CIVIC CULTURES IN EASTERN EUROPE

Communication spaces and media practices of Estonian civil society organizations

Liisa Sömersalu

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Abstract

What kind of routine media and communication practices do Estonian civil society organizations enact in their everyday work? What sort of symbolic and physical spaces are used, created, and accessed by Estonian civil society organizations and informal citizen groups when engaging internally and with their target groups? How do these spaces and practices evolve over time? These are the questions this dissertation addresses, with the aim of understanding the ways in which already-established and evolving civil society organizations navigate the highly-mediated everyday through their routine media practices and the spaces in which these practices are situated.

Theoretically, this study takes a cultural approach to political participation with the concept of 'civic cultures' (Dahlgren 2009, p. 103) in the centrum. In this dissertation, the civic cultures framework is concentrated into a focus on the everyday, on media practices, and on communicative spaces. The concepts of 'everyday' and 'spaces' are empirically accessed through a practice approach. To distill and explore the role of media in the everyday work of civil society organizations, this thesis borrows from "activist media practices" (Mattoni 2012, p. 159) framework.

The empirical study is grounded in the wider geopolitical context of Eastern Europe and in the historical context of post-Soviet Europe, and more specifically in Estonian civil society. Using a multi-methods approach based on media ethnography, this study includes a nationally- representative survey, in-depth interviews with civil society organizations, and a longitudinal study of the Estonian Forest Aid movement.

This study found that parallel to striving towards episodic visibility in physical spaces, in mainstream media, and in decision making, civil society organizations worked on constant visibility in the social media space. The most used social media platform, Facebook, proved to be an important space for developing civic cultures on an everyday level: it was used for campaigns, opinion shaping, for disseminating news, and for civic talk. Everyday communication within the organizations was done using a mix of different media technologies and face-to-face meetings. Each media technology and communicative space had their own role and function in the everyday work of Estonian civil society organizations.

Keywords: civil society, Estonia, Eastern Europe, space, activist media practices, civic cultures, media

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1. Introduction

I am sitting at a petrol station close to the Tallinn airport, waiting for the ride I had arranged earlier through a Facebook group. I have just flown to Estonia from Sweden and am on my way to Estonian Forest Aid's weekend camp. Estonian Forest Aid (EFA)[1] is a civil society organization that engages in environmental issues; especially issues related to forests. It is the second time I am taking part in their weekend camp. I am picked up by three other participants and this time, the journey takes us to a small village in Northeastern Estonia. I am the last person to be picked up and am immediately drawn into a conversation about the rumors of the building of a new environmental-oriented political party. Even though I hardly knew my fellow passengers and had not heard of some of the politicians, it felt nice to be included and it was exciting to hear firsthand about what is happening in my former home country, instead of reading the news online.

After an hour-long car ride filled with lively discussions, we arrive at the campsite. We are staying at an old farm with a lot of its original charm left. It has different antique-filled buildings arranged around a yard with an old well in the middle. On one side there is a small pavilion with a fireplace in the center and a cauldron hanging over the fire. That place became the main meeting point during camp, as it provided shelter from the rain and all our meals were cooked in that big pot hanging over the fire. There we ate, chatted, played music, and sang. The program of the camp took place on a grassy patch nearby. The third gathering place was an old Russian-style smoke sauna. In the front room there was space to sit and hold workshops, and conversations continued later in the sauna, once it was hot enough.

The weekend involved both scheduled activities and discussions, and a lot of hanging around and socializing. EFA coordinators were also making small video clips for social media about EFA representation in policy discussions for the forest development plans until 2030. The camp weekend ended with us in a circle singing a runic song written and performed by one of the camp participants. The energy created in the song circle gave me goose bumps. As a researcher there for fieldwork, I was both exited and a bit overwhelmed, as everywhere I went on the campsite, some of the participants were engaged in

[1] An in-depth overview about Estonian Forest Aid and their activities can be found in Chapter 6 and in Appendix 5.

interesting talks about forest politics - about their experiences and other topics that you would not be able to read about in the news.

The weekend included even a small excursion, in which a few of us visited a travelling exhibition in a bus filled with interactive displays about how forests serve as a source of renewable material for almost anything. It was an informational space which was travelling around to different places and various events around Estonia, which was created by the timber industry. It provided the group even more fodder for discussion. For example, there was a virtual reality headset on the display that let the headset wearer sit in a harvester that harvests trees in the summer. I found out that logging fir forests in the summer contributes to the already-prevalent issues with fungal diseases, as one of the activists with a background in forestry became frustrated by the display, which according to him, promoted faulty forest management practices. On our way back to the campsite we chose to visit a real forest.

On the second day of camp, I had been allocated a one-and-a-half-hour slot to talk about my research, which involves the same group, Estonian Forest Aid (EFA). For my lecture/workshop I hung up a list of all of EFA's accomplishments during the previous eighteen months, and introduced Peter Dahlgren's theoretical framework on civic cultures, which I use in my dissertation, to see what the group thought of it. My short lecture was followed by a lively conversation about what makes people engaged and how to turn that engagement into concrete action, and I received some questions about my research. My session ended with everybody saying their name and why they joined or support EFA. People who answered came from all walks of life and from all over Estonia, and everyone had their own personal story as to how they got involved. What connected them was their worry for Estonian nature and Estonian forests and their wish to do something about it.

EFA was born after a protest event in 2016, and in the beginning was mainly organized around a public Facebook group. The above scene, describing my experience at the EFA weekend camp, is a glimpse into just one of the spaces that was created by activists. As EFA members and supporters are dispersed all over Estonia and mainly meet on a purposefully-created Facebook groups for the rest of the year, this one weekend in August brought people together into a physical space. Not just any place is chosen for those meetings; it needs to have certain aura and a feeling of proximity to nature. Located at an old farm, the campsite was turned into a space of civic activity for one weekend that year. The space was used to plan, to strengthen ties, to gain empowerment, and to lend energy in organizing upcoming activities. It

was also a space for exchanging experiences, voicing grievances, and letting off steam.

This short recollection from my time at the EFA camp in the summer of 2018 illustrates a diversity of spaces and places of varying dimensions and shapes: for example, the weekend camp took place in Estonia, which historically and culturally belongs to Eastern Europe and where some cultural patterns of the Soviet era are still present, even though administratively it now belongs to European Union and the general orientation of the country is and has been toward the West. Then there are the spaces for civic talk, which Peter Dahlgren (2009) terms as important for civic engagement and for the health of democracy: the car, the pavilion, the grassy area, and the sauna, among others. That meeting in physical place was made possible through previously-mediated communication and mediated spaces are the main everyday domain of socialization for groups like Estonian Forest Aid.

Online-offline relationships, in spatial terms, are well-researched in the context of activism. Various spatialities are a part of the everyday of social movements and civil society organizations. Some of those spaces are molded into the fabric of the everyday and are not reflected upon, and some are created by the practices they entail and require constant presence and continued practice to keep them alive. With this dissertation I hope to at least scratch the surface of understanding different spaces (both online and offline) that civil society organizations navigate in their everyday work.

Media technologies, besides altering and innovating practices for political participation, have also influenced spatial relationships and the way people take part in politics. Therefore, this dissertation aims to discover what role space plays in media and communication practices within the framework of everyday life and political participation. Political participation is a part of individuals' everyday lives in different ways, but in this thesis, I am concentrating on civil society organizations and citizen groups. More precisely, I focus on their everyday communication practices, which include, among others, gaining media visibility, engaging with the wider public, taking part in political decision-making in the issues important to them, and maintaining the organization through internal communication practices. The study also addresses the question of what kind of physical, mediated, or other kind of communicative spaces are created and used for those practices. On one hand, civil society organizations create new spaces for gaining visibility and attracting supporters (for example on social media platforms), but on the other hand, there are pre-existing communicative spaces (mass media), where access is being negotiated and where communication practices are

enacted in certain ways. In addition to visibility practices, organizations need communicative spaces for internal communication to maintain their operation and spaces to reach out to political institutions to create change in society. The ability to create, maintain and shuffle between different spaces is, therefore, an integral part of civil society organizations' everyday work.

In this thesis, I am studying the situatedness of everyday communication practices in the context of one civil society in Eastern Europe. This dissertation belongs to a research project entitled "*Retooling Citizenship: Digital Media and the Dynamics of Civil Society in New EU Democracies*" (Bakardjieva, Bengtsson, Bolin & Engelbrekt 2021). The project is built on a paired comparison of Estonia and Bulgaria and asks if and how digital media has strengthened civil societies in the respective countries.

The larger research project and my dissertation both take their starting point from the study by Marc Morje Howard (2003), who argues that post-communist countries in Europe have exceptionally weak civil societies because of low membership in civil society organizations (CSOs). In his analysis, Howard (2003) sees membership and participation in voluntary organizations as a main indication of the health of civil society. A lot has happened within the almost 20 years since his study was published, but membership in civil society organizations is still in decline (Käger, Lauring, Pertšjonok, Kaldur & Nahkur 2018). Other studies (Rikmann & Keedus 2013; Ekiert & Kubik 2014; Foa & Ekiert 2017) however, argue that CSO membership is not the best measurement of the strength of civil societies and there are other aspects that are more telling. Ekiert and Kubik (2014) propose that civil society in Central and Eastern Europe is not chronically weak but varies between countries and is dependent on the situation in each specific state. They suggest that measuring the strength of the civil society should be done not by counting CSOs and their members, or asking for opinions, but by assessing how and how often civil society gets involved in political life and examining the links that are created between CSOs and other actors. Other authors critique how civil society has been conceptualized in social sciences and stress the need to look beyond normativity and into local contexts to find out what is actually happening in the associational life and political community within any specific civil society (Kopecký & Mudde 2003; Chandhoke 2007; Jacobsson & Korolczuk 2017). With this study, I am contributing a focus on the everyday aspects of associational life within a specific civil society.

For this thesis I have chosen Estonia as the specific civil society and the context for my study. There are several reasons why Estonia is a particularly

suitable context for studying civic processes. First, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Estonia has made it into world indices as a country with high press and internet freedom[2]. Second, despite having a relatively small population, Estonia has established a reputation as a digital society by providing innovative ways for e-government services.[3] Third, while some scholars lament the weak civil society in Eastern Europe (Howard 2003), Estonia is once again rated at the top of the class regarding the strength of civil society in the region (USAID 2020). While they are a poster child for societal and digital development, Estonia still has issues when it comes to income, poverty, social welfare and regional development (Charles 2009; Kalmus, Lauristin, Opermann & Vihalemm 2020).[4]

In this thesis, I will not be making concrete evaluations about the strength of Estonian civil society or as to whether digital media has strengthened civil societies, as this has already been done by other reports and studies (Loit & Siibak 2013; USAID 2020). I will instead contribute to the discussion with in-depth insights into local context (Jacobsson & Korolczuk 2017), and into how digital media plays a role in CSOs' everyday communication activities, through an examination of how one civic initiative has emerged and developed over time.

1.1. Previous research and articulating the problem

This thesis contributes to the research about political participation and media. There are different scales to participation, varying between a minimalist model with foci on representation and delegation of power, and a maximalist model with direct democracy, and either can vary between conflict- and consensus-oriented participation (Carpentier 2011). Some scholars have also created typologies of different forms of citizen involvement in democratic processes (see for example Ekman & Amnå 2012). Only recently, with the widespread use of digital and interactive media, have more traditional fields studying political participation started to include media studies in their inquiries. Media is not merely a tool used to organize and disseminate messages, but every aspect of our lives is intertwined with media in some form, and that includes aspects that have to do with how organizations, movements and citizens take part in democratic processes.

[2] According to indexes by Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House.
[3] https://www.eesti.ee/en (accessed 31/01/22).
[4] I will write more about Estonia and my motivation in section 1.3 of this chapter, and the Chapter 4 covers the historical development of Estonian civil society.

More specifically, my starting point is that the visible collective form of political participation is a product of underlying knowledge acquiring, networking and relationship-building (Melucci 1989). This dissertation concentrates on the underlying practices that lead up to participation and contribute to the development of civic cultures. Furthermore, all communication takes place in a space of some sort. Communication media technologies have removed the need to be in the same physical space, and that, in turn, has shaped the ways in which political participation takes place.

1.1.1. Political participation and media

There is a back-and-forth discussion between democracy-in-crisis discourse and revitalization of participation in studies about political participation and civic engagement. Some explanations to the decline in traditional political participation are, for example, influences of global processes like neoliberalism, global risks, and consumerism (Dahlgren 2009), deficits of legitimacy (Norris 2011), and a drop in social capital caused by the decline in civil society association membership (Putnam 2001). At the same time, with deteriorating trust in political institutions, a growing number of citizens bypass party structures and take part in 'alternative politics' by engaging in political issues on their own terms, thus linking the political to personal meaning, identity and cultural matters (Dahlgren 2016).

Media in different forms have always been a part of citizens' political participation: news press in the coffee houses of the bourgeois public sphere, pamphlets and underground press for the earlier social movements, mass media in the 60's, and internet and social media in the contemporary times. Parallel to this, there have always been discussions about the democratizing power of the media; be it the radio (Brecht 1964; Enzensberger 1970), or social media and "Twitter revolutions" (Christensen 2011). The scholarly discussion over the role the internet and digital personal media might have on democratic deliberation and how they impact and facilitate civic engagement has expanded quantitatively in volume, method, and diversity of topics (see Neumayer & Rossi 2016 for an overview; also Van Laer & Van Aelst 2010; McCurdy 2012; Poell & Van Dijck 2016). Studies range from techno-optimistic (or even utopian) views on how the interactive affordances of the new media banish hierarchies and empower citizens to mobilize and work together toward social change on equal grounds (see for example Benkler 2006; Bennett & Segerberg 2012; Castells 2015; Jenkins 2008; Shirky 2009), to pessimistic views on the matter, with some examples being 'clicktivism',

echo-chambers and the threat of algorithms and big data to democracy (Sunstein 2009; Morozov 2011; O'Neil 2016).

Even though traditional media is still crucial for social movements to get the message across and gain supporters (for a review, see McCurdy 2012), digital media has garnered the most attention in studies connected to social movements. Digital media is described as a tool for organization and communication and used to provide an alternative means for reaching out to supporters and the wider public. Although social and mobile media are used by activists to mobilize protest events, media scholars point out that gathering crowds through those channels leads to a specific type of mobilization. Such actions have different names, like 'cloud protesting' (Milan 2015), 'the logic of connective action' (Bennett & Segerberg 2012), and 'the logic of aggregation' (Juris 2012). A common finding in these studies is that participation in collective action is coordinated through social media and is based on individualism and personal expression rather than group identity. However, social media does not only cater to individualized mobilizing, it also offers backstage spaces or digital comfort zones for creating collective identities (Treré 2015). Lately, in an attempt to understand the complex relationships social movements and activists have with media technologies, some media scholars have turned toward practice theory to study what activists are doing with media across a wide range of situations (see for example Askanius & Gustafsson 2010; Mattoni 2012; Mattoni & Treré 2014; Treré & Mattoni 2016; Kubitschko 2017; Treré 2018).

Besides being a tool for collective action, digital media has also influenced political participation on the individual scale: it is not anymore simply about traditional civic practices like voting and discussing matters of public importance. Politics has become a lifestyle issue, with people engaging in matters that are close to their hearts or affect them personally. Such change has raised questions as to what citizenship and political participation really entail. John Hartley (2010) has coined the term 'DIY citizenship', which is characterized by individual, bottom-up, self-organized activities that rely on technological platforms (see also Ratto & Boler 2014). He also talks about 'silly citizenship' where political issues are "discussed" in playful and humorous ways (Hartley 2010).

'Mundane citizenship' illustrates the new media-facilitated power of ordinary people to participate in public discussion and action relating to public issues, without leaving the normal course of their everyday life (Bakardjieva 2012). Moving toward even more latent forms of activism, Maria Bakardjieva (2009) proposes the concept of 'subactivism', which is a

type of activism that goes under the radar of traditional political participation, but serves as a prerequisite of manifest participation. Hidden in everyday life, 'subactivism' refers to the small individual decisions that have some sort of political or ethical point of departure and how the internet, with its communicative affordances, offers opportunities to make them visible and shareable.

With this dissertation, I am applying the literature reviewed here about the variety of political participation and the role of media in political participation to a specific geo-political area, Eastern Europe, where earlier studies have registered low political engagement. Doing this helps to debunk the myth of political apathy in Eastern Europe and uncover the diverse nuances behind political participation.

1.1.2. Civic culture and media

Everyday actions and choices can have a political motivation, but less is known about how people become politically engaged in the first place. Anne Kaun (2012) conceptualizes civic experience in the context of 'public connection' (based on Couldry, Livingstone & Markham 2007): how young people feel as citizens and how they develop that understanding. Couldry and his colleagues (ibid.) explain 'public connection' as an orientation people share towards a political world where issues of shared concern are addressed. Such connection is achieved through everyday media consumption (p. 3). Media consumption of political issues no longer only includes solely the news, as entertainment media and political comedy programs have become outlets for political discussions (Doona 2016). Peter Dahlgren (2009) argues that there are certain preconditions rooted in everyday life that contribute to engagement and political empowerment. To empirically study those preconditions, he has developed the concept of a 'civic circuit' which has six dimensions: knowledge, values, trust, identities, spaces, and practices. These dimensions of the civic circuit are essentially areas that need to be present in the process of learning to be a citizen. Besides formal education, media plays an important role as the facilitator of such learning (Miegel & Olsson 2013).

Those preconditions to civic engagement do not only apply to individual citizens, but can also be studied in groups (Camauër 2000). Moreover, as Mattoni (2020) points out, the vast majority of studies about social movements and media are concentrated on the visible periods of protest actions and less on the everyday practices of social movement collectives. Such an approach offers a better understanding as to how these collectives form and maintain their networks. Barassi (2013) found in her study that social move-

ment networks are everyday processes of human interaction and negotiation, rather than structures.

1.1.3. Political participation, media and spatiality

Space is important for political participation, as citizens need a space to meet, discuss, and express their grievances. One of the overarching discussions about locating politics regards the relationships between the public and the private (Staeheli & Mitchell 2004). Digital media has made the borders between the public and the private more porous, so the threshold for participation is lower (Bimber, Flanagin & Stohl 2005); at the same time, public spaces are being privatized, and spaces for physical gathering and discussions are diminishing (Coleman 2013).

There is a fair amount of research about space and contentious politics in human geography and social movements studies (For example McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001; Sewell 2001; Martin & Miller 2003; Featherstone & Painter 2013; Nicholls, Beaumont & Miller 2016). One common focus of inquiry is the variety of spatialities, such as space, place, and scale that shape and are shaped by contentious politics (Martin & Miller 2003). Other examples include the examination of space in the context of spatial agency and meanings, copresence, power relations, spatial rituals and how built environments play a role in the strategies and outcomes of social movements' activities (Sewell 2001).

Within the field of media studies, research regarding space, media and political participation covers several areas. One of the more commonly studied areas is the relationship between the online and the offline. On one hand, media studies see 'online' as a territory (Christensen, Jansson & Christensen 2011), or a cyberspace that has certain characteristics and asks what it means to be a digital citizen (Isin & Ruppert 2015). Other studies discuss certain places or spaces within the so-called cyberspace that are used, or have potential, for political participation. For example, spaces for civic talk address the internet as a new public sphere (see for example Papacharissi 2002; Coleman 2013; Batorski & Grzywińska 2017) or as a 'third space'—a non-political space online that facilitates everyday civic talk and can lead to political discussions, deliberation and political action (Graham & Hajru 2011; Wright 2012; Graham, Jackson & Wright 2015). For social movements actors, the internet can provide 'safe spaces' away from harassment (Clark-Parsons 2018) or an alternative media channel for news distribution (Dencik 2013).

In the context of protest movements, studies point to the entanglement of online spaces and offline places (see for example Routledge 2003; Gerbaudo

2012; Castells 2015; Treré 2018). The protests deemed "Twitter revolutions" in the beginning were actually a complex mix of different media practices and physical spaces (Gerbaudo 2012). Castells calls this a 'hybrid public space of freedom' (2015)—the connection between free communication on social media and the occupation of urban space. The framework of 'convergence spaces' (Routledge 2003; Routledge & Cumbers 2013), helps us to understand multi-scalar political action and how local struggles from particular places are linked to a global common concern, which in turn expands the spatio-temporal scale of actions. Karduni & Sauda (2020) illustrate empirically how local communities, urban space, and social media interplay—social media expanding protests from the locality, and, at the same time, providing a means for participants to engage from a distance or from outside the local community.

Media practices can also shape how space is used and perceived within a physical location like a protest camp. In one example by Feigenbaum, Frenzel and McCurdy (2013), activists created strict borders between protest action and everyday life at the camp-sites. The borders between the front- and backstage were governed by activists' media practices, wherein 'media space' was open to journalists and outsiders but 'activist space' was closed to media representation. In an another example, activists tried to create an 'open to all' rhetoric by using a 24/7 live stream and a Facebook group to extend the space of the protest camp, which in turn influenced the spatial practices and relations within the camp and outside it (Mattoni 2019).

Besides media influencing the spatial relations, activists use spatial media, or more precisely location-aware technologies, as a tool in protests. Communicating spaces through crowd mapping and geolocated protests (Rodríguez-Amat & Brantner 2016), mapping collective action and producing knowledge politics to influence authority (Elwood & Leszczynski 2013) and protests through remote check-in on Facebook, what Baik (2020) terms 'geo-tagging counterpublics', are some examples of research inquiries in the area.

It is not only digital media practices that produce space or alter spatial relations. Anne Kaun (2016) contributes with a historical point of view by comparing three social movements from different times, and demonstrates how, over time, social movement actors' development of media technologies and media practices has changed the way they produce space. Technological changes can also alter the activist communities centered around certain spaces like, for example, print shops (Baines 2012).

In the light of this literature review, instead of focusing on specific cases of collective activism and their relationship to media and space, I turn my

gaze toward a specific civil society. By doing so I am contributing to the understanding of how media shapes the ways in which political participation is practiced and how the spatial aspects of everyday communication practices in civil society organizations intersect with geo-political space and its contextual specificities, including history and political culture.

1.2. Aim and research questions

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze contemporary Estonian civil society to understand the ways in which both established and evolving civil society organizations navigate the highly-mediated everyday through their routine media practices and the spaces in which these practices are situated.

The main research questions are:

1. What kind of routine media and communication practices do Estonian civil society organizations enact in their everyday work?

2. What sort of symbolic and physical spaces are used, created, and accessed by Estonian civil society organizations and informal citizen groups when engaging internally and with their target groups?

3. How do these spaces and practices evolve over time?

These questions will be addressed via a multi-methods approach including a nationally representative survey of media use and civic agency in Estonia; interviews with leaders and communication officers representing a range of Estonian civil society organizations; and a case study of the environmental civil society organization Estonian Forest Aid.

The main theoretical concepts of space and practice are informed by an overarching framework of civic cultures (Dahlgren 2009). On one hand, civic cultures contribute to the focus on everyday practices, as civic cultures are anchored in the lifeworld and to areas that are often taken for granted. On the other hand, spaces and practices are two of the six dimensions of the civic circuit, which is a concept for operationalizing civic cultures with six dimensions signifying the pre-conditions necessary for civic engagement and political participation. I am therefore concentrating on communicative spaces and practices related to civic agency.

1.3. From Soviet Union to e-Estonia: the study object

Estonia is a small country of 1.3 million inhabitants and is the northernmost country of the three Baltic States, situated both geographically and symbolically between the East and the West. Gaining independence from Soviet Union in 1991, and then joining the European Union and NATO in 2004, Estonia has made a name for itself as a digitally innovative and tech-savvy country, as it is also in the forefront in providing e-government services. For example, Estonian citizens have been able to vote digitally since 2005, and Estonia is the first country to offer e-residency for non-Estonians to help entrepreneurs drive location-independent businesses (Republic of Estonia e-Residency n.d.). A young democracy with a Soviet past, Estonia is an interesting case, as civil society started developing in parallel to virtual communications (Loit & Siibak 2013).[5] The transition period from the end of Soviet time to joining EU in Baltic States is well studied in regards to media (for example Rosengren, Lauristin & Vihalemm 1997; Kalmus et al. 2020).

Statewide efforts to develop Estonia into an information society began in the 1990's when the Tiger Leap Program was launched to bring computers and the internet to schools and thereby connect Information Communication Technology (ICT) with education. The very first government policies about information technologies were made in 1994 and became part of the government agenda from 1995 to 1998 (Runnel, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Reinsalu 2009). Although the Tiger Leap was an educational program under the larger goal of national computerization, it became a symbol of Estonia's fast changing society and provided foundations for later developments in e-government and e-Estonia. The first e-government in Estonia was implemented in 2000 and has turned into a platform of diverse digitalized e-services for residents like e-government, e-health, and others (Lauristin & Vihalemm 2020).

Such a continuous emphasis on digital services, also widely advertised outside the country, became the most valuable sign of success for Estonia and a part of the country's official identity construction and branding (ibid.).[6]

[5] However, the development of both digital technologies and civil society did not start on an entirely clean slate, having roots in sociological and cybernetic know-how from the Soviet era (Velmet 2020) and the private networks that gave routine to associational life and the nationalistic tradition that the Soviet regime did not manage to entirely dissolve (Rosengren, Lauristin & Vihalemm 1997). Chapter 4 will provide an in-depth description of historical developments within Estonian civil society, in this section I will concentrate on developing information technologies as they relate to political participation.

[6] See also (e-Estonia n.d.).

However, there are some critical voices about the e-Estonia narrative, asking if the visions of e-government and e-democracy have been replaced by hegemonic practices of nation-branding that reduce citizens to individual consumers of e-solutions instead of providing a political space for discussions and problem solving (Mäe 2017).

Political participation

Although newly-independent Estonia made fast advances in ICT development, civil society was not so quick to follow. Influences from their Soviet past and the government prioritizing technical advancement over the social sphere in the first years of Estonian independence created a gap between the political elite and the people (Lagerspetz, Rikmann & Ruutsoo 2002; Kala 2008).[7] Despite the initial e-democracy hype, the government had trouble engaging digitally with citizens, and the majority of internet use happened in the private sphere (Runnel, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Reinsalu 2009). Runnel and her colleagues (ibid.) mention the top-down approach ICT implementation in democratic participation as one of the reasons behind low citizen engagement in government-provided participatory platforms. The government was more focused on investing in infrastructure and people were viewed as passive recipients.

Other studies have reached similar conclusions regarding low citizen participation in democratic processes online (Reinsalu 2008; Kitsing 2011a, 2011b; Toots, Kalvet & Krimmer 2016). Some reasons highlighted by the studies are factors like education, traditions and demographic differences coupled by unmet expectations (Reinsalu 2008). Also, despite success in e-voting, there is low engagement in legislative process (Kitsing 2011a, Kitsing 2011b) and low governmental success in promoting and enabling e-democracy in general. The reasons mentioned included poor top-down management and a lack of interest from citizens (Toots, Kalvet & Krimmer 2016). Digital society, in addition to creating opportunities to participate, has also led to inequalities: from more concrete issues of access to unequal capabilities in dealing with the digital environment in general (Lauristin & Vihalemm 2020).

What comes to bottom-up political participation, Veronika Kalmus and her colleagues (2018) find that social media does not enhance participation but supplements it. Additionally, collecting and handling information has become an important part of civic engagement. The report by Open Society

[7] Chapter 4 gives an in-depth overview of the development of Estonian civil society.

Foundations (Loit & Siibak 2013) states that available digital tools are used by Estonians to make everyday life more convenient, but the number of people willing to take part in online public discussions is still low. The report adds that a change in values, norms and thinking patterns is needed to stimulate deliberation among citizens (although the use of Facebook for engaging in single issues and for sharing events is increasing) (p. 44).

1.4. Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into 7 chapters including the conclusion. The current chapter has presented the motivation of the study, situated the study with the help of previous research, introduced the context of the study (Estonian civil society), and delimited the research aim and questions.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the theoretical framework, and with the concept of 'civic cultures' (Dahlgren 2009, p. 103) in the center, it grounds the study in cultural approaches to political participation. On one hand civic cultures contribute to the focus on everyday practices, as civic cultures are anchored in the lifeworld and to areas that are often taken for granted. On the other hand, as civic cultures are empirically accessed through the civic circuit (ibid.), this study focuses on two dimensions of the civic circuit: practices and spaces. The concept of space is empirically accessed through a practice approach. For that I borrow from 'activist media practices' (Mattoni 2012, p. 159).

Chapter 3 presents the research design and introduces the research participants. The study uses a multi-methods approach based on media ethnography. It includes a nationally representative survey of media use and civic agency in Estonia, an interview sample with leaders and communication officers representing a range of Estonian civil society organizations, and a case study of the environmental civil society organization Estonian Forest Aid. The chapter also touches on the study's analytical approach, ethical considerations, and reflects on researcher practices.

Chapter 4 offers a contextual background to the empirical study. The background is presented from several angles: first, mapping the civil society in Estonia, both from the historical and the contemporary point of view. Secondly, the chapter gives an overview of the development and current state of the Estonian media landscape and media use. Finally, the chapter introduces the context of the forest issue, often called the "forest war" in the media, in which the Estonian Forest Aid was created and currently operates.

Chapters 5 and 6 are the main analysis chapters for this dissertation. Chapter 5 concentrates on civil society organizations (CSO) and Chapter 6 is

a case study of Estonian Forest Aid (EFA). Chapter 5 starts with a detailed overview of the CSOs participating in this study: their area of activity, size, structure, and financing. This overview is followed by a categorization of CSO activities. The remaining chapter describes three different areas of CSO everyday work and media practices, as well as communicative spaces within those areas. These spaces include: practices in spaces mediated for visibility; practices aimed at engaging the wider public and encouraging participation in decision-making; and media practices in different communicative spaces for internal communication.

Chapter 6 goes in-depth in the case of Estonian Forest Aid. As I was following the activities of EFA for two years, this chapter also contains the dimension of time: how practices and spaces evolve over time. This chapter provides an in-depth overview of different communicative spaces EFA was making use of in their everyday work. Both mediated spaces like the mainstream media space or online space, but also physical spaces like local communities and library conference rooms.

Chapter 7 ties the empirical findings together into a conclusive discussion about civic cultures. The main focus of this chapter is to bring the findings from the previous chapters into a theoretical discussion and to conclude the study. The chapter is then concluded with a reflection on the limitations of this study and with a look ahead at future research prospects.

2. Theory

This dissertation takes a cultural approach to political participation in the context of the everyday practices of citizens engaged in civil society. 'Cultural approach', in this thesis, in short refers to a holistic approach: not only focusing on one medium or one form of participation (like elections or protest marches) but on a variety of media and forms of participation coupled with studying processes of meaning making around media within civil society organizations and social movements. The two main theoretical concepts guiding this study are, accordingly, practice and space; which are also two of the main areas highlighted by Peter Dahlgren (2009), in his framework of civic cultures, for analyzing the conditions that make civic agency possible. Civic cultures are rooted in the everyday practices of citizens and often exist in a latent form, alternating with visible action in public spheres and spaces. As the visible part of political participation and activism is grounded on invisible everyday practice, this dissertation will analyze everyday communication work and practices in civil society organizations, with a focus on the spaces in which they occur, and how action forms and reforms space.

This chapter will define the main theoretical concepts and presents the analytical framework for the empirical study. The chapter is structured as follows: the first part sketches the contextual frames of the study by discussing the cultural approach to everyday political participation and civic cultures. The next part introduces the concept of 'practices', and its subcategories; activist media practices, media knowledge practices, and relational media practices, which are borrowed from Alice Mattoni (2012). I then explain my approaches to space and place as they are configured in civic practices.

2.1. A cultural approach to political participation

In the 1960's, interest rose within political science in studying the cultural aspects of democracy and citizenship. Pioneers in that area included Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba (1989) with their comparative research about political culture. They used large surveys to study the values, beliefs, and attitudes of individual citizens about politics in different countries. According to Dalton and Welzel (2014), if for Almond and Verba, political culture was about patterns of orientation toward political objects, then civic

culture was political culture with something extra: a positive orientation towards political structures and processes. Therefore, at first it was thought that the allegiant citizen model (participation based on voting, trust in political elites) is required for representative democracy to function in developed countries. As their civic culture framework is still used today to examine changes in civic culture over time, their later studies show a shift from an allegiant citizen to an assertive citizen; or one who is critical and self-expressive, and more distrustful of elites (ibid.).

Other scholars (Dahlgren 2006; Melucci 1996) argue for a qualitative cultural approach to civic agency by focusing on the subjective realities of citizens and collectives. With an emphasis on the everyday practices, this approach is good for bridging the gap between 'objective' conditions (structural possibilities and constraints) and 'subjective' motives (individual practices and motivations) to understand how collectives form and maintain cohesion over time (Melucci 1996). By 'culture', Peter Dahlgren (2009) means lived experience in the form of internalized patterns of communication and taken-for-granted orientations that guide our actions. Dahlgren (ibid.) argues that as culture is not entirely static, it should be treated as a general orientation, as a guide for patterns of doing and thinking. In order to capture the dynamics of civic agency, Peter Dahlgren has thus developed the civic cultures framework, operationalized in six dimensions within a civic circuit.

2.1.1. Civic cultures

Instead of lamenting the crisis in democracy, Dahlgren (2006; 2009) proposes the civic cultures[8] framework as an alternative means of studying what makes citizens engaged or disengaged and how they participate in politics. Also, it helps to redraw the lines of what is considered political participation in the first place. Dahlgren (2009) defines the 'civic cultures' concept as a "framework intended to analyze the conditions that are necessary for—that promote or hinder—civic engagement" (p. 103). They are "cultural patterns in which identities of citizenship and the foundations for civic agency, are embedded" (Ibid., 103). According to Dahlgren, media are interwoven with civic cultures, both shaping and reflecting them. In addition, through civic cultures, media have the ability to empower or disempower citizens with its role as a symbolic environment and a communicative infrastructure (Dahlgren 2009).

Dahlgren insists on the importance of studying processes and contexts as politics and political are not given, they happen and are made in certain

[8] 'cultures' is in plural as there is more than one civic culture (Dahlgren 2009).

situations. In my study, I am using the framework of civic cultures (Dahlgren 2009) as an overarching approach to study the spaces of everyday communication practices of civil society organizations. The main aspects of civic cultures I am incorporating into my study are an emphasis on process and context and the patterns of communication at the level of everyday life.

Alberto Melucci is another scholar who has focused on everyday and political participation, in his case in the form of new social movements and collective action. In his *"Nomads of the Present"*, Melucci (1989) stresses that considering the everyday experiences of social movement actors is crucial for understanding contemporary conflicts and social movements.

According to Melucci, collective action is both pre-political and meta-political—it develops outside the political system and operates in the realm of everyday life. For my study, I use Melucci's latent and visible periods of social movements'. The visible dimension is usually in the form of a mobilization which only happens when a public conflict arises. Such visible forms of collective action are only the tip of an iceberg, as the main "work" happens in small groups of invisible networks that are hidden in everyday life:

> These 'submerged' networks, noted for their stress on individual needs, collective identity and part-time membership, constitute the laboratories in which new experiences are invented. Within those invisible networks, movements question and challenge the dominant codes of everyday life. These laboratories are places where the elements of everyday life are mixed, developed and tested, a site where reality is given new names and citizens can develop alternative experiences of time, space and interpersonal relations. (ibid., p.6)

Melucci warns about political reductionism, which can occur when studying only the visible and measurable parts of collective action, like protest and effects on policy. Considering mobilizations to be discrete units of analysis is effective and provides useful data, but according to Melucci (1989), those observations are only "the *product* of diverse relationships and goals of an underlying structure of action" (p. 44). The 'visible' depends on the production of new cultural codes and alternative frameworks of meaning and therein lies the difference between mobilization and a movement. Often political effects and organizational tactics are mistaken for mobilization; but Melucci stresses that effective strength lies instead in the latent dimension of the movement.

According to Highmore (2002), the question of 'placing' the everyday lies in dictating whose everyday life will be the subject of attention. In this dissertation, the 'place' of everyday is the context of specific CSOs in the narrower sense, and Estonian civil society in a wider sense. Being aware that established CSOs function differently than social movements, I still find that Melucci's (1989) differentiation between latent and visible periods is relevant and important to include in this study. Even though CSOs might not always mobilize for protest events to create change in society, they do need public and political visibility to gain supporters and to influence policies. That kind of visibility is also based on extensive activities in the latent dimension: internal communication; creating and maintaining interorganizational ties; administrating media visibility through relationships with journalists; and keeping up with self-visibility through their own informational spheres, including social media channels and newsletters.

2.1.2. Civic circuit

According to Peter Dahlgren (2009), civic cultures are on one hand a normative notion—civic engagement is needed for democracy to function. On the other hand, civic cultures are empirical, as they include features that constitute specific pre-conditions for democratic participation. These pre-conditions make up the six interconnected dimensions of the civic circuit: knowledge, values, trust, identities, practices, and spaces. The aforementioned dimensions are accessed through the lived experiences of citizens: how they think and feel about what goes on, and what motivates their actions.

Empirically it is possible to study each dimension separately and analyze its connections to media (Dahlgren 2009). For my study, I am focusing on the dimensions of practices and spaces. The main reason for focusing on these dimensions of the civic circuit is that practices and spaces provide a material grounding for the other four dimensions of the civic circuit: political participation and media practices are enacted in space; and knowledge, values, trust, and identities are gained, expressed, and become visible through practices. In the final discussion, I will bring together all dimensions of the civic circuit.

Below is a recap of Dahlgren's (2009) description of the six dimensions of the civic circuit (pp. 108–123):

Knowledge is crucial for citizens' political participation. On one hand, citizens need to have access to reliable information and on the other hand, they need to have strategies for acquiring relevant knowledge. Education is

the base for knowledge, but media play an important role, as citizens use them to obtain information and political actors use them to generate and disseminate that information. New media technologies can also create new modalities for generating knowledge; take, for example, media's emphasis on the visual. However, Dahlgren distinguishes between background knowledge and incoming new information. The latter only becomes knowledge through an appropriation process which is influenced by various factors like cultural background, demographic specificities, technology, or specific situation: translating information into one's own frame of reference and making it personally meaningful.

Values. Certain universal virtues, like tolerance, a willingness to adhere to democratic principles and procedures, and support for the legal system, need to be present in everyday life for democracy to function. Dahlgren distinguishes between substantive values like equality, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, and procedural values like openness, reciprocity, discussion, and responsibility/accountability. The main question is how to apply democratic values in practice, as democracy is both about living democratic values in everyday life and about a democratic system of institutional frameworks. Dahlgren adds that passion for democratic values can stimulate engagement and lead to political participation.

Trust is a self-evident and important part of democracy. Citizens are the bearers of (ideally) the right amount of trust (not too much, not too little); and institutions and government representatives' act as the objects of trust. For civic cultures, equally important is the trust among or between citizen groups. Dahlgren relies on Putnam's idea of 'thick' and 'thin' trust. Without the latter, collective action becomes impossible, as it needs a minimal amount of trust. Dahlgren calls it 'focused trust': like-minded people forming collective identities around certain problems.

Identities—as a centerpiece of civic cultures and a foundation to agency—refer to people seeing themselves as members and participants of democracy. Dahlgren lists a few general points about identities: first, they are plural and not static—there are several ways of being a citizen, and those identities evolve in the contexts of institutional and social settings. Second, identities evolve through experience, which in turn is based on emotion. And third, the prominence of civic identities varies among individuals, but in general it is low and only a small part of their overall identity, being limited to the

received citizenship. Having a feeling of being an empowered political agent and being a member in one or more political communities helps to expand the significance of civic identities in peoples' lives.

Practices. Individuals, groups, and collectives realize a viable democracy through concrete and recurring practices done in diverse situations. Practices are learned and require social and communicative skills, and through execution they create experience, which in turn can empower citizens. Some examples of practices include voting, taking part in civic talk, and having the ability to connect to certain issues through the use of networks (to define and promote issues, express opinions, recruit support, create relationship bonds, and develop organizational skills). Media technologies play a crucial role in helping citizens to enact those practices and communicate. Over time, practices develop into traditions, and experience into collective memory. Both new and old practices need to grow and evolve to keep democracy healthy.

Spaces. For a functioning democracy, it is viable that citizens meet and talk to each other as well as contact their political representatives and enter the communicative spaces where policy and decision-making are discussed. Citizens can meet and talk in various physical spaces and settings in their everyday life. The presence of communicative spaces like viable public spheres is fundamental, but in the context of civic cultures, citizens' experiences of being able to access and use those spaces for civic purposes is also important. Media increases the possibilities for civic encounters and multiplies potential communicative spaces. Digital media contributes to the growth of what John Thompson calls "despatialized simultaneity" (referenced by Dahlgren 2009, p. 115): where the sense of co-presence in time is unconnected from physical proximity. Digital media also enables citizens to collectively construct new spaces and to move easily between different communicative spaces online, where strangers can easily create loose networks based on common interests and experiences. To further civic cultures, availability and accessibility of both online and offline communicative spaces is crucial, as are the skills and practices of finding, using, and generating new spaces. Dahlgren stresses that such mediated communicative spaces complement and compensate decreasing physical public spaces, but they do not replace real-life communication: much of social life is still connected to a physical place.

2.2. Media practices and activism

This dissertation is interested in the relationship between spaces and practices in the context of civic cultures. It makes use of a practice approach to empirically access the concept of space. Practices are a constitutive part of spaces: in particular, social space is produced by social forces and has not existed as a non-social or natural space prior to this production (Elden 2007). Even physical locations, like nation states, are products of practices (for example, the signing of peace treaties) and the everyday practices of its residents are governed by the rules valid in the space of the nation state. Media play an important role in shaping spatial practices, in how we perceive distance, but also in the world in general, in how we interact, and in how we behave in our immediate surroundings.

2.2.1. Practice theory and the definition of practice

Without embracing practice theory in its entirety, I use 'practice' as a sensitizing concept that helps me to look closely at the concrete activities that constitute the everyday communication of civil society organizations and how communication media figures in them.

Although theories of social practices have become a well used tool in studying the relationship between human agency and social systems, there is no unified 'practice theory' (Postill 2010). Relying on Theodore Schatzki, John Postill (2010) names two generations of practice theorists. The first of the two generations, formed by sociologists like Bourdieu and Giddens, set the basis for the theories of practice. They were concerned with resolving the opposition between agency and structure which treats social phenomena as either a result of individual action, as a result of structures, or as social wholes. The first generation of practice theorists found the human body to be linked with individuals' engagements with the world and that agency and structure are intertwined. Some examples of the concepts connected to practices that were developed in that time are Bourdieu's 'habitus' and 'field theory', and Giddens' 'structuration' (Postill 2010, pp. 7,8).

The second generation of practice theorists (e.g., Butler, Lyotard, Ortner, Schatzki, Reckwitz, and Warde) were interested in the philosophy of action and concentrated on performances, taking agency for granted (Warde 2014, p. 285). Andreas Reckwitz (2002) defines 'practice' as

> a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of

> understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (p. 249)

The common view for theories of practice is that practices are multidimensional and comprised of interconnected elements: in addition to activities that people do, they include mental and material aspects. Another aspect that theories of practice have in common is that they place practice as the fundamental element of social reality, and in that way their attention lies on the things actors do and not on the actors themselves or their motivations (Mattoni 2020).

According to Keven McMillan (2017), one of the main characteristics of practice is the aspect of the 'everyday', to the point that it becomes 'second nature'—it is habitual, based on skills which are, in turn, acquired by experience. Also, practices are embodied in tacit knowledge and know-how. One example of deeply routinized practice could be driving a car, where through acquired know-how (traffic rules) and the experience of operating a motor vehicle, we can easily move around without reflecting on how we do so. It isn't until we change vehicles or drive in a different country with different rules that we need to pay more attention to our driving activity.

Theorizing media practices has gained new momentum in media studies, in the research area of activism and social movements, among others.[9] Most of those studies rely on work by Nick Couldry (2004) who puts media practice discussions back on the scholarly agenda by proposing a new paradigm; 'media as practice', which treats media as an open set of practices relating to or oriented around media[10], both directly and indirectly. The main question is: what are people doing in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts?

However, in the Nordic countries in the 1980's and 90's, studies about media practices were conducted under the onus of 'media ethnography'. During that time, scholarly interest shifted from the medium towards audiences' meaning-making and how different media acquires meaning in the process of interaction within a specific group of people (Drotner 1993). Göran Bolin (1998) defines media ethnography in his dissertation as "a study

[9] One of the main books is "Theorizing Media and Practice" (Bräuchler and Postill 2010). "Mediation and protest movements" (Cammaerts, Mattoni & McCurdy 2013) folds the practice approach into social movement studies.

[10] Later, Hobart (2010) offers an upgrade to the concept with 'media–related practice' which allows us to consider absences (refusal to use some media) and how media has impacted other non-media-related practices.

that takes a certain group of people as a starting point and their relationship to one or many media (or the whole media use)" (p. 239). In that way, media ethnography filled the gap between the broadness of ethnography and the limits of the then-popular audience studies that focused on very limited parts of everyday life. Media ethnography focuses on the question of what relationship different groups have to their everyday lives, where media use is only one part of that life (Bolin 1998).

When studying everyday communication practices in civil society organizations in Estonia, on one side, their organizational work is guided by the laws and regulations of the Estonian state, and on the other side, they have developed a unique repertoire of their own, although their practices are influenced by the affordances of media technologies and institutions. My initial concern was how to differentiate between actions and practices. If an activity does not happen every day, is it still an everyday practice? Alice Mattoni (2020) offers a suitable explanation in her understanding of practice theory, by explaining practices as nexuses of actions (based on McMillan 2017)—in that formula, actions are concrete and datable events (for example, sending out a press release on a certain date about a certain issue) and practices are generalized forms of these actions (for example, the practice of sending out press releases for informing the press about the events).

Still, after one has differentiated between actions and practices, it becomes evident that practices are more than just generalized actions. Here, Mattoni (2020) points out the other elements that we can observe besides the performance of the action: the body of the performer, objects they use, the underlying relationships, motivations, and perceptions. Based on the above definition by Reckwitz and the work of Elisabeth Shove, Milka Pantzar, and Matt Watson (2012) about the interconnectedness of different elements of practice, Mattoni (2020) proposes her version for an operational definition of practice[11], which has three interconnected dimensions:

> First, the social, which refers to the actions of which the practices are more general phenomena of and that is performed into a social world and by social actors that have the skills to perform them. Then, the material, that points at the many and various concrete objects that such actions involve. Finally, the symbolic, that is linked to the meanings, motivations, emotions, and knowledge that subjects assign to actions and objects, and

[11] This definition has Mattoni created for her 'media-in-practice' approach, she has developed other approaches to study media practices of social movements.

> that also speaks about how these actions should be performed and understood. (p. 2834)

When studying media practices, Mattoni suggests taking material dimension as the starting point—media technologies that are deeply embedded in the everyday practices of social movements actors. This dissertation examines the role of media in the everyday practices and spaces of civil society organizations. The above definition is suitable for both media and spatial practices; however, for analyzing media practices, I rely on the concept of 'activist media practices' which I will describe in the coming section.

2.2.2. Activist media practices

When it comes to political participation and media practices, a practice approach has been successfully used in studying social movements and media. Alice Mattoni (2020) lists the benefits of studies about social movements' media practices: the shift in focus from one type of media device or platform to the interconnected use of different media; instead of generalizing about social movement environments, studies consider the contexts of media use; go beyond the structural role of media and highlight social movement actors' agency regarding media. As a downside, Mattoni highlights the studies' descriptive character and one-sided interest in the peaks of mobilizations, instead of analyzing the consequences of media practices to social movement actors and organizations during the times between mobilizations.

Mattoni (2012) created 'activist media practices' framework to study mobilizations of precarious workers in Italy to understand what social movement actors do with media as a whole when they communicate within and beyond the social movement setting while engaging in mobilizations. Such an approach makes it easier to see interconnections and interdependencies between actions and reactions regarding the media environment, technology, mediated messages and media professionals (ibid. p. 20).

Mattoni (2012) argues that practices are not only routinized, but also innovative, as they redefine old practices or produce new ones, and defines 'activist media practices' as:

> 1) both routinized and creative social practices that; 2) include interactions with media objects (such as mobile phones, laptops, pieces of paper) and media subjects (such as journalists, public relations managers, other activists); and 3) draw on how media objects and subjects are perceived and how the media environment is understood and known. (p. 159)

The 'activist media practices' framework is comprised of media knowledge practices and relational media practices.[12] Media knowledge practices include both the perceptions and the experiences of the media environment. Media knowledge practices contribute to creating a semantic map of the media environment: assumptions, predispositions, and attitude towards different types of media outlets, technologies, and professionals as they are enacted in practices connected to media literacy and self-reflexivity (Mattoni 2012). Relational media practices are directed toward interacting with media subjects, like media professionals, and/or toward media objects by manipulating, recombining and appropriating media technologies for spreading activists' messages as well as creating spaces of communication (ibid.).

If media knowledge practices were about skills and ideas surrounding media, then relational media practices are about activists' practical relationships to media technologies on one hand; and media subjects, like journalists, on the other hand. For example, media knowledge practices include the knowledge and preconceptions of different media outlets and journalists, for example which outlets are open for cooperation and which journalists to look out for. Such knowledge could be based on both personal preferences and earlier experience with those outlets and media professionals. Relational media practices are about these interactions—how contacts with media subjects are obtained and maintained. In that sense, media knowledge practices and relational media practices feed into each other: activist-created 'semantic maps of the media environment' (ibid.) or 'lay theories about media' (McCurdy 2011) influence how interactions with media subjects are conducted and how those interactions, in turn, contribute to the formation of these semantic maps.

For my purposes, I am applying Mattoni's framework in slightly different empirical context. Instead of studying the mobilization situations of non-established political actors (Mattoni 2012), in this text I consider media knowledge practices and relational media practices to be a part of everyday communication practices where possible mobilizations and wider visibility through media are just one part of the overall communication practices. Also, instead of social movement actors, I am studying a different form of organization in a different political and cultural context; that of established civil society organizations in Estonia.

[12] 'The repertoire of communication' is a combination of the media knowledge practices, relational media practices and media representations (Mattoni 2012). The scope of this study does not include media representations and focuses only on media knowledge practices and relational media practices.

2.3 Space, media, and the spatiality of political participation

Earlier in the chapter I introduced the concept of space as a dimension of civic cultures and the civic circuit (Dahlgren 2009). Spatial perspectives are also useful for understanding wider structural relationships and shed light on the 'connections between daily life experiences and broader social, political, and economic processes' (Martin and Miller 2003, p. 143). Further, studying space in the context of contentious politics gives knowledge on how spatial practices, built environments, and spatial power relations play role in the strategies and outcomes of social movements' activities (Sewell 2001).

Media have been seen as instruments for the construction of social space, and one of the proponents, Shaun Moores (2012), is interested in the relationship between media settings and the physical settings of social interaction. He argues that instead of leading to 'placelessness' (Meyrowitz 1985) media use can 'double reality' and create 'multiplicity of space' as social interactions can happen in both mediated and physical space. Media saturation of our homes and everyday lives has also altered the way we perceive and organize our space and behave in it (Bakardjieva 2005; Bengtsson 2006, 2018). Such increased media saturation in our everyday spaces has made it more difficult to separate studying social space from studying media (Couldry & McCarthy 2004).

2.3.1. Space, place, and media

Human and cultural geography distinguishes between place and space with the latter being more abstract; "a realm without meaning" (Cresswell 2004, p. 10). Place, on the other hand, is created by adding meaning and significance to space. Place is about how we make world meaningful and the way we experience the world (ibid., p. 12). John Agnew (2003) summarizes this distinction by arguing that space is created top-down, and place is created bottom-up. However, if you add media to the mix, the separation of space and place becomes more complicated, and the question arises as to how media affects our understanding of place and space and if mediated spaces should be considered spaces (or places) in their own right (cyberspace)?

Space

In this dissertation, my definition of space is mainly grounded in the field of human geography and their "post-spatial turn" understanding of space. In the 1980's, human geographers' focus shifted from seeing space as an abstract and quantifiable aspect of a real world, to studying space as something

concrete, as something that is used, seen and experienced (Sewell 2001). One of the most influential geographers who has contributed to conceptualizing space is Doreen Massey. She (2005) departs from the idea of space as a mere container of time, and, according to her, space is a product of interrelations which are rooted in practices. These interrelations, varying from global to intimate, contribute to the relational understanding of the world, and even spatial identities like places and nations can be reconceptualized in those same relational terms. Other characteristics of space according to Massey (ibid.) are the existence of multiplicity—she views space as a 'sphere of co-existing heterogeneity', (p. 10) where many narratives are present at the same time. Also, Massey argues that space is never a finished product but always under construction, which leads to a belief that the future of political discourse is open to change.

Another scholar who has had a profound influence on the modern understanding of space is Henri Lefebvre.[13] He understood space as a social product, which is both mental and material and is created through practices. Based on Stuart Elden's (2007) overview, Lefebvre views space in three ways: as perceived, conceived, and lived space (p 110). The first type of space is a physical space which is generated and used. The second type is conceived space, which sees space as a mental construct, for example maps and city plans. The third, lived space, includes real and imagined spaces, and is invested with symbolism and meaning which is acquired through the use of the space over time. Below is a small table with a detailed overview of Lefebvre's space triad (ibid. p. 110):

Spatial practice	Perceived	Physical	Materialism
Representations of space	Conceived	Mental	Idealism
Spaces of representation	Lived	Social	Materialism and idealism

Regarding the role of media in the production of space, André Jansson (2007) notes:

[13] Lefebvre's main work about space is *The Production of Space* (1991), which was originally published in 1974 in French and only translated to English in 1991.

> Digital information and communication technology (ICT) networks blur the boundaries not only between perceived and/or conceived spatial categories (public-private, local-global, etc.) but also between the processes (material, symbolic and imaginary) that constitute space itself. (p. 185)

In that sense, media technologies and especially digital media technologies add a layer of complexity in the understanding of space. Besides mediating communication over distances, one can 'surf the web' or 'go online'. Some ask if mediated space and especially so-called cyberspace is separate from social or cultural space as often there is a separation between 'real' space and online space (Isin & Ruppert 2015). Isin and Ruppert (2015) argue that when it comes to the internet, our relation to that space becomes more ambiguous:

> It is not just our bodies that are connected through the internet but also our devices in which our lives are embodied. To put it differently, while being online may be a discontinuous activity, being connected is almost always continuous. (ibid. p. 27)

With mobile devices we can bring that space with us everywhere we go and according to Miller and Slate (2000, referenced by Moores 2012), internet spaces, being an important part of everyday life, are not isolated but are continuous with other social spaces. Stina Bengtsson (2006) fleshes out some of the ways media use arranges our everyday spaces: media use creates boundaries in physical space, as spaces are used for different everyday rituals like work, play, and rest. Media also function to create links between material spaces at home and the world outside. Bengtsson's findings are particularly resonant now, almost 20 years after their initial publishing, as we find ourselves in the midst of pandemic and working and studying from home. Those spaces that used to be separate physical spaces of office and school are brought together in one domestic space and the individual work of creating and maintaining boundaries between the spaces becomes more challenging.

Place

For some scholars, places are tied to a location (Agnew 1987); for others they are theoretical abstractions, created only by practices (Pink 2012). Tim Cresswell (1996) calls places "centers of meaning". He explains that places are both material and mental, they exist in the material form (a building, a village) and at the same time carry some sort of significance. Cresswell gives

an example of a church which is both a specific building and at the same time a set of religious ideas. In that sense, the understanding of place is more complex than just a simple reference to a certain location. The concept of place is then similar to that of space, being both abstract and concrete, in which human practices play an important role in meaning-making.

Based on his study about voter behavior in Scotland and the US, John Agnew (1987) argues that political behavior is intrinsically geographical, and how people participate is influenced by their location. For defining place in this study, I follow Agnew's (ibid.) definition of place which is a triad—like Lefebvre's conception of space—but incorporates the everyday, wider societal processes and the subjective meaning of place. Agnew (ibid.) defines place along three interconnected dimensions: *locale*, which refers to the settings of everyday life and places of routine social interaction; *location*, a geographical area incorporating the settings of social interactions and governed by wider social and economic and political processes; and *sense of place*, or subjective orientation and the affective bonds created by living in a place.

Putting Agnew's concept of place to use, I will take Audru, a small municipality in Estonia as an example. It is a place where I grew up and spent 18 years of my life. Following Agnew's definition of place, 'locale' then is the part of Audru where I spent most of my everyday life which is not more than a few square kilometers, although the municipality itself is much larger. It is a 'location' or a place within geographical space, as Audru municipality belongs to Pärnu county which is in Southwest Estonia. With the latest reform, Audru was integrated to Pärnu town, which altered some of the social, economic, and political processes, as governing became more centralized. The 'sense of place' is my affective bond to the locale which has not disappeared even if I do not spend my daily life there anymore.

One should be aware that Agnew's (ibid.) definition of place comes from the era prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall and before widespread digital media technologies. One could even say that some spaces within the internet are places. For example, a Facebook group used for civic talk is a setting for social interaction which, in turn, is located within a specific online space—a social media platform—and people who use the group attach significance to the interactions and to the group members. However, in my analysis, I reserve the concept of place to spaces that are tied to a physical location and where the meaning of place is created by practices.

How does our media saturated everyday lives influence our understanding of place? How important is a physical place if media can instantly take us

anywhere in the world? And how does it affect how we participate in politics? Joshua Meyrowitz (2005) proposes that we live in 'glocalities'—the coexistence of the local and the global—we are place bound with our bodies and our daily lives, but media expand our perceptional field further. We judge our locality through 'the generalized elsewhere' and all our media function as a mental 'global positioning system'—we conceive our place through an imagined elsewhere. Media also alter the meanings of interactions in the locality. For example, through the elsewhere specific and located personal difficulties are translated into more abstract social issues and into struggles between social categories. Thus, place is still important as we are located, but our relationship to that location and possibly our political behavior has become more complex. Manuel Castells (2002) argues that a 'global–local nexus', which refers to and connects local struggles to global level is essential for urban social movements to have a power to create change. For one, being limited to their own communities, urban social movements may contribute to further spatial fragmentation (ibid.). Also, in the case of environmental movements, it is important for local people to be able to connect their case to the larger global/national scale and discourse in order to get the necessary support to create the desired change (Rootes 1999).

The empirical part of this thesis is tied to a location or place in different ways. First, the study submerges itself into a specific geo-political context; that of Estonia. Second, participating CSOs are located (their offices are located in the major cities); concrete forests that Estonian Forest Aid has helped to save are located and form a part of the sense of place to people living in the vicinity. However, these locations are not isolated, and local forest issues are tied to a larger deforestation problem nationally and globally; local people need media visibility to get national recognition of their causes. Even though most of the CSOs whose representatives I interviewed had an office space in the bigger cities, a lot of work was still done remotely via communication technologies.

2.3.2. Civic space

Civic spaces, both physical and mediated, are created by civic practices. Certain built environments are well suited for civic activities, but they only become civic spaces through practices. For example, a town square can, at the same time, be a tourist destination, an everyday route to work, and a hangout place or it could become a civic space through certain practices like a protest march. In that sense, something can be a place and a space at the same time: a town square is part of a public space, but occasionally it can turn into a place

for political participation. But protest is just one form of political participation. What other civic spaces exist for social movements but also for citizens and civil society organizations?

Traditionally, the Greek *agora* was the place where citizens met and discussed matters of public interest. In contemporary times, there are concerns about the disappearance of public space and its replacement with private spaces like shopping malls (Coleman 2013).

For social movements and also for democracy, the availability of physical public spaces is crucial, and sometimes the planning of urban space influences the ways mobilizations in these public spaces occur (Parkinson 2012). Meeting places are important for social movements, even during latent periods outside mobilizations. For example, 'movement scenes', consisting of both human networks of like-minded people and certain physical meeting places, provide an alternative non-institutional structure to aid social movements—they help to help mobilize, attract new members, sustain the movement during periods of latency, and work as a space for training civic skills and to engage in civic talk (Haunss & Leach 2007). Kimberly Creasap (2012, 2016) considers movement scenes to be processes rather than static spaces, as creating one is a political activity. One such example is a squatting movement (Polanska 2016).

'Safe spaces' (The Roestone Collective 2014) or 'free spaces' (Polletta 1999) to meet are important for not only social movements but for civil society and citizens in general. In civil society, the emphasis is on the formal organizations or voluntary associations that play important roles in creating 'social capital' (Putnam 2001). Even here, non-institutional meeting places or 'third places' (Oldenburg 1999), like cafes, parks, and hair salons are important for evolving civic cultures, as non-political places have the potential to create political initiative (for online 'third spaces' see Wright 2012).

The above examples of civic space are based on places for face-to-face meetings. Civic space could also be something more symbolic, or discursive and overarching: Peter Dahlgren (2016) considers civil society and the public sphere to be civic spaces. He names civil society as sites where people enact their role as citizens and the public sphere as the communicative space of politics. A short definition of the public sphere is something like this: "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, Lennox & Lennox 1974). The public sphere is a both conceptual and physical space for citizens to meet and talk, and it comes to life in the active and rational reasoning of the public (Dahlgren 1995).

These civic spaces—civil society and the public sphere—are comprised of many physical and mediated communicative spaces. However, these communicative spaces are not solely public, as public and private spheres are increasingly diffused (Papacharissi 2010). In Estonia, one can vote for Parliament on the internet from anywhere; at home in front of the TV, or while having a coffee at a coffeehouse. Civil society organizations are public bodies, but a lot of the everyday practices that feed into their political participation are enacted in spaces outside the public eye. Nevertheless, those communicative spaces are also civic and deserve scholarly attention.

2.3.3. Space and time

When studying social space, another important and interconnected concept is time. According to Massey (2005), there is a dominant idea in the philosophical and social theoretical debates that spatial framing could be used to contain the temporal: that the world stands still for one moment and one can therefore analyze its structure. Massey is critical of this kind of static view of space and advocates an understanding of space that is characterized by openness, heterogeneity, and liveliness.

In the empirical part of this study, the aspects of time and space have two different expressions. To understand the present practices of CSOs, it is important to be able to place those practices in context. Göran Bolin (2003) suggests temporal perspectives and articulates space in time as a way of approaching space and time when analyzing media landscapes and studying the processes of change. Going back in time is a way of understanding the present. In this case, a historic description of Estonian civil society and its media landscape is helpful in making sense of the everyday communication practices of CSOs during the contemporary time, the second decade of the 2000s. Those practices are, on one hand, influenced by geographical and cultural space, but also the media landscape, and the spaces with in it.[14]

I followed one organization, Estonian Forest Aid, for two years to study the development of civic cultures over time. One way of looking at time in the context of social movements is through cycles as they go through times

[14] As an example, I am drawing a parallel to Bulgaria, where the relationship to mainstream media and visibility in mediated places is problematic for civil society actors. The main reason is a low trust in mass media, the means of which is often are owned by oligarchs; people of whom the activists are critical. Therefore, activists prefer to use alternative communicative spaces to gain visibility and attract supporters (Bakardjieva, Bengtsson, Bolin & Engelbrekt 2021). Estonia and Bulgaria also have different historical trajectories they have followed to reach the present point.

of visibility and latency (Melucci 1989). During different times, the types of communicative spaces and the intensity of their use changes. While protesting, streets are a common gathering space, but during latent times, other meeting places are likely preferred. To study activist groups during 'normal times' Kathleen M. Blee (2014) suggests that we pay attention to groups' own trajectories of action and the turning points that change those trajectories. Leaning on Emirbayer and Mische's argument of agency taking place both *over* time and *in* time, Blee argues that the practices of activists are simultaneously directed toward the past (habitual ways of doing things, learning from past events), the present (matters of immediate concern) and the future (distant goals). Studying the Estonian Forest Aid's trajectories of action helps us to understand the process of political participation—not only the visible action, but also the path-dependencies (ibid.), the motivations of activists, and the development of the group and their experience over time. Being interested in communicative spaces and practices, following one organization over time helps me to understand how those spaces and practices evolve and change over time.

In addition, one can also study the time of a certain social space. Veronica Barassi (2015) conceptualizes the temporality of social media by analyzing the social media practices of social movement actors. She focusses on immediacy and the relationship between the hegemonic construction of social time and the everyday social media practices of the activists. Barassi argues that the activists reproduce the temporality of immediacy through their practices; for example through real-time reporting at protests or by swiftly answering messages on the chat. What Barassi (2015) calls "temporalizing practices" influence the everyday workflow of CSOs and the way the activists perceive social media.

To summarize, in this study I use 'place' for those geographical, material sites where people can meet, act, and engage, in, for example political or activist practice. In these places, social action (including speech acts) result in discursive spaces. Discursive spaces do not have coordinates, and cannot be found on Google maps, but they are nonetheless of the utmost importance in the construction of civic culture. I will then reserve the concept of 'space' for those symbolic rooms in which communicative deliberation occurs which are the result of civic practice. Civic spaces in this thesis are communicative spaces—they could be both symbolic and physical, public or private, but the main thing is that they are created by practices of civil society organizations. On one hand, these organizations operate within civil society and on the other hand, they create and utilize a variety of communicative spaces with

the ultimate goal of contributing to the common good and of bringing change to society.

2.4. Summary

This chapter has presented the central theoretical concepts informing my study. In short, those concepts were civic cultures, practices, and spaces. First, the chapter presented a cultural approach to political participation in the conceptual form of civic cultures, which in this case is about communication patterns and practices rooted in the everyday life-world of citizens. The operationalization of civic cultures based on Peter Dahlgren's (2009) framework of civic circuit was then introduced. Furthermore, the chapter gave an overview of the main concepts of focus: practices and space. It then shortly took up practice theory and the discussions around media practices before zooming in on the 'activist media practices' framework developed by Alice Mattoni (2012) as a way of analyzing the civil society organizations' relationship to media at large within their everyday work context. The understanding of space was divided into place and space, with the former being based in a material location and the latter being both symbolic and discursive, something that is created by practices and through lived experiences. The chapter offered a notion of civic space to study how active citizens and civil society organizations create communicative spaces for civic talk and political participation. The chapter was concluded with a brief account of the relationship between space and time.

3. Method

In this chapter, the methodological approaches and implications for the empirical study are discussed and the process of material collection and analysis is described. As a reminder, the aim of this dissertation is to analyze contemporary Estonian civil society to understand the ways in which both established and evolving CSOs navigate the highly-mediated everyday through their routine media practices and the spaces in which these practices are situated. I have used a media ethnographic approach with mixed data collection methods, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative methods, to reach the research aim and answer the research questions. More precisely, the empirical material includes survey data, semi-structured interviews, and data from online and offline observations.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, I will introduce the overall research design and media ethnography approach. This is followed by describing the different research methods employed for data collection, and descriptions of the research material and the process of analysis. Finally, I will reflect on my practices as a researcher and consider research ethics.

3.1. Research design

The empirical study of my dissertation uses a media ethnographic approach, which includes an array of data collection methods: survey, semi-structured interviews, and participant observations. All these parts have their own role to play in the overall study going from more general to specific: the civic cultures/civic space of Estonian population (survey), then the everyday and spaces of civil society organizations (interviews), and finally a case study of Estonian Forest Aid (EFA). This dissertation makes use of longitudinal study that covers the first two years of EFA movement activity. The reason for following the movement over a longer period is to understand how civic cultures emerge and evolve through everyday communication practices. To be able to make sense of the process, the empirical study of civil society organizations needs to be viewed in a wider context. Therefore, I have designed my study in three steps, illustrated by Figure 1.

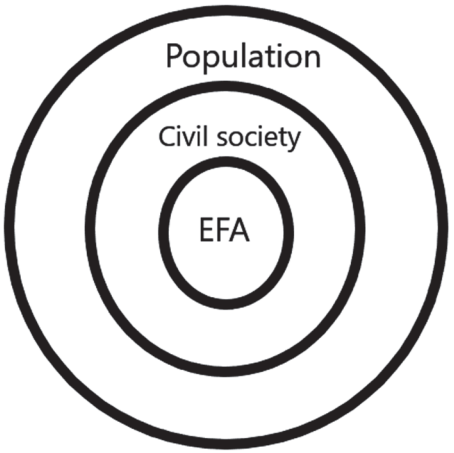

Figure 1. Study design

Going through the methods one by one, the survey questions are directed toward finding out to what extent the Estonian population uses different media for participating in matters of public and political importance, and the attitudes toward civil society and civil society organizations (CSOs). Survey results are used mainly in Chapter 4, where I give a historical overview of Estonian civil society and map the contemporary civil society which acts like an arena for the 'civic cultures' (Dahlgren 2009). The survey contributes to constructing the cultural and geopolitical context where the case study plays out and where civic cultures evolve and are practiced.

I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews in total, 11 of which were with different civil society organizations, and 6 of which took place during the in-depth study of Estonian Forest Aid. The interviews make up the second layer of context; that of civil society. Here, the focus lies on the day-to-day communication work of civil society organizations with various orientations and organizational structures aimed at achieving a broader understanding of their everyday communication practices and spaces as well as the ways media is used and perceived as connected to it.

In final circle on Figure 1, I completed a longitudinal study of the Estonian Forest Aid movement, following them from their emergence and during their first two years of activity. The choice of EFA for my study seemed appropriate, as it was an opportunity to follow a group of strangers that met through the Facebook and evolved into a considerable actor in civil society that takes active part in democratic processes. Longitudinal and media

ethnographic approaches allowed me to see beyond the visible events into everyday communication practices.

3.2. Media ethnographic approach

Ethnography in the traditional anthropological sense studies groups of people in their specific 'natural habitat' (Burawoy 1991) and often requires lengthy field-visits to the studied community. As this study is focusing on media practices, I am leaning on a *media ethnographic* approach, rather than on full-blown ethnography. Media ethnography, as it has been discussed by Kirsten Drotner (1993) and others (for example Bolin 1998, Fornäs 1989, Moores 1993) can be defined as an methodological approach that is concerned with "the social interaction within a specific group of people (often limited in number and defined by the local area in which they live, work or go to school); and the researcher investigates how a variety of media operate and acquire meaning within this field of interaction" (Drotner 1993, p.35). However, Bolin (1994) points out the need to be more specific about the media aspect in the media ethnographic approach, since media is already deeply rooted in our everyday lives. He suggests concentrating on a certain group of people and their relationship to a specific media (or all their media use), rather than the entire field of interaction. This dissertation follows the definition given by Drotner (1993), in following a specific group, in this case EFA and studying their relationship to different media in the everyday work context. However, because digital media in its different forms allows us to form communities and affiliations without being defined by the local area, I am interested in the role of space in the everyday interactions of all the studied organizations.

Looking back, media ethnography was, at first, a methodological loan from audience studies from anthropology but has become a sub-field in its own right (Nightingale 2012). According to Drotner (1993), since the end of the 1970's, albeit coming from different starting points, there was a simultaneous rise in the interest of ethnographic methods in media studies and in general qualitative social research in Anglo-American and Nordic countries. It originated from the interest in the complexities of mediated meaning-making which was accompanied by conversations about media power (Drotner 1993). Bolin (1994) adds that at first, media ethnography was used as a tool for audience reception studies and often investigated what kind of role a certain medium played in the audiences' everyday life or how they interpreted media texts. It was also concerned with cultural aspects of media

production, texts, and consumption, as well as how audiences are involved in cultural production through media use (Bolin 1994).

Drotner (1993) proposes that media ethnography has some specific traits that distinguishes it from traditional media reception studies. Besides the focus on social interaction within groups of people, she stresses the importance of the researcher's immersion in the field and prioritizes paying attention to interpersonal patterns of activity. Another characteristic of media ethnography is the use of triangulation in data collection: besides a traditional ethnographic approach, there might be other data collection methods involved (for example textual analysis), which allow for diverse and heterogeneous material. Alongside the array of research methods, since media use has permeated people's life-worlds, media ethnography is epistemologically focused on everyday life (Drotner 1994).

For the methods chapter, the more relevant question regards how to study the 'everyday'. Sarah Pink (2012) argues that as researchers we are a part of the everyday and the dilemma is how to both live it and study it, as we cannot just go to everyday, as we are always engrossed in it, and as it is in constant movement. Pink (2012) proposes a distinction between everyday life as it is lived and everyday life as it is represented (p. 44). She adds that representation is a part of everyday life and essential to the mediation of everyday life; especially now, when it is common to post about one's daily life on social media.

Media ethnography and digital media practices

With the widespread use of the internet and personal media technologies, digital media has intertwined with our everyday life, and our ways of interacting, which in turn pose challenges for ethnographic studies. Hallett and Barber (2014) acknowledge that without adding communicative spaces in digital media to traditional ethnographic studies, we might not give an accurate portrayals of peoples' lifeworlds. Some other challenges are, for example, collecting and making sense of digital data (Coleman, 2010), following groups in their complex mix of online and offline habitats (Postill & Pink 2012; Hallett & Barber 2014), and the challenges of immersing oneself in online ethnographic fieldwork without leaving one's own natural habitat (Bengtsson 2014).

Coleman (2010) puts into words the role of ethnographic studies in digital media. They "provincialize and thus particularize the role that digital media play in the construction of sociocultural worlds, group identities and representations, protocols of economic exchange, communicative genres, and

phenomenological experience" (p. 497). Thus, according to Coleman (2010), the task of the ethnographer is to look behind the universal presumptions of digital experiences to show how, where, and why they matter.

There are different ways to go about doing ethnography when it comes to digital media. Firstly, without travelling to the field physically, one can do digital ethnography and study online communities and cultures (see for example Kozinets (2015) for his concept of 'netnography') or focus one's inquiry around a certain media event (Hine 2000, from Postill & Pink 2012). Postill and Pink (2012) propose 'internet-related ethnography'; as when studying social movements' media use, one needs to consider a complex mix of online and offline interaction and that means studying groups both in their natural and internet habitats. They suggest focusing on 'socialities' instead of spatially-bound notions of networks and communities. Socialities concentrate on the qualities of social relationships instead of just belonging to a community. Such an approach allows us to focus both on belonging and on the more transitory contacts that exceed the borders of online–offline. Consequently, locality acquires a different meaning in ethnography that involves digital media. Sarah Pink (2009) conceptualizes 'ethnographic places' which are not physical localities, but collections of things that become intertwined (this could include physical places but does not have to). Postill and Pink (2012) argue that practices produce place, and moreover, that ethnographic places are constructed by researchers through their own practices.

Besides the problematic of 'place' in contemporary media ethnographic research, there is also the issue of time. Traditional ethnographic fieldwork usually requires lengthy field visits to the studied cultures. Often this is not feasible nor necessary. Pink and Morgan (2013), propose short-term theoretically-informed ethnography as an approach that leads to deep and valid ways of knowing. Also, Bakardjieva (2005) in her study about domestic internet use in Canada, argued for short intentional visits instead of a long time spent in the field, waiting for things to happen.

'Ethnographic places' in this study included short intentional field visits and daily presence in online spaces, specifically in two of EFA's Facebook groups, where the bulk of everyday discussions took place. I took the opportunity to take part in gatherings and had also one-on-one meetings for interviews. An analysis of social media spaces was included in my research aims, and therefore my observations in those spaces were guided by the research questions and the study's underlying theoretical framework. In

addition, social media monitoring helped me to stay updated about EFA activities and the occurrences surrounding the 'forest war'.

3.3. Material overview and data collection process

Data collection was partially coordinated with the "New Media and the Dynamics of Civil Society in the New EU Democracies: Retooling Citizenship in the Baltics and the Balkans"[15] research project. My study was planned in three steps. The first step was the collection of quantitative data in the form of a representative national survey, conducted in October 2015, aimed at understanding the Estonian population's media use patterns, practices connected to issues of public and political importance, and attitudes toward CSOs. In the second step, I interviewed CSO members/employees. These interviews were conducted at the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017. The choice of organizations was guided by the accessibility of organizations, their field of operation and actual issues in society. To narrow this down, I included organizations from certain areas: the environment, human rights (including refugee help), and advocacy. The third and final stage was material collection for the case study of Estonian Forest Aid (EFA), which is a civic movement dedicated to protecting Estonian forests. My study covers the first two years of their activity: from the end of 2016 when EFA was formed, until the end of 2018. Fieldwork included participant observation both online and on location, interviews with group members, and collecting various documents and secondary data.

Empirical materials for the study comprise survey data and interview transcripts, as well as field notes, recordings, screen shots, and pictures from observations. Those primary sources are supported by secondary data from public documents and web sites, news articles, press releases, screenshots from Facebook posts, and e-mail correspondence.

The table in Figure 2 summarizes the empirical material used in this dissertation.

[15] This dissertation is a part of the "New Media and the Dynamics…" project which is a paired comparison between Estonia and Bulgaria with the aim of finding out if the growing permeation of social life by new media contributes to strengthening civil society in the new EU democracies in the Baltics and the Balkans, and the concrete processes and mechanisms through which new media help develop and consolidate civil society in these countries.

Type of material	Description	Timespan
Survey	Original and nationally representative, N = 1000	October 2015
Interviews	17, a list of interviewees can be found in the Appendix 3.	2016–2018
Online observation	2 Facebook groups	2016–2018
Offline observation	2 occasions, weekend EFA camps	August 2017 and 2018
Secondary data	Webpages, e-mails, internal documents, media texts (self-representation: articles, press releases, and news stories written by EFA), media representation (articles about EFA in mainstream media), official reports	2016–2018

Figure 2. Table overview of empirical material

The research data from these three steps have different roles to play in the dissertation. The reach of the material goes from wider (an entire population), to more specific (the EFA movement). Therefore, the survey data is for understanding the wider context, namely interviews with CSOs to provide the civil society context, and the case study is used to follow the creation and development of civic cultures of a specific group of citizens in their quest to influence forest politics. In the following sections, I will describe all three steps of material collection in detail.

3.3.1. Survey

Within the scope of the larger project on dynamics related to media in civil society and the purpose of a paired comparison, two parallel nationally representative surveys with identical questions were executed in Estonia and Bulgaria at the end of 2015. The survey was constructed by the whole research team including myself, and I was thus involved in the entire data collection process. The rationale for the choices of these two countries were that they were sharing the same post-Soviet legacy of repressed civil society, and while one was a media-rich country (Estonia), the other had less-developed digital

media infrastructure, with less access and use of digital technologies (Bulgaria). In this dissertation, I am using only the Estonian data.

The survey study was conducted in Estonia in October 2015 with the help of the local polling agency Turu-uuringute AS. The survey was created with the objective of measuring the scope of digital media penetration in Estonia to find out if citizens use these media to become informed about and to participate in issues regarding public affairs and political developments. Questions were divided into six themes: media use, access to and use of digital technology, media use for civic engagement/participation in public affairs and/or political issues, attitudes toward civil society organizations and public institutions, degree of organized membership in political/civic/cultural organizations and knowledge of such organizations, and socio-demographic characteristics. Some of the questions in the survey were, for example, how often different forms of media are used, and what are the most trusted sources for news; questions about access and the quality of access to the internet; how social media is used; what activities are done on the internet that are connected to public and political issues; questions about being aware of and supporting civil society organizations (CSO) and attitudes toward them; and if the surveyed individuals are members of any CSOs. For this study, I was interested in questions about the main information channels, what activities people perform related to issues of public and political importance as well as questions about the activities and attitudes connected to CSOs and public institutions.

At the end of the Estonian version of the survey, there was an option to add contact details (phone number, e-mail) for further questions, but I did not make use of that opportunity. The full survey questionnaire is added in the Appendix 1.

The sample

The sample (N =1000, sampling error = ±3.1%) is representative of the population of Estonia and describes the behavior patterns and attitudes of permanent inhabitants of Estonia aged 18 and above (representing 1,072,179 individuals according to statistics from 2014). The sample was formed according to the proportional model of the general sample which is based on area and settlement size. Short overview of the demographic characteristics of the sample shows that 44.3% of respondents were men and 55.7% were female. The raw data was a bit overrepresented by older age groups, but the sample was weighted to adjust it. 72.6% of interviewees used Estonian as a main language and 27.4% used another language (mainly Russian). 69.2% of

the sample lives in an urban area and 30.8% in a rural area, and 32.0% of respondents live in the capital, Tallinn. A complete overview of the sample can be found in the Appendix 2.

The quantitative data has two purposes for this dissertation: first, combined with secondary data about Estonian civil society, it provides a background to the in-depth study of CSOs. I have used descriptive statistics to obtain information about the 'individual structure of civil society' (Uhlin 2010) in Estonia (how many people are active in CSOs, what sort of activities people do online connected to political engagement, etc.) and civic culture (Almond & Verba 1989)—what attitudes people have towards civil society. Secondly, the survey data produces a context for analyzing the media practices of civil society organizations, making it possible to compare some themes that arise from the interviews with the general population.

The survey was completed a year before EFA's formation and the following wide-ranging societal discussion about sustainable forest politics. Around the same time, there were a number of other civic mobilizations, like protests against the building of the cellulose factory, and different actions connected to the refugee crisis, to give some examples. This raises the question as to whether my survey data is giving a correct picture of the situation on the national level. I am aware of the issue while doing an analysis of the qualitative data. At the same time, coupled by newer studies, my data provides a good comparison of before and after the activation of civil society, and a chance to see whether there were any changes in how people engage in public matters over the last few years.

For the survey, I used descriptive statistics to obtain summaries about the sample and its observations. The statistical software package 'Stata' was used to analyze the data. At first, I explored the whole data set, to get an idea about internet access, media usage, the most trusted media sources, and the sample's demographic composition. For my study, the relevant questions were about attitude towards civil society and political institutions in CSOs, and media practices connected to public and political issues.

3.3.2. Interviews

All together I conducted 17 interviews for this study. Of those, 11 were with different civil society organizations and 6 were with EFA coordinators. Interviews could thus be divided into two stages. In the first stage, I held 12 interviews with different CSOs on three separate occasions between the end of December 2016 to the end of February 2017. The EFA case study emerged from one of these interviews. Later I carried out 5 more interviews with EFA

coordinators on 4 different occasions between the summer and winter of 2018.

In the CSOs, in total of 11 interviews were held with individuals from different organizations. In most cases, one person was interviewed but in some cases, there were two people present and in one case there were four people, who comprised the whole staff of the organization. It was relatively easy to access these organizations. I got rejected once, and in two other cases, the interviews did not happen because we did not manage to find a suitable time, or the request was seen as too late.

The first 11 interviews were planned and conducted in order to respond to wider research questions on CSOs within the "Retooling Citizenship" project. That aspect somewhat influenced the choice of interview participants, regarding their area of activity. Other factors—like access to organizations, their level of presence in online media, and the issues on the society's agenda—further determined the final choice of the organizations in the sample. Since CSOs and associations divide themselves into various categories, among them political parties, unions, and sports and hobby associations, it was important to narrow down the choice of participants. I decided to concentrate on the organizations active in the areas aimed at the common good: the environment, human rights, animal rights, feminism, and umbrella organizations for CSOs. I excluded CSOs and associations that concentrate on their own members, like sports and cultural associations, and housing cooperatives. The reason to choose these categories was due to the research focus on political participation (rather than culture and sports-oriented organizations), and because these CSOs have better chance of actively influencing political decision-making and of mobilizing the wider public than other kinds of organizations. I usually spoke with the managers or the communication officers of the organizations. In three cases I was talking to volunteers, since they did not get paid for their position. Most of the CSOs participating in my study were professional organizations that have full and/or part time employees, and sometimes use volunteers for specific tasks.

The interviews were semi-structured, which meant that I used the same interview guide for all interviews, but in some cases, some questions were not relevant and therefore excluded (during the interview) and in some cases I asked extra questions when something interesting came up during our talk. So, the interview followed a guide, but the questions were mostly open-ended, to leave room for the participants to offer stories from their own experiences. Questions in the interview guide were divided into two major

categories: organizational and individual. Questions about the organization were in turn divided into subcategories of general information, internal communication, external communication, and digital media. Under the individual category, there were questions about the participant, their background, their earlier experience with digital media, and their preferred channels and personal media practices connected to taking part in public discussions. As a final question, I asked everybody what, in their opinion, characterizes an active citizen. The full interview guide can be found in the Appendix 4.

As mentioned earlier, six interviews of a total of 17 were made with EFA coordinators. Two of the interviews are with the same person, made during EFA's infancy in February 2017, and then close to their 2nd year anniversary in November 2018. The other interviews were done on separate occasions with core members. One of the interviews turned organically into a focus group when several other people joined in the conversation while I was interviewing one person during the EFA weekend camp, which is a yearly gathering for EFA to make plans for future projects, to socialize, and to strengthen social ties. One interview was made over the phone, and another interview was preceded by a lengthy forest hike around the home forest of my respondent. On one occasion I visited the coordinator (and his partner who was also active in EFA at the time) in his office location in Tallinn. The questions were loosely (except for the first interview, which was conducted at the first stage) based on the general interview guide, but this time, questions were adapted to the interviewee: how they became active and about their role in the organization. Also, there were more general questions; for example about EFAs' general communication practices, relationships with mainstream media and public officials,' and EFAs role in the Estonian civil society.

All interviews were conducted in the Estonian language and recorded. In the beginning of each interview, I informed participants about my study, about the research ethics involved, and asked for their consent for the interview to be recorded. Most of the interviews were between 1.5 and 2 hours long. I let participants decide where to meet. Therefore, the interviews were held in different places: mostly in the offices of the organizations, but also in cafes, and in one case, at the university library. With two of the interviewees, we ran out of time and finished the interview over Skype at a later time. All interviews were transcribed; partly by me, but most of them with the help of Eesti Uuringukeskus OÜ. Later the interviews were

translated to English by the Luisa translation agency in order for them to be useful for the rest of the project members.

Introducing Estonian Forest Aid

As identified above, one part of the empirical study is the case of the civic association "Eesti Metsa Abiks", or "Estonian Forest Aid" (EFA).[16] The empirical objects are the group's everyday communication practices and their spaces of interaction.

EFA gained my interest as a research object because it was fast-growing and gained broad public support. It also brought visibility and urgency to a highly-contentious issue with strong industry interest. It focused on problems related to the environment that 1) have strong symbolic significance in Estonia and 2) intersect with many other issues concerning democratic governance, such as transparency and taking into consideration the views of local communities and affected citizens.

My reasons for choosing EFA are threefold: first, although the movement started with a protest event, their later communication strategy was cooperation oriented to bring together different groups with the same aim of protecting Estonian forests. Second, as this dissertation is theoretically grounded in political participation in democratic processes, EFA seemed a good choice, as their communication and activities are guided by the Estonian constitution and laws about nature protection, and have a strong tradition of demanding more transparent governing and emphasizing citizens' right to take part in the decision-making. Finally, as EFA emerged during my overall fieldwork, following a new group gives a good opportunity to study the evolution of civic cultures.

Observing a newly-formed group has its challenges, as they do not yet have a collective memory and routine communication practices are still to be developed. To meet these challenges, I paid attention to the context of their appearance (Chapter 4) and followed EFA activities for a longer period of time (two years). For the latter, online observations and collecting other supporting material helped facilitate prolonged fieldwork.

Although during my fieldwork I became aware that individual skills, communication routines and relationships to media played a role in the overall group's communication practices, the focus is still mainly on the

[16] They have a juridical body for formalities but consider themselves to be a movement or network. Therefore, I refer to them as a 'movement'.

collective everyday communication practices or 'socialities' (Postill & Pink 2012) and the situatedness of those practices.

3.3.3. Observation

One part of my fieldwork included participant observation for the Estonian Forest Aid case study. The observation took place both on-site and online. For my fieldwork, engaging in long-term participant observation onsite was complicated, since first of all, there was no permanent location available in the case of the EFA movement. Also, the factors of time and living in Sweden played a deciding role. Therefore, short term and intentional field visits (Bakardjieva 2005; Pink & Morgan 2013) were the best option for me, as a researcher. Through theoretically-informed (practice theory) short (but intentional) visits, combined with online observations, it was possible to produce an 'ethnographic place' (Postill & Pink 2012) to study media practices and place production of the EFA movement.

In short, fieldwork on location included two weekend events, one in August 2017 and another in August 2018. The online fieldwork consisted of being in the constant information field of EFA for two consecutive years, from the beginning of 2017 to the end of 2018. This was done by following two of their Facebook groups—the large public one and the internal forum. Besides following the Facebook groups, I received e-mails from the mailing list, followed the news on their webpage, and read media representations of the group.

Online

EFA's online public presence included a webpage, a public Facebook group (more than 7000 members in 2018) that is linked to a Facebook page, and an Instagram account. Among the semi-public communication channels there was a mailing list for members, and they also had a secret Facebook group[17] for the core activists. I became a member of EFA's public Facebook group shortly after it was established in December 2016. Since then, I followed their discussions and kept myself updated about their activities, discussions around forest issues, and any other topics under discussion. I took screen-shots of posts I found interesting. I was also added to their internal forum, so I could see and take part in the discussions there.

[17] A "secret" group is a distinction made by Facebook. It means the group is closed and not possible to be found by search function. In case of EFA, the secret group was the internal forum where the more committed members gathered.

I signed up as a member and was added to their members' mailing list. Since June 2017 until the end of 2018, I archived all the communication from that mailing list. There, the most important information was posted: press releases, upcoming events and meetings, and activity planning. Usually, the information posted by the core coordinators was doubled in other channels, but there were also e-mail conversations about different topics like what EFA stands for, comments about events, and acknowledgements for a job well done.

I was closely following two Facebook groups; the public Facebook group, and the internal forum. The public Facebook group I followed since the end of 2016 until the end of 2018. I was added to the internal forum in August 2017 and followed discussions there until the end of 2018. Both were active groups with several posts every day. Some posts led to lengthy discussions and numerous comments, at least fifty under certain posts (for example posts about articles in the news media). I was a lurking member for most of the time. Occasionally I 'liked' posts and, on a few occasions, left comments. The purpose of this work was to gather some naturally occurring data (Silverman 2013) without influencing it myself. Because of the sheer amount of information and to protect the privacy of the members, I did not save all the posts. I made field notes about interesting discussions, took screenshots, and performed a few thematic analyses of the posts. I took screenshots sporadically of posts that I found interesting as the content of the posts was not my main focus. My presence in these groups helped me to see the difference in the communication practices between the public and the private group. Also, it kept me updated as to what was happening from a distance, and made it possible to eavesdrop on heated discussions about specific topics and discussions about the identity and strategies of the internal group. Such online observation provided me with an alternative to longer on-site observation.

Offline

Besides following EFA networks' online communication, I have also met them in person on two occasions when I participated in their weekend planning events in August 2017 and 2018. The first event took place on the 25th to 27th of August 2017 at MoKS, a non-profit artist-run project space or 'guest studio' which is situated in the small community of Mooste in Southern Estonia. The weekend was organized as a bonding and planning event to get to know each other, talk about how things are done and what is in store for the future, hear lectures from engaged specialists about trees' fungal diseases, and problems with monoculture fir forests. During the weekend, close to 30 people were present (although not all the time) from all

over Estonia and from different backgrounds. New ideas and working groups were born (including a music group) and a lot of room was left in the schedule for just conversations.

As a participant, I wanted to contribute and therefore I volunteered for the responsibility of documenting the sessions (which I was doing anyway) and sharing voice recordings with the organizers. I also took part in day-to-day activities, like preparing meals, cleaning, yoga sessions, and a guided walk to the nearby manor park. In addition to recording discussions, I made field notes and took pictures. Between the scheduled sessions, I was engaged in different forms of casual conversations. Sometimes I would ask my conversation partner about how they found out about the cause and became active in the group and how often they post on the Facebook group. Other times, I was approached and told about different experiences with social media, since people there knew that I was a media researcher. In some cases, I was asked questions about my research which made me reflect on what I was doing. It was a challenging task to make field notes about casual conversations, because there was many of them happening in short time and in different places like the sauna and while sitting at the bonfire at night. I did try to get few moments of privacy here and there to write down my impressions.

The second meeting took place during the 24th to 26th of August 2018 at Koolme farm, among the fields and forests of Northeastern Estonia. The farm itself consisted of old-style timber buildings with an old well in the middle of the yard, and a Russian-style smoke sauna at the edge of a pond (that is home for several fish, as the owner proved). One of the main gathering places during the event was an outside kitchen, a circular construction under a roof that had a fire hole in the middle. Over the hole hung a huge pot which was used for cooking the food during the weekend. The daughter of the owner, a man in his 70s, had contacted EFA and thought that his place could be suitable for the event and the owner had agreed to welcome the activists.

Around 20 people attended the weekend camp. Some did not spend the whole weekend, some stayed for few hours, some came for one day, but most stayed the whole weekend. Transportation was arranged previously through the internal Facebook group.

This meeting was a bit different in the sense that most of the people knew each other already and were already active in organizing actions and discussions in the Facebook forums. This is compared to the first meeting, which was aimed to establishing these strong ties. This time the workshops and discussions were more focused on concrete future activities but there was

still a lot of room left in the schedule for just conversations, sauna time, and music. At least ten people had also been at the previous meeting, and most of them had formed into a core group.

For me, this meeting was also different as I had met some of the people already and I felt a bit more comfortable in my role. As was the case last time, I volunteered to record all the meetings and take minutes on the meeting about future plans. That way, I could collect data and be useful at the same time. In the schedule was a 1.5 hour slot allocated for me, where I introduced my research and discussed what I had accomplished so far. I also explained my main theoretical concepts of the civic circuit and civic cultures, and we discussed what it meant to be an engaged citizen.

People attending the meeting had various backgrounds and competencies. There were also people from other organizations and networks 'visiting' during the weekend and contributing to discussions. Among these were organizers of the anti-cellulose factory protest, one vegan activist, and a person from the Estonian Fund for Nature.

After those two weekend camps there have been two more of such gatherings (2019 and 2020), but I did not attend them as they were out of the scope of this study.

In my online participant observation, I chose to take a more passive role; more of an observer and less of a participant. Gold (quoted in Burgess, 2000) distinguishes between four ideal typical field roles for observations, of which two—complete participant and participant-as-observer—are more participatory and the other two—observer-as-participant and complete observer—are more passive roles. Lieberg (1994) approaches the researcher's role from similar perspective: first, from the perspective of the degree of communication between the observer and the informant and second, from the perspective of informant's knowledge regarding being observed. Based on Tord Jacobsson's distinctions, Lieberg (1994) proposes four categories of roles: the participatory (openly observing participant), the reporter (openly observing), wallraffaren (hidden observing participant, named after undercover journalist Günter Wallraff) and the spy (hidden observer).

I took different roles for online and offline observation. For online observation, I mainly resorted to lurking and adopted a more passive approach. Sometimes (but not very often) I did participate to show my support by liking their posts, signing petitions, sharing posts, and donating money, but I did not actively take part in their online discussions. I did comment once when somebody posted about the forest situation in Sweden and posted a photo of a long train filled with logs which I had taken just few days earlier.

I did not make my position as a researcher a secret, the main activists of EFA were aware that I was studying their network, even though I did not make myself seen on the Facebook group. One time there was a short discussion about it on Facebook after a Lithuanian source had written something about the EFA. One of the activists had found a blog post where I mention EFA and which I had written earlier to one Bulgarian blog wondering about my representation of them. Then few others commented and confirmed that they had met me, and I seemed to be a proper researcher. Since I did not study the people who post, and the main purpose of the Facebook observation was to be in their information field and have a good overview of what they are doing and talking about without physically being there, I did not feel the need to take actively part in EFA's online activities or to make myself seen.

When taking part in the EFA meeting in Estonia, I took the role of observer-as-participant. The time spent together was too short for me to be able to take part in their activities more actively and since they do not have an office, prolonged fieldwork was complicated. I was introduced on the spot as a researcher and was often approached as one; however, I was incorporated into the group and included in all activities, both mundane tasks like cooking, and more sensitive ones like talking about leaked documents. Since I was like many of the people there (in age, nationality, looks, worldviews), it was easy for me to blend in and be part of the group.

3.4. Analytical approach

By the end of my fieldwork, I had an array of different materials to work with: survey data, interview transcripts, field notes, recordings from the fieldwork, photographs, and secondary data like e-mails, documents, reports, media representations, and information from webpages. Chronologically, the survey was analyzed first, followed by interview data and finally the case study.

For the survey, I used descriptive statistics to obtain summaries about the sample and my observations. The statistical software package Stata was used to analyze the data. Initially, I explored the whole data set, to get an idea about internet access, media usage, the most trusted media sources and the demographic composition of the sample. For my study, the relevant questions were about the attitudes toward civil society and political institutions, CSO membership, and media practices connected to public and political issues.

For the interviews I conducted a thematic analysis following the process of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Keeping the

research questions and the main theoretical concepts in mind, I coded the interviews using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data AnalysiS (QADAS). For this, I used Nvivo software.

For the case study, I started with analyzing some of the secondary data to get an overview of EFA activities and the main topics in which they are involved. The process went as follows:

To start, I worked through EFA's webpage and created a monthly timeline of what they have done according to the news section on the page. Then I categorized the e-mails in the mailing list. I was added to the list in June 2017. I went through 328 emails, coded them according to themes, and took notes. I compared the e-mails with the earlier timeline and created an overview of what EFA has done and talked about every month during those two years.

The analysis also allowed me to create different kinds of preliminary categories:

- Their action repertoire—what sort of things they do
- Their topic repertoire—what specific cases they have been involved in (also how it went)
- Their network structure—who belongs to their network (how, when) and which networks they belong to
- Topics that have been discussed more thoroughly (for example, identity and their 'balanced' strategy when communicating with authorities).

In the earlier stage of my Facebook observation (in May 2017), I undertook a thematic analysis of the public Facebook group. I analyzed posts from two weeks (one week during an 'action' and one week of 'peaceful' time) to get an idea of how active the group is, who are the most active posters, the nature of post—original or shared, and what are the main topics that members post about. This gave me some quantitative understanding of the group: the activity level (the number of posts every day), the amount of people posting regularly, and the nature of the posts. Later, my analytical focus shifted toward more qualitative characteristics: finding patterns in routine communication practices; for example, how certain rules are applied, the tone of conversations, and changes in these conversations over time. Some of my observations I included during interviews to gain insight from the people doing the communicating in these Facebook groups.

While analyzing fieldwork data, I was both creating a life history of the EFA movement, and comparing my findings with the results from the interviews from other CSOs to find common patterns in everyday communication practices between already-established formal organizations and an emerging informal association.

3.5. Research ethics and reflecting on researcher practices

Some of the issues I grappled with were connected with my attitude toward the contested issue, my role as a researcher, and studying a moving target.

As a person, I am an Estonian, highly educated, have an interest in environmental issues, and have a 'home forest' near my childhood home towards which I have strong sentimental feelings. Within that profile, I fit nicely into the EFA movement, and I am not indifferent to the cause of protecting Estonian forests. During those two weekends in the summers of 2017 and 2018, as well as the years I have followed EFA closely online, I have gotten quite a decent overview of the forest issue. Also, I know more about specific forestry issues like fungal diseases in fir trees and the requirements for clear cutting forests, the main actors in the industry, in science and in politics, and what sort of attitudes and challenges environmentalists encounter when trying to influence forest politics. I have also learned about the people active in protecting the forests: about their areas of interest, and their ways of arguing. Some of them I came to know personally through the weekend camps, interviews and contacts through the chat and via e-mail. Especially during the second weekend camp in 2018, I felt like I blended in quite nicely with the rest of the crowd.

Being the member of the two Facebook groups, following their discussions and the posted links, at some point I felt that I was immersed in some sort of "filter bubble" (Pariser 2011): how forests in Estonia are cut down faster than they grow, how sacred forests are ruined with clear cuts, and how politicians let it all happen in cooperation with the forest industry. Suddenly I started to notice fields of clear-cut forest everywhere, and really worry about the future of Estonian forests including my home forest in Audru. Of course, there is a legitimate reason to worry, but this made me realize that this "bubble" I am investigating in is one among many others and there are other bubbles and positions within this highly contested issue.

Being able to identify with my research participants and being partial to the cause as well as being immersed in the point of view of my case study made me reflect on my position in the contested matter and how it influences

the knowledge produced (for a discussion about the ethical aspects of reciprocal communication in studying activist practices, see Velkova 2020). As the focus of my research is civic cultures and not the forest conflict, I do not see my attitude towards the issue as a problem. Moreover, taking almost a year off from dissertation work due to parental leave provided me the distance from the case necessary to break out of the 'bubble' and see the surrounding context more clearly.

Often, when studying organizations, ethnographic fieldwork includes participant observation conducted through volunteering at the organization or the social movement (for example Barassi 2013). In my case this was complicated, as EFA does not have an office and I was situated in another country which made attending regular meetings difficult. Still wanting to contribute, I offered to proofread and edit documents some coordinators were working on. This gave me a chance to be useful to EFA and get a glimpse into the everyday work that did not always pop up in the forum discussions. Doing observations from a distance raises a question as to how much of the everyday I can access through online forums. I am aware that it is a certain *kind* of everyday. On one hand, the forum discussions about activities present me with 'representations of everyday' (Pink 2012) and on the other hand, the forums themselves are 'spaces of civic talk' (Dahlgren 2009) where a myriad of citizens discuss matters about the environment in general and forest protection politics in particular. Interviews also helped me to fill in some of the gaps with reports about everyday communication practices.

Another challenge I faced was that of studying a process, something in constant movement. When I started my doctorate, EFA was one year away from forming. The movement will still be evolving by the time this dissertation is written or has even, perhaps, dissolved. On such occasions, there could be new developments that can put earlier conclusions to question. For example, some of the research participants I interviewed had left the movement by the time I was analyzing and writing up the results. To solve that issue and to limit the time for observation, I decided to include the first *two years* of EFA activity, even though I continued to keep an eye on them afterward, and even though there were interesting developments and action happening after those two years had passed.

Ethical considerations

As the material for this dissertation consists of a survey, semi-structured interviews, and ethnographic observations both online and in real life, ethical research procedures need to be followed.

The survey was conducted by a professional polling agency; Turuuuringute AS. To adhere to research ethics, the questionnaire included an introductory text that presented the aim of the study, the people behind the research project, and what sort of questions are to be expected. It also informed participants that taking part in the survey is voluntary and that the participant can withdraw at any time during the interview. Finally, participants were ensured as to the confidentiality of the data storage and that answers will not be traced back to them.

Prior to interviews, I introduced the aim of my research project and informed interviewees about their right to withdraw from the study at any point. I also promised to anonymize them. In some cases that is problematic, since within the organizations, one can still guess who participants are unless I also anonymize the organizations. In other cases, in order to promote the organization, disclosure of the organization's name was desired. Since I was mainly interested in the media practices that are related to civic engagement in 'good' civil society, the topics covered are not that sensitive, and during analysis, the interviewees' and organizations' identity became less relevant. However, during the writing-up process, I contacted my research participants again and double-checked how they would like to be quoted and offered them the opportunity of reading the chapter with the quote to ensure I have not misrepresented them.

In the case of EFA it was harder to provide anonymity, as there are few people who are very active, and they are often present in the public sphere of news media. However, they showed their openness by saying they have nothing to hide. Also, in this case, I made sure to verify their willingness to participate and ask again how they would like to be quoted. Where discretion was requested (during a certain discussion at the EFA meeting), then I complied by not recording the conversation. During my fieldwork, at the EFA weekend camp in August 2018, I lead a workshop where I presented my study, my theoretical model, and the results I had gathered thus far. After the presentation, EFA members and other people in attendance had the opportunity to ask questions about my research and we discussed 'civic cultures' and 'civic circuit' concepts. The workshop enabled me to bring my material back to the research participants and in that way strengthen the reliability of my work.

Studying groups on social media brings with it its own ethical issues, like when and how to get informed consent; how to distinguish between public and private data; and how to guarantee participant anonymity (Lomborg 2012). During online fieldwork, I followed AOIR (franzke, Bechmann,

Zimmer, Ess & Association of Internet Researchers 2020) guidelines for ethical research practices. I observed the public Facebook group where anyone accepted by the administrator could be a member. As a member of that group, I followed conversations topically and discursively to get a sense of how the topics were addressed. Since I did not follow specific persons, I did not feel the need to obtain informed consent from the whole group. My main analytical focus was directed toward general communication processes and patterns and less towards specific people who were posting. I was more interested in the dynamics of the relationships, the topics of the posts, the tone of conversations, the implicit and explicit rules of behavior, and if and how the dimensions of the 'civic circuit' (Dahlgren 2009) appear in the conversations. The focus was the same for the internal group: to concentrate on general and not specific posts or on specific people posting. I was added to the internal Facebook group by one of the core coordinators and introduced to the groups as a researcher. As this group discussed more sensitive information, I also had to be more careful in the analysis process. Therefore, I refer to the group as an internal forum in my text instead of using the name of the group to avoid mentioning the members and specific posts about the forest issue.

3.6. Summary

In this chapter, I have presented my methodological approach of mixed methods for conducting the empirical study. The fieldwork was conducted in Estonia and on the internet and research data was collected through a survey study, qualitative interviews, and a media ethnographic case study. The chapter has introduced the case study group: Estonian Forest Aid and described the research material and the process of data collection, given an overview of the analysis process, and reflected on researcher practices as well as ethical considerations. The next chapter will present the context of the case study—Estonian civil society.

4. Civil society in Estonia: mapping the field

This chapter presents the contextual background to the empirical study. The chapter is divided into three parts: the first part gives a historical overview of the development of Estonian civil society in the last 100 years. The history is complemented by a look into contemporary civil society, first through an overview of the composition of the civic sector, and then by using original survey data introducing peoples' attitudes towards and involvement in civil society organizations. The second part of the chapter describes the formation of the Estonian media landscape and discusses how citizens use media for political participation. The third part is dedicated to introducing the so called 'forest war' as a background to the emergence of Estonian Forest Aid. The 'forest war' refers to a wide-ranging societal discussion and public dispute about the future of Estonian forests and environmental politics in general.

4.1. Estonian civil society 1918–2020

4.1.1. Historical overview

Besides being a young democracy, Estonia is also quite young as a nation-state. In 2018, Estonia was celebrating 100 years since the founding of its first republic, however, half of that time, that is between the years 1940 and 1991, was spent under Soviet rule. In the 100 years since Estonia declared its independence, Estonian society and civil society were redefined and rearranged several times: during the first republic, under Soviet rule, and later while rebuilding the democratic state.

The seeds for creating an independent state were planted during the time of national awakening which started in the beginning of the 19th century with the appearance of the Estonian intelligentsia. These people had an important influence on national self-consciousness and cultural development (Lauristin & Vihalemm 1993). Parallel to the intelligentsia, there was widespread use of Estonian language newspapers and in the second part of the 19th century, those newspapers became politicized and were used as spaces for discussions about political matters (ibid.). At the same time cultural development flourished, with the national song festival tradition founded in the year 1869. The latter became a tool for cultural resistance and for sustaining national identity during Soviet occupation, when every five years, tens of thousands

of choir singers performed songs from the national awakening to a public of 100,000 to 200,000 people (Rosengren, Lauristin & Vihalemm 1997).

In 1920, after the war for independence and after the signing of the Treaty of Tartu, the construction of the national state could begin. According to Erle Rikmann (2012), who has written an extensive historical overview of the development of Estonian civil society, having political stability made people socially active and allowed new associations to spread, but most organizations were connected to cultural activities, sports, and popular education. As the government of Estonia during the 1930s leaned towards autocracy, the involvement of civil society in decision-making remained limited and political discussions and activities outside the political system were disapproved of (Rikmann 2012).

After the Second World War, Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union, which meant that the socialist institutional framework destroyed and replaced civil society and other established institutional structures with structures approved by the new powers. Any political initiative outside the socialist party system was out of the question, only 'harmless' associations of culture and sports were allowed as a part of the same socialist institutional framework (Rikmann 2012). In the beginning of the Soviet regime, there was some opposition to the system, like the Forest Brothers, who were partisans who used guerilla tactics to fight against Soviet rule (Laar 1992). The partisan movement was stifled by the Soviets, and later in the 1950s and 1960's, opposition toward the system became more inward and silent. Despite the demolishment of civic society, national culture survived and cultural traditions persisted both inside Soviet Estonia and in exile (Lauristin & Vihalemm 1993). The roughly 70,000 people who managed to flee from the war and the regime that followed, continued to have an active social life in diasporas by establishing Estonian houses, schools, newspapers, and various associations all over the world (Raag 2004).

Between 1988 and 1991, a time referred to as the 'Singing Revolution', witnessed a surge in civic participation when people saw a chance to restore their independence from the Soviet Union. According to Lauristin and Vihalemm (2009), during that period civic participation was at its highest possible level with around 70% of the Estonian population mobilized through social movements. For example, people took part in mass rallies, in nationwide public debates about the future of hopefully-independent Baltic countries, and in discussions about the content of strategic documents. Here it is worth mentioning the largest Baltics-wide mobilization the 'Baltic Way', when, on 23rd of August 1989, on the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-

Ribbentrop Pact, 2,000,000 people held hands to form a 675-kilometer-long human chain from Tallinn to Vilnius to peacefully protest against the said pact and to campaign toward regaining independence from Soviet rule (The Baltic Way 1989–2021 n.d.).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonia had to rebuild the state from scratch. The excitement of the Singing Revolution passed as the reality of building up the state sank in, and the political elite took over the job. Rebuilding the state was done through radical economic reforms and liberal 'shock therapy', where the central administration was replaced by market economy and privatization (Lauristin & Vihalemm 2009). According to Rikmann (2012), during the first years of transition, the state did not consider civil society to be a partner; it was viewed as something that belongs to the private sphere. Rikmann (Ibid.) lists the lack of support and recognition from the state as contributors to the slow development of early of organized civil society, among other factors like insufficient resources, weak democratic values and population behavioral patterns. Even though there were many new organizations, most of them focused on their own members and not on general societal issues (Rikmann 2012). Also, political participation was low during the transition, as the majority of people accepted the reforms and the few protests that did occur were not heard by politicians. The latter distanced themselves from the people as economic and technological development was prioritized over social issues (Lauristin and Vihalemm 2009). Others have called the dip in civic activism the 'sudden death' of civil society (Ruutsoo 2009). Rein Ruutsoo (ibid.) illustrates the death sentence with the following numbers: if in 1991 around 25% of Estonians and 16% of Russians took part in protest activities, by 1995 the numbers had fallen to 3% and 2% respectively. In comparison, average protest participation worldwide was 15.7% the same year.

In the second half of the 1990's, the relationship between the state and civil society changed. In cooperation with the state, a small group of active people made systemic efforts to strengthen civil society via the framework of what Rikmann (2010) calls the 'Civil Society Project'. Rikmann (2012) highlights discourse and institutional change as the results of that effort. By 'discourse change' she means that the role of civil society became clearer: it was not only about sports and culture but focused on being a participant in democratic processes and decision-making. The institutional change meant making CSOs stronger and more sustainable. This was done through local support structures and umbrella organizations. Rikmann (ibid.) adds that the foreign funds and programs used to strengthen Estonian civil society played an

important role in helping to build up the infrastructure for civil society, however, the Western model of civil society was not just applied, but domesticated.

In 2002, the Riigikogu (Parliament) adopted the "Estonian Civil Society Development Concept," which is a document that regulates relations between the state and civic initiatives. Even though it took time before the document was used in practice, the process of document creation and the recognition it entailed by the state had an empowering effect and provided a good lesson in democratic discussion (Rikmann, 2012). Later, more documents were created as voluntary agreements between civil society and the public sector. For example, take "Good Practice of Involvement", which regulates public and interest group involvement in decision-making process and obliges the state to engage the civic sector in decision-making (Good Citizen n.d.). Within civil society, CSOs mutually created the "NGO Code of Ethics" (in 2002) which is a document that draws up the principles of ethical conduct among CSOs and acts as a tool to evaluate the practices of CSOs according to those principles (Good Citizen n.d.). Elsewhere, it is pointed out that the development of CSO sustainability is not equal throughout Estonia (Rikmann 2012). CSOs with Russian as their working language face problems regarding language barriers and unequal access to resources and support from their beginnings has contributed to their lower sustainability.

Rikmann (2012) stresses that most of those important initiatives have been instigated by civil society itself without any significant support from the state, and that the modest role of the state is characteristic in strengthening Estonian civil society. Peeter Vihma (2016) argues that Estonian civil society did not suffer from weakness, as some scholars have claimed (Howard 2003), but struggled to find political relevance. As the state understood civil society both in neoliberal terms and as apolitical entities, CSO political participation outside state-offered frames was underdeveloped and discouraged, and was even seen as a threat to the state order (Vihma 2016).

After the success of joining EU and NATO, the second decade of the 2000s brought about political stagnation. However, at the same time there was a surge in civic activism. Some of the cases worth mentioning are the bronze solider riots in 2007, when the Russian minority took to streets after the government's decision to remove the statue of the unknown solider from the center of town to the military cemetery. According to Vihma (2016), in 2011 the Occupy movement did not resonate in Estonia, but the issue of ACTA copyright policies mobilized a large amount of people onto the streets. Lauristin and Vihalemm (2020) add that as these protests were

also government-critical, it inspired action toward novel forms of political participation through public digital platforms. Lauristin and Vihalemm give the 'public assembly' as one example of such a platform. With the goal of developing participatory e-democracy, the platform was created by the "Charter 12" group in cooperation with internet activists. Charter 12 was an initiative created in the Spring of 2012 and signed by 12 intellectuals, and which, after its publication on the internet gathered another 16,000 online signatures (ibid.).

Lauristin and Vihalemm (2020) name some other examples of the growing effectiveness of the civic initiative, like the "Let's Do It!" campaign from 2008, which mobilized 50,000 people on one day for trash picking-up activities and which later developed into a global network that supports world-wide trash picking-up activities.[18] In 2013, an association of CSOs started an initiative to develop a dialogue between people and officials is the format of annual national 'opinion festivals'[19], which during one weekend in August brings together civil society actors, political actors, and citizens into one space for discussion (ibid.).

4.1.2. Civil society in numbers

The Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO), the umbrella organization for Estonian CSOs, which, among other things, advocates for a sustainable civic space, defines Estonian civil society on their webpage accordingly:

> In Estonia civil society refers to the self-initiated cooperation of people for the purpose of pursuing their interests, discussing public issues, and participating in decision-making processes, as well as the associations, networks and institutions which enable such cooperation. A civil society means to have an able-bodied public sector, a strong private sector and an active third sector. (Good Citizen n.d.)

According to NENO, the third sector, which is comprised of non-profit organizations and interest groups, is a central part of civil society, although the latter has a broader scope. The main entities of the third sector are non-profit organizations (NGOs), foundations, and membership associations. NENO divides the sector into two spheres: first, professional organizations

[18] https://www.worldcleanupday.org/ (accessed 16/02/2022).
[19] Modeled after the Swedish Almedahlsveckan.

with employees and organized activities like lobbying, advocacy, and service provision. The second sphere involves voluntary participation (ibid.).

According to the Centre of Registers and Information Systems, there are about 23,000 CSOs in Estonia, of which 800 are foundations. Since 2018, apartment and housing unions are not under the same juridical body, which has decreased the overall number of registered CSOs by around 12,000. However, it is difficult to evaluate the final number of CSOs, as there are about 6,000 organizations that are still registered but are not active (Siseministeerium 2022). Of these CSOs, around 2,500 have public benefit status and are eligible for income tax exemption. In comparison, in the beginning of 1998, when the first big study of civil society was made, there were 4,566 CSOs and 147 foundations registered in addition to almost 5,000 housing associations. The average CSO at that point was mostly small, had been active for few years and was struggling to survive (Rikmann 2012). The report made by Tallinn University, Balti Uuringute Instituut and Turu-uuringute AS (2019) evaluated the contemporary Estonian non-profit sector to be sustainable.

The non-profit sector employs around 4–5% of the Estonian workforce (together with foundations it would be around 8%). According to the National Statistics Authority, around 30% of CSOs have employees. CSOs that are started through citizen initiatives have created fewer jobs, around 2%, as most of the work is done on a volunteer basis (Siseministeerium 2022).

The most common focus areas for CSOs are recreational activities (17% of CSOs), sports (16%, and culture (14%) (USAID 2020). Other areas of activity are social services, health and environment, civic rights, education, and local development. Quite a few CSOs are functioning as business and professional associations, and fewer work in philanthropy and policy analysis (Good Citizen n.d.).

4.1.3. Individual forms of civic engagement and participation

As discussed above, civil society is a self-initiated cooperation of people, and the third sector, non-profit organizations provide a structure for such cooperation. In this section, I consider the people making up civil society, as in the next chapters my focus shifts to the organizations. Here I am relying on the survey conducted by our project team in the second half of 2015 and other relevant studies done in Estonia. First, I am taking up trust and attitudes towards government, news sources, and CSOs. Then, I move on to actual participation in civil society and how media is connected to issues of political and public importance.

Trust and attitudes

For democracy to function, there must be an adequate amount of trust in institutions and the government but also among or between groups of citizens for collective action to become possible. Therefore, trust is a pre-condition for civic engagement and one of the dimensions of the civic circuit (Dahlgren 2009).

Estonians in general have a high level of trust in public institutions and professional media (see an overview in comparison with Bulgaria: Bakardjieva et al. 2021). There is a similar tendency visible in the survey conducted by our project team at the end of 2015. As shown in Figure 3, respondents trust mainstream media as news sources significantly more than alternative media and are less sure if they trust internet news organization sites. One needs to keep in mind that this survey was conducted five years ago. According to a study by The European Broadcasting Union (2020) published in June 2020 using data mostly based on Eurobarometer survey, Estonians continuously trust traditional media channels more, especially radio, which was considered the most trusted venue for news. Trust in written press has increased and trust in social media networks has decreased. According to the same study, EU citizens trust traditional media more than their governments and other political institutions. The same trend can be seen in the results of our survey from 2015, where more people agree either fully or partially with the question about trusting news media than questions about trusting the government and having a political party that represents their positions and interests.

Figure 4 illustrates attitudes toward civil society organizations. As Figure 4 demonstrates, residents of Estonia have a positive attitude toward civil society organizations (CSOs) and mostly agree that CSOs are useful and that they strengthen democracy and defend the interests of ordinary people. Also, they mostly disagree with the statements about CSOs causing problems in society and serving foreign interests or the interests of those in power. Interestingly, data shows that even though people think that CSOs are useful and important, they are less convinced about their competency and their ability to influence political decisions.

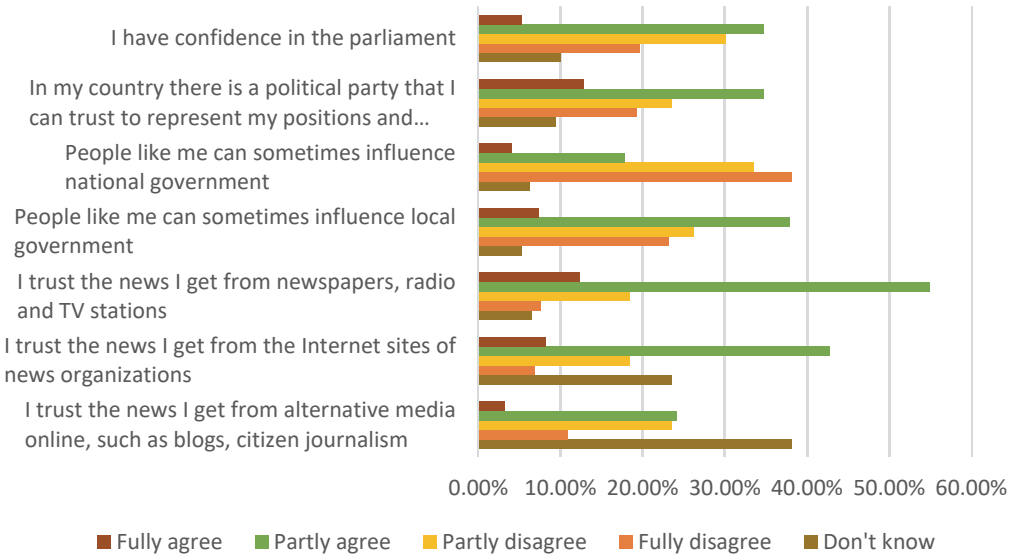

Figure 3. Trust toward political institutions and news sources. N =1,000. Source: 2015 survey.

When comparing Figures 3 and 4 in regard to the perceived ability to influence decision-making, results show that respondents believe that they can influence local decision-making to a higher degree than national decision-making and in general, not many who answered believe they can influence national decision-making (22.0% fully or partially agree, 71.7% fully or partially disagree) and around half (45.3%) of the respondents believe they can influence their local government. More survey respondents think that CSOs can influence political decisions (50.4% agree either fully or partially, 29.2% disagree to some degree) or allow ordinary people to influence decision-making (46.2% agree or fully agree, 30.4% disagree either partially or fully). However, it is worth mentioning that a larger proportion of responders (between 18% and 35%) did not have opinions about or did not know how to answer the questions related to CSOs' role in society and decision-making.

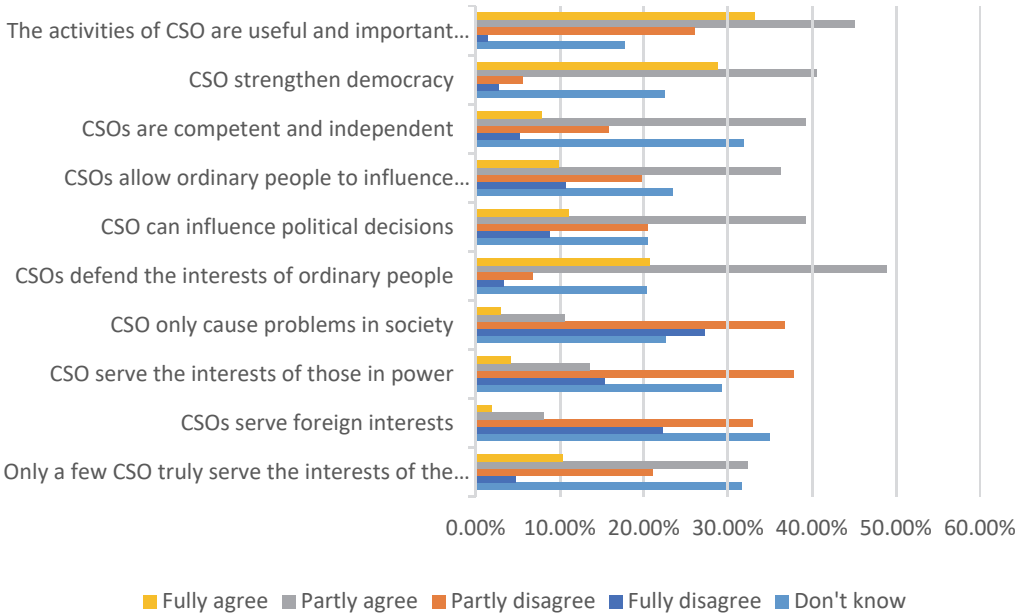

Figure 4. Attitudes about civil society organizations. N= 1000. Source: 2015 survey.

Taking part in civil society

According to the survey done for this dissertation, 13% of respondents were members of some kind of CSO or a voluntary organization.[20] However, more people are aware or informed about CSO activities. When asked in the survey, 39.3% said they were aware. Even though CSO membership is low, more people take part in volunteering without being a member of an organization. A study done by The Institute of Baltic Studies (Balti Uuringute Instituut) (2018) states that in 2018, 49% of people living in Estonia had been doing some kind of volunteering within the past 12 months. This figure is up by 18% since their last study five years earlier. About 26% are regularly volunteering, and 29% volunteered only once. The top three areas were advancing local life, environment, and education/science. According to the study, 53% of CSOs are engaging volunteers.

This dissertation is more interested in activities that are connected to public and political importance and less in activities like volunteering at one's

[20] This number is in accordance with the trend of decreasing CSO membership. According to the report the number was 21% in 2013 and only 9% in 2018 (Käger, Lauring, Pertšjonok, Kaldur & Nahkur 2018).

child's kindergarten. When asked whether during the past 12 months survey participants had taken part in online or offline events or activities organized by CSOs (like discussions, petitions, information campaigns, fund-raising, as well as marches, demonstrations, blockades, festivals etc.), in both cases around 11% said yes and of those, roughly half had done so more than once.

When looking more closely at different activities connected to public affairs and political issues that are not necessarily connected to CSOs, Figure 5 shows that donating money is the most common activity compared with other options. Kalmus and her colleagues (2018) differentiate between civic and political activities. The former is more common than political (for example clean-ups, charity, and memorial events). Among more 'traditional' ways of political participation, voting is still the highest; according to our survey, 44.4% of those who answered had voted on parliamentary elections and 39.5% had voted during the latest local elections as opposed to 34.6% who had not performed any of the activities asked about, including voting.[21] Going back to the graph at hand, data shows that people are more willing to take part in activities/events organized by others than in being organizers themselves. The latter makes sense, as there are various ways one can be an active citizen (resident).

4.2. The media landscape in Estonia[22]

So far, this chapter has touched upon the historical development of civil society in Estonia and has given an overview of civic culture and individual citizens' participation in societal issues. To understand the role of media in these developments over time and in contemporary Estonia, it is helpful to know about the Estonian media landscape and the patterns of citizens' media use in general and for political participation in particular.

In the description on the formation and consistency of the Estonian media landscape I rely mainly on Signe Opermann's (2014) doctoral dissertation, as she has written an extensive overview on the topic. As Opermann is focused on news media, for her, the history of the Estonian media landscape begins

[21] Other activities surveyed were, for example, attending public hearings, speaking to a public official, sending a letter to a public official, attending a political rally, participating in meetings for local action, called to a TV or a radio show, written to a news organization, or having been involved in the activities of political action groups, clubs, or parties.

[22] For the definition of media landscape, I am following Bolin's (2017) conceptualization, which understands media landscapes to be simultaneously a material, an organizational, and a symbolic structure. A media landscape is a theoretical and empirical construct, against which a certain type of analysis can be made.

with Estonian language journalism in the mid-19th century. This is also the time when Estonians started to develop a national identity. Newspapers published that time became a vehicle for the national independence movement and by 1907, there were as many as 12 daily newspapers published in Estonia. In 1926 the radio became another channel for news and entertainment, followed by TV in the 60's, and the internet in the 90's (ibid.).

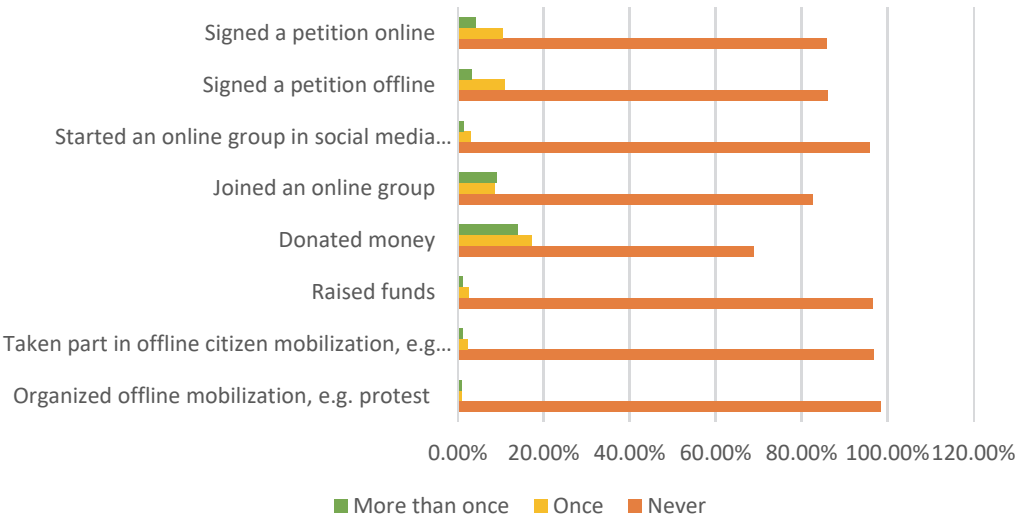

Figure 5. Media use for civic engagement/participation in public affairs and/or political issues. N =1,000. Source: survey from 2015.

Opermann (2014) also describes the huge changes Soviet rule brought about in the organizational and symbolic media landscape beginning in the mid 1940's. From the beginning, all media was subjected to Soviet ideological standards and the news was more like party propaganda than reporting real facts. Even though broadcast mass media was strictly state controlled throughout the Soviet era, after the death of Stalin, journalism became more professional again. In addition, Estonians gained access to foreign literature through translations, and to Western culture thanks to the Finnish YLE TV broadcasts that reached over the sea to the Northern parts of Estonia.

The end of the 1980's saw the beginning of the development of the public sphere and mass media played a key role in disseminating the information of the movement for restoring independence and became a tool for political resistance (ibid.). The privatization of the media channels started a few years before independence and the public broadcasting service, Estonian Televi-

sion and Estonian Radio, began in October 1990 (Bakardjieva et al. 2021). Soon after the fall of the Soviet regime, the media landscape in Estonia was colorful, with many TV and radio channels and paper publications. The commercial channels were at first owned by Nordic media houses instead of oligarchs, as was the case in several other Central and Eastern European countries.[23] Later, local actors bought the media channels and outlets and now the private media market in Estonia is dominated by two companies; Ekspress Group and Eesti Meedia (Estonian Media) (Opermann 2014).

According to the country report written by Henrik Örnebring (2011), the Estonian media landscape is, in general terms, free, open, competitive, and mostly run along liberal, free-market lines. There are no direct links between media and political parties and state intervention is low even in public broadcasting which is entirely financed by the state. Despite the relatively large Russian-speaking minority in Estonia (close to ¼ of the population), the choice of local Russian language newspapers and TV channels is small. Instead, TV channels broadcast from the Russian Federation are popular among Russian speaking people in Estonia (ibid.).

Parallel to developments in the traditional media, there was a large-scale digitalization that had already begin by the early 1990's. A large number of services, provided by both the state (tax returns, paperless government initiative, and digital signatures, among others) and private sector (online banking) were moved online and were adopted by citizens. Online outlets also started to take over traditional mass media outlets, as is apparent in the main trends of Estonians' media use.

4.2.1. Estonians' media use

Peeter Vihalemm and Ragne Kõuts (2017) provide an overview of Estonians' media use between 2000 and 2015. Their description is based on the survey studies "Me. The World. The Media" which includes members of the Estonian population between the ages of 15 to 74 and is carried out by the Institute of Social Studies at the University of Tartu every third year since 2002. The study fleshes out the main trends in Estonians' media use which are recapped here. Between 2000 and 2015 internet use went up rapidly before leveling off. Internet use was 28% in 2000 and 88% in 2015 among individuals aged 16–74. Among young people the user rate is 100%, but in that age group the difference lies in users' skills. Moreover, traditional media use has moved to the internet. People read fewer newspapers but also

[23] For comparison with Bulgarian media landscapes, see Bakardjieva et al. 2021.

consume more news. By 2011, primary information comes from the internet and communication technology ownership is more personal - people own several screens and use them individually. Thus, media no longer structure time and synchronize people's lives. Media use has also become space independent: thanks to mobile media, media use is separated from the domestic environment. For example, mobile news browsing went up in four years; from 9% to 50% (2012–2016). Another trend the study highlights is that thanks to digital and mobile media technologies, family and other interpersonal communication patterns have changed. Also, internet-based media consumption has increased, and more people have given up watching TV, as they can create their own media repertoire online. Social media has become part of the overall media repertoire of Estonians, and in 2014, 52% of people used it, out of which 90% were young people. Finally, Vihalemm and Kõuts (2017) name generations[24] as an important aspect influencing media use, besides the usual variables of nationality and education.

Even though the study by Vihalemm and Kõuts (ibid.) shows that people are exchanging traditional media channels for the internet, our survey shows that in the second half of 2015, TV was still considered to be the most important source for information, followed by radio and newspapers (Figure 6). When comparing the age of respondents in the information sources in Figure 6, results point to the trend that younger people are more often using online channels, as older generations prefer traditional mass media outlets. The age group 35–49 is most varied in their news consumption, and respondents in age group 18–24 meet most of their information needs from online sources.

4.2.2. Estonians' media use in political participation

Vihalemm and Kõuts (2017) find that approximately 1/5 of the Estonian population uses digital media for public and political issues. The use is determined by user skills and overall patterns of media use: people who are proficient internet users, are variable in their media use and those who follow traditional media, are more active in taking part in issues of public and political importance online.

[24] There is extensive research done on media generations in Estonia (see for example Opermann 2014; Bolin 2017).

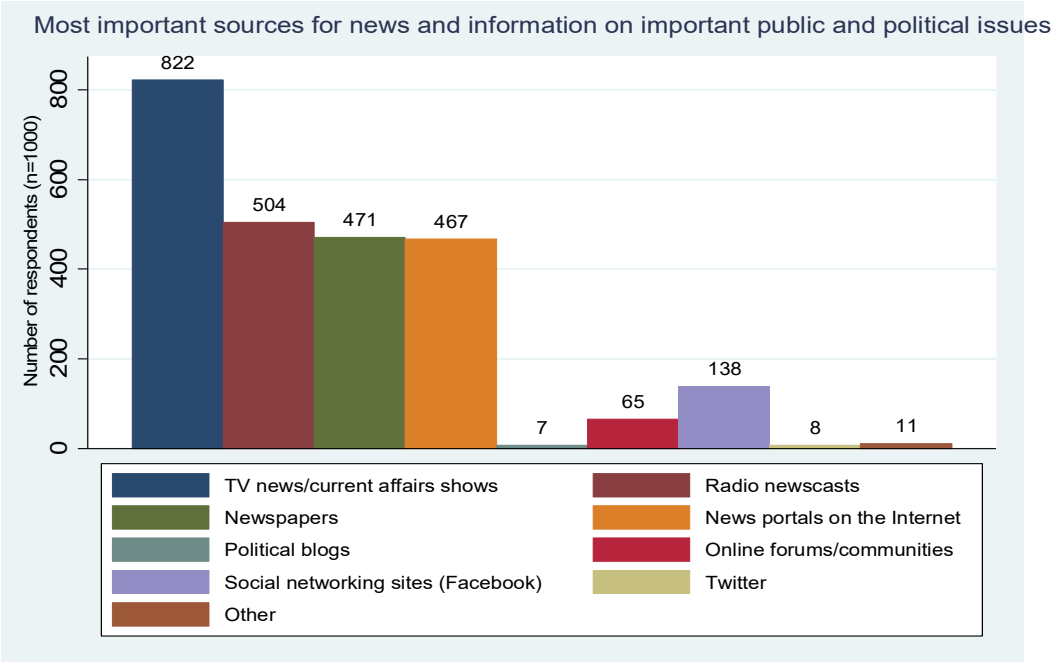

Figure 6. Important sources of information about public and political issues (N =1,000). Source: survey from 2015.

Kalmus and her colleagues (2018) find that in general, new opportunities for e-participation have not created new patterns of political or civic engagement. Active citizens employ e-participation tools as a complementary means to existing forms of participation. The authors also mention that digital participation is not at the level of offline participation as the main internet users, young people, use the internet mostly for personal and entertainment purposes. In addition, their way of participating is different: with individual input toward improving future living environments rather than on identifying oneself with a political party. Another study shows that the participation in available platforms also depends on users' motivation, values, and thinking patterns (Loit & Siibak 2013).

Our survey study had a question about digital media use to learn about public affairs and political issues and to participate in discussions or activities. The results (Figure 7) show that being politically active on social media like Facebook is more common than writing a blog post, posting on Twitter, or commenting on other's postings or news articles. The most common activities were, according to the data, searching for information, emailing,

and sending instant messages. Since Facebook is convergent media (one place for news and entertainment and interaction) on one hand and on the other hand mostly used for interaction with one's own private networks, more information is needed to make conclusions about the character of participation on social media. However, in most cases, social networks are somewhat closed networks where most of the sharing and interacting is done among different groups that may or may not overlap. If we take into account the aforementioned aspect of social networks, the data suggest that interactional forms of citizen engagement (emails, instant messages) are far more common than posting something in the public for everybody to read. It is important to consider that such results are influenced by other factors that might not be obviously evident in the data. For example, societal situations can influence results considerably—for example, citizens are more likely to be politically active online in times of crisis and less so in other times. Also, the question remains as to what constitutes normal frequency when it comes to writing blogs and posting on social networking sites.

In comparison, the study made by Kõuts and her colleagues (2017) shows that of all the things people do on social media, the most common activities in 2014 were posting about one's personal life (74% have done it or do it several times a week); exchanging information about work or studies (62%); and hitting the 'like' button on some institution's activity (60%). Of activities related to public and political life, the most common activity was to share, post a link, or comment on a news article (59%)[25]. Less people had 'liked' some initiative or CSO activity (44%) and the least popular activity was offering feedback to local government or state institutions (19%) or to post, comment, or ask about political topics (15%).

[25] In 2012, the number was 35.9% so it is going up (Loit & Siibak 2013).

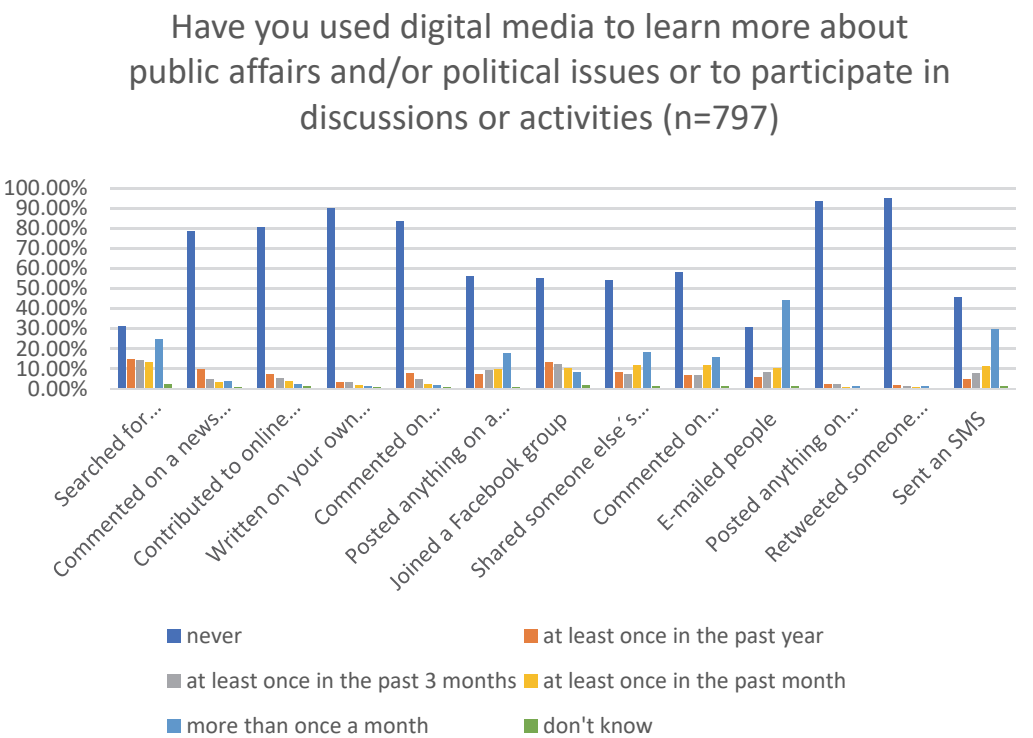

Figure 7. Digital media use to learn about or participate in discussions about public affairs and political issues (N =797)

4.3. The 'forest war' as context in the rise of Estonian Forest Aid

I chose Estonian Forest Aid (EFA) for this study as an example of collective political participation in the matters of societal and environmental importance. EFA came into existence in the context of forest polemics: a large-scale societal dispute around the management of Estonian forests, which has been accompanied by extensive discussion in mainstream and social media, as well as by mobilizations in the physical space. In the media, the forest polemics were often referred to as the 'forest war'. To get an idea of the extent of media discussions, according to Peeter Vihma and Arho Toikka (2021), the internet search for "forestry" in Estonian newspapers gave 773 results in the year 2017, compared with 96 results in 2014. In the early 2000s there have been a few more public disputes in reaction to legislation supporting more intensive logging, but this time, the issue has stayed in the limelight for at least five years.

Asko Lõhmus, a research professor in conservation biology from the University of Tartu, has written yearly summaries of the so called 'forest war' in the newspaper Sirp, which mainly publishes articles about culture, but also about societal issues (Lõhmus 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021). In a nutshell, the 'forest war' is a societal discussion about the future of Estonian forests and environmental politics in general. Lõhmus (2021) defines forest polemics as a wide-ranging public criticism of Estonian forest management, which according to critics, is breaking several conditions of sustainable forest management and as such, breaks official forest politics and laws of forest and environmental protection. Lõhmus (ibid.) adds that the majority of critics invoke the need to address the large environmental problems of our century and to follow the green strategy of the European Commission. At the same time, the Estonian government, the responsible authorities, and people connected to the forest industry have tried to diminish and quiet the polemics and have called the criticism baseless.

Lõhmus (2017) describes conflict in two dimensions. The first one is about basic values, like money, nature, private property, and citizens' self-esteem; and the second one is about finding solutions to contentious issues, from societal discussions to backstage political lies. In his fourth summary, Lõhmus (2020), who also took part in the latest renewal of the Forestry Development Plan, is critical toward the state and the way the whole dispute has been handled so far. He concludes that the state has chosen the side of industry and in doing so, lost credibility in the eyes of the more environmentally aware.

Vihma and Toikka (2021) have analyzed forest polemics in the context of collaborative governance. They argue that in the case of contentious issues when demand for resources is high, the collaborative process becomes more difficult. The authors (ibid.) give an overview of the background of the forest dispute and the process of collaborative governance and use the Forestry Development Plan's policy renewal as a case study. In Estonia, in some areas in forestry, collaborative governance is required by law. For example, before logging the state forest, the State Forest Management Centre must organize a meeting with the affected communities to get their input. Another example in which Estonian Forest Aid became involved, is the renewal of the Forestry Development Plan, which is the main policy regulating forestry and the cutting volumes. It is renewed every 10 years and includes a variety of relevant non-state actors. Vihma and Toikka (2021) name a lack of trust between the actors as one of the problems the process of collaborative governance. Such a lack of trust was expressed in non-state actors' com-

plaints about collaboration being a show put on for their benefit. The article (ibid.) mentions additional drivers behind the 'forest war'; the recreational and cultural value of forests had gone up at the same time as people's opinion about the sustainability of forest management had decreased. Additionally, big decisions affecting the forest, like lowering the cutting age of fir trees and planning construction of the resource-craving cellulose factory were adding to the dispute about the future of Estonian forests.

There have been other analyses of the forest issue beside discussions on media, collective action by citizens, and campaigns by civil society organizations. In the area of culture, there are several songs released, a controversial film clip about logging was shown on the President's ball for the National Day in 2018, and a children's Christmas movie "Eija jõulud Tondikakul", where a young girl saves a forest from logging, released in the end of 2018[26]. Additionally, a writer and semiotician Valdur Mikita (for example Mikita 2008, 2013, 2015, 2018) has written several bestselling books about Finno-Ugric thinking and Estonians' connection to nature which has, in turn, contributed to discussions about the meaning and value of forests in Estonian culture.

As the 'forest war' continued, other actors have emerged alongside EFA and mobilized around the forest issue. For example, Extinction Rebellion has organized two marches against clear-cut logging. Päästame Eesti Metsad MTÜ, Save the Estonian Forest, is another grassroots organization that was created to organize a demonstration in support for Estonian forests. On August 16th, 2020, they organized an Estonia-wide demonstration against deforestation in 27 different places. They have also created a forest manifesto and a petition which has, so far, been signed by over 5,000 individuals and over 30 environmental organizations (Päästame Eesti Metsad n.d.). Also, nature photographers, nature tourism entrepreneurs, and older generation forest workers have made collective public addresses to politicians to express their concern about the unsustainability of forest management in Estonia.

In this section I have described some of the processes behind the so-called 'forest war' which is the context surrounding EFA's rise and as organization and the context to which EFA has contributed. In chapter 6, I will describe EFA's movement in detail, as well as its emergence and development during the first two years of their activity. However, the focus of this study is not forest politics, but on EFA as a citizen movement and as an organization;

[26] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9261284/ (accessed 08/02/2021).

namely their communication practices and the development of civic cultures (Dahlgren 2009) as a pre-condition to political participation.

4.4. Summary

This chapter has presented the context for the empirical study in the chapters 5, 6 and 7 to follow. That context consisted of an overview of Estonian civil society, both in the past and in the present. Also, the chapter made use of the 2015 survey to discuss attitudes toward CSOs and media use in political participation. Finally, the chapter explained the 'forest war', a societal discussion about sustainable forest management which in the context for the case study of Estonian Forest Aid.

5. Everyday media practices of established civil society organizations

Chapters 5 and 6 are the main analysis chapters for this dissertation. The research questions are first, what kind of routine media and communication practices do Estonian civil society organizations enact in their everyday work? And secondly, what sort of symbolic and physical spaces are used, created, and accessed by Estonian civil society organizations and informal citizen groups when engaging internally and with their target groups? Those questions are analyzed through two angles: by studying professional and established CSOs and following the creation and development of an environmental association over time. This analysis contributes to the understanding of spaces and practices for communication within civic cultures.

The chapter has two p arts: the first part introduces the CSOs participating in the study: their activity area, size, structure, financing, and so on. The overview is followed by the categorization of CSO activities, which will be the basis for structuring the second part of this analysis chapter which considers visibility-related mediated practices and spaces, political participation-related practices and spaces, and internally-oriented practices and spaces.

5.1. Civil society organizations

Chapter 3 offered an introduction to the CSOs that were participating in my study. In this section I am introducing them and their activities in more depth as well as discussing their role in developing civic cultures in Estonia. I divided the interviewed CSOs into four categories: human rights organizations, environmental organizations, an animal rights organization, and a feminist group set up around a blog. In addition, two of the interviews were held with umbrella organizations: one was an umbrella organization pertaining to CSOs in general, and the second one was for CSOs based in the countryside and villages. The organizations vary in size, formality, and in their activities. I will give a more detailed overview of the organizations below and a table with the interview sample can be found in Appendix 3.

The two umbrella organizations were the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) and the Estonian Village Movement 'Kodukant'. They can both be described as network organizations that organize and mediate between topically-similar CSOs. Both were founded in the 1990s and

deal with interest protection and capacity building in their member organizations, among other interests. NENO is also working on changing societal attitudes regarding civil society and on promoting civic education. Kodukant is promoting rural life and developing volunteer organizations in Estonia in partnership with the Ministry of the Interior.[27]

The human rights organizations that participated in my study are Human Rights Centre (founded in 2009), the Estonian Refugee Council (founded in 2001, revived in 2011) and the Estonian Institute of Human Rights (founded in 1992). All three have different areas of expertise and focus. The Human Rights Centre is focused on the topics of equal rights and diversity, and the rights of refugees and of minorities, among other topics. They also provide legal help connected to those topics. The Estonian Institute of Human Rights concentrates on research and education on human rights. They organize a yearly conference and the commemoration of the victims of the June deportations. The Estonian Refugee Council has three pillars of activities: providing support services to receivers of international protection in Estonia, humanitarian aid, and what they call the Center of Excellence—which includes interest protection, educating professionals, and raising awareness of the wider public.[28]

Environmental organizations participating in this study are: Estonian Fund for Nature, Let's Do It World, the Estonian Green Movement, and Young Green. The latter is a youth organization for the Green party, but I have added the organization to my participants because the representative of Young Green was also an activist outside of the organization and one of the initiators of the 2016 protest that started EFA movement. Estonian Fund for Nature was founded on February 1, 1991 and was meant in the beginning to be following the same action directions as WWF.[29] The Estonian Fund for Nature deals with practical nature conservation, expertise and research, and informing people. Their main areas of activity are forests, wetlands and the sea, but also other topics like renewable energy and coordinating the Estonian Let's Do It! day of civic action. Let's Do It World[30], was started from a one-day clean-up event initiated by IT entrepreneur Rainer Nõlvak in 2008.

[27] https://kodukant.ee/en/ (accessed 24/04/2022).
[28] Interview, Estonian Refugee Council.
[29] https://elfond.ee/elf (accessed 31/01/21).
[30] In the time of writing, the structure and the work of the organization has somewhat changed, for example, it is it is divided into a foundation and to an NGO with different goals. https://letsdoitworld.org/ (accessed 24/04/2022).

The day mobilized 50,000 people who cleaned up over 10,000 tons of illegal waste from in nature. The YouTube video about the initiative went viral and other countries contacted the organizers to get help in doing the same. In 2012 there was a campaign for a global one-day clean-up and from then on, Let's Do It World has developed into a global network with the headquarters and core team located in Estonia. They provide inspiration and support for countries to find ways to sustainably manage resources and organize a World Cleanup Day—a yearly global litter picking activity day. The Estonian Green Movement was founded in 1988 to aid the "phosphorite war"[31], and later grounded the Green Party. Now the organization belongs to the Friends of the Earth network (among others) drives different environmental projects, and educates the public through summer schools and "Green Tea Evening" discussion events.

The animal rights advocacy organization Loomus was created in 2014 as a lobby organization for animal rights. At first, they were focusing on advocating banning fur farms and wild animals in the circus, but their topics also cover the treatment of farm animals. Besides the lobby work, they have awareness campaigns, organize a vegetarian food fair, start petitions, and have organized a few protest events.

Feministeerium is a group of women running a feminist publication (started in 2014) that publishes texts written by members of their organization and by numerous guest authors. They take part in societal discussions with the goal "to serve as a platform for the voices of non-expert women at the grassroots level" and to mainstream gender issues.[32] Besides the publication, the team is invited to express their opinions in other occasions like expert panels, and offer opinions to the media. They have also organized events like creative writing workshops. Feministeerium differs from the other CSOs as it is a blog run by a group of active feminists and the CSO "Oma Tuba" to which the blog belongs, acts as a legal body for project applications and other administrative purposes. Earlier, the CSO "Oma Tuba" started the "Virginia Woolf Sind Ei Karda" reading group which later turned into the biggest Facebook forum (in the form of moderated public Facebook group) about gender issues and the same CSO also organized the feminist culture

[31] The phosphorite war was an environmental campaign against Moscow's plan to create a large scale phosphorite mine in Northern Estonia. The wave of protests turned into a massive national movement that was at the same time protesting the Communist Party's rule over Estonian economy. The success of the movement encouraged the following liberation movement (Rosengren, Lauristin & Vihalemm 1997).

[32] Interview, Feministeerium.

festival "Lady Fest". However, both activities were handed over to other groups. Also, Let's Do It World and Estonian Forest Aid have a similar organization model, which is something between a movement and a CSO, where the CSO body is for formalities, as activities and the group identity is more activism- or movement-oriented.[33]

The biggest organization during my fieldwork was the Estonian Fund for nature with 15 employees. The smallest was Loomus, with only two people. Feminsisteerium and Estonian Green Movement each had four employees. A lot of the funding came from project grants, both local and international. Fundraising for specific purposes and getting donations was also common. The CSOs in the study were established and professional CSOs that were led by highly educated tech-savvy people, were situated in big cities, and were Estonian speaking (some of them did have their communications translated to Russian). Working in the CSO was a full-time job for the majority of my interviewees. The Village Movement Kodukant, offered some idea as to the reality of CSOs in the countryside with less fewer resources for communication, both technically and in terms of know-how.

All CSOs used volunteers in their work to varying degrees or did the work without getting paid themselves (as in the case of Young Green). In general, the CSOs used volunteers for specific tasks, for example in helping to organize events, translate texts, or offer support for newly arrived refugees, among others. Estonian Fund for Nature and Let's Do It World engaged the largest number of volunteers. The former had listed around 1,500 volunteers who participate on a regular basis in the activities related to nature conservation. Estonian Fund for Nature was also the organizer of Estonian yearly Let's Do It! cleanup campaign where on one day around 30,000–50,000 people participate in picking up trash or doing other activities to better their communities. Also, the Estonian Village Movement engages a large number of volunteers for organizing the Maapäev–Estonian villages' parliament that gathers every second year to bring together the people in power and village representatives. My interviewee mentioned that it is much easier to involve people for those one-off events compared to having somebody helping on a regular basis. Finding somebody reliable with specific expertise, for example knowledge of the Russian language, or public relation expertise is a recurring

[33] For EFA was adhering to the formalities of CSO a learning curve at least in what comes to tax declarations. This resulted in hiring an accountant and in the moment of writing. They have published the statutes and the annual reports on their website: https://www.eestimetsaabiks.ee/mtu/ (accessed 10/03/22).

issue for other CSOs. Also, a lack of human resources for training and managing volunteers was mentioned as a continuing challenge.

CSO activities

As described above, CSOs work in different areas and engage with various topics. Their everyday work includes both routine communication practices and communication activities that are new or do not happen every day. In that sense, it is difficult to divide CSOs' communication practices into everyday and non-everyday practices. Even an innovative or spontaneous campaign consists of mundane communication practices like team meetings or sending e-mails to partner organizations. In her 'activist media practices' approach, Mattoni (2012) differentiates between media knowledge practices and relational media practices, which in short are about what activists do with media (relational media practices) and how they perceive the media environment (media knowledge practices). Mattoni applied her framework on social movement actors in times of mobilization and when those actors were making efforts in gaining media and political visibility and media practices were mainly connected to the mainstream media, to alternative media channels, and to communication in organization mobilization. As this study is applying Mattoni's concepts of media knowledge practices and relational media practices in the everyday context of established and evolving civil society organizations, I first needed to know what CSOs are doing.

From the interview material with CSOs, I was able to create rough categories of their activities: activities connected to gaining visibility and disseminating information, members/topic-oriented activities, activities involving communicating with decision-makers and taking part in democratic processes, networking-oriented activities, and activities connected to internal communication and the maintenance of the organization. Activities connected to gaining visibility consisted of communication in mediated spaces like mainstream media, or maintaining visibility on social media platforms. Visibility was also gained through real life events like seminars, conferences, festivals, and remembrance events. Finally, CSOs organized different campaigns, mobilized people on the streets for protest events, although the latter occurred less frequently. Members/topic-oriented activities are CSO-specific activities. For example, the Estonian Refugee Council offered support services for newly arrived refugees. The Estonian Fund for Nature engaged those who were interested in practical activities for nature conservation, for example in helping frogs across the road in the spring or by cleaning up the nesting areas of the black stork. Some of the CSOs were more

involved in regular communication with public and political institutions and engaged in democratic processes through activities like lobbying, taking part in collaborative governing and participating in policymaking, or acting as an expert organization within their area. CSOs also engaged in networking-oriented activities through interorganizational communication and cooperation. Most of the CSOs belonged to different national and international networks and roundtables. All the above activities were based on the underlying workflow that sustains CSOs (Mattoni 2020). This includes activities connected to administration, social events, planning and strategizing, writing project grants and filing paperwork, and working with volunteers, among other activities.

I chose three of the above categories of activities to analyze using Mattoni's concepts of media knowledge practices and relational media practices (2012): those concerned with visibility, participating in democratic processes, and internal communication. I chose these three in particular because they were common to all CSOs. In addition, those categories are also closest to what Mattoni studied, but my study concentrates on slightly different kinds of civil society actors and is located in the context of everyday, not in specific campaigns or mobilizations. I excluded two of the categories described above. First, I excluded member/topic-oriented activities as they were unique to specific CSOs and not common to all CSOs. Second, I excluded network-oriented activities as they partially overlap with internal communication and research data is limited in this regard as we did not discuss interorganizational communication in as much detail with my interviewees. As the following analysis concentrates on practices as generalized forms of actions (Mattoni 2020) and uses specific events as examples of those practices, I named those categories of activities in my analysis as visibility-related practices, political participation-related practices, and inward-oriented practices. The study also considers CSO's everyday communication practices in relation to communicative spaces those practices create and are enacted within.

5.2. Visibility related practices in mediated spaces

This section is divided between two mediated spaces, the mass media space and the social media space. The latter belongs to a wider online space, but I have scaled my focus to the social media space as Facebook was the main channel for CSO's self-visibility practices CSOs. Although being visible on mainstream media was not an everyday task for CSOs, most of them had,

over time, developed relationships with journalists and attitudes toward media outlets. Maintaining social media spaces was literally everyday work, as posting, finding things to post, and monitoring feedback were constant activities.

5.2.1. Reaching the movable middle – mainstream media space

Besides activities directed towards the members, beneficiaries and topics, most of the interviewed CSOs focused on raising awareness about their topics among the wider public. Some of them voiced the challenge of reaching the movable middle[34] or the silent majority[35]—i.e., people who have not yet made up their mind about the issues with which CSOs are concerned. Visibility in mainstream media was considered as a way of breaking out of one's own information field and some of the functions named in mass media visibility were opinion shaping, campaign promotion, raising awareness, and attracting new supporters. From the material emerged two reoccurring themes which were connected to practices related to their access to the mainstream media space and to practices dealing with representation. The latter was often connected to having some control over representation.

Access to mass media space

The below quote from the animal rights advocacy organization Loomus includes several aspects that characterize CSOs' relationships with mainstream media:

> We have media relations, ordinary media relations. We have different ways of sharing information. We send out press releases, initiate stories, contact sources, suggest all kinds of topics depending on the target group. We contact people and call them when we're organizing events. Just like with officials and politicians, we've gotten to know a few journalists over the years, who care about these topics and really are interested…. We haven't had any negative experiences with the media, because we communicate with them constantly and professionally. (Interview, Loomus)

Other CSOs shared similar relations with the mainstream media as those described in the above quote. The main common characteristics were long-term relationships with journalists; professional relationships based on

[34] Interview, Human Rights Center.
[35] Interview, Estonian Refugee Council.

credibility where CSOs acted as experts, and proactive approaches in contacting the press.

The interviewed CSOs had, in general, a good and constructive cooperation with journalists. On several occasions, contact was based on personal relationships with specific journalists. That relationship could be based on personal affiliation (friendship), evolve over time or be based on the sympathy for the topic. Overall, participating CSOs had little trouble getting coverage from mainstream media in situations where they needed visibility.

One of my interviewees explained that, for her, an interpersonal relationship with a journalist was a starting point in gaining access to mainstream media space:

> But one lot we do enjoy good contact with in relation to Village of the Year is Estonian Public Broadcasting and the morning show *Terevisioon*. If we have something we want to promote we can always go to them. We used to deal with Urmas Vaino, but there are new hosts now, so I hope we can still get our foot in the door there. Things always start with people. You can make all the plans you want on paper, but if you don't have that person to rely on the other side, if you don't have anyone who shares your interest, your plans will go nowhere. So you have to find the right people. (Kodukant)

My interviewee from Kodukant then listed people she could trust to write a story. And how in *Maaleht*, the newspaper about countryside matters, the contact person was useless. Or that in some bigger national newspapers they did not have people to call and offer a story. On one hand, having those people available to contact helped get the story out to wider public. On the other hand, such relationships provided a degree of control over the message, safety about fair representation, and the opportunity to tweak messaging to the media.[36]

Kari Käsper from Human Rights Centre described their relationships with journalists as good. They got a lot of requests to give them stories, but at the same time the people in the organization were well aware of the position media professionals have. Therefore, they were careful not to abuse their good relations with journalists:

> Some of our own friends work as journalists as well, of course. We've had people helping us with PR who have previously been journalists or gone

[36] Interview Kodukant.

> back to being journalists, but we have to be careful with them, too, because it's like... We don't want to put them in an awkward situation. We understand only too well that a journalist's job is to be objective and not to present things in a one-sided way. We're really careful regarding that in our communication with journalists, so that things don't get out of hand. But yes, we know some journalists who we've worked with more often, so we know we work well with them and they already know us. We don't have to explain to them the basics of our organization, who we are, what we do or what we have. They already know a bit about our activities and they can ask us interesting questions.

Besides getting a foot through the door, personal relationships helped to raise the quality of the stories as introductions can be skipped and misunderstandings avoided. Although, as Kari mentions, there is a fine line between professional personal relationships and personal relationships.

From those two quotes emerge a CSO-specific dilemma. On one side you need to know people to gain visibility as the activities of CSOs are often not spectacular enough to gain attention organically. On the other side, too-close relationships with media professionals might damage the relationship or the credibility of the CSO.

CSOs often had a proactive approach toward contacting the press and they often called journalists directly and offered them stories. In some cases, communication people in CSOs sent out press releases with follow up communications, but in other cases my interviewees said they did not use press releases as they perceived that they did not generate enough traction. One of my interviewees said that they had a passive approach toward gaining access to mainstream media spaces, except in the times when there was a need to promote their own campaigns. However, they were always open for interviews when approached by journalists, even from channels with a relatively small reach.[37] For the animal rights organization Loomus, their need for proactiveness had decreased over time as the interest in the topic had risen, and journalists had become proactive in contacting them.[38]

The higher interest from journalists was also connected to the results of the work people from Loomus had done to increase their credibility as experts on the topic:

[37] Interview, Human Rights Centre.
[38] Interview, Loomus.

> I think things have changed and we're being taken seriously. One of our aims concerning communication with the media is to boost our credibility. That's crucially important. It's not some trivial thing. It's deadly serious. These are political issues, ethical issues, issues that concern our principles. So that's been one of our aims and we've worked hard to be seen as credible and as experts in our field, opinion shapers. So that if something's happening involving farm animals or test animals, the media knows they can contact Loomus and ask us for advice. (Interview, Loomus)

Being asked for expert comment by journalists was one way the CSOs achieved media visibility. Especially for older and more established CSOs like Estonian Fund for Nature, it was common to be contacted as an expert organization. My interviewee mentioned that as they do not cover all needs for expertise, they have divided the topics between different environmental organizations. Also, one of the human rights organizations received numerous requests for comments and for them this was an issue, as not everybody wanted to answer those comments as they would later receive negative comments by readers and trolls.[39] At the same time, human rights organizations like Human Rights Centre and Estonian Refugee Council played an important role during the times when there were societal issues related to their area of work. The representative from the Estonian Refugee Council said that during the refugee crisis they had the important task of spreading adequate information when state communication was underwhelming. A Feministeerium representative told me that at some point they received quite a lot of questions from journalists and reacting fast with well thought-out and professional answers became quite taxing. At the same time my interviewee expressed her disappointment in how some media outlets were after sensationalism and how final stories were often based on crude opposition between feminists and chauvinists.

Sometimes access to the mainstream media space happened organically when journalists picked up a story from CSO's social media space. In some cases, the story was taken directly from CSO's social media without asking for permission[40] or sometimes journalists would pick up an old story.[41] For a Flying Squirrel campaign that preceded the "forest war", the organizer told me that she made a Facebook page for the campaign, and as it gathered

[39] Interview, Human Rights Centre.
[40] Interview, Loomus.
[41] Interview, NENO.

thousands of likes in a short time, a journalist from *Postimees* contacted her for an interview on the same day.[42]

Control over representation

As CSOs had developed relationships with journalists and wrote some of the texts themselves, issues with representation were not something that came up a lot in the interviews. However, there were some practices in place to enable CSOs to have more control over their representation. These practices included negotiation and co-operation, choosing the right channel, and creating content for the mainstream media outlets.

CSOs used 'adaptive relational media practices', which, according to Mattoni (2012), means adjusting interactions with media organizations, outlets, technologies and professionals to the unspoken and direct norms and rules social movement actors assume those media subjects possess. CSOs understood the importance of being visible and with more controversial topics like promoting feminism, reaching beyond their own channels was important:

> And we direct our content to the mainstream media: we don't want to keep all the articles to ourselves. We want to get them out there. We've had strategic discussions about what our demands are if we send something to the mainstream. For example, if we have a guest writer. Different media offers different options, whether the information we provide goes in the header or the footer, whether there's a source, things I'll ask them to add. It's the least they can do in addition to providing an active link to our page. It comes back to us, too. It's not a lot, but we create free content and we know it. But it's worth it if it gets our propaganda out there. (Interview, Feministeerium)

My interviewee added that they were willing to adapt the material to the channel, for example a Delfi news portal wanted the headlines to be emotional. Over time Feministeerium had figured out what they were capable of and what their stories were worth.[43] Even though the organization adapted to the media formats and the ways of working, they saw success in terms of media collaboration as finding balance through compromise and negotiation.

[42] Interview, Young Green.
[43] Interview, Feministeerium.

Based on Quadruple-A model (Rucht 2004), Mattoni (2012) outlines three additional relational media practices that characterized certain interaction styles between activists, media objects, and media subjects. Besides 'adaptive relational media practices', the other three were 'abstention relational media practices', 'attacking relational media practices' and 'alternative relational media practices'. The last named three kinds of relational media practices were not clearly present in my material, however, all CSOs had created a Facebook page as an additional channel for information dissemination. Facebook pages were not so much as an alternative to mainstream media coverage, as alternative media channels like Indymedia, Global Project, and other purposefully-made websites and flyers were for the precarious workers movement in Italy (ibid.), but functioned more as a complement to them. And in times of mobilization or campaigns Facebook was used as a tool for organization in combination with other communication channels.

When CSOs had a story or a written text to offer to the mainstream media, they often chose a suitable outlet themselves. That choice was based on several aspects. Some of the choices were based on personal preferences, based both on earlier experiences with the channel or on personal convictions. For example, a few of my interviewees said that they did not want to work with *Õhtuleht*, because of its sensationalism and their lack of ethics, at the same time as one other CSO[44] had a positive experience with the same newspaper when they were organizing an impromptu protest event against fur farms. Another way of choosing the channel was based on the personal relationships described earlier in the section; namely whether the media channel had journalists who were sympathetic to the topic. Also, the choice of channel was in some cases strategic—for example, to get media visibility in channels that the interviewees usually would not read themselves or to publish in various channels, not only those channels that hold the same views. In some cases, the choice of channel boiled down to taking what is available at the moment. For example, one of my interviewees mentioned using an alternative online portal *Telegram*.[45] At the same time, she was aware of the criticism the channel was receiving, but it worked well to promote the forest protest at the time when conventional media channels were silent.[46] In

[44] Interview, Loomus.

[45] https://www.telegram.ee/ (accessed 06/04/2022) is an alternative online news channel whose slogan is "transparent media" and they publish on variety of topics, among which are world news, health and personal development, the new world order and mysticism. They have also published articles criticizing COVID vaccination.

[46] Interview, Young Green.

another case, my interviewee was expressing her dilemma of choosing a respectable alternative channel over a disrespected mainstream channel, as the latter reaches wider public but at the same time her question was how to obtain wide visibility without creating random content.[47] Creating quality content was, for her, more important than wider visibility.

Media practices listed in this section, like personal relationships with journalists, negotiation, and producing media texts also came up in Mattoni's (ibid.) study. However, the social movement groups in her study found it more difficult to reach mainstream media with their representation of contentious issues which also affected their perception of mainstream media. In this study, CSOs had a constructive relationship with mainstream media which was often was built on professionalism and personal relationships with journalists. These relationships have often been built over time and through experience. Having the time to establish oneself as a serious and professional CSO made a difference in contentious and time-sensitive issues as was shown in the examples of the forest-related protests preceding the birth of Estonian Forest Aid where the mainstream media was slow to report as opposed to their reporting during the spontaneous protest[48] organized by Loomus[49] which got extensive and supportive media attention prior to and after the event (more detail about the protest will be in the section 5.3.1)

5.2.2. Self-visibility practices in social media spaces

Online communication spaces offer activists an alternative means of disseminating messages and by-passing the gatekeeping of mainstream media. According to Mattoni (2012), alternative media is more than a means of communication but a way of constructing own subjectivity for the activist groups. Having a means of accessing alternative communication channels is especially important during times of increased visibility and mobilization and when access to traditional media is unreliable. At the same time, online communication spaces are also important for everyday visibility during latent periods. For civil society organizations who do not engage in large scale mobilizations, maintaining online visibility is an important part of their everyday work: keeping in contact with their supporters, promoting topics important to them, and raising awareness, among other reasons. For that purpose, instead of relying other alternative information channels, CSOs

[47] Interview, Feministeerium.
[48] Interview, Young Green.
[49] Interview Loomus.

have created their own information sphere online using different channels like websites, newsletters, and social media profiles.

All of the interviewed organizations used website (and in one case a blog) and Facebook as their main digital media channels for self-visibility in 2017 when these interviews were held. From social media, around half of the CSOs also used Twitter, and fewer organizations used other channels like Instagram, Flickr, YouTube (usually videos are distributed on other channels), Soundcloud, Issuu (a publishing platform) to name a few. A few organizations had even set up automated posting between different platforms to save time. For example, a blog post automatically generated a tweet on Twitter.

Around half of the participating organizations had a regular newsletter. Those who did not had an updated news section on their webpage. The newsletter was distributed through mailing lists and posted on the website/social media. Newsletters usually communicated information about the topics on which organization was focused: on their own activities, about past and future events, and topical news from different sources like networks, decision-makers, from other countries. One organization used Facebook instead of a newsletter[50]. One of my interviewees from NENO had a good overview of the reach of their newsletter. She also knew that from the circa 2000 readers only around 20% open the newsletter. Sometimes the low readership was connected to a technical issue, like the newsletter ends up in the spam folder. However, my interviewee expressed her concern that people do not read e-mails anymore and because of that their mailing list will become obsolete, and the newsletter will too.[51]

Visibility practices on Facebook

Facebook was the main social media platform for external communication and was often also used for internal communication. For external communication, the most commonly-used function was pages, where organizations can disseminate multimodal information, collect likes, and spread messages through the share button. Facebook users can also interact with the CSO by commenting on the posts or sending them a message from the page.

My interviewees named various roles social media had for their organizational visibility. One that was mentioned more than once was simply showing that the organization exists. Another role of social media was direct contact

[50] Interview, Human Rights Institute.
[51] Interview, NENO.

with potential and existing supporters, as Facebook users can send messages through the platform. Social media was also reported to be a cheap way of spreading information, and some of my interviewees offered examples of successful social media campaigns for fundraising. In general, it was not used to replace the webpage but to complement it, as they were supposed to have different functions.

Posts on the CSO's Facebook pages could roughly be categorized as follows: posts on their own activities, advertising events, posting relevant news from Estonia and elsewhere in the world, campaign and fundraising posts, and sharing other organizations' posts that work on the same topic. Besides regular posting, people working with social media in the CSOs had to answer queries and moderate comments under the posts. Creating and scheduling posts, finding relevant and interesting things to post about, and after-post monitoring were other activities that added to the overall maintenance work of Facebook visibility. When asked how much everyday work with Facebook takes, answers varied. For some, it took only a little time, while others experienced that it takes a lot of time. Besides the actual posting, activities like finding things to post, planning the posts, and monitoring the page made the work related to social media time consuming. One of my interviewees mentioned that the benefits from social media depends on the effort that is put in, and doing it properly takes a lot of work.[52] For my interviewees, taking care of social media accounts was one task among others that needed to be done every day.

The explanation by the representative from the Human Rights Institute illustrates the approach to Facebook strategy, even for other CSOs:

> We do technically have a social media strategy, but it's more about things like how often and what topics we post about. Like how much we should talk about our daily activities and how much news about other issues we should share. … The strategy's a good thing to remind ourselves of from time to time. But we don't necessarily follow it every day; usually we just share things when we find something cool. (Human Rights Institute)

Digital media strategies for CSOs were a mix of mutual agreements or general guidelines and going by 'gut instinct'. Some of the words I heard describing CSOs' digital media strategy were for example: principles[53], gut feeling[54], do

[52] Interview, Human Rights Centre.
[53] Interview, Young Green.
[54] Interview, Kodukant.

things as we go along[55], cognitive thing[56], tacit agreements and collective memory[57], unspoken agreements[58], agreements on main things[59], and it's all in my head[60]. There were some patterns in the labor of creating Facebook posts: either one person was doing all the posting, or posting was a shared responsibility. Another combination was that even though one person did all the posting, the communication strategy was a collective endeavor.

My interviewee from Feministeerium explained how their Facebook practices had changed over time: in the beginning they tried to discuss and strategize more, but after gaining some experience, posting and deleting became more time-effective as they became routine activities:

> We used to post less and discuss things more. We used to *delete* less and discuss things more, but now we just block anyone who starts posting crap. We still let the others know in the chat if we've blocked anyone because of spam. Did someone delete such-and-such a comment, things like that. I found a typo, can someone fix it? Sure, I'm at my computer, I'll do it. (NL, Feministeerium)

My interviewee added that they developed a sense of mutual trust and personal responsibility. Coupled with a how-to guide, the need to discuss everything decreased. Moreover, the representative from Feministeerium experienced that too much and too-rigid planning led her to become more passive. In that sense, social media posting practices for the CSO had become such a routine activity that one does not require time need to think about the mechanics of it. Even so, some CSOs found guidelines useful: about what to post and how, what sort of language to use, how the posts should be formulated, how to answer comments—answering either as the organization or using their own name.

The CSO people working with Facebook had developed a good understanding of when and how often is best to post. They gave me long descriptions of what times of the day are optimal and why: for example, one CSO representative scheduled the posts for mornings as it made the most sense to him because news also come in the morning.[61] Other examples were

[55] Interview, Human Rights Institute.
[56] Interview, Estonian Refugee Council.
[57] Interview, Feministeerium.
[58] Interview, Green Movement.
[59] Interview, Young Green.
[60] Interview, Loomus.
[61] Interview, Estonian Refugee Council.

posting articles in the mornings, events after work, and only posting positive things on weekends. The CSO representatives were careful not to post too often, a maximum once a day. However, there were different understandings as to how often posts should be made. For some, two to three times a week was survival mode, for others, more posts were not even attempted. My interviewees had also a good understanding of which posts are the most popular and gather the most likes and shares. Such posts had certain parameters: it must have a visual element, people can relate to it, it involves personal stories or acknowledgements, and it has a positive tone. Some also mentioned the element of surprise and that the links bring users to an Estonian language source.

The Facebook pages of the CSOs were not only for one-way information dissemination, as through commenting the posts, readers could start or take part in discussions. Most CSO representatives were open to discussions if the comments stayed polite and stayed within the frame of Facebook community standards. Unfortunately, some areas CSOs worked with attracted quite a lot of what they called 'trolls', who post offensive comments without any intention for constructive discussion. My interviewees had different ways of dealing with trolls, either by hiding or deleting the offending comments or banning the person doing the trolling. My interviewee from Loomus shared her experience with subtle trolls who formulate their comments in a civilized way so the person managing the page has to keep answering although the discussion is not moving anywhere and wastes a lot of time of the person working in the CSO.[62]

The representative from NENO pointed out an interesting observation; often the discussions are not taking place in the organization's Facebook page but move elsewhere:

> We get likes and shares, but not many comments. Comments and discussions often take place on people's own walls, which is a shame in a way. Someone shares our link or post and then discussions ensue on their wall instead of on ours. But I guess that's how social media works. Like Maris said, the personal touch is much more important. People will comment on a friend's post even if the post is shared from an organization. So it's a connection between people, not with the organization. We just have to factor that in. (Interview, NENO)

[62] Interview, Loomus.

My interviewee added that although it is nice that people make organization's posts their own, it also decreases contributions as the discussion happens on several walls and becomes fragmented and even as the author of the post, she might not even see the feedback as she does not always have time to track the conversations elsewhere.

Temporality of social media practices

Interviews revealed how the temporality of social media influences everyday social media practices and the experience of social media for CSO representatives. On one side, one needs to keep posting regularly in order to stay relevant on followers' timelines, but on the other side, the posts themselves needed to be timely:

> From time to time I do like to play the reporter when there are Kodukant events, and while they're going on I'll post stuff, like, "This is what's happening here right now and people are discussing this and that" and click and it's up. It's worth posting stuff like that; instinct tells you to. What's happening in real time, what's going on right now, what people are talking about. Not, like, "We all got together yesterday." (Interview, Kodukant)

Veronica Barassi (2015) argues that the activists reproduce the temporality of immediacy through their practices; for example by real-time reporting at protests or by swiftly answering messages on the chat. As reported by Barassi (2015), such 'temporalizing practices' and keeping up with the immediacy of the social media also often creates stress. The representative from the animal advocacy organization Loomus brought up a similar experience in the quote below. She characterized the challenge as the urgency of Facebook that creates stress and addiction. On one hand, there are practices for gaining visibility by creating posts over which one has more control, but on the other hand, there is the need to react to others' communication.

> Well it's the, how can I put it, the urgency, I suppose. I think that's the biggest problem with social media. For starters, it's addictive: I have to see what's going on there. I don't know what's going on, whether someone's submitted a question or a comment, whether I have to delete something... That's what I have to deal with a lot. Social media is a playground for trolls, especially social justice topics like banning fur farms, and animal rights in general. There are just so many trolls you need to weed out – like ban, ban, ban… What do we even say in Estonian for 'urgency'? By which I mean

> you get addicted to it because you always have that feeling. It's getting like that again now. And it's not just a feeling: it's the actual experience. You think that you'll be away for a few hours or shut down your computer at ten in the evening and open it at eight or nine in the morning and there's already something there. For me, that's actually a big problem. I've been thinking about the fact that last summer I was able to go on holiday, and since I knew that Kadri would be handling everything, I didn't worry. But I couldn't imagine being away for several days at a time with nobody covering everything. Which is actually really sad. (Interview, Loomus)

Managing the communication on social media channels was, according to my interviewee, continuous and demanding work. As illustrated in the above quote, visibility through Facebook, does not only suggest producing content. Depending on the topic, it is also about moderating discussions, which might demand almost a constant presence. As brought up in the quote below, my interviewee believed that responsiveness on Facebook is directly tied up with visibility on the platform and therefore there is a need to adapt to a social media logic and reproduce the immediacy in order to stay visible and to keep comments on topic and respectful.

> I'm the moderator or administrator of lots of pages and you get a notification every time someone writes to you or comments. Your rating drops if you don't respond quickly enough. I've managed to keep the responsiveness level on our Loomus page at 'very responsive', I think it was. If it drops, our visibility in the news feed dwindles because algorithms come into play. So I have reply to people to keep it up. In some ways the communication field has become really urgent because of it. There's always this tension in the air. (Interview, Loomus)

Not all the CSOs shared the same experience. Certain topics, like human rights, animal rights, and feminism attracted more negative attention from trolls than others and some organizations rely on the Facebook communication more than others. Usually organizations with more activist tendency have work hours might go beyond regular office hours (Feministeerium, Loomus, Estonian Forest Aid). To tackle the stress of immediacy, the interviewees named some strategies, like creating rules for communication, or disconnecting while doing other calming activities like yoga.

At the same time, the interviews revealed a paradox about the 'temporality of immediacy' (Barassi 2015). Although CSO representatives needed to answer inquiries fast and Messenger chat was considered fast and operational

within the CSO, Facebook was not always considered a suitable channel for urgent information. Varying daily rhythms and the fact that not everybody is on Facebook all the time were some of the reasons mentioned. For the representative from Loomus, varying daily rhythms posed a problem as volunteers would activate in the evening, after their own workday was over, as my interviewee had already been working all day. In that sense, the activists also need to consider the temporality of overall everyday life which sometimes might clash with the temporality of social media.

5.3. Political participation related practices and spaces

In this section, communication practices related to political participation are divided into two broad areas: engaging the wider public and communicating with decision-makers. Most of the visibility-related practices, which were covered in the previous section are already oriented toward reaching supporters and the public. The current section considers additional forms of engaging the public using different kinds of communicative spaces. More specifically, I describe practices of organizing campaigns, mobilizing in physical space, and using specialized platforms for online mobilization, like petitions and crowdfunding. The second part of this section is dedicated to communication with decision-makers. I am naming the space for communicating with decision-makers the 'hallways of power'. It is a discursive space that can take the form of a physical space, like the Parliament house, or the offices of ministers, but does not necessarily do so. In some cases, engaging non-state actors in the decision-making processes through collaborative governance is required by law, like in the areas of environment and forestry (Vihma & Toikka 2021). Decision-making space is also available online. Some examples are the official platform for petitions and law proposals Rahvaalgatus[63], where petitions gathering at least 1,000 signatures must be discussed in Parliament. Furthermore, Estonian citizens can send information requests to ministries, and they are obliged to answer within 5 or 30 days, depending on the matter. Also, anyone who is interested can watch recordings of Parliament sessions on YouTube.[64]

5.3.1. Engaging the wider public

Engaging the wider public in the case of participating organizations usually meant awareness-raising and opinion -forming, and it was less about

[63] https://rahvaalgatus.ee/ (accessed 24/04/2022).
[64] https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/ (Accessed 27/06/21).

mobilizing crowds in public space. In that sense, engaging the wider public was a part of the overall work description, as the CSO's topics of interest were of common appeal. One of my interviewees said that their organization does not mobilize people in the traditional sense, but instead through media stories they hope people's empathy will grow and lead to real participation down the line.[65]

Another sort of activity for awareness raising and mobilizing the public was organizing campaigns—communication with specific topic and goal. Some examples were fundraising campaigns for specific causes, like reuniting a separated family,[66] or gaining monthly donors for the CSO. Some of the participating CSOs have also organized awareness campaigns and petitions. Here is an example from the animal advocacy organization Loomus, who has run a campaign to urge people not to purchase fur. In 2014 they collected over 10,000 signatures nationally in support of banning fur farms which was later complemented with over 56,000 signatures internationally.[67] Another example was a 'non-event' campaign for Human Rights Day organized by the Estonian Human Rights Centre. It was a Facebook campaign where they invited people not to take part in an event they did not organize and to donate money instead.[68]

CSO representatives were quite aware of the benefits and limitations of doing Facebook campaigns. They listed some benefits: it was fast and easy, required a low budget, and allowed them to aim their campaign at very targeted audiences or a very specific goal. Another experience from social media campaign was the snowball effect—that through sharing, key people like journalists and opinion leaders picked up the message and spread it in different communication spaces.[69] As a downside, one of my interviewees expressed his doubt as to how much online sharing translates into a real change or activism offline.[70]

Mobilizing supporters and the wider public for protests or other events in the public space was not part of a regular activity for interviewed CSOs. There were a few occasions in which this happened, like the protest event against fur farms organized by Loomus; an event in the support of Dakota pipeline protests organized by Green Movement; and a yearly memorial event on

[65] Interview, Feministeerium.
[66] Interview, Estonian Refugee Council.
[67] https://loomus.ee/kampaaniad/ (accessed 28/01/2021).
[68] Interview, Human Rights Centre.
[69] Interview, Estonian Fund for Nature.
[70] Interview Human Rights Centre.

Vabaduse Väljak in Tallinn to remember the deported with 50,000 blue balloons that represent tears and the amount of people deported. Common to these mobilizations were that they employed all possible mediated spaces simultaneously to get the word out. In the case of Green Movement, they had written an article about the protests about the Dakota pipelines, where in the United States, native people fought to save their land from fracking and via the protests managed to get wide international support. The article by Green Movement was published in the national daily newspaper *Postimees* and at the same time, another group of people were organizing the protest in support of the people in Dakota. My interviewees from the Green Movement helped to organize the protest and talked about it with fondness, describing how the article and the protest worked well together. Loomus' protest was another example of different spaces working together. My interviewees told me how they had only a weekend to organize a protest when they found out that Parliament was discussing their motion on Monday morning. Besides using their own social media channels, they were interviewed by *Õhtuleht*, who published a supporting story, they were approached by few other media outlets, and appeared on the radio. In addition, some other organizations helped to widen their reach by lending them their social media space and calling people to join the protest. For example, Feministeerium shared the invitation to Loomus' protest.[71]

When it comes to specialized platforms for engaging the wider public, such as petition or crowdfunding sites, the participating organizations had differing opinions and experiences. Some found the crowdfunding platform Hooandja useful to help fund some projects.[72] Some found petitions useful, but others did not believe in their impact. Arguments against the petition platforms were, for example, that discussions happen elsewhere or that such sites take traffic away from the organization's own communicative spaces. Those who organized petitions using those platforms also understood the difference between the platforms and the results they yielded. Signing a petition with an ID card on the Rahvaalgatus website gave less signatures than signing with just an e-mail on a different platform[73] but once a certain threshold was reached, it guaranteed attention from the decision-makers.

[71] Interview, Feministeerium.
[72] Interview, Kodukant.
[73] https://petitsioon.ee/ (accessed 08/04/2022).

5.3.2. Participating in the decision-making

For some CSOs communicating with decision-makers was a common part of their everyday work. However, that communication came in different forms. For example, advocating for the topics the organizations worked with, providing the state a service (for example, a support network for refugees), or receiving grants for projects. In some areas, collaborative governance was compulsory; like in environmental issues and environmental organizations took part in discussions about law changes and policymaking. The animal advocacy organization Loomus was lobbying for banning the fur farming and using wild animals in the circus and for other laws that concerned the welfare of animals. Another form of relationship with decision-makers was acting as an expert in their field by giving talks in front of committees[74] or giving feedback to policies. However, several of the CSO representatives were not sure about the impact they could make on policy and expressed the thought that there is little hope for change once the policy gets out of the ministry. In addition, one of my interviewees recounted that the way the feedback is sometimes requested does not even motivate citizens to engage; by providing long documents in difficult language with no specific instructions besides asking what citizens think.[75]

5.4. Inward oriented practices and spaces

The previous sections were dedicated to practices directed outwards, toward the general public and decision-makers. This section concentrates on the everyday communication practices that underlie the visible activities of CSOs and that maintain the organization. Those practices are enacted in various spaces, both physical and mediated. The people from participating CSOs sometimes wished for more contact in physical spaces. In other situations, digital solutions were happily adapted, as in the case of government e-services. This section addresses main channels for internal communication, how CSOs adapt their communication to spatial realities, and what kind of strategies they have for separating work and private life on social media. Furthermore, the section describes both physical and Facebook spaces for internal communication.

The most common channels for internal communication were e-mail and mailing lists. These were followed by Skype, phone calls, face-to-face meet-

[74] Interview, Estonian Refugee Council.
[75] Interview, Kodukant.

ings, and Facebook messenger. Some organizations used a customized intranet or specialized project management software.

Although mailing lists and emails were the most commonly-used channels, some of the study participants addressed some challenges with using email. The main issue was the passiveness of email and the difficulty in getting responses from people. This challenge was brought up by umbrella and network organizations who need to communicate with many other organizations and individuals every day. I heard descriptions of how people do not respond when the CSO representative sends out an email asking for help or opinions, even when they would have opinions or would gladly help if asked personally.[76] The representative from the other umbrella organization Kodukant had a similar experience and she estimated that maybe one third would read the email and the rest would not even open it.[77] My interviewee from NENO said that not getting responses from people implicates her everyday work. She explained her email challenges with both organizational culture and with the inevitability of digital society as everybody is already swamped with information and digital communication. The need for a personal approach in communication within a network was present even on the global level, but it was difficult to achieve in 150 countries simultaneously.[78] Interviewees' reflections are an example of the complicated relationship CSO representatives have with media objects; in this case media objects for interpersonal communication. Everyday experiences in using the object have molded the understanding of the medium (media knowledge practices), but at the same time, the relationship needs to continue in the absence of a better alternative.

In some of CSOs, the choice of channel for internal communication was based on situation and comfort. To deal with combining different communication channels, some CSOs had created rules by assigning specific communication tools to specific situations:

> We use Skype to talk about bigger issues, exchange thoughts, have discussions and brainstorm. We use e-mail for more specific matters that require sending documents, for example. At the beginning of every week we send a weekly schedule to each other. So it's very well structured and easy to adhere to; we don't waste time. We also have Facebook chat. It got

[76] Interview, NENO.
[77] Interview, Kodukant.
[78] Interview, LDIW.

> out of hand at one point though so we wanted to do without it, but we've gradually started using it again (Interview, Loomus).

Managing the abundance of communication channels was sometimes a challenge, both for small organizations like Loomus and for a global network like Lets's Do It World. For Loomus, where there were only two people, creating rules for everyday communication had helped to somewhat manage the realities of remote work and constant social media communication. In another occasions, a person who was coordinating a global network had to adapt to the relational media practices (Mattoni 2012) of others in the network. As there were many people and organizations in the network, sometimes the mix of different communication channels would cause individuals to feel overwhelmed:

> Lots of people like Facebook and we have to be wherever they are. People can take a long time to answer e-mails and we often have to check if they even got it. I personally really dislike when part of your conversation is on Facebook, part of it is in an e-mail somewhere and the rest is on Skype. But that's how a lot of people interact these days. Take clean-up campaigns, for example. Someone might send you a file on Skype, then write you an e-mail and afterwards you have to look at three different channels to get all the facts. They might send you some kind of voucher in one place and a letter or comments in another and put their statistics and data on Facebook. Not to mention sharing pictures, right? So that's really annoying, and if you have 100 people doing that all at the same time, it's quite hard to handle. (Interview, Let's Do It World)

When describing her workday, the representative from Let's Do It World found it challenging to handle simultaneous conversations both work-related and private, and to use different communication technologies at the same:

> The moment I open Facebook every morning, there are already seven or eight conversations going on that are all connected to work and only two or three with friends. So I'm juggling 10 conversations, Skyping, e-mailing, calling people and having meetings all at once, and inevitably it's all a bit overwhelming. (Interview, Let's Do It World)

Having to not only to juggle different communication channels, but also the amount of information one needs to process was perceived as overwhelming. My interviewees from the Green Movement shared their experience in

working in the CSO by saying that you start as a volunteer with a lot of energy, then in day-to-day work it is easy to get swamped with a flood of information and stuff that needs to be done and becomes hard to get anywhere. This is perhaps especially true for an organization like theirs that deals with a range of different topics.

As some digital media outlets and social media platforms were used for both private and work-related communication, separating or not separating the two became a conscious choice. Loomus was one of the CSOs where the conversation went naturally to the troubles of separating work and private life. To tackle the issue, my interviewees in Loomus chose a specific kind of medium (SMS) for communicating outside work hours:

> We've agreed not to talk about work stuff when it's our day off, on weekends or during official vacation time, but we still do sometimes. However, if there's a crisis, an SMS is the sign that something's wrong (Interview, Loomus).

During my interviews I encountered different strategies in separating private life and professional life on social media. For some, it was impossible, as being an administrator of the Facebook page demanded constant presence. Others had changed their Facebook habits and decreased posting private things or avoided posting work things on their private profiles, whereas some posted work stuff on their private walls and engaged their personal networks in their causes and campaigns. For some, Facebook was only used as a tool for work. In general, my interviewees were aware of the challenges in using the same platforms for private and work purposes and had developed individual ways of dealing with those challenges.

For most of the interviewed CSOs, the main site of daily work was an office. However, even with the existence of an office, a lot of daily work was done remotely. Several of the study participants wished there was more face-to-face communication. Meeting in person as much as possible was important, even for upholding a global network:

> It's all based on Skype and one-on-one meetings, but that isn't as motivating for volunteers as taking part in events is. I feel it's somewhat easier to communicate in this online society or e-country we have, but there's a much larger amount of information pollution. It's everywhere, and it actually leads us to crave real contact. In Estonia and lots of other countries, being able to access services isn't special – what's special is seeing someone in real life. (Interview, Let's Do It World)

Some of the reasons for preferring to work in the office and meeting colleagues face-to-face included better productivity and increased response rates, as there was already a lot of electronical communication.[79] Meeting in real life was also seen as saving time with communication in comparison with emailing[80] and was good for fixing problems with online communication.[81] In addition, sharing the same physical space was considered good for motivation[82] and for creating trust.[83] The representative from Estonian Fund for Nature shared that sometimes people would travel two hours, from Tartu to Tallinn for one meeting as they get more out of it than joining through Skype. She found taking the time to be present was especially important when they deal with volunteers. Although it was felt that the internet could not replace meetings in real life, being able to work over internet was found to be equally important.[84]

Facebook groups as a social space

From my fieldwork emerged the theme that Facebook groups were sometimes used as spaces for community. My interviewee from Feministeerium described how the surge in membership of VWSEK group[85] lead to the creation of three other closed groups for activists who wanted to have deeper discussions and closer relationships. In the quote, she detailed the communication practices that shaped one of those closed the groups and how the nature of that communication space altered over time:

> The third group is a women's tavern, also closed and with even fewer members. It used to be a group for Woolf admins, a place where they could blow off steam. Not anymore. It's grown into a group that does everything I mentioned in the sense of a community. We have long, really personal discussions about mental health, very personal issues. We specifically helped someone who got out of an abusive relationship and moved to Tallinn. The group put together enough money for an initial payment for her to be able to move to Tallinn with her kids. On Friday evenings we start some random fun thread. We post selfies, ask what kind

[79] Interview, NENO.
[80] Interview, Human Rights Institute.
[81] Interview, Feministeerium.
[82] Interview, LDIW.
[83] Interview, Loomus.
[84] Interview, Estonian Fund for Nature.
[85] "Virginia Woolf Sind Ei Karda" is a public Facebook group that Feministeerium started as a reading group for queer literature. Later it turned into the largest public forum for gender topics in Estonia.

> of frying pan everyone's got, who the lecturer at the University of Tartu was who harassed such-and-such a person. Oh, I know them, too. And then everyone shares harassment stories. I'm so grateful the group exists. I've never felt as much solidarity anywhere else (Interview, Feministeerium)

Admittedly, the above group was not created by Feministeerium or the CSO to which it belongs, but it united a wider circle of feminists. However, the community aspect and informal socializing was also common in the Facebook groups made specifically for the people active in the CSO. For example, Eero Janson, the director of the Estonian Refugee Council, recounted the practices of the closed Facebook group for trained support persons. On one hand it was a tool for the CSO to keep in touch with their volunteers and share relevant information. On the other hand, the space was also a means for those volunteers to be social among themselves, as most of them were scattered all over Estonia and did not meet as often in real life:

> It's not just about technical topics. It is just regular people communicating, making jokes, and sometimes posting articles. So, also other topics are discussed there. And sometimes planning of the activities is done there, too. For instance, when we planned the Christmas party, people were thinking along what to do and how to do it (Interview, Estonian Refugee Council).

For other CSOs, Facebook groups were used as operative spaces for networking and information sharing. For example, representatives from the Estonian Green Movement each counted at least five groups they used for work purposes. One of the representatives took up a feature of the group space that also came up in another interview[86]; namely the slower pace from the usual 'temporality of immediacy' that characterizes social media (Barassi 2015):

> The groups are quite constructive in the sense that if there are problems, you ask and people answer and give you advice. You can ask for or give information. But when you're busy at work then you don't look at the groups. You contribute when you have more time or the chance to do so. They aren't urgent channels for information or places to share the most

[86] Interview, Loomus.

> important information. They're softer, in a sense. You feel like part of a community or part of a group. (Interview, Estonian Green Movement)

Some of the different Facebook groups the Estonian Green Movement had were, for example, groups for specific projects, or for the network of partner organizations, but they also had separate groups for board members, for employees, and for volunteers. In other organizations such working spaces were created instead through mailing lists or specific programs like Microsoft Teams. So, it was a matter of choice as to which communication channel worked best for a specific CSO. The representative of Let's Do It World aptly pinpointed the appeal of Facebook groups by saying that even though they are not an ideal working environment, groups add a social element to communication which is especially important with the lack of face-to-face meetings.[87]

5.5. Summary

In this chapter I have described various everyday communication practices in established civil society organizations (CSO) in Estonia. Those practices were discussed in relation to different communicative spaces. Such spaces were mediated spaces for visibility, spaces related to engaging wider public and taking part in decision-making, and spaces for internal communication. As this chapter has demonstrated, everyday CSO work happens in what Mattoni (2012) calls a 'dual space of interaction', where online and offline communication is intertwined and complement one another, and where interaction with technical objects is combined with face-to-face communication. However, this chapter went deeper than the dual space to find out what kind of communicative spaces CSOs use more specifically, and how they perceive their media use and the media environment in general.

For visibility, the chapter has considered mainstream media spaces and online spaces. Access to mainstream media space was achieved through interpersonal relationships with journalists, through proactive and professional approaches. In some cases, visibility happened organically when journalists picked up a story from social media but CSOs often took measures to gain control over their representation in mainstream media. Some of the measures discussed in the chapter were negotiation, producing content for media outlets, and choosing a suitable channel for their media texts. Of all

[87] Interview, Let's Do It World.

online spaces, Facebook was the main space for everyday visibility. Facebook posts served several functions: among them reporting about a CSO's own activities, promoting campaigns, or generating awareness about the topic. With few exceptions, taking care of the Facebook page was often perceived as a time-consuming activity. Time was spent on both physical activities like posting, finding things to post, and monitoring the activities on the page. But it also took mental effort to plan when and what to post. Another factor was adapting to the temporality of Facebook: posting at the right time and answering swiftly to comments and messages. The temporality sometimes did not fit with the daily rhythm of the person working with social media and caused extra stress.

Political participation-related practices were divided into engaging the public and communicating with decisionmakers. Here, the interplay of different spaces became evident. To mobilize the public in physical space, CSOs needed to make good use of all sorts of mediated spaces to get the word out: different mainstream media channels, social media, and, if possible, making use of other organizations' information sphere. Also, social media offered a cheap and easy way of organizing campaigns, an opportunity sometimes used by CSOs. However as described above, despite the budget-friendliness, the work with social media craved different kind of resources, mainly time and effort and constant presence. Sometimes CSOs used specialized platforms like those used for petitions and crowdfunding to mobilize people but not to a high degree. In case of CSOs, the role of media when taking part in decision-making was not so evident.

For internal communication, CSOs used various spaces and communication tools. Many CSOs had offices but a lot of work was still done remotely. Some of the communication challenges that CSOs encountered were connected to email communication and the overwhelming feeling that accompanies using many different communication channels at the same time. CSO representatives had strategies in place for separating the private sphere and the work sphere on social media platforms that incorporated both spheres. Facebook groups offered a way to add community feeling and a social aspect to work communication.

6. Communicative spaces and developing civic cultures

This chapter narrows the focus to one civil society actor: Estonian Forest Aid (EFA). Starting out as a social movement, EFA has been fighting for Estonian forests on several fronts: through mainstream media, on social media platforms, through activities in physical space and developed as an organization through intensive communication in spaces for internal communication. This chapter focuses on different communication spaces in the context of time, and how some functions of spaces change over time and with them communication practices.

The chapter is structured accordingly: it starts with a description of EFA—its emergence, structure, membership, and activities. The chapter then proceeds by exploring various communicative spaces that are part of EFA's everyday activities. Those places include a number of mediated spaces, physical spaces, and discursive spaces.

6.1. Estonian Forest Aid

Kathleen M. Blee (2014) describes the issues with studying activist groups over time by comparing activist groups with a neighborhood ball game. Instead of tracing a process of coherent entity, activist groups constantly change in their membership—some leave, others join or re-join. The strategies and the intensity of the activist groups are also subject to change. I can attest to those challenges from my own fieldwork. From the time EFA started until now, when I am finishing my writing, EFA has changed a lot in the core group and as an organization since people who leave and those who join bring along their personal talents and interests that they use in the organization. I would like to emphasize that in my study I am concentrating on the first two years of EFA's existence—from the end of 2016 to the end of 2018 and not on the organization it is now in 2022.

The beginning

"Civic association Estonian Forest Aid"[88] aka EFA is an independent civic movement that grew out of wide dissatisfaction with Estonian forestry

[88] In Estonian, the movement is called "Eesti Metsa Abiks" and is more commonly known by its abbreviation EMA, which also means 'mother'.

politics. This is how EFA introduced itself on their webpage[89]. The webpage also informed readers about their goal, which was to counteract intensive deforestation and strengthen the position of environmental interest groups to match the position of the timber industry. Such interest groups were, for example, cultural heritage-related, beekeepers, small-scale forest owners, hunters, and nature tourism entrepreneurs. Another focus of EFA was to inform the public about problems in the forest and in environmental politics. In other words, EFA was striving toward influencing forest politics to adopt more sustainable practices and they did that through a range of activities. Some of these activities included keeping up public discussions about the forest issue in the media, pressuring decision-makers to follow the laws and to change laws to better protect forests, investigating and reporting misconducts during logging, helping local communities to negotiate with local governments, and gaining media visibility. These were only few of the examples of EFA's activities, and a more detailed list can be found in Appendix 5.

Estonian Forest Aid was born on December 16, 2016 when a protest event took place in Tallinn. The gathering started in front of the Ministry of Environment and later moved to the parliament building and handed over two documents: a public letter to Riigikogu (the Parliament) signed by 101 persons from the culture sphere, and a petition with 7,000 signatures[90]. Both documents demanded more sustainable forest management as well as higher transparency and increased citizen participation in decision-making related to state forest management. Several hundred people from both the countryside and from the city took part in the protest. The protest event coincided with a meeting between environmental CSOs and the Environmental Ministry about lowering the cutting age of the spur tree and creating new forest protection areas to compensate. As the officials had backed out of an earlier agreement, the CSOs had had enough and organized a social media campaign prior to the meeting to inform the public about the law change and the impact of it. That social media campaign organized by established CSOs also contributed to the motivation to organize the protest event.

Formal environmental CSOs, including the Estonian Fund for Nature and Estonian Green Movement, were inside the Environmental Ministry participating in the meeting and at the same time, there people protesting outside.

[89] https://www.eestimetsaabiks.ee/mtu/ (accessed 09/03/22). EFA has changed their webpage since I first wrote this text, but they have kept the same definition.
[90] https://www.eestimetsaabiks.ee/mtu/ (accessed 09/03/22) and interview LMV, Feb 2017.

At some point, the-then Environmental minister, Marko Pomerants, came outside to meet the protesters and ended up in a verbal standoff with Linda-Mari Väli, who was one of the main initiators of the EFA movement. She was at that point a freelance journalist who had investigated the mismanaging of Estonian state forests on her own for a while, but the issue had not received any significant coverage in the media. Another two initiators were Martin Luiga, and Züleyxa Izmailova. After a while, the latter became more active in politics as the head of the Green Party and distanced herself from EFA.

The law lowering the cutting age of fir trees was eventually passed, but one important outcome of the protest was that discussions about forest management were placed high on the public agenda where they stayed for the following four years and counting.

After the protest event, the movement started developing as a Facebook group/discussion forum. At first, it was only comprised of the three people that created the Facebook group the day after the protest. One of them, Linda-Mari, had not had a personal Facebook account until that point created one for that purpose.[91] In the interview from the end of February 2017, Linda-Mari describes how people, new members of the EFA Facebook group, started getting in contact and how from then on, things started moving quite quickly and organically:

> Facebook's definitely interesting as an information channel. It's irreplaceable for us. We started our Facebook group just before the new year. Last year, at the end of December. Quite quickly we came to the conclusion, or someone came up with the idea, that we should create our own homepage. Not me – someone else. And then someone else again said we should do that and so I said great, let's do it. There was a person who helped me write the texts and they designed it, arranged the webhosting. We did it together. Now there's a new person writing about felling in nature reserves. We agreed that they'd start a new website: a map application for cutting sites. All of this has happened through Facebook. I've never met these people in real life. We agreed to meet for the first time face to face on Friday. Which is actually necessary. But without the Internet, I don't know. I also met Zuzu via the Forestry Roundtable list, which was also a mailing list. All of that happened online. I don't know how.

[91] Interview, LMV, Feb'17.

About half a year after forming EFA, activists held regular meetings in Tallinn and Tartu. A year later, two more local groups had emerged, in Pärnu and in Haapsalu.

The date of the founding of the organization, the 16th of December, was important for EFA members and they have been celebrating it in the following years with different activities, like a march "Meeleavardus" (2017), a conference in the Parliament house (2018), a seminar (2019), and instructions for how to protect forests (2020). Weekend camps held at the end of August were another yearly event for EFA movement besides the anniversaries. I took part in two of those weekend camps, in August 2017 and 2018. These events were organized for planning future events and for spending time together.

In the first two years, EFA developed rapidly from a loose group of people on Facebook to a tight-knit organization with the capability to take part in policy discussions, gain nation-wide media visibility, and organize different kind of campaigns and events. Although December 16, 2016 was considered the start date for EFA as a collective, the members' personal journeys to activism started earlier. From the conversations with my interviewees and also from the observations during the weekend camps it emerged that for some of the people active in EFA, the realization of the unsustainability of Estonian forest management came individually some time earlier through some significant happening: through their own struggle to protect a piece of nature from destruction, witnessing the misuse of forest and natural resources, or through a spiritual experience. During my workshop on the second weekend camp in 2018 we talked about what makes people take action and then we agreed that it starts with an emotion and a realization of injustice which one can no longer ignore. Then we discussed the next important step, which was to operationalize that emotion in a way that is acceptable to decision-makers. In that sense, EFA did not appear from thin air but connected people who had had this realization of injustice and provided a platform to channel the emotions that individuals had had about Estonian forests from earlier on.

The structure

The structure of the movement, by the summer 2018, as one of the coordinators put it, was still somewhat anarchistic. My interviewee argued that things got done by those who had the time and were willing to do some-

thing.[92] However, on their previous webpage, there was a list of people who were responsible for certain areas; for example, communication, international cooperation, program coordinator, forest management coordinator, and so on. These people were called EFA's voluntary coordinators. According to another of those coordinators, there was no formal leadership, and authority came from commitment and the level of activeness.[93]

EFA was an NGO for legal reasons and to be able to officially communicate with public and political institution, but they called themselves a civic movement ("kodanikuliikumine"). EFA did express the characteristics of a social movement (Della Porta & Diani 1999) as they were comprised of an informal network, shared beliefs and solidarity and were oriented to social change which was demanded through collective action. An interest group, a pressure group, and a Facebook group were other things EFA had been called, mostly by those who were critical about their activities. In this dissertation, I am calling them both a movement, following their own self-definition, and an organization.

Membership

As EFA was something between a movement and an organization, it was a challenge to determine the number of members in the movement or even who was considered a member. Formally, an NGO is required to have registered members. While I was doing my fieldwork, EFA had only two officially registered members of the organizational body but a larger number of informal members. The older version of their webpage had a function where one could sign up as a member. The membership registration ceased after EFA lost access to that webpage due to an internal disagreement. Through that old webpage, about 500 people signed up. Out of those about 300 signed up to the mailing list. According to Linda-Mari, membership was important for EFA to show that there were people behind the movement, and with that to get the state to include them in shaping the forest politics by accepting EFA as a movement with an accountable voice.[94] The public Facebook group had over 7,500 members in 2018, but that number included not only supporters, but also persons from the 'opposing' side like forest harvester operators, politicians, and industry people, as well as journalists.

[92] Interview, ML. Aug '18.
[93] Interview, MS. Nov'18.
[94] Interview, LMV. Feb'17.

It has been tricky to determine the exact number of members of EFA or even to determine who counts as a member.[95] In the following, I present some of the ways in which to consider the membership of EFA. In general, nobody was given the title of member as membership was not defined by the movement but the person themselves. As explained by some of the coordinators, there were several layers of membership or support: 10–20 people who were actively doing things, then there were people who contributed occasionally, those who contributed to the discussion,[96] and those who actively followed EFA's information channels and supported them silently.[97] I was informed that EFA even had secret members who supported their work but for various reasons could not show their support publicly.[98] Another form of affinity I witnessed was at the weekend camp in August 2018, where some of the people there who actively took part in discussions identified themselves not as members but instead as friends of EFA.

The core group consisted of 10–12 people who were involved in EFA on a daily basis. That circle was not a constant, but people came and left and returned. The more active circle of around 60–70 people gathered in the closed Facebook group and the wider circle of supporters on the public Facebook group.

Moreover, the movement cooperated with other organizations, like local communities and various interest groups, but these were not integrated to EFA, unless individuals from these groups personally joined. Also, although the movement itself was apolitical, some members of EFA belonged to different political parties. Moreover, people in the EFA movement had very different backgrounds. There were quite a few specialists from various fields with varying interests. This contributed to widening of the focus on the forest issue, by including other connected areas like water, swamps, hunting, and so on.

The finances

EFA was mainly financed through donations. One could do a one-time donation or become a monthly giver via their webpage. For a while, EFA had a social media campaign to gather 1,000 monthly donors to secure a more reliable income. There have also been few fundraising campaigns for specific

[95] According to della Porta and Diani (1999), social movements have participants rather than members.
[96] Interview,ML. Aug'18.
[97] Interview,IV. Oct'18.
[98] Conversation,IV. Aug' 18.

things, for example covering costs for court cases. The money also went towards running costs like transportation, organizing events, and the like. Two of the activists who worked full time with EFA got a small wage in the limit of the tax-free minimum (which during writing was 500 euros per month). The rest of the coordinators worked on a voluntary basis and in some cases got some running costs (for example petrol) reimbursed. During my interviews, there were talks about getting money from foreign funds, but that was seen as slightly problematic, as it took long time to apply, required knowledge as to how to do it and might have put some restraints on activities on which the money could be spent.[99] However, in November 2018 they did receive a small grant of 6,800 euros from Lush Cosmetics, with part of which they planned to buy a drone. I was told that for a non-profit organization in Estonia, they got quite a few donations and got by. However, such a mode of financing was not sustainable and was vulnerable to unexpected costs.

The strategy

EFA's chosen strategy for operating was to be politically neutral and to act in a balanced, not radical way (this came out both from the interviews and from observing their discussions online and offline). The movement aligned itself with the framework of the Estonian constitution and the laws of sustainable forest management. In their activities they were more bureaucratic than radical.[100] Going out on the streets to protest was seen as the only solution when there were no opportunities left for dialogue. When I asked one of the coordinators about it, I received an answer that, if necessary, they could go and physically stop machines from cutting down the trees, but they would have to pick the right moment (if the activity is illegal). Also, they were not sure if there was enough capacity in the organization for things that required fast reaction offline.[101]

EFA's main demand was transparency in decision-making about forest issues and inclusion of citizens in the process (as is required by the Aarhus convention, which grants public rights to access information, participation, and justice regarding environmental decision-making). Complaints often arose in the Facebook group that such occasions for public participation were a mere formality, where affected people were informed about decisions that had been made beforehand instead of offering a forum for discussion and

[99] Interview, ML. Aug'18.
[100] Interview, ML. Aug'18.
[101] Interview, ML. Aug'18.

contributions to the decision. Therefore, there were situations where local people were left powerless with respect to decisions that affected their everyday lives and many interest groups were not represented in discussions about the future of state forest management in general. In that sense, EFA worked like an advocacy organization in the form of a grassroots movement. Being financially and politically autonomous gave them an advantage, as they could raise a voice in the public sphere and be openly critical of the governing of the state in general and forests in particular.

In practice, EFA's focus was both on the single cases of specific forests and on sustainable forest politics more widely. The single cases often included giving advice and encouraging local people and community members to act, visiting affected places and communities, meeting people, and helping people negotiate with local governments and gain media coverage. A number of such cases resulted in saved forests (in Harku and Lohusalu). During our conversation, Linda-Mari shared her vision of EFA becoming a support system for local communities to empower people to organize locally, but at the same time, not do all the work for them.[102] Around the end of 2018, I was told they received around 5 to 10 requests in one month from individuals and communities who asked for help with specific cases, to prevent logging or to investigate misconduct.

Although EFA's main focus was protecting Estonian forests, their activities were not place-bound (Blee 2014). Besides their nation-wide reach, EFA also belonged to different international networks and worked towards getting outside attention for forest problems in Estonia. In addition to networking, EFA hosted international journalists who wrote articles and made documentaries. They also took part in authoring public letters to the European Council and participated in a continent-level court case against the EU level policy that contributes to deforestation by considering burning wood pellets to be a climate-neutral activity.[103]

6.2. Mediated spaces for public deliberation

EFA contributed to the public discussion about the forest issues both in the mainstream media space and in the online space, most specifically in social media. Throughout my fieldwork following EFA, their access to the mass media space and relationships with journalists and media outlets changed. In the very beginning, the media was reluctant to start public discussion about

[102] Interview, LMV. Dec 18.
[103] Estonia is a large-scale exporter of wood pellets to other European countries.

forest issues, followed by a period of intense reporting. Sometime later, EFA once again experienced again obstacles in gaining media attention. EFA created and maintained a space for public discussion online for individuals who were interested in forest issues. A Facebook group with around 7,000 members and counting provided a space to air frustrations and share visuals of forests being cut down, and ask for advice and help. It was also a space to spread news and information, as well engaging in civic talk and commenting on media texts and decision-makers' activities. This section will describe EFA's practices in these two spaces in more depth.

6.2.1. Starting and keeping the discussion alive in the mass media space

Prior to the first protest in December 2016, two of the main organizers were worried that the media was quiet about the events like the meeting of environmental organizations and politicians, the open letter of 101 renowned figures from the area of culture and the petition with 7000 signatures. The protest event was the turning point which gave way to a wide public discussion in mass media. In the following year, other related issues like plans to build a large cellulose factory and the creation of the Forest Policy strategy document for the next ten years contributed to the wide media coverage. Besides EFA, the cellulose factory case was met with wide opposition from scientists as well as citizens and the plans for building the factory were eventually stopped after several petitions and protest events. When I talked to Lina-Mari Väli for the first time in February 2017, she said she had a good relationship with journalists. On one side, she was a journalist herself and on the other side she pointed out that there was a readiness to cooperate and publish after the issue was raised.[104]

More than a year later, in the second part of 2018, EFA coordinators were saying that they have met some resistance from mass media, as some of their articles had been denied and it was harder to get screen time on television and radio. I heard different explanations of the access issue: some explanations were connected to people in high places who favor the industry; advertising money; or media outlets just refusing to publish their text. I also heard some stories about how they managed to get airtime on public broadcasting radio and TV. It happened thanks to supportive contacts working there and good timing in scheduling programs so it would be too late to remove EFA from the program guest list. There was also a difference in access to spaces: for example, within public broadcasting, they had to get

[104] Interview, LMV. Feb'17.

help to get on radio or television, but it was easier to publish opinion pieces in the online portal.

EFA had a good understanding as to how the mainstream media system works and used different strategies to gain access to the public sphere. EFA coordinators were already very media savvy. Some of them had an earlier experience working with media and others were interested in media and were good at analyzing media discussions. In practice, they worked with mainstream media by writing articles, sending press releases, writing opinion pieces, giving interviews, being called on television and radio programs, and answering questions from journalists. To call attention to Estonian forest issues outside the country, they also hosted foreign journalists who would write articles or film documentaries. Occasionally there was a need to write a response to articles that showed them in an unfavorable light.

I observed a number of ways in which EFA members developed their "semantic map of the mass media environment" (Mattoni 2012). This was done through the experience of relational media practices and through civic talk. My observations and conversations with EFA members revealed elaborate "lay theories of media" (McCurdy 2011): they included observations as to which outlets were the most reliable, which journalists were trustworthy, and whether the media was trustworthy in general. I had a chat with a few of the people at the camp and we focused for quite a while on media and journalism. I was told different stories, both from their own experiences and those of others, and speculations about why certain stories get published and others do not. I heard references to specific people and reflections on whether journalism in Estonia is trustworthy and what the problem areas are. I heard such conversations throughout both weekend camps I attended and also saw them on the Facebook groups. Which brings me to the next topic; media monitoring and collective analysis of media texts. One of the coordinators had set up an automated media monitoring system with over 30 keywords, and if anything was published in the news or in other news sources, they were notified about it. While following both the public and the private Facebook groups, it was common to post different articles which then were collectively analyzed in the comments section. Sometimes somebody would post a text first in the internal forum and then ask that it also be posted in the public group. I also encountered some personal practices for gaining media literacy. One of the coordinators mentioned that he was going through a lot of scientific papers and in doing so, he developed critical thinking skills and could tell who tells the truth and who happens to be lying. Through these practices EFA coordinators developed an understanding of certain media

outlets, journalists, politicians or other public officials, scientists, organizations, and people connected to forest problematics.

Linda-Mari Väli, a freelance journalist, did the majority of the writing but there were other EFA coordinators who also got their articles published in different media outlets; both in mainstream media and online. Over time and with experience, EFA's ability to write quality journalism and the practices of writing itself evolved. Linda-Mari reflected over their journalistic development:

> So the breakthrough is how we're getting better at spreading information, and the quality of the information itself. It's steadily improving. How much we've learnt, if you compare our activities from two years ago to now, they're like night and day; that's a breakthrough. Our statements are properly cited and well thought through. And really, the fact that one text... Well, I'm the writing machine, right, but the fact that we have five different specialists looking at everything I've written and adding to it, that's like some kind of *Avatar* effect. We look over the bigger texts with the whole team. Which works well. (Interview, LMV Dec'18)

During my online fieldwork I had the opportunity to witness the development Linda-Mari was talking about. Some of the media texts were edited collectively within the internal forum where there were extensive discussions as to how to write up their arguments in the best possible way. While improving their journalistic practices, EFA also improved their credibility as an information source and developed as a team.

6.2.2. Public Facebook group as a civic space

For EFA, the main channels of self-visibility were Facebook and the organization's webpage. Other social media channels had not yet been utilized during my fieldwork as they had no suitable person who would take it upon themselves to constantly update the channels. EFA also had a YouTube channel with a collection of videos from different events, some instructional videos, and calls to join their events.

EFA's webpage contained information about what EFA stands for, provided contact information for the main coordinators, offered information about their main projects and instructions as to how to get involved in protecting the forests. In addition, there was a section with all their news and another one with a call for donations. Updating the page was continuous work for Linda-Mari and for her, the news section doubled as an archive. That archive functioned as both a backup in case something happened to her

laptop, and as an information source for journalists. She described her archiving practice as something mostly useful for herself, but also found it important to be available and transparent for other media professionals:

> … I've documented everything by topic and year. So they can be found again. That pretty much all exists. But I think the EFA news is all on the website, too. I always try to put everything up. All the documents, so there's a place you can always find everything. Yes, and then under the news I try to build those news trees, add related news and documents to it as extras. (Interview, LMV. Dec' 18)

EFA employed different media platforms to spread their media texts. For example, press releases were sent to media outlets and at the same time formulated as news stories on their own website and then shared on the Facebook page in the public group as well as with the mailing list.

As with the other CSOs, EFA's main social media platform for everyday visibility was Facebook. They maintained both a Facebook page and a public Facebook group. The page had around 5700 likes in 2021 and served as "mass self-communication" channel (Castells 2007) where EFA posted items about themselves or chosen by themselves. The group had around 10,100 members at the beginning of 2021[105] and the communication was "three-way" (Mattoni 2012) as every member of the group could post a thread unless denied by the moderator. This is where EFA differed from other CSOs. None of the CSOs included in this study had a public Facebook group, as public Facebook visibility was limited to the pages function. However, groups were mentioned in the context of closed circles.[106]

After the protest event in December 2016, the movement started developing on Facebook. During my fieldwork, I was told on several occasions that nobody knew each other from earlier (except for those three who organized the protest and they had met shortly before) and they got to know each other through the Facebook group. Linda-Mari opened a Facebook account only to make the group and in the early days, she put a lot of effort into com-

[105] As a comparison, in the beginning of my fieldwork in February 2017, the group had about 3,000 members and by the end of my fieldwork in December 2018, it had over 7,000 members.

[106] A slight exception was Feministeerium, as the underlying CSO "Oma Tuba" started a group "Virginia Woolf sind ei karda!" which has developed into the main discussion space about feminism and gender issues. Feministeerium posts their articles there for discussion, but according to my interviewee, no longer takes part in active moderating of the group.

municating in the group—systematizing information, talking to the people who post there, making posts, acknowledging the work done.[107] With her Facebook work Linda-Mari was doing what Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) calls "liquid organizing'": practicing soft and emotional leadership where the leader acts in the background but plays the role of giving the action coherence and a sense of direction. Linda-Mari contacted group members with potential for activism personally and made sure different opinions had room in the same space and nudged others to act on their enthusiasm. During our first interview she said it is a lot of work and complained about how annoying Facebook was, while at the same time acknowledging the usefulness of the platform in keeping the movement alive (she still complained about it two years later during our second interview). Later, she had more people helping with the group and she got to move on to different tasks. Also, the function of the group changed once there were enough people active in the movement and the number of Facebook group members rose.

One and a half years later at the weekend camp, I took up the topic of how the role of the public Facebook group has changed over time. Some of my conversation partners mentioned that they did not even go there anymore. According to them, arguments in the public Facebook group were repetitive and the more interesting conversations happened in the internal forum. One of the coordinators listed the functions of the public group which was seen as both useful and as an information channel, and a forum for developing civic skills:

> Well, it is an information channel where some news, a good article or an analysis, or a piece by the opponents can be taken apart. Or there are our own association's announcements … And people can come there and let everybody know about suspicious loggings that could or could not become into some working case. (Interview, ML. Aug'18)

Some of EFA's core members had decreased their presence in the group and occasionally went there to comment and show support. However, keeping the public group alive was deemed important by them. Some of the reasons given were that the group was significant for supporters of EFA who could follow the activities of EFA and keep themselves informed about the happenings in forest politics[108] and it played a role in educating the journalists

[107] Interview, LMV, Feb'17.
[108] Interview LMV, Dec'18.

as they got a lot of their information from there.[109] Also, other groups used the EFA Facebook group as a platform to spread information about their activities, even though EFA is not involved in them.[110] One example was the controversial willow tree sit-in protest where, in May 2017, a group of people camped around one willow tree to prevent it from being cut down in a Tallinn suburb for a whole month. The activists who camped at the tree used the EFA Facebook group as an additional platform to spread information and organize, even though EFA was not involved in the cause. Also, according to one of my interviewees, their Facebook group also attracted the attention of those who belonged to the 'opposition', like industry people:

> ML: Journalists go there, the industry people read it all the time themselves. Big part of our influence comes from the aspect that many people who are specifically connected to the forest industry, cannot avoid reading us and so it seems to them that everybody reads this stuff and they cannot stand that. (Interview, ML. Aug'18)

For one of the moderators, the Facebook group was a project for improving the communication culture and he liked the idea of an open space where problems can be discussed constructively in a civilized manner. However, he was disappointed that the reality was different. He aired his frustration when talking about the underwhelming discussion about the risks of building a cellulose factory:

> But when the risk is pointed out, then there must be a debate around it. You cannot brush it under the carpet… On the opposite, everything must be shone light on. Even the smallest risks. If there is a risk, why don't we talk about it? Why don't they talk about it? They don't want to talk about it because it could lead to some uncomfortable result and then they cannot comment it any more. They find out something they do not want to know. In that sense I like this kind of public space for discussion, so for me it is kind of like a project. For me its … completely voluntary thing. I do not get paid for it. I don't even imagine starting to get paid for it. But I think that it will improve attitudes and overall communication culture. In the communication culture these things are missing … arguments are either avoiding or they just troll or offend or do other kind of stuff. Those two things disturb the communication culture. Yet still they somehow stimu-

[109] Interview MS, Nov'18.
[110] Interview, IV. Oct'18.

> late it in some sense. Through inspiring certain people, for example I have been inspired a lot by opponents. (Interview, JR. Dec'18)

My interviewee believed that through his practices as a moderator he contributed to improving the communication culture for democratic deliberation about issues of public and political importance.

Moderating the Facebook group

The bulk of the work with the public group fell on the coordinators who were moderating and keeping the discussions civil. One of the coordinators compared the moderators' work to taking care of a child, as it had become a habit and you must do it, even if sometimes you could not be bothered.[111] Moderating the public Facebook group involved a collective responsibility to safeguard the space and keep the discussions respectable and constructive. Most of the time, moderators were the same coordinators who did everything else in the organization and moderating was just another task.

When the group was created, there was less moderating and more attempts to include all sides of the forest issue. Linda-Mari said about people who were posting and commenting opposing views and trying to create a multi-sided discussion:

> Yes, I've kept them there on purpose, and even encouraged them to speak up. That's because the purpose here is to create a dialogue and actually improve things. Just fighting with the forest industry won't help our cause. We endeavor to communicate. I don't know how successful it is, but we do try. Not those sorts of people though. I've called some people out who've been very aggressive. I've told them to calm down. But of course we let them in. (Interview, LMV. Feb'17)

A year later, after the number of people on the group had multiplied and the forest issue had been under constant media scrutiny, moderating of the discussions became a constant job for seven to eight people. Since moderating was a job that took a lot of effort, one of the coordinators shared a thought they had had among themselves of how not moderating would affect the Facebook group:

> IV: At some point one of our thoughts was to close down EFA.… Imagine what EFA does, EFA has 8 moderators, twelve people altogether who

[111] Interview, JR. Dec'2018.

> administer all of this, who let the news to be posted and delete comments. Do you really think we sit and do nothing? People are deleting all the time, I am scanning after keywords like 'to kill', 'to beat up', 'to burn' and such and delete those comments. I have a list of people in my computer who are trouble and write bad comments because a bad comment does not only mean that the person is a logging activist, he/she might be. So we delete all the time.
>
> Me: That public group?
>
> IV: Yes. Or we leave the group open but do not moderate. Take away the thing that if you post it won't be published straight away but is read through and your background is checked when you post for the first time to find some connections and things.
>
> Me: But is there many things that need to be taken away?
>
> IV: Oh yes, it is all the time, constant work.
>
> Me: Are they trolls or…?
>
> IV: There is everything. There are trolls, there are forest protection radicals, aggressive people, desperate people, those who think they are kidding. There are systematic, who are disturbed, I call the disturbed who deliberately do some shit. (IV, conversation)

In that sense, maintaining a public forum like EFA's Facebook group is an investment by activists as it takes a lot of time and effort to do it. When I asked another moderator about how long it takes to moderate these posts, he then answered that it takes all of his time and added that he needed to be in a constant state of readiness to react.[112] Besides the constant monitoring and guarding of the space, this work happened invisibly in the background. Moderators become visible only when they needed to call somebody to order and remind them of the rules or when somebody complained about their post or comment being deleted. Despite heavy moderating, respondents in a different interview thought that EFA's Facebook group was quite civilized compared to some other forest-related groups.[113]

To summarize, the role of EFA's public Facebook group changed over time, from bringing together the core group to facilitating a public discussion about forest problematics. As described in this section, maintaining the public Facebook group took a lot of time and effort, but EFA coordinators

[112] Interview JR. Dec'18.
[113] Interview, ML. Aug'18.

thought it was worth it. The Facebook group stood up as a space of visibility constructed by the organization, where they could continuously negotiate and publicly represent their identity and goals.

6.3. Places and spaces of political participation

The last section described how EFA used mediated spaces to gain visibility—to attract supporters, to raise awareness among the wider public about the deforestation problem, and to gain credibility as an organization. Besides those mediated spaces, EFA has also made efficient use of physical spaces and the symbolic space I called in the previous chapter the 'hallways of power'. According to Dahlgren (2009), being able to contact decision-makers and having both access and the perception of access to decision-making fall under the dimension of spaces in the civic circuit and therefore is one precondition for civic engagement. In Estonia, the state has created mediated infrastructures for citizens to participate, but as previous studies showed, citizens are not really making use of these opportunities (Runnel, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Reinsalu 2009; Kitsing 2011a, 2011b). This section first considers how EFA is using physical spaces for mobilizing but also for gaining trust, developing knowledge, and to lift concrete local issues from their local context and connect them to wider issues in forest politics. Second, the section demonstrates different ways in which EFA has gained access and made use of the spaces of decision-making.

6.3.1. Public spaces and local places

In the literature of social movements and contentious politics, public places are arenas for mobilization and protest events. Castells (2015) calls those spaces "spaces of places" which are usually characterized as urban spaces of symbolic value, like main squares or parks or buildings. According to Parkinson (2012), urban planning and city architecture can influence how people can engage in public mobilizations. For example, if there are main squares or wide boulevards for marching, if there is enough space left close to the government quarters, etc. EFA was born out of a protest event, and they organized a few more public protests during the two years I followed them. However, their activities were not limited only to public spaces in cities. What made EFA stand out from other movements and CSOs is that they did not only stay in the city but also engaged on a local level with people in their communities, met local governments and visited specific forests to investigate and document possible misconduct.

Mobilization in public space

For CSOs included in the study, using public places for protests was not common but still happened occasionally. Usually, such mobilizations happened near decision-makers, either outside the Riigikogu, outside the Parliament house, or at the (public) institution that needed to hear and see the messages. In Tallinn, Vabaduse väljak (Freedom square) and in Tartu Raekoja plats (Town Hall Square) were also places where such gatherings occurred. During the protest event against building the cellulose factory in May 2018, around 2,000 people formed a human chain along the banks of Emajõgi, the river in Tartu that was supposed to house the future factory. Shortly after, a similar chain was organized in Tabivere, a small community outside Tartu, which was another possible location for the factory. Such a way of protesting, by holding hands to create a chain, is grounded in the Baltic Way demonstration, when in 1989, two million people formed a human chain through the Baltic countries with the aim of protesting against the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact, and eventually to gain independence from the Soviet Union.[114] EFA members took part in both protests in Tartu and Tabivere and supported the Tartu event financially, even though they were not the organizers of the protests. However, EFA organized a protest event against the same cellulose factory a year earlier in the Town Hall Square in Tartu.

EFA organized a few public events in public spaces during their first two years of activity. Not all of them were protest events. Besides the first protest in December 2016, there was the above-mentioned protest in Tartu, where 150 people gathered to show their opinions about building the cellulose factory near Tartu. Another larger event was "Meeleavardus" ('opening of the mind', a wordplay with 'meeleavaldus' which means 'a protest'), a march through the old town of Tallinn from the Environmental Ministry building to Parliament, accompanied by musical acts and speeches. It was not a protest but a celebration of EFA's one-year anniversary in December 2017. EFA has also organized smaller impromptu activities, like a few members spreading information in front of the Parliament house to Parliament members about the risks of burning wood for electricity. In October 2018, they lit candles in front of the State Forest Management Centre headquarters to mourn the biodiversity lost during the clear-cut loggings. Those mobilizations happened close to decision-makers and were visible to the public and to the media. On one occasion, they travelled to meet the decision-makers close to the disputed

[114] https://www.thebalticway.eu/en/history/ (Accessed 07/03/22).

location. Then, a small number (less than 10) of people gathered with posters at Nursipalu in Southern Estonia where the Defense Ministry was planning to build a military exercise field right next to an area which is a habitat for several protected species. EFA has not engaged in physical obstruction of forest machines to stop logging.[115] Instead, they have used other methods, like meeting local governments and taking part in collaborative governance meetings, writing letters, inspecting for violations, proposing legislative changes, and taking some cases to court.

When looking at the process of forming EFA, there is a movement between spaces: the key people of the protest met online through a mailing list and the protest happened in the public place and gave a push for the creation of EFA. The nascent organization moved to Facebook which was soon after combined with face-to-face meetings. Castells (2015) talks about movement space as a combination of "spaces of places" and "spaces of flows"—occupying public places and organizing online.

EFA has used the symbolic meaning of places even in occasions other than protests. For their 'birthday events' in December they organized the aforementioned good-will march in 2017 and a conference inside the Parliament house in 2018. The latter was an event that looked back on the work of the last two years and to acknowledge other initiatives who are active in protecting Estonian nature and forests. Although the number of participants was limited for the conference, the place, the inside of the parliament house was strategically chosen for symbolic reasons. Half a year earlier in the summer camp where the preparations started, the choice of place was discussed, and the activists thought that it would be significant as two years earlier the movement started outside Parliament house and two years later, they would celebrate their anniversary inside the house, a lot closer to the decision-makers. For those who could not attend or did not fit in the room, the entire event was broadcasted through YouTube.

Local place

[115] State-owned forest, in theory, also belongs to the citizens and could be considered a public place in a non-political sense since everybody can access it (as is not the same case with privately owned forests) but the absence of the public and of politicians make it a less suitable (but not impossible, due to media) place for convenient collective communicative action unless there is a need to physically obstruct logging and that forest becomes the space of appearance (Arendt 1998).

I understood public spaces as both physical and symbolic in the sense of 'location' (Agnew 1987), close to the governing power and where political processes that affect the local places are coordinated. The local place in this study is also both a physical and symbolic space but in a slightly different way: as a 'locale', the site of daily life to which the people living there give meaning by 'sense of place' (ibid.). Some examples of the activities EFA initiated in local places were information events in local communities, investigations in specific forests, meeting people who contacted them for help, participating in meetings in local municipalities, and meeting with local decision-makers.

When asked about the purpose of the local information events, one of the informants explained that for people it is important to see the person behind the media image:

> It's to show that we're there, that we really exist. That it's real... It's very important for people to know that those they see online almost like cartoon characters or cartoon heroes are actually real people. You've heard that some guy called Indrek stopped this felling somewhere in Soomaa and then you see this guy in person and he's actually talking about it. It's important to see the character in person. (Interview, IV. Oct'18)

In the local place, meeting those "characters" happens on a more intimate level than for example at a protest event in a public space. Coming and meeting people in their home communities also makes activists more approachable for interaction about in specific issues in that local place.

Meeting people face to face was especially important in the beginning, when EFA was still young. On one hand, it created relationships and inspired trust, and on the other hand it resulted in knowledge about the realities of life outside the bigger settlements. Two months after the formation of the organization, one of the initiators, Linda-Mari, explained:

> In the end of the day I think that the most important is to always go to the spot and look the person in the eye, talk to him/her. Even more, the forest issue, it is still forest, you cannot do that only in the Internet environment, you must go around and see what is happening. The main issue with the forest problem is exactly that every third Estonian lives in Tallinn. Everybody has their summer houses and they don't see much further. And people actually do not know what happens in the forest.
>
> [---]
>
> Me: But how often do you participate these kinds of offline events?

> That I communicate with people face to face? Well, this is my preferred form, this weekend [in February 2017] is also three separate places I go to.… I ride around a lot and communicate with people. In my opinion this is crucial for advancing a social movement, to have a real contact, otherwise you do not get that connection. (Interview, LMV. Feb' 18)

Fast forward six months and I sit at the bonfire with a bunch of people who have come to the first EFA weekend camp. I talk to a lady who has spent a few years fighting for the forest near her home to prevent it from being turned into a gravel mine. She confessed that it created an enormous amount of trust when two of the EFA coordinators personally showed up to meet her and see the forest after she shared her story with them on the internet.

Almost two years after the first interview, we were talking again with Linda-Mari, and we touched upon the previous years. One thing she mentioned was that many people turned to them for help with specific problems. She evaluated that they received around 5–10 cases a month where people have been deceived by forest companies or by local government plans to take down an important batch of forest close to their home. My interviewee saw EFA's role as a communication center: they help local communities to help themselves by giving them practical advice on how to organize within their community, help them to establish contact with local governments, and, if needed, call wider media attention to the case. They also gave them moral support and encouragement to keep politicians accountable.

For EFA, going to local places to meet locals and hear their stories was important for understanding what was really happening on the ground, which in turn contributed to better understanding of the forest issue and led to more reliable communication in the public sphere. Thus, taking time to visit local places to meet people in group or personally and investigating specific cases contributed to inspiring trust in two ways. First, through trust of the people who were potential supporters. Second, through gaining firsthand knowledge about local issues the trustworthiness and legitimacy of the organization increased, which was a capital necessary in other situations, like negotiations with decision-makers or gaining the support of the wider public.

In the above description, media was a part of communication practices as the first contact was usually made online, but media was not central in the interactions with people in the local place. However, EFA also held investigative trips to forests, where they filmed the misconduct that had occurred during logging and share those videos through their social media channels.

Here, media is used to visualize the problem and then disseminate the information to the wider public. Sharing visuals from clear-cut forests was a common practice, even among other members of the public Facebook group. Such posts were usually done to report suspicious logging or to share a frustration about the loss of a significant forest. Some of those posts led to further investigation by EFA, who reported to environmental inspection if a law had been broken.

One thing that EFA has managed to do is to gather individuals and local groups who have campaigned locally, often with a little success and expanded their struggles further from that specific place, by helping with media coverage, or approaching higher-level politicians. In that sense, EFA acted like a global-local nexus (Castells 2002), by connecting local struggles to wider problems with sustainability in Estonian forest politics and to the global deforestation issue. EFA's everyday work included this balance; between helping to save concrete forests and trying to influence the more abstract forest politics. One of the tasks in working with local issues was to translate the emotional language of the sense of place into language that speaks to people working on laws, regulations, and decision-making. Also, by visiting people in their home territories, EFA provided a space to meet and share grievances in a constructive manner, which in turn helps develop civic cultures—the empowerment to engage in and to demand to be included in the democratic processes.

6.3.2. Gaining access to the hallways of power

Most of the established CSOs who participated in this study had some sort of established relations with decision-makers, as described in the previous chapter. Their cooperation took variety of forms: giving expert advice, taking part in policymaking, and lobbying for law changes among others. In some cases, CSOs were financed by project funds that came from state institutions like ministries. For EFA, who started out as an informal group of active citizens, access to the hallways of power and pressuring politicians has been a conscious part of their everyday work. I observed a variety of ways in which EFA communicated with people in power. Some of those interactions would happen in the public space during protests or in written form; either as an open letter addressed to a specific person or as an article in the news media space. Sometimes meetings would happen on the turf of those decision-makers: in the Parliament house, in ministries, or in the offices of specific politicians or public officials. Those kinds of meetings were often pre-arranged and happened behind closed doors but could later be reported to

the wider group of members and on EFA's Facebook channels. Some of the meetings with decision-makers were not allowed to be recorded, which sometimes caused disappointment and protest among EFA coordinators. Before elections, EFA has also interviewed candidates and analyzed the forest-related promises of all parties. The analysis was then published to help citizens make their choice. In the end of 2018, EFA announced a goodwill cooperation with the Environmental Inspection[116], a state institution that dealt with monitoring the use of natural environments and natural resources. Such cooperation was seen as a major advancement by EFA members and as one of the coordinators named it, as "back-door access" to the system.

Besides meeting decision-makers in person or addressing them in the media, EFA coordinators made use of online tools to communicate with them. One of the ways was by through using the systems provided by the state, for example, Rahvaalgatus platform for petitions. EFA had a petition campaign to ban clear cut loggings in which they were hoping to collect 10,000 signatures.[117] In the end, they managed to gather over 3,000 signatures which was enough to get the proposal to be discussed in the Parliament (the minimum is 1,000 signatures). EFA also utilized the law that public officials and ministries must answer information requests of the citizens after certain amount of time. One of the coordinators described his practice of contacting public officials:

> For example, on the new TV program *Esimene Stuudio* you invite someone from a civil movement like myself and then some deputy secretary general to debate. Two completely different people. They're high up in the hierarchy and I'm, as Kiisler [then environmental minister] would say, nobody. Some avid commentator in some Facebook group. But if Kiisler in his own home looks up what I've done, how many information requests I've submitted, I think I deserve a minor medal. For how much I pester them.
>
> What kind of information requests?
>
> - Whatever comes to mind. My main weapon is here on the table. I didn't use the computer for almost a year, couldn't even turn it on. I used my phone. If an idea came to me while I was in the forest, I was able to send it right away. You get so good at it that it becomes natural. I get an idea,

[116] In 2021 the Environmental Inspection was merged with another state institution, Environmental Board. The merge got a lot of criticism from environmental CSOs and EFA among others.
[117] Inspired by a Finnish campaign that gathered 50000 signatures.

> read a comment and think it's suspicious. Feels like something's off here. I can send an e-mail to the prime minister or some other minister right away and request information, send reminders.
>
> How often do you do things like that? Every week?
>
> - Yes, something every week. There's no other way. The other day, Marku Lamp [Deputy Secretary General at Estonian Ministry of the Environment] was speaking gibberish somewhere in the media and I thought, hold on a minute, the preliminary work on the next development plan is finished, the working groups are no longer meeting up, but something else is starting up here. I sent an e-mail straight away asking to participate in upcoming projects. (Interview, IV. Oct'18)

Through his phone, my interviewee had access to the hallways of power from anywhere and he knew how to take advantage of the requirement that state institutions have regarding answering citizens' inquiries. From one other interview, the person did not get an answer from the Ministry and contacted journalists about it.[118] The answer came after a news story, so access to hallways of power had to occur through the mainstream media space. EFA even used other state-provided tools and information in their work; for example different map applications with the information about logging permissions and the protection state of forests, and statistical information about the volumes of forest taken down and rates of regrowth, among other data.

How does a group of citizens get an audience with politicians or gets to participate in deciding the policy for forest management? One of the informants, who has been an active participant in the meetings on forming the Forest Policy document during the years 2021–2030, commented how they managed to get EFA to participate in the working groups:

> You have to be aggressive in some sense, or forceful. You have to demand and demand it shortly. Not to spread ashes on yourself, like 'oh I don't know, I hope I maybe I can get [to participate]'. No, I want, and I want…. Those who are in the world of law-making, their operation is very straight forward. They align after the laws and rules and earlier practice and there is no room for emotions or soft values there. You have to demand straight, because this is how you create a stronger position. Because according to law, they have to let you participate. But you can always interpret the law

[118] Interview The Young Green.

> in a way that you won't let citizens participate. So, this participation…you have to demand it vocally. (Interview, IV. Oct'18)

At the same time, it was not enough to just demand access. Prior to participating in the work groups for creating the Forest Policy document (the first meeting was held in March 2018), EFA had had over a year to make themselves visible in the public sphere and gain trust and legitimacy through their communication. Some of the ways legitimacy was gained were through the conscious strategy of being composed, in the sense that EFA's program was not radical but is based on model sustainable forest management, environmental laws, the Estonian constitution, international policies, and scientific research. EFA's media savviness, coupled with their combined expertise in the forest and in Estonian laws made it harder for decision-makers to ignore them. At the same time, being an autonomous movement rather than a formal environmental organization gave them the edge by allowing them to be more vocal with their critique towards the process of governing.[119]

On one occasion, EFA coordinators organized an exceptional 'protest event' as one of them called it. That was when Indrek Vainu and Linda-Mari Väli met then-Minister of Public Administration Janek Mäggi in his office in late October/November 2018 to discuss state planning for the cellulose factory and see if could be cancelled. During the meeting, one of the EFAs coordinators acted "out of place" (Cresswell 1996)—he raised his voice and was perceived to be acting aggressively by the minister and his staff as he was demanding answers from the minister. Later, the minister told the story from his point of view to a journalist who formulated it into a two-page article in a well-read weekly newspaper *Eesti Ekspress* (Moora 2018). Indrek wrote his side of the story and published it on his Facebook wall and shared his post in EFAs public Facebook group. According to him, his behavior was just a show, and he knew that the meeting might end up in mainstream media. His post got several shares and comments, both supportive and less supportive that signaled he should have acted according to the rules of the space. The "show" resulted in enough attention, and soon after, state planning for the cellulose factory was cancelled.

The above story of the meeting with the minister was an example of an interplay between different spaces, both physical and mediated in the course of one situation. Something that happened behind doors reached the public through the media. Although the journalist asked for their point of view, EFA

[119] Interview MS. Nov'18.

coordinators did not have control over their representation in the final article. Facebook's space provided control over their representation, but less control over their reach, as many people who read the article probably did not see the Facebook post.

6.4. Civic spaces outside the public sphere

The times EFA was not visible in mainstream media or mobilizing for public events were filled with intensive communication in various spaces. Some of the mediated spaces were a mailing list, an internal forum on Facebook, and messenger group chats. Constant online communication was accompanied by meetings in physical space. For example, weekly meetings in the library or in cafes, special events like hikes and trash picking, and the biggest face-to-face meeting was the yearly weekend camp that usually happened on the last weekend of August. This section takes a closer look at those different spaces and their function for the organization and also for developing civic cultures.

The main channel in EFA's internal information sphere was a closed Facebook group (I call it an internal forum here) for more active members where the bulk of the discussion and organizing took place. The group had around 60–70 members, who were added by older members. Once added, the new members were usually introduced, and informed that discussions in that room should stay there. In the below quote, Linda-Mari, the initiator and EFA communication coordinator, shares her opinion about the importance of the internal forum:

> When we answered to Mikk Link's smear story, then particularly thanks to those discussions, my story got toned down about 30X. Which I think is really good. And in general, this is the place where we digest through all of those public utterances. Together. Also, somebody can point attention to something… It is necessary already for the reason, so we could be what we strive to be: a democratic citizen movement. That we are equal, everybody has a chance to contribute. This does not mean that all the contributions are automatically accepted, everybody can oppose. So, everything has to be discussed through. So that is so called internal room. (Interview, LMV. Dec'18)

Since I had the opportunity to be included in their internal forum, I got to see first-hand the discussions happening there. Some examples were discussing and co-editing their own media texts; analyzing other media texts published in Estonia about forest issues; sharing other kinds of information

and gossip; discussing different politicians, industry people, journalists, and others; and analyzing different kinds of data released by state institutions. Besides such topical discussions, there were also discussion threads about the organization, what EFA stands for, and how they should work. In one of the conversations at the weekend camp, I heard one of the activists describe the internal forum as a messy place, since there were so many different things that came up there, even conflicts and disagreements. The internal forum offered a kind of backstage space (Treré 2015) for civic talk and the creation of a collective identity. The question is also whether such Facebook groups can offer an alternative to a "movement scene" which is otherwise defined by a combination of specific physical spaces and human networks (Haunss & Leach 2007). The people taking part in discussions both in EFA's public forum and in the internal forum were dispersed all over Estonia and even outside the country and the Facebook group provided them a shared space to talk about common concerns for the sustainability of Estonian forests.[120]

Within the backstage of EFA there were also other communication spaces on Facebook that served as outlets for civic talk and organizing for political participation. For example, there were more specialized groups for local activists in Haapsalu and Pärnu. In another case, the core group of EFA, which consisted of about 10–12 people, had created a Facebook messenger group chat which they called 'vestlusaken' ('a conversation window'). I was told that that space was reserved for less-censured conversations and it was possible there to get feedback for very raw ideas. These messenger chats were even good for urgent questions and for sensitive topics that could not have been discussed on the internal forum.[121]

The email list was another mediated space to share information and discuss forest-related topics. It was less interactive than Facebook groups and had about 300 members. The mailing list was created when EFA was starting up as an organization in the beginning of 2017. On their first webpage there was an option to fill in the form and become a member and those who wished it were added to the mailing list. Linda-Mari found the mailing list important, and she took it on herself to maintain it an add people when appropriate. The mailing list was mainly useful as a space for people who did not have Facebook but wished to be informed about EFA's activities.[122] In average the mailing list had at least 20 emails a month, less in the summer and more at

[120] Interview IV. Oct'18.
[121] Interview, ML, MM, VV, JK. Aug'18.
[122] Interview IV. Oct'18.

other times of the year. They consisted mostly of press releases, EFA news stories (double-posted on the website and Facebook sources), and other relevant information. Occasionally there were discussions taking place among the members of the mailing list.

EFA did not have a common office for everyday work and most of their online everyday work was done remotely from home. However, EFA coordinators made time to meet face-to-face regularly. Most of those occurrences were in the form of weekly meetings which took place in a conference room in the National Library in Tallinn or in a café. Local EFA branches in Tartu, Haapsalu and Pärnu had their own meetings, in which core members took occasional part. Besides meetings, EFA organized smaller activities together, like field trips, hikes, and trash pick-up events. The biggest events with the opportunity to meet other members were yearly weekend camps that usually took place on the last weekend of August in different remote places close to nature. The first pages of this dissertation offered a closer description of the second EFA weekend camp in 2018.

The first weekend camp in Mooste in August 2017 had an important role in helping to create stronger ties between participants. Most of the people who came there did not know each other from earlier, or had met and talked only on Facebook. I even heard a story how one of the coordinators had met his wife at that first camp.[123] For another coordinator, who worked in forestry, the support he received during the first weekend camp gave him the courage to speak up about the problems in his field of work and after the camp he became active in EFA.[124] The second camp was more operative, as people already knew each other but still, spending time together was a high priority.

Besides building strong ties and negotiating a common identity and shared values, physical spaces facilitated discussions in a different way than online spaces. One of the coordinators described EFA's regular meeting:

> You should come to an EFA meeting, see what it's like. We just talk over each other. It gets loud! Some people who come to one meeting never come back, because it's too much for them. We argue and yell at each other, but it always ends on a positive note and we part as friends. It brings results because some issues get argued over and talked through. (Interview, IV. Oct'18)

[123] Interview IV. Oct'18.
[124] Interview, MS. Nov'18.

I also witnessed a heated dispute at the second weekend camp, where for an hour or two emotions were flaming, and voices were raised. After a while the issue was solved, and everybody was on friendly terms again. On another occasion I also witnessed disputes in the internal forum, but these took longer to solve and in one case they agreed to meet in person to talk things out. Some of those conflicts in the Facebook group also raised other discussions about who they were as an organization and what EFA stands for, and how to improve communication and conflict management within the group. Later they also agreed not to have such disputes in the internal forum but to talk things through within the inner circle at the Messenger chat.[125] In that sense, getting things 'off the chest' according to one of the coordinators, can be done both online and in person. However, as one of the coordinators said, the intense arguing, yelling and even swearing which you cannot do online, helps one to unload and also teases out certain truths.[126]

6.5. Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth overview of different communication spaces Estonian Forest Aid created and appropriated in the course of their everyday work of protecting Estonian forests and striving to influence forest politics. In addition, the chapter added a time dimension—how some of the relationships to space and practices within these spaces changed as the organization developed.

Compared to established CSOs from the previous chapter, EFA's access to mainstream media was more unpredictable and subject to change. However, as in other CSOs, they also had a proactive approach to mainstream media: for example, they wrote their own texts, sent out large numbers of press releases, and negotiated the ability to draft responses to one-sided stories. Over time EFA's journalistic practices became more professional, and with that professionalism, they became more credible as news sources.

Within online spaces, EFA invested time in social media communication as they maintained and moderated a large public discussion group where all members could post. The function of the group changed over time, but EFA coordinators found it was worth the investment to keep it up and running.

Although EFA organized some protest events, mobilizing in public spaces like other CSOs was not very common. However, EFA included other kind of physical spaces in their regular activities, like visiting local communities

[125] Interview, LMV. Dec'18.
[126] Interview, IV. Oct'18.

and specific forests. This had a double function: to gain the trust of the locals and to gain credibility as an organization through gaining firsthand knowledge 'from the field'. EFA coordinators were also frequent participants in spaces of decision-making. These spaces were accessed through taking part in face-to-face meetings or through written online communication.

Parallel to visibility in the public sphere, there was intense communication activity happening internally. The spaces for EFA's internal communication—a closed Facebook group, a mailing list, messenger group chats, and meetings in physical space—had their own function and certain communication practices were also space-specific. For example, arguing and yelling during physical meetings helped to obtain results faster than arguing on Facebook, which tended to create more tension and longer-lasting conflicts.

7. Concluding discussion

The main objective of this thesis was to analyze contemporary Estonian civil society to understand the ways established as well as evolving civil society organizations navigate the highly mediated everyday through their routine media practices and the spaces in which these practices are situated. The main research questions were: What kind of routine media and communication practices do Estonian civil society organizations enact in their everyday work? What sort of symbolic and physical spaces are used, created, and accessed by Estonian civil society organizations and informal citizen groups when engaging internally and with their target groups? And how do these spaces and practices evolve over time? These questions were addressed through a multi-methods approach including a nationally representative survey of media use and civic agency in Estonia, in-depth interviews with leaders and communication specialists representing a range of Estonian civil society organizations, and a qualitative case study of the environmental civil society organization Estonian Forest Aid.

Before going into the theoretical discussion about civic cultures, activist media practices and spaces, and highlighting this study's methodological contributions, I will summarize the main empirical findings of this study. The chapter concludes with reflections on the limitations of the study and offers a look ahead to future research prospects.

In this study, I divided the everyday work of CSO activists into three areas: producing visibility, political engagement, and internal communication. Within the practices and spaces connected to visibility, this study went in detail into two kinds of mediated spaces: the mainstream media space and social media space for self-presentation. Mainstream media visibility was important for breaking out of CSOs' own information sphere and reaching the movable middle: potential supporters and people who have not made their mind up about the CSO's issues of interest. Established CSOs had a generally constructive relationship with journalists and media outlets. Access to mainstream media space, in many cases, was based on personal relationships with journalists. Those relationships were created over time and based on the sympathy of the topic and earlier contacts, or on private personal relationships. Other ways of gaining visibility in mainstream media was a proactive approach and professionalism—answering journalists' questions about their areas of expertise. Besides access, CSOs also strived to have some

control over their representation in mainstream media. This was achieved through negotiations, writing their own media texts, and choosing a suitable media channel for these publications. In the case of EFA, who was then an evolving movement dealing with the contested issue of forest politics, access to the mainstream media space and control over their representation was less stable and changed over different periods. However, EFA coordinators were highly media literate and adapted to the processes and logic of news media.

From alternative channels, CSOs mainly used their own channels for self-visibility and used several at the same time. These were, for example, webpages, newsletters, and different social media outlets. A central tool for self-visibility for all the organizations in my study was Facebook. It was used in all areas: in gaining visibility and engaging supporters via Facebook pages, sociality, and discussions happening in Facebook groups. Messenger chats were used for interpersonal interactions and for communication within small circles. Moreover, Facebook use often included both private use and work-related use at the same time, which prompted some of my interviewees to come up with strategies to separate the two. EFA also maintained a public Facebook group with over 7,000 members at the time of the study. It was a lot of work to moderate the group, but coordinators found it important to maintain the group as a place for EFAs supporters to gather and discuss forest issues, exchange experiences, get information, and organize for political participation.

Practices and spaces connected to political participation entailed engaging the wider public and taking part in decision-making. Mobilizing people in public space was something that CSOs did not do often, but if the need arose, successful visibility in various mediated spaces was crucial for the success of the mobilization. In communicating with decision-makers, CSOs used a mix of mediated communication and face-to-face meetings. In the case of EFA, putting pressure on politicians was an integral part of their everyday work. EFA got involved in decision-making processes both on the local and national levels. Parallel to face-to-face meetings, EFA coordinators made use of online communication and made information requests to ministries, organized a petition on the official petition site Rahvaalgatus, and used state information databases to find out about planned loggings and other relevant forest-related information.

For internal communication, CSOs used a mix of mediated communication and face-to-face meetings. Remote work was common and as such, various media technologies were found helpful but in occasions, the simultaneous use of several communication channels made activists feel

overwhelmed. However, meeting in person had its own functions which online communication could not replace.

7.1. Activist media practices in the everyday context

When it comes to studying media knowledge practices and relational media practices of Estonian CSOs in the context of mainstream media space, the results of this empirical study has similarities with Mattoni's (2012) research about the mobilizations of precarious workers in Italy. What the social movement groups in Italy were striving toward, like having direct contact with journalists and finding ways to control reporting, established CSOs in Estonia had already accomplished. However, established organizations have created those relationships with journalists over time. In the case of Estonian Forest Aid, when there was a powerful and resource-rich opponent, the relationship with the mainstream media became more complicated. In such situations, EFA coordinators' media-savviness was crucial in gaining access to the mainstream media space and for getting fair representation. EFA core members had developed a good understanding of the mainstream media space—being a journalist herself, Linda-Mari Väli, the main article writer in EFA, already knew the news making processes, which journalists to trust and which to look out for and how to produce media texts. She also knew the ethical codes of journalism and knew to demand a chance for an answer if somebody had published a one-sided story that showed EFA from a negative point of view.

Similarly to Mattoni's (2012) study, EFA members' understanding of the media environment was developed through being in a position as news audiences, news producers, and news sources. EFA did active media monitoring and often, articles published in the news media were posted on their Facebook groups and collectively analyzed. Similar civic talk about mainstream media also happened during meetings and gatherings. As media producers, EFA was quite prolific, at some point sending out over five press releases in one month. Also, their media literacy increased over time. The coordinators themselves pointed out the improved journalistic skills over time and the striving towards quality journalism. Through their activities, EFA also acted as a news source, providing material to journalists.

What differs between Mattoni's study (2012) and this study is that social media has taken over alternative communication channels like Indymedia, purposefully created websites and blogs, and paper publications in various formats. Social media and in the context of this study, Facebook, had inter-

twined in every aspect of CSOs' everyday work. It was used to reach supporters, mobilize, campaign, and for internal communication. However, the concept of media knowledge practices was useful even here, as the understanding of social media platforms came both from internalized ideas and practical experience as Mattoni brought out in her research. Posting on Facebook was often led by a gut feeling combined with collective agreements and CSO representatives had a good idea about what posts gather most likes and when to post. Relational media practices were often adapted to the working of the platform and to CSO representatives' understanding of how social media platforms work and how the Facebook users behave. For example, they were following community standards while moderating comments, scheduling posts for certain times of the day, automating posts between platforms, and answering incoming messages swiftly to stay relevant in followers' timelines. The latter was connected to "temporalizing practices" of social media (Barassi 2015) where CSOs' social media responsible parties reproduce the temporality of immediacy through their practices and in some cases, constant presence on Facebook caused stress. Not everyone felt that stress. For some, Facebook played a side role and did not require much effort, while others invested more work into maintaining social media channels.

Mattoni (2012) developed the activist media practices approach to studying social movements striving towards visibility which was based on mobilizations for specific protest events. This study has extended this focus to everyday work, which includes times without intense organizing and visibility on the media and on the streets. For participants of this study, a variety of digital communication technologies were a natural part of their everyday work: to facilitate remote working, for internal communication, and for networking with organizations abroad. Different communication channels had their roles depending on the need and the situation. However, mediated communication did not replace the face-to-face meetings and on some occasions CSO representatives were grappling with the abundance and overlap of different communication tools as the information fragmentation and overload caused overwhelm. In those instances, extra practices were put in place to control feelings of being overwhelmed and to separate private and work communication. These practices were applied where needed, like on Facebook, and when the borders between working hours and private life were not as clear.

As Mattoni (2020) has argued elsewhere, the everyday work of social movement actors during latent periods is embedded in media in different ways, but media do not always have the center stage. For example, for EFA

the internal forum had an important role in everyday discussions but in other cases, like face-to-face meetings, media technologies might have been used to arrange the meeting and report about it afterwards, but then the media only played a secondary supportive role. Media practices had also their limits; as in cases where meeting in real life worked better or when somebody decided to disconnect and purposefully avoid media use.

This study has also contributed with providing additional geo-political and cultural context to the 'activist media practices' framework. Rather than just focusing on one specific CSO or movement, this thesis has put civil society actors and their media practices into the wider context of civil society and civic culture. Features of geo-political and cultural space like the historical trajectory, the media landscape, and aspects of political and civic culture like attitudes and trust towards media and political actors could shape the everyday communication practices of CSOs. For example, in Estonia, there is no longstanding tradition of social movements compared to what is the case in Italy (Mattoni 2012). In Estonia it is the opposite, social movements were banned during the Soviet era and later, civil society had issues in finding political relevance and large scale as well as government critical protests were found to be inappropriate by decision-makers (Vihma 2016). However, it does not mean that Estonian civil society or the capacity to create social change is less active in Estonia than in Italy. Continuous and constructive cooperation with the state in creating political relevance and the effort to increase the sustainability of CSOs (Rikmann 2012) has shaped the role and position civil society has in Estonia. In that sense, it is equally important to study what civil society actors do (Ekiert & Kubik 2014; Jacobsson & Korolczuk 2017) than to just concentrate on its composition (Howard 2003).

There is also the question as to whether the specifics of the Estonian media landscape and the high level of digitalization has made any difference to how CSOs and social movements take part in political processes. The material of this study showed that CSOs had adopted digital services for everyday administrative tasks like banking, signing documents, and employee-related tasks. However, for the parts of the everyday work that included gaining visibility, the most-used tool was a global social media platform, and there was no clear tendency for digitally innovative activist practices. The latter was also found by the study conducted by Kalmus and her colleagues (2018), in that new opportunities for e-participation had not, in turn, created new patterns of political or civic engagement, but instead, the e-participation tools were employed in a complementary manner to existing forms of partici-

pation. When it comes to relational media practices and media knowledge practices in relation to mass media, there is a high trust in mainstream media in Estonia compared to other post-communist countries such as Bulgaria (Bakardjieva et al. 2021).

7.2. Communicative spaces of civil society organizations

The concept of space was the other guiding concept in thesis study besides practices. Space is one of the dimensions of the civic circuit (Dahlgren 2009)—a tool for analyzing the conditions that make civic agency possible. According to Dahlgren (ibid.), having spaces for citizens to meet and talk and having access to public sphere and to decision-makers is crucial for a functioning democracy. This dissertation was interested in specifying some of the spaces used for political participation and for civic talk and contributed to the knowledge about communicative spaces created and used by civil society organizations (CSO) in their everyday work in Estonia.

Based on the definition of space as a product of interrelations which are rooted in practices (Massey 2005), space in this study took varying forms. As described in the opening pages, a simple car ride could provide a physical space for civic talk if the persons sitting in the car decided to discuss issues of public and political importance. CSOs created their own mediated information spheres in online spaces using different channels like newsletters, websites, and social media profiles. Even though anyone could take part in that information sphere, it was usually supporters and opponents (or what my interviewees called trolls) who made use of it. To break out of their own information sphere, CSOs sought visibility in the mainstream media space to reach those who had not yet formed their opinion about the matters CSOs were working on. Being able to use mediated spaces for visibility was also important when communication in the space of decision-making failed—either for mobilizing or for revealing the shortcomings of the whole decision-making process.

Facebook was a central platform for online communication for most of the CSOs participating in the study. One of the functions was everyday visibility for the organizations. Through regular posting CSOs showed that they existed and were active and because of how Facebook is built up, those posts became part of CSOs' followers everyday space (Pink 2012). Facebook groups afforded collective discussions on both small and large scales, and in open or closed environment. As this study showed, Facebook groups are an integral part of communication spaces for CSOs, either as a tool for internal

communication or a space for public discussions about a certain topic. Such groups face the danger of becoming filter bubbles (Pariser 2011) or echo-chambers (Sunstein 2009) and contribute to the spread of misinformation, as we have been able to witness in the movement against COVID restrictions. However, as this study demonstrated, Facebook groups serve the function as a civic space for CSOs and activist groups. Melucci (1989) has argued that the visible forms of collective action are only the tip of the iceberg and a product of underlying invisible networks hidden in everyday life. For EFA, for example, their Facebook groups provided a mediated space for this 'sub-merged' network (ibid.) to gather at first and then develop their vision of Estonian forest politics to organize for moments of visible action.

How did EFAs Facebook groups develop civic cultures? Taking the six dimensions of civic circuit as a base, the Facebook group was a suitable communicative space to get information about the forest issue. It was also a space for gaining experience in civic talk—how to argue and express thoughts in constructive manner, as those not adhering to community standards were asked to behave or were blocked from the space. Through their activities and the rules for the Facebook spaces, EFA aligned and enforced certain values—to follow the laws of peaceful activism, and to practice citizens' rights when pressuring politicians. As EFA as a movement started developing in the public Facebook group, it was a space where like-minded people met and created 'focused trust' (Dahlgren 2009) and started forming a collective identity around the Estonian forest issues. This Facebook group was also the starting point to friendships that were formed over time by doing different activities together. Besides negotiating the collective identity, EFA Facebook groups had the potential to expand the significance of individual members' civic identities. The practice of civic talk and organizing around specific issues offered a possibility to gain experience in political participation and empower both EFA core members and other citizens to take action toward demanding more sustainable forest politics.

In this dissertation I have argued that civic spaces are created through practices. This study has explored some of those practices and demonstrated that studying spaces and practices together can shed a light on how certain communicative spaces are used to foster civic cultures and political participation. This study has also demonstrated that the role of media connected to civic spaces is threefold—as a facilitator of specific civic spaces, and as a mediator between communicative spaces and as a symbolic environment, like the public sphere.

7.3. Civic cultures in Eastern Europe

This thesis studied civic cultures in one of the countries in Eastern Europe, Estonia. If we follow the traditional Western understanding of civil society, then civil society in Eastern Europe has a relatively short history, which in Baltic states was disrupted by 50 years behind the iron curtain and under Soviet regime. As it was pointed out in previous studies, there is no universal history of Eastern Europe, as the countries in the region had their own unique historical trajectories. Estonia, located at the border between East and the West, could only start rebuilding civil society from the end of the 1980's during the time of large social movements for dissolving the Soviet Union. In 30 years, Estonia has evolved into highly digitized country with a sustainable civil society and a third sector.

This study contributes to the knowledge about civic cultures in Eastern Europe by concentrating on one of the countries and combining historical overview of the civil society and the media landscape with population level study of attitudes towards civil society organizations and political institutions and an overview of the population's media use for political participation. In addition, this study offers a glimpse behind the scenes into the everyday communication practices of civil society organizations and how communicative spaces and practices evolve over time as in the case of Estonian Forest Aid.

Compared to, for example, Bulgaria (Bakardjieva et al. 2021), Estonians have high trust in media, government and civil society organizations. CSOs had mostly constructive relationships with mainstream media and decision-makers although some of the representatives of CSOs complained about a situational lack of agency in decision-making processes. That complaint is also reflected in the study made by Vihma and Toikka (2021) where the authors argue that in the processes of collaborative governance, where non-political actors are involved in decision-making, lack of mutual trust is an obstacle for reaching consensus or compromise about contested issues like the use of natural resources. This study found that the aspect of trust, which is one of the six dimensions of the civic circuit (Dahlgren 2009), was also important for the evolving collectives when participating in democratic processes. In the case of EFA, it was trust between people that provided a base for organizing activities together and getting insider information about different kind of forest related misconducts. Writing well-researched and factual media texts also helped to raise the trustworthiness of the organization which was important for shaping the public opinion and getting access

to the "hallways of power". The practice of quality journalism by EFA also contributed to enriching discussions in the public sphere and knowledge about forest issues as the skills of EFA creating media texts improved.

When looking closer at Howard's (2003) argument of weak civil society in Eastern Europe, previous studies and this study show that civil society is more varied than the number of active CSOs and their members. Historical overview showed that the struggles of early civil society in Estonia were connected to finding political relevance and achieving sustainability for CSOs (Rikmann 2012; Vihma 2016). Although the membership in civil society organizations has been continuously in decline even nearly 20 years after Howard (2003) published his study, new ways of participating in civil society have become prevalent. Some empirical studies made about political participation in Estonia differentiated between civic and political participation (Kalmus et al. 2018) but there were also cases of 'subactivism' (Bakardjieva 2009) where people act on issues important to them and engage within informal social frameworks, like discussions in public and private forums, or organize activities without the constraints of formal organization. Besides the more traditional ways of engaging the public, like mobilization on the streets or visibility in the mainstream media, social media and especially Facebook appeared to be an important space for developing civic cultures on an everyday level. The social media platform was used for campaigns, opinion shaping, for disseminating news and for civic talk.

Thus, this study contributes to more inclusive understanding of what constitutes a 'healthy civil society'. Sustainability of civil society organizations is important, but as the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations understand civil society, strong civil society is also about "self-initiated cooperation of people" (Good Citizen n.d.) which has varying organizational forms. In the sample of CSOs in my study there were different kinds of organizations. Some of the CSOs I studied did not sign up members but instead engaged the wider public in different ways: for example, through petitions, professional and specific social media campaigns and mobilized volunteers for specific tasks. I also encountered organizations that were something in between a movement and a CSO. For administrative purposes, even informal groups need to register themselves as an NGO. In the case of EFA, membership in the collective was a matter of feeling and personal identification, not of a formal registration.

As established in the introductory chapter, this study's scope did not include evaluations about the strength of Estonian civil society. Instead, it offered an understanding of how civil society actors work every day toward

societal change and through that towards a better civil society and healthier democracy. The study also demonstrated that placing theoretical frameworks of civic cultures (Dahlgren 2009) and activist media practices (Mattoni 2012) within a context of one civil society can give in-depth qualitative understanding how people and organizations engage in initiatives important to them and the complex ways media is intertwined in the everyday communication practices of civil society actors.

7.4. Limitations and future trajectories

Some of the limitations of these study also present opportunities for future research about civic cultures in Eastern Europe. This study concentrated only on Estonian civil society and Estonian civil society organizations. Estonia was part of the former Soviet Union and had its own unique history within the bloc which was partly influenced Estonia's geographic location on the borderland between the East and the West. There have been other factors playing a role as well, like the culture and the history preceding the Soviet occupation. To be able to understand the civic cultures of wider Eastern Europe, a comparative approach would be fruitful. There are already studies comparing civil societies in Eastern Europe (Rikmann & Keedus 2013; Ekiert & Kubik 2014; Foa & Ekiert 2017), but it would be useful to understand the media and communication practices of civil society actors; for example to which degree those practices are influenced by the local context, geographical and cultural characteristics of Eastern Europe and by the affordances of global communication platforms like Facebook and other social media channels. The larger research project this study belongs to addresses these questions by comparing Estonia and Bulgaria (Bakardjieva et al. 2021), but a bigger sample of countries could be beneficial.

Another limitation of this study was the choice of research participants. In this dissertation, the majority of the participating CSOs were well established and had employees who were professional in their assignments. For my interviewees their role in the CSO was a full-time job. Concentrating on the 'professional' civil society gives leaves out those people who fit their CSO work into their everyday lives a bit differently, not as a full-time job but as something done from 'free time'. I got some hints from the research material that CSOs in the countryside had both limited technological connectivity and lower levels of media literacy when it came to relationships with media professionals. On such occasions, network organizations, like NENO, Kodukant (Let's Do It World on a global level) and Estonian Forest

Aid play a crucial role in raising the capacities of local organizations and helping them to get both public and political visibility. It would be worthwhile to study civic cultures of civil society organizations (those with the focus on political participation) in local communities, also taking into account the demographic and geographical specifics, to find out what communication challenges those CSOs have and what role different media plays in their organizational work.

The third limitation of this study I would consider an inevitability rather than a limitation. The fieldwork for this study was done between the end of 2015 (survey) and the end of 2018 (the qualitative part) which is a certain point in time in Estonian society and in the trends of media use. As Kathleen M. Blee (2014) suggested studying turning points in the trajectories of activist groups to understand how their everyday practices evolve, it would also be beneficial to take into account turning points in the society or world at large to see how these influence the everyday communication practices of civil society organizations. A lot has happened in the three years since I did my fieldwork, both in Estonia and in the world. For example, having a populist party in the government gave a boost to citizens' political participation in the form of mobilizations and new networks. Another global event one cannot fail to mention is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has given rise to even more activism and, in the context of my study, has affected the way CSOs conduct their everyday work. CSOs participating in my study already made use of media technologies to facilitate remote working while at the same time valuing the face-to-face meetings. It would be interesting to revisit the field to see how CSOs have adapted their everyday practices during the pandemics and how the time of exclusively remote work has changed their relationships to various communicative spaces.

Isin and Ruppert (2015), in their book *Being Digital Citizens,* ask 'what kind of political subject, if not citizen, is coming into being through the Internet?' (p. 2). Inspired by their inquiry, I find that for the future research it would be interesting to study the identity dimension of Dahlgren's (2009) civic circuit to find out if and how the pervasive online communication influences the way we see ourselves as citizens? If the information we get from the Internet forms our attitudes and the affordances of communication tools shape the way activism is practiced, then does it have any influence on the understanding of what it means to be a citizen? While doing my fieldwork, I always ended the interview with the question of what my interviewee thinks constitutes and active citizen and if being able to use social media helps to become a more active citizen. The answers I received tied the characteristics

of the active citizen to values, identity and behavior rather than to the availability of communication technologies. Some thought technology helps but other thought it creates pseudo-activism. In the light of recent rise in civic activism, both civil and uncivil, I think it would be fruitful to study the connection between online spaces, media practices and the imaginary of citizenship.

8. References

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1.
The survey questionnaire.

Uus meedia ja kodanikuühiskonna areng uutes Euroopa Liidu demokraatiates: kodanikkonna ümberkujundamine Balti- ja Balkanimaades

Hea vastaja!

Te olete palutud osalema uuringus, mille eesmärgiks on: 1) mõõta, mil määral on digitaalse meedia kasutamine juurdunud Eesti ühiskonnas; 2) uurida, kas Eesti kodanikud kasutavad digitaalseid meediakanaleid, et saada infot poliitilise ja ühiskondliku tähtsusega teemade kohta ning mõjutada nende teemade arengut. Uuring sisaldab ka küsimusi traditsioonilise meedia, nagu ajalehtede, raadio ja televisiooni populaarsusest ning hoiakutest poliitiliste institutsioonide ja kodanikuühenduste suhtes.

Uuringutulemuste analüüsi viib läbi Rootsis Södertörni ülikoolis baseeruv rahvusvaheline teadlaste meeskond prof. Maria Bakardjieva juhtimisel. Projekti toetab Läänemere Sihtasutus (*Baltic Sea Foundation*).

Kui Te nõustute osalema selles uuringus, palutakse Teil avaldada infot Teie soo, vanuse, hariduse, ameti ja elukoha ning samuti Teie poliitiliste vaadete ja kodanikuühendustesse kuuluvuse kohta.

Teie osalemine uuringus on vabatahtlik ning Te võite osalemisest üldse keelduda. Enne uuringus osalemise otsustamist saate esitada küsitlejale mistahes küsimusi uuringu kohta. Te võite ilma põhjendust andmata keelduda üksikutele küsimustele vastamast. Te võite igal ajal küsimustikule vastamise käigus uurimuses osalemisest taganeda. Peale küsimustikule vastamise lõpetamist ei ole enam võimalik uurimuses osalemisest taganeda ning Teie poolt avaldatud informatsioni kasutatakse uuringus.

Teie poolt esitatud andmed hoitakse rangelt salajased. Teie nimi ja muu identifitseeriv informatsioon hoitakse Teie vastustest ja uurimuse küsimustest eraldi. Teie vastused analüüsitakse kogumina ning neid ei ole võimalik seostada Teie isikuga.

Teie nõusolekut küsimustele vastamiseks tõlgendatakse kui Teie informeeritud nõusolekut uuringus osalemiseks.

Oleme väga tänulikud vastamisele kulutatud aja ja tähelepanu eest!

Södertörni ülikool, Stockholm
Turu-uuringute AS, Tallinn

Teema 1: Meediakasutus

1. Kui tihti Te kasutate järgnevaid meediakanaleid?

	Mitte kunagi	**Vähem kui kord nädalas**	**1-2 korda nädalas**	**Rohkem kui 2 korda nädalas**	**Iga päev**
Ajalehed	□	□	□	□	□
Raadio	□	□	□	□	□
TV	□	□	□	□	□
Ajakirjad	□	□	□	□	□
Internet üldiselt	□	□	□	□	□
Blogid	□	□	□	□	□
Facebook	□	□	□	□	□
Twitter	□	□	□	□	□
_____					
Muu sotsiaalvõrgustiku platvorm	□	□	□	□	□

Milline? _____ *(kirjutage!)*

2. Mis keeles Te ülalmainitud meediakanaled kasutate? Võimalik valida mitu vastusevarianti.

□ Eesti
□ Vene
□ Soome
□ Inglise
□ Muu
□ _____ *(kirjutage!)*

3. Millistesd alljärgnevatest on kolm kõige olulisemat allikat, millest Te hangite uudiseid ja informatsiooni oluliste poliitiliste ja ühiskonnaelu teemade kohta? Palun märkige kuni kolm vastusevarianti.

□ Teleuudised / päevakajalised saated
□ Raadio uudistesaated
□ Ajalehed
□ Uudisteportaalid Internetis
□ Poliitilised blogid
□ Internetifoorumid/-kommuunid
□ Sotsiaalvõrgustike lehed (nt. Facebook)
□ Twitter
□ Muu, milline_____*(kirjutage!)*

4. Palun nimetage igas alljärgnevas kategoorias kuni kolm Teie jaoks kõige usaldusväärsemat infoallikat poliitilistes ja ühiskonnaelu küsimustes:

Trükimeedia /ajalehed, ajakirjad/: 1)_____
2)_____
3)_____
4 – Mul ei ole usaldusväärset infoallikat trükimeedias

Raadiosaated: 1)_____
2)_____
3)_____
4 – Mul ei ole usaldusväärset raadiosaadet

Telesaated:	1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____ 4 – Mul ei ole usaldusväärset telesaadet
Veebileheküljed/platvormid:	1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____ 4 – Mul ei ole usaldusväärset veebilehekülge/-platvormi

Teema 2: Juurdepääs digitaaltehnoloogiale ja selle kasutus

5. Kas Teil on olemas järgmised seadmed või igapäevane juurdepääs nendele?

	Jah	Ei
Lauaarvuti	□	□
Mobiiltelefon	□	□
Nutitelefon (iPhone, jne.)	□	□
Sülearvuti	□	□
Tahvelarvuti (iPad, jne.)	□	□
e-luger	□	□

6. Kus Teil on juurdepääs internetile? Võimalik valida mitu vastusevarianti.

□ Ma ei kasuta internetti □ Kodus □ Tööl/koolis □ Kohvikutes

□ Igal pool (mobiil) □ Avalikus raamatukogus □ Mujal avalikus kohas

KÜSIMUSTELE 7-12 VASTAVAD VAID NEED, KES KASUTAVAD INTERNETTI (KÜS 6 ≠ 1).

7. Milline allolevatest väidetest kirjeldab Teie juurdepääsu internetile kõige paremini?

□ Mu internetiühendus on aeglane ja saan seda kasutada vaid kindlates kohtades

□ Mul on vahendid igal pool internetti pääsuks, kuid kehv levi takistab mind

□ Mu internetiühendus on hea, kuid piiratud kindlate kohtadega

□ Mul on hea internetiühendus - alati ja igal pool

□ Ei oska öelda

8. Kui palju aega Te ühel tavalisel päeval internetis veedate?

□ 0 min □ 1-30 min □ 31-90 min □ 1,5-3 tundi □ rohkem kui 3 tundi

9. Kui sageli Te kasutate internetti järgnevateks tegevusteks?

	Mitte kunagi	Vähem kui kord nädalas	1-2 korda nädalas	Rohkem kui 2 korda nädalas	Iga päev
Konkreetsete teemade kohta info otsimine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Töö- või õppematerjalide lugemine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poliitikateemaliste materjalide lugemine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Meelelahutuslike materjalide lugemine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sotsiaalvõrgustike lehtedel teiste kasutajate loodud sisu lugemine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online pangandusega tegelemine või finantsalase info otsimine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Internetifoorumitesse postitamine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Enda blogisse kirjutamine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Enda sotsiaalmeedia profiilile postitamine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tweetimine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E-mailide saatmine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teiste inimeste sotsiaalmeedia postituste ja Twitteri säutsude kommenteerimine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
„Tšättimine“	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Videokõnede pidamine	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Telefonikõnede tegemine (nt. Skype i kaudu)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. Millist sotsiaalvõrgustikku Te kasutate kõige rohkem? Võimalik kuni kaks vastusevarianti.

□ Facebook □ Twitter □ Instagram □ Google+ □ Vkontakte
□ Odnoklassniki □ LiveJournal □Tumblr □LinkedIn □Pinterest
□ Muu, milline/millised?_____ (kirjutage!) □ ei kasuta suhtlusvõrgustikke

KÜSIMUSTELE 11-12 VASTAVAD VAID NEED, KES KASUTAVAD SOTSIAALVÕRGUSTIKKE KÜS10≠12

11.Umbes mitu "sõpra" on Teil sotsiaalvõrgustikes, mida kasutate kõige tihedamini?

□ vähem kui 5 □ 5-20 □ 20-50 □ 50-100
□ 100-300 □ üle 300

12.Keskmiselt kui palju aega Te kulutate tavalisel päeval interneti sotsiaalvõrgustikes?

□ 0 min □ 1-30 min □ 31-90 min □ 1,5-3 tundi
□ rohkem kui 3 tundi

VASTAVAD KÕIK VASTAJAD:

13. Mil määral Te nõustute või ei nõustu järgnevate väidetega?

	Üldse ei nõustu	Pigem ei nõustu	Pigem nõustun	Nõustun täielikult	Ei oska öelda
Tänu internetile võib igaüks vabalt oma arvamust avaldada					
Tänu internetile on võimalik saada ühendust endale sarnaste huvide ja arvamustega inimestega					
Tänu internetile on võimalik saada ühendust endast erinevate huvide ja arvamustega inimestega					
On hea, et inimesed saavad internetis olla anonüümsed					
Tänu internetile saavad tavakodanikud mõjutada poliitikuid ja valitsust					
Inimesed, kellel puudub internetile juurdepääs, on ebasoodsas olukorras					
Interneti kasutamine ei paku mingeid tegelikke eeliseid					
Interneti kasutamine on ajaraiskamine					
Sotsiaalvõrgustikud on interneti kõige kasulikum osa					

Teema 3: Meedia kasutamine kodanike kaasamiseks/osalemiseks poliitikas ja ühiskonnaelus

KÜSIMUSELE 14 ja 15 VASTAVAD VAID NEED, KES KASUTAVAD INTERNETTI

14. Kas Te olete kasutanud digitaalmeediat mõnel alljärgneval moel selleks, et saada rohkem teada poliitiliste ja/või ühiskonnaelu küsimuste kohta või osaleda nende küsimustega seotud aruteludes ja tegevustes:

	Mitte kunagi	Vähemalt korra eelneva aasta jooksul	Vähemalt kora viimase 3 kuu jooksul	Vähemalt kora viimase kuu jooksul	Rohkem kui korra kuus
Otsinud infot avalikku huvi pakkuvatel ja poliitilistel teemadel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kommenteerinud ajaleheartiklit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Panustanud internetifoorumitesse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kirjutanud oma blogisse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kommenteerinud kellegi teise blogi	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Postitanud midagi sotsiaalvõrgustikku (nt. Facebook /vkontakte)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ühinenud Facebooki grupiga	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Jaganud kellegi teise postitust sotsiaalvõrgustikus (nt. Facebook/VKontakte)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Kommenteerinud kellegi teise postitust sotsiaalvõrgustikus (nt. Facebook/VKontakte)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Saatnud e-maile	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Postitanud Twitterisse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Taaspostitanud kellegi teise Twitteri säutsu	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Saatnud SMSi	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

15. Keda Te jälgite sotsiaalvõrgustikes (Facebook, VKontakte, Twitter, jne)?

□ Sõpru, perekonda ja kolleege
□ Poliitilisi erakondi/poliitikuid
□ Kuulsusi/artiste
□ Kaubanduslikke ettevõtteid/ärisid
□ Mittetulunduslikke organisatsioone /kodanikeühendusi/
□ Spordiklubisid
□ Aktiviste/aktivistide gruppe
□ ei kasuta suhtlusvõrgustikke

VASTAVAD KÕIK

16. Kas Te olete eelneva aasta jooksul teinud seoses ühiskonnaelu ja/või poliitiliste küsimustega midagi alljärgnevast?

□ Osalenud avalikul istungil, linna- (valla-) valitsuse või linna- (valla) volikogu koosolekul
□ Rääkinud isiklikult riigi- (või kohaliku omavalitsuse) ametnikuga
□ Helistanud või kirjutanud (rahva poolt) valitud rahvaesindajale
□ Osalenud poliitilisel demonstratsioonil
□ Hääletanud parlamendivalimistel
□ Hääletanud kohalikel valimistel
□ Osalenud koosolekul, mis oli mõeldud sotsiaalse- või poliitilise reformi teostamiseks KOHALIKUL tasandil
□ Helistanud tele- või raadiosaatesse
□ Kirjutanud kirja või e-maili ajakirjandusväljaandesse
□ Olnud seotud poliitiliste tegevusgruppide, poliitiliste klubide või erakondade tegevusega
□ Ma ei ole teinud midagi ülalmainitust

17. Kas Te olete viimase 12 kuu jooksul teinud midagi järgnevast <u>seoses ühiskonnaelu ja/või poliitilise tähtsusega küsimustega</u>?

	Ei ole kordagi	Olen ühe korra	Olen rohkem kui ühe korra
Allkirjastanud petitsiooni internetis	☐	☐	☐
Allkirjastanud petitsiooni paberil	☐	☐	☐
Asutanud virtuaalse grupi sotsiaalvõrgustikus	☐	☐	☐
Liitunud virtuaalse grupiga	☐	☐	☐
Annetanud raha	☐	☐	☐
Organiseerinud korjanduse	☐	☐	☐
Võtnud osa rahvakogunemisest (nt. protestiaktsioonist, demonstratsioonist vms.)	☐	☐	☐
Organiseerinud rahvakogunemisi; inimeste väljaastumisi (protestiaktsioone, koosolekuid, demonstratsioone jms.)	☐	☐	☐

18. Kui Te vastasite mõnele ülalmainitud tegevusele "ühe korra" või "rohkem kui ühe korra", siis kust Te kuulsite nende ürituste kohta? Märkige sobivad variandid:

□ Facebook
□ Twitter
□ SMS
□ E-mail
□ Meililist
□ Ajalehed
□ TV
□ Raadio
□ Näost näkku kontaktid
□ Muu, mis_____

Teema 4: Suhtumine kodanikuühendustesse ja avaliku sektori asutustesse

19. Kas Te olete kursis (olete informeeritud) mõne kodanikuühenduse tegevusega (tegevusest)?
või
Kas Te tunnete püsivat huvi mõne kodanikuühenduse tegevuse vastu?

Jah □ Ei □

KUI „JAH" K19:

20. Kas tunnete poolehoidu mõne kodanikuühenduse tegevuse suhtes?

Jah □ Ei □

KUI K20 = „JAH":

21. Mis valdkonnas tegutsevaid kodanikuühendusi Te pooldate?

KUI K20 = „EI":

Mis valdkonnas tegutsevate kodanikuühenduste vastu Te huvi tunnete? (kursis/informeeritud olete)

□ Sport
□ Kunst ja kultuur
□ Heategevus
□ Hobid
□ Keskkond, keskkonnakaitse
□ Inimõigused
□ Huvigruppide esindamine ja kaitse
□ Poliitika
□ Kutseorganisatsioon
□ Ametiühing
□ Muu, mis?_____

KÕIK VASTAJAD:

22. Mil määral Te nõustute või ei nõustu järgmiste väidetega?

	Üldse ei nõustu	Pigem ei nõustu	Pigem nõustun	Nõustun täielikult	Ei oska öelda
Kodanikuühenduste tegevused on kasulikud/vajalikud meie ühiskonnale					
Kodanikuühendused tugevdavad demokraatiat					
Kodanikuühendused tekitavad ühiskonnas ainult probleeme					
Kodanikuühendused kaitsevad tavainimeste huve					
Kodanikuühendused saavad mõjutada poliitilisi otsuseid					
Kodanikuühendused teenivad võimulolijate huve					
Kodanikuühendused teenivad välishuve					
Kodanikuühendused võimaldavad tavainimestel mõjutada poliitilisi otsuseid					
Kodanikuühendused on asjatundlikud ja sõltumatud					
Ainult mõned kodanikuühendused teenivad avalikkuse huve					

23. Mil määral Te nõustute või ei nõustu järgmiste väidetega?

	Üldse ei nõustu	Pigem ei nõustu	Pigem nõustun	Nõustun täielikult	Ei oska öelda
Ma usaldan riigikogu					
Eestis on olemas erakond, mida ma saan usaldada minu seisukohtade ja huvide kaitsmisel					
Minusugused inimesed saavad mõnikord riigivalitsust mõjutada					
Minusugused inimesed saavad mõnikord kohalikku omavalitsust mõjutada					
Ma usaldan uudiseid, mida saan ajalehtedest, raadiost ja telekanalitest					
Ma usaldan uudiseid, mida saan ajakirjandusväljaannete kodulehtedelt					
Ma usaldan uudiseid, mida saan alternatiivsest internetimeediast nagu blogid ja kodanikuajakirjandus					

Teema 5: Osalusmäär poliitilistes, kodanikuühiskonna- ja kultuurilistes organisatsioonides ning teadlikkus selliste organisatsioonide kohta

24. Kas Te olete viimase 12 kuu jooksul võtnud osa kodanikuühenduste poolt organiseeritud <u>VEEBIPÕHISTEST</u> tegevustest või üritustest? (näiteks arutelud, petitsioonid, infokampaaniad, korjandused jne)?

□ Jah □ Ei

KUI JAH:

Kui tihti?

□ Ühe korra □ Rohkem kui ühe korra

25. Kas Te olete viimase 12 kuu jooksul võtnud osa kodanikuühenduste poolt organiseeritud <u>VEEBIVÄLISTEST</u> tegevustest või üritustest? (näiteks marsid, demonstratsioonid, blokaadid, festivalid, petitsioonid, infokampaaniad, korjandused jne.)?

□ Jah □ Ei

KUI JAH:

Kui tihti?

□ Ühe korra □ Rohkem kui ühe korra

26. Kas Te olete mõne varemnimetatud kodanikuühenduse liige? (näiteks spordi, kunsti-, heategevuse-, hobi-, keskkonnakaitse-, inimõiguste kaitse, poliitika-, kutseorganisatsioon, ametiühing jne.)

□ Jah □ Ei

KUI JAH:

Palun loetlege need organisatsioonid, mille liige Te olete:

Teema 6: Sotsiaal-demograafilised näitajad

27. Mis on Teie sünniaasta?

Vastus: 19_____

28. Teie sugu?

☐ Naine ☐ Mees ☐ Ei soovi avaldada

29. Milline on Teie praegune haridustase? Kui Te ei ole veel õpinguid lõpetanud, märkge hetkel pooleliolevad õpingud.

☐ Algharidus ☐ Keskharidus/kutseharidus ☐ Kõrgharidus ☐ Kraadiharidus (magistri- või doktoriõpe)

30. Mis on hetkel Teie peamine tegevusala?

☐ Õpilane ☐ Palgatööline ☐ Ise endale tööandja/vabakutseline ☐ Palgatööline, kuid pikemal puhkusel ☐ Töötu ☐ Pensionär ☐ Kodune

31. Kui te töötate, kas te töötate täistööajaga või osalise tööajaga?

☐ Ma ei tööta ☐ Täiskohaga ☐ Osalise tööajaga

32. Mis on Teie elukutse (kellena Te töötate või töötasite)?
/intervjueerija poolne selgitus neile, kes ei tööta (pensionärid, töötud, kodused): nimetage see elukutse, mida Te olete kõige kauem pidanud/

Ma olen:_____

33. Mis on Teie isiklik keskmine netosissetulek kuus (ilma tulumaksuta)?

- ☐ Kuni 200 eur
- ☐ 201 – 300 eur
- ☐ 301 – 400 eur
- ☐ 401 – 500 eur
- ☐ 501 - 650 eur
- ☐ 651 - 800 eur
- ☐ 801 - 1000 eur
- ☐ Üle 1000 eur
- ☐ Isiklikku sissetulekut ei ole
- ☐ Ei soovi avaldada

34. Mis on Teie leibkonna keskmine netosissetulek KOKKU?

- ☐ Kuni 300 eur
- ☐ 301 – 400 eur
- ☐ 401 – 500 eur
- ☐ 501 – 800 eur
- ☐ 801 – 1300 eur
- ☐ 1301-2000 eur
- ☐ üle 2000 eur
- ☐ Ei soovi avaldada
- ☐ Ei oska öelda

35. Mis on Teie leibkonna keskmine netosissetulek kuus ühe leibkonnaliikme kohta?

☐ Kuni 200 eur
☐ 201-300 eur
☐ 301-400 eur
☐ 401-500 eur
☐ 501-650 eur
☐ 650-800 eur
☐ Üle 800 eur
☐ Ei soovi avaldada
☐ Ei oska öelda

36. Kus te olete sündinud?

☐ Eestis
☐ Mujal (nimetage riik) _____

Kui 36 = 2 (on sündinud mujal kui Eestis)

37. Millal Te kolisite Eestisse elama?

☐ Enne 1991. aastat
☐ 1990ndatel
☐ 2000ndatel
☐ Viimase 5 aasta jooksul

38. Millist tüüpi asulas Te elate?

□ Pealinn □ Suur linn/maakonnakeskus □ Muu linn, alev, alevik
□ Küla, maakoht

39. Kui kaua Te olete selles asulas (vallas, linnas) elanud?

□ kogu elu □ rohkem kui 10 aastat □ 3-10 aastat
□ vähem kui 3 aastat

40. Kas te toetate mõnda poliitilist parteid?

- ☐ Eesti Keskerakond
- ☐ Eesti Reformierakond
- ☐ Erakond Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit
- ☐ Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond
- ☐ Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond
- ☐ Eesti Vabaerakond
- ☐ Eesti Iseseisvuspartei
- ☐ Eesti Vabaduspartei – Põllumeeste kogu
- ☐ Eestimaa Ühendatud Vasakpartei
- ☐ Erakond Eesti Kristlikud Demokraadid
- ☐ Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised
- ☐ Jah, aga ma eelistan mitte avaldada oma parteipoolehoidu
- ☐ Ei, ma ei poolda ühtegi parteid

41. Mis keelt Te kodus peamiselt räägite*? /võib olla mitu vastust/*

- ☐ Eesti
- ☐ Vene
- ☐ Muu, millist? _____

SUUR TÄNU TEILE VASTUSTE EEST!

Küsitlustulemuste analüüsi käigus võib tekkida vajadus läbi viia täiendavaid intervjuusid vastanutega.

Kas olete nõus jätma meile oma kontakti (meiliaadressi või telefoninumbri), et oleks võimalik Teiega ühendust võtta?

Need andmed jõuavad ainult uuringu töörühma käsutusse ning kindlasti ei tülitata Teid rohkem kui ühe korra.

_____

/KIRJUTAGE KONTAKT/

Appendix 2.
Respondents' social and demographic profile (%), N=1,000
(from the field report by Turu-Uuringute As)

	UNWEIGHTED	WEIGHTED
GENDER		
Male	44.3%	45.7%
Female	55.7%	54.3%
AGE		
18–24	8.1%	10.4%
25–34	16.7%	17.6%
35–49	25.9%	24.9%
50–64	29.5%	24.5%
65–74	13.4%	11.7%
75 +	6.4%	10.9%
EDUCATION		
Primary	8.7%	9.4%
Secondary/vocational	59.7%	59.4%
University, postgraduate	30.6%	21.2%
MAIN LANGUAGE		
Estonian	72,6%	67.9%
Other	27.4%	32.1%
REGION		
Tallinn	32.0%	31.7%
North-Estonia	15.1%	16.0%
Nort-East-Estonia	11.3%	11.7%
West-Estonia	11.0%	11.3%
Middle-Estonia	7.0%	7.3%
South-Estonia	23.6%	22.0%
URBAN/ RURAL		
Urban	69.2%	69.1%
Rural	30.8%	30.9%

Appendix 3.
CSO interview information

Name CSO	Topic	Founded	About	Interviewee
Noored Rohelised (Young Green)	Environment	2007	Youth organization of the Green Party	Then leader, full time environmental activist (different initiatives)
Eesti Roheline Liikumine (Estonian Green Movement)	Environment	1988	Established NGO, part of Friends of the Earth	Project coordinator Member of board Communication Manager Project coordinator
Estonian Fund for Nature	Environment	1991	Established NGO, office staff,	Communication officer
Let's Do It World	Environment	2011	Established NGO, global, with core team in Estonia. Call themselves movement. Organize a global campaign for trash picking	Communications and network officer (at the time of the study)
Eesti Inimõiguste Keskus (Human Rights Centre)	Human Rights	2009	Established NGO, office staff, mostly project and donation funded, advocacy.	Manager (at the time of the study), one of the founders
Eesti Inimõiguste Instituut (Estonian Institute of Human Rights)	Human Rights	1991	Established NGO, office staff, awareness building and education, funded by state grants.	Project manager, communication (at the time of the study)
Feministeerium		2014	Feminist blog, juridical body MTÜ Oma Tuba	Activist, writer, project coordinator

MTÜ Eesti Pagulasabi (Estonian Refugee Council)	Human Rights	2001	Established NGO, office staff, main refugee organization.	Manager
MTÜ Loomus	Animal advocacy	2014		Manager Communication officer
Eesti Mittetulundusühinguте ja Sihtasutuste Liit (Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations)	Umbrella organization	90s	Established, umbrella organization for NGOs	Manager Communication officer
Külaliikumine "Kodukant" (Village movement "Homeplace")	Umbrella organization	90s		Manager
Estonian Forest Aid	Environment	2016	Civic self-organization. Grassroots movement.	Initiator, communication coordinator

Appendix 4.
The interview guide

Organization

- What is the purpose of your organization? What are the main forms of action? How many members do you have? How many of them are active?
- How many employees you have? How do you fund your organization? Do you have access to any other resources?

Internal communication

- How do you keep in touch with your members?
- How do you communicate with employees/active members?
- How do you organize/plan campaigns? How do you mobilize members or volunteers for the campaigns? (Are they mostly know from earlier?)
- Has the way you organize campaigns changed over time?
- Is the system you have now working well? What could be better?
- (extra) How often you have meetings online compared to face-to-face? How effective are such meetings?

External communication

- How do you find new members/supporters/volunteers? Do you have any feedback about where they heard about your organization?
- Have you had an occasion or campaign where you had to mobilize the general public? What was the occasion and the outcome? How did you reach them?
- How do you communicate with other institutions (politicians, public officials, mass media)?
- How do you communicate with partner organizations (other similar organizations, membership in local and international networks)?
- Do you have any experience of various digital participatory platforms to raise a problem, to mobilize or to start a public discussion around a topic important to your organization (petitions, Rahvaalgatus etc.)?
- Or an example of an occasion where you have started a topic on social media, and it has moved further from there and helped to mobilize people?

Digital media

- How is the work with digital media strategically organized in your organization?
- Who does it (person in charge)? How do you make decisions what to post? Which are the main platforms? Which are most useful? Why? What kind of challenges you face dealing with social media? Problems, disappointments, failure?
- How much time/effort is put into strategic media management? Who decides over the communication policy (is it silent agreement or thought through strategy)? Has there been occasions where journalists have written a story about your social media post? Or when internet communication has led to an offline initiative?
- What kind of posts you usually do? Have you set yourself parameters for a successful post (how many likes, comments, shares and so on)? How does it reflect in the work of your organization (what are likes good for)? What kind of posts get more likes/retweets/shares than the others?
- How often do you post? Have you established some patterns for your posts (post on a certain time)? How open you are for public participation, and do you moderate your posts?
- Have you had a negative experience connected to social media? Some setbacks, disappointments (impact less than expected), wishes of how it could be used?
- Does your organization use e-services provided by the state? How does it help your work? How much use do you have of the so-called e-Estonia in your work?

Individual background

- What is your position in the organization? How long have you been a member/employee? What is your work/educational background? Why is this organization/initiative important? How is it significant personally? Do you have a similar experience from earlier?
- Experience with digital and social media: have you used social media (blogs, social media platforms, forums etc.) actively from earlier, before you became active in this organization? On what purpose? What kind of earlier experience has been useful in the current position?
- What are you preferred social media channels and why?
- How often you take part in offline events?
- Is there an overlap between your private life and the work at the CSO (if you share CSO things in your personal network)? Describe your

social networks: followers, friends, offline contacts with people and institutions—how do you manage them, and do you use them in your work as an activist? Do you take part in public discussions as a private person? On what topics?
- What in your opinion describes an active citizen? Do you consider yourself a more active citizen when you have access to social media? How?

Extra questions for Estonian Forest Aid (EFA) interviews at the end of 2018

Role in EFA

- When did you become a member of EFA? How did it happen?
- What is your role in the movement? Has it changed over time?
- What other things do you take part in besides online work?

Everyday work on EFA

- What does your regular day look like as an EFA activist?
- What are your preferred channels of communication?
- How much of what you have achieved is visible to the wider public? How important is it to be visible?
- Do you feel you have been able to spend your time as needed? Or do some activities take more time than expected? What are the activities that take the most time?
- How often do you do different documents like audits and rapports? What sort of work does it acquire? How does it help to reach your goals?

Facebook vs other communication channels

- Why is the public FB group necessary?
- What are the rules for the public FB group? Did you mutually discuss them beforehand?
- How do you feel about using a commercial channel?
- What do you get from FB discussions? What value does that environment have?
- What function do different social media platforms have in your work?
- What are the limits of internet communication? When does it stop being useful (in the light of internal dispute)?

EFA role in the society

- How do you perceive the support/non-support from the wider public?
- What do you think EFA has managed to change?

- Regarding other initiatives (the cellulose factory case, Rail Baltica etc.), how has it impacted EFA's work (people trust more, easier to make the voice heard etc.)?
- What makes EFA unique in Estonian civil society?

Personal practices

- Can you tell me a bit about your background?
- In what ways you feel you have developed as a citizen during your time in EFA?

Appendix 5.
Estonian Forest Aid activities December 2016–2018

- Laws pertaining to forest management: protesting/criticizing the passing of certain laws, proposing changes in forest laws (also in cooperation with other interest groups), reporting instances when laws are broken, investigating schemes that make use of holes in the law.

- Helping to save concrete forests (together with local inhabitants)—several successful cases; take part in meetings with local government, write to relevant institutions, write texts to media.

- Work toward widening and protecting natural reserves through communication with institutions, investigating deforestation in the national parks, and writing open letters.

- Organize information events offline—information events in local communities (Klooga, Hiiumaa), informing parliament about the dangers of bio energy, hold a conference about sustainable forest management in parliament.

- Online campaigns—filling out Estonian Wikipedia on sustainability, #minaelansiin—post pictures of meaningful places along Rail Baltic track.

- Support other civil society causes—by, for example, taking part in the protests organized by animal advocacy groups to oppose wolf hunting in Norway, taking part in the willow tree protest, taking part in protests around Emajõgi; donating money to another movement who organized the protest; supporting an open letter against building Rail Baltic railway tracks.

- Protest events—the first one at Parliament, on May 17, 2017 against the cellulose factory (main square in Tartu), Nursipalu (at the spot), one-year anniversary march (not really a protest).

- Witness and report—inspect when people report suspicious logging activity. Report to authorities, even go to court (Nursipalu). Uncover schemes. Map State Forest Management Centre failings in FSC audit.

- Pressuring politicians—demand citizens be included in decision making, inform them about sustainable forestry, ask their opinions about forest politics before elections (campaign).

- Opinion shaping—writing an open letter about dangers of bio-energy politics, campaigning for logging peace during the nesting season, warning for fire hazard in the summer, encouraging the reporting of illegal traps, etc.

- Organize cultural events—song festival in the bog, school children's art competition.

- International work—open letter with international organizations about bio-energy, co-organizing network meetings of Forest Movement Europe, participating in the Finnish campaign against clear-cutting spread to Estonia.

- Cooperation with state institutions—in December 2018, EFA made a good-will agreement with Environmental Inspection for information exchange and to help site inspection in the case of suspected offences.

- Taking part in policy creation—Forestry Development Plan policy renewal for 2030.

- Organizing petitions for banning clear cuts in Estonian forests. Managed to gather over 3000 signatures on Rahvaalgatus platform in the second part of 2018.

What kind of routine media and communication practices do Estonian civil society organizations enact in their everyday work? What sort of symbolic and physical spaces are used, created, and accessed by Estonian civil society organizations and informal citizen groups when engaging internally and with their intended audiences? How do these spaces and practices evolve over time?

These are the questions that are addressed in this licentiate dissertation, aiming to understand how established as well as evolving civil society organizations navigate the highly mediated everyday. The analysis focuses especially on the routine media practices and the spaces in which these practices are situated among civil society organizations in Estonia, and paints a dynamic picture of the everyday practices – from the mundane and routinised to the mobilised, activist media practices.

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