



Spatial aspects of de-radicalisation processes in Tbilisi

D9.1 City Report

September 2023

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Reference: D.RAD 9.1

This research was conducted under the Horizon 2020 project 'De-Radicalisation in Europe and Beyond: Detect, Resolve, Re-integrate' (959198).

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About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims to identify the actors, networks, and wider social contexts driving radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I- GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation) with the goal of moving towards measurable evaluations of de-radicalisation programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalisation of individuals, which include a sense of being victimised, a sense of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures and the influence of “us vs them” identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptionally broad base. The project spans the national scene in countries ranging from the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Georgia and Austria to several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad LABs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation from which to test practical interventions geared to prevention, inclusion and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of seventeen nations and several minority nations, the project will provide a unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping the situation in this diverse group and the links to their national contexts will be crucial in uncovering the strengths and weaknesses in existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad encounters the problem that the processes of radicalisation often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national frameworks of justice. The participation of AI professionals in modelling, analysing and devising solutions to online radicalisation will be central to the project’s aims.

Abstract

This report examines public spaces in Tbilisi and the extent to which they serve as a meeting point for people from various backgrounds. It relies on expert interviews and focus groups to identify and explore best practices in inclusionary local public spaces as well as some of the exclusionary spaces. By identifying the practice of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces, this report contributes to the study of the role of spatial aspects of deradicalisation and offers policy recommendations to relevant stakeholders. This research identifies: *Mzirui*, *Deda Ena*, and the former *Hippodrome* as exhibiting the best practices of inclusive public space and engages in in-depth analysis of Deda Ena Park. On the other hand, the space in front of the Parliament building and the neighborhood around Metro Station Marjanishvili are analysed as areas where contestation takes place. Key findings of this report suggest that contestations in Tbilisi usually takes place around spaces of political importance/symbols of power or along ethnic lines. Furthermore, public spaces in Tbilisi are designed from top-down, making the rules of interaction and engagement regulated. The local population rarely gets a say in what a space should look like. Some of the stakeholders and civil society actors can raise awareness. or introduce issues for public discussion, yet the success rate of bringing actual change remains rather low. However, the study of reasons for such a disconnect between the stakeholders and citizens goes beyond the scope of this report.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to examine public spaces in Tbilisi and the extent to which they serve as a meeting point for people from various backgrounds. Based on expert interviews and focus groups, it studies best practices at inclusionary local public spaces as well as some of the exclusionary spaces. By identifying these practices of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces, this report contributes to the study of the role of spatial aspects of deradicalisation and offers policy recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

This report follows the definition of public space as a sphere of encounter where people from different backgrounds engage with each other and on a regular basis reproduce their belonging. These daily encounters between various groups could give rise to potential social tensions and conflicts, making the study of urban design and the specificities of public places even more relevant if one wants to examine trends of radicalisation and prospects of deradicalisation. More specifically, it explores to what extent the disappearance of non-commercial spaces, so-called *gentrification*, securitisation, and privatisation, contribute to radicalisation in urban spaces. Explicitly, this report is focused on the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, and its public spaces as places of encounter and engagement as well as practices of exclusion and inclusion.

For the in-depth analysis of public spaces in Tbilisi, Deda Ena Park or Mother Tongue Park in English, was selected. This particular public space has historic significance for local residents as it became one of the major protest locations in the 1970's. Protestors managed to force the Soviet government to withdraw proposed amendments to the constitution and maintain Georgian as an official language in the republic. The park is located in the touristy part of the city, making it an attractive location for city visitors. Furthermore, it borders one of the largest flea markets in the city and hosts the first-ever skate park. Hence, this public space is used by a crowd that is very diverse, coming from different social and economic backgrounds.

This report is organised in three parts. In the first section it overviews and analyses general characteristics of public spaces in Tbilisi. Then it engages in detailed analysis of the selected case-studies of best practices and contested spaces, and lastly, before drawing conclusions, offers detailed analysis of D.Rad LAB I and LAB II.

The main findings of this report indicate that in general public places in Tbilisi are not exclusive or contested. Most of the time there are no cases of particular social or economic groups feeling excluded or discriminated against. However, when contestation does take place, it is usually in the public spaces that are of political importance. Furthermore, the findings of this report also illustrate that public spaces in Tbilisi remain designed from top-down, with the local population getting little say in the process. What is also important is that the legacy of neoliberal reforms from the 2000s, that gave a quick economic boost to the country, continue to have a considerable impact on public spaces and the overall urban development of Tbilisi.

2. Description of methods

The start of the research carried out within the framework of this report was identifying and assessing public spaces in Tbilisi and their inclusiveness and availability. In order to do this, the methodological framework included several stages.

In the early stage, desk research was carried out that helped to identify relevant actors and stakeholders in Tbilisi, as well as potential respondents to be contacted for interviews. During the second stage of the research five experts working in the field of urban studies, architecture, human geography, and sociology were interviewed (see appendix 1). These expert interviews were crucial for assessing the conditions of public spaces in Tbilisi, the existing challenges as well as specific spots in the city that could be used as cases for the in-depth analysis.

During the third stage of the research, Deda Ena Park, located in the historic district of the city, was identified as the subject for the in-depth analysis. The case-study process included two interactive focus groups (D.Rad LABs) on this specific public space. Participants of D.Rad LAB I were 4 experts that were either involved in the development of Tbilisi's urban masterplan or had been working in this field. As for the second focus group, 8 participants were recruited from the youths who use Deda Ena park as the place of encounter, spending time with friends or relaxing. The majority of the participants were students at the state university, who while not from that part of the city use this space to meet. The interactive workshop also included one young person who is from the neighborhood where the park is located and is actively using this public space for spending free time.

Expert interviews were conducted both in person and via Zoom. With the consent of interviewees, interviews were recorded and transcribed in accordance with the GIP's research ethics requirements. Similarly, with the consent of the participants of the D.Rad LAB I and II, workshops were recorded on the audio device, and later transcribed. In the following stage of the research, thematic analysis was applied to the transcriptions. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants were kept during all the steps of the research process as well as while referring to any of the respondents throughout the report. D.Rad LABs are summarised in this report and serve as a bases for analysis and policy recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

3. Description of spatial characteristics and city context

Tbilisi, while located in the South-East part of Georgia, is geographically at the center of the whole of the Caucasus (Figure 1). Due to its location, it has always been a center of cultural, political, and social attraction for the region. The city was founded on the place of a settlement in the 5th century C.E., and has served as the capital of the Georgian kingdom. Due to its importance, Tbilisi was also the epicenter of the political and nationalist movements of all three republics of the South Caucasus. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation – an Armenian nationalist and socialist party that was

represented in the government of the first republic of Armenia in 1918-1920 - was founded in Tbilisi.

The city was also a place where Armenia and Azerbaijan declared their independence in 1918. The rich history of this city, at the crossroad between the Asian and European civilisations, is reflected in its architecture, which is a mix of medieval, neoclassical, Beaux Arts, Art Nouveau, Stalinist, and Modern Structures.

The Georgian population has been declining for the last two decades. According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, over the last two decades the population has fallen from 4,9 million to 3,688 million people (Geostat.ge). This decline is mostly caused by economic hardship and the subsequent migration of Georgians abroad. However, in contrast to the declining population of the country, the number of people living in Tbilisi has been steadily increasing. The population of the metropolitan area of Tbilisi in 2015 was 1,115 million, but by 2022 this number reached 1,201,8 million (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2022). These numbers also illustrate that about 1/3 of Georgia's population lives in the capital. However, some experts believe, this number might be considerably higher because of the under- registration as residents of people living in the capital, or due to the recent influx of Russian migrants.

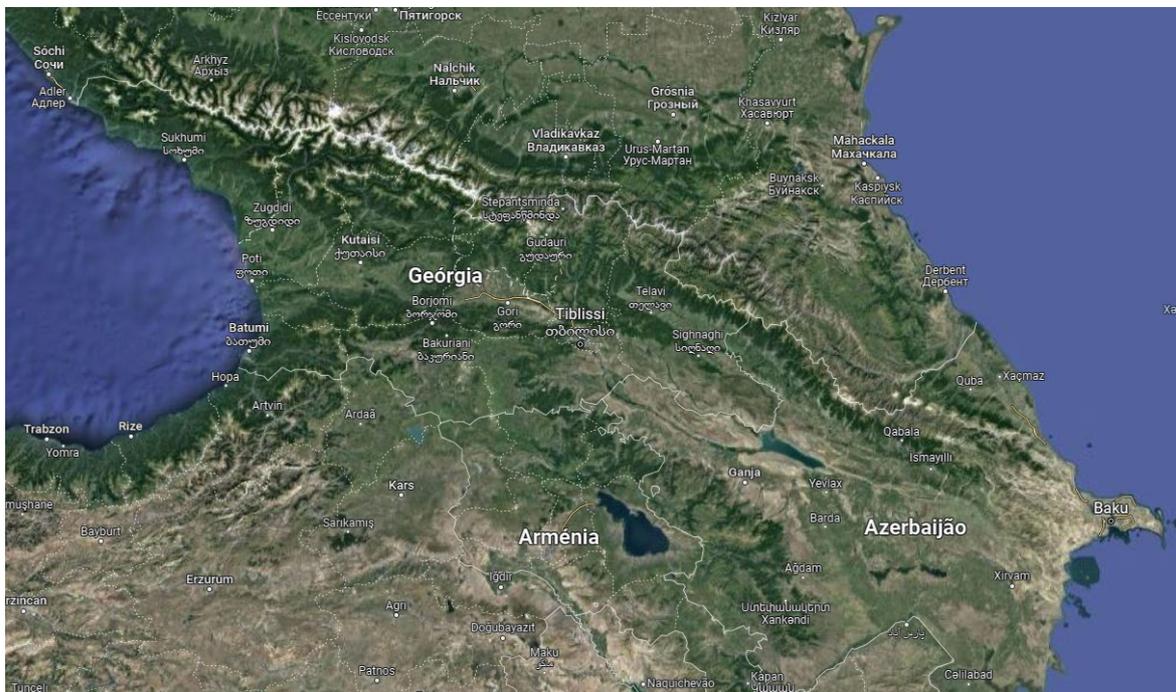


Figure 1: Map of the Caucasus. Source: Google Maps. Available at: <https://www.google.com/maps>

According to various sources, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022 about 100,000 Russian citizens have moved to Georgia (Civil.ge 2022). There are several reasons why Georgia became one of the top destinations for Russians (visa policy, geographical proximity, government type, etc.). However, what needs to be noted is that the absolute majority of those who entered the country have settled in the capital and other major cities. Such a sudden increase in demand for real estate has led to a dramatic surge in prices on the market (Gabritchidze 2022). As Russian migrants can afford to pay considerably higher rent prices, these developments have led to the risk of

further gentrification of Tbilisi and a driving out of the local population from the city center. However, at the time of writing, the war is still ongoing and it is still not yet clear what will be the full implications of the Russian influx into Tbilisi.

Yet, the major characteristic of modern Tbilisi is its chaotic urbanisation and the transformation of the city into “concrete jungles”. This is mostly the result of rapid modernisation and right-wing economic reforms.

3.1. Neoliberalism and its implications for Tbilisi

One of the major characteristics of the modern Georgian state has been the drastic neoliberal reform agenda that was actively pushed by the government after the Rose Revolution in 2003. While these reforms have helped Georgia to drive economic growth and rapidly modernise the state, they have also caused increasing income inequality and poverty remains high (Gugushvili 2017). The legacy of the aggressive neoliberal reform agenda is also felt in the chaotic urban development of major cities in the country. Old tram and trolleybus systems were demolished, never to be restored, while roads were built for private cars (Amiranashvili 2020, p. 3). There was also a clear lack of consistent urban policy, along with a top-down strategy of decision making that continues to have negative impact on Tbilisi’s sustainable development even to this day (Salukvadze & Golubchikov 2016). Consequently, more and more green public spaces have started disappearing. It should also be noted that Tbilisi was not performing that well in terms of green spaces even during the state-planned Soviet economy, either. In the 1980s green space per person in Tbilisi was 13 m² which was below the 15m² set as the standard by the USSR. Yet, by 2020, this number was down to just 3 m² (Zakashvili 2020). What also needs to be noted is that the city desperately lacks green spaces. On average, per person, green space is now barely 5 square meters in the city, which is considerably lower than the European average. This is mostly the effect of privatisation and the influence of big business interests over the politics of the city administration.

During the interviews it was also noted that in the case of Tbilisi, due to its mountainous geography, most of the green public spaces are not easily accessible. Thus, what needs to be taken into consideration during the analysis is the portion of public places in the areas of the city that are developed as a living space. Which brings the ration of green spaces per person even lower.

The legacy of these neoliberal reforms of the early 2000s, which is still felt in contemporary Tbilisi, has led to the low performance of the city in various rankings. In 2018, Tbilisi ranked 130th among 164 cities in 80 countries in terms of urban planning (Forbes Georgia 2018). Deregulation has also affected the quality of the air in the city. According to the World Health Organisation the level of air pollution in Tbilisi is alarming (Georgian Journal 2018).

In terms of distribution of the public spaces across the city, according to the experts interviewed for the report, it is largely unequal. The focus of the city administration is mostly on the central parts of Tbilisi, where parks and other public places have gone through massive renovation and reconstruction in the last couple of years.

One of the main avenues of the city, Chavchavadze Avenue, acquired the function not only of transit but of leisure because of such renovation in 2019. In other words, pedestrians have appeared who use the public place of the avenue not only for getting from one destination to another but for simple walking and leisure. However, renovated and modernised parks and streets are mostly concentrated in the central and touristic parts of the city, while the outskirts are less developed.

One important aspect of how privatisation and commercialisation of public spaces have affected Tbilisi's transformation of its so-called *Italian courtyards* that are typical in the old neighborhoods. The origin of this type of courtyard date back to the 19th century, when parts of Georgia were annexed by the Russian Empire. In a way they represent a duality of those times – with modern facades of neo-classicist and cosmopolitan buildings, but behind which one could find courtyards as spaces for the informal and traditional Georgian lifestyle. Yet, the name *Italian* for such courtyards appeared much later, during the Soviet times, when Italian movies were widely distributed in the USSR and to many the Mediterranean lifestyle were a reminder of the courtyards in Tbilisi (Caucasian House n.d.).

According to one of the experts interviewed for this report, these courtyards used to be semi- public spaces, providing a meeting and engagement point for locals of various ethnic and religious background. These multiethnic yards represented a “human” side of “others” who were not of the same ethnic or religious group, thus reducing the potential for conflicts between groups (Researcher). However, according to the same expert, due to the ongoing developments and renovations in these historic parts of the city and the subsequent gentrification, the local population is being driven out of these neighborhoods and is being replaced by better-off off segments of Tbilisi residents or by tourists. These developments are also leading to the dissolution of traditional Tbilisi courtyard communities and is increasing the potential for social tensions.

3.2. The role of the city administration and other stakeholders

During the interviews with experts in the field, it became apparent that the link between the city administration and the population is almost non-existent, due to the Soviet legacy, low trust in the government, the under-developed culture of accountability, and economic hardship Urban planning happens top-down, while the residents of the city get almost no say. This has become apparent since the consolidation and modernisation of the state in mid-2000s and urban development moved to the phase called by Salukvadze and Golubchikov (2016) *politically-determined urbanism*.

The consolidation of state power from the mid-2000s placed national government as the major player in urban development. The ‘Rose Government’ initiated many development projects, most of which took place in the central city, dramatically changing it. The adoption of the new General Plan for Tbilisi in 2009 brought some regulatory frames, but the government still commonly violates them. This *politically-determined urbanism* phase has not finished, due to the arrival of ‘The Georgian Dream’ coalition in power in 2012.

As one of the experts explained when interviewed, this could be down to distrust of the

city officials. Citizens do not believe that their concerns or opinions will be shared and considered by the city administration. The urban planning of the city administration is mostly driven by large business interests and political considerations. This type of relationship between the city administration and citizens/local population is also reflected in the way public places are being designed and planned. According to some experts, most of the parks, regardless of location, the characteristics of the neighborhood or the needs of local population, follow a uniform design. This uniformity in the design of public places reflects lack of bottom-up approach from the city administration's side.

In terms of other stakeholders, these are usually non-governmental organisations and activists that are involved in civil activism trying to save green public spaces in Tbilisi. For example, chemi kalaki mk'lavs (My City Is Killing Me), an NGO which is very active on social media, tries to promote ecologically clean and environment-friendly Tbilisi by bringing to light existing problems (Figure 2).

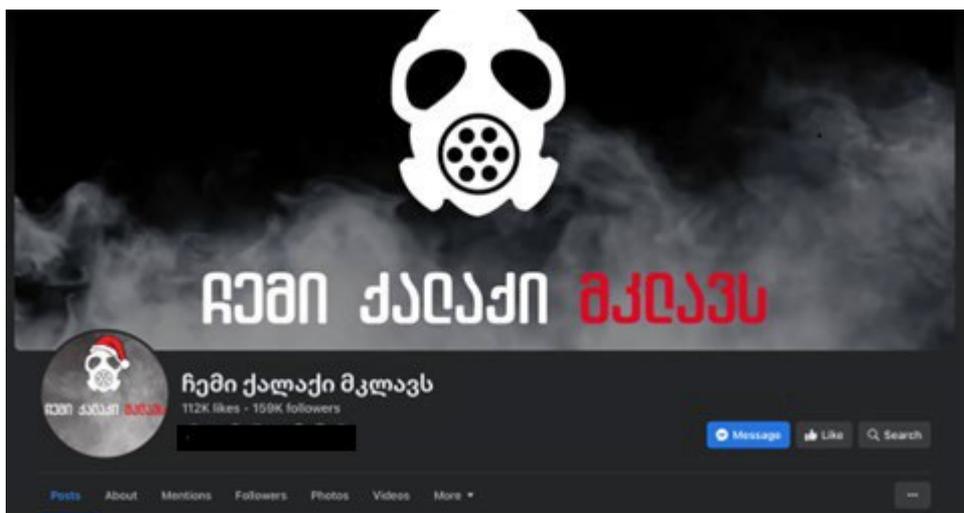


Figure 2: Screenshot of the Facebook Page of chemi kalaki mk'lavs. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064883552283>

Such activism, especially in terms of demanding more green spaces and “reclaiming” public spaces from cars and privatisation. is popular among the country's left-leaning youth. These movements are in opposition to the established neoliberal approach of the city administration. A very good example of this is the transformation of the young activists' movement Mtsvaneebi (Greens) into a political movement with the ambition of becoming the first feminist and queer political party in Georgia (Kokaia 2022). Yet, despite such instances and success stories, the influence of such stakeholders on policy making still remains very low.

3.3. Description of three best practice areas

Within the framework of this report, experts were asked to name at least three public spaces which could be regarded as best practices and that contribute/facilitate social cohesion and inclusivity. Considering the specificities of Tbilisi and that, overall, the state's role in social programs in Georgia remains rather minimal, spaces that were

named by the experts were mostly parks. The three parks are: *Mzirui*, *Deda Ena*, and the former *Hippodrome*. What needs to be noted is that all three of them are located in the central districts of Tbilisi.

Mzirui and Deda Ena Park have recently been renovated and have seen a sudden influx of tourists, skaters, youths, and a wide range of various groups. It has become one of the most popular meeting points, especially during the summer. The former Hippodrome is a slightly different case. It was privatised for many years and was a dysfunctional green space in the middle of Saburatalo (a district in Tbilisi). The city administration reclaimed the territory a couple of years ago and promised to build a central park. However, at the time of writing not much progress has been achieved in this regard. Despite the conditions of the territory, it is a very popular place for the dwellers of this neighborhood. It brings together and can accommodate at the same time people practicing rugby, Indian students playing cricket, and dog owners training their dogs. This is a unique place in Tbilisi, which, unlike the other two public places mentioned, is more spontaneous or chaotic. Unlike Mzirui and Deda Ena Park, where spaces are planned by the renovators, the former Hippodrome does not follow the strict division of space between the people using it. In other words, while the other two are public places where the interaction and engagement between the groups is “regulated” by the design of the planners, in the former these rules of interactions and divisions have emerged naturally. It also needs to be noted that Mzirui and Hippodrome are more inclusive and almost all age or social groups can find something to do, while Deda Ena park (also a case study for the in- depth analysis of this report) is more youth and tourist-oriented, making it difficult for the older generation to feel included.

3.4. Description of three contested areas

None of the respondents interviewed for the report were able to name any particular space as a source of repeated tension. Tbilisi does not have neighborhoods that are settled by religious or ethnic minorities which could lead to the formation of isolated neighborhoods or cities within the cities. Yet, as one expert has mentioned, the space in front of the parliament is the most contested public space in Tbilisi.

It is a space where all the political and social protests take place. It has been a contested space between conservative fundamentalists and LGBTQI+ activists since the first clash between them in May 2012. Every year, since 2012, around May 17th (international day against homophobia) Orthodox Christian fundamentalists take over the space around the parliament in order not to allow LGBTQI+ activists and supporters to use it. In 2021 human rights activists had to cancel their planned march, while the radicals took over the space and violently attacked journalists on the premises (Civil.ge 2021). What is especially relevant for this report is that they have illegally erected a metal cross in front of the parliament. Interestingly, the cross still stands and city administration has not yet taken it down or shown any intention of planning to do it, despite its being illegally erected.

The space in front of the parliament remains a highly contested place between different groups. Especially political actors. Recently, this public place has become highly

securitised. In addition to the existing metal barriers in front of the main gate, surveillance cameras have been added to the façade of the building. Nonetheless, it needs to be noted that some experts seem sceptical of the securitisation of the space (Candidate for mayor). According to one of them, what makes a public place secure is people and accessibility rather than surveillance cameras and security guards.

Another area that was mentioned by the respondents as an example of contested public space is the neighborhood around Metro station Marjanishvili. This is a historic district of the city that has undergone several stages of renovation during the last two decades. These makeovers have contributed to the commercialisation and gentrification of this space. However, most of the small business owners are of the Middle Eastern or Arabic origin, making this district of Tbilisi a corner stone for Georgian ultra nationalist and alt-right discourses. One of the leading Georgian extreme right movements, the Georgian March, was actually established after several groups organised a xenophobic march in this neighborhood.

4. In-depth analysis of the case study

For the purpose of in-depth analysis this report is focused on Deda Ena Park. The name of the park in Georgia means “mother tongue” and it has significant importance for the modern Georgian national identity discourse. Its name and importance for the Georgian nation originates in the 1970s. More specifically, although the park itself was built soon after the end of World War II, it became Deda Ena park after 1978’s events.

In 1978 the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR was considering a new draft constitution that would have amended the existing status of the Georgian language and it would have lost the status of the sole state language. In response, hundreds of thousands of Georgians marched to protest. The Soviet government had to back down and withdraw the proposal. Later, the park where the demonstrations started became known as Deda Ena (mother tongue) park and a monument to the Georgian language was erected. As the Soviet Union was nearing its end in 1990, in commemoration of that day, 14th of April was declared the day of mother tongue.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia was plunged into a series of military conflicts and economic hardships that have also affected to the quality and safety of public places in Tbilisi. It was only in the late 2010’s, when Deda Ena Park underwent renovation that it became an attractive public space for youth. Renovation was completed in 2021 and since then it has become one of the key attractions for tourists and youth in Tbilisi. One of the reasons this space has become a “must-see” and a hangout spot for tourists is the large flea market, the so-called “Dry Bridge Market”, on a site on the border of the park. But for youth, as it was mentioned in the D.Rad LAB I, this park was the first of this kind – containing a public place with a special space designed for skateboarders.

4.1. D.Rad LAB I

During the D.Rad LAB I experts have noted that Deda Ena Park is the space of

encounter mostly for young people (under 25) and tourists, while other segments of the population have not that many things to do in that space. And this stands in contrast to Mzirui or the former Hippodrome, which are more inclusive and family friendly. Although it was not intentionally designed so, it lacks something that would attract people of older generations.

One of the participants has remarked that the possible reason why this particular space is less attractive for family picnics is the pollution of the city's main river, Mtkvari, that runs along the park. Hence, Tbilisi dwellers prefer to take their children to Lisi Lake, where the water is cleaner and it is possible to play in it. This lack of a nature component seriously affects the segment of the population that is using this space.

Deda Ena Park is also an interesting space in the city as it is a place of social protests and movements. Experts have recalled protests related to environmental issues, or celebration of the end of Covid-19-related-curfew in this park, yet none of them were able to recall any political protest in this space. This gives it a unique characteristic - it becomes a territory where young people can organise on issues which they feel major political parties either completely ignore or do not pay enough attention. Experts during the focus group also mentioned that this public space is heavily regulated i.e. after renovation spaces for skaters, dog-owners etc. are clearly separated and it lacks natural components.

Another aspect which also came out during the focus group was the role of the neighborhood and its impact on who-and-for-what-purposes this public space acts as a space of encounter. To be more exact, because it is in a historical neighborhood and houses around the park are usually hotels or rented out to tourists, the local population does not use this space so often. Furthermore, the location and the overall transportation system of the city make it less attractive option for people from other neighborhoods to drive to Deda Ena Park specifically for this purpose. Yet, this only applies to families and those who would like to take their children somewhere for a walk/picnic, while Deda Ena Park still remains a space of inclusion and encounter among young people from different neighborhoods and with a diverse social or economic background.

Changes in who uses this public space and how is also the result of the renovation that the park went through in the 2010s. The renovation of the space alienated the local population. It lost the role of a "community" park and became an attraction for youth and tourists. Hence, the old users of Deda Ena Park have fled the space, leading to the replacement of the local culture and lifestyle.

One of the participants argued that one of the main functions of a public space is the opportunity it provides to observe others and to be able to engage in this process easily. However, Deda Ena Park lacks this characteristic. Because of the way it has been designed, it is difficult to observe other people's activities and behavior.

None of the participants were able to recall any instances of contestation or tensions between the users of this space. Although this space is being used by tourists, skateboarders and other groups simultaneously, it seems that they are able to coexist peacefully and do not enter in conflict over the space.

Last, but not least, this park, due to the way it is constructed and renovated, gives less space for unplanned, spontaneous activities. Thus, it is not an attractive option for older people who would want to go there just to sit on the bench or read a book. It is a space of encounter for young people who go there for planned-in-advance activities.

4.2. D.Rad LAB II

Participants of the D.Rad LAB II were young people, who use this specific public space - Deda Ena Park - as a space of encounter. During the focus group it became clear that none of the participants has ever felt that this public space, or indeed the city in general, was not inclusive towards them or that they somehow felt excluded. However, when this question was more generalised to overall public places in Tbilisi, participants mentioned that the city is not inclusive when it comes to people with various disabilities and almost on a daily basis, they have experienced how those people are excluded from public places, be it either parks, public transport or buildings. One of the participants recalled a personal experience of a blind person getting verbally attacked in the street for bumping into a passerby.

Another exclusionary practice mentioned by one of the participants of the D.Rad LAB II was towards Indian students, who use the public places in the neighborhood - more specifically, small football fields that are usually for public use in a specific district. Foreign, especially Indian, students are either prevented or frowned upon when they use pitches for playing cricket. Usually, a pitch becomes split in two, with Indians in one corner of the playing field and Georgians in the other. None of the participants were able to mention/recall other types of discrimination and exclusion from public spaces, whether gender, social or economic background.

Another important aspect that came from the focus group was that Deda Ena Park is used as a space of encounter because of a lack, or low quality, of public places near the homes of the participants. This low quality is related to non-existent infrastructure (a skate park was mentioned as an example). One participant has also mentioned that the park in her neighborhood was rather small and overcrowded with dog owners or families with kids, thus they would choose Mziuri or Deda Ena Park as a hangout spot for their circle of friends.

In terms of existing challenges and what could be improved in this public place, the focus group participants once again talked about infrastructure and issues related to that. For example, it was mentioned that there is no facility to leave your bicycle and even the nonexistence of public toilet was pointed out as a challenge by one of the participants. D.Rad LAB II has also confirmed what was mentioned during the LAB I, that the approach of the city administration towards urban planning and designing is very much top-down, with the local population and users of the space getting almost no say.

5. Analysis and policy recommendations

D.Rad LABs and expert interviews have revealed that one of the key challenges in terms

of inclusivity and accessibility of public places in Tbilisi relates to transportation. Hence one of the key recommendations to the relevant stakeholders would be the creation of a transport network that would connect public spaces across the city and make them more accessible to those who use these places for encounter and engagement. Another important aspect, especially in regard to Deda Ena Park, is that it is exclusively for young people, making it less inclusive for the population of the neighborhood. Hence, to facilitate the inclusiveness of this specific public space it needs to offer more diverse infrastructure. Finally, in terms of securitisation, the space at Deda Ena Park is usually crowded in the evenings, which does more to ensure its safety than surveillance cameras. Thus, the main focus of relevant stakeholders should be on how to increase the engagement of the public with this space in order to make it safer.

However, it needs to be noted that the link between the city administration and the local population is not strong. Because urban planning and design happens top-down, the ways and rules of engagement about public places have become heavily regulated and relate to how the city administration designs the space. Therefore, relevant stakeholders need to include the local population more in order to increase the sense among them of belonging and caring about city spaces they use.

6. Conclusion

Expert interviews, along with D.Rad LAB I and II, have demonstrated that public places in Tbilisi are not necessarily contested or exclusive, especially among different ethnic or social groups. Contestation usually occurs around spaces of political importance/symbols of power. One of the reasons for this is that as an economically less well-off county, Georgia is not really an attractive spot for migrants. Hence, Tbilisi does not really have neighborhoods which might be contested between its residents.

In recent years early signs of potential future social tensions have been appearing in the neighborhood around Marjanisvili Metro station. A series of renovations and privatisation led to the gentrification of this historic district. Consequently, immigrants, mostly from the Middle East, started opening small business there. Their increasing presence, driving out the local population, is creating social tension that is being actively exploited by ultra conservatives and alt-right movements. Even more interesting in this regard is the recent influx of Russian migrants due to the war in Ukraine. Tens of thousands of Russian citizens with relatively high income have moved to Tbilisi for an uncertain period. Considering that 20% of Georgia's territory is occupied by Russia, encountering Russians in public spaces has a potential for becoming a source of tension and radicalisation. This is especially so, given Georgian's ontological insecurity amidst the war in Ukraine and with Russian forces being stationed about 40 minutes' drive from Tbilisi.

Public spaces in Tbilisi remain designed from the top-down, and as a result the rules of interaction and engagement are regulated. The local population rarely gets a say in what the space should look like. Some of the stakeholders and civil society actors are able to raise awareness or introduce issues for public discussion, yet the success rate of bringing actual change is rather low. However, some scholars also argue that the

Western type of participatory planning might not be that advisable for Georgia considering its fragile representative democracy and the fact that it still lacks a fully functional separation of power (Assche et al. 2010). The reasons for such disconnect between society and stakeholders stem from structural reasons within Georgian politics and go beyond the scope of this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1. The list of experts interviewed for the report

No.	Area of expertise	Area of employment	Interview conducted
Professor 1	Human Geography	Tbilisi State University	21/01/2023
Professor 2	Urbanism studies	Ilia State University	23/01/2023
Architect	Urban design	A private company	01/02/2023
Candidate for Tbilisi mayoral elections 2021	Architecture/Urban planning	Political party	07/04/2023
Researcher	Public spaces	Ilia State University	21/06/2023

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