PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC COUNCILS IN KAZAKHSTAN: CULTURAL EXPLANATION

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ABSTRACT

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Performance of Public Councils in Kazakhstan: Cultural Explanation

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This dissertation focuses on public councils (PC) of Kazakhstan, which are consultative-advisory bodies established in 2016 with the purpose to offer recommendations to state bodies. The research aims to answer the following research questions: how does social capital impact the effectiveness of regional PCs? How do grid and group environments impact PC effectiveness? What are the hindering and enabling factors of PC effectiveness? To that purpose, it applies two theoretical models: social capital thesis (Putnam, 1993) and grid-group cultural theory (Douglas, 1982).

The research applies qualitative research methods, such as an explanatory multiple case study, focusing on four regional PCs in Kazakhstan: North-Kazakhstan, Qaragandy, Qyzylorda, and Atyrau oblasts (regions). To collect data, it employs a non-participant observation in PC meetings and the daily working routines of PCs. Moreover, the study applies in-depth semi-structured interviews (N=60) with PC members (who represent civil service, NGOs, trade unions, media, political parties, voluntary and social organizations) and external civil society representatives in each region. The full interview transcripts with PC members and civil society representatives are coded and analyzed using the NVIVO software program. Additionally, the study surveyed the PC members to measure social capital in four PCs. Furthermore, the research uses administrative documents such as annual reports by the Ministry of Information and Social Development of Kazakhstan on PC performance and socio-economic data retrieved from the National Bureau of Statistics of Kazakhstan.

The findings suggest that social trust and cooperation norms positively impact PC effectiveness, however, networking does not. In addition, the group environment also explains why effective PCs outperform their counterparts, whereas the grid environment does not explain the PCs' effectiveness. Finally, institutional factors such as the role of akimat (local executive body) and maslikhat (local representative body), PC Chairman, and available resources also contribute to PC effectiveness.

These findings have both academic and practical relevance and implications. It fills the literature gap in studying the impact of social capital on institutional effectiveness in Central Asia and offers practical recommendations to policy-makers. It will be interesting for scholars who study institutions and political culture, and civil society engagement in local governance in the Central Asian context.

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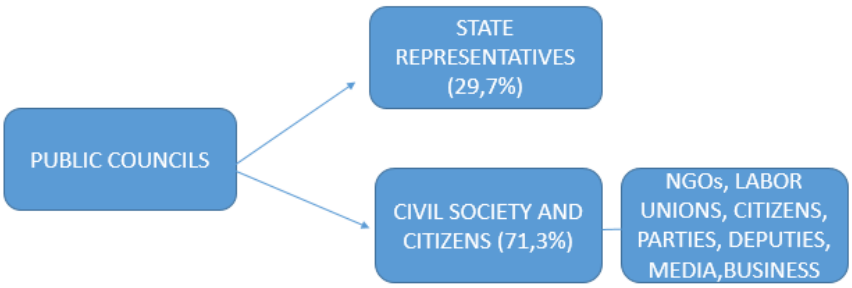
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

COVID-19	«Corona Virus Disease» — «disease caused by coronavirus»
ACSA RK	Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs
USAID	The US Agency for International Development
ACA	Anti-corruption Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan
ASPR	Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan
HCS	Housing and communal services
MISD	Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan
RLA	Regulatory legal act
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
GONGO	Government-organized non-government organizations
PC	Public Council
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RK	Republic of Kazakhstan
WVS	World Values Survey 2017-2022 (7^{th} wave)
EBRD	Eurasian Bank of Reconstruction and Development
Akimat	Local executive body – headed by the mayor (akim) of the region (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Local Government and Local Self-Government, dated 23 January 2001)
Akim	The head of the local executive body
Maslikhat	Local representative body in Kazakhstan
Majilis	The lower chamber of the Parliament of Kazakhstan
Senate	The upper chamber of the Parliament of Kazakhstan
Oblast	An administrative division, similar to a province

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Due to abundant hydrocarbon resources, Kazakhstan moved from a lower-middle-income to an upper-middle-income country in two decades (O'Connor et al., 2019). However, due to growing inequality (GINI index=27.8[1] according to World Bank, 2018), corruption, and declining socio-economic conditions over the last few decades in Kazakhstan, there have been a growing number of protests which culminated in the January 2022 events[2]. To improve the dialogue between the state and citizens, President Tokayev introduced the "hearing state" concept (Tokayev's State of the Nation Address, September 2, 2019) and strengthened the role of public councils (PCs) in Kazakhstan. Public councils are state-mandated consultative-advisory bodies, which consist of civil society (2/3) and state representatives (1/3) (Figure 1). PCs aim to express civil society's view on socially significant problems (Law on Public Councils, 2016).

Figure 1. The composition of public councils in 2021



Source: National report by MISD (2021).

To improve dialogue, the state also established the National Council of Public Trust in 2019 (renamed to Qurultay in 2022) and introduced PCs in national companies in 2021. More recently,

[1] GINI index is derived from the World Bank (2018), it measures the distribution of income among individuals and ranges from 0 "perfect equality" to 100 "perfect inequality".

[2] Peaceful demonstrations against the rise of gas prices continued with violent attacks against state buildings, and authorities in the major cities of Kazakhstan.

the Chairman of Majilis Mr. Koshanov declared that the state would establish a public chamber under the Majilis and some regional PC members would be a part of the public chamber:

> "Today, unfortunately, there is an opinion that legislators have become detached from the people, that is, citizens talk about one thing, and the law addresses other problems. Therefore, the main goal of the public chamber is to consider the most relevant, resonant bills "before the first reading", taking into account the opinions of experts and civil society. As mentioned by President Tokayev, socially significant discussions should not take place in social media and the squares, but in the Parliament." (Koshanov, June 22, 2022, para. 3)

This shows that the state expresses the willingness to discuss drafts of national laws by involving the regional PC members. In other words, the state wishes to employ regional PCs' potential and wants to reflect civil society's views in national laws.

1.1. Problem statement

After Kazakhstan gained its independence in 1991, President Nazarbayev introduced a new institution of akims – heads of local executive bodies. Akims are political civil servants representing the national government and the President, who are either appointed by higher-level akims or by the President[3]. Thus, both administrative and political civil servants are accountable to those who hire and fire them (Bhuiyan, 2010). There is no consultation with the general public in the process of appointing the akim (ibid). Similarly, Makhmutova (2004) argues that transparency and openness are not typical for akims and that the akims do not consider people's opinions and expectations in decision-making. Therefore, akims are not accountable to general citizens.

Another institution designed to express citizens' views is the maslikhat which is elected by citizens. According to the Constitution of Kazakhstan (1995), citizens can express their views and indirectly participate in local decision-making through the maslikhat. *De jure* akimats are accountable to maslikhats for their performance at all levels (article 27, Law on Local Government

[3] Only akims of rural areas are elected by citizens.

and Self-government, 2001). The maslikhat has the power to pass a vote of no confidence in the akim. However, no such cases have been recorded so far (Bhuiyan, 2010; Junussova, 2018). Despite legal power, maslikhats are subordinated to akimats (Makhmutova, 2004, as cited in Bhuiyan, 2010). A more recent study by Junussova (2018) shows that maslikhat deputies are informally dependent on the akimat, thus maslikhats fail to serve as an institution where deputies can deliver citizens' preferences.

Given the context, where general citizens can neither appoint akims nor hold them accountable (Makhmutova, 2001, as cited in Bhuiyan, 2010), and where citizens cannot impact local decision-making through maslikhats, there was a need to establish public councils in 2016. PCs were introduced to allow citizens and civil society to reflect on strategic programs, local budgets, urban planning, and oversee the performance of state bodies. The 2019 Presidential election-related protests stressed the salience of PCs as an institution for dialogue between citizens and state bodies.

However, academic literature raised concerns about PC performance due to a lack of transparency, autonomy, and duplication of maslikhat functions (Knox and Janenova, 2018; Shaukenova, 2017; Muratova and Onuchko, 2021; Gabdualiev, 2017). Consequently, the government introduced amendments to the law on PCs in 2021, which made three significant changes: PCs are to be created in national companies, PCs have the right to hear the reports of law enforcement bodies and PC members can participate in corruption commissions, and public procurement tender commissions (MISD, 2021).

PCs operate at all levels of public administration[4] (except the third tier, which represents the villages and rural areas) and in national companies. The state keeps stressing the role of councils involving citizens and civil society in decision-making. In his speech to the nation of Kazakhstan, President Tokayev stated:

[4] They exist under each central executive body, except the Constitutional Court, the Ministry of Defense, the Administration of the President, the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan, the Constitutional Council, the National Bank, and others (for more details, see the Law on Public Councils, 2016).

> "We must awaken civic activity in the country and launch a conscious and constructive partnership between the state and society. This is why we are developing public councils at central and local executive state bodies, and in the quasi-public sector. I have repeatedly criticized their activities, but generally, they have a great institutional potential that we need to employ fully. This year we plan to renew their working plans and composition." (Tokayev,16 March 2022)

This implies that under Tokayev's regime the PC institution is likely to keep functioning with further improvements. However, except for state-supported research on PCs (Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies, National Report by MISD, Kazakh Institute of Public Development), there is no alternative literature explicitly focusing on *regional* PCs' performance. PCs, as consultative-advisory bodies, have the potential to serve as a dialogue between the state and society. However, PCs face challenges and constraints on the ground irrespective of the 2021 amendments to the law.

1.2. How is the researcher going to address the problem?

Previous studies explain PC performance through endogenous factors such as resources and the role of local state bodies (Shaukenova, 2017; Knox and Janenova, 2018). This study aims to add to our understanding of PC performance by adopting a cultural perspective on it. According to Putnam's social capital thesis, the stock of social capital (trust, networking, and norms) impacts institutional performance. By applying the social capital thesis, the research mainly focuses on cultural variables apart from the institutional function of the PC. In addition to the social capital thesis, the study applies grid-group cultural theory[5] (Douglas, 1982; Wildavsky, 1987) to complement the components of social capital. Specifically, the group complements the networking component of social capital, and the grid complements the generalized social trust[6]. As a result,

[5] grid means externally imposed prescriptions and regulations on individuals, group stands for individual's incorporation into a bounded unit (Douglas, 1982).

[6] Douglas (1982) states that there is a high insulation (separation) in a high-grid context. In that sense, higher insulation within the group means that there is a low generalized social trust.

this study defines culture as social capital (Putnam, 1993) and grid-group environments in four PCs (Douglas, 1982; Wildavsky, 1987).

Concerning methodology, the study applies an explanatory multiple-case study analyzing the performance of four regional PCs (Qaragandy, Atyrau, North-Kazakhstan, and Qyzylorda oblasts) (Figure 2). The rationale for the selection of these cases is based on their geographic location: Qaragandy represents Central Kazakhstan, Atyrau is located in the Western part, Qyzylorda lies in the South, and North-Kazakhstan represents the Northern part of the country. The study collected data through semi-structured interviews with PC members and civil society representatives, as well as surveys with PC members. Moreover, the author carried out non-participant observations of PC meetings with state bodies, PCs' working routines, and archival work on produced outputs and successful/unsuccessful cases.

Figure 2. Four public councils on the map of Kazakhstan

Source: https://stock.adobe.com/kz/

1.3. Relevance. Why is the subject of this research important?

In general, much of the research on the social capital thesis was carried out in the Western context, particularly in the U.S. This topic is also increasingly relevant to Kazakhstan because the

development agencies (e.g. World Bank) have introduced development projects across post-Soviet space to boost social capital, which in turn is believed to improve local governance (Babajanian, 2008). Thus, by applying the social capital thesis, this research assesses the explanatory power of social capital thesis in the context of Kazakhstan. Social capital has various components such as cooperation norms, networks, and social trust (Putnam, 1993). The present study seeks to explain how these various components contribute to PC effectiveness and, if found unable to explain the effectiveness of four PCs, explanations shall be provided as to why the social capital thesis cannot explain the performance in the local context.

This research seeks to contribute to the study of institutional performance by integrating cultural perspectives, which the researcher tries to explain with Research question 1 and Research question 2. Additionally, the study aims to offer practical recommendations to policy-makers which will be addressed through Research question 3:

- How does social capital impact PC effectiveness? (RQ 1)
- How do grid-group environments impact PC effectiveness? (RQ 2)
- What are the enabling and hindering factors of PC effectiveness? (RQ 3).

By analyzing how PCs operate, the study seeks to identify practical barriers and challenges facing the four regional councils and offers recommendations to policymakers to improve the potential of PCs further.

Since the existing literature pays insufficient attention to citizen engagement and civil society involvement in local governance in Central Asia, this research tries to fill this gap by:

- Exploring the question of the impact of social capital on PCs in the four regions of Kazakhstan;
- Identifying the grid-group environments and their impact on PC effectiveness in the four units of analysis;

- Shedding light on the effectiveness of PCs in terms of interaction with the state, quasi-state, private, and civil society;
- Revealing factors that enable and hinder PC effectiveness through non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews;
- Offering a new PC effectiveness evaluation approach to policymakers.

1.4. Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of seven chapters, excluding the reference and annexes. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 sheds light on the main features of consultative-advisory bodies in democratic and authoritarian contexts, and public councils in Kazakhstan. This chapter uses a comparative lens to examine successful and unsuccessful consultative bodies in Russia and Kazakhstan. Furthermore, this chapter engages with scholarly debates on the conceptualization of social capital and its link to institutional performance. Moreover, the chapter discusses the grid-group cultural theory and its operationalization in empirical studies. Chapter 3 illustrates the socio-political context and local public administrations where PCs operate. According to the Law on Public Councils (2016), PCs have legal autonomy; however, in reality, they are embedded in the local public administration system. Therefore, this chapter shows the main features of the akimat and maslikhat and their interaction with regional PCs. Chapter 4 describes the research methodology, including the data collection and measurement of the dependent variable (effectiveness of PCs) and independent variables (social capital, grid-group environments). Chapter 5 demonstrates findings on the dependent variables of the study. The study measures PC effectiveness via a number of outputs and activities (objective indicators), and subjective data collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations of PCs' daily working routines, meetings with state bodies, and commission works. Chapter 6 reviews the findings from surveys conducted with 80 PC members and from the subjective data collected

through non-participant observations and interviews. The chapter also examines the impact of cultural and institutional factors on PC effectiveness and addresses the study's research questions. The final section of this chapter shows which factors can hinder or enable PC effectiveness. Chapter 7 synthesizes the findings, illustrates the theoretical contribution, offers practical recommendations to policy-makers, and highlights future research perspectives. Table 1 provides a summary table of how the rest of the chapters are organized.

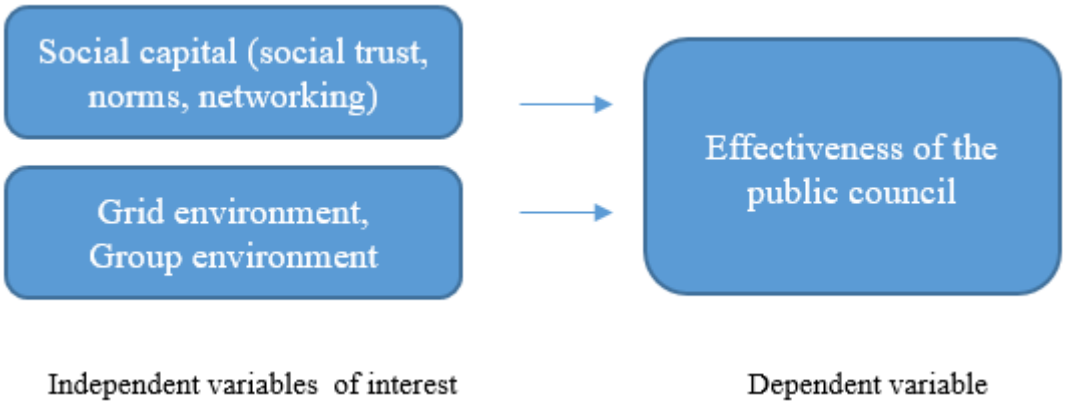
Table 1. Summary of chapters

Chapter	**Summary**
Chapter I. Introduction	This chapter illustrates the problem statement and how the researcher sets about addressing the problem, and why the topic is important.
Chapter II. Literature review	Chapter 2 reviews the literature on advisory bodies, social capital and grid-group cultural theory. The theoretical framework is described at the end of the chapter.
Chapter III. Political context and local public administration of Kazakhstan	Chapter 3 provides insights into political context and local public administration units (e.g. maslikhat and akimat) in which regional public councils are embedded.
Chapter IV. Methodology	It demonstrates the research design and data collection. Moreover, it illustrates the measurement of PC effectiveness and the rationale behind that approach.
Chapter V. The performance of public councils	This chapter shows the findings on four PCs' effectiveness based on objective data (the number of activities and outputs) and subjective data (non-participant observations, interviews).
Chapter VI. The impact of cultural and institutional factors on PC effectiveness	In this chapter the impact of social capital, grid-group environments on PC effectiveness are illustrated. Moreover, it demonstrates the impact of institutional factors (resources, the role of state bodies) on the dependent variable.
Chapter VII. Conclusion and practical implications	It concludes the research, shows theoretical contribution and offers practical recommendations.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the impact of political culture (social capital, grid-group dimensions of cultural theory) on PC effectiveness (Figure 3). To that purpose, it reviews the literature on consultative-advisory bodies in general and public councils in Kazakhstan. Secondly, the chapter reviews the significant scholarly debates on conceptualizing social capital and existing empirical studies that link social capital to institutional performance. Thirdly, the chapter discusses the grid-group cultural theory, which complements the social capital thesis. Lastly, it presents the theoretical framework of the study.

Figure 3. Impact of social capital and grid-group environments on PC effectiveness.



Source: The author.

2.1. Consultative-advisory bodies and public councils of Kazakhstan

Engaging various stakeholders in policy-making enhances transparency, leads to better decision-making, improves social stability and regime legitimacy, and enriches various opinions/expertise in the policy process (Pateman, 1970). In this regard, advisory bodies offer policy-relevant knowledge and advice. By referring to those recommendations, policy-makers improve the legitimacy of decision-making (Bressers et al., 2018; OECD, 2017b).

In Western settings, advisory bodies are very diverse in structure and operation, but they all share a similar aim to study problems and then offer recommendations to policy-makers. In most

cases, their decisions are non-binding and policy-makers have the discretion to accept/reject councils' recommendations. The government institutionalizes the advisory bodies as councils, public research institutes, think tanks, and ad hoc commissions (Bressers et al., 2018). They are neither fully inside the government nor fully outside it (Pollitt and Talbot, 2003; Halligan, 1995). Many policy advisory bodies are financed and staffed by the government; this is why there is a trade-off between advisory bodies' autonomy and state control (Bressers et al., 2018). The distinguishing feature of Western advisory bodies is that apart from civil servants and the general public, they predominantly include experts and representatives of academia. Advisory bodies may act as "legitimizers," i.e. they are used by the government to justify predetermined decisions by appealing to some scientific data; or they act as "knowledge brokers" providing policy alternatives to policy-makers; or they may act as "policy entrepreneurs" by providing new policy solutions to challenging issues (Averchenkova et al., 2021).

Authoritarian countries adopt participatory mechanisms and advisory councils for various reasons. Due to accelerated technological change and globalization, authoritarian countries are not immune to the influence of democracy. Authoritarian countries show changes and import democratic mechanisms to survive (Morgenbesser, 2020; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2007) or use them to strengthen the authoritarian regime (Jayasura and Rodan, 2007). Another reason is New Public Management (NPM)-style reforms; this is particularly true in China and Russia, where democratic institutions are legitimized by referring to global economic competitiveness. Authoritarian countries introduce participatory mechanisms to increase the effectiveness of governance (Owen and Bindman, 2019; Owen, 2017; Owen, 2020), which serves to downsize the ineffective Soviet-era bureaucracy in Russia (Owen and Bindman, 2019).

Authoritarian regimes introduce consultative-advisory bodies to consult professionals, experts, and citizens in policy advice. However, such bodies' operations and membership are controlled by the government and may exclude critical advice in some instances (Li and Dunlop, 2019). In China, advisory committees are presumably comprised of experts and professionals rather than general

citizens. Thus, in the literature, they are called Expert Advisory Committees (Li, 2021; Zheng et al., 2010). The Chinese government prefers "scientific-based decision-making" rather than "democratic decision-making." In Malaysia and Singapore, they are called deliberation councils and include private sector representatives as well as civil society and citizens. The key to the deliberation process in Southeast Asian advisory councils is the unanimity principle and the principle of non-attribution[7] (Campos and Gonzales, 1999; Lim, 1998).

Advisory councils are common in Latin American countries. Similar to Western councils, for example, Brazil's councils focus on narrow policy domains. One such council is the National Food and Nutrition Security Council, which consists of civil society (2/3) and the government (1/3). According to scholars, its effectiveness depends on autonomous civil society and the "high negotiation ability of the council, to generate proposals that are likely to be approved and implemented" (Leão and Maluf, 2012, p.38). Brazil is also famous for participatory health councils (since the 1980s) at all levels of government, which are based on the parity principle (the number of civil society representatives is equal to that of service providers and the government) (Barnes and Coelho, 2009). Some scholars found them effective due to their deliberation capacity (Bortoli and Kovaleski, 2020), while others see limited effectiveness by arguing that city councils were co-opted by management in a push to a "municipalization" (Lyra, 2007 as cited in Bortoli and Kavaleski, 2020).

In 2005, Russia also introduced a consultative-advisory body, called public chambers. Soon after, other post-Soviet states (Kazakhstan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan) introduced similar consultative-advisory bodies. Russian public chambers aim to monitor the operations of executive agencies and engage in consultation regarding the legislative processes (Evans, 2010). As a continuation of public chambers at sub-national levels, PCs came into existence from 2005 to 2014

[7] It ensures that policy recommendations are not attributed to any group or groups.

in the Russian Federation (Orlova and Sokolova, 2017). PCs and chambers focus on a variety of social issues in Russia (road construction, health, prison conditions, and so on).

Russian consultative bodies (public chambers, public councils) intervene on behalf of citizens in particular issues. While some issues are off-limits for open discussion, others encourage the public chamber to be more outspoken, as a result, the effectiveness of this institution depends on the nature of social issues (Evans, 2010). Genuine debate is only permitted on issues that do not challenge Putin's 'power vertical' in Russia (Owen and Bindman, 2019). Moreover, its performance depends on the commission chairman's resources, interests, energy, and organizational skills (Richter, 2009a). Additionally, consultative bodies' performance depends on the informal authority and on how chamber members interact with each other, local officials, and social organizations (Richter, 2009b).

Several consultative advisory bodies in Russia have illustrated progress in fulfilling their functions. The Public Monitoring Commission (Russia) for prisons which acts as a consultative body, oversees the conditions in places of detention and makes recommendations for improvement to the state authorities. Despite the less committed colleagues who are loyal to the state, the social activist members of public monitoring commissions could contribute to small social changes (Owen, 2015). Similarly, the Public Chamber in Novgorod enhanced public participation, and local authorities "took their inputs very seriously" (Petro, 2001, p.234), while the Murmansk regional Public Chamber resolved many minor social problems (Stuvøy, 2014). In a similar vein, Owen and Bindman (2019) suggest that despite the controlling role of the state, the participatory mechanisms offered an opportunity for civic groups to influence policy outcomes (e.g., improvement of prison conditions, conservation of city architecture, liberalization of NGO law in 2009). In some circumstances, their inputs can shape the direction of reforms (ibid). However, small in scope, PCs in Russia provide opportunities for critical voices to be heard by state bodies (McCarthy et al., 2020).

In contrast to these examples of the effectiveness of PCs on a small scale, other scholars emphasize the limited effectiveness of PCs in Russia. In the case of Saint-Petersburg's PCs, Sungurov et al. (2020) conclude that they have a weak impact on policy-making processes due to the lack of feedback from authorities, deficiency in resources, lack of openness of PCs, and inability to influence the political agenda. Other limitations relate to ineffective and non-transparent selection processes (Richter, 2009a) and; biased accountability, for they are accountable neither to the general citizens nor to the selected body. The most powerful and experienced civil society representatives are not included in the public chamber (Belokurova, 2010). In addition, public chambers aim to recruit members who are peaceful and loyal to the state (Owen, 2015).

In Kazakhstan, public councils (PC) came into existence in 2016 as independent and autonomous bodies (Law on Public Councils, 2016). A PC is a consultative-advisory body with non-binding decisions; they exist under central and regional executive bodies[8], except the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan, and others (Law on Public Councils, 2016). PCs consist of civil servants (1/3) and representatives of civil society as well as the general public (2/3). The state or local government determines the former, the latter is based on membership proposals from civil society organizations and citizens on a competitive basis. There is no allocated budget for PCs, and PC members work voluntarily.

PCs are mainly occupied with reviewing legal acts and meetings with state/quasi-state bodies. For example, Shaukenova (2017) claims that in 2016 there were 270 meetings with state bodies, 587 expertise (review of legal acts), 145 hearings of reports by local authorities, and 352 public hearings at regional levels of Kazakhstan. Likewise, a more recent report by the Ministry of Information and Social Development of Kazakhstan (2021) shows that regional PCs are mainly

[8] Since 2021, PCs also exist in national companies and other quasi-state bodies.

involved in two activities: PC meetings with state/quasi-state bodies (N=1886) and review of draft legal acts (3467).

There are no agreed evaluation criteria for PC performance in Kazakhstan. MISD is a national coordinating body of PC operation at all levels of public administration. In this regard, MISD releases annual reports on PC performance. It is mainly focused on the main activities (e.g. PC meetings, public monitoring, review of draft legal acts) (MISD, 2021; Shaukenova, 2017) and small successful cases achieved by regional PCs (MISD, 2021; Kazakh Institute of Public Development, 2020).

There are regional councils that show successful cases. MISD (2021) claims that the PC of Almaty city shows the best performance across all regional councils. The Almaty city council offers effective recommendations; its work is well-coordinated and transparent (ibid). As an example of success, MISD (2021, p. 217) illustrates the Karasu lake improvement project by the Almaty city council, which remains under the control of the council to date. Likewise, Knox and Janenova (2018) show a successful case by the Astana city council on public transportation. Astana city council conducted a public hearing and monitored public transportation in 2017; based on collected data; the council developed recommendations for the city akimat. As a result, some passenger transport and road regulations have been amended referring to council recommendations (ibid). Another council highlighted by the literature (European Union, 2016) is the PC of the East-Kazakhstan region. It came into existence even before the Law on Public Councils (2016), and it is distinguished by involving experts from various fields.

PCs face numerous challenges in their operation. They are overloaded with multiple tasks and given little guidance on priorities (Knox and Janenova, 2018). The law on PCs (2016) does not provide specific guidance on how duties should be performed (OECD, 2017a). Likewise, the national report by MISD (2021) highlights the PC secretariat's excessive workload in administrative work.

Furthermore, some state bodies violate the regulation on the requirement for representatives from civil society (2/3) and state bodies (1/3) (Shaukenova, 2017). Shaukenova (2017) reveals the unequal workload across regional PCs. For instance, the council of Almaty city with a population of 2 million consists of 25 members (in 2017), in contrast to West-Kazakhstan oblast with a population of 641 000, which has 41 council members. Moreover, there are gender and age biases, with the majority of members being males (78%) and aged above 45 (78.2%) (Shaukenova, 2017). Finally, the law prohibits acting civil servants to be selected as Chairmen of the PC. However, there are violations, and some civil servants at regional levels act as Chairmen of PCs (Muratova and Onuchko, 2021).

To sum up, in Western societies, advisory bodies are institutionalized, state-sponsored, and controlled by the state to a certain degree. They focus on narrow policy domains (e.g., water, climate, health) and may operate permanently and ad hoc. In authoritarian countries, consultative-advisory bodies vary across regions, China has expert advisory bodies that are under strict state control, and preference is on scientific decision-making. Kazakhstan and Russia's consultative-advisory bodies face similar challenges in their operation: limited resources (technical, human, financial), a non-transparent selection process, and some members are loyal to the state. A common feature of all consultative-advisory bodies is that they are neither outside nor inside the government.

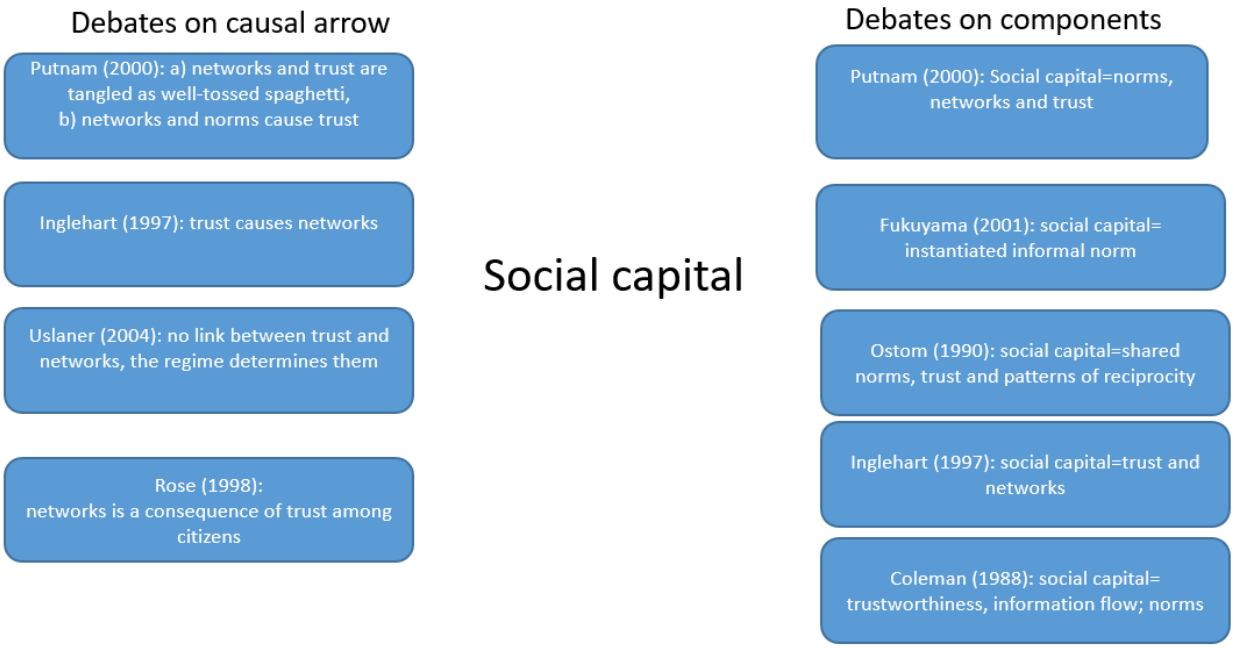
2.2. Social capital and institutions

This section reviews the Western literature on social capital and its link to institutions, and social capital literature on post-communist societies. The term social capital relates to individuals' connectedness and sociability in a community or broader society, which has been earlier theorized in various forms by Karl Marx, Adam Smith, and Emile Durkheim (Quibria, 2003; Tzanakis, 2013). However, starting with Bourdieu's (1986), Coleman's (1988), and Putnam's (1993) seminal works social capital has attracted more academic interest as well as various new conceptualizations. Ever

since scholars have been debating *the concept of social capital*, its *components*, and *the causal relations* between its components.

Coleman and Bourdieu treat social capital as an individual asset, however, they disagree on the definition of social capital. Coleman's (1988) proposal relies on: "obligations and expectations which depend on trustworthiness; information-flow capability of the social structure, and norms accompanied by sanctions" (Coleman, 1988., p.39). These three components are better maintained in societies with closed social structures, i.e. where individuals are in close relations with each other and obligations are better fulfilled. In contrast, Bourdieu (1986, p. 241) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition." In other words, Bourdieu stresses the individual's membership in groups, whereas for Coleman three components – trustworthiness, information-flow, and norms – are the hallmarks of social capital.

Diagram 1. Debate on the components of social capital and causal arrow



Source: Developed by the author based on existing literature.

Unlike Bourdieu and Coleman's individualistic perspective, other scholars treat social capital as an aggregate and collective asset (Putnam 1993; Fukuyama, 2001; Inglehart, 1997; Woolcock

and Narayan, 2000). For Putnam (1993) social capital consists of social trust, norms, and networks. Similarly, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) refer to social capital as a network and norms that enable individuals to act collectively. In contrast, Fukuyama (2001) treats social capital as an instantiated informal norm (at lower levels, it starts from the reciprocity between friends, at higher levels, it comes in the form of doctrines such as Confucianism and Christianity). In his view, although networks, norms and civil society are associated with social capital, they (networks, trust, and civil society) do not constitute social capital but arise from social capital.

Scholars not only disagree on what constitutes social capital but also debate the *causal arrow* between components of social capital (Putnam, 2000; Uslaner and Conley, 2003; Rose, 1998; Inglehart, 1997) (Diagram 1). Putnam (2000, p.14) seems to think that social trust arises from networks and norms by arguing that "social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p.14). Overall, he is not confident enough about the causal relationship between social capital components because Putnam (2000, p.137) notes that the causal arrow between them (networks, norms and social trust) is "as tangled as well-tossed spaghetti", and only well-designed experimental studies would be able to set them apart and identify the causal arrow between them.

Rose (1998) criticizes Putnam's conceptualization of social capital as it is hard to determine cause-and-effect links between norms, networks, and trust. Instead, Rose (1998) employs Inglehart's definition of social capital arguing that Inglehart avoids conflating various components in a causal chain. Inglehart (1997, p. 188) defines social capital as: "a culture of trust and tolerance in which extensive networks of voluntary associations emerge." Like Inglehart, Rose (1998) views networks as a consequence of trust among citizens rather than the other way around.

Although scholars disagree on the conceptualization of social capital and the causal relationship between social capital components, further studies stress the impact of *social capital on institutions*. Before showing the impact of social capital on institutions (Putnam, 1993), it is crucial to highlight the role of culture on economic development and political progress (Almond and Verba, 1963;

Banfield, 1958; Weber, 1930; Putnam, 1993; Harrison and Huntington, 2000; Pasquino and Pelizzo, 2022; Pelizzo, 2021), and on institutions (North, 1971; Putnam, 1993; Stiglitz, 2000; Granovetter, 1973).

To incorporate human behavior (culture) into an institutional explanation, game theory economists attempted to unpack the cooperation between humans under the following concepts: the tragedy of the commons, public goods, the logic of collective action, and the prisoner's dilemma. However, the critical question remains why uncooperative behavior fails to emerge as often as game theory predicts (Putnam, 1993). In this regard, Elinor Ostrom (1990) argues that some local institutions could overcome the dilemmas of common-pool resources. As a result, Putnam (1993) notes that in some societies, collective action is easy to achieve without third parties due to the high level of social trust among citizens. In societies with low social trust, the transaction cost[9] is higher, and cooperation between citizens is hampered (ibid).

Furthering economists' and institutional theorists' argument that culture matters for institutions, Putnam (1993) claims that social capital significantly impacts institutions. In his words, "the performance of government and other social institutions is powerfully influenced by citizen engagement in community affairs, or by social capital" (Putnam, 1993, p. 163). In *Making Democracy Work* Putnam (1993) links the vibrancy of associational life with democracy and good governance in Italy. His *social capital thesis* implies that dense networks of civic engagement generate trust, reciprocity, and cooperation, which in turn impacts democracy and local governments (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001). Likewise, Elinor Ostrom also highlights the impact of social capital on local institutions in *Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective actions*. Accordingly, social capital helps individuals to build institutional arrangements to resolve the common pool resources problems (Ostrom, 1990, p.184).

[9] Transaction costs are costs related to the obtaining of information, monitoring and the enforcement of contractual performance. Some scholars use it to analyze organizations' activities, including organizational culture (Robins, 1987).

Putnam's *social capital thesis* received immense scholarly attention and empirical tests in Western contexts (Rice, 2001; Knack and Keefer, 1997; Whiteley, 2000). A group of scholars researched the link between social capital and ***public service performance*** (Andrews, 2012; Andrews and Brewer, 2013; Andrews and Brewer, 2010; Andrews, 2007). The majority of research tends to support Putnam's claim that social capital has a positive impact on performance. Andrews' (2007) research shows that trust, community organizational life, and political engagement (social capital) improve public service delivery in England. Likewise, the research by Andrews and Brewer (2010) examines the link between public service performance and social capital (social trust, volunteerism, and community organizational life). It concludes that social capital has a positive impact on the public service quality of US state governments. Meanwhile, another research by Andrews (2012) shows that not all components of the social capital impact public service. Specifically, some dimensions of social capital (social trust, community organizational life, volunteerism) have an impact, and other components do not (informal sociability).

Another group of scholars (Coffé and Geys, 2005; Rice, 2001; Cusack, 1999) examines the impact of social capital on ***local government performance.*** Coffé and Geys (2005) refer to a Flemish municipality's fiscal balance as a measure of performance, measuring social capital via associational life (voluntary organizations), electoral turnout, and crime rates. They conclude that social capital has a strong positive effect on objective performance in Flemish municipalities. In contrast, Rice (2001) and Cusack (1999) employ subjective indicators of local government performance, and both argue that social capital positively impacts government performance.

A large body of scholarship examines social capital and ***economic development*** in Western contexts (Knack and Keefer, 1997; Whiteley, 2000; Zak and Knack, 2001; Działek, 2014; Raiser et al., 2002). Knack and Keefer (1997) examine the relationship between social capital (trust, civic norms, associational groups) and economic performance in 29 countries (the sample does not include any post-communist country). Interestingly, Knack and Keefer (1997) find that civic

cooperation and trust impact GDP growth and investment rates, but membership in groups (trade unions, professional associations) impacts neither GDP growth nor investment rates. Similarly, Whiteley (2000) finds a powerfully positive impact of social capital on economic growth in 34 nation-states from 1970-1992. In contrast, Li (2004) concludes that social capital cannot replace other forms of capital and cannot create unrealistic outcomes beyond the materialistic limits of that social context.

Although there are plenty of empirical findings that support the social capital thesis (Rice, 2001; Coffé and Geys, 2005; Whiteley, 2000), some scholars are skeptical about the causal mechanism of social capital (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001; DeFillips, 2001; Levi, 1996; Brehm and Rahn, 1997). According to them, external factors that may impact the level of associational life in society are neglected, and the social capital thesis fails to address the problems of inequality within civil society (Giffen et al., 2005). Furthermore, it ignores power relations between state institutions and civil society, which are crucial in intergroup relations (DeFillips, 2001). Likewise, Levi (1996) criticizes the social capital thesis as overly society-centered which neglects other factors, particularly those in government. Evers (2010) raises the concern that there might be a reverse causality between democratic institutions and social capital.

The body of literature (Howard, 2004; Sapsford and Abbot, 2006; Uslaner, 2004*) on post-communist social capital* primarily debates the reasons for low networking and low social trust in former Soviet countries (Diagram 2). For Howard (2004) the reason for not joining voluntary organizations (networking) in post-communist societies relates to the Soviet legacy. According to him, firstly, previously Soviet citizens were forced to participate in formal organizations and now mistrust them. Secondly, due to the pervasive economic deficit, Soviet citizens sought connections to find goods and services. This generated informal networks, which have persisted to date, and there is no need to be involved in intermediate organizations (Howard, 2004).

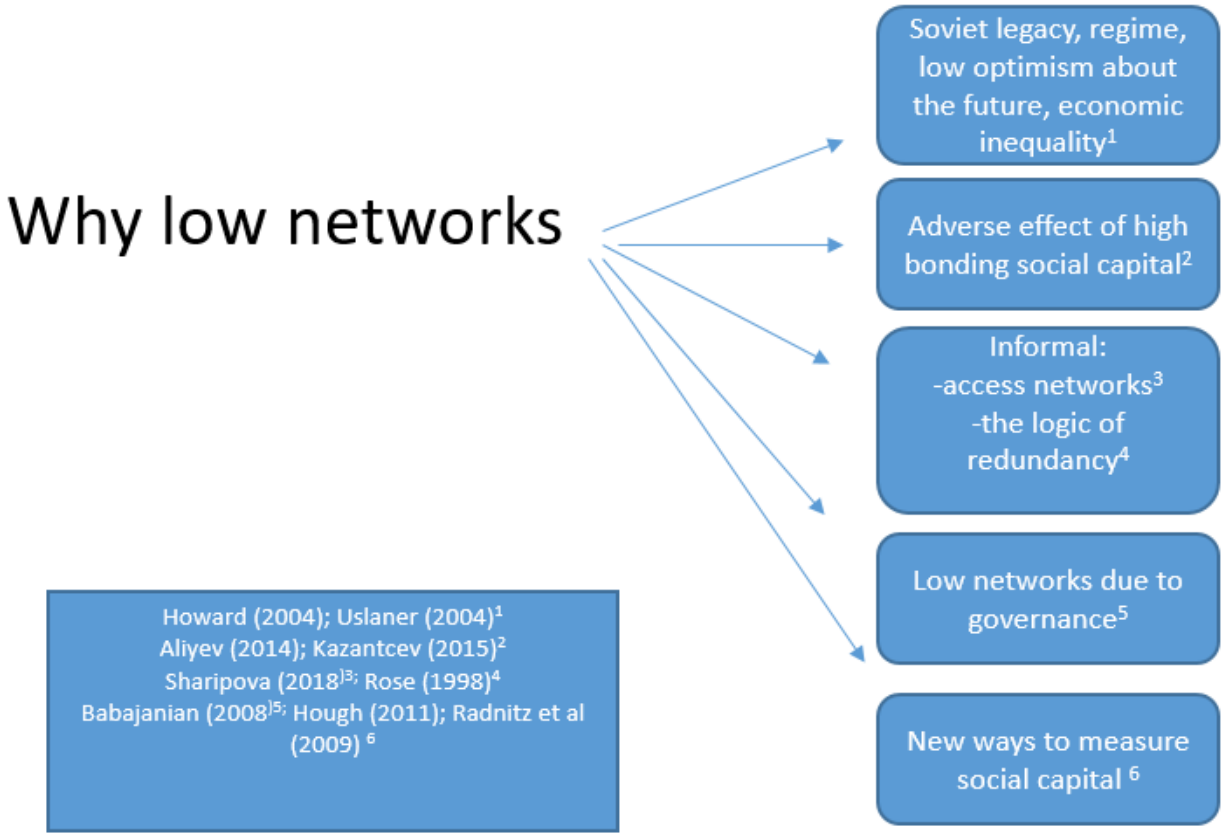
In contrast, other scholars (Uslaner, 2004; Radnitz et al., 2009) stress the regime differences between the West and East, which are responsible for variation in social capital. People who live

in oppression tend to distrust their fellow citizens (Uslaner, 2004). The regime is the key factor explaining why post-communist citizens participate less in voluntary organizations; thus, there is no link between trust and civic engagement in post-communist societies (Uslaner, 2004). Likewise, Radnitz et al.'s (2009, p. 707) research in Central Asia demonstrates that three components (trust, networking, and norms) diverge in local settings, and it appears that trust and norms are higher in repressive environments, while networking is higher in liberal political contexts.

Another reason for low networks in post-communist environments may relate to high bonding social capital[10] (Aliyev, 2014; Kazantsev, 2015; Kudebayeva et al., 2022; Sapsford and Abbot, 2006). For instance, in the South Caucasus, kinship-based networks serve as social support and facilitate intra-network relationships while making participation in civil society organizations unattractive (Aliyev, 2014). Strong ties[11] based on kinship with dense networks and strong ties among extended families nurture lower demand for extra associational life (ibid). Similarly, Sapsford and Abbot (2006) argue that in post-communist societies the highest amount of trust is placed in relatives and friends (particularized trust), less in people in general (generalized trust), and the least political trust in institutions.

[10] Bonding social capital refers to exclusive intragroup ties (e.g. church-based women's reading groups), whereas bridging social capital means inclusive intergroup connections (e.g. civil rights movement) (Putnam, 2000).
[11] Tie strength is measured through emotional intensity, amount of time, intimacy, and reciprocal services among individuals (Granovetter, 1973).

Diagram 2. Debates on the reasons for low networking in the post-communist societies



Source: Developed by the author based on the existing literature

Other scholars (Rose, 1998; Sharipova, 2018; Howard, 2004) link the strengths of *informal networks* in post-communist societies to the incapability of state institutions to deliver quality services/goods. Social capital is employed to get things done as formal organizations fail to provide proper means (Rose, 1998). The logic of redundancy by Rose (1998) implies that individuals maintain as many informal networks as possible so that if one network fails the other can be used to get things done. Underprovision and unequal access to quality welfare services and goods strengthened the channels of informal institutions during the Soviet period, and informal institutions were employed in the search for basic consumer goods due to deficits (Rose, 1998). In contrast, in the post-independence period, people resorted to "access networks" to gain quality health services, public housing, and jobs (Sharipova, 2018).

However, another group of scholars (Babajanian, 2008; Hough, 2011) argues that post-Soviet countries have a good stock of social capital. Babajanian's (2008) research on community

participation in Armenia claims that limited participation was not due to the lack of social capital but broader structural factors (governance environment) that strongly impact community participation. Similar to Babajanian, Hough (2011) challenged the common assumption that there is low-level bridging social capital in Georgia and demonstrated this by measuring altruism and civic engagement through unconventional survey statements[12].

Furthering the study of social capital in post-communist contexts, some scholars even examined the link between *social capital and economic growth* (Działek, 2014; Raiser et al., 2002). Działek's (2014) study examines the relationship between Poland's economic development and social capital. It concludes that neither bridging nor bonding social capital impacts economic growth. In contrast, the research by Raiser et al. (2002) on Central/ Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (excluding Central Asia) explains the relationship between economic development and social capital. Their study finds that trust is not related to growth, but that participation in civic organizations positively impacts economic growth. Although there are studies that examine the impact of social capital on economic development in some post-communist countries, there is no study that tested the social capital thesis in the Central Asian context.

In sum, there are various conceptualizations of social capital (Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 2001; Inglehart, 1997; Newton, 1997) and various empirical findings on the link between social capital and institutional performance in the Western context (Knack and Keefer, 1997; Whiteley, 2000; Zak and Knack, 2001; Andrews, 2012; Andrews and Brewer, 2013; Andrews and Brewer, 2010). There are studies that examine the social capital in post-communist societies and Central Asia (Kazantsev, 2015; Radnitz et al, 2009; Kudebayeva et al., 2022; Sapsford and Abbot, 2006). However, there is a literature gap in testing the social capital thesis in the Central Asian context. Specifically, almost no study examines the impact of social capital on institutional performance. This study aims to address this deficiency in existing scholarship. In

[12] G-PAC civic engagement surveys were administered in Georgia.

doing so this study employs Putnam's conceptualization of social capital (networks, norms, trust), because Putnam's (1993) research specifically links social capital with the performance of local governments. In contrast, other scholars discuss the link between social capital and development in general (Fukuyama, 2001), and the link between social capital and economic development (Inglehart, 1991; Fukuyama, 1995), but do not focus on local governments and their performance.

2.3. Grid-group cultural theory

The merit of the social capital thesis is that it links culture with institutional performance. Meanwhile, social capital is society-centered (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001), it measures the stock of networking, norms, and trust at the societal level. Thus, the social capital thesis seems to neglect group interactions within organizations. To complement the social capital thesis, this study incorporates two other dimensions of culture offered by Douglas (1982): grid and group dimensions of cultural theory. The cultural theory allows us to focus on social relations within organizations.

Cultural theory scholars claim that "any social unit (organization, society, group, individuals) are under two societal controls: the grid (constraints by externally imposed regulations) and the group (incorporation into the bounded group)" (Caulkins, 1999, p. 110). *The grid* addresses the behavior/actions/thoughts: such as "How should I behave? Am I free to negotiate my behavior?" (Caulkins, 1999; Maleki and Hendriks, 2015). For instance, a person's behavior is controlled by rules based on gender, age, and other classifications. At night there is no discussion about who goes to bed; children go to bed first (regulation based on age) (Douglas, 1982).

A group represents the extent of incorporation of the individual into bounded units (Douglas, 1982). Douglas (1982, p. 202)[13] measures the group by the extent "to which an individual's life is

[13] Douglas (1982) built the grid-group theory based on Durkheim, who identified two dimensions: social regulations and social integration.

absorbed in and sustained by group membership". It addresses the identity/status of an individual "Do I belong to an existing social unit or do I shape my social network?" (Caulkins, 1999, p. 110). For instance, group commitment to Sunday church activities (low group) and group commitment to monasteries (high group) (Douglas, 1982). Both dimensions put specific social control on individuals and control on identity or status.

Based on these two dimensions (grid and group), cultural theory scholars (Douglas, 1982; Wildavsky, 1987; Schwartz and Thompson, 1990) developed four types of culture: fatalism (weak group-strong grid), hierarchy (strong group-strong grid); egalitarianism (strong group-weak grid), and individualism (weak group-weak grid)[14].

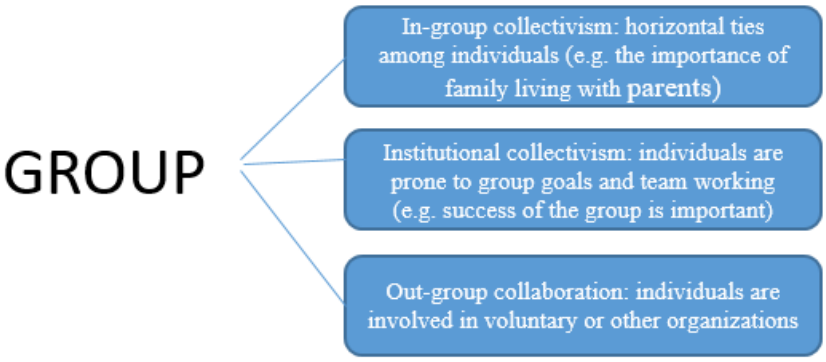
Cultural theory is applied in various fields such as climate change, environmental studies, music, political science, and others (Shepherd and Wicke, 1997; Steg and Sievers, 2000). This study reviews the literature that employs grid-group cultural theory in political science, public administration, and sociology (Thompson et al., 1990; Caulkins, 1999; Wildavsky and Dake, 1990; Hood, 1995) as it is close to the phenomenon under study. The main debate in cultural theory is centered on the measurement of grid-group dimensions of cultural theory because Douglas (1982, 1978) gives a broader interpretation without a detailed measurement of grid-group (Maleki and Hendriks, 2015).

The operationalization of grid and group in empirical studies suffers from arbitrariness and inconsistencies (Maleki and Hendriks, 2015). The group is variously conceptualized and operationalized (Dake, 1990; Dake 1991; Wildavsky and Dake, 1990; Jenkins-Smith and Smith, 1994). Firstly, there are empirical studies (Chai et al., 2009; Torsello, 2013) that operationalized the group in terms of ***horizontal dependence*** and interpersonal ties (e.g., the importance of family;

[14] Individuals with four cultural biases stress different values in policy issues. For example, in traffic policy, individualists' core values in traffic policy cover the following: self-determination, speed, privacy and accessibility. Individualists do not see any problem in increase of automobiles until they are faced with barriers in parking spaces and passable roads (Hendriks, 2019). In contrast, hierarchist puts the value on orderliness, synopsis and control (ibid). In contrast to previous biases, egalitarians stress the equality, sustainability and accessibility of public space to various stakeholders such as car drivers, pedestrians, public transport, cyclists and residents (ibid). Finally, fatalists prone to withdraw from discussions on traffic policy because, in their views, their opinions will not bring any change to the traffic policy.

the importance of friends; living with parents.). This measurement of the group is rooted in Douglas's (1982) interpretation of group according to "which an individual's life is absorbed in and sustained by group membership". Secondly, elaborating further on the measurement by House et al. (2004), Maleki and Hendriks (2015) propose a second interpretation of group, which states that individuals are prone to group goals and team working (***institutional collectivism***). This interpretation's rationale is rooted in Douglas's claim that individuals are committed to group goals (Douglas, 1989a; Douglas, 1986). Thirdly, Maleki and Hendriks (2015) argue that the group is also operationalized in terms of the involvement of individuals in voluntary and other out-group organizations, which they call ***out-group collaboration*** (the third interpretation of the group is used by Grendstad, 1999; Caulkins and Peters, 2002). Therefore, many scholars (Maleki and Hendriks, 2015; Maleki and De Jong, 2014) recognize three distinct interpretations of a group that are widely used in the existing literature: in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, and out-group collaborativeness (Diagram 3). However, some scholars conflate these three interpretations into one in their measurement of a group (e.g. Chai et al., 2009), which makes cross-cultural comparisons difficult.

Diagram 3. Various interpretations of the group



Source: Adapted from Maleki and Hendriks (2015).

This study measures the group in terms of in-group collectivism and institutional collectivism because PC's performance depends on whether PC members are committed to PC goals, contribute to group success, and whether there are strong horizontal ties among PC members. The third interpretation, i.e. out-group collaboration, is captured through social capital's networking

dimension, where PC members are asked about their membership in voluntary, community, and professional organizations (Diagram 3).

The existing literature measures the group in terms of in-group collectivism and institutional collectivism in the following way. In a high-group context:

1. Collective goals and the ***organization's survival*** have more importance than members' personal interests (Harris, 1995; Gross and Rayner, 1985).
2. Group strength is identified by the ***shared time for interaction*** between members of the organization; the more time spent together in group activities, the higher the group's strengths (Gross and Rayner, 1985).
3. A high-group environment draws clear ***group boundaries*** that show insiders and outsiders (Harris, 1994).

Similar to the group dimension, there are debates on the conceptualization of the grid dimension. The literature disagrees on whether the grid represents authority, rules, role distinctions, religiosity, or classifications (Chai et al., 2009; Gross & Rayner, 1985; Harris, 1995; Maleki and Hendriks, 2015; Caulkins, 1999). Since the grid has a very broad interpretation, it is difficult to operationalize it. According to the existing literature, this study identified two interpretations of the grid: 1) insulation within the group, role distinctions, and classifications; 2) authority, power, and control (Diagram 4).

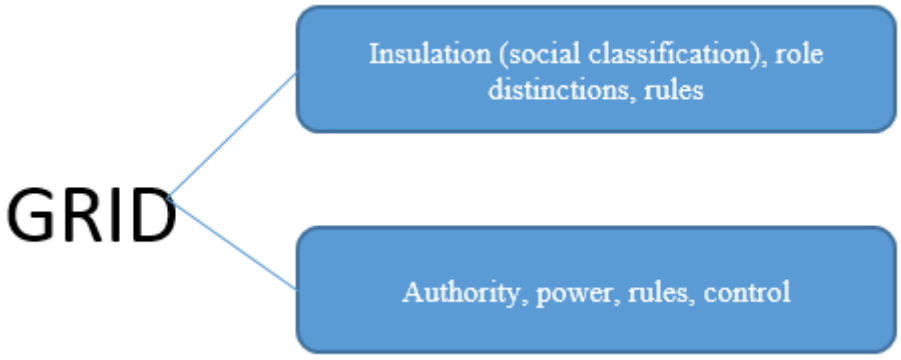
High and low grid context implies the following:

1. In a high-grid context, there is "an explicit set of institutionalized classifications that keep individuals apart and regulate their interaction" (Douglas, 1978. p.8)**.** ***Role distinctions and classifications are sharp*** (Boettger, 1997). In contrast, in a low-grid environment, individuals achieve roles by themselves and compete for status (Harris, 1995).

In a high-grid context, there is high ***insulation*** [15] ***(separation within the organization) of individuals***. "Moving away from such context lowers insulation and autonomy, control of self, and competition emerges" (Douglas, 1978, p.16). In the high-grid context, individuals are identified according to their roles in society and their status prescribed by external controls.

2. In a high-grid context, there is a higher ***authority*** (Boettger, 1997; Chai et al., 2009) and activities are authority-directed (Harris, 1995). Absolute freedom from ***control and rules*** mean a low-grid context (Melton, 2003). In a high-grid society, an individual's behavior is limited by externally imposed ***rules.***

Diagram 4. Varying interpretations of the grid



Source: Developed by the author based on the literature.

Further to debates on grid and group conceptualization, there is a disagreement on the link between four types of culture (egalitarianism, hierarchy, fatalism, and individualism) and macro-level political institutions (Thompson et al., 2018; Grendstad and Selle, 1995; Grendstad, 1999; Caulkins, 1999; Lockhart, 1999). All scholars agree that nation-states entail all four types of culture, although one culture may dominate (Caulkins, 1999). According to Grendstad (1999), West Germany (1981) is best defined as a mixture of individualism and egalitarianism; on the other hand, Great Britain, South Europe, and Ireland are interpreted as fatalist cultures. In contrast, Thompson et al. (2018) define Germany as hierarchical, whereas USA and Britain are defined as

[15] Douglas (2013) uses insulation interchangeably with social classifications

individualist and hierarchical cultures. Interestingly, Lockhart (1999) claims that when society is confronted by historical contingencies one of the four cultures shapes the social and political institutions. For example, even in the individualistic USA, the concerns for internal order arising from the Great Depression and external security due to WWII led to the greater influence of hierarchy (ibid). Another example by Thompson et al. (2018) relates to the Cultural Revolution in China where egalitarians achieved a ruling position and shaped the institutions by their beliefs and values.

There is limited research on the impact of grid-group on organizations' performance. What has been examined in the literature is whether the grid-group cultural theory is applicable to measure an organizational culture (Boettger,1997; Murer, 2002; Diel, 1998; Stansberry, 2001; Harris, 1995; Matheson, 2018). Boettger's study (1997) focuses on site-based management in schools, which affords more freedom in decision-making and puts fewer constraints on teachers. However, the various levels of grid and group in schools led to a varying implementation of site-based management. Purvis (1998) also employs Douglas's grid-group cultural theory to analyze the teacher's rewards. However, these studies are mainly concerned with finding out whether the grid-group can be applied to measure organizational culture and fail to discuss its impact on institutional performance.

Although the above studies do not examine the direct impact of grid-group environments on organizational performance, some studies demonstrate the link between grid and group environments to institutions such as tribes, communities, and families. Concerning group-environment, in *How institutions think* Douglas argues that due to group allegiance, the members of the Nuer family contributed to collective institutional goals (Douglas, 1986). The inheritance systems (four generations of founding ancestors) enable the men to maintain their group loyalty (ibid). Likewise, *In the active voice,* Douglas (2013) examines the economic backwardness of the Lele community compared to the progressive Bushong community, the two are separated by the Kasai river in Africa. Apart from environmental reasons that explain the weak economic

institutions in the Lele community, Douglas also stresses the cultural factors, one of them being the weak cooperation (i.e. low group) among community members in the Lele community which is demonstrated by the atmosphere of jealousy between older and younger men. This shows the importance of the group environment on the production of outputs, which is crucial for economic institutions. Regarding the grid environment and performance of institutions, Douglas claims (2013, p.212) that "due to continuous selectivity the low grid is intellectually vigorous, enquiring and demanding the highest standards. In any field of competence, low grid demands high levels of performance, in craftsmanship, style and syllogistic argument." Similarly, in her discussion of Bushong's economic progress, Douglas (2013) stresses the well-organized political system underpinned by a decentralized authority. The decentralized authority shows the low grid, which is defined by the delegation of power and responsibility to various community units in the Bushong tribe.

In sum, there are two main debates in cultural theory: firstly, conceptualization of the grid-group dimensions; secondly, the debate on what is the impact of the four types of culture on social and political institutions at the macro level. Additionally, although some studies examined the applicability of cultural theory at an organizational level, there is almost no research that examines the impact of grid-group on institutional performance in public administration, particularly in the Central Asian context. This study aims to fill this gap through an examination of the grid-group impact on PC performance in Kazakhstan. Finally, this study employs the first and second interpretations of the group (Diagram 3) because the third interpretation is captured through the networking dimension of social capital. Regarding the grid, since the literature is undetermined as to what dimension best captures the grid (Diagram 4), the study employs both interpretations of the grid i.e. authority and insulation.

2.4. Theoretical framework

Drawing on the existing literature, this study sets the following hypotheses:

H1. Higher social capital has a positive impact on public council effectiveness.

Lower social capital has a negative impact on public council effectiveness.

H1. a. Higher **social trust** has a positive impact on public council effectiveness.

Lower social trust has a negative impact on public council effectiveness.

H1. b. Higher **networking** has a positive impact on public council effectiveness.

Lower networking has a negative impact on public council effectiveness.

H1. c. Higher **cooperation norms** have a positive impact on public council effectiveness.

Lower cooperation norms have a negative impact on public council effectiveness.

H2. A high-group environment has a positive impact on public council effectiveness.

A low-group environment has a negative impact on public council effectiveness.

H3. A high-grid environment has a negative impact on public council effectiveness.

A low-grid environment has a positive impact on public council effectiveness.

Research assumptions

There are studies that link four types of culture (i.e. egalitarianism, hierarchy, fatalism, and individualism) to macro-level political institutions (Thompson et al., 2018; Grendstad and Selle, 1995; Lockhart, 1999) and literature that links the grid-group environments to institutions at family, community and tribe levels (Douglas, 1986; Douglas, 2013). The latter shows that the high group and low grid environments have a positive impact on institutions. However, almost no literature links the grid-group environments to the institutional performance of organizations, particularly in public administration (PCs are embedded in local public administration of Kazakhstan); thus this study makes the following assumption. High-grid environment entails a higher number of rules and regulations, which regulates individuals' interactions and keeps them apart (Douglas, 1982). Moreover, the high-grid context entails insulation (separation) within the organization. If the study applies these statements to the PCs, which were formed to allow civil society representatives to

discuss socially significant issues based on shared decision-making principles and involve various external stakeholders, then the high-grid environment hinders the PC's performance. PCs are participatory institutions where members can equally contribute to the final output. This means that if a PC operates in a high-grid context, it negatively impacts PC effectiveness because, in such contexts, too many rules are imposed on PC members that regulate and constrain members' interaction. Additionally, if there is a sharp role distinction and insulation within the PC it has a negative impact on PC effectiveness. Moreover, the high-grid environment means centralized decision-making and strong authority, which have an adverse impact on PCs.

Secondly, a high-group environment implies the commitment to group goals by PC members, frequent interaction, and strong group boundaries between PCs and local state bodies. Such kind of social environment has a positive impact on PC effectiveness and allows PC members to contribute to common goals, share time to collaborate, and develop proposals to state bodies. Thus the study assumes that the high-group environment has a positive impact on PC effectiveness.

Finally, Putnam's (1993) seminal work *Making democracy work* mainly focuses on formal organizations, civic engagement, norms, and social trust. Later on, Putnam (2000) differentiated between bonding social capital (intragroup ties) and bridging social capital (intergroup ties)[16], where the former was portrayed as "dark" social capital. Since then, scholars have stressed various components of social capital – social trust, networking, and norms. Social trust was divided into "particularized trust" ("trust people one knows personally") and "generalized trust" ("trust people one meets for the first time") (Uslaner and Conley, 2003; Uslaner, 2004). In *Bowling Alone,* Putnam (2000) also differentiated between thin (trust to generalized others) and thick trust (personal relations). More recently, some scholars named them bonding social trust and bridging social trust (Korosteleva et al., 2020). This study assumes that particularized, thick, and bonding

[16] Bonding social capital assists in "getting by" and bridging social capital, aids in "getting ahead." (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Like Putnam (2000), Woolcock and Narayan (2000) consider the adverse effect of social capital. Particularly associational membership is not always socially beneficial; in some circumstances, it produces negative externalities to the society (e.g. drug cartels, gangs) (ibid). Moreover, bonding social capital may generate negative externalities such as exacerbating social inequalities or reinforcing nepotism or, ethnic hatred (Norris and Inglehart, 2006).

trust have the same underlying meaning. On the other hand, the study also assumes that generalized, thin, and bridging social trust have the same meaning.

Application of theories

Most recent studies (Knox and Janenova, 2018) mainly examine the impact of endogenous variables on PC performance such as the role of the Chairman, members, and resources. This study in addition to endogenous variables, mainly investigates PC performance from a cultural perspective. The social capital thesis (Putnam, 1993) is explicit in terms of the link between culture (social capital) and the performance of local governments. Other research that stressed the role of culture is broader and links culture with economic progress (Banfield, 1958; Fukuyama, 1995), political progress (Tocqueville, 1838), development of democratic and political institutions (Almond and Verba, 1963), or political accountability (Pasquino and Pelizzo, 2022). The seminal work by Putnam (1993) *Making democracy work* is narrowly focused and links social capital with the performance of local governments. Thus, this study finds the social capital thesis more appealing and explicit.

Concerning former communist societies, Putnam (1993) states as follows:

> "any of the formerly Communist societies had weak civic traditions before the advent of Communism, and totalitarian rule abused even that limited stock of social capital. Without norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement, the Hobbesian outcome of the Mezzogiorno—
> amoral familism, clientelism, lawlessness, ineffective government, and economic stagnation—seems likelier than successful democratization and economic development." (Putnam, 1993, p. 183)

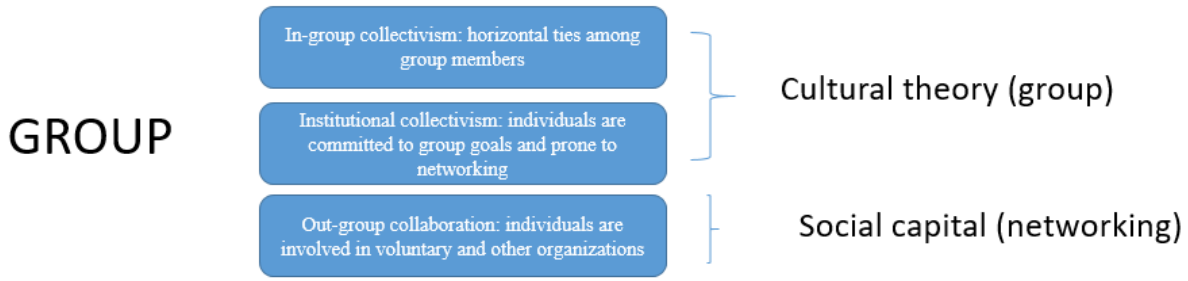
According to some scholars, low levels of trust (particularly trust in people in general) and even distrust is the main feature of post-Soviet societies (Hosking, 2014, as cited in Kudebayeva et al., 2022). Meanwhile, post-Soviet society faces challenges in socio-economic progress. However, almost no research has been conducted to examine the relationship between frequently discussed low trust, low networking (social capital) and institutional performance in post-Soviet countries.

By applying the social capital thesis on four PCs in Kazakhstan, this study aims to test the social capital thesis and offer an explanation of why it works or does not work in the local context.

Theories can complement each other in explaining some phenomenon without contradicting one another logically (George and Bennett, 2005). The social capital thesis is complemented by grid-group cultural theory in this study. Another rationale for applying grid-group cultural theory (Douglas, 1982) is the author's own experience in fieldwork. During the pilot project in a regional PC in 2021, the author encountered other crucial cultural variables (grid-group dimensions of cultural theory) that may perfectly complement the social capital thesis.

The cultural theory (grid-group dimensions) offered by Douglas (1982) perfectly complements the components of social capital. Specifically, the group complements the networking component of social capital (Diagram 5). Social capital scholars (Knack and Keefer, 1997; Działek, 2014; Raiser et al., 2002) mainly stress the membership of individuals in formal organizations and intermediate associations such as trade unions, clubs, and voluntary/professional organizations. In other words, the available stock of networking at the societal level is crucial for social capital. In contrast, the group dimension of cultural theory focuses on group strength within the organization through the measurement of shared time, commitment to group goals, and group boundaries. Thus, by introducing the dimension of group dimension from cultural theory, this study will approach networking from an additional angle (Diagram 5). The study examines whether PC members are committed to the organization's common goals and frequently interact with each other to generate recommendations to state bodies.

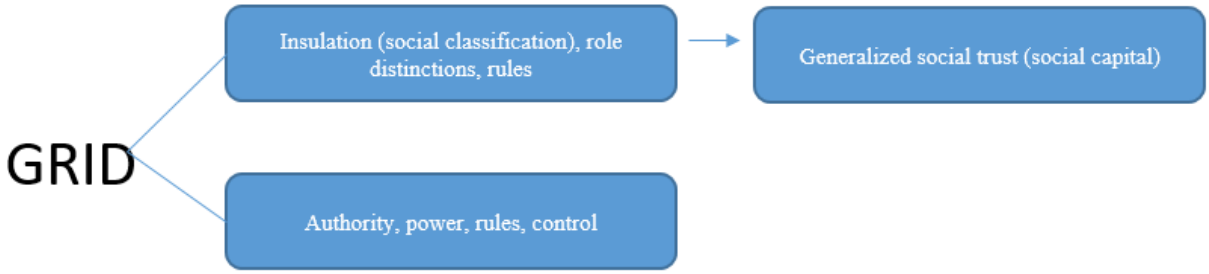
Diagram 5. Social capital is complemented by cultural theory



Source: The author.

Secondly, the grid is associated with generalized social trust of social capital. A social context with a high grid implies "an explicit set of institutionalized *classifications that keep individuals apart*" (Douglas, 1982, p.192). As a result, in a high-grid environment, individuals are classified by age, gender, ethnicity, race, and others, which are conducive to bonding ties. Harris's (1995) study defines the Riverview school as a high-grid context that entails sharp racial segregation between American Indians and Anglos. This school context is characterized as a community that has ascribed roles, insulation, and *mistrust* between segregated groups (ibid). Consequently, this study argues that the classification (insulation) dimension of the grid is in line with generalized social trust (Diagram 6).

Diagram 6. The grid dimension is complemented by generalized social trust



Source: The author.

Furthermore, cultural theory scholars show the impact of grid-group on micro-level institutions (e.g. tribes, communities) (Douglas, 1986). In *How institutions think,* Douglas claims that due to group allegiance, the institutions can avoid the free-rider problem, e.g. members of the Nuer family will contribute to collective institutional goals due to group allegiance (Douglas, 1986). If Putnam (1993) and Ostrom (1990) claim that due to the stock of social trust and norms individuals are able to cooperate and contribute to institutions, then Douglas (1986) argues that individuals also cooperate and contribute to institutions due to group loyalty and allegiance.

Moreover, Douglas (1992) claims that in explaining the institutions we need to pay attention to cultural factors along with physical factors. "But a reference to the latter alone is hardly any more

convincing as an explanation of why an institution is what it is than the simple reference to cherished values. As an institution entrenches its values in the minds of its members it cumulatively transforms its environment" (Douglas, 1992, p. 179). Elaborating it further Grendstad and Selle (1995) argue that the application of some concepts (where do preferences and interests come from?) by grid-group cultural theorists resembles the neo-institutional theory, thus we may grant the cultural theory the status of being an institutional theory. This implies that grid-group cultural theory has a strong potential to explain institutions from a cultural perspective.

Other alternative theories may also complement the social capital theory. The grid-group cultural theory was applied instead of Hofstede's (1984) theory on organizational culture (uncertainty avoidance culture, power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and Confucian values) for the following reasons. First, the grid-group cultural theory applies to various levels of analysis (individual, regional, national, and macro), while Hofstede's approach mainly focuses on work-related culture. Second, the grid-group theory captures not only cultural biases (values, beliefs, symbols) but also social relations (practices, experiences) (Swedlow et al., 2016). Furthermore, the cultural theory has been influential among public policy and public administration scholars who used this theory to examine urban traffic policy, public budgeting, and others (Hendriks, 2019; Hood, 1995; Wildavsky, 1986; Wildavsky, 1988). Finally, Hofstede's (1984) cultural theory mainly measures the group strength from horizontal ties (in-group collectivism e.g., "Adult children become independent from parents early"; "Parents have significant influence over their adult children's important life decisions"). In contrast, the grid-group cultural theory measures the group strength from both horizontal ties (in-group collectivism) and institutional collectivism (commitment to group goals) (Diagram 3).

Besides, there is a *postmaterialism theory by Inglehart*. Postmaterialism theory states that under the influence of economic growth and rising affluence, the values change from materialist to post-materialist, from traditionalism to liberalism (Abramson and Inglehart, 1995). And although Kazakhstan is an upper-middle-income country, counterintuitively there is a lower number of

citizens with post-materialist values (Ziegler, 2010; Haerpfer and Kizilova, 2020) as compared to Central Asian Kyrgyzstan (a lower-middle-income country). This fact weakens the explanatory power of postmaterialism in Central Asia.

In addition, postmaterialism theory considers the value change as a development/sequence where ultimately postmaterialist values will replace materialist values (Grendstad, 1999). In contrast, grid-group cultural theory's four cultures exist in any society (irrespective of the economic conditions) and will always exist in any society (ibid). Finally, there is limited research on postmaterialist theory in Central Asia, instead, the study refers to findings in Asian societies. For instance, Zhang et al.'s (2017) research on China fails to confirm the postmaterialism theory's assumptions and concludes that economic development has an unexpected impact on value change in China. Therefore, this study does not consider postmaterialism as a potential theory that may complement the social capital thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter describes the main features of consultative-advisory bodies in democratic and authoritarian settings. Furthermore, it shows the main debates on social capital and the link between social capital and institutional performance in the Western context. It elaborates on social capital literature in post-communist societies and the lack of research on the social capital thesis in the Central Asian context. Moreover, this chapter sheds light on the main debates in grid-group cultural theory and identifies the research gap in the existing literature. Further, this chapter explains the rationale for complementing the social capital theory with the grid-group dimensions of cultural theory. Building on the reviewed literature the study sets the three hypotheses.

CHAPTER III. POLITICAL CONTEXT AND LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OF KAZAKHSTAN

To understand how the regional PCs work in Kazakhstan, it is crucial to examine the context within which they operate. Although the Law on Public Councils (2016) specifies the PC as an autonomous consultative-advisory body, *de facto*, the regional PCs operate within local public administration. The regional representative body (the maslikhat) is responsible for forming the PCs. The Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MISD) coordinates the operation of regional PCs through regional executive bodies (akimats). Therefore, this chapter sheds light on the critical functions of the maslikhat and the akimat as well as the power relations between the two. All regional PCs operate within similar socio-economic conditions, which is illustrated in the final part of this chapter.

3.1. Kazakhstan: political context

Kazakhstan is an authoritarian country where the President has strong vertical power. The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2022) defines Kazakhstan as a hard-line autocracy. Freedom House (2021) describes it as 'not free' due to unfair elections, imprisoned opposition members, state-controlled media outlets, endemic corruption, and limited freedom of speech. These two, as well as other indicators, can be seen below (Table 2).

Table 2. Socio-political background of Kazakhstan

	Kazakhstan 2013	**Kazakhstan 2020**
Government effectiveness	-0.53	0.16
Corruption perception index	26	38
Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)	n/a	Hard-line autocracy
Freedom House	n/a	Not free
Regulatory quality	-0.37	0.14

Political stability	-0.40	-0.26
Voice and accountability	-1.24	-1. 19

Worldwide governance indicators: government effectiveness ranges from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5(strong).
Worldwide governance indicators: corruption perception index (100=no corruption).
Freedom House: Kazakhstan scores 23 out of 100 on civil liberties and political rights.
Worldwide governance indicators: Regulatory quality index (-2.5 weak; 2.5 strong).
Worldwide governance indicators: Political stability index (-2.5 weak; 2.5 strong).
Worldwide governance indicators: Voice and accountability (-2.5 weak; 2.5 strong).

N.Nazarbayev's power has been consolidated since 1995 when a referendum approved the new constitution "reshaping the government from a parliamentary democracy into a presidential republic" (BTI, 2022, p.4). Since then, the power balance has deviated in favor of the President. In 2007, the President transferred some power to the Parliament. However, this did not improve the power balance between the legislative and executive bodies substantially. The President's power has been increasing, which led to the subordination of the legislative branch to the executive. For example, the President has the power to dissolve the parliament and select a third of the Senate[17] members.

The President improved his power over local governments as well. At the sub-national level, the akims have become the President's and national government's representatives. The President has the power to appoint the regional akims on an alternative basis upon the approval of the regional maslikhat. Thus, the akims have strong vertical accountability to the national government and the President. They often fall short, however, of showing political accountability to general citizens (Makhmutova, 2006).

In addition, the ruling political party Nur-Otan (Light of the Fatherland) assisted in the consolidation of power in the hands of the first President[18]. The party emerged in 2006 as a "response to the process of elite fragmentation to mitigate and provide durability for Nazarbayev's

[17] Upper chamber of the Parliament

[18] Kazakhstan's first President N. Nazarbayev was in power from 1991-2019, the second President K. Tokayev's term in office started in 2019 and lasts to date.

authoritarian regime" (Isaacs, 2013, p. 1068). Since then Nur-Otan has become synonymous with civil service and bureaucracy in Kazakhstan. The President was also the Chairman of the Nur-Otan Party, and regional/district akims were chairs of the regional branches of the party from 2006 to 2022.[19] Moreover, the Nur-Otan party members dominate the local representative body and the national Parliament. For instance, in the 2007 parliament election, Nur-Otan won 88% of the votes and all the seats in the lower chamber of the Parliament (Isaacs, 2013).

Although the second President K. Tokayev transitioned to power in 2019, the first President retained significant political power. N. Nazarbayev acted as the chairman of the ruling Nur-Otan party; held the chair–for–life in the National Security Council; was called the Leader of the Nation since 2010; and remained an honorary senator (BTI, 2022). Only after the January events in 2022[20] was President K. Tokayev able to consolidate his political power. Soon after, President Tokayev announced major political reforms in March 2022. Political reforms included:

- the shift from a super-presidential form of governance to a model consisting of strong Parliament, a President, and an accountable national government;

- a mixed system of voting for the Majilis (70% based on a proportional system and 30% based on single-member constituencies);

- the prohibition for the closest relatives of the President to occupy high political positions;

-the President is not allowed to dismiss district and village akims and so on.

Given a political context where the executive body dominates over the legislative body (Freedom House, 2021), the PCs were established at the national, regional, and district levels in 2016. Particularly regional PCs share similar functions with regional representative bodies (maslikhats). Although the maslikhats *de jure* oversee the operation of local executive bodies,

[19] The second President K.Tokayev declared in his message to the people of Kazakhstan (March 2022) that the President quits his position as a chairman of the ruling party and so did regional akims.

[20] Peaceful demonstrations against the raise of gas prices continued with violent attacks against the state buildings and authorities in major cities of Kazakhstan.

maslikhats *de facto* are under the akimat's informal influence (Junussova, 2018). Consequently, the dominance of local executive bodies has a constraining impact on maslikhats and PCs as well.

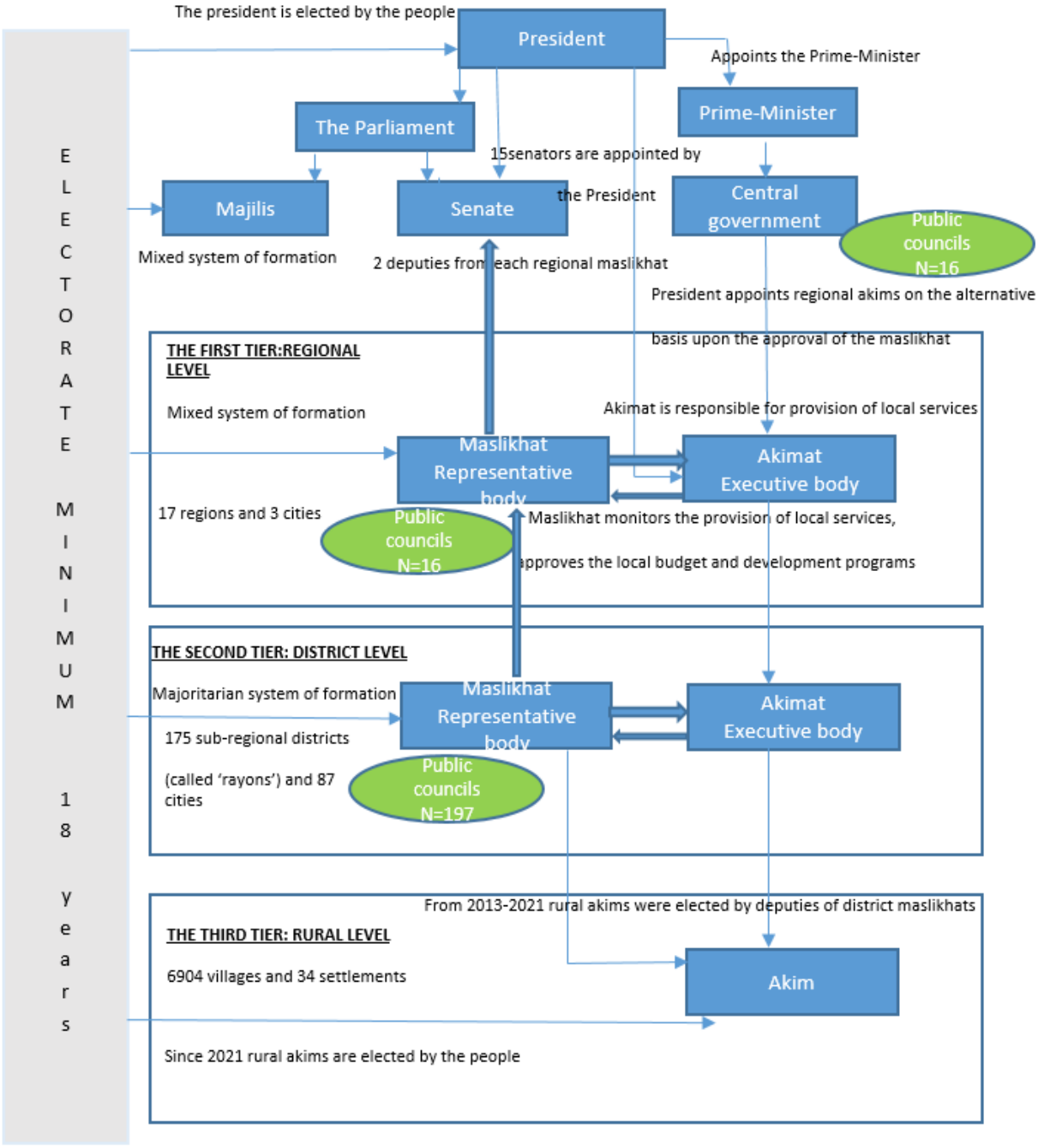
3.2. Local public administration

General features. Administratively the country is divided into 17 regions[21] (oblasts), 175 districts (rayons), 10 large city districts, 87 cities, 34 settlements, and 6904 villages (Junussova, 2018), and three cities of special status – Almaty, Astana, and Shymkent.

There are three tiers of local government in Kazakhstan (Figure 4): the first tier, the regional-level, has a representative body (maslikhat), an executive body (akimat), and state-established PCs. Similarly, the second tier has a maslikhat, an akimat and a PC. The third tier has only the local mayor (akim) (Junussova, 2018). This study's unit of analysis is the regional-level PCs.

[21] President Tokayev announced the establishment of three new regions in March 2022. Abay region with an administrative center in Semey, Ulutau region with an administrative centre in Zheskazgan and Zhetisu region with an administrative center in Taldiqorgan. Almaty region's administrative center is now Konayev city.

Figure 4. The public administration of Kazakhstan.



Source: Adapted from Makhmutova (2006) and Junussova (2018).

There are four types of public councils in Kazakhstan: PCs under the national governments; PCs under the regional maslikhats; PCs under the district maslikhats (Figure 4) and PCs under

national companies. Although they have a common aim to express civil society's view on socially significant issues, they are distinct in functions (Table 3).

Table 3. Main features of public councils

	PCs under the national governments	**PCs under the local representative bodies (oblast and district)**	**PCs under national companies**
Formation	The ministry establishes the working group, which forms the new convocation of a PC. The working group consists of 1/3 of state body representatives and 2/3 of civil society representatives. The composition of the working group is approved by the head of the central government.	The maslikhat establishes the working group, which forms the new convocation of PCs. Working groups consist of 1/3 of maslikhat representatives and 2/3 of civil society representatives. The composition of the working group is approved by the head of maslikhat.	The quasi-state (national company) establishes the working group which consists of national company representatives (1/3) and civil society (2/3). Working groups form PCs under national companies. The composition of the working group is approved by the head of the national company.
Structure	Between 15-30 members	The number of members is determined based on the Ministry of Information and Social Development's recommendations.	Between 10-15 members
Functions	Discussion of strategic plans and programs, discussion of state and local governments' budgets; Discussion of executive bodies' reports; Participation in the development and discussion of draft regulatory legal acts; Consideration of individuals and legal entities appeals to socially significant issues; Public oversight over state bodies and quasi-state bodies.		Discussion of draft plans for the development of national holdings; Discussion of reports and monitoring of national holdings' development plans; Discussion of national holdings' financial and economic activities.
		Participation in local government bodies' regulation of *land relations;* Consideration of the draft decision of the local executive body on the creation of an *industrial zone*; Hearing the reports of local *enforcement bodies*.	

Source: Law on Public Councils of Kazakhstan (2016), Approval of Model Regulations on Public Councils of Kazakhstan (2021), and MISD (2021)

Table 3 shows that PCs in local governments (oblast and district PCs) have much broader functions and operate under the local representative bodies. Regional (or oblast) PCs reside in the buildings of akimats and maslikhats. In cases when the maslikhat has a separate building, the regional PC resides in the building of the maslikhat. The maslikhat provides technical and resource assistance to PC operations (Law on Public Councils of Kazakhstan, 2016).

Moreover, the regional PCs are connected to local akimats and maslikhats. All significant regional issues, such as state programs, budget formation/amendments, and draft legal acts, are subjected to a two-stage process involving all three (akimat, maslikhat, and PC). For instance, before introducing amendments to regional budgets it is subjected to the regional PCs' discussion. If more than half of the PC members vote for approval, the amendments are viewed as discussed by the PC. Then it proceeds further to the regional maslikhat, which approves/disapproves the amendment, taking into account the PCs' recommendations. The maslikhat's decision is binding as compared to non-binding decisions by PCs. The akimat plays the role of initiator of the budget amendment and coordinates the processes between the concerned parties. Therefore, it is crucial to shed light on the functions and main features of the regional akimats and maslikhats (Table 4).

Table 4. Differences and relationships between akimats, maslikhats, and public councils

	Oblast-level akimats [22]	**Oblast-level maslikhats**	**Oblast-level public councils**
	Local executive body	Local representative body	Local participatory body
Formation	The akim is appointed by the President with the approval of the maslikhat. Akimat staff are recruited on a merit-based system.	Elected through proportional and majoritarian systems	1/3 of members are appointed by state bodies and 2/3 are selected on a competitive basis (The working group selects PC members after reviewing the applicants' CVs and conducting the interviews).
Structure	The akim is a political civil servant, who is appointed by the	The Chairman[23] of the maslikhat is elected from	The Chairman of the PC;

[22] In this study, the oblast level maslikhat means the regional maslikhat.

[23] The position of maslikhat Chairman was introduced after the President's speech to the nation of Kazakhstan in March 2022. Earlier it was called Secretary of the maslikhat.

	President. Others are administrative civil servants.	among deputies. Deputies are members of standing commissions. In addition, there are civil servants in the maslikhat apparatus who assist in the operation of the maslikhat.	Presidium (highest body between PC meetings); Standing commissions and expert groups.
Differences in functions	Presents the draft regional budget; Develops rules for regulating migration processes in the regions; Adopts normative legal acts; Controls the activities of individuals and legal entities; Manages communal property; Ensures the implementation of trade and agricultural policy; Organizes the construction and operation of water pipelines, treatment facilities, heating and electrical networks, and so on.	Approval of rules for the heating season; Approval of the rules for the improvement of the territories of the cities; Consideration of the annual report on the execution of the budget by audit commissions; Appointment of audit commissions' members and Chairmen; Approval of rules for keeping animals, rules for keeping farm animals in settlements, rules for grazing farm animals, and rules for keeping and walking domestic animals[24].	Conducts a public oversight over state bodies; Participation in the development and discussion of draft regulatory legal acts; Hearing the reports of local enforcement bodies.
Relationship		Maslikhat forms a working commission (1/3 of state and 2/3 of civil society representatives) to select members for a new PC convocation. PC's new convocation is approved by the oblast maslikhat. The PC's technical secretary is *de-jure* a staff of the maslikhat. The PC secretariat is located in the maslikhat. The maslikhat Secretary is a member of the PC Presidium (the highest body of the PC). Maslikhat deputies are members of the PC. The Maslikhat provides organizational support (e.g. technical equipment, stationery) for PC activities.	
	The President nominates at least two candidates for the position of oblast akim (and akims of republican-status cities). The nominee, who receives the majority votes of maslikhat deputies, is appointed by the President. Maslikhat deputies can express a vote of no confidence to akim by the majority of deputies (1/5[25]) The akimat's staff is approved by the maslikhat. The maslikhat can appeal to respective bodies to hold state bodies responsible for their failure or to implement the maslikhat decisions.		
	Oblast-level akimats develop the regional programs for social and economic development as well as the regional budget, which is then submitted to the consideration of the PCs and then for approval to the maslikhats. Maslikhat deputies and PC members are allowed to make appeals on social issues to executive bodies. PCs discuss state bodies' reports, the maslikhat also discusses the local state bodies' reports.		

[24] The table shows functions of three institutions, which are different and distinct; these functions are not exhaustive.

[25] According to Makhmutova (2001) the majority of deputies for a vote of no confidence accounted for 2/3 in 2001. After recent changes, it accounts for 1/5 (Constitution of Kazakhstan, 1995 amended in 2022).

	PCs discuss measures for environmental protection, the maslikhat approves the rules for the maintenance and protection of green spaces. PCs participate in the work of local government bodies on the regulation of land relations, the maslikhat regulates the land relations.

Source: Constitution of Kazakhstan (1995), Law on Local Government and Self-government of Kazakhstan (2001), Law on Public Councils of Kazakhstan (2016), and Makhmutova (2001).

As table 4 demonstrates, akimats, maslikhats, and PCs have distinctive features and at the same time, the three are intertwined in some of their functions. Therefore, this study provides an overview of the akimats'/akims' and maslikhats' functions in the following paragraphs.

Makhmutova (2006) argues that The Local Representative and Executive Bodies Act (1993) introduced the head of the local administration (i.e. akim) who represents the President and the national government. Akim is responsible for the economic and social development of the region. Acts issued by the akim are binding within the territory under the corresponding akimat. The force of akimats' and akims' decisions can be suspended by higher-level akims/akimats, by the national government, by the President's decrees, and by courts' decisions (Makhmutova, 2006, pp. 279–280). The main features of akims' work are as follows (Makhmutova, 2004 cited in Bhuiyan, 2010):

> "The akims are vertically subordinated to the government, which limits their interest in solving the local problems;
>
> The akims do not know what and how they have to gain popular support;
>
> Openness and transparency are not typical for the work of the akims — the authorities are not used to informing people, or to considering their opinions and expectations;
>
> The current system of local public administration takes no responsibility for the level and quality of public services provided." (Bhuiyan, 2010, p. 668)

Another institution in local public administration is the maslikhat. Maslikhats are local representative bodies financed by the local budget (Makhmutova, 2006); they consist of deputies elected for five years by the local population based on universal, direct suffrage by secret ballot (Constitution of Kazakhstan, Article 86). Any Kazakhstani citizen aged 20 can be elected as a deputy of a maslikhat; deputies fulfill their duties honorary. Thus, they are permitted to work for

various sectors (Constitution of Kazakhstan, Article, 86). Before 2021, maslikhat elections were based on direct votes and candidates were able to self-nominate without party membership, the 2021 elections were based on party lists, while the procedure of primaries was carried out within each party and then people voted for parties. That year, Nur-Otan Party won the majority of seats. In March 2022, President Tokayev introduced changes to the election of maslikhat deputies: a mixed system (proportional and majoritarian) at the regional level and a majoritarian system at the rayon level. These changes are reflected in the 2023 maslikhat election.

The maslikhat is a hybrid institution; according to the law on Local Government and Self-Government (2001), it simultaneously serves as a local public administration unit and a self-government body. Interestingly, the maslikhat secretariat's employees are civil servants with permanent paid positions. Even if the term of office of the maslikhat is terminated or new deputies are elected, the civil servants' positions are not subject to termination. Generally, both maslikhat and akimat reside in one building.

Ideally, maslikhat deputies should express citizens' will and monitor the service delivery (Makhmutova, 2006). Responsibilities of maslikhat include the following: e.g. approving the local budget and strategic plans; reviewing amendments to local budgets; approving the rules for the maintenance and protection of green spaces (Law on Local Government and Self-Government, 2001). Maslikhats are not constrained by vertical subordination, but the decisions of the higher-level maslikhat are binding (Makhmutova, 2006).

According to the Constitution, all representative and local executive bodies are a part of the public administration (Article 85, Constitution of Kazakhstan). Akimats are accountable to maslikhats for their performance at all levels (Article 27, Law on Local Government and Self-Government, 2001). Maslikhat has the power to subject the akim to a vote of no confidence. However, no cases have been recorded so far (Bhuiyan, 2010; Junussova, 2018), and the final decision to dismiss the akim rests with the higher-level akim or the President. Despite their legal

power, maslikhats are subordinated to akimats (Junussova, 2018; Makhmutova, 2004, as cited in Bhuiyan, 2010; Onalbaiuly, 2019). Maslikhat deputies are informally dependent on the civil servants of akimat, akims attempt to influence the maslikhat election in order to push for desired, trustworthy candidates to become maslikhat deputies (Junussova, 2018). In many cases, the akimat officers develop a list of potential candidates for maslikhat deputies, which is then subjected to the akim's informal approval (Junussova, 2018, p.106). In addition, representatives of the business elite frequently become deputies to employ their positions in favor of their business interests (ibid); this leads to a friendly relationship between the akimat and maslikhat deputies (Table 5). Similarly, Knox (2022) argues that the Local government index[26] and Division of power index[27] remain very low for Kazakhstan, which shows the influence of unelected bodies on the operation of elected bodies at the local level.

Table 5. Composition of the Maslikhats (average percentage)

The first tier of the Subnational government	The second tier of the subnational government	Businessmen	State employees	NGO leaders
Astana city		57%	39%	4%
Almaty city		65%	24%	11%
South-Kazakhstan region		70%	18%	12%
	Shymkent city	68%	20%	12%
Aktobe region		68%	15%	7%
	Aktobe city	63%	32%	5%

Source: Junussova (2018).

To address these problems, in 2022, President Tokayev introduced changes that may alter akimat-maslikhat power sharing:

[26] Measured through the question "Are there elected local governments, and — if so — to what extent can they operate without interference from unelected bodies at the local level?" (Varieties of Democracy, 2019).

[27] Measured through the question" Are there elected local and regional governments, and — if so — to what extent can they operate without interference from unelected bodies at the local level?" (Varieties of Democracy, 2019).

- The President quits his position as a Chairman of the ruling party, and so did regional and district akims. This implies that the role of Nur-Otan (renamed to Amanat) is declining. Thus, the maslikhat has the opportunity to include representatives from various political parties;

-Regional maslikhats will be formed (in March 2023) based on proportional and majoritarian systems. This allows for the maslikhat's composition to be more diverse, including deputies from various sectors.

-District maslikhats will be formed based on a majoritarian system. This will provide more political leverage for citizens to elect desired deputies.

According to social activist Murat Abenov (2023), there will be more democracy at district levels after the election of new maslikhats due to the following reasons. Firstly, the new position of Chairman[28] of the maslikhat will be introduced to counterbalance the power of the local executive body. Secondly, oblast akims appoint the district akims in agreement with the district maslikhat, the latter is elected by a majoritarian system (100% of deputies are elected by direct votes). Moreover, district maslikhat deputies can impose a vote of no confidence on district akims. Thirdly, the President is not allowed to dismiss district and rural akims from their positions. Finally, a maslikhat which is independent of party decision is free in decision-making concerning their akims. It will be hard to approve a budget that does not meet citizens' needs and the executive body will be accountable to independent maslikhat deputies (ibid).

Thus, there will be some changes to local public administration after the 2023 maslikhat election. However, there are also several concerns. Although maslikhat deputies are free from affiliation with the ruling party, it will not make them independent. There is a risk of nepotism at district levels. Moreover, as illustrated in Junussova's study (2018) the majority of maslikhat deputies are business representatives who attempt to secure their economic interests via executive bodies. Furthermore, some maslikhat deputies are representatives of public organizations

[28] Before there was a Secretary of the maslikhat who was elected by maslikhat deputies.

(*budjetniye organiziy*) financed by the state e.g. hospitals and schools. Finally, while civil society members will join the maslikhat, some civil society members are financially affiliated with the executive body. Thus, it is still too early to state how independent the new deputies will be. Nonetheless, these new election rules hold the potential for more citizen involvement because, in general, the role of citizens is essential in counterbalancing the influence of local executive bodies on local maslikhats. Through access to social media, general citizens should be perceptive of social issues and budgets and will be able to discuss them on social media. This will aid new maslikhat deputies and PC members to constrain the behavior of the local executive body.

Within the local public administration, the public councils are operating next to maslikhats and are assigned to oversee the performance of local state bodies. PCs share similar functions with maslikhat (discussing the local budget and strategic programs and hearing the reports of the executive body). However, the local power arrangement between the akimat and the maslikhat has a constraining impact on PC operation. If the 2023 maslikhat election does not bring significant changes, then it may lead to the following:

1) PC members will copy the institutional behavior of the maslikhat and its deputies.

2) In many cases, PC members remain apathetic because it is hard to make changes independently of their involvement and commitment to public interests.

3) If the maslikhat is under the akimat's informal influence, PCs will be under the informal influence of the akimat.

Central and local government relations.

Libman (2013) claims that Kazakhstan experienced *de facto* political decentralization in the 1990s due to the economic crisis that strengthened local governors. The concentration of FDI (Foreign direct investment) inflow in oil-rich western Kazakhstan had significantly increased

regional elites' bargaining power. Similarly, Melvin (2001) argues that regional governors of the north and east had significant power in the 1990s (Libman, 2013; Melvin, 2001). Nevertheless, by the end of the 1990s, all regional powers had been subordinated toward the center.

After introducing the institute of akim in the local government structure in 1993, the power vertical gradually shifted toward the center. Local soviets were renamed maslikhats; and they did not participate in local governance as they had done during the Soviet times (Junussova, 2018). The power at local levels changed: Local state administration bodies and executive bodies are no longer formed by the local representative body. Secondly, the head of the local executive body represents the President and the national government (Law on Local Representative and Executive Bodies, 1993, as cited in Makhmutova, 2001, p. 412).

Before 2013, the President appointed akims of oblasts and the cities with special status (Almaty, Nur-Sultan) upon the nomination by the prime minister, while the oblast akims appointed district akims, and district akims appointed rural akims. By appointing members of national elites to provincial positions, the President gained political control over the periphery (Cummings, 2005). However, regional akims and akims of cities with special status (first tier of local government) are still appointed by the President upon approval by respective maslikhat. At the same time, the district akims (second tier) are appointed by higher-level akims upon approval by the corresponding maslikhat (Junussova, 2018). More recently, President Tokayev (March 2022) introduced a small change in this matter and now the President appoints regional akims on an alternative basis[29] upon approval by the regional maslikhat. Thus, the top-down hierarchical model of akim appointment has been retained with minor changes.

Interestingly, political decentralization started in Kazakhstan's third tier of local governments (rural settlements and villages). In 1999, Shamalgan rural district, the First President's home

[29] Alternative basis means when the President nominates several potential candidates for the position of an akim, which is then subjected to the maslikhat's discussion. After the discussion, the maslikhat selects the akim among the nominated candidates.

district, elected the rural akim. Following this, the pilot elections of rural akims were carried out in 28 villages. However, it did not bring any further changes (Makhmutova, 2004). From 2013 to 2021, rural akims were nominated by the higher akims and elected by the maslikhat deputies. Since 2021, rural akims are elected directly by the population. Despite establishing an independent budget for rural areas to increase citizen engagement in local decision-making (2018), villages' revenue-raising capacity is limited (Zhumashov, 2022). Rural akimats are still financially dependent on higher-level executive bodies (ibid).

To conclude, the main approaches to control the periphery included vertically subordinated akims and the frequent rotation of regional akims by the President. The political decentralization in the third tier of local government (election of akims by direct votes) is negligible as the rural akims are still financially dependent on the higher-level akimat. Thus proper political accountability toward the population is hard to achieve. President Tokayev introduced minor changes to the appointment of regional akims (March 2022), which means regional akims remain loyal and accountable to the national government and the President.

3.3. Socio-economic conditions of regions

This study selected four regional PCs from 16 regions of Kazakhstan, and it is crucial to examine the regional socio-economic conditions. To reveal the impact of cultural factors (social capital, grid-group environments) on PC effectiveness, this study needs to consider the socio-economic backgrounds of regions. As shown above, all local governments of Kazakhstan share a similar institutional design, which implies that all regional PCs operate within a similar local public administration environment. In addition, the study examines the regions' socio-economic indicators to show that all regional PCs share similar socio-economic backgrounds. In doing so, the study discusses the respective regions' taxation power, budget formation, and socio-economic indicators.

There are four levels of budget in Kazakhstan: republican, oblast, district, and since 2018 rural-level budget. According to the Constitution, regional budgets are independently developed by akimats and approved by maslikhats (Consitution of Kazakhstan, Articles 85, 86, and 87). The taxation power of regional governments is limited, and they cannot fix the tax rates, except for land taxation (Makhmutova, 2006). Taxation is centralized and regional akimats are highly dependent on the central government which finances approximately 60% of subnational government spending (Beazley et al., 2018). Financial assistance by the center is delivered in the form of revenue assignments, targeted transfers[30], and equalization grants[31] (Beazley et al., 2018).

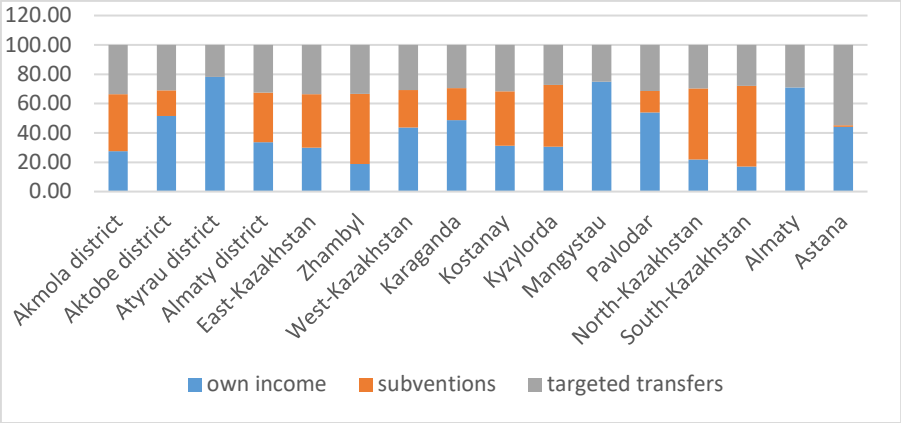
Oblasts differ in their contribution to the national budget (Bhuiyan, 2010; Makhmutova, 2006). Since 1999, to level the fiscal differences across regions, the national government of Kazakhstan introduced *fiscal equalization*. Consequently, since 1999, regions that generate higher revenues must contribute to the national government while the national government delivers subventions to regions with a lesser fiscal capacity[32] (OECD, 2017c, p.91). The transfer system aims to distribute the revenue of oil-rich oblasts (Mangistau and Atyrau) and the city of Almaty to benefit 13 other subnational governments (World Bank, 2006). In 2006 Makhmutova argued that only 3 (Mangistau, Atyrau, Almaty city) out of 15 local governments have a revenue-raising capacity to cover their costs, all other local governments depend on transfers from the center. Likewise, more recent research by Kadyrov et al. (2017) shows that only three sub-national governments – Atyrau, Mangistau, and Almaty city - do not require subventions from the center (Figure 5).

[30] Transfers from the national government are allocated to specific programmes or projects (OECD, 2017c)

[31] Equalization grants ensure the equal provision of common services across regions (Beazley et al., 2018).

[32] Subventions (equalization grants) are delivered to local governments for service delivery so that common services are delivered across the regions. In contrast, transfers are allocated for targeted projects and programs such as road construction (OECD, 2017c).

Figure 5. The structure of local budget revenues



Source: Kadyrov et al., 2017.

Since the Soviet period, neither property nor personal income tax has generated sufficient revenue for local governments (World Bank, 2017). Kazakhstan's subnational government's revenue-raising capacity is limited. Therefore, subnational governments are highly dependent on transfers, subventions, and subsidies from the center. In a recent World Bank report, experts also confirm that tax revenues are relatively small in Kazakhstan compared to OECD countries (World Bank, 2017).

Kazakhstan's fiscal decentralization is uneven. While some state services and functions are transferred to the regional akimats, they remain dependent on the national government (OECD, 2019). Additional responsibilities were transferred to the local governments as a part of fiscal decentralization, but the national government oversees how these responsibilities are implemented (OECD, 2017a). The Budget and Tax Code regulate fiscal relations between the center and sub-national governments. Meanwhile, the Budget Code overregulates sub-national governments' expenditures on compulsory public services. There are 22 directions of mandatory government expenditures (Budget Code, 2008) with further sub-directions within each direction; for example, education has 15 sub-directions for expenditures (OECD, 2017c), which limits the flexibility for local expenditure. In addition, according to the Budget Code, the central government is allowed to fix local government staff (OECD, 2017c).

Regarding socio-economic indicators, recent national statistics show that the Turkestan region has the highest level of unemployment, the highest percentage of people with incomes below the subsistence level, and it has one of the lowest average monthly incomes (Table 6). In contrast, Nur-Sultan city has the lowest unemployment rate, only 1.1% of its population lives below the subsistence level, and people have one of the highest average incomes per month.

Table 6. Socio-economic indicators for regions of Kazakhstan

	Unemployment rate % (2021)	Gross regional product per capita Thousand tenge (2019)	Gross regional product/ Million tenge (2019)	Share of the population with incomes below the subsistence level (poverty rate)% (2019)	Nominal monthly wage (2021) tenge
Akmola	4.8	2621,2	1 933 580,2	4.3	218 267
Aktobe	4.8	3396,8	2 974 420,9	3,0	244 619
Almaty	4.6	1585,5	3 246 080,4	2,9	235 357
Atyrau	4.8	1458,4	9 327 263,3	2,5	420 415
West-Kazakhstan	5.0	4501,2	2 946 389,1	3,7	240 703
Zhambyl	4.9	1518,8	1 712 883,6	4,8	215 285
Karaganda	4.6	3911	5 388 260,6	2,5	271 409
Kostanay	4.8	2815,9	2 451 736,4	3,4	225 172
Kyzylorda	4.9	2289,1	1 828 864,7	4,9	224 326
Mangistau	4.9	5352,8	3 685 383,5	4,3	382 431
Pavlodar	4.7	4023,3	3 029 608,9	3,8	246 299
North-Kazakhstan	4.8	2505,9	1 382 322,2	5,6	202 983
Turkestan	5.2	1008,1	2 016 120,7	10,8	207 929
East-Kazakhstan	4.8	2929,2	4 024 968,4	6,2	250 976
Nur-Sultan city	4.6	7075,8	7 834 828,5	1,1	340 584
Almaty city	5.1	7183,9	13 546 958,4	2,8	329 103
Shymkent city	5.0	2152,1	2 202 956,7	2,8	209 308
Kazakhstan	4.8	3755,7	69 532 625.5	4.3	275 580

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of Kazakhstan (2019, 2021)

In sum, socio-economic indicators insignificantly vary across regions of Kazakhstan[33]. In addition, taxation and budget formation are centralized, because the national government introduced fiscal equalization to avoid significant differences between regions. In 2006 Makhmutova argued that only 3 (Mangistau, Atyrau, Almaty) out of 15 local governments have a revenue-raising capacity to cover their costs; more recent studies (Kadyrov et. al., 2017) show that

[33] This study does not include Turkestan and Nur-Sultan cities (outliers) as units of analysis.

little has changed since then. Thus, all regional PCs operate in similar socio-economic conditions where most regions receive money from the center, and taxation/budget is centralized.

Understanding the local socio-economic settings, power relations between akimat and maslikhat, and their implications for PCs are crucial because it creates a solid ground for the empirical part of this study.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the political context of Kazakhstan and revealed the dominance of the executive body over the legislative body both at national and local levels. Furthermore, it elaborated on local public administration and the role of PCs within that system. It examined the main features of PCs at national, regional levels and PCs under national companies. Moreover, this chapter demonstrated the relationship between the akimat, maslkihat and regional PCs. Finally, the chapter examined the relations between the center and local governments as well as the socio-economic contexts of local governments.

CHAPTER IV. METHODOLOGY

This study employs various data sources such as in-depth semi-structured interviews with PC members and civil society representatives; non-participant observations of PC meetings, daily working routines, and cultural environments; and archival work on produced outputs by PCs. In addition, the author collected data on social capital through self-administered paper-based and online surveys among PC members. These sources of data have been triangulated to avoid researcher bias.

This research applies qualitative methods, namely the explanatory case study approach. Although there are some limitations of the case study, such as a small N, N/V ratio (number of sample size is lower than the number of variables included in the study) and a bias toward verification, it offers a unique opportunity to use multiple data sources (e.g., archival work, surveys, interviews) to study the phenomenon in context and to reveal causal mechanisms (Gerring, 2004; Levy, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2006). An explanatory case study is applied as the research question of this study seeks to answer the presumed causal link between, on the one hand, social capital and grid-group environments, and PC effectiveness, on the other. Apart from specific independent variables, the case study method is robust in revealing other intervening variables between X and Y (Gerring, 2004). Therefore, the study remains open to other intervening variables besides cultural factors. According to Yin (2003), the case study has the following strengths:

> "1) it copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points and as a result; 2) it relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion; 3) it benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis." (Yin, 2003, pp. 13-14)

This study employs a multiple-case design: each public council is the subject of an individual case study because each PC has a distinct cultural context. Four PCs have been selected referring to a geographic representation: the Northern, Southern, Western, and Central parts of Kazakhstan.

(For ethical considerations, in this study they will be referred to as PC A, PC B, PC C, and PC D). There is a single regional-level PC in East Kazakhstan, which did not permit the fieldwork [34]. PCs operate at national, regional, and district levels. The rationale for selecting the regional PCs is the following. Firstly, PCs under national governments are distant from civil society and citizens. Shaukenova (2017) argues that PCs under national governments are made up of civil servants, NGOs, education and business, whereas underrepresented by professional organizations (1%), media (3%), and cultural fields (0.3%). Because civil society members in those PCs represent various regions of Kazakhstan (for example, the PC of the Ministry of education includes members from various remote oblasts) it is hard to observe their physical group interactions. Furthermore, PCs under Ministries are embedded in bureaucratized executive bodies, which makes fieldwork difficult to accomplish. In contrast PCs under national companies were established only recently, in 2021, and PCs under national companies have been in action for an insufficient amount of time and it is not yet possible to properly evaluate their performance.

Secondly, PCs in districts operate under the district maslikhats. Although district PCs are close to citizens and civil society compared to PCs under national governments, civil society is very weak in districts. For the functioning of PCs, two-thirds of which are civil society representatives, the existence of NGOs, group associations and media is essential. However, the countryside is criticized for a lack of group associations and civic engagement (ADB, 2005; Nezhina and Ibrayeva, 2013). NGOs and the third sector in Kazakhstan are perceived as an urban phenomenon (ADB, 2005; Saktaganova and Ospanova, 2013). This study employs Putnam's interpretation of social capital where horizontal associations and civic engagement are important for institutional effectiveness. Therefore, the study does not consider the district PCs as an ideal unit of analysis for testing the social capital thesis.

[34] When the author had started fieldwork in May 2022 there was one single regional public council in Eastern part of Kazakhstan. However, President K.Tokayev declared the establishment of a new Abay region (March, 2022 Speech to the Nation of Kazakhstan) in Eastern part of Kazakhstan in 2022, as a result a new regional PC (Abay region's PC) was established in June 2022.

Finally, this study purposively selected regional (oblast)[35] PCs because they are closer to civil society and general citizens than PCs under national governments. Moreover, regional PCs' functions are broader than those of PCs under ministries or PCs under quasi-state bodies, covering a broad range of socio-economic issues. According to the Law on Public Councils (2016), PCs at local levels can also hear the reports of local enforcement bodies, and discuss the issues related to land regulation and industrial zones. Furthermore, regional PCs operate under regional representative bodies compared to PCs under ministries which operate next to executive bodies. This gives regional PCs more freedom of operation. Interestingly, some regional PCs came into existence even before the legal framework was adopted (2016), and before the PCs under national governments (Shaukenova, 2017), which means that they have a long history of operation. Moreover, regional PCs are located in administrative centers of oblasts, i.e. average-sized cities with a variety of NGOs, group associations, and media organizations. There are city-level PCs along with regional PCs in cities, however, city PCs are mainly focused on communal issues. In contrast, regional PCs cover a wide range of social issues related to corruption, communal affairs, and socio-economic issues, which will give a broader picture of council operation. For the abovementioned reasons the study purposively selected the regional PCs as the main unit of analysis.

This study aims to determine how different values of social capital and different grid-group environments impact PC effectiveness. That is why an explanatory case study is an appropriate and productive method to use because it reveals whether the different values of X lead to different outcomes in Y (Haverland and Blatter, 2012). Furthermore, in a multiple case study, each case is selected to "either predict similar outcomes (literal replication) or to show contrasting results for predictable reasons (theoretical replication)" (Yin, 2003, p.47). In this study, higher stock of social

[35] In this study regional PC means an oblast PC.

capital as well as a low-grid and high-group context (i.e. independent variables of interest) should lead to a better performing PC (literal replication).

4.1. In-depth semi-structured interviews

To examine the impact of social capital and grid-group environments on PC effectiveness, this study applies in-depth semi-structured interviews. They have been carried out with one person at a time using predetermined questions to gain more profound knowledge about PC operation. The purposive and snowballing sampling technique was employed to recruit respondents for semi-structured interviews. In this regard, Maxwell emphasizes that:

> "selecting those times, settings, and individuals that can provide you with the information that you need to answer your research questions is the most important consideration in qualitative selection decisions." (Maxwell, 2005, p.88)

The sampling frame for interviews includes PC members and civil society representatives who frequently interact with the PC. The interview respondents were purposively selected primarily for their knowledge of the council. The ***inclusion criteria*** of external civil society representatives cover the followings: either civil society representatives attended the meeting of the council; or civil society representatives were involved with or interacted with PCs; or carried out public monitoring with PC members; or have been involved in the working group that forms the PC. In other words, the author recruited only those civil society members who were engaged with PCs in one of the above-stated forms and were aware of PC operation. The rationale behind including external civil society representatives is that it allows counterbalancing the PC effectiveness overestimation by PC members.

The Law on Public Councils (2016) also mentions the involvement of citizens in PC operations. However, the sampling frame does not include the general citizens. During the pilot project, the author noticed that finding a citizen who can subjectively evaluate PC effectiveness is challenging.

There is no standard answer to the number of interviews in the qualitative study. In this regard, Dworkin states as follows:

> "While some experts in qualitative research avoid the topic of "how many" interviews "are enough," there is indeed variability in what is suggested as a minimum. An extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommend guidance and suggest anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate." (Dworkin, 2012, p.1319)

In qualitative studies, the essential point refers to the saturation level rather than the exact number size of interviews (Sim et al., 2018). In four PCs, an overall of 60 interviewees have been recruited for the study. The data saturation was reached on the 10th respondent almost in each region. The number of respondents for each region is as follows: PC A – 17 interviewees, PC B – 15 interviewees, PC C – 13 respondents, and PC D - 15 interviewees (more details on interviewees' backgrounds are available in Annex 8 and Table 8).

Respondents have been asked ten common questions about PC operation, successful/unsuccessful cases, and political culture (available in the annex). The Chairperson and the technical Secretaries of the PCs served as gatekeepers and provided contact numbers of PC members. The Regional Association of Civil Alliance helped to identify the civil society representatives who are aware of PCs' performance. Prior to fieldwork in the four PCs that lasted from May 10th to July 30th 2022, the author conducted a pilot case study in one of the regional PCs in June, 2021. During the pilot study, the author sent 35 emails to PC and civil society members to receive their agreement to interviews. However, the response rate was very low and only five people agreed to give an interview. Thus during the data collection on the other four PCs, the author contacted the Chairperson of the PC and the head of the Regional Association of Civil Alliance, who helped with respondents. As a result, the author contacted the PC members referring to the Chairperson, which increased the response rate. Semi-structured interviews were carried out mainly face-to-face and rarely through WhatsApp calls (Annex 8). The face-to-face interviews lasted between 35 minutes to 1.5 hours and were comprehensive compared to interviews through WhatsApp. The latter form of interview lasted between 20 to 40 minutes.

As the PC renews its members every three years and the third convocation has been recruited in February-March 2022, some new members are unaware of PC's past experiences. Thus the PC Chairperson purposively selected the most experienced and active members for the interview. However, to avoid the overestimation bias, as the Chairperson may recommend only loyal members, the author also recruited other PC members for interviews through the snowballing technique.

In this study, successful cases imply the social problems (e.g. contaminated lake), which have been resolved by the contribution of PCs. PCs initiated a meeting with concerned stakeholders or conducted public monitoring, sent letters to local and national state bodies. On the other hand, irrespective of PCs involvement some social problems have not been resolved, which are named as unsuccessful cases. During the interviews, the respondents have been asked about the successful and unsuccessful cases. These cases have been further tracked in archival documents to seek supporting evidence in formal correspondences. The interviews were carried out in Kazakh and Russian. Interview transcripts have been subjected to NVIVO analysis, revealing the cultural and institutional factors that impact PC effectiveness.

Finally, as the case study is open to intervening variables in addition to social capital and grid-group environments, the semi-structured interviews also revealed institutional factors that impact PC effectiveness. In this study institutional factors include resources, training provided to PCs, the composition of PCs as well as the informal influence of specific agents (e.g. local state bodies and PC Chairman). This study named this group of variables as institutional factors because North (1971) claims that institutions have formal and informal rules. The differentiation of informal and formal rules embedded in institutions allows this study to capture the additional variables discovered in fieldwork, in which informal rules are represented by the informal influence of akimats/maslikhats and formal rules embody the resources, training, and PCs' composition.

Table 7. Codes of the anonymous interviewees.

Interviewees position	Code
A PC member who represents a social organization	PC-1
A PC member from NGO	NGOPC-1
PC member (representing citizens)	PC-C-1
PC member from the business	BPC-1
Civil society representative (NGO)	CSR NGO-1
Civil society representative (NGO)	CSR NGO-2
Former civil servant, member of PC	FCS-1
PC technical secretary 2	PC-TS-2
PC technical secretary 3	PC3
PC member (representing the youth organization)	PC-4
A civil servant from the maslikhat apparatus	MA-1
Total	11

Table 8. Background of interview respondents

PC staff	PC members	Civil society representatives (external stakeholders)
Public council technical secretaries – 5 Staff (who concurrently work at maslikhat) - 1	NGO - 6 Media- 3 Public fund - 4 Public association - 5 Quasi-state - 4 Civil servant – 1 Business and private sector – 8 University instructor -1 Regional association of alliance- 1 Citizen – 1 Political party – 1	Regional association of alliance – 4 Public funds - 1 Public associations - 1 Media – 3 journalists NGOs – 6 Labor union - 4
Total: 6	35	19

4.2. Measurement of public council effectiveness

Scholars variously conceptualize performance. While some refer to performance from an *efficiency* (i.e. input – output) perspective (Knack and Keefer, 1997), others measure it via *effectiveness* (John, 2005); or responsiveness and effectiveness, such as accomplishing tasks (Putnam, 1993; Rice, 2001). Scholars who examined the link between performance and social capital, employ objective (Andrews, 2010) and subjective (Cusack 1999; Rice 2001) indicators to capture the performance. Others employ *managerial effectiveness*, which focuses on the achievement of organizational goals (Campbell et al., 1970; Boyne, 2002). This study operationalizes the performance of PCs via managerial effectiveness (i.e. achievement of the PC goal) (Reddin, 1970; Kassem and Moursi, 1971; Boyne, 2002) and uses both objective (through quantifying the outputs) and subjective (semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations) evaluations of PC effectiveness. PCs aim to "express civil society views on socially significant issues" (Law on Public Councils, 2016), and PCs (*consultative-advisory bodies*) mainly offer recommendations to state bodies to fulfill this goal.

This study employs managerial effectiveness, which is mainly concerned with the achievement of organizational goals. This study did not use efficiency and formal effectiveness to measure PC performance because efficiency is the input-output relationship and formal effectiveness is the input-outcome relationship. Firstly, PCs, for example, do not have a specifically allocated budget (input), which makes the input difficult to quantify. Secondly, social outcomes are achieved by the contribution of various stakeholders (PCs, state bodies, citizens and enforcement bodies). Attributing social outcomes to a single institution, such as a PC, is incorrect. Likewise, O'Mahony and Stevens (2006) argue that the relationship between input (expenditure on health per capita) and outcome (life expectancy) is not clear-cut, as many other factors also contribute to the outcome.

Furthermore, initially, this study aimed to illustrate the effectiveness via outcomes without measuring the inputs. However, fieldwork demonstrated that some outcomes are the result of

processes over a long time (e.g. one case related to the boiler construction lasted for 10 years[36], see Case 1 in Chapter 5). Thus it is hard to quantify them within a short timeframe (e.g. 2020-2022); it is infeasible to cover all years of PC operation (from 2016 to 2022) and to track all outcomes due to time and resource constraints of this research. Additionally, all PCs have successful outcomes and illustrating a PC as effective based only on outcomes is prone to selection bias.

PCs are introduced to oversee the state bodies' performance and hold them accountable. In general, the institutions that oversee the actions of state bodies and state officials can hold them accountable through enforceability and answerability (Schedler, 1999; Pasquino and Pelizzo, 2022). According to the Law on Public Councils (2016), PCs lack sanctioning power. Thus they cannot enforce the implementation of their comments and recommendations (enforceability). Meanwhile, the Law states that state bodies must provide motivated responses to PCs (answerability). However, there is no definition for a motivated response, and the Law fails to mention what implications are imposed upon state bodies that do not provide motivated responses (MISD, 2021). It is noteworthy that mainly responsive local state bodies respond to PCs' recommendations and explain the course of action/inaction. That's why this study does not evaluate the performance of PCs on the enforceability or answerability criteria.

Enforceability and answerability criteria are used by scholars to measure the performance of Western advisory bodies. Averchenkova et al. (2021) assess the performance of the UK Committee on Climate Change based on its influence on policy-makers and provides strong evidence that Parliamentarians have used this advisory body's analysis, and that its influence is growing. Likewise, Fobé et al. (2013) assessed Flemish advisory councils' (perceived) influence on policy-making and concluded that members are skeptical about the influence of their advice on the government. In contrast, Nakrošis and Bortkevičiūtė (2018) assess the Lithuanian Sunset

[36] A power plant construction in Kazakhstan lasted from 2012 to 2022 due to corruption. The district PC approached the regional PC A in 2016 to assist in social problem resolution.

Commissions based on adopted and implemented recommendations and claim that the 1999-2000 and 2009 Commissions have been successful as compared to the 2003-2006 and 2013-2016 Commissions. Another study on 15 education councils in Europe (Van Damme and Brans, 2013) evaluates their performance referring to the impact of policy advice, and concludes that institutional features (membership, social status of members) have an impact on good outcomes.

Likewise, some scholars measured Brazil's health council's effectiveness based on the council's influence on health policies (Bortoli and Kovaleski, 2020). It is feasible to evaluate the health council's influence on policies in the Brazilian context because health councils exist there since 1980 and some councils make binding decisions. Coelho (2004) argues that city health councils approve plans and health budgets. If the plan is rejected the Ministry of Health will not provide a budget (ibid). Moreover, it is feasible to assess the council's influence on health policies in Brazil because the council is focused on a single policy domain – healthcare, which allows the council members to track and monitor the implementation of their recommendations.

However, these evaluation criteria (i.e. council recommendations' influence on public policy) are difficult to apply to the context of this study because the real impact of recommendations by Kazakhstan's PCs is hard to quantify due to the non-transparent state bodies. Because O'Connor et al. (2019) claim that although there is a Law on Access to Information in Kazakhstan (2015), bureaucrats undermine access to information on the ground. Furthermore, there is a tendency for bureaucratic obstruction and an "implementation deficit" of policies in Kazakhstan (O'Connor et al., 2019) implying that even adopted PC recommendations are not guaranteed to be implemented. Finally, Kazakh PCs are focused on a variety of policy domains which creates challenges in monitoring the implementation of council recommendations by PC members.

There are no common evaluation criteria for PC performance in Kazakhstan. PC performance is assessed by citizens and experts (MISD, 2021), by subjective evaluation of PC members and media coverage (Kazakh Institute of Public Development, 2020). According to the report by MISD (2021), 35.15% of survey respondents (N=1200) find the PC useful for the following

reasons: it resolves social problems, offers recommendations to state bodies, represents citizens and civil society in decision-making, and so forth. In contrast, 26.6% of respondents criticize PC performance for the following reasons: limited influence on state bodies, formal operation, and others. However, the author has the following concerns regarding the methodology of PC performance assessment (MISD, 2021): the report does not disaggregate city, district, and regional PCs in survey questions; N=1200 is not based on probability sampling; the report fails to explain the sampling frame for the survey respondents and so on. In sum, the current PC performance evaluation has fallacies, aggregates the data of all level PCs and mainly targets PC activities (MISD, 2021; Shaukenova, 2017).

Notably, studies on Kazakh PCs (MISD, 2021; MISD, 2019; Shaukenova, 2017) measure PC performance by referring to main activities (number of PC meetings, public hearings, review of draft legal acts, and public monitoring), successful cases (Kazakh Institute of Public Development, 2020) and civil society's/members' evaluations (Knox and Janenova, 2018; MISD, 2021). This evaluation fits the local context of Kazakh PCs better than Western studies' assessment of council effectiveness through the adopted recommendations (e.g. Averchenkova et al., 2021; Fobé et al., 2013). Western and Brazilian council assessments mainly employ the influence of council recommendations on policies which is feasible in that context due to the council's focus on a specific policy domain. In contrast, Kazakh PCs are relatively young and focus on a variety of policy domains, therefore it is hard to track the implementation of council recommendations in the local context. As a result, the present study partially adopts the measurement of PC performance from local studies. This study quantifies the two activities (meetings with state bodies, and review of draft legal acts) and measures the produced outputs (recommendations to state bodies and comments to draft legal acts).

Regarding PC activities, the recent National Report by MISD (2021) illustrated the following main activities of regional PCs (the data combines district, city, and oblast councils): the activities with the highest quantity are PC meetings (1886), consideration of draft laws (3467), and public

monitoring (1708). Regarding public monitoring, during the fieldwork, the author noticed that successful PCs carry out public monitoring before the PC meeting and express the recommendations at the meeting with state bodies. Thus, frequently, recommendations produced upon public monitoring and recommendations at PC meetings are combined. Additionally, recommendations produced upon public monitoring are not well documented in regional PC correspondences. Due to this, the present study does not include public monitoring as a separate activity and assesses the PC effectiveness on two activities (review of draft legal acts and meetings with state bodies) and produced outputs (comments and recommendations).

Two activities – meetings with state bodies and review of draft legal acts – are the hallmark of PC's operation because the Model Regulation of Public Councils (2021) pays particular attention to them. Part 3 of the regulations, articles 50-70, contains regulations on PC functions. More specifically articles 50-54 discuss the meeting procedures and articles 55-64 address the review of normative legal acts. This also shows that these two activities and their produced outputs are a cornerstone of PCs' operation.

Regarding PC outputs, in order to "express the civil society's views on socially significant issues," PCs predominantly produce the following outputs: 1) they provide comments to draft legal acts; 2) they offer recommendations to state bodies at PC meetings. This study quantifies the number of *activities* (PC meetings, reviewed draft normative legal acts) and *produced outputs* from January to June 2022.

The study uses the following approach to measure the PC activities and produced outputs. Regarding the PC activities, the author counted the conducted meetings and reviewed draft legal acts in minutes and outgoing letters, afterwards it was cross-checked with the PC technical secretaries. Firstly, regarding the review of draft legal acts, if the PC reviews one draft legal act and provides at least one comment (>1), then the study counts it as one recommendation (ratio=100%). According to outgoing letters, the number of comments to a single draft legal act varies from one to three. Secondly, regarding PC meetings with state bodies, if the PC meets with

one state body and offers at least three recommendations (>3), then the study counts it as one recommendation (ratio=100%). According to meeting minutes, in the majority of cases, the number of recommendations to state bodies varies from 1-9.

Several sources indicate that PCs are predominantly involved in reviewing draft legal acts[37] and carrying out meetings with state/quasi-state bodies (MISD, 2021; USAID, 2022). After the meeting, the PC designs a meeting minute. Some PC meetings are very formal, and meeting minutes mention that the state report is "taken into account" but contains no recommendations.

This study defines an effective PC as one that not only reviews draft legal acts but also provides a comment. Furthermore, an effective PC not only conducts a meeting with state/quasi-state bodies but also offers recommendations to improve their performance. Thus, the author counted these two outputs in correspondence according to tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. Output 1: a review of draft normative legal acts and comments, January-June 2022

Public councils	Number of reviewed legal acts	Number of commented legal acts	The ratio of outputs (number of commented legal acts/number of reviewed legal acts)
Public council A			
Public council B			
Public council C			
Public council D			

Table 10. Output 2: number of meetings with state/quasi-state bodies and recommendations to them, January-June 2022

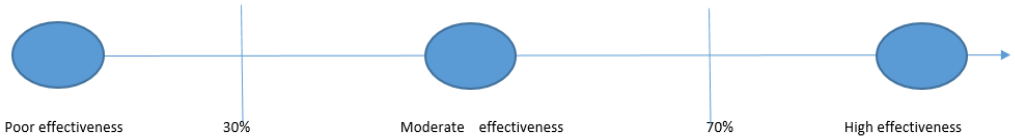
Public councils	Number of state/quasi-state bodies	Number of recommendations to state bodies[38]	The ratio of outputs (number of recommendations/number of state bodies)
Public council A			
Public council B			
Public council C			
Public council D			

[37] In 2016-2021, public councils of all levels reviewed more than 20 thousand draft legal acts (National Report by the Ministry of Information and Social Development, 2021).

[38] Please note that if the PC had a meeting with one state body and offered at least 3 (>3) small recommendations, then it is treated as 1 recommendation (ratio=100%). For instance, one PC had meetings with 5 state bodies and offered recommendations only to 3 state bodies; then the ratio is 3/5=60%

After calculating these two outputs of the respective PCs, the study sums the % of the two outputs and divides them by two in order to provide an averaged output ratio (%) for each unit of analysis. This study used a 30% and 70% threshold to differentiate between high, moderate, and low effectiveness (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Effectiveness of Public councils



Source: Developed by the author.

4.3.Archival work

Employing the abovementioned measurement of PC effectiveness, the study collected data on outputs and activities. Moreover, the author collected data on outcomes (successful/unsuccessful cases) through archival works in the four units of analysis. Archival works are mainly focused on two outputs: *recommendations to state bodies*; and *comments on draft legal acts* from January to June 2022, which are presumably documented in incoming/outgoing letters and meeting minutes. The author conducted fieldwork in PC D in May, in PC A in June, in PC B in June and July 2022, and finally in PC C in July 2022. As the timeframe for produced outputs covers January-June 2022, in addition to archival works, the author maintained connections with technical secretaries to update collected data on outputs and activities.

Moreover, the author looked for supporting evidence of successful/ unsuccessful cases in archives, which are not limited to a specific time frame. Successful/unsuccessful case records are documented in the following correspondences: incoming and outgoing official letters, minutes of meetings, and PCs' annual reports by MISD. PCs make a social impact through successful cases

and fail to do so due to certain constraints. The study acknowledges that social outcomes are hard to achieve by a single institution such as a PC. Many other stakeholders from outside (e.g., enforcement bodies) have contributed to outcomes. Taking this into account, this study included successful and unsuccessful cases referring to the following criteria: either the PC organized a meeting and involved concerned stakeholders in discussing the social problem (documented in minutes of meetings); or the PC sent official letters to various enforcement bodies, local and national governments regarding the social problem; or PC members carried out public monitoring in a concerned social place (e.g., road construction, contaminated lake) (documented in annual reports and local media publications).

4.4. Surveys

One of the methods to measure political culture was a survey, which contained questions related to social capital, socio-demographic background, and perceived evaluation of PC effectiveness (See Annex). The sampling frame for surveys includes only the members of four PCs.

Scholars variously conceptualize social capital (Coleman, 1988; Newton, 1999; Fukuyama, 2001; Putnam, 1993); this study employs Putnam's conceptualization of social capital, which contains three components: social trust, networks, and cooperation norms. The study measures social trust through the two commonly used questions: "Trust people you meet for the first time?" (bridging/generalized/thin social trust) [39] and "Do you trust people you know personally" (bonding/particularized /thick social trust). These questions are taken from the World Values Survey (7th wave); respondents were provided a segregated answer from "trust completely", "trust somewhat", "do not trust very much", and "do not trust at all" (Table 11). The next component of

[39] Two standard measures of generalized trust are as follows: "trust in people you meet for the first time" or "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" (Frederiksen et al, 2016; Newton and Zmerli, 2011).

social capital – networks - was measured through two commonly used questions: membership in political parties and membership in a professional, voluntary, or community organization (non-political organizations). Answers range from "active member" to "not a member". The study measures networking through membership in formal organizations (parties, voluntary and professional organizations) because Putnam (1993) stressed the “salience of horizontal networking and membership in secondary associations” (p. 173). Therefore, this study does not include statements on informal networking (kinship, extended family). Similarly, Granovetter highlighted that strong ties (kinship, intimate friendship) are less critical than weak ties (membership in secondary associations) for collective actions and institutions (Putnam, 1993). The third component is the cooperation norm. It was measured by asking, "Do you agree that every citizen should invest time and resources in common social issues?"; answers vary from "a great deal", “quite a lot”, “not very much”, and “not at all”, this question was taken from Radnitz et al., 2009. Questions on social capital are as follows (more details on survey questions are provided in annex 6):

Table 11. Survey questions on social capital

Do you trust people you meet for the first time?	**Trust completely**	**Trust somewhat**	**Do not trust very much**	**Do not trust at all**	**Don’t know**
Do you trust people you know personally?					
	A great deal	**Quite a lot**	**Not very much**	**Not at all**	**Don’t know**
Do you agree that every citizen should invest his time and resources in common social issues?					
	Don’t belong	**Inactive member**	**Active member**	**Other , please specify**	
Are you a member of a professional, voluntary, or community organization?					

Are you a member of a political party?					

Further, some scholars employ numerous questions on social trust (trust your family, neighborhood, and friends.). However, this study included a limited number of questions on social trust (and limited statements on networking) in order to avoid the respondents' fatigue. The PC members represent the local-level elites, and during the pilot study in 2021, they showed reluctance in filling out the long surveys. Therefore, survey statements are short and straightforward.

The survey also contains questions on the socio-demographic background and PC performance: "evaluate an overall performance of the public council", as well as questions related to grid-group cultural theory (Adapted from Swedlow and collaborators, 2016) (available in annex 6).

Due to the lack of resources and time, the study employs convenience sampling in the survey administration. Bryman (1989, p. 113-114) argues that "in organizational fields, convenience sampling is common and more prominent than probability sampling". The sampling frame for surveys includes only PC members in the four units of analysis. The survey's sample size varies from 16 to 24 people in each PC. In PC A sample size accounts for 24 out of 38; in PC B 20 out of 31, in PC C 20 out of 30 and in PC D number of completed surveys accounts for 16 out of 21 council members. Overall, 80 survey answers from both online and paper-based surveys[40] were used. Surveys have been completed by respondents in May (PC D), June (PC B and PC A) and July (PC C) of 2022. The response rate in each PC varies from 63% to 76%; printed surveys were administered by the technical secretary after PC meetings or self-administered to members after the interview with the author. To mitigate the problem of non-response bias, the author asked the PC Chairmen and the technical secretaries to announce after the PC meeting a request to complete

[40] Initially, there were 89 responses by PC members, however 9 survey answers were discarded due to incompleteness.

surveys. Additionally, the author kindly asked to complete surveys after semi-structured interviews with PC members, which can be regarded as mobilized participation in surveys.

4.5. Non-participant observations

There are different types of non-participant observations: overt or covert, structured and unstructured, and simple or contrived. The author conducted simple, overt unstructured, non-participant observations.

The author observed the daily working routines of four PCs. Non-participant observations of daily routines lasted from a minimum of 2 days to a maximum of 11 days in PCs, a minimum of 2 hours to 5 hours per day from May to July 2022. During the observation, the author focused on the operation of the PC secretariat and negotiations with external stakeholders (state bodies, private and quasi-state bodies, citizens, and the media). Notably, the author observed the PCs' pre-meetings and attended the PC meetings (PC A, PC B and PC D) with state bodies. During non-participant observations particular attention has been paid to the following:

-PC commissions' preparation works before the PC meeting;

-preparation of the meeting agenda and involvement of the state bodies;

- involvement of PC members in the meeting;

-frequency of interaction among PC members;

-the role of the Chairperson in preparation for meetings;

-the role of the technical secretary in preparations for meetings;

- the decision-making process;

-the power relations and authority within PCs;

- roles and classifications (gender-based, age-based) within PCs;

- rules and regulations imposed on PC members;

-the interaction between the Chairman and members;

- the influence of local executive and representative bodies.

Additionally, observations of daily working routines give a broad understanding of grid-group environments, social cohesion, and trust among members. Furthermore, non-participant observations provided information on barriers faced by PCs. The author made extensive field notes about the content of interactions between members, interaction with state bodies, and the media.

This study operationalizes grid-group environments, mainly referring to Boettger's (1997) research that investigates grid-group environments on site-based management in American schools. Because site-based management implies more freedom and fewer constraints on teachers, its implementation is contingent upon the grid-group contexts of schools. Similarly, PCs require more freedom for interaction, and less constraint on PC members to reflect citizens' views on socially significant issues freely. Boettger (1997) measures grid-group environments through non-participant observations and interviews. Accordingly, similar to Boettger, this study captured the group environment through *individuals' commitment to common goals*; *allegiance to the organization*, *survival of the organization*; *group boundary*, and *shared time among group members*. The grid environment is measured through *centralized or decentralized decision-making*, *roles*, *classifications*, *authority*, and *rules*.

Jotted notes and semi-structured interviews captured the grid-group dimensions of cultural theory. The author noted down symbols, narratives, and social practices that capture the dimensions of cultural theory and social capital.

Finally, non-participant observations also revealed institutional factors (resources, training of PC members, informal influence of the akimat and the maslikhat) in addition to social capital and grid-group environments.

4.6. Secondary sources

This study employs secondary sources from an online media publication and websites of the PCs. Some successful and unsuccessful cases have been reflected in online media publications. Moreover, the research used some information on outputs from the common website www.kazkenes.kz for PCs. The author contacted the national body that coordinates all PCs – the Ministry of Information and Social Development of Kazakhstan (MISD), which provided the annual reports for all PCs from 2017-2022. The author retrieved some details about PCs' successful cases from the annual reports provided by MISD.

Further, the study employs the data drawn from the state official databases www.egov.kz, www.goszakup.gov.kz, and https://pk.uchet.kz/ . All PC members' backgrounds have been analyzed to reveal their financial affiliations with local state bodies through state social orders (grants). Because most PC members represent civil society, the literature (Earle, 2005; Axyonova and Bossuyt, 2016; Knox and Yessimova, 2015) highlights the state-led feature of civil society in Central Asia. Therefore, this study examined PC members' financial affiliation with state bodies as it relates to conflicts of interest and indirectly impacts PC effectiveness.

4.7. Data analysis

Regarding the in-depth semi-structured interviews, the author transcribed all interviews during the fieldwork and deleted the audio-recorded files of interviews afterward. The interview transcripts (overall 148 pages, 11-point font size) and field notes (40 pages, 11-point font size)

helped the author to preliminary identify reasons for the erosion of trust and reveal the main hindrances in PC operations. To avoid researcher bias, the author audio-recorded assumptions, reactions, and concerns in the four units of analysis. In addition, by the end of each interview, the author made a small summary of the interview to verify the data with the respondent, this helped to construct the trustworthiness and credibility of the data.

The author read the transcribed data several times, thus it was easy to capture the essence of the data in the coding process. After the completion of fieldwork in four regions, the data has been analyzed (interview transcripts) through the NVIVO program. The study examined meanings and patterns in the text. The interview data were classified by coding, categories, and themes (thematic analysis). The study employed descriptive, structural and value coding techniques[41] (Saldaña, 2009). Codes aided to generate categories and subcategories, which in turn, generated broad themes (Annex 7). The identification of key categories, concepts, and themes is the main task in qualitative data analysis (Ritchie et al., 2013). After the management of raw data (coding process), the author synthesized the data and linked the generated themes to the research question, it was an iterative process between the raw data and categories/themes, between the latter and theories.

Hand-written field notes served two purposes: to observe PC operation and to capture the cultural environment (grid-group contexts, social capital). Jotted notes mainly captured PCs' daily working routines and cultural contexts. Expanded notes were used during PC meetings with state bodies. By the end of each fieldwork, the field notes were analyzed and divided into PC operation-related notes and cultural context notes. The latter was broken down into pieces to categorize grid and group typologies, and social capital components. Musante and DeWalt (2010) state that field notes are simultaneously the data and analysis. Thus, by the end of the fieldwork, the author discussed preliminary analyzed data on cultural environments with PC technical secretaries and

[41] Value coding mainly addresses beliefs, values and worldviews of observed objects or respondents; Descriptive coding summarizes the content of a passage or sentence in a word or a phrase; Structural coding is linked to research questions and codes through the lens of research questions (Saldaña, 2009).

on some occasions, PC technical secretaries (in PC C, PC D) helped to remedy the misinterpretations by the author.

In the data analysis, none of the sources collected through various methods (survey, semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation) is given priority to make the claims in the empirical part of the study. Sources of data are used for triangulation since Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that triangulation of data sources is a good technique that ensures the confirmability criteria of trustworthiness.

Conclusion

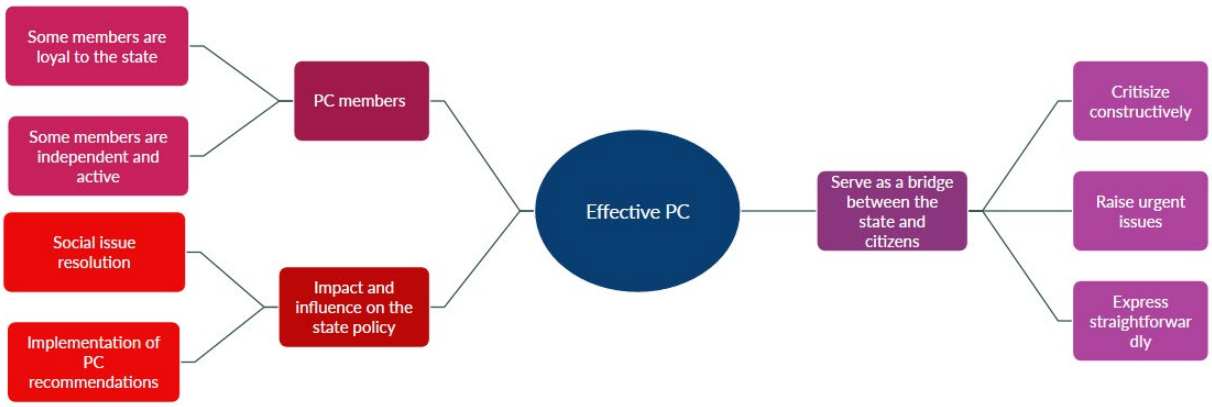
This chapter outlines the methods and data analysis. It described the process of interviews and surveys, non-participant observations, and archival work. This study employs Putnam's (1993) conceptualization of social capital, and in order to measure the social capital it takes the questions from World Values Survey (20177-2022). Regarding grid-group environments of cultural theory, this study applies the interpretation and measurement of grid and group environments from Boettger's (1997) study. Moreover, it demonstrates the measurement of the dependent variable and the rationale for employing PC activities and outputs to measure PC effectiveness. This chapter also elaborates on data analysis of interview transcripts and field notes.

CHAPTER V. PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC COUNCILS IN KAZAKHSTAN

This chapter illustrates the findings on the effectiveness of four regional public councils (A, B, C, D). It operationalizes the performance of PCs via managerial effectiveness and uses both objective (through quantifying the outputs through archival work) and subjective evaluations (non-participant observations, semi-structured interviews) of effectiveness. The goal of the public council is "the expression of civil society views on socially significant issues" (Law on Public Councils, 2016). To achieve this goal, PCs predominantly produce the following outputs: they review the draft legal acts and provide comments to state bodies; they carry out meetings with state bodies and offer recommendations (MISD, 2021). This chapter demonstrates each PC's effectiveness based on produced outputs and data obtained through non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews.

According to interview findings, the answers to "What is an effective PC?" generated three broad categories (Figure 7): 1) an effective PC serves as a bridge between the state and society; 2) it impacts and influences public policy; 3) an effective PC consists of socially active and independent members.

Figure 7. Interviewees' perception of effective PCs.



Source: NVIVO project by the author

This study measures PC effectiveness based on activities and produced outputs, which is in line with the third category of "serve as a bridge between the state and society" (Figure 7). According to respondents, some PCs do not even take advantage of this opportunity and use the platform of

the PC to deliver citizens' concerns and offer recommendations to state bodies. Thus, there is a need to pay particular attention to the effectiveness of procedures (PC activities and produced outputs). In this regard, one of the PC members noted:

> "An effective PC is when the members can express concerns to state bodies straightforwardly. Maslikhat deputies are constrained by their party affiliation compared to PC members. State bodies should be aware of citizens' perspectives on social issues. And the PC is the only institution where civil society can meet with state bodies and discuss social issues. Whether we can impact state bodies is another question, it doesn't only depend on our work, it depends on the responsiveness of state bodies." (NGOPC-1)

According to non-participant observations and interviews, an effective PC not only carries out meetings with state/quasi-state bodies but also prepares for the meeting and develops recommendations that are reflected in meeting minutes. Upon the completion of meetings with state bodies, the PC usually reflects recommendations in meeting minutes and sends official letters with recommendations to the respective state bodies. This was traced through archival work. To triangulate this finding, the data gathered through non-participant observations throughout all major stages (i.e. before meetings, during meetings, and post-meetings) are illustrated.

Findings suggest that before the meetings with state bodies, an effective PC either carries out public monitoring in public spaces, surveys public service users or works in small commissions within PCs. In other words, an effective PC prepares for the meeting, and based on prepared work and received information during the meeting with state bodies, the PC offers recommendations. In contrast, an ineffective PC predominantly carries out meetings without any preparation, meetings are formal and the meeting minutes conclude that the report by the state body was "taken into account". Non-participant observations also show that ineffective PC meetings are a one-way relationship[42], formal and bureaucratized. Members in ineffective PCs mainly do not prepare for

[42] Loeffler and Martin (2016) distinguish the following types of citizen engagement: information (a one-way relationship between citizens and the state); consultation (a two-way dialogue where citizens are given a voice); public participation in decision-making; and co-production of services.

the meeting with state bodies; neither are the commission works carried out nor is public monitoring conducted.

The majority of PCs carry out the following two activities separately: they review the draft legal acts and conduct meetings with state bodies. Interestingly, the author found out that only one PC (PC D) carried out both activities in one meeting. In PC D, some state bodies report on their performance and other state bodies demonstrate the amendments to legal acts.

Concerning the review of draft legal acts, an effective PC not only reviews draft legal acts but also comments on them. The author is not a legal expert and lacks competence in assessing the quality of comments made to draft legal acts. However, according to the Law on Normative Legal Acts of Kazakhstan (2016, article 19), if the state body disagrees with the PCs' comments, then it should send an official letter to the PCs justifying their disagreements. The author did not encounter such letters from local state bodies during the archival work. This means that in the majority of cases state bodies accept the comments made by PCs.

Additionally, findings show that PCs' comments vary from one comment to three comments. For example, annex 1 illustrates the findings on PC A's comments concerning the approval of rules for the maintenance and protection of green space (number of PC comments=3). Also Annex 1 includes PC D's comment on the draft legal act concerning additional provision of medicines to certain categories of citizens (number of comments=1). An effective PC constructively comments on draft legal acts and offers solutions on how to improve the legal act, in doing so the PC refers to national laws and regulatory acts of the national government. An ineffective PC rarely or not at all comments on draft legal acts.

Apart from produced outputs, each PC has successful and unsuccessful cases, which is the second category in Figure 7 (influence and impact the local public policy). The literature on consultative advisory bodies in Russia (Petro, 2001; Stuvøy, 2014; Owen and Bindman, 2019; McCarthy et al., 2020; Owen, 2016) suggests that irrespective of challenges faced by PCs (lack of resources, non-binding decisions), some public councils and public chambers make a small social

impact. Similarly, this chapter demonstrates successful and unsuccessful cases, which will help to understand the factors that improve and hinder PC effectiveness. Additionally, small cases show the role of PCs in local governance.

5.1. Public Council A

Each PC usually develops an annual agenda for meetings with state/quasi-state bodies. The councils inform the corresponding state bodies about the intention of meeting them well ahead of the specified date. Table 12 shows the meetings with 17 state bodies by PC A from January to June 2022. Meeting minutes show that to 14 of them, PC A offered recommendations. The ratio is 14/17 or 82% (Table 12). The author calculated the data provided by the meeting minutes and cross-checked it with the technical secretary. However, this data is merely descriptive and therefore might not show the whole picture, solely relying on meeting minutes and outgoing letters with recommendations is insufficient.

That's why it is crucial to triangulate it with the data obtained through non-participant observation throughout all major stages (i.e. prior to meetings, during meetings, and post-meetings). The author conducted a non-participant observation of PC A's meeting with state bodies. Before meeting with the state bodies (***Department of Economy, Department of Environmental Management and Natural Resources, Department of Informatization of State Services and Archives, Department of Ecology***) the members of PC A carried out the following preparation works.

Firstly, during the pre-meeting stage, the author witnessed the active work of three PC A commissions on three separate issues. The budget commission had a meeting with the state body on the clarification of the local budget, and the Chairman informed the general public about the commission's activities via the Instagram page. This was the preparation by the budget commission for the meeting with the Department of the economy. The author did not participate

in a budget commission meeting, however, the Chairman of the budget commission provided a photograph of the commission meeting with the akimat's Department of Economy and a WhatsApp chat regarding their discussions with other members.

Secondly, the commission on legal affairs had a meeting regarding the draft legal acts and the wholesale distribution logistics center which had been the topic of the previous PC meeting. Apart from PC members, two lawyers from professional legal organizations participated in the commission meeting. The lawyers were included as experts without voting powers at PC meetings. The author did not participate in this commission meeting, but the member of the commission provided information through Instagram with photographs and details on the meeting.

Furthermore, the commission on ecology and its chairman carried out public monitoring of the local lake which had been contaminated. This commission carried out visiting (mobile) meetings with the involvement of a local akim, and representatives of the factory that contaminated the lake. The agenda of the visiting meeting also included questions about tourism. On the way to the contaminated lake, this commission carried out a public monitoring of a republican highway (evidence is illustrated on their Instagram page). During the interview, PC A Chairman mentioned that private constructors who were responsible for highway construction would participate and explain the progress. Later on, an ecology commission member posted a photo on Instagram with details on public monitoring and the visiting meeting at the contaminated lake in June 2022. Thus, the PC A commissions had intense work on various issues prior to general meetings with state bodies.

The general meeting of the PC A was full of discussions; the limitation was the attendance of representatives of several state bodies (Department of Economy, Department of Environmental Management and Natural Resources, Department of Informatization of State Services and Archives, Department of Ecology) within a limited time (2-hour meeting). The concerned state bodies from remote districts joined the PC meeting via Zoom. In this meeting which lasted over

2-hours, PC A approved the amendments to the local budget (which had been discussed in a prior commission meeting) and heard the reports of three state bodies: the oblast akimat's Department of Environmental Management and Natural Resources; Department of Informatization of State Services and Archives, and the Department of Ecology. This process was expedited because numerous state bodies were involved in one meeting and only a 15-minute time slot had been allocated for the final report discussion (Department of Environmental Management and Natural resources). Thus, PC members were unable to discuss and offer recommendations to the Department of Environmental Management and Natural Resources (Table 12).

Table 12. PC A meetings with state bodies (outputs: recommendations) from January to June 2022

	Name of the state body	Number of recommendations	%[43]
1	Department of Finance of the oblast akimat	1	100%
2	Department of Entrepreneurship	0	0
3	Department of Agriculture	1	100%
4	Department of Economy	1	100%
5	Employment Coordination and Social Programs Department	1	100%
6	Health Department	1	100%
7	Education Department	1	100%
8	Department of Physical Education and Sports	1	100%
9	Department of Culture, Archives, and Documentation	1	100%
10	Department of Passenger, Transport, and Highways	1	100%
11	Department of Environmental Management and Natural Resources	0	0
12	Department of Informatization of State Services and Archives	1	100%
13	Department of Ecology	1	100%
14	Department of Police	1	100%
15	Department of Natural Monopolies' Regulation	1	100%
16	Department on Youth Policy Issues	1	100%
17	Socio-entrepreneur Corporation Saryarka" JSC	0	0
	Number of state bodies = 17	Number of minutes with recommendations = 14	Ratio = 14/17= 82%

Source: The correspondences of public council A.

Furthermore, PC A is involved in reviewing legal acts. The legal commission of PC A organizes workshops on legal acts for other members. A review of the draft legal acts makes this council exceptional compared to others. In the process of carrying out the archival work, the author noticed

[43] The percentage is calculated as follows: if the PC met with one state body and offered at least three recommendations (frequently it varies from 3 to 9) it is 100%. For instance, the PC A met with the Department of Environmental Management and Natural Resources but did not offer recommendations, that is why it is 0%.

the quality and quantity of recommendations on the draft legal acts. The legal affairs commission is strong and includes not only PC members but also brings in experts (lawyers) from professional legal organizations. PC A not only critically assesses the received legal act or identifies contradictions with the national law, but also offers a resolution on how this should be amended through phrases and paragraphs (a sample of a reviewed draft legal act by PC A is available in the annex). Not only the quantity of reviewed acts is higher but also the quality of comments is comprehensive and legally justified. As a result, PC A (Table 13) commented on all received draft legal acts (100%). Similarly, the National Report on PC performance by MISD (2021) also highlights PC A's accomplishments in reviewing legal acts.

According to the Law on Public Councils (2016, Article 5, Paragraph 5), the council reviews legal acts concerning the rights, responsibilities, and freedoms of citizens except the cases related to the establishment (or cancellation) of a quarantine zone with the introduction of a quarantine regime in a relevant territory. PC A's legal competencies are reflected in the process of reviewing legal acts. Unlike other PCs which reviewed all submitted legal acts, PC A is selective and in its official responses, PC A makes use of its right to assert that a legal act's topic does not fall into the council's consideration. For instance, PC A received a legal act on enzootic animal diseases in 2019, which was beyond the scope of PC A.

Table 13. Review of draft normative legal acts by PC A (outputs: recommendations)

Number of reviewed legal acts in 2022[44]	Number of commented legal acts	%
18	18	100%

Source: The correspondences of public council A.

In sum, PC A exhibits high effectiveness based on the abovementioned findings. Meanwhile, although PC A is strong in reviewing draft legal acts and offering comments to state bodies (output ratio=100%), the meetings with state bodies and recommendations (output ratio=82%) still require

[44] The data on outputs for all councils covers the number of reviewed legal acts from January-June 2022.

improvement. Within a 2-hour meeting, the council considers numerous social issues and hears various state bodies. Due to limitations in the organization, the PC A members, for instance, could neither discuss nor offer recommendations on a report by the Department of Environmental Management and Natural Resources.

Besides these limitations, PC A also faces the following challenges and limitations. Although PC A shows strong effectiveness regarding outputs, it lacks transparency and interaction with civil society/citizens. There is no updated information about meetings, agendas, media plans, and reports on official websites (e.g. www.kazkenes.kz). The main information is reflected on the social media accounts of PC A members (not on the PC's institutional page). Archival documents are not well-managed and in some cases, the loss of documents is evident.

Below are the small cases drawn from PC A, which demonstrate PC A's social impact as well as cases that reveal the hindering and enabling factors of the council's effectiveness.

Case 1. The district public council members contacted the oblast public council A to assist with an issue of central heating in A-city in 2016. Archives of the council show that the council members carried out one public monitoring and two visiting meetings regarding central heating. A-city with 43 000 population should have been connected to central heating in 2015. However, the heat and power plant center[45] of the city A became *a source of corruption.* 5 billion tenge was allocated from the republican budget for its construction. But the funds were stolen. During the judicial investigation, the construction of the power plant center has been halted. PC A members sent numerous letters to the oblast and national government, the general prosecutor's office, and the Parliament regarding this case. As a result, according to the state media resources, businessmen and state officials who were responsible for technical supervision received prison sentences. During the 10 years of the power plant construction (2012-2022) the national currency has devalued twice and the expenses for the construction have risen to around 7 billion tenge. As a result, 6.9 billion tenge was allocated to the new private company to construct the power plant in A-city. The citizens were connected to the central heating system in 2022.

Case 2. At the end of Summer 2021, the residents who live close to a paper and pulp factory complained of an unbearable smell. According to them, the paper and pulp factory's production waste flowed into the steppe and a small water reservoir (Picture 1). There was a moratorium on checking the business facilities. Therefore, PC A sent several official letters (with video recordings of the contaminated site) to the national government. Production waste merged with local water reservoirs from which the livestock and poultry drink water. PC A carried out a public oversight and initiated official letters to the Department of Ecology. All findings and proceedings carried out by PC A were reported in local media. The inspection revealed that the contaminated water contains heavy metals and oil products which hurt the environment in the long run. According to inspectors, the pulp and paper factory violated the state regulations on waste processing. The

[45] The power plant not only produces electricity, but is also a source of thermal energy in district heating systems.

factory has been fined 1.5 million tenge for environmental offenses, and the factory was forced to remedy the transgression.

Picture 1. The paper and pulp factory 16 October 2021

Source: www.tengrinews.kz

Regarding the first case, this study concludes that collaboration of efforts between the district PC and a regional PC on some issues may result in positive changes. This is not the only case where the collaboration of PCs at various levels (district, city, region) succeeded. This is because the regional PC is regarded as a higher unit within the state apparatus hierarchy, thus they have more impact on the district and city-level bureaucrats. Moreover, regional PCs tend to have more administrative resources to resolve social issues. The second case shows that on some issues, the national government facilitates the resolution of a case. Interview respondents mentioned that PC A approaches the national government when other measures are ineffective. Moreover, the role of media is crucial in attracting state officials' attention to an issue.

5.2. Public Council B

PC B has active members and a strong secretariat. The Chairman has networking resources and experience with state bodies and international organizations. This oblast's executive body supports

the operation of PCs. In the process of visiting trips to various districts, the oblast akim was accompanied by the Chairman of PC B. This was the only PC in which the oblast akim had a meeting with new council members in April 2022 (right after the formation of a new PC convocation). PC B organizes meetings with only one state body at a time. Moreover, besides the reporting state body, the oblast deputy akim and other concerned departments of the oblast akimat also participate in all meetings of PC B. As illustrated in Table 14, PC B had a meeting with only 4 state bodies from January to June 2022 but developed recommendations for all of them and sent recommendations to corresponding state bodies promptly (ratio=100%). Recommendations are comprehensive and supported by evidence (a sample is in the annex).

Table 14. PC B meetings with state bodies (outputs: recommendations)

Name of the state body	Number of recommendations	%
The Finance Department of the oblast akimat	1	100%
City akim's report	1	100%
The Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency	1	100%
The Health Department	1	100%
Number of state bodies N=4	Number recommendations N=4	Ratio = 100%

Source: Correspondence January-June 2022.

The PC B meeting considers a single issue each time (Table 14). For instance, a meeting with the ***Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency*** lasted 3 hours. Apart from the anti-corruption agency, the local media and the oblast deputy-akim participated in the meeting. The commission on legal affairs of PC B carried out two additional meetings: pre and post-meeting with the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency. The meeting was very open and full of discussion, PC B members raised critical questions to the state body and offered recommendations related to state tender processes, and compliance officers in state and quasi-state bodies. It was evident that PC B's legal commission carried out comprehensive preparation for this meeting. This includes statistical data, analytical work, and interviews with state representatives. 3 hours was insufficient

and this is why the legal commission had an additional meeting with the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency.

Concerning the review of draft legal acts, PC B predominantly approves received draft legal acts and comments on them in some instances (Table 15). Overall 44 draft legal acts were received and only 6 of them were commented on, thus the ratio is 13%. Although PC B is not very strong in reviewing draft legal acts (Table 15), it is very strong in tracking the responses of state bodies to council recommendations (a sample is provided in the annex). Moreover, the secretariat informs council members and the general public about official responses made by state bodies through the unified webpage for all councils (www.kazkenes.kz)[46]. This makes PC B exceptional and this practice should be exported to other PCs.

Table 15. Review of draft normative legal acts by PC B (outputs: comments)

Number of reviewed legal acts in 2022	Number of commented legal acts	Ratio
44	6	6/44= 13%

Source: Correspondences, January-June 2022.

Overall, in terms of produced outputs, PC B's effectiveness is inferior to PC A's. PC B lacks competencies in reviewing draft legal acts. Moreover, not all PC B commissions are involved in the preparation of the PC meeting with a specific state body. Thus the author defines its effectiveness as moderate. The meetings of PC B are generally well-organized, the legal commission is very active in carrying out preparation works for PC meetings and the discussions were comprehensive during the meeting. There was enough time to raise critical problems and offer recommendations at the meeting, while the secretariat sends all recommendations to the concerned parties on time and tracks the responses from state bodies. However, only a few

[46] PC B's technical secretary showed the author all uploaded documents (recommendations to state bodies, response by the state, agendas and meeting minutes) to the common PCs website www.kazkenes.kz through his account. However, the author noticed that some documents are unavailable to people who do not have accounts. It is impossible to create an account, only authorized people (PC members, technical secretaries) may have an account. Thus, the transparency of PCs does not only depend on PCs, but also on outside resources such as www.kazakenes.kz or the maslikhat's webpage.

commissions are active (e.g. ecology and legal commissions) and are involved in the daily work routines of the PC. Concerning draft legal acts, PC B still faces challenges and the majority of received draft legal acts are approved without any comments.

Apart from these features, PC B's effectiveness rests upon the skillful and powerful Chairman (he is the only Chairperson who is involved in the daily operation of the council from 9 am to 6 pm compared to other PCs' Chairmen). In addition, the local state bodies are responsive to PC B's recommendations. Finally, semi-structured interviews show that some council members lack a sound understanding of specific social issues; some members can bring attention to public issues and require immediate resolution but lack a detailed understanding of the interaction between state, quasi-state, and private stakeholders. Ideally, social issues are resolved through systemic means, not by the emotional attraction of state bodies' attention and phone calls.

The cases below show the social issue resolution by PC B.

Case 3. District B is located 250 kilometers away from the oblast's administrative centre. The road that connects it with the administrative city is part of the international highway which is under renovation. The oblast akimat launched the train service from district B to the oblast's administrative centre in 2021 with 3 train carriages. The taxi fee per person costs around 10,000 tenge, while the train ticket costs 1,500 tenge. However, due to the limited number of train carriages, the general public expressed their concerns. In this regard, the Chairman of PC A sent numerous letters to the head of the regional Department of Passenger Transportation and the deputy oblast akim. *The Chairman visited the regional department* of passenger transportation to discuss this issue. As a result, in 2022 two additional train carriages were successfully added to the train. PC A members, whom the author interviewed, were unaware of this. Only the Chairman and the technical secretary were aware of all the details related to this case.

Case 4. The maintenance of burial areas (cemeteries) was investigated by PC B in 2017. The absence of demarcation and legalization of the lands for cemeteries led to a worsening of sanitary conditions in cemeteries, theft, and robbery. There are 27 cemeteries with a total area of 347 hectares in the administrative city and districts, 17 of which had not been fenced. Public council B carried out public monitoring and discovered that some cemeteries were illegally located along the highways and caused problems with renovation works and the expansion of highways. The public council's meeting on issues related to the maintenance of cemeteries involved various stakeholders including *the oblast akim*. As a result, the PC's 2019 report included the results of this social problem. Overall, PC B sent 9 recommendations to district state bodies. 7.5 million tenge from the local budget was allocated for the legalization of cemeteries and 52 million tenge was allocated from the local budget for the estimated documentation of 27 cemeteries. As a result, 8 additional cemeteries had been fenced by the end of 2019; two district cemeteries' documents had been legalized. According to the annual report, the demarcation and legalization of cemeteries had been fully implemented in the administrative city and were under processing in some districts.

The first case shows the role of a specific agent – the Chairman – who uses his personal contacts in state bodies, resources, and time to resolve a specific issue. Semi-structured interviews with PC members show that they are generally unaware of this case. The second case illustrates the efforts made by the PC B members and the role of the oblast akim who is interested in PC operation. In general, all PC B meetings are attended by representatives of the oblast akimat, which is quite a distinguishing factor and this happens irrespective of the appointment of a new akim. In other words, the oblast akimat as a state body is responsive and open to collaborating with PC B.

5.3. Public Council C

PC C met with two state bodies during the specified period from January to June 2022 (Table 16). Similar to PC B, PC C dedicated each meeting to only one state body. According to Table 16, PC C offered recommendations to all state bodies. However, it is worth mentioning that when the author arrived at PC C 3 weeks after PC C's meeting with the Healthcare Department the recommendations had not been sent to the corresponding state body. Only a few more weeks later did the secretariat of PC C send out the recommendations. This may illustrate the performance of the secretariat rather than that of PC C members who offered comprehensive recommendations. Nevertheless, the PC secretariat and PC members should work closely, because cooperation and trust impact the PC's effectiveness.

PC C has competent and independent members. According to interviews with PC C members, the preparation for the meetings with state bodies (Departments of Agriculture, and Healthcare) was very intense. The commission on social issues carried out public monitoring in social markets and administered a survey among consumers on price increases and agricultural products. The meetings were open and the members raised challenging questions to state bodies. However, the recommendations raised during the hearing of state reports were sent to the respective state bodies

with a delay of almost five weeks. The author observed the secretariat's daily operation and noticed that the secretariat members were slow and seemed to lack confidence in processing council members' recommendations. The secretariat shows a lack of experience in the operation of the council, let alone the tracking of state bodies' motivated responses (Table 16). There were three officers in the PC C secretariat. The author observed several phone calls made by PC secretariat officers to the head of the Internal Affairs Department of the akimat during which they attempted to clarify how to further process the official letters with recommendations.

Table 16. PC C meetings with state bodies.

Name of the state body	Number of recommendations	%
Oblast akimat's Department of Agriculture	1	100%
Department of Healthcare	1	100%
Number of state bodies = 2	Number recommendations =2	100%

Source: Correspondences January-June 2022

Concerning draft legal acts, PC C either lacks competencies or is apathetic in reviewing them. Almost all of them are approved except for one draft legal act with minor comments and one that was returned to the state body due to incomplete supporting documents. Annually, this council reviews around 100 legal acts. To be sure, the author further checked other draft legal acts for 2021, 2020, and 2019. In those years, almost all draft legal acts were approved without any comments. In other words, the reviewing of draft legal acts is purely a formal job in PC C's operation.

Table 17. Review of draft normative legal acts by PC C

Number of reviewed legal acts in 2022	Number of commented legal acts	Ratio
24	1 legal act has been returned to the state body 1 legal act was commented	1/23=4.34%

Source: Correspondences, January-June 2022.

As a result, PC C shows low moderate effectiveness: although the council members offer substantial and strong recommendations to state bodies' reports (see Table 16), the secretariat is slow in processing the recommendations further. Only two meetings were carried out during the specified period. This is the lowest number across the four PCs under study. For instance, PC A met with 17 state bodies in the same period. Interestingly, the annual plan of PC C anticipates only two more meetings with state bodies by the end of 2022. Regarding the review of draft legal acts, PC C's operation is formal and approves received draft legal acts in almost all cases. The output ratio for commented draft legal acts is very low, it accounts for merely 4.34%.

Apart from these limitations, PC C faces the following challenges in its operation. The secretariat members also happen to be the staff of the local state bodies and PC C largely operates as a 'department' of the maslikhat. There are three technical staff members in the secretariat of the council, two of whom *de facto* work at the maslikhat, and another one is recruited (*de jure*) through the executive body. The Chairperson of PC C had been provided a separate office next to the oblast akim. It is worth noting that the previous technical secretary of PC C (2018 to 2021) was the head of akimat's Internal Affairs Department. In addition, some PC C members work at the council for the third term which violates the Law on Public Councils (2016, Article, 9, Point 5). This possibly happens due to a lack of legal awareness of existing law.

Although PC C's performance is evaluated as low moderate, this council has a number of successful and unsuccessful cases to offer for analysis.

Case 5. PC C carried out public monitoring of landfills in 2018 and organized a public discussion with the involvement of state bodies, the private sector, and experts on ecology and the environment. During the public monitoring, PC C revealed the adverse impact of landfills on five districts of city C. As a result, the old landfill was closed and a 20-hectare territory was allocated to the new landfill and recycling complex. The cost of the project was estimated at more than 1.5 billion tenge. The project capacity is 60 thousand tons of waste per year. The new landfill was constructed. However, according to a local journalist's publication, the landfill lacks technical facilities for recycling and 15 workers were sorting the trash manually, thus the journalist was curious about the usefulness of the 1.5 billion tenge expense for the landfill project.

Case 6. The problem of the gas tariff had been a major social issue in this oblast for many years. *The gas tariff is generally high* and the local public demands to decrease it. The regional association of veterans "The Veterans Union" (whose members are well-respected *retired males* of the oblast) raised this issue and appealed to PC C in 2018. There is archival evidence of a meeting carried out by PC C on the gas tariff, and the minutes of the council meeting show that the following stakeholders were involved: "The Veteran Union", JSC "C" (the monopolist company that charges gas fees), and the regional branch of the Agency for the Regulation of Natural Monopolies. The official letter to the Ministry of Energy of Kazakhstan states the following (2021): the regional Department of Natural Monopolies regulation found the 2019 tariff proposed by the JSC "C" unjustified and designated a temporary compensatory transit tariff for 2020-2025. That is, the transportation tariff must be reduced by 34 percent, which in turn would reduce the marginal price of natural gas. However, JSC "C" disagreed with this price and filed a suit in July 2021. Despite the court's decision, JSC "C" continues to receive payments for gas at a higher rate.

The first case is illustrated in the National Report on PC performance by MISD (2021) as a positive case. However, even in this case, the PC's performance cannot be described as completely effective. Although a new landfill was constructed, it operates without a properly functioning recycling system. PC C did not track the implementation until construction was completed. The second case shows that, in regions, veteran organizations (often with respected retired people) can raise pressing issues. However, gas prices relate to the economic interests of national and regional elites. Despite the decision of the court, the monopoly company JSC "C" still receives gas payments at higher rates. Thus, the economic interests of regional and national elites are well-secured and it is hard to make changes. Similar cases related to the economic interests of regional and national elites have been revealed in other PCs during fieldwork. Findings suggest that social issues that are related to the economic interests of regional and national elites are hard to resolve for all PCs.

5.4. Public Council D

Before conducting fieldwork at PC D, the technical secretary of the council led the author to the Office of the Secretary of the oblast maslikhat. Only after gaining the approval of the maslikhat's Secretary was the author allowed to observe the daily routines of the council and to

proceed with archival works as necessary. Interestingly, the archives of PC D were mixed with the correspondences of the oblast maslikhat.

PC D meetings include the hearing of state bodies' reports, the review of draft legal acts, and others. The author observed a PC D meeting in May 2022 and noted that *within two hours* 15 civil servants made reports: four civil servants reported on changes to legal acts, while five civil servants reported on budget programs; four representatives of state and quasi-state bodies made reports on youth employment issues; two people gave reports on the "*Ruhani zhangiru*" (Spiritual Transformation) state program. This is the only council that combines various activities (such as hearing the state reports and reviewing the draft legal acts) in one meeting. This council's meeting is formal and bureaucratized because the PC approved all reports and legal acts without comments. Only one critical question on youth employment was raised by a council member to the district deputy akim. It is worth mentioning that after each state report, the PC D Chairman asked PC D members to raise questions, concerns and offer recommendations, however, except for one member, no one else spoke up.

The author arrived well ahead of the meeting and started interviews with PC D members prior to the general PC meeting with state bodies. None of the PC commissions were involved in the preparation process for the meeting with state and quasi-state bodies. The author observed phone calls to the PC technical secretary before the meeting of the PC with state bodies. PC members called to explain why they could not attend the meeting. One phone call was made from the maslikhat to exempt a PC member from attending because that member is also a maslikhat deputy and he/she had another activity at that time. The technical secretary of PC D explained:

> "The oblast maslikhat's Secretary called me to explain why a PC member who is a maslikhat deputy cannot attend tomorrow's meeting. I rejected… justifying that the local media is very critical and would raise concerns if more than half of PC members are not present at the meeting, then the decision of the PC would be invalid. Then the maslikhat Secretary made a phone call to the Chairperson of PC D. The Chairperson is a gentle person and allowed that member to miss the meeting. Every time we have this situation, where not all PC members attend the meeting, I use the 'Zoom' program to allow those members to attend the meeting online.

Otherwise, the local media will challenge the PC decisions arguing that they are not based on a majority vote[47].” (PC3)

The meeting was formal and not very productive. As stated by the technical secretary, other missing PC members joined the meeting online. None of them (online participants) raised any questions or contribute to the meeting. The day after the meeting, the technical secretary sent official letters (that contained no recommendations) to state bodies and no recommendations with respect to the draft legal acts that had been considered at the PC meeting. Table 18 shows that overall PC D had meetings with 14 state bodies, and to five of them PC D offered some recommendations (ratio=5/14=35%).

Table 18. PC D meetings with state bodies (outputs: recommendations)

Name of the state body	Number of recommendations	Ratio
Department of Emergency Situations	0	0
Department for Coordination of Employment and Social Programs of the Akimat	1	100%
Health Department of the Akimat	1	100%
Department of Agriculture and Land Relations of the Akimat	1	100%
Department of Agriculture and Land Relations of the akimat	1	100%
On the implementation of the national program "Rukhani Zhangyru".	1	100%
About the Draft budget programs for 2023-2025 of the state administration of region D	0	0
On approval of the report on the execution of the regional budget of region D for 2021	Taken into account	0
Report on the implementation of the Development Plan of the region in the field of "Culture" for 2021	Taken into account	0
Report on the implementation of budget programs for the administrator of budget programs 748 KSU "Department of Culture, Development of Languages and archives of the Akimat” for 2021	Taken into account	0
On approval of retail price thresholds for socially significant food products for the first, second, third and fourth quarters of 2022	Taken into account	0
Department of Entrepreneurship and Industrial and Innovative Development of the Akimat	Taken into account	0

[47] According to the “Approval of Model Regulations on PCs” (2021, article 52), the meetings of PCs are able to lawfully make comments and recommendations if at least 2/3 of PC members attend. Although the Model Regulation states that meetings can be conducted in the form of videoconference, it does not state whether PC members are allowed to join the meeting online when the meeting is conducted offline.

Deputy Head of "Department of Construction, Architecture, and Urban Planning" of the Akimat	Taken into account	0
Reports of deputy district akims of A, B, C, D, and E on youth employment	Taken into account	0
Number of state bodies = 14	Number of recommendations=5	Ratio=5/14=35%

Source: Correspondences, January –June 2022.

Concerning draft legal acts, PC D reviews around 130 legal acts annually which is the highest number among all the PCs under study. PC D reviewed 38 legal acts from January to June 2022. However, usually, they provide no comments on draft legal acts (Table 19). This is also true concerning draft legal acts for the previous years (2019, 2018, 2017). As the technical secretary explained, all comments are discussed during the meeting or through phone calls, thus all official responses generally reflect the approval of legal acts. However, the author attended one meeting in May 2022 and the council members did not make any comment on the four legal acts under the meeting's review.

Table 19. Review of draft normative legal acts by PC D (outputs: comments)

Number of reviewed legal acts in 2022	Number of commented legal acts	Ratio
38	2	5.26%

Source: Correspondences, January-June 2022.

In sum, PC D shows low effectiveness, because the meetings are generally found to be unproductive. Only in rare cases do council members offer recommendations to state bodies. The official documents state that the information provided by state bodies is "taken into account", however, PC commissions did not prepare for the meeting. Moreover, in most cases, PC D approved draft legal acts without commenting on them. The meetings are formal and bureaucratized and without discussions. Thus, it was a waste of time for both PC members and civil servants who reported their performance. Interestingly, deputy akims of the four districts traveled a long distance to present their reports in regional PC meetings. Deputy akims have been accompanied by numerous followers from respective district akimats. This is a common practice across all PCs where the heads of state bodies are accompanied by their deputies to respond to PC members' questions. However, PC D members did not raise any questions to the district deputy

akims and there were no genuine discussions. As a result, it was a waste of time for PC members, deputy akims, and their followers who dismissed a whole working day in order to attend the PC meeting.

Meanwhile, civil society representatives in this region have strong competencies[48] in social issues, and the interview respondents are generally aware of numerous successful cases that have been addressed by the city public council rather than the (regional) PC D. The Law on Public Councils (2016) states that PCs are allowed to carry out public monitoring in contrast to social organizations, which are not allowed. This is why local social organizations include PC members in their public monitoring groups. Some samples of public monitoring carried out by local NGOs with the involvement of council members are available in Annex 3. Despite the limitations, PC D contributed to addressing the following social issue.

Case 7. Members of the council raised the issue of water pipelines (reconstruction of water pipelines and branches) in six districts in 2017 (Picture 2). Water distribution pipelines were reconstructed in 10 districts at the expense of the state budget in 2014-2016 (the average allocated amount per district was 263 million tenge). However, they did not work adequately and citizens raised concerns regarding the quality of the water pipelines. PC D members carried out public monitoring in 5 districts (Picture 4). The public council organized a meeting involving several stakeholders: private providers, the rural akimat representatives, and the Oblast Department of Housing and Communal Services. The public monitoring revealed the following fallacies in various rural areas: in some rural areas the pumping station had not been installed, in others, only 60% of citizens had access to water and in many rural areas water pipelines did not work. PC D sent numerous official letters to the Prosecutor's Office, the Regional Communal and Housing Department, and the Anti-corruption Agency. PC D initiated dealing with this social problem and collaborated with enforcement bodies (regional branch of the anti-corruption agency, economic court). As a result, the letter from the oblast housing and communal service department contains the following results about this case:

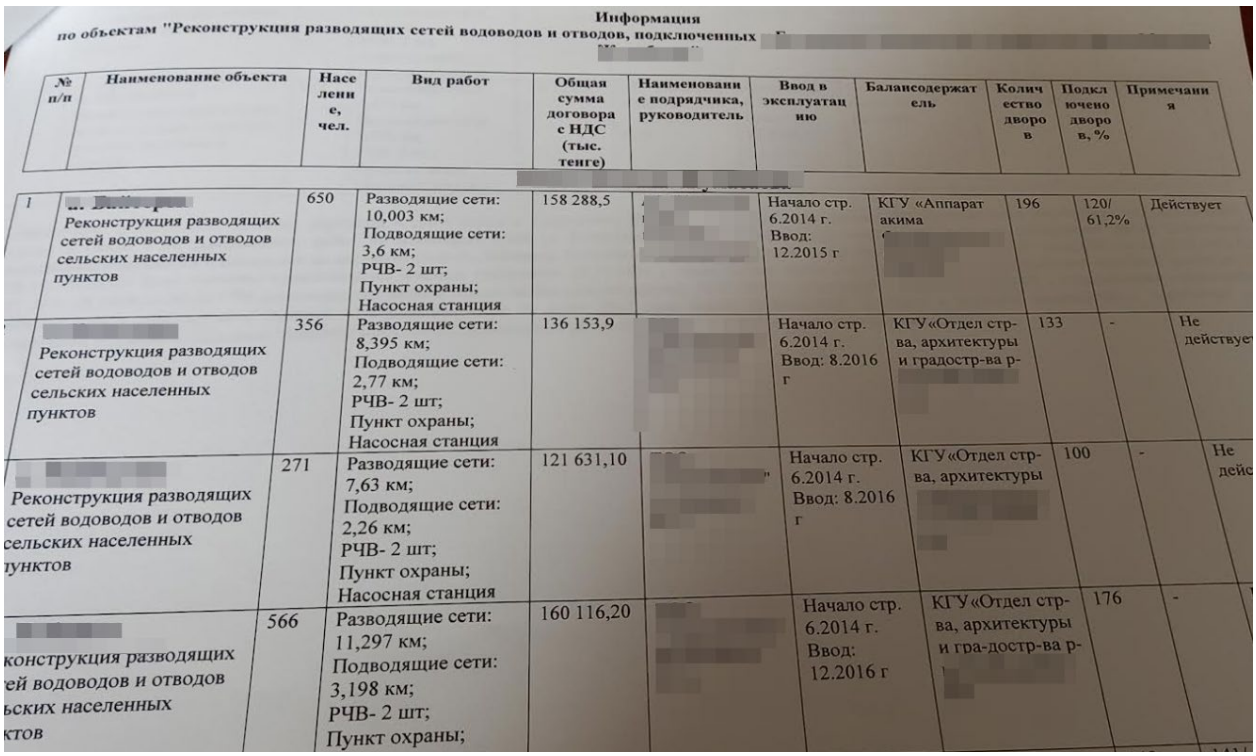
- 10 district civil servants were subjected to disciplinary sanctions in this case;

- By decision of the Specialized Interdistrict Economic Court, Limited Liability Partnership "D" was forced to complete the construction and installation of water pipelines in villages D, A, and C. The director of LLP "D" was brought to administrative responsibility (a fine of 20 monthly calculated rates) under Article 669 of the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Administrative Offenses for the failure to comply with a court decision. The materials of the case were handed over to the District Department of Internal Affairs of district A in order to bring LLP "D" to criminal liability. Investigations are underway.

[48] According to active and strong NGO members who are not PC members, the recruitment process does not allow them to join the PC.

- Regarding the theft of pumping equipment in village M, the Department of Architecture, Housing Construction, and Communal Services sent a statement to region M's Police Department, and a criminal case was initiated. At the expense of the republican budget, pumping equipment was purchased and installed in the pumping station building located in village M. In village G, iron doors were installed in the buildings of the security and the pumping station.

Picture 2. Public monitoring details of rural water pipelines by PC D members



Информация
по объектам "Реконструкция разводящих сетей водоводов и отводов, подключенных

№ п/п	Наименование объекта	Население, чел.	Вид работ	Общая сумма договора с НДС (тыс. тенге)	Наименование подрядчика, руководитель	Ввод в эксплуатацию	Балансодержатель	Количество дворов	Подключено дворов, %	Примечания
1	Реконструкция разводящих сетей водоводов и отводов сельских населенных пунктов	650	Разводящие сети: 10,003 км; Подводящие сети: 3,6 км; РЧВ- 2 шт; Пункт охраны; Насосная станция	158 288,5		Начало стр. 6.2014 г. Ввод: 12.2015 г	КГУ «Аппарат акима	196	120/ 61,2%	Действует
	Реконструкция разводящих сетей водоводов и отводов сельских населенных пунктов	356	Разводящие сети: 8,395 км; Подводящие сети: 2,77 км; РЧВ- 2 шт; Пункт охраны; Насосная станция	136 153,9		Начало стр. 6.2014 г. Ввод: 8.2016 г	КГУ«Отдел стр-ва, архитектуры и градостр-ва р-	133	-	Не действует
	Реконструкция разводящих сетей водоводов и отводов сельских населенных пунктов	271	Разводящие сети: 7,63 км; Подводящие сети: 2,26 км; РЧВ- 2 шт; Пункт охраны; Насосная станция	121 631,10		Начало стр. 6.2014 г. Ввод: 8.2016 г	КГУ«Отдел стр-ва, архитектуры	100	-	Не дейс
	конструкция разводящих ей водоводов и отводов ьских населенных ктов	566	Разводящие сети: 11,297 км; Подводящие сети: 3,198 км; РЧВ- 2 шт; Пункт охраны;	160 116,20		Начало стр. 6.2014 г. Ввод: 12.2016 г	КГУ«Отдел стр-ва, архитектуры и гра-достр-ва р-	176	-	

Source: Photo made by the author. Archive. May 2022.

This case shows that PCs without binding decisions can have a social impact, and to succeed PCs should collaborate with enforcement bodies with sanctioning power. In this case, PC D worked with the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption agency, the Prosecutor's Office, the Police, and the Economic Court.

Comparison of four public councils' effectiveness

The abovementioned findings suggest that PCs' operations vary in producing outputs (i.e. comments on draft legal acts; meetings with state bodies, and recommendations) (Tables 21 and

22). At the same time, all PCs have cases that made a social impact, which is demonstrated through the successful cases above.

PC A is distinguished by reviewing draft legal acts, while meetings with state bodies still need some improvements which will impact the production of recommendations by council members. Furthermore, PC A is distinguished by active commission works and the involvement of external experts. Similar to PC A, PC B's meetings are generally full of discussions and critical questions. However, not all commissions are involved in preparation for meetings with the state body. This council is particularly effective in tracking the state's response to council recommendations. However, PC B still lacks competencies in reviewing draft legal acts and Chairman plays a leading role in the operation of the council. In contrast, both PC C and PC D lag behind their counterparts, particularly in reviewing draft legal acts (Table 20).

Regarding the quality of produced outputs, the following can be mentioned. The number of recommendations to state bodies provided by PC A, PC B, and PC C were comprehensive and contained numerous recommendations to a single state body, whilst in PC D recommendations were short and too general (a sample of PC D and PC B's recommendations to state bodies are available in Annex 2). In contrast to other PCs, comments to draft legal acts were highly comprehensive in PC A (samples of reviewed draft legal acts by PC A are available in Annex 1). Tables 21, 22, and 23 provide an overview of the different outputs in the four PCs, as well as the average output ratio.

Table 20. Main features of four public councils 'operation

Public councils	Main features of operation	Successful and unsuccessful cases
PC A	As a preparation for PC A's meeting with state bodies in June 2022, three commissions (legal affairs, budget and ecology) concurrently worked on various social problems. PC A's meeting with state bodies in June 2022 was full of discussion. Legal commission reviews draft legal acts and the commission includes experts (non PC members) from professional organizations. PC A reviews and comments almost all draft legal acts.	1. The power plant of City A became a source of corruption. The power plant was constructed in 2022 due to the contribution of PC A. 2. The paper and pulp factory's production waste flowed into the steppe and a small water reservoir. Due to the contribution of PC, the factory was imposed 1.5 million tenge fine and enforced to take corrective action in 2021.

PC B	The Chairman has networking resources and experience with state bodies and international organizations. This oblast's executive body supports the operation of the PC. PC B met with the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency in June 2022, the legal affairs commission conducted comprehensive preparation work before the meeting and met with the Regional Branch of the Anti-Corruption even after the meeting to address their critical comments. Regarding legislation, PC B comments not all draft legal acts.	1.Two additional train carriages were successfully added to the train in 2022. It was achieved mainly due to the contribution of PC B Chairman. 2. The maintenance of burial areas (cemeteries) was investigated by PC B in 2017. 7.5 million tenge from the local budget was allocated for the legalization of cemeteries and 52 million tenge was allocated from the local budget for the estimated documentation of 27 cemeteries. As a result, 8 additional cemeteries had been fenced by the end of 2019; two district cemeteries' documents had been legalized in 2019.
PC C	The commission on social issues carried out public monitoring in social markets and administered a survey among consumers on price increases and agricultural products before the meeting with the Department of Agriculture. Although PC members' recommendations are comprehensive, the secretariat is slow in processing those recommendations further to state bodies. PC C secretariat functions as a department of the maslikhat. Regarding the review of draft legal acts, PC C's operation is formal and approves received draft legal acts in almost all cases.	1.The old landfill was closed and a 20-hectare territory was allocated to the new landfill and recycling complex due to the contribution of PC C. The project cost was estimated at more than 1.5 billion tenge. 2.The problem of high gas tariffs is a major issue in this region. PC C organized a meeting regarding this issue. Despite the Court's decision to decrease the gas tariff, "C" JSC receives high gas tariff till now, because national and regional elites' interests are well secured.
PC D	The author observed a PC D meeting in May 2022 and noted that within two hours 15 civil servants made reports. The meeting was rather unproductive, with one-way information flows without any discussion. None of the PC commissions were involved in the preparation process for the meeting with state and quasi-state bodies. Regarding the review of draft legal acts, PC D's operation is formal and approves received draft legal acts in almost all cases.	1.Members of the council raised the issue of water pipelines (reconstruction of water pipelines and branches) in six districts in 2017. As a result, 10 district civil servants were subjected to disciplinary sanctions; by a decision of the Specialized Interdistrict Economic Court, Limited Liability Partnership "D" was forced to complete the construction and installation of water pipelines in villages D, A, and C.

Table 21. Output 1: a review of draft legal acts and comments by all councils, January-June 2022

Public Councils	Number of reviewed legal acts	Number of commented legal acts	The ratio of outputs (number of commented legal acts/number of reviewed legal acts)
Public council A	18	18	100%
Public Council B	44	6	13.66%
Public Council C	23	1	4.34%
Public Council D	38	2	5.26%

Source: Developed by the author.

Table 22. Output 2: number of meetings with state/quasi-state bodies and number of recommendations, January-June 2022

Public Councils	Number of state bodies	Number of recommendations	The ratio of outputs (number of recommendations/number of state bodies)

Public Council A	17	14	82%
Public Council B	4	4	100%
Public Council C	2	2	100%
Public Council D	14	5	35%

Source: Developed by the author

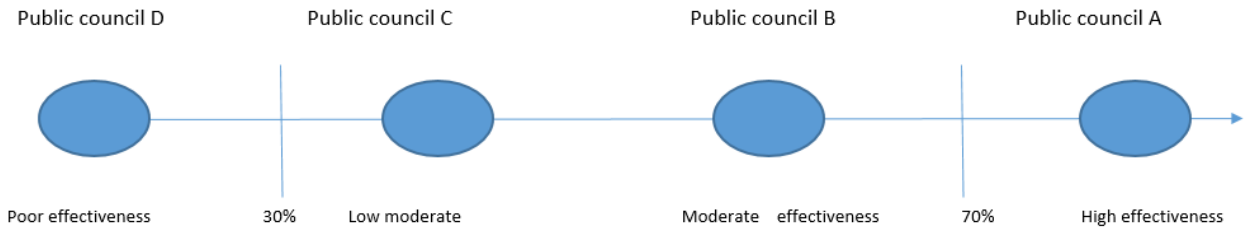
Table 23. Average output ratio

Public Councils	Averaged output ratio
Public Council A	91%
Public Council B	58%
Public Council C	52%
Public Council D	20.5%

Source: Developed by the author.

According to findings based on archival work and non-participant observations of meetings and daily routines of the four PCs, the four units can be placed on the following horizontal axis in terms of effectiveness (Figure 8):

Figure 8. Varying effectiveness of public councils

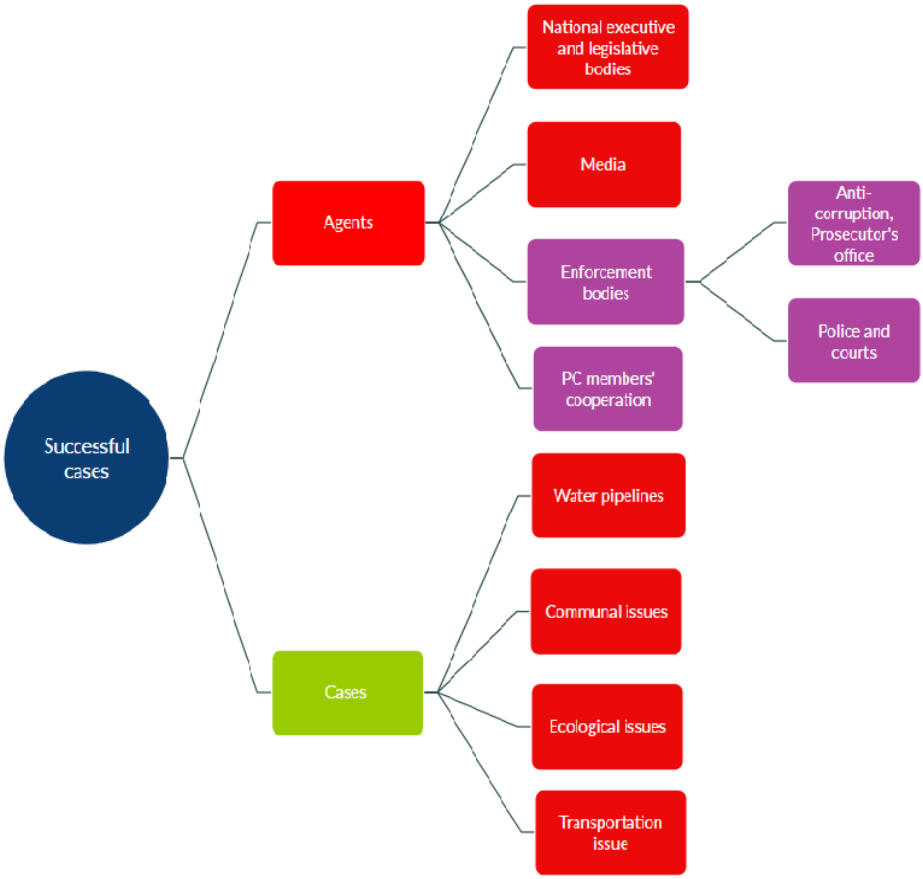


Source: The author's calculation.

In terms of hindering and enabling factors of PC effectiveness, studying the cases revealed the following. Collaboration of efforts between the district council and the regional council on some issues may result in positive changes because the regional PC is regarded as a higher unit within the state apparatus hierarchy. Thus, they have more impact on district and city-level bureaucrats. Moreover, the regional PC has more administrative resources to resolve social issues (Figure 9). Additionally, the national government facilitates the resolution of social issues. The role of media is also crucial in attracting state officials' attention to a social issue. Furthermore, the role of a specific agent – the Chairperson – is crucial, as he/she uses personal contacts in state bodies,

experience, resources, and time to resolve the issue. It is worth mentioning that the agent (a specific PC member, Chairperson, the akim) is a temporary factor that enables PC effectiveness.

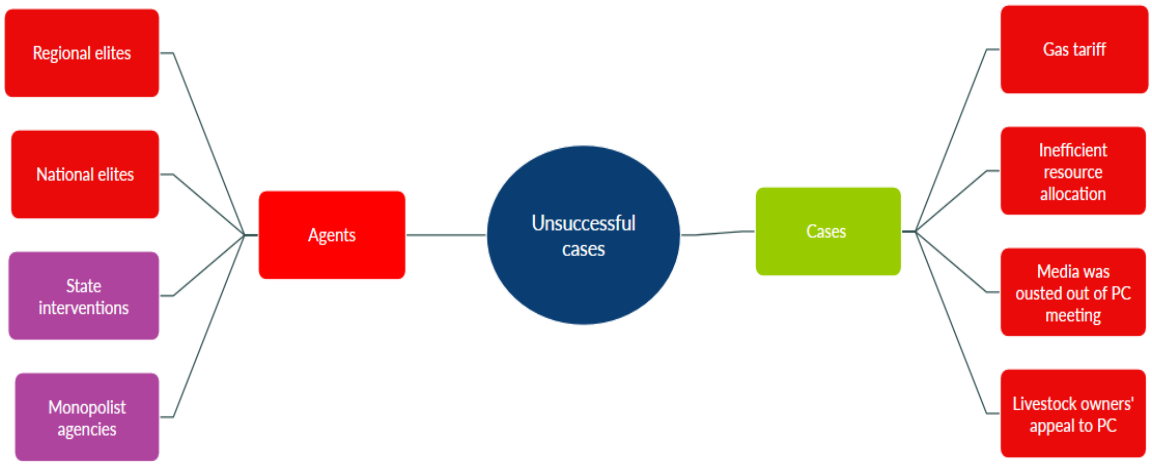
Figure 9. Successful cases



Source: NVIVO project by the author

Moreover, social issues related to the economic interests of regional and national elites are hard to resolve (Figure 10). Only the political will of the regional/national leadership may bring changes and PC members are almost unable to make a social impact on such cases (this problem was encountered in most cases during fieldwork). Finally, although PCs have no sanctioning power and their recommendations are non-binding, they may collaborate with regional enforcement bodies (e.g. Economic Investigations Department, Courts, and the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency) to resolve social issues (Figure 9).

Figure 10. Unsuccessful cases



Source: NVIVO project by the author

Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the findings on PCs' effectiveness based on outputs and non-participant observations/interviews. Based on the findings, the chapter demonstrated units of analysis as highly effective (PC A), moderately (PC B) and low moderately (PC C), and poorly effective (PC D). Effective councils not only meet with state bodies, but also offer recommendations and the meetings are full of discussion. Additionally, effective councils offer constructive comments on draft legal acts. Moreover, this chapter shows the successful and unsuccessful cases by PCs, which reveal the enabling and hindering factors on PC effectiveness. Enabling factors are PCs' collaboration with enforcement bodies and the role of specific agents such as PC Chairman, media and national government. Hindering factors on resolution of social problems include the state intervention, the interest of national and regional elites.

CHAPTER VI. THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS ON PUBLIC COUNCIL EFFECTIVENESS

This chapter examines the impact of social capital (Putnam, 1993) and grid-group dimensions of cultural theory (Douglas, 1982) on PC effectiveness. To that purpose, the stock of social capital (social trust, networking, and norms) is measured through surveys and non-participant observations and interviews. Grid-group environments are measured through non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews. The first section shows the available stock of social capital and discusses the link between social capital and PC effectiveness. The following section demonstrates grid and group environments in the four PCs and their impact on PC effectiveness. The final section addresses the practical question of enabling and hindering factors of PC effectiveness.

6.1. The impact of social capital on public council effectiveness

This section addresses *RQ 1. How does **social capital** impact public council effectiveness?* and examines H1 (Higher social capital has a positive impact on public council effectiveness. Conversely, lower social capital has a negative impact on public council effectiveness). Because social capital has three major components, H1 can be subdivided into three:

*H1. a. Higher **social trust** has a positive impact on public council effectiveness.*

Lower social trust has a negative impact on public council effectiveness.

*H1. b. Higher **networking** has a positive impact on public council effectiveness.*

Lower networking has a negative impact on public council effectiveness.

*H1. c. Higher **cooperation norms** have a positive impact on public council effectiveness.*

Lower cooperation norms have a negative impact on public council effectiveness.

Therefore, this section presents survey findings on social trust, cooperation norms and networking (**in this order**) in the four PCs. The survey findings will be triangulated with findings from interviews and non-participant observations.

Prior to fieldwork, the available stock of social capital in the selected PCs was unknown. Survey findings (Table 24, Table 25) demonstrate that, in general, PC members have a healthy stock of social trust, cooperation norms, and a high stock of networking in non-political organizations (voluntary, community, and professional). This is in contrast to World Values Survey (2017-2022), which shows that only 2.3% of Kazakhstani citizens show a complete trust in people they meet for the first time (WVS, 2017-2022). The solid stock of social capital in four PCs can be explained by the fact that council members are mainly civil society representatives who are predisposed to higher networking and social trust. As a recent Report on PC performance (MISD, 2021) states that civil society enjoys high representativeness in regional PCs (80% - 100%).

Table 24 shows that cooperation norms ("every citizen should invest his/her time in common social issues") and particularized social trust ("trust people you know personally") are higher than generalized social trust ("trust people you meet for the first time"). This finding is in line with the existing literature on social trust in Central Asia (Sapsford and Abbott 2006). Sapsford and Abbot (2006) claim that there is high trust in relatives and friends, less in people in general, and the least in political institutions.

Table 24. Trust and norms of cooperation in four public councils (% of respondents who have "a great deal" of trust and "completely agree" that every citizen should invest time in common social issues)

	Particularized trust: Trust people you know personally	Generalized trust: Trust people you meet for the first time	Norms: Every citizen should invest time in common social issues
PC A	37%	30%	85%
PC B	35%	29%	90%
PC C	30%	27%	53%
PC D	26%	21%	40%

Source: Surveys in four public councils

Social trust

According to Table 24, there is a higher social trust - both particularized and generalized - in PC A and PC B, which are councils with superior performance. This finding shows that social trust contribute to PC effectiveness. Interestingly, PC D members show the lowest level of generalized trust compared to the other three (Table 24), which is in line with the findings of the World Values Surveys, which showed that respondents in the oblast where the PC D operates indicated they had 0% of complete and somewhat trust in general people (WVS, 2017-2022). The regional stock of social trust is important because PC D also engages with external stakeholders (e.g. citizens and enforcement bodies) to produce recommendations.

Similarly, the non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews revealed the impact of social trust on PC effectiveness. In PC D, C and B (in the decreasing order of effectiveness) there are instances of the erosion of social trust to varying degrees. In general, members do not trust each other due to the language, institutional background (affiliation with state bodies, affiliation with media, business), age, gender and affiliation either with old Kazakhstan or new Kazakhstan [49] (Figure 11). Generalized social trust means members should trust each other irrespective of age, gender, social affiliation, language, ethnicity, race, and other differences. Interview findings show that the erosion of social trust indeed impacts the PC operation.

In public councils B, C and D, there is a noticeable erosion of trust based on the institutional affiliation of council members. Council members who represent civil society show distrust toward members from the civil service. In this regard, Knox and Janenova (2018) claim that although civil servants form only 1/3 of the council, "they possess detailed knowledge of how public

[49] President K. Tokayev announced in his March (2022) message to the people of Kazakhstan that the country is moving to a new path of modernization leading to a "New Kazakhstan." New Kazakhstan encompasses political and economic reforms, equal distribution of resources, free and fair political competition and others. People from an old Kazakhstan are associated with nepotism, corruption, oligopoly and tribalism.

administration works in Kazakhstan and can if they are so minded, use this to thwart the extent to which state agencies are held to account" (Knox and Janenova, 2018, p.9). They are indeed treated as cadres "from the old Kazakhstan" by the active members of public council B, as the interview data shows:

> "We have independent and active members, and members from the old Kazakhstan. Those members represent civil service, ex-civil servants, or just those who are loyal to the state. They usually keep silent during PC meetings and are inactive in commission works. As far as we have them in the political system and public council, it is hard to make big progress forward." (PC 1)

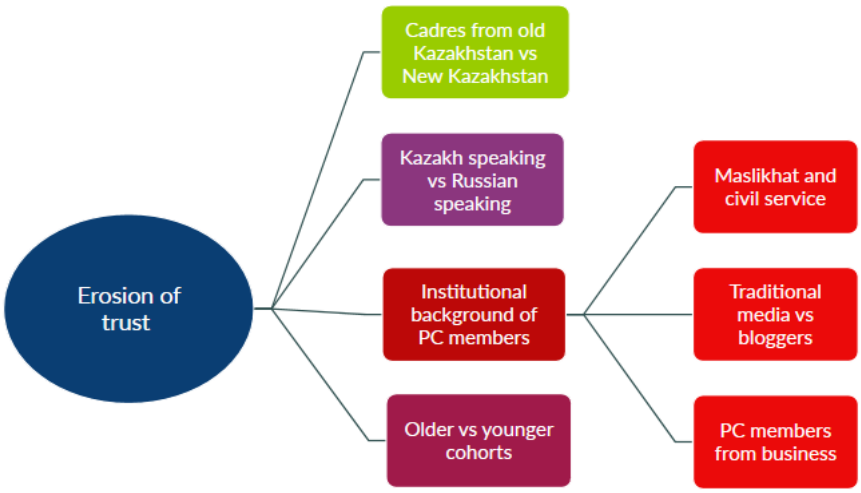
Similarly, council members lack mutual trust due to the institutional background of members. There are several forms of sharp mistrust among members in PC D, C and B (e.g. mistrust due to gender, age, institutional background, old vs new Kazakhstan people, and language). In contrast, there is a minor distrust in PC A mainly based on the institutional background of the members. Some PC A members perceive journalists as having the skills to attract the state's attention to a particular social issue but as lacking deep understanding of that issue itself. PC A member, who is a former civil servant, explains this as follows:

> "One of our members, who is a journalist… by the way we have 7 journalists in our council. So, that member wanted to raise the issue of the Botanic gardens' renationalization. We did not support his initiative in the council as he does not understand the resolution mechanism for this specific issue. I contacted the general prosecutor's office, I know what is happening there. I used to work in the state body and I know that we should not raise this issue here." (FCS-1)

In this case the former civil servant shows distrust towards the journalist arguing that journalists can only raise social issues without knowing the mechanism of its resolution. Interestingly, although some council members supported the journalist-council member's initiative to raise the problem of the Botanic gardens, the other group of members did not support it. This social issue did not progress in PC A, thus the journalist organized a state-sanctioned meeting in the city and attracted the national government's attention. After the state-sanctioned meeting, the media

reported that the Ministry of Education and Science announced the start of renationalization of the Phytochemical Institute, which is a part of the Botanic Gardens.

Figure 11. Reasons for the erosion of trust among PC members



Source: NVIVO project by the author

In PC C, the author observed the erosion of trust between the older and the younger generations. According to interview findings, older cohorts (aged 60+) sometimes refuse to give younger members a chance to speak, neglecting their recommendations, and even placing them in lower seats in the council meetings. This relates to the hierarchical relationship in traditional societies where the older generations are in higher positions than younger ones. This problem is also evidenced in other studies on Kazakh PCs, which stress the age bias in PCs where the older cohort (aged 60+) dominates in the councils (Shaukenova, 2017; MISD, 2021). According to the same sources, there is an erosion of trust due to the institutional background of members and gender differences in PC C.

Interview and non-participant observations suggest that PC D members are sharply divided based on language and institutional affiliation; most members are Kazakhs, but some speak Kazakh while others prefer speaking Russian. A PC D member expressed his/her view on this:

> "As you may notice, in our region, civil society and PC members are divided based on the spoken language. Russian-speaking members are mainly concerned with ecology, pets, and socioeconomic indicators, whilst Kazakh-speaking members are concerned with traditions, the

renaming of streets to Kazakh names, and the Kazakh language. This creates challenges for common work in the PC" (PC 1)

As can be seen from this evidence, social trust has an impact on PC operation. This erosion of trust based on language is evidenced in the ethnically diverse Northern part of Kazakhstan. Additionally, in PC D there is an erosion of trust based on institutional affiliation. This council has a large group of business representatives (33% of members are from the business sector). Members from other fields (e.g. social organizations) do not trust them to have a genuine intention to contribute to common problems. This mistrust seems to have a fair ground, for example, the author attended the PC D meeting in May 2022 and observed that almost all business sector members dismissed the general meeting.

Similar to other findings in the Western context (Knack and Keefer, 1997; Andrews and Brewer, 2013; Goldfinger and Ferguson, 2009), this study finds supporting evidence that social trust has an impact on PC effectiveness. The argument that social trust has an impact on performance is not new. Many scholars acknowledge the salience of social trust in the performance of organizations (Andrews, 2012; Andrews and Brewer, 2010). For example, Fukuyama (1999, p.16) argues that "trust acts like a lubricant that makes any group or organization run more effectively." The findings of this study show that particularized and generalized trust both impact PC effectiveness. In public councils, members are grouped by their interests or expertise and work in small commissions. Particularized trust is essential when PC members work in these small commissions. Additionally, when all PC members work together at PCs' general meetings or with external stakeholders there is a need for generalized trust.

Cooperation norms

The next most productive component of social capital (Putnam, 1993) is cooperation norms. Council members in PC A and PC B have higher cooperation norms (85% and 90% respectively) than council members from poorly effective PC D (40%). As reported in Chapter 5, cooperation

norms were strong in the most effective council, PC A (with the three commissions cooperating before the general meeting of the council), and weak in the least effective one, PC D (where members did not cooperate before or after the general meeting). Unsurprisingly, only 40% of survey respondents in PC D completely agree that "Every citizen should invest his time in common social issues" (Table 24). This percentage is the lowest value in comparison to the other councils.

Interview and non-participant observation data corroborate that finding and indicate that cooperation norms are higher in better-performing councils, i.e., PC A and PC B. In PC A, members are engaged in PC's agenda and meet weekly offline at Chairman's working place. For example, in contrast to other councils, where the review of draft legal acts is conducted mainly by the legal affairs commission, in PC A other commissions also cooperate in such review. This shows there is a strong stock of cooperation in this council. Unsurprisingly, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, all reviewed draft legal acts were commented on by PC A between January to June 2022. Additionally, PC A's legal commission conducts regular workshops about Kazakhstan's regulations for other commission members. One PC A member notes:

> "We have "law hours" in our council, which is similar to the Majilis's "law hours". In "law hours" the legal affairs commission teaches other council members about existing national and local regulatory acts and laws. Also, we reviewed together the received draft regulatory acts in those workshops. I think only by cooperating we can we increase our team's capacity to review the draft legal act." (PC-1)

In contrast to PC A, for example, the erosion of trust inhibits cooperation among PC C members. One PC C member states as follows:

> "I am a maslikhat deputy, which has a negative impact on my work in the council. I see that in commission work they neglect my opinion and even place me in a lower seat[50] despite my age. I am almost 60 years now. Therefore, sometimes I skip the commission work or send my recommendations via WhatsApp." (PC-C-1)

[50] In traditional Kazakh society well-respected people and people from the older generation prefer to sit in higher seats.

This quote shows that social trust and cooperation norms matter, as affiliation with certain institutions (e.g. maslikhat) may lead to the erosion of trust and hinder cooperation among council members. Commission work is the core of PC operations because the general meeting with state bodies is very short (between 2-3 hours) and serves as a platform to give feedback to state bodies. Thus, commission work before the meetings allows PC members to determine their common position, develop recommendations and identify actions in preparation for the general meetings, e.g. public monitoring, surveys and interviews with citizens. However, commission work is not regulated by the Law on Public Councils (2016), which allows some PC members to dismiss it. Therefore, the existing stock of cooperation norms in each PC plays an important role in advancing commission work.

These findings suggest that the role of cooperation norms in PC effectiveness is non-negligible, which is why it is surprising that it remains undertheorized in the existing literature. Social capital literature treats norms as *honesty and trustworthiness* measured through, e.g. “Cheating on taxes if you have the chance” (Knack and Keefer, 1997); or as *cooperation and solidarity norms* e.g. "Every member should contribute his or her free time and resources in common projects and events in his community" (Radnitz et al. 2009, p. 713); or as *norms as reciprocity* (Putnam 1993; Fukuyama, 1995). Consequently, norms are inscribed by multiple meanings (reciprocity, honesty, solidarity, cooperation, trustworthiness). While these meanings are interrelated and measure the concept of norms, the further theorization of cooperation norms is required to enhance the explanatory power of social capital thesis. The findings from this study may offer useful data for future efforts in that direction.

For example, through observation of PC member interactions, the author was able to confirm the existence of honesty and reciprocity norms among council members across councils but noted the lack of cooperation norms in some cases (particularly in PC D). Such reciprocity fits the balanced or specific type of reciprocity (e.g. colleagues exchanging gifts) in Putnam (1993). The other type Putnam describes is generalized or diffuse reciprocity. The balanced or specific type of

reciprocity is well-attested in Central Asia, due to community censure (shame) (Nezhina and Ibrayeva, 2013). However, it is not clear whether the existence of reciprocity equals the existence of solidarity and cooperation. Particularly in rural areas of Central Asia, citizens may display mutual support based on reciprocity and trust toward their fellow citizens, but they may lack norms of cooperation (Babajanian, 2008). For example, there are strong norms of mutual support based on reciprocity and trust in rural Armenia, but they do not translate into community participation and cooperation (Babajanian, 2008). Observation data from the present study further support this conclusion.

One way in which these observations can be used to help refine our understanding of cooperation norms is to distinguish among several levels: cooperation norms at the level of the community or organization, at the level of a region, and at the level of a society or state. The World Values Survey may include questions on cooperation norms, such as "Citizens contribute their time and resources to common social issues in my community", "Citizens contribute their time and resources to common issues in my oblast", "Citizens contribute their time and resources to common issues in my country". By differentiating among these levels (community, regional, national), we will be better equipped to measure cooperation norms in a Central Asian context. And we will be better equipped to explain how traditional nomadic norms, which are well-attested in Kazakhstan, for example, operate at the community level but are absent at the national level (Sokol, 1954 as cited in Bankoff and Oven, 2019).

Networking

The following component of social capital is networking. Table 25 illustrates the networking of four PC members. It suggests that respondents are more involved in nonpolitical social organizations than in political parties. This finding of lower membership in political parties compared to non-political organizations is in line with the data from WVS (2017-2022). According to WVS, only 1.6% of Kazakhstani respondents (N=1200) describe themselves as "active members

of political parties" as compared, for example, to membership in arts, music, and educational organizations, which accounts for 4.4%.

Table 25. Networking of four public council members (% of respondents who are active members)

	Networking: membership in voluntary, professional, and community organizations	Networking: political parties
PC A	86%	68%
PC B	90%	20%
PC C	79%	21%
PC D	93%	60%

Source: surveys in four public councils

Regarding the low level of membership in political parties, the BTI (2022) report states that Kazakhstan's party system is underdeveloped and lacks competition among political parties. Within this party system, the ruling Nur-Otan party (now Amanat) has a dominating role. Similarly, Isaacs (2011) argues that the party development system in Kazakhstan marginalizes all parties except pro-presidential parties. This explains why PC members do not see the value of membership in political parties.

Table 25 shows that almost all respondents indicate their active membership in voluntary, professional, and community organizations, which is particularly high in poorly effective PC D (93%). This finding does not support the hypothesis that high networking is associated with better-performing PCs. Similarly, non-participant observations in PCs have shown that the majority of council members are civil society representatives, but they show reluctance to contribute to PC meetings with state bodies (particularly in PC D). During semi-structured interviews with PC D members, for example, it was noted that they have certain civic skills (challenging attitude toward state bodies, monitoring skills, self-organization skills) but they lack incentives to challenge and monitor state bodies.

Yet it is unclear why networking, particularly in non-political organizations, does not have an impact on PC effectiveness. Scholars suggest that networking and trust go hand in hand (Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Inglehart, 1997; Rose, 1998). Putnam (2000, p.137) portrays networking and trust as "tangled as well-tossed spaghetti." If so, why does social trust impact PC effectiveness while networking in formal organizations does not? Survey findings show that PC members are mainly members of intermediate organizations (e.g., voluntary, professional, community, and political parties) (Table 25); if so, members have higher civic skills in self-organizing and demanding accountability, transparency, and efficiency from state bodies. This implies that the PC is an ideal platform for those with higher civic skills to influence state bodies. However, survey and non-participant observation findings fail to show that networking contributes to PC effectiveness. Because in the Central Asian context, scholars highlight the dependency of civil society organizations on the state and its operation under the state's constraints (Giffen et al, 2005; Knox and Yessimova, 2015; Nezhina and Ibrayeva, 2013; Axyonova and Bossuyt, 2016). For instance, Giffen et al. (2005) suggest that the state has established some public organizations on various issues, which are known as GONGOs (or government-organized NGOs). That said, membership in organizations does not necessarily improve individuals' civic skills and does not necessarily show the strength of neo-liberal networking. Western scholars' notion of the network (Putnam, 2000; Inglehart, 1997; Newton, 1999) assumes a neo-liberal civil society, while the network in Kazakhstan (particularly at the regional level) remains mainly state-led and, in some occasions, is liberal and communal[51].

As an NGO member who is not a PC member stated in a semi-structured interview:

> "In our region, civil society predominantly waits for state social orders. There are around 1000 registered NGOs in our region, but only 10 of them work all year round. Other NGOs wake up only during the announcement of the state social order. Another feature is that in most instances NGOs do not focus on specific issues such as ecology, education, or tourism. Instead, they disperse their activities on everything; this is due to dependency on state social order. NGOs

[51] Networking is a part of civil society. Babajanian et al. (2005) and Earle (2005) differentiate the following types of civil society in Eurasia: neo-liberal (NGOs monitor the state), state-led (established with state support), communal (the non-challenging attitude toward the state) and global civil society (e.g. ecological issues and climate change).

participate in all types of social orders (e.g. healthcare, pets, ecology) to receive state money." (CSR NGO-1)

This quote shows the incentive of NGOs is to capture social order in any policy domain in local areas. Although republican-status cities, such as Astana, Shymkent, and Almaty are regarded as local governments, they are not included as units of analysis in this study. Republican-status cities may have a neo-liberal civil society. But this study focuses on regional PCs operating in smaller cities with limited financial resources for civil societies. Thus networking is mainly state-led, which is different from what is discussed in social capital research based on the Western context.

The dependency of civil society organizations on the state was solidified in 2005, when the government of Kazakhstan initiated the law "*On State Social order, Grants and Bonuses*", which transformed the relationship between the state and civil society and restricted access to funding other than state sources (O'Connor et al., 2019). Earlier, civil society organizations had access to various financial sources: international funding, consultancy fees, private donations, and so forth (ibid). However, since 2015 all funding (both state and international) has to be delivered through a state-controlled joint stock company "Centre for Support of Civic Initiatives" (ibid).

Some interviewees of this study stressed the affiliation of some PC members with state bodies through state social orders, which shows a state-led feature of civil society. Likewise, Junussova's (2018) research claims that more than half of maslikhat deputies are affiliated with state bodies and they secure their economic interests through a partnership with local executive bodies. Concerning regional PCs, more than 2/3 of PC members are civil society representatives. Meanwhile, the literature on Central Asian civil society highlights the existence of state-led civil society (Giffen et al, 2005; Knox and Yessimova, 2015; Nezhina and Ibrayeva, 2013). The affiliation of PC members with local executive bodies through state social grants can be viewed in

databases online[52] revealing that some council members' organizations received money through state social orders (*gosudarstvenniy social'niy zakaz*).

Table 26. The percentage of civil society members whose organizations received payments through state tenders from 2017-2022

	Overall members	State representatives	Civil society Members	% of civil society members whose organizations received payments through state tenders
Public council A	38	2	36	33%
Public council B	31	4	27	23%
Public council C	30	1	29	41%
Public council D	21	5	16	75%

Source: the author's calculation is based on data from www.goszakup.gov.kz , www.egov.kz www.pk.uchet.kz

Table 26 shows that each PC has members from civil society whose organizations received social payments in 2017-2022, while the budget of each contract varies from 20, 000 tenge to 1, 696 660 000 tenge (www.goszakup.gov.kz). The highest number of signed contracts belongs to an organization of one PC member with 14 contracts in 2017, 19 contracts in 2018, 40 contracts in 2019, 53 contracts in 2020, and 31 contracts in 2021, all contracts contained a large sum of money (ibid).

Perhaps PC members have civic skills such as articulating civil society's demands, self-organization, and skills to work with large data to monitor state bodies. However, they may lack incentives to influence state bodies' performance because some of them depend on state funding. In addition, there is a conflict of interest at PC meetings where members are assumed to influence and challenge the state bodies. The highest % of organizations that received state tenders belong to PC C and PC D members, with 41% and 75% respectively. In this regard, it is worth noting that PC D shows the worst effectiveness overall.

[52] www.goszakup.gov.kz, www.egov.kz and www.pk.uchet.kz

A final note regarding the three components of social capital in the local context. Tables 24 and 25 show that social trust and networking do not move in one direction. The majority of respondents show their membership in non-political organizations, meanwhile, the stock of social trust is comparatively lower than the membership in non-political parties. Radnitz et al. (2009) made this claim earlier with respect to Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan), arguing that social trust and norms diverge from networking. According to these scholars, social trust and norms are higher in greater repression, whilst networking is higher under less repressive regimes (ibid). However, Radnitz et al. (2009) did not explain why these two (social trust and norms, on the one hand, and networking, on the other) diverge within one country. The present study argues that the reason for this divergence is to be sought in the fact that membership in non-political organizations is mainly state-led, as demonstrated by the data on social orders received by social organizations (Table 26).

Some western scholars treat social capital as a *monolithic concept* (Putnam, 2000; Inglehart, 1997). In other words, social trust, norms, and networking are believed to go hand in hand, though there is some debate on what causes what (social trust causes networking or vice-versa) (Putnam, 2000; Uslaner and Conley, 2003; Rose, 1998; Inglehart, 1997). In contrast, other group of scholars note that there is no link between trust and networking in post-communist societies (Uslaner, 2004; Radnitz et al., 2009) and even in Western countries (Newton, 1999). While the present study supports the claim that networking and social trust diverge, it also goes further and explains the reason why networking does not correlate with social trust at a sub-national level.

In sum, regarding the impact of social capital on PC effectiveness the following can be concluded. Firstly, social trust and norms contribute to PC effectiveness. Secondly, membership in political parties or non-political organizations (networking) does not contribute to PC effectiveness because networking is mainly state-led in regional contexts. Finally, social trust and networking in formal organizations do not go hand in hand.

In the next section, the grid-group cultural theory (Douglas, 1982; Wildavsky, 1987; Douglas, 1973) will be used to further unpack the puzzle of networking. That is because this theory allows us to measure group strength from other angles as well (commitment to group goals, shared time, group boundary), not just through membership in intermediate associations and formal organizations (e.g. political parties, voluntary organizations).

6.2. The impact of grid-group environments on public council effectiveness

This section addresses research question 2: *How do grid-group environments impact PC effectiveness?* And examines hypotheses:

H2. A high-group environment has a positive impact on PC effectiveness.

A low-group environment has a negative impact on PC effectiveness.

H3. A high-grid environment has a negative impact on PC effectiveness.

A low-grid environment has a positive impact on PC effectiveness.

This study conceptualized the group in terms of in-group collectivism (horizontal ties), and institutional collectivism (commitment to group goals). The grid is conceptualized as authority, role and status distinctions, and classifications. The study adapted Boettger's (1997) measurement of group and grid environments through interviews and non-participant observations. In the measurement of the group, the following dimensions have been captured: members' shared time, the group's survival, and the group's boundaries. In the measurement of the grid, the study focuses on insulation within PCs, rules, regulations, and authority.

Low-group environment.

PC D operates in a low-group environment. The author arrived at PC D one week ahead of PC D's planned meeting with state bodies.

Table 27. Group contexts of PC D and PC C

Group (in-group collectivism and institutional collectivism)	Public council D	Public council C
Shared time	Lack of interaction between council members. PC members did not work in small commissions within 2 weeks observed by the author.	During the observation timeframe, the author did not detect interactions. PC C planned merely 4 meetings with state bodies for 2022. This indicates a low group interaction throughout the year.
Commitment to group goals	Low commitment to group goals, PC meeting is missed by members, only 11 PC members (overall 21) physically attended the meeting. PC D does not have an annual working plan (agenda), and goals are set only for 4 months.	Some members put personal interests higher than PC goals.
Group boundary	There is no clear boundary between the maslikhat and the public council. The PC D secretariat functions as a department of the maslikhat.	There are no clear group boundaries between PC C, the maslikhat and the akimat. In PC C three secretariat officers simultaneously work in the maslikhat and the akimat.

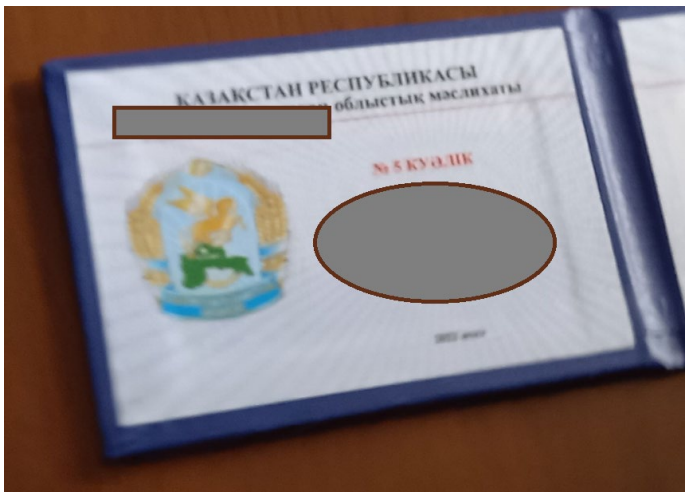
The author did not *encounter any interaction between council members* in the PC D Secretariat and outside. During interviews, none of the council members mentioned that their corresponding commissions were preparing for the meeting. The author visited PC D for two weeks and observed the daily working routines of the technical secretary, however, neither the Chairman nor council members showed up during this time. The whole preparation for the meeting with state bodies had been conducted by a single person – PC D's technical secretariat, who is not a council member. The technical secretary even worked on weekends till 10 pm due to the high workload preparing for the council meeting with state bodies. In addition to members' passive attitude, three council members who are maslikhat deputies asked the maslikhat Secretary to excuse their absence from the meeting. According to the Law on Public Councils (2016, article 15), failing to participate in council meetings more than three times within a year without justified reasons leads to a termination of council membership. Therefore, some council members who are also maslikhat deputies attempted to justify their absence through their commitments to the maslikhat activities. The technical secretary allowed 5 members to join the meeting via zoom because otherwise, the local media would challenge PC's decisions with respect to state bodies' reports. Only 11 members

(out of 21) physically attended the meeting. This shows *a low commitment* to the council goals by PC C members because the general meeting is being missed by PC members. After the meeting, there was *no group interaction* between council members.

According to Douglas, *group allegiance* is also observed through membership criteria. Interestingly, PC D's council membership cards indicate the oblast maslikhat's name (Picture 3) rather than the oblast public council's name.

Concerning another criterion, the organization's long-term survival, PC D does not have an annual working plan (agenda), and the goals are set for a 4-month period, which is different from the other councils. Thus, council members are not concerned with *the long-term survival* of the council.

Picture 3. The membership card of the council member (PC D) indicates his affiliation with the oblast maslikhat



Source: Photo made by the author in May 2022

Another criterion for evaluating group strength is *the group boundary,* which differentiates insiders from outsiders. There is no clear boundary between the maslikhat and the public council in PC D. Three maslikhat deputies are PC D members (Table 31). The PC D secretariat functions as a department of the maslikhat. The author was surprised when the maslikhat officer addressed his concern about the author's fieldwork in PC D:

> "We see that you (the author of this study) visit the secretariat of PC D every day and asked the technical secretary about you. However, you must inform the head of the oblast maslikhat apparatus about your fieldwork. Because we (maslikhat) formed the council. The PC is under maslikhat's supervision." (MA-1)

Although the law grants an autonomous position to PCs, this quote shows that maslikhat officers treat the PC as a part of the maslikhat. Moreover, it shows that there are no clear group boundaries between maslikhat and PC D. Even the archival works show that the correspondences of PC D are mixed with the oblast maslikhat's documents.

Another council with a low stock of group is PC C. The author arrived after PC C met with a state body. Interview respondents who are council members noted that the preparation for the meeting was intensive. However, neither council members nor the Chairman showed up at the PC C secretariat during the two weeks the author conducted fieldwork there. Additionally, PC C planned merely 4 meetings with state bodies for 2022, which is the lowest number across all units of analysis. In contrast, PC A met with 17 state bodies from January to June 2022. As a result, PC C members have *fewer interactions and shared time*. There is lower group allegiance among PC C members. Some members put personal interests above organizational goals. One PC C member mentioned during the interview that one of the members used his council membership card to avoid being sanctioned by the enforcement body. Another PC C member shared his view about PC C members who are maslikhat deputies:

> "We have 4 maslikhat deputies in our council. All of them are aspiring for higher political positions. The PC will give them a chance to show themselves as active citizens in the eyes of local and national governments. One of them prepares to be a deputy of the Majilis. Otherwise, why would they need to join the maslikhat and the PC at the same time?" (BPC-1)

Additionally, the author encountered a social problem addressed by small-size livestock owners [53] in this region. When the author attempted to connect livestock owners with the

[53] Livestock owners seek state subsidies in order to purchase fodder.

commission's Chairman and active council member whom the author had interviewed earlier, this social problem was completely neglected. They were highly interested in their topics (ecology, republican highways) and they lobbied for these issues in PC C. This shows that some active PC C members are selective in raising social issues and are not committed to common issues such as agriculture.

Regarding the group commitments by PC members, the PC C technical secretary claims as follows:

> "Although our PC is predominantly represented by civil society, not all of them express willingness to contribute to the PC operation. As I notice, in every convocation, only 5-6 members (out of 30) are active and are involved in PC operations." (PC 3)

There are no clear *group boundaries* between PC C, maslikhat, and akimat. In PC C, two secretariat officers simultaneously *de facto* work in the maslikhat and akimat[54]. Four members concurrently serve as maslikhat deputies. The previous technical secretary of PC C was the head of akimat's internal affairs department. During the fieldwork, it was noted that PC C's current technical secretary spends most of his time at the maslikhat secretariat than in the PC secretariat.

Additionally, PC C and D's web pages are incorporated into maslikhat's websites. As a result, PC C and D resemble the oblast akimat's or maslikhat's departments.

High-group environment.

Most members of PC A and PC B are committed to councils' *common goals*; they are engaged in the work and share common beliefs and visions. Although they have permanent work positions at other institutions, members share their time for mutual interaction. When the author arrived at PC A and started interviewing council members, it was clear that three PC A commissions worked

[54] According to the Law on Public Councils (2016), the maslikhat provides a support (technical, human resources) to PCs operation. Almost all PCs' technical secretaries are, *de jure*, maslikhat officers. But in PC C, two workers of PC secretariat are *de jure* and *de facto* maslikhat officers.

simultaneously on various issues – ecology and tourism, budget, and legal affairs. PC A members also used social media to inform about their common work, particularly through photos on their Instagram pages. According to Gross and Rayner (1985), the more time spent together in group activities, the higher the group's strength.

Table 28. Group contexts of PC A and PC B

Group (in-group collectivism and institutional collectivism)	Public council A	Public council B
Shared time	In addition to council meetings, PC A members share their time in commission works.	Frequent visits to the PC B secretariat by members. Intensive interaction in legal affairs and ecology commissions.
Commitment to group goals	The majority are committed to common goals. The legal commission of PC A organizes "law hours" for other PC members to inform on budget code, tax code, and normative legal acts.	The majority of PC B members are committed to group goals. PC B members keep working on a single issue for a long time.
Group boundary	There are group boundaries between PC A and maslikhat. None of the members is a maslikhat deputy. PC A has a separate website. PC A conducts office hours for citizens in the Chairman's office rather than in the building of maslikhat.	PC B resides in the building of the maslikhat, but none of its members are maslikhat deputies. It has its website.

Interestingly, when the author contacted PC A members for interviews, they initiated a shared group interview (focus group). Four council members joined the discussion and were interested in discussing the PC A operation because they found it to be beneficial for them, too. Additionally, the legal commission of PC A organizes "law hours" for other PC members to inform them about regulations on budget, tax, normative legal acts, and the like. This shows the strength of the group in PC A.

There are clear *group boundaries* between the maslikhat and PC A. This is reflected in the following. PC A's secretary is inside the oblast maslikhat building, but commission meetings and office hours for citizens are organized in a different building (in the building where the Chairman works). PC A's website is separate from the oblast maslikhat and none of the members is a maslikhat deputy.

Likewise, in PC B, the author observed the active participation of eight council members in the legal affairs commission as they were preparing for the meeting with the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency. In addition, the author encountered *frequent visits* by council members to the council secretariat. When the author arrived at the agreed location in order to meet a PC B member for the interview, the author unexpectedly met four PC B members working together in a workshop. In general, PC B members were committed to council operation. For instance, council members arrived at the meeting (about anti-corruption) beforehand and discussed their positions and concerns regarding corruption statistics in their oblast. PC B's meeting with the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency lasted for three hours but turned out to be insufficient. Thus, council members decided to continue their discussion in a separate meeting at the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency the next day. This shows their commitment and allegiance to common goals.

PC B members' commitment to council goals is reflected in members' perseverance in social issue resolution. For instance, the ecology commission initiated a letter to a local state body with requesting them to be transparent about the funding they receive from international companies as part of the social responsibility of business. Members are determined and keep track of the state bodies' responses (and post updates about this issue on Facebook). This shows that PC B members raise social issues not only for formal reasons but are willing to work until it is resolved.

The majority of PC B members put the interests of the council above their own. To this, one member said:

> "I used to be the head of an NGO that received money from the state for our services and projects. But when I officially joined PC B, I told to my colleagues that I would not work as a head anymore. Because I knew that my finance seeking as a head of NGO would constrain my behavior at the public council." (NGOPC-1)

To conclude, PC B members are *committed to the council's goals* and *frequently interact* with each other in addition to meetings with state bodies. PC B resides in the building of the maslikhat

and none of its members are maslikhat deputies, and it has its website, which is separate from the maslikhat. In contrast to PC D, membership cards of PC A and PC B indicate the names of the councils rather than the name of the oblast maslikhat.

Moderate and low-grid environments

Interestingly, PC D is the only council with open access for anyone without strict *security rules.* It resides in the building of the maslikhat, and access is open to both institutions, to the oblast maslikhat and PC D. This was the only council where the author had to negotiate the details of the fieldwork with the technical secretary instead of the PC D Chairman. In all other councils, technical secretaries provided the email or phone number of the Chairman with whom the author communicated about the fieldwork.

Table 29. Grid contexts of PC D and PC A

Grid	Public council D (moderate grid)	Public council A (low grid)
Authority, rules, and control	Authority is decentralized. No strict rules on processes by the Chairman.	Decision-making is decentralized, and every member can contribute to shared decisions. Each commission works without the Chairman's control.
Insulation, classification, and role distinctions	Sharp classification based on language (Kazakh/Russian speaking) and institutional affiliation (e.g. business).	Some classifications are based on institutional affiliation. Roles and status are *rewarded on merits*.

In PC D, *authority is decentralized* and the PC processes are self-directed. The technical secretary performs *independent decision-making* on many issues. For instance, PC D's meeting (May 2022) agenda covered the issue of youth employment, and the technical secretary selected three districts (out of 13) to report in the meeting. This decision was not based on the decision made by the Chairman of PC D. In a low-grid environment, there are fewer rules on processes and individuals. Even the archival documents of PC D were classified without clear rules (no separate folders for the years and incoming/outgoing letters) and mixed with maslikhat letters.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that PC D members are sharply divided based on spoken language and institutional affiliation. This shows the classification and insulation within PC D. Russian-speaking PC members' concerns are different from Kazak-speaking ones. Furthermore, members' affiliation with institutions (e.g. businesses) led to an erosion of trust within the council. Meanwhile, these classifications are not based upon a hierarchical system or enforced by the authority in PC D. The authority of PC D (i.e. Chairman) did not ascribe specific roles to members in order to better regulate the operation of the council, rather these social classifications exist irrespective of the council's authority.

In contrast, PC A operates in a comparatively low-grid context, which is reflected in the fact that the Chairman does not attend every commission meeting and does not try to *control their processes*. Three commissions were preparing for the PC A meeting simultaneously, each with its own Chairman, and the PC A Chairman did not interfere. Meanwhile, other commissions shared their agenda in a common WhatsApp chat and asked other commission members' opinions (participatory decision-making). Decision-making is decentralized, and every member can contribute to the decision-making process. For instance, the PC A commission on the budget had a meeting with akimat's Economic and Financial department during which they kept informing other members through a WhatsApp chat and asked other commissions to share their opinions. Thus, the *work is self-directed and authority is decentralized*. Similarly, the Chairman of PC A did not selectively give the phone numbers of PC A members to the author. Instead, the Chairman made an announcement in the WhatsApp chat and asked members if they would be willing to give an interview. This shows decentralized decision-making.

Concerning classification and insulation within PC A, there is a minor classification based on the institutional background of members (media, state body). The author did not witness the gender and age-based *classifications*. For instance, after one month of fieldwork, the author contacted PC A's Chairman for a follow-up interview and asked for additional output data. Interestingly, the Chairman transferred all power to the acting Chairwomen due to his annual leave, which shows

that the Chairman does not always try to control PC operation. Moreover, this shows that role status (Chairwoman) is based on merit. The role status will be granted irrespective of gender because, in low-grid environments, status and rewards are based on merits. In contrast, in traditionally high-grid contexts, female members cannot offer their candidacy for the role of PC Chairperson. Additionally, there are more women in PC A (35%) than in other councils (in PC C, which is from a high-grid context, female accounts for merely 14%). Another example also shows that PC A operates in a low grid environment, while interview findings revealed that when the new convocation had started its operation members voted for the youngest member to the position of council Chairman due to his/her strong civic skills. However, that member declined to act as a Chairman. This shows that status is rewarded based on merits.

Finally, PC D and PC A share a common feature, their meetings are operated at round tables where council Chairmen and other members sit side by side. In sharp contrast, the Chairmen sit at separate tables at the center in PC C and PC B (high-grid environments). Non-participant observations and interviews suggest that PC A operates in a comparatively low grid environment and PC D operates in a moderate-grid environment.

High-grid environment

In contrast to PC A and D, the PC C operates in a high-grid environment. The author had to wait three months for the PC C Chairman's approval to conduct fieldwork. The Chairman decided every issue related to the author's fieldwork: respondents (by selectively providing phone numbers of some commission Chairmen); determined the time when the author was allowed to visit the secretariat and; what archival documents the author was allowed to review.

Table 30. Grid contexts in PC C and PC B

Grid	Public council C	Public council B
Authority, rules, and control	Centralized decision-making. The Chairman controls all processes and individuals in PC C.	Centralized decision-making. The Chairman controls all processes.

Insulation, classification, and role distinctions	Sharp position-related ranking and role distinctions (well-respected males, gender, and age-based ranking). Classification is based on the institutional background of members.	Sharp position-related ranking and role distinctions (gender-based ranking). Classifications are based on cadres from old Kazakhstan and new Kazakhstan.

The strict rules made it tough to enter the secretariat's office. The security checked the author's identity and requested to leave the belongings in the storage box, requesting the Secretariat officer to accompany the author to PC C. Interestingly, instead of the name of the oblast public council, the Chairman's name was written on the entrance door of the PC secretariat. During the archival work, the technical secretary rejected any requests for additional data and redirected it to the Chairman. The cases below illustrate the *centralized decision-making by authorities* rather than shared decision-making among council members.

Case 8. The purchase of 150 city buses. City C has a public transportation park, and 150 buses were purchased in 2017; the expenses were covered by the local budget as well as the loans of the EBRD[55]. The purchase of buses is prone to corruption. After five years, there are only 30-40 buses left due to the improper maintenance of buses and five milliard tenge of debt to the bank. In 2022 oblast budget amendments included the purchase of 150 new buses for the city. The issue has been discussed in the budget committee of PC C. According to some commission members, they offered to change the ownership of the public transportation park (through a private-public partnership or privatization). However, the Chairperson of PC C (*unexpectedly) joined the meeting of the budget commission of PC C and influenced the approval of the new bus purchase*. Independent members wanted to discuss this issue at the general PC meeting, but the *Chairperson did not allow the discussion at the general meeting*. The Chairperson and loyal members forced others to approve this amendment with minor recommendations at the commission meeting.

Case 9. A PC C member raised the timezone change from GMT 6 to GMT 5 in 2018. Other council members *expressed unwillingness to support this idea without the approval* of the oblast akim. The oblast akim supported it; only then, PC members supported this idea. Afterward, to legitimize this idea, PC C organized a public hearing for around 100 citizens, and eventually, the timezone was changed in 2018. However, there was a massive debate among social activists and citizens about the timezone change in 2018. There are hot debates on Facebook and requests to return to the previous timezone. According to social activists, the timezone change was made in a rush and reflected akim's PR campaign in 2018.

The first case shows that the PC C Chairman has strong authority and did not allow to discuss the issue at the general meeting. This shows centralized decision-making. The second case illustrates

[55] Eurasian Bank of Reconstruction and Development.

position-related rankings and centralized decision-making. Council members waited for the akim's approval rather than the general citizens' approval of the timezone change. There is a new akim since 2022, but citizens keep complaining about the timezone change.

The cultural theory states that an individual's actions/behavior and thoughts are regulated by *classifications, and position-related rankings* (Maleki and Hendriks, 2015). Concerning classification based on age, PC C members from the younger generation expressed their concerns, arguing that the Chairman does not provide opportunities for them to voice their views referring to their young age. Similarly, the case regarding the gas tariff (see Chapter 5, case 6) reviewed by PC C illustrates the role of the veteran organization (members are well-respected retired males). In a high-grid environment, position-related ranking is salient and the gas tariff case shows that only retired males can challenge the regional elites' economic interests.

PC B also operates in a high-grid environment. The Chairman of PC B tries to control every process in the council. The Chairman of PC B visits the PC secretariat every day between 9 am and 6 pm. The Chairman actively resolves many social problems without involving other council members. During the interviews, council members were unaware of recently resolved social issues. Council members contribute to common decision-making only in particular cases, e.g., issues raised by council members. For example, the ecology commission initiated a letter to a local state body with a request to be transparent about funding from international companies. In such issues, decision-making is decentralized. However, for other social issues which are, for example, addressed by citizens and other stakeholders, the PC B Chairman single-handedly decides the measures that should be taken, people that should be contacted, and how the cases should be resolved. In many instances, the Chairman does not inform or invite other council members to contribute to the development of proposals to state bodies (*centralized decision-making).*

In PC B, there are clear gender and age role distinctions. A female respondent, who is a member of PC B, pointed to the gender-based classification within the council. In her view, only male

members could be the Chairman of the council and the commissions. In addition, there is a separation between cadres from old Kazakhstan and the young generation who are committed to resolving social issues. One active PC B mentioned the following during the interview:

> "When I supported one social activist on the issue of kindergartens, another PC member asked me whether I am supporting that person because I am also from the same *ru*[56] as that person. That member has old thinking, particularly since he is from old Kazakhstan and applies that thinking to me." (PC-C-1)

In PC B, documents are *strictly classified* by incoming, and outgoing letters and meeting minutes. Additionally, there is a folder for state responses to PC B's recommendations (only this council has that type of folder). Likewise, PC B's webpage on www.kazkenes.kz contains strictly classified folders and documents related to council operations. This also demonstrates the high-grid environment of PC B.

Regarding the grid dimension of cultural theory, individuals who were raised in a high-grid context need formal rules and regulations for their daily work routines. The Law on Public Councils (2016) is ambiguous about the council's operation, particularly in public monitoring and expertise. Studies on Kazakh PCs also agree that PCs work without clear guidance (OECD, 2017a; Shaukenova, 2017) and priorities (Knox and Janenova, 2018).

In this regard, uncertainty exists concerning the number of members, the gender ratio, and the exact number of procedural operations (i.e. monitoring, expertise, and meetings). These uncertainties result in the arbitrary implementation of the law, which is believed to affect the council's effectiveness. Similarly, the OECD (2017a) pointed out that the Law on Public Councils does not offer clear standards on PC formation and operation.

Particularly, PC C operates in a high-grid environment, and research suggests that individuals living in a high-grid environment are cautious about uncertainties (Chai et al., 2009). During the

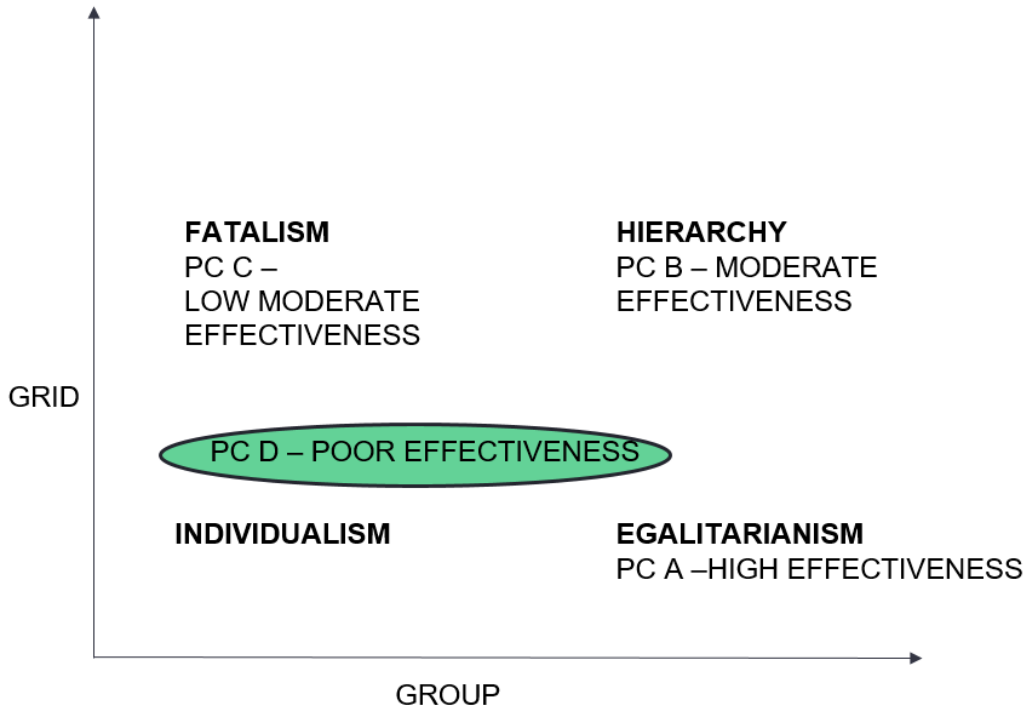
[56]Kazakhs traditionally formed three hordes, within these hordes Kazakhs distinguished their lineages. Ties based on kin/lineage (i.e. ru) are still prominent features of Kazakh society, particularly so in representatives of Old Kazakhstan.

non-participant observation, the author noticed that PC C *modified the internal instructions* in July 2022 to put more rules, and regulations on the operation of their council. This happened irrespective of the fact that there was an internal working instruction from the previous convocation (2019-2022). This exemplifies the high-grid environment of PC C. The PC C secretariat and Chairman want to regulate and improve PC effectiveness by updating and introducing new internal rules which can also be seen as being cautious about uncertainties.

Further the study synthesizes the data on grid-group environments with the existing knowledge of cultural theory. In the previous section, the social capital thesis was applied to measure group strength. Survey findings suggest that all PC members have a strong stock of *networking,* particularly those with membership in voluntary, community, and professional organizations. However, according to collected data and the surveys, networking does not contribute to PC performance. The reason for this relates to the state-led feature of networking. Additionally, the study applied grid-group cultural theory to measure the group strength from another angle. The puzzle is unpacked by complementing this through the measurement of the group dimension of cultural theory. Although PC members are affiliated with various intermediate social organizations (voluntary, professional organizations), it does not necessarily mean that they are willing to contribute to common social issues. In this regard, by applying grid-group cultural theory, this study provides an additional explanation as to why networking does not contribute to PC effectiveness. For instance, in PC D, the author found a very low group (institutional collectivism and in-group collectivism). PC D is also the council with the worst effectiveness, which suggests a correlation between a low-group environment and a lack of effectiveness. In contrast, PC A and PC B, which operate in high-group contexts (Figure 12), outperformed PC C and PC D in terms of effectiveness. High-group environments are ones in which PC members are committed to group goals, frequently interact to produce recommendations and there is a group boundary that separates outsiders from insiders. In the existing literature, scholars stressed the importance of *public-spiritedness* (a public-spirited individual tries to pursue public goals and well-being rather than

their interests), *civic cooperation* (the willingness and ability of individuals to work with others to influence the government), *concerted action* and a *sense of community* for economic development and progress of political institutions (Banfield, 1958; Almond and Verba, 1963). These show the positive link between high-group and the progress of institutions. In a similar vein, this study also shows that a high-group environment contributes to the institutional effectiveness of councils.

Figure 12. Douglas's typologies of cultural environments



Source: Adapted from Coyle and Ellis (2019).

On the other hand, the study assumed that a low grid environment should lead to an effective PC because there are fewer regulations and fewer classifications within the council, and decentralized decision-making. However, despite the finding that PC D functions in a moderate-grid context it does not lead to effective performance. Case studies are strong in identifying "black swans", and even finding only one "black swan" will falsify the proposition that all swans are white (Popper, 1959; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Therefore, this question requires further investigation. In this study, findings on PC D (moderate grid-ineffective) serve as a "black swan". The findings of

this study suggest that low grid matters only if it is combined with a high group (the case of PC A), but alone it does not explain the PC effectiveness.

Potential reasons why the grid does not explain PC effectiveness are as follows. Firstly, as this study shows, the grid dimension fails to capture external agents (maslikhat, akimat, MISD, specific personalities) who may impose informal rules, regulations, and other forms of influence upon PCs. One case illustrated in the empirical chapters is that PC D was under the informal influence of the maslikhat's Secretary and the oblast akimat (See chapter 6, case 10). Sometimes, informal external regulation imposed by a single person – akim, maslikhat Secretary- blocks shared decision-making within PCs. Findings suggest that in an authoritarian country such as Kazakhstan, even when operating in a moderate-grid environment (PC D), institutions are subject to external informal regulations and influence, which is hard to capture with the grid dimension of cultural theory for the following reasons. Firstly, it depends on the nature of the issue e.g., if it concerns regional elites' interests, then there is a higher likelihood that external agents will interfere. Secondly, informal external regulation depends on personalities– akim, maslikhat's Secretary and others. Although PC D operates in a moderate-grid environment, if the akim forces PC D to discuss threshold prices for groceries, which is an irrelevant and outdated topic, then PC D will discuss that issue due to informal external pressure (see chapter 6, case 10). Consequently, there is a mismatch between the moderate-grid environment of the organization (PC D) and external influence.

Cultural theory scholars do not stress the difference between internal and external regulations, between formal and informal regulations. Although scholars mention the state mandate (external control) (Purvis, 1998) and the principal's control (internal control) (Diel, 1998) they do not show their differences. Diel (1998) employs grid-group cultural theory to analyze rural schools and mentions the internal regulation of teachers by arguing that: "On first arrival at this elementary school, it is obvious that the teachers govern their own classrooms with a very *loose control by the principal*" (Diel, 1998, p.51). In contrast, Purvis (1998) is not sure whether state mandate (external

regulation) explains the grid or group orientation of teachers because he uses "state mandate" to measure the low group as well as the low grid (p.62). Finally, although the scholars mention the external and internal regulations imposed on teachers, they do not show whether they might differ. Perhaps this is inexplicit in an educational environment. However, it is crucial to differentiate between internal and external control in public administration (PCs are embedded in the local public administration).

Thirdly, the grid is condemned to be overloaded because it covers a broad range of definitions (Spickard, 1989). Spickard (1989) states that the majority of scholars (e.g. Malina, 1986) misread and misinterpreted Douglas's grid dimension because *Natural Symbols* by Douglas (1970 and 1973) contains quite a different variant of her theory as compared to *Cultural bias* (1978) or *Essays in the Sociology of Perception* (1982b) (ibid). Spickard claims that:

> "Earlier versions of Douglas's theory is prone to treat religion and worldview as simply reflecting social life. Later Douglas comes to claim that cosmologies are ultimately used to make people accountable for their actions." (Spickard, 1989, p. 154)

In other words, in the latter version, Douglas added the notion of accountability, coercion and authority. Douglas claims (1982b, p.5) that "people who have banded together under a certain rubric or constitution will tend to coerce one another increasingly to develop the full implications of that style of life". In her reply to Spickard, Douglas (1989b) acknowledges that the development of the grid dimension is harder than anticipated. In her attempt to clarify the grid she further elaborated on the notion of authority and power as a measurement of the grid. In doing so, she was influenced by Bernstein's (1970) study of socialization in the education environment. Douglas argued that in a high-grid environment, there is a high insulation of roles, e.g. teacher to teacher, student to teacher, and so on. Consequently, she concluded that the *pattern of insulation reflects authority* (Douglas, 1989b). Douglas states as follows:

> "I draw heavily on Basil Bernstein's ideas on visible and invisible pedagogies. As he shows for teaching institutions; strong insulation holds so long as power is securely monopolized. Insulations are the result of effective power. They are also a means of making it effective all

the way down from its source to the boundaries of control. Classifications are enforced in an effort to stabilize power, to filter information, ration it, limit access." (Douglas, 2013, p. 192)

This study measured the grid in terms of insulation, role distinctions and authority. According to Douglas (1989b) insulation reflects authority. However, the findings of this study (PC D) show that it is not always the case when insulation is in line with authority. In PC D, there are sharp insulations (based on institutional background and spoken language) irrespective of authority and control by the Chairman of PC D. In contrast, in the high-grid environment of PC C the centralized authority employs insulation based on age to award roles or ranks within the council. This finding is in line with Douglas's argument (1986b) that insulation reflects authority. In PC C, there is a separation that reflects the hierarchy and authority, PC C member complained about the situation when due to his younger age he was rejected the opportunity to voice his opinion. That said, the authority employs existing classifications (gender, age) to regulate interaction within the council. In that case, the authority and separation (social classifications) are mutually reinforcing. However, there is another type of insulation (e.g. sharp separation based on language) as in PC D which does not reflect the authority, it exists irrespective of the authority and hierarchy within the council. Elaborating further, the PC C authority employs existing age and gender insulation to operate the council and that type of insulation is long-lasting in nature. Age and gender distinctions and classifications have been existing in the traditional societies of Kazakhstan for a long period. In contrast, the classification of language is a more recent phenomenon[57] because earlier the majority spoke Russian and now some people speak Kazakh while others speak Russian. Thus, the authority may even be unaware of this classification and does not employ it for the enforcement of hierarchy and authority. Similarly, the classification of cadres from old Kazakhstan and new Kazakhstan (PC B) is a more recent phenomenon because the separation of New and Old has started since President Tokayev's message to the people of Kazakhstan in March 2022. This type of

[57] According to fieldwork, in some regions, the classification based on ethnicity is invisible, but the classification based on language is sharp.

classification exists in PC B, but the Chairman perhaps is unaware and did not use it for the enforcement of his power.

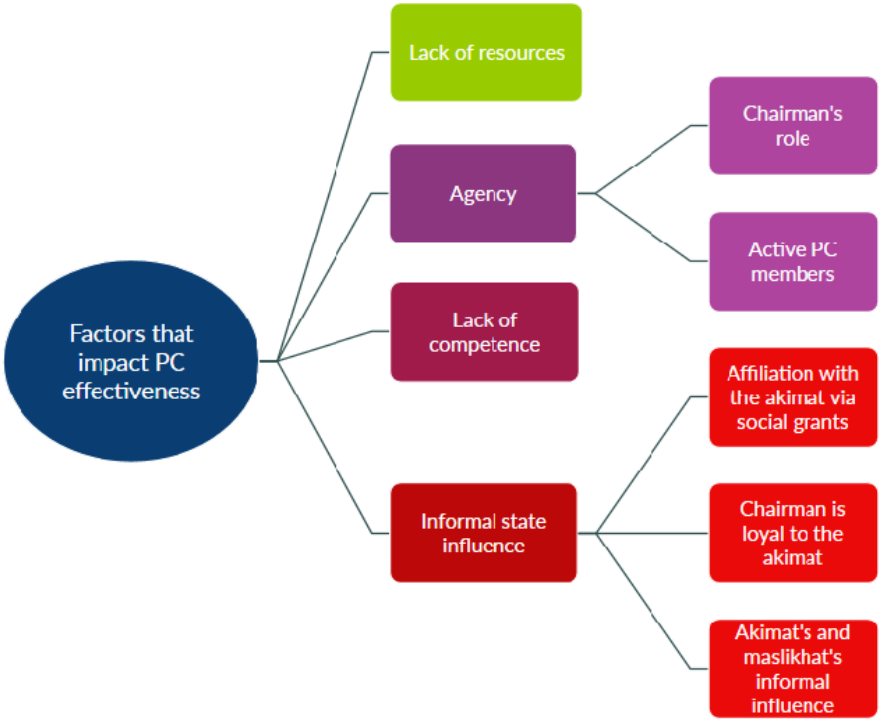
These findings possibly show that authority, coercion, and power, on the one hand, are different from classification, role distinctions, and insulation, on the other. Earlier studies already attempted to introduce an additional dimension to cultural theory (Maleki and Hendriks, 2015; Thompson, 1982; Hampton, 1982; Caulkins, 1999). For instance, Thompson (1982) added the dimension of manipulation or power as a third dimension in addition to grid and group, while Caulkins (1999) added ideology (secular versus religious orientation) as a third dimension.

In sum, applying grid-group cultural theory (Douglas, 1982), this study offered more details about group interaction and social relations in four PCs. The group dimension of cultural theory provides a more nuanced understanding of the group strength compared to networking in social capital. As illustrated above, PC D functions in a low-group environment, which explains inferior performance as compared to other councils. Therefore, the group dimension of cultural theory explains the strength of the group better than the networking component of social capital. Furthermore, the second hypothesis states that a low-grid environment leads to an effective public council. In practice, however, PC D has a moderate-grid environment but lags far behind other units of analysis. Thus, the grid dimension has limited causal depths, and the causal link between the two (grid environment – institutional effectiveness) requires further investigation in other institutions and social settings. Nevertheless, this study contributes to cultural theory with respect to the grid dimension: in the grid dimension internal and external control should be differentiated; informal and formal regulation should be better addressed. Furthermore, this study argues that insulation does not necessarily reflect the authority in the context of PCs.

6.3. Institutional factors that impact public council effectiveness

This section addresses *RQ 3. What are the enabling and hindering factors of PC effectiveness?* The author interviewed 60 respondents in four units of analysis. To avoid overestimation of PC effectiveness by council members, the sampling frame included external stakeholders (civil society members). The interview data has been transcribed, and in addition to cultural factors, it revealed the following institutional factors that impact PC effectiveness (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Institutional factors that impact PC effectiveness



Source: NVIVO project by the author.

Firstly (Figure 13), the major institutional factor that impacts PC effectiveness is the **lack of competencies and training** by PC members. Members of PCs are involved in various social issues (agriculture, urban planning, communal services, healthcare, education), which require expertise in various policy domains.

Semi-structured interviews (N=60) show that some council members lack a sound understanding of specific social issues; some members can bring attention to public issues and require immediate resolution. However, they lack a detailed understanding of the interaction of

state, quasi-state, and private stakeholders. Ideally, social issues are resolved through systemic means, not by the emotional attraction of state bodies' attention and phone calls. In this regard, one civil society member noted:

> "One PC B member is very active on Facebook. Sometimes, it is noticeable from his media posts that he does not know about economics. Even I have Facebook followers and I feel social responsibility. But that person does not have a higher education. Once he criticized the police that confiscated caviar from private dealers and requested the police to distribute them to children in orphanages. That member should understand the social procedures and that the police cannot do it, what if children got poisoned? PC members' expertise and knowledge about social issues (from macroeconomic, and microeconomics perspectives) should be increased." (CSR NGO-2)

PC members highlighted the *need for training and the lack of competencies* by PC members. For example, PC A's legal commission includes external experts in commission works to improve the quality of council recommendations. PC A legal commission includes invited experts permanently without voting power. Similarly, PC A's commission for social-economic affairs includes local university faculty members. It is a good practice that should be exported to other PCs. The majority of PC members represent civil society and the Law on Public Councils (2016) pays little attention *to experts* in the council. PC recommendations to state bodies mainly contain citizens' subjective opinions or perceptions. Most PC recommendations lack data analysis as well as cost-benefit analysis. In contrast, in the Western context, advisory bodies differ from participatory mechanisms (e.g., citizens' juries and consensus conference). The former tends to predominantly involve experts from think tanks and academia (OECD, 2017b) as compared to ad hoc participatory mechanisms. The institutionalized advisory body requires expert advice (Bressers et al., 2018), whilst the participatory mechanisms (citizens' jury) are mainly conducted to consult with citizens to find out their preferences. In this regard, particularly the Dutch law on the advisory system makes a clear distinction between *advice,* which is fact-based, free of opinions and interests, and *consultation,* which reflects the interests/preferences of various stakeholders (Bressers et al., 2018).

The distinguishing feature of advisory bodies in OECD countries is that apart from civil servants and the general public, they predominantly include experts and representatives of academia such as the 'advisory councils' (Beirate) or 'expert commissions' (*Sachverstandigenkommissionen*) in Germany (Veit et al., 2017) or the Lithuanian Sunset commissions (Nakrošis and Bortkevičiūtė, 2018). Therefore, Western advisory bodies are viewed as a place where science, the state, and society are intertwined.

Likewise, modern Chinese advisory committees are predominantly comprised of experts and professionals rather than general citizens. In the literature, they are called Expert Advisory Committees of China (Li, 2021; Zheng et al., 2010). The Chinese government prefers "scientific-based decision-making" rather than "democratic decision-making" and irrespective of the authoritarian feature of the Chinese Communist Party, the government is open to expert advice made by advisory committees and think tanks (Li, 2021). In contrast, Kazakhstan's PCs are mainly composed of *civil society representatives* without due attention to experts from the local academic community. However, it is essential to use the potential of experts in the operation of PCs about issues related to economics, social policy, ecology, and others. Civil society may provide the perception of society about social issues, but only experts can offer science-based recommendations.

The literature also emphasizes the role of human capital (competencies) in productivity (Coleman, 1988) and in organizational performance (Colombo and Grilli, 2005). In this regard, Coleman (1988) acknowledges the significance of physical and human capital along with social capital:

> "If physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form, and human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, social capital is less tangible yet, for it exists in the relations among persons. Just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well." (p.101)

Similarly, Putnam (2007) argues that training (human capital), tools (physical capital), and social networks, all contribute to outcomes. The research by Knox and Janenova (2018) on Kazakh public councils also noticed the lack of training and competencies that inhibits the potential of PCs.

Secondly (Figure 13), another factor that impacts PC effectiveness is the informal **influence of local state bodies**. Some councils face the influence of the oblast maslikhat or akimat. Informal influence starts when the loyal Chairman or loyal members are recruited to PCs. In addition, although the PC has legal autonomy, it lacks managerial and financial autonomy. This provides a good opportunity for local state bodies to interfere in PC processes. In interviews, respondents expressed the following concerns: "the state does not want to lose control, it manages PCs", "the state filters the recruitment process", "the majority of PC members are loyal to the state", "the akimat approves an unofficial list of candidates for PCs". Likewise, Junussova (2018) claims that the local executive body predetermines a list of candidates for the maslikhat deputy position, which, in turn, is subjected to the akim's approval. In this regard, Makhmutova (2004) and Bhuiyan (2010) also highlighted the dominating role of the local executive body over other institutions in Kazakhstan.

The state bodies' (akimat and maslikhat) influence is mainly operationalized through loyal Chairpersons and loyal PC members. Even though some independent members joined the PC in April 2022, their voices are curtailed by other members who are loyal to state bodies. The case illustrated in the previous chapter, in which the Secretary of the maslikhat made a phone call to the PC D Chairperson, serves as an example (see Chapter 5, section 5.4). The maslikhat Secretary should not interfere and excuse the maslikhat deputy from the meeting of the PC. Another example was when PC D's technical secretary led the author to the maslikhat's Secretary to receive informal approval for the fieldwork. The cases below offer more details about state bodies' informal influence on PCs.

Case 10. PC D discussed the threshold prices for socially significant food products for the first, second, third, and fourth quarters of 2022. However, the discussion of threshold prices for the first

quarter *was an irrelevant topic* for PC D because it was outdated. *Under the influence of the local executive body, PC D agreed to discuss* and approve the threshold prices for the first quarter. PC D did not want this to be exposed and required the local media representatives to leave the meeting of the PC D. PC D justified this action by referring to the issue as a "case only for internal use". However, the main principle of the public council is publicity (Law on public councils, 2016), and the "case only for internal use" (*DSP* in Russian) is mainly practiced in state bodies. During the interview, the media representatives mentioned that this was done in order to protect the executive body. One representative of the local media made an appeal to the prosecutor's office claiming that PC D had violated Article 158 of the Criminal Code of Kazakhstan "Obstruction of the legal professional activities of journalists". However, this appeal did not bring any results and the police closed the case. Nevertheless, this case shows the informal influence of the local executive body on the public council and the deficit in rule of law.

Case 11. Several livestock owners approached the oblast akimat asking them to subsidy the livestock fodder, but could not get approval from the akimat. The national state put the responsibility of fodder subsidies on regional executive bodies. Thus, regional executive bodies have to consider whether they subsidize livestock fodder or not in their regions. A large group of small and medium size livestock owners wanted to purchase livestock fodder in the summer when it is cheaper because this will aid them to feed their livestock in winter. This is crucial for the food security of the region in winter. However, despite the drought and unpleasant climate conditions in this region, the executive body rejected subsidizing the livestock fodder. The livestock owners approached PC C. *PC C's response just restated the local executive body's decision* not to subsidize the livestock fodder due to the lack of available budget. Interestingly, PC C's official response to livestock owners was very quick and without the initiation of letters to the national government or the Parliament to impact the local executive body.

Case 12. The new convocation of PC D members has been approved by the maslikhat session in February 2022. The PC is comprised of civil servants and civil society/citizens. Civil servants are proposed by state bodies and civil society members/citizens are selected on a competitive basis. In PC D, an oblast labor union member made an appeal to the prosecutor's office claiming that the working commission for the formation of PC D violated the law. According to the labor union member, the working commission selected a person who already served two terms in PC D (according to the law, members can only serve two terms in office) and the selection process was non-transparent and biased, *influenced by the maslikhat Secretary*. However, the prosecutor's office did not proceed with the appeal any further.

It is noteworthy that the informal influence of state bodies is not region-specific. The author observed that PC A collaborates with local state bodies and the latter is responsive to the council's recommendations. In contrast, the city council in this region is under heavy constraints by the city maslikhat. Interview respondents from civil society mentioned that the city maslikhat's Secretary removed the city council's Chairman one month after his election by council members. The city maslikhat's Secretary forced PC members to choose a new Chairman who would be loyal to the maslikhat.

Local state bodies –akimat and maslikhat- have an essential role. Knox and Janenova (2018) mentioned that the akims of Almaty and Astana were Western-educated Bolashak alumni who imported Western public management into their work and these specific executive bodies attempted to integrate inputs from regional PCs. This shows that some PCs operate in a liberal environment, which in turn, impacts PC effectiveness. For instance, in PC B, the local executive body and the akim are interested in resolving social problems. Particularly after the January events the recruitment of new members in February 2022 was transparent and 93% of the newly elected PC B were indeed new members who had previously not been serving in a PC. The interest of the oblast akimat in the operation of PC B is evident; every meeting of PC B with state bodies has been carried out with the involvement of the oblast deputy akim. In addition, the oblast akim had a meeting with the new convocation of PC B in April 2022 and expressed his interest in collaboration. This is also reflected in a statement by a PC B member who represents a youth organization:

> "I am the youngest council member; I did not expect that I would be selected for the PC. I see progress after the January 2022 events. We had a meeting with the oblast akim after the formation of the new convocation in April 2022. We had a 3-hour long and frank discussion with him. He expressed his willingness to cooperate with us and instructed all akimat departments to work with us. This means we can approach any akimat department and share our concerns so that they treat us as collaborators. This akim is young and open-minded, but the former akim was also very responsive to PC recommendations. In general, the akimat tries to collaborate with us." (PC-4)

Thirdly (Figure 13), another major factor that impacts PC effectiveness **is a lack of resources** (technical, human, financial, and non-binding decisions). The lack of resources makes PCs vulnerable and dependent on state bodies. PCs reside in the building of the maslikhat, *de jure* the PC technical secretary is either a maslikhat officer or an akimat officer (in PC C secretariat officers are *de jure* and *de facto* local state bodies' workers). PC members' visiting trips to remote areas sometimes are financially supported by the maslikhat or the akimat. Technical equipment and

stationery are provided by the maslikhat. Due to these reasons, PCs lack managerial and financial autonomy. A council member describes this as follows:

> "The PC is like a baby without legs and hands, it is a person with disabilities, no material and financial conditions for that. Very hard to achieve the goal which is required by the law. Impossible. They must provide financial support, then equip us with experts. We have only one officer who has a salary – a technical secretary, who receives a salary of 80 000 tenge. This is ridiculous. The law puts too much responsibility on PCs, too many tasks, and provides no financial and technical support." (NGOPC-1).

The state offers a social grant (via state social order) for the operation of PCs, which is about 3 million tenge annually. However, third parties win that grant (www.goszakup.gov.kz) and their contribution to PC effectiveness is limited. In contrast, the majority of Western advisory bodies have a government-allocated budget. For instance, Flemish councils receive between 250,000 and 1 million Euros annually from the government (Fobé et al, 2013). Nonetheless, even Western advisory bodies are not immune to state control. Since advisory bodies are staffed and financed by the state, there is a trade-off between advisory bodies' autonomy and state control (Bressers et al., 2018).

Without proper resources, PCs have to address multiple social issues: education, agriculture, communal services, ecology, transportation, healthcare, food security and others. In addition, the 2021 amendments to the Law on Public Councils added two more tasks: PC members can participate in corruption commissions and public procurement tender commissions. Because of this, the local executive body invites PC members to various corruption and tender-related commission works. In contrast, foreign advisory bodies concentrate on specific policy domains. The majority of Western advisory councils or committees are focused on narrow policy domains such as water (the National Water Advisory Council in the US), climate (e.g. the UK Committee on Climate Change), technology (e.g. the Technology Transfer Council (Krick, 2015)) and education (e.g. European Educational Councils). Likewise, advisory bodies of Malaysia and

Singapore focus on specific policy domains (Singapore Wage Council, Malaysia Business Council) (Campos and Gonzales, 1999; Miners, 1996; Campos and Root, 2001).

Another problem that concerns PC members is the *lack of enforcement power* of council recommendations. The fact that PC decisions are non-binding demotivates PC members. However, foreign practices also show that advisory bodies' recommendations are non-binding. For instance, Lim (1998) argues that Malaysian and Singapore's advisory bodies' deliberation are confidential, recommendations are open and decisions are non-binding. Similarly, Western advisory bodies' decisions are, in most cases, non-binding and policy-makers have the discretion to accept/reject councils' recommendations (OECD, 2017b; Bressers et al, 2018).

Although PC recommendations cannot be enforced, the Law on Public Councils of Kazakhstan (2016) states that state bodies must provide a motivated response (answerability) to council recommendations within 10 working days to budget-related issues and 30 days to other issues. However, the law fails to state what implications are imposed upon state bodies that do not respond (MISD, 2021), and the term "motivated response" is vague. This is why only responsive local state bodies respond to PCs' recommendations and explain their course of action/inaction.

Finally, (Figure 13), **agencies** (council members, the Chairman) play a huge role in PC effectiveness. Every PC has independent and open-minded members (or Chairmen) who joined the council in order to make a change. One PC member shared his experience:

> "The PC depends on specific members, the majority are either ex-apparatchiks or heads of quasi-state bodies, maslikhat deputies, businessmen. Through the contribution of specific active PC members, the wide population is informed about the council's operation. On social media, people tag specific personalities to resolve the issue rather than tagging the oblast public council. Those members are independent and active in PC operation." (PC-1)

Likewise, the national report on PC performance by MISD (2021) noticed that the media activity of specific PCs depends on PC members (or its Chairman). The report listed the following people: M. Shibutov (member of Almaty city PC), S. Gulyaev (Pavlodar region's PC), G.

Kurbanbayeva (Karaganda region's PC member), R. Akzharkenova (Almaty region's PC member), A. Nurkeeva (Nur-Sultan city PC member), and S. Chernyshov (East Kazakhstan region PC member). Similarly, the literature on Central Asian civil society (Babajanian et al., 2005; Stevens, 2005) stresses the personality of the Chairman as a critical factor for the completion of projects. Noteworthy, the reliance on personality is a temporary factor that makes progress unsustainable in the long run. The case below illustrates the role of the Chairperson in the resolution of an issue submitted to PC B by ordinary citizens.

Case 13. This case relates to the use of the Kazakh language by business companies. The general public appealed to PC B to organize public monitoring and involve related state bodies to sanction private companies' improper usage of the Kazakh language[58]. PC B secretariat sent an official letter to akimat's Department of Culture regarding the violation of the law on "Languages of Kazakhstan." However, the cultural department of the akimat informed PC B of a moratorium on checking business companies. The PC B secretariat sent a letter to the city prosecutor's office, and later, a letter was sent to the oblast prosecutor's office. Official letters did not work; *the Chairman's phone call* to the oblast prosecutor's office resulted in success. The oblast prosecutor's office visited selected private companies to warn them about violating the law "Languages of Kazakhstan." In addition, the regional entrepreneurial chamber "Atameken" carried out workshops for business companies on this issue.

This case involved only the secretariat and the Chairperson of PC B. PC B members were unaware of this case. This case demonstrates the role of the Chairperson in the problem-solving process, which is here related to the improper usage of the Kazakh language by the private sector. This is not the only case where PC B's Chairperson was the main actor in problem-solving. Another instance was cited in the previous chapter. As described there, the fact that additional train carriages were added to the train also contributed mainly to one specific agent – the Chairperson of PC B.

About the composition of PCs.

Earlier studies on Kazakh PCs pay particular attention to PC composition and reveal age and gender biases (Shaukenova, 2017; MISD, 2021; Muratova and Onuchko, 2021). As the third

[58] They make a spelling mistake.

convocation of PCs started its work between February and March 2022, it is worth examining the composition of newly elected PC convocations.

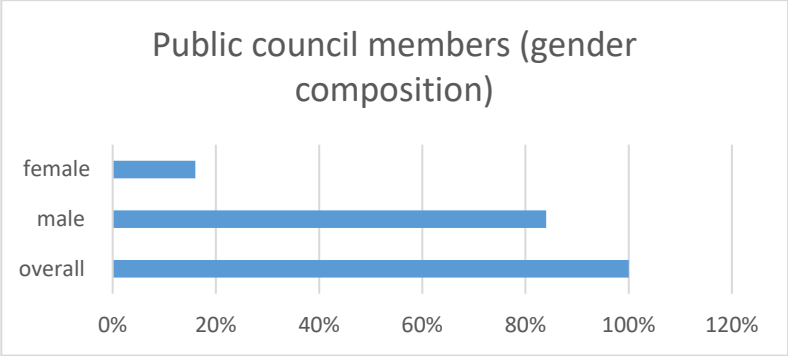
As can be seen in Table 31, the number of Kazakh members outweighs other ethnicities in all units of analysis. In terms of gender, males dominate PCs in all regions. Some PCs include many maslikhat deputies and state representatives (PC D) compared to their counterparts.

Table 31. Members of four public councils (the 3rd convocation, 2022)

	Number of members	Number of Kazakhs	Number of males	Average age	Civil society		State representatives
					Civil society	Maslikhat deputies	
Public council A	38	30	24	50	35	1	2
Public council B	31	29	21	51	26	1	4
Public council C	30	29	22	54	25	4	1
Public council D	21	13	15	51	13	3	5
Overall	120	101	82	51,5	108		12

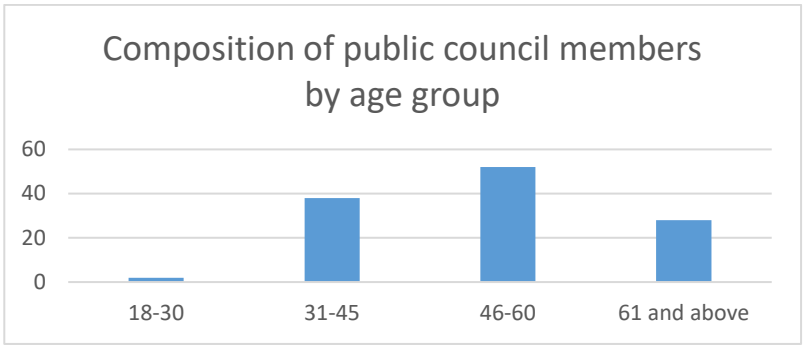
Source: The author's calculation.

Figure 14. Gender composition of four public councils



Source: The author's calculation.

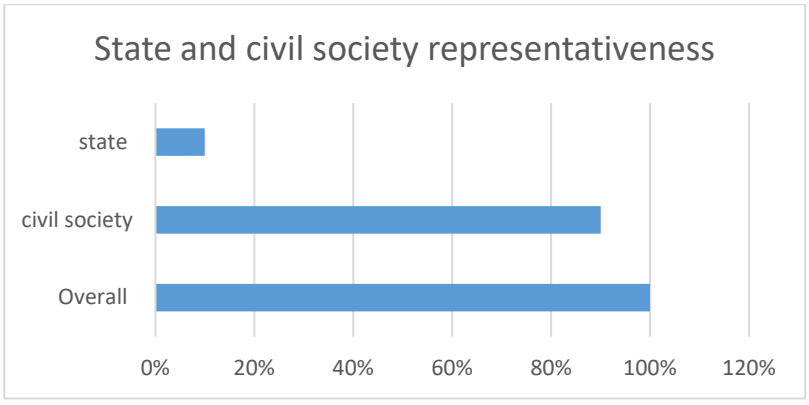
Figure 15. Four public council members by age groups



Source: The author's calculation. N=120.

PCs are dominated by males (Figure 14) and the average age is 51.5 across all units of analysis. This is consistent with Shaukenova's (2017) findings which also revealed a similar gender and age bias in council composition in 2017.

Figure 16. State-civil society representatives in four PCs, 2022



Source: The author's calculation.

Earlier studies on PCs (Shaukenova, 2017; Muratova and Onuchko, 2021) raised concerns about the violation of the ratio between the state and civil society representatives in PCs. However, of the four PCs under the study (N=120), more than 80% of the members are civil society representatives (Figure 16). This is in line with the recent findings by MISD (2021). However, according to interview findings, *the civil society itself is represented* by former civil servants, state-led NGOs, maslikhat deputies, business representatives, and quasi-state servants (Table 32).

Shaukenova's (2017) research also raised concerns regarding the maslikhat deputies who are treated as civil society representatives. In her view, this negatively impacts PC performance (ibid).

Table 32. Composition of four PCs

State representatives	10%
Quasi-state representatives	7,5%
Maslikhat deputies	7,5%
Public funds, NGOs, and associations	24,16%
Business	23,33%
Labor union	4,16%
Media	7,5%
Citizens	9,16%

Source: The author's calculation

Concerning PC members from civil society who are affiliated with the state, the following has been revealed. State affiliation of members who represent civil society does not only relate to state-led social organizations (or GONGOs) but also to some civil society members who are concurrently representatives of quasi-state bodies (Table 32). For instance, member A is a public fund representative and a quasi-state body's worker (the head of the regional "KazPost" JSC); nonetheless, he was treated as a civil society representative by the recruitment committee. Some council members work in quasi-state bodies and they are not critical to state bodies' reports. Moreover, PCs also hear the reports of quasi-state bodies and might be compromised due to their affiliation with that quasi-state body. A local NGO made this point:

> "Some PC members who are treated as a civil society also work as officers in quasi-state bodies. The recruitment committee for the PC does not consider this. In addition, the PC has businessmen whose economic gains depend on the akimat. We do not have a law on lobbying that may force PC members to disclose all financial and other interests." (CSR NGO-1)

Concerning business, *the private sector* is encouraged to join advisory bodies in Malaysia and Singapore. Campos and Gonzales (1999) claim that due to the robust private sector in East Asian countries, the involvement of the private sector benefited the advisory council. However, in the African context, where there is a very small private sector (many influential land oligarchs), many attempts to create an advisory council failed (ibid). Likewise, in the Kazakhstani context, the

private sector is weak. Similarly, Junussova (2018) argues that business representatives dominate regional maslikhats and in order to secure their economic interests they are in partnership with local akimats. Therefore, the inclusion of business into regional PCs under the guise of civil society does not improve PCs' effectiveness.

In sum, along with social capital and grid-group environments, other institutional factors also impact PC effectiveness. PC members' lack of competencies is the main hindering factor of PC operation; lack of resources and informal influence of state bodies also impact PC effectiveness. Informal influence is exercised by loyal Chairpersons and members who are affiliated with the state (GONGOs, PC members who are from quasi-state, business sector, and maslikhat).

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that not all components of social capital (networking, social trust, and norms) equally contribute to PC effectiveness. Findings show that social trust and norms have a positive impact on PC effectiveness. In contrast, the networking component does not impact PC effectiveness because the membership of civil society representatives is associated with the state. Finally, findings suggest that social trust and networking diverge in the context of PCs.

Furthermore, group environment (cultural theory) provided a strong explanation as to why some PCs (PC A and PC B) outperformed their counterparts. In particular, PC A and PC B members share more time while working in commission, they are more committed to the councils' goals, and there are clear group boundaries between councils and other institutions. Finally, in addition to cultural factors, this chapter illustrated hindering and enabling factors on PC effectiveness. The lack of competencies and resources (technical, financial, human, and non-binding decisions), and the informal influence of local state bodies as well as specific personalities contribute to PC effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

CHAPTER VII. CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Social capital thesis

This dissertation examined the impact of social capital (Putnam, 1993), and grid-group environments (cultural theory by Douglas (1982)) on PC effectiveness in Kazakhstan. This study mainly focused on cultural factors (social capital, grid and group environments) along with institutional factors to explain PC performance. Firstly, findings suggest that social trust and norms have a positive impact on PC effectiveness, which is supported by the finding on PC D with the worst performance and low level of social trust and norms. Secondly, the group environment also explained why PC D lags behind its counterparts. The reason for the poor performance of PC D is explained by members' low commitment to common goals, low group allegiance, and limited interactions among council members.

RQ 1. How does social capital impact PC effectiveness? The social capital thesis argues that a higher stock of social trust and networking in formal organizations leads to effective institutions (Putnam, 1993). Other scholars also stressed the salience of social trust, reciprocity, norms, and ties among individuals in local institutions (Ostrom, 1990; Banfield, 1958). Banfield (1958) claimed that the lack of civicness explains the socio-economic backwardness of Southern Italy. Likewise, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Max Weber highlighted the role of culture in economic progress, while Elinor Ostrom (1990) stressed the role of social capital in building institutions to resolve collective action problems.

Similarly, this study finds supporting evidence that social trust and norms have a positive impact on PC effectiveness. The erosion of trust among PC members hinders their cooperation in producing recommendations to state bodies. In the PCs under study, there is an erosion of trust due to differences in language (Kazakh-speaking and Russian-speaking members), age, gender, and the institutional background of PC members (media, business, maslikhat, New vs Old

Kazakhstan representatives). Findings confirm that the erosion of trust among PC members negatively impacted the PCs' commission work and general meetings with state bodies. Likewise, the low level of cooperation norms has an adverse impact on PC effectiveness, because council members in poorly effective councils (e.g. PC D) are less involved in commission works and general meetings.

Another component of social capital is networking in formal organizations (clubs, voluntary, and community organizations). The networking component was measured by asking PC members whether they were members of intermediate organizations or secondary associations. Although most survey respondents show their affiliation with (non-political) intermediate organizations, it does not contribute to PC effectiveness because PC members' networking is mainly associated with the state. That said, membership in political and non-political organizations is incentivized and financed by the state, which constrains social organizations' ability to challenge, or monitor the government, and to hold state bodies accountable.

7.2. Grid-group cultural theory

RQ 2. How do grid-group environments impact PC effectiveness? PC A and PC B outperformed PC C and PC D in terms of effectiveness. Findings demonstrated that a high-group environment (PC members are committed to group goals, frequently interact with each other to produce recommendations, and a group boundary separates outsiders from insiders) is associated with better-performing PCs. In the existing literature, cultural scholars (Banfield, 1958; Almond and Verba, 1963) stressed the importance of public-spiritedness, civic cooperation, concerted action, a sense of community (i.e. high group) for economic development and the progress of political institutions. Similarly, this study's findings confirm that a high group environment contributes to institutional effectiveness of PCs.

On the other hand, the grid environment did not explain PC effectiveness. This study assumed that a low grid environment would lead to an effective PC because in a low-grid context there is more decentralized decision-making, fewer regulations and less authority. Additionally, a low grid environment means fewer rules and classifications based on gender, roles, and age. Such an environment is conducive to PC members' cooperation, which enables them to produce comprehensive recommendations. However, despite the finding that PC D functions in a moderate-grid context, it does not lead to an effective PC. Case studies are strong in identifying "black swans"; and even one "black swan" will falsify the proposition that all swans are white (Popper, 1959; Flyvbjerg, 2006). The finding on PC D (moderate grid - low effectiveness) serves as a "black swan". It also shows that a low grid context matters only if it is combined with a high group (as in the case of PC A), but the grid environment alone does not contribute to PC effectiveness.

By referring to the example of PC D, we observe decentralized decision-making, a non-authoritarian Chairman, but there is an insulation based on language and institutional affiliation. This finding challenges the claim that insulation reflects authority. Elaborating further on the inability of grid dimension to explain the effectiveness of the councils, this study states as follows. Firstly, when applying the grid dimension of cultural theory to the organizations, scholars (Purvis, 1998; Diel, 1998) did not differentiate: a) between internal and external regulations; b) between formal and informal regulations. Thus, the grid dimension fails to capture external agents (maslikhat, akimat, MISD, specific personalities) who may have a highly authoritarian attitude and not only influence but also impose informal rules and regulations upon PCs. One case illustrated in the empirical chapters is that PC D was under the informal influence of the maslikhat's Secretary and the oblast akimat. Sometimes, informal external regulation imposed by a single person – the akim or the maslikhat Secretary - blocks shared decision-making within PCs. Findings suggest that in an authoritarian country such as Kazakhstan, institutions are subject to external informal regulations and influence, even when operating in a moderate grid environment (PC D), which is hard to capture by the commonly applied measurement of the grid (cultural theory).

7.3. Theoretical contribution

This study makes an empirical contribution by expanding social capital research at the sub-national level of an authoritarian setting such as Kazakhstan. In contrast to Putnam (1993), who claims that higher social capital (all three components: networking, cooperation norms and networking) has a positive impact on institutional performance in Italy, this study's findings partially support the social capital thesis in Kazakhstan's context. Social trust and cooperation norms have a positive impact on the effectiveness of regional public councils in Kazakhstan, but networking does not impact. Networking is measured through asking the council members' membership in horizontal (professional, community, voluntary organization, and political party) associations as in Putnam (1993). Findings of this study demonstrate that although council members have membership in horizontal associations, they are affiliated with state bodies through state social grants or their employment in quasi-state bodies.

Additionally, similar to Radnitz et al.'s (2009) findings in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, social trust and networking are not interrelated in PCs' contexts. Although council members indicate their membership in non-political horizontal associations, the stock of social trust is not very high particularly in PC D. This finding shows that social capital is not a monolithic phenomenon in the local context, which is in contrast to Western studies (Putnam, 2000; Inglehart, 1997). For instance, Putnam (2000, p.137) argues that social trust and networking are "as tangled as well-tossed spaghetti" in the Western context.

Another component of social capital is the norm, which remains undertheorized. Social capital scholars variously define norms such as reciprocity, honesty and cooperation norms (Knack and Keefer, 1997; Radnitz et al., 2009). This study argues that when we examine the impact of social capital on institutions, it is suggested to employ cooperation norms compared to reciprocity and honesty. Findings illustrated that the existence of reciprocity does not necessarily show the cooperation norms. Moreover, to help refine our understanding of cooperation norms it is

suggested to distinguish among several levels: cooperation norms at the level of the community or organization, at the level of a region, and at the level of a society or state. The World Values Survey may include questions on cooperation norms, such as "Citizens contribute their time and resources to common social issues in my community", "Citizens contribute their time and resources to common issues in my oblast", "Citizens contribute their time and resources to common issues in my country". By differentiating among these levels (community, regional, national), we will be better equipped to measure cooperation norms in Central Asia.

Regarding cultural theory, this study makes the following theoretical contribution. Douglas's later elaborations on cultural theory, i.e. adding coercion, power and authority, complicated the grid dimension and overloaded it with definitions (Spickard, 1989). Particularly, Douglas's statement that "insulation reflects authority" does not necessarily fit in the contexts of PCs. Findings of this inquiry refutes the cultural theory's claim that "insulation reflects authority", which was suggested based on findings from educational settings (e.g. Douglas, 1989b; Douglas, 2013). In contrast to Douglas (2013), this study shows that in a public administration body (PC D) insulation exists irrespective of loose authority and decentralized decision-making. PC D members were insulated due to the spoken language (Kazakh vs Russian) and institutional backgrounds of members (business, state). At the same time, there is a loose regulation by PC D's Chairman. Moreover, PC D authority does not use these insulations (based on spoken language and institutional background) for enforcement of his/her power. As a result, this study suggests that in public administration bodies insulation does not necessarily reflect authority.

Finally, to further improve the cultural theory, studies should clearly differentiate between internal and external regulation, formal and informal regulation. For example, although PC D functions in a comparatively moderate grid environment there are various informal external regulations (local executive body, national government, representative body) imposed upon PCs. This constrains the explanatory power of grid dimension of cultural theory particularly in public administration in authoritarian settings. In applying another dimension of cultural theory i.e. group

dimension, studies make clear distinctions between insiders and outsiders of the specific group (e.g. public council), but fail to do so in applying the grid dimension. The failure to differentiate between internal and external regulation constrains the explanatory power of grid environment in four public councils under the study.

7.4. Practical implications and recommendations

RQ 3. What are the enabling and hindering factors that impact PC effectiveness?

Interview findings revealed institutional factors that impact PC effectiveness. The lack of competencies by PC members is the main hindering factor of PC operation. Lack of resources (technical, human, financial) and informal influence of state bodies also impact PC effectiveness. Informal influence is exercised by a loyal Chairperson and members who are affiliated with the state (GONGOs, quasi-state, people in business). The data analysis suggests that there are age and gender biases in PCs. Apart from state and civil society representatives, PCs are largely represented by business, quasi-state, and maslikhat deputies. Besides the abovementioned factors (human capital, specific agent, informal influence by state bodies), the following factors may improve PC performance.

One factor is a collaboration between the district PC and the regional PC. Collaboration between various level PCs may result in positive changes. As demonstrated in chapter 5, there are some cases dealing with social issues which succeeded through a collaboration of district and regional public councils. Particularly, they succeed because the regional PC is regarded as a higher unit within the state apparatus and therefore has a higher impact on the district and city-level bureaucrats. Moreover, regional PCs have more administrative resources to resolve social issues. Another enabling factor of PC effectiveness is that the national government facilitates the resolution of the case. Moreover, the role of the media is crucial in attracting state officials' attention to an issue.

PCs lack sanctioning power. Nevertheless, PCs without binding decisions can make a social impact. To succeed, PCs should collaborate with enforcement bodies. As illustrated in chapter 5, PC D worked with the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency, the prosecutor's office, the police, and the Economic Court to resolve the problem of water pipelines.

Finally, as illustrated in the empirical part of the dissertation, PCs' operation is hindered by the following factors: social issues related to the economic interests of national and regional elites/oligarchs as well as the lack of managerial and economic autonomy by PCs.

Despite the abovementioned constraints, there is still room for improvement. This study offers the following **practical recommendations**:

Competencies-related recommendations:

- PC members should be trained. For this purpose, the Graduate School of Public Policy (Nazarbayev University) and the regional branch of the Academy of Public Administration may launch workshop sessions for members of the new PC convocation. Workshop sessions may cover the following: foreign open government practices; the formation of the budget and amendments to the budget; regional state programs; drafting legal acts and assessment of the performance of state bodies; national regulations that guide the PC operation; corruption investigation; training on the basics of budget legislation and public procurement legislation.
- The erosion of trust inhibits members' collaboration. Therefore, team-building workshops should be conducted at the beginning of the new convocation.
- Civil servants should undertake training courses at the Graduate School of Public Policy (Nazarbayev University) and regional branches of the Academy of Public Administration of Kazakhstan. It is recommended to include courses about PCs, citizen engagement, and civil society participation in decision-making. This will increase regional civil servants' understanding of PCs and increase the effective interaction between the state and PCs.

- Peer-to-peer learning: oblast level PCs should maintain links with the city and district-level public councils. According to the law, they are all independent. However, their operations are coordinated by MISD. It is recommended to centralize all level PCs; sometimes, various public councils in the same region discuss the same issue and sometimes district-level PCs lack knowledge, experience, and administrative resources in comparison to regional ones.
- PCs need members with ecology, economy, legal, medicine, engineering, and agricultural backgrounds. Applicants with these backgrounds should be given priority because PC members must have specific expertise in social problems (agriculture, ecology, road construction, medicine).
- Benchmark PCs (PC A, Almaty city council, East-Kazakhstan regional council) involve experts in the work of commissions. External experts do not have voting power but may contribute to the development of recommendations and resolution of issues. Thus, PCs should involve experts from regional academia and think tanks. This will strengthen the value of their recommendations.

Resource and operation-related recommendations

- PCs need more financial and technical resources (managerial and economic autonomy). The regional representative body pays the technical secretary's salary; this limits the independency of the technical secretary and the PC. Some councils' secretariats have only one employee - the technical secretary - whose salary is only 80 000 tenge (around $170). This led to the frequent change of technical secretaries, adversely impacting PC performance. The PC itself does not have its own office and technical resources (computer, stationery), and thus mainly relies on the local representative body. The state offers a 3 million tenge social grant (via state social order) annually for PC operation. However, in many cases, third parties win those social grants. Those grants are allocated through the

state social order (www.goszakup.gov.kz), where any organization from any part of Kazakhstan can participate and win the social grant. However, this resulted in malpractices and did not contribute to the PCs' effectiveness. Instead of this, the budget should be directly allocated to the PC secretariat. This study recommends canceling the state social order to PC operation through state tenders and instead allocating the money directly to PCs. The budget for PCs from state bodies should cover the following: the technical secretary's salary; financial expenses for stationery and other technical needs; travel expenses of council members to remote districts; maintenance of the website, expert fees, and training fees. Rather than putting a financial burden on local executive and representative bodies, the government should directly finance the PC's operation. This is a common practice in Western advisory bodies (Bressers et al., 2018).

- As PCs lack jurisdictional status, they do not have their stamp and electronic-digital signature (*ECP* in Russian), inhibiting correspondence management through the common electronic portal for all state bodies. PCs are in close ties with state bodies and face challenges when exchanging letters with them.
- PCs are overloaded with excess tasks. The PC secretariat should be increased in staff and be independent of the local representative and executive bodies. More and more tasks are imposed on PCs; according to the 2021 amendments to the Law on PCs of Kazakhstan, PC members should participate in tender and corruption commission works. However, this puts an additional burden and responsibilities on council members (besides the council duties, members have permanent jobs). District and regional PCs should focus on narrow policy domains such as healthcare, agriculture, education, and communal services. This will lead to a more focused workload and increase PC effectiveness. Every PC can meet with state bodies concerning these specific policy domains and monitor their performance from time to time. MISD may develop evaluation indicators of state bodies' performance in education, healthcare, agriculture, and housing. MISD should offer guidance in dealing

with statistical data from the National Bureau of Statistics and data from the national tender website (www.goszakup.gov.kz). This will aid regional PCs in evaluating state bodies' performance effectively.

- Regional public councils' correspondences and documentation vary. In some PCs, this leads to arbitrary processing of correspondences. There should be common standards of documentation across all PCs.
- Before meeting with state bodies, effective PCs carry out surveys among consumers of state services. This study recommends using a one-stop shop survey platform to collect the citizens' evaluation of public services.
- PCs should be in a strategic partnership with the Regional Branch of the Anti-corruption Agency, the Department of Economic Investigations, the media, and the prosecutor's office.
- The connections between the state, PC members, and other stakeholders should be regulated. There should be a law or normative acts to avoid the conflict of interests (members should have to disclose their contacts with interest groups and lobbyists, and PC members should also have to declare their financial interests and assets). For instance, the OECD report (2017b) on advisory bodies claims that most OECD countries have a regulation to prevent conflict of interests, and some countries, such as the Czech Republic, have "codes of conduct" and "ethical codes" for advisory bodies. In France, the National Authority for Health (a permanent advisory body) is required to declare its assets and financial interests to prevent a conflict of interests (OECDb, 2017).
- The storage of PC archives (venue, period) should be regulated by the Model Regulation on Public Council of Kazakhstan. The absence of regulations on archives led to a loss of documents and arbitrary management of PC archives in some public councils.

Independence-related recommendations

The OECD report (2017b) highlights the salience of the autonomous status of policy advisory bodies.

- The working group for recruitment of council members should be formed neither by the maslikhat nor by the akimat. The state should consider alternative mechanisms such as an online electoral voting scheme to recruit council members.
- Interview respondents (non-PC members) raised concerns about the recruitment commissions (called *working groups* in the Law) that form the new convocation of PCs. In other words, according to some respondents, the selection process is biased and non-transparent. Moreover, the law needs to be more specific about forming a working group. There are numerous questions regarding the working group, how members (notably, from civil society) are selected for the working groups, and what are those criteria. There needs to be more clarity in the law.
- There are instances when the Secretary of the maslikhat is the Chairman of the regional PC. This should be prohibited by the law. Moreover, some maslikhat secretaries are members of the Public Council Presidiums (PC's highest organ). These practices hinder PC autonomy.

Amendments to the Law on the Public Council of Kazakhstan (2016)

- The Law on Public Councils (2016) pays too much attention to *civil society representativeness* in the PC. This focus on civil society should be redirected to societal organizations, which may include scientists, professional experts, and citizens. Giving recommendations based on perceptual judgments, as is now the case in PCs, may undermine factual analysis. For instance, in the Netherlands, only independent academics and professionals who can carry out comprehensive research while considering all

perspectives can provide policy advice (OECD, 2017b). In Kazakhstan, PCs mainly perform the role of consultation; civil society representatives deliver their opinions while neglecting the advisory role where expert views should be reflected. It should be changed and specified in the law because PCs are not merely consultative, but consultative-advisory bodies.

- The Law on Public councils (2016) does not specify what happens if a PC member participates only in PC meetings but does not participate in commission meetings. Moreover, the law should clearly state whether PC members are allowed to attend the meeting online when the PC meeting is conducted offline.
- The Law on PCs states that the legal acts related to human freedoms, rights, and responsibilities are subjected to PC approval. However, some state bodies send the draft regulatory acts to PCs which are out of scope. Moreover, during the fieldwork, the author witnessed the submission of amendments (e.g., 2 sentences) to legal acts for the council's consideration. The law on PCs and Law on Normative Legal Acts do not specifically mention amendments to legal acts. As a result, the workload of PCs increases. The Law on Public councils should clarify the PC's duties regarding normative legal acts, laws, and amendments to normative legal acts (e.g. time for review, method of review: in general meetings or commission meetings).
- The law needs to include a vote of no confidence on the council's Chairman because the lack of legal regulation leaves room for malpractices. Similarly, there are no clear procedures for the membership termination of inactive and apathetic council members.
- The law states that the state bodies have to provide motivated responses to PC recommendations and proposals within ten working days when it concerns the local budget and within 30 days for other issues. However, the law does not specify how state bodies will be sanctioned in case they do not respond according to this law; this leads to an arbitrary attitude to PC recommendations by state bodies. Therefore, answerability must

be enhanced legally. State bodies must be held accountable when they neglect council recommendations. This study recommends that in such cases, the Ethics Council of the regional department of the ACSA RK should be involved. Neglecting PCs' recommendations should be regarded as a strong disciplinary case (or an administrative sanction) which may even lead to the dismissal of the head of the state body. Additionally, the term "motivated response" should be defined clearly in the law.

- Age bias creates the erosion of trust among younger and older generations. Similarly, gender bias can lead to an erosion of trust. To address this problem, the law should specify the quotas for female and young members, which will improve trust among PC members.

7.5. Limitations and further research

This study has the following limitations. The survey sample comprises members of public councils it is obviously expectable that for the question on "membership in professional, voluntary, or community organizations" the answer is predefined by the fact that the respondents are the active members of public councils. Furthermore, due to resource and time constraints, the study included a limited number of survey questions. In order to avoid the respondents' fatigue, the study employed a limited number of questions on social capital, particularly the networking questions. Questions about membership in voluntary, or professional organizations, and in political parties still do not capture other types of networking (e.g., networking in labor unions, and sports clubs). Future studies may include various types of networking. Moreover, more questions on social trust (trust in your family, neighborhood, friends, and so on) should be included in future studies. The author carried out a pilot work in one regional PC in 2021 and observed that PC members represent the local elite and were reluctant to complete long surveys. No monetary incentives have been given to survey respondents. Thus, the survey questions were minimal to increase the response rate during fieldwork in 2022.

Due to the frequent change of technical secretaries in some PCs, the archival documents for 2017-2021 are not well managed (particularly in PC A). To overcome this, the author visited former technical secretaries and triangulated their data on small cases through media reports and information from National reports by MISD (2019, 2020, 2021). Additionally, due to PC secretariats' limited time and lack of competencies, some activities are not well documented (e.g. public monitoring recommendations).

The study's external validity is limited as this study selected only four regional public councils out of 16 existing ones. The role of social capital may differ concerning other state institutions (executive and representative bodies). Thus, this study acknowledges that findings cannot be generalized to other state bodies. Meanwhile, there is a difference between statistical generalization (generalizing to large samples) and analytical generalization (the outcome of the research is generalized to a theory or propositions) (Yin, 2003). In that sense, the results of this study made a particular contribution to knowledge accumulation concerning the social capital thesis and grid-group cultural theory. Additionally, this study acknowledges that the sampling for surveys is based on convenience sampling, not on random sampling. Taking this into account, the author attempted to mitigate the non-response bias. Firstly, the Chairman announced and kindly requested that members complete the surveys after PC meetings. Secondly, the author asked PC members to complete the surveys after interviewing them and made phone calls to PC members kindly requesting them to complete an online survey.

Furthermore, the fieldwork was carried out after the January events and President Tokayev's message to the people of Kazakhstan in March. Due to this, PC members were more optimistic about political changes and there was a much higher trust in the President. While the author encountered passive attitudes toward social problems by PC members before the January events in the 2021 pilot project, January 2022 changed their attitudes positively.

Another restraint of the study was that non-participant observations lasted only for two weeks in each public council, which is a short time to unravel group interactions. Nevertheless, the author kept on observing PCs' activities through social media (Facebook and Instagram) and the respective websites between September 2022 and January 2023. These online observations corroborate the findings of this study.

Further research on the social capital thesis in the Central Asian context may focus on local governments' performance (executive and representative). Moreover, future research may include more questions on social trust, networking, and norms to capture as many dimensions as captured by the WVS (2017-2020). Regarding the grid-group dimension, further studies may focus on the following statement: "Moving away from high-grid context lowers insulation and autonomy, control of self, and competition emerges" (Douglas, 1978, p.16). Scholars may investigate whether the lack of insulation means an abundance of competition, or is it possible that some contexts lack insulation while at the same time lacking competition. Future research on cultural theory and social capital may focus on other institutions such as executive, representative bodies and may be conducted in other former Soviet countries.

This study measured PC effectiveness based on produced outputs rather than on adopted recommendations due to data collection concerns (particularly due to the difficulty of tracking records in state documents about PC recommendations[59]). Currently, the PC's influence on regional public policy primarily depends on the responsiveness of local executive bodies. A recent political reform on the maslikhat formation (at the oblast level a majoritarian and proportional electoral system) may alter the power balance between the executive and representative (i.e. maslikhat) bodies, which in turn will have implications for regional PCs. Therefore, the political reform might positively affect PC effectiveness as PCs' recommendations might have a higher

[59] As PCs cover various policy domains, they offer recommendations to various state bodies (healthcare, corruption department, ecology and so on). Given the time constraints, it would have been infeasible to track the implementation or influence of PC recommendations on the demand side.

impact on state bodies. As a result, future studies on PC effectiveness might focus on the impact and influence of PC recommendations on local policy-making.

In conclusion, there are no previous studies that examined the impact of social capital on institutional performance in the Central Asian context. There are no studies that looked at the impact of grid and group environments (cultural theory) on institutional performance in public administration bodies in authoritarian settings. Thus, findings of this study add new cultural perspectives on institutional performance by applying the social capital thesis and cultural theory to regional public councils in Kazakhstan. The major findings of this study show that social capital thesis partially works in the authoritarian setting of Kazakhstan. Social trust and cooperation norms have a positive impact on PC effectiveness, but the networking (membership in horizontal associations such as community and professional organizations) does not impact public council effectiveness. Although council members show their membership in horizontal associations they are associated with state bodies (e.g. through state social grants, or employment with quasi-state bodies).

Regarding cultural theory, findings show that the high group environment has a positive impact on PC effectiveness because in those PCs council members frequently interact with each other, committed to group goals and there is a clear group boundary between the PC and other state bodies. At the same time, the low grid environment does not necessarily have a positive impact on council effectiveness. Because despite the loose regulation within the council, there are external (informal) regulations from national and local state bodies particularly in authoritarian settings such as Kazakhstan. Therefore, it is hard to apply a grid environment to explain the PC effectiveness. This study's findings are important as previous studies show that there is a low level of social trust in former Soviet countries (e.g. Sapsford and Abbott, 2006), but no one looked at its impact on institutional performance. This study demonstrates that the simple adoption of Western institutions to Central Asian countries might not bring desired outcomes as the cultural factors (social trust and cooperation norms) are also essential for the proper functioning of

institutions. This research also makes a contribution to comparative public administration literature (Demircioglu and Sharipova, 2023; van Der Wal and Demircioglu, 2020) through using and collecting data in non-Western settings such as Kazakhstan.

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ANNEX 1

Sample of the legal act reviewed **by Public Council A.**

Concerning the approval of the rules for the maintenance and protection of green spaces in the A oblast and the rules for the improvement of the territories of cities and towns of the A oblast

Having considered the draft rules, and having analyzed their compliance with the norms of the current legislation, Public Council A submits the following comments.

1. In paragraph 1 of the Rules, reference should be made to comply with the Model Rules for the maintenance and protection of green spaces, approved by order of the Minister of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated March 20, 2015 No. 235

The reference to subparagraph 23-15) of Article 20 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On architectural, urban planning and construction activities in the Republic of Kazakhstan" is incorrect since it falls within the competence of the authorized body in the field of architectural, urban planning and construction activities for the development of model rules.

Accordingly, it is necessary to delete the words "and determine the standard procedure for the maintenance and protection of green spaces" in the first paragraph.

2. Paragraph 43 of the draft rules must be supplemented with a paragraph as follows: The procedure for issuing a permit for cutting trees is issued by the authorized body in strict accordance with the Rules for the provision of the public service "Issuance of a permit for cutting trees", approved by order of the Minister of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 20.03.2015 No. 235

This addition complies with the norms of the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, makes the process of obtaining a permit transparent and understandable for the subjects receiving such a permit.

3.1 In paragraph 1 of the draft Rules, the words "and other regulatory and legal acts" shall be replaced by the words "by order of the Minister of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated March 20, 2015 No. 235 "On approval of the Model Rules for the maintenance and protection of green spaces, public service Issuance of permits for cutting the trees.

In fact, the draft rules were drawn up precisely in accordance with the model rules by order of the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 235 dated March 20, 2015, and no other acts were used.

3.2 Taking into account the peculiarities (environmental, climatic, geological) of individual districts and cities of region A, using the norm of paragraph 42 of the Model Rules for the improvement of the territories of cities and settlements approved by the Order of the Minister of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 235 Paragraph 3 "Collection and removal of waste" of the Rules must be supplemented with the following content:

“In the territories of remote settlements and rural areas of region A, where due to climatic, geographical, economic and other conditions it is difficult to install container sites and there are no specialized organizations for the collection and removal of waste, the procedure for collection and removal of waste is determined by the local executive body independently with the taking into account of these rules and with the obligatory coordination of such a procedure with the authorized body.

Upon necessity to finance the collection and removal of waste in the territories indicated in this paragraph, local executive bodies prepare a budget application for the allocation of funds from the regional budget."

Problems of waste collection and disposal in remote regions of the region are one of the existing problems that create risks of negative environmental consequences. In case of disagreement with these comments, the developer of this legal act must submit a written justification to the Public Council.

----------the end of the letter----------

Sample of the legal act reviewed **by Public Council D:**

"on the additional provision of medicines to certain categories of citizens, free of charge for outpatient treatment" (list of medicines in the appendix) for discussion and recommendations**"**

The response by PC D:

Ankylosing spondylitis disease is not included in the List of medicines and medical products for free provision of the population within the guaranteed volume of free medical care, approved by the Minister of Health on November 4, 2011. This draft decision of the regional maslikhat contradicts the current legislation.

----------the end of the letter ----------

ANNEX 2

Recommendations developed **by the public council B** to the city akim:

In accordance with the Law on Public Councils of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the B oblast public council listened to and discussed the report of the akim of the city B "On the work of the akim of the city B with public opinion" and the regional public council meeting adopted a resolution.

1. The report of the mayor of the city B should be taken into consideration.

2. The following recommendations are addressed to the city administration.

1.1. The development of a rehabilitation center for people with disabilities.

1.2. To take into account the needs of people with disabilities when building roads and pedestrian paths

1.3. to consider the possibility of drip irrigation of greenery in the city, to organize watering in the evening or morning by transporting water.

1.4. Awareness works of houses to be demolished in the old part of the city.

1.5. Consider the possibility of building a sport complex in our city.

1.6. Making a proposal to international company B with Limited Liabilities regarding an increased number of grants for non-governmental organizations

1.7. Hot water supply system has been turned off every year in September, change the time of renovation works to the summer time of the year

1.8. Organization of elimination of stray dogs in the city

1.9. It is recommended to study the requests of the residents living near the Oil Refinery Factory regarding the relocation.

3. It is recommended to inform the secretariat of the council about the results of consideration of these proposals within the period established by the Law

----------end of the letter ----------

Below is the response by the city deputy akim (response to PC B):

The City Administration sends the following response regarding the implementation of the tasks adopted in the Resolution #2/2 of the Public Council meeting held on April 19, 2022 with the participation of the Deputy Akim of the region:

2. Today, the project estimate documentation for the renovation of the central bridge on Abay Street is being prepared. We inform you that according to the project, a ramp for disabled people has been contsructed.

In addition, the design and estimate documentation for the construction of a pedestrian crossing over railways in the village of Abay was prepared, and then on April 8, 2021, a positive conclusion of the state examination # 01-0069121 was received.

The above-mentioned projects will be implemented in the future depending on the source of funds.

3. The task was given to the contractor institution to organize irrigation by water transport in the evening or morning in the city.

4. (1 stage) 2017 for the purpose of implementation of the B City General Plan. Demolition of dilapidated old buildings located in the central area of the city B has started.

According to the City General plan, land acquisition and demolition of 262 objects of the first stage were carried out in the territory of the Old City. Among them, compensation has been paid to 260 object owners, and land plots have been returned to state ownership. A court decision has been issued on the remaining 2 objects, and funds from the local budget are being considered.

(2nd stage) On July 30, 2020 # 1515 of the Atyrau city administration, the resolution of the Akimat of Atyrau city was issued on the acquisition of 43 plots of 1.6 ha in the area of the perimeter of Gagarin, Pushkin, Abai, Zhambyl streets. the following works are being carried out:

Compensation to 8 private owners (168,372,846 million) has been paid, contracts have been concluded with 12 objects (372,948,657 million), contracts are being concluded with 7 objects (209,681,227 million), and 2 real estates cannot be acquired for state use (1 owner is in prison, court processes with another owner). 14 targets in 2020-2021 (Covid - 2019) were not completed on time due to the pandemic, and they are being re-evaluated.

8. As part of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated December 30, 2021 #97 "On the Responsible Treatment of Animals", hunting of stray animals is carried out by the Regional Animal Husbandry Department. 31 million 633 000 tenge were allocated for hunting stray dogs in the city administration and all rural districts. Now the state procurement tenders have ended, and dog hunting has begun in rural districts.

9. Based on the resolution No. 785 of the B city administration dated June 9, 2016, the settlement located in the sanitary protection zone has been completely relocated. However, we inform you that it is not planned to relocate the houses located near the sanitary protection zone.

----------end of the letter----------

Recommendations developed **by the public council D** to the Health Deaprtment of oblast akimat:

To recommend "Health Department of the akimat" and other health care institutions of the region to take the necessary measures to improve the efficiency of their activities, the availability of medical care and the quality of services:

- organize more efficient work of health care subjects, avoid long queues and waiting times for appointments;

- taking into account the social importance of the issue of the supply of medicines, it is necessary to initiate amendments to the relevant regulations aimed at simplifying the procedure for purchasing medicines, consider the possibility of purchasing medicines many times more often;

- providing medicines to rural residents in a timely manner;

- develop a set of measures to address the problems associated with the lack of ambulance teams, improve the skills of healthcare workers involved in the provision of services;

- to ensure the timely arrival of ambulance crews, to prevent violations of the existing rules for the provision of services;

- improve the quality of the material and technical equipment of ambulance teams;

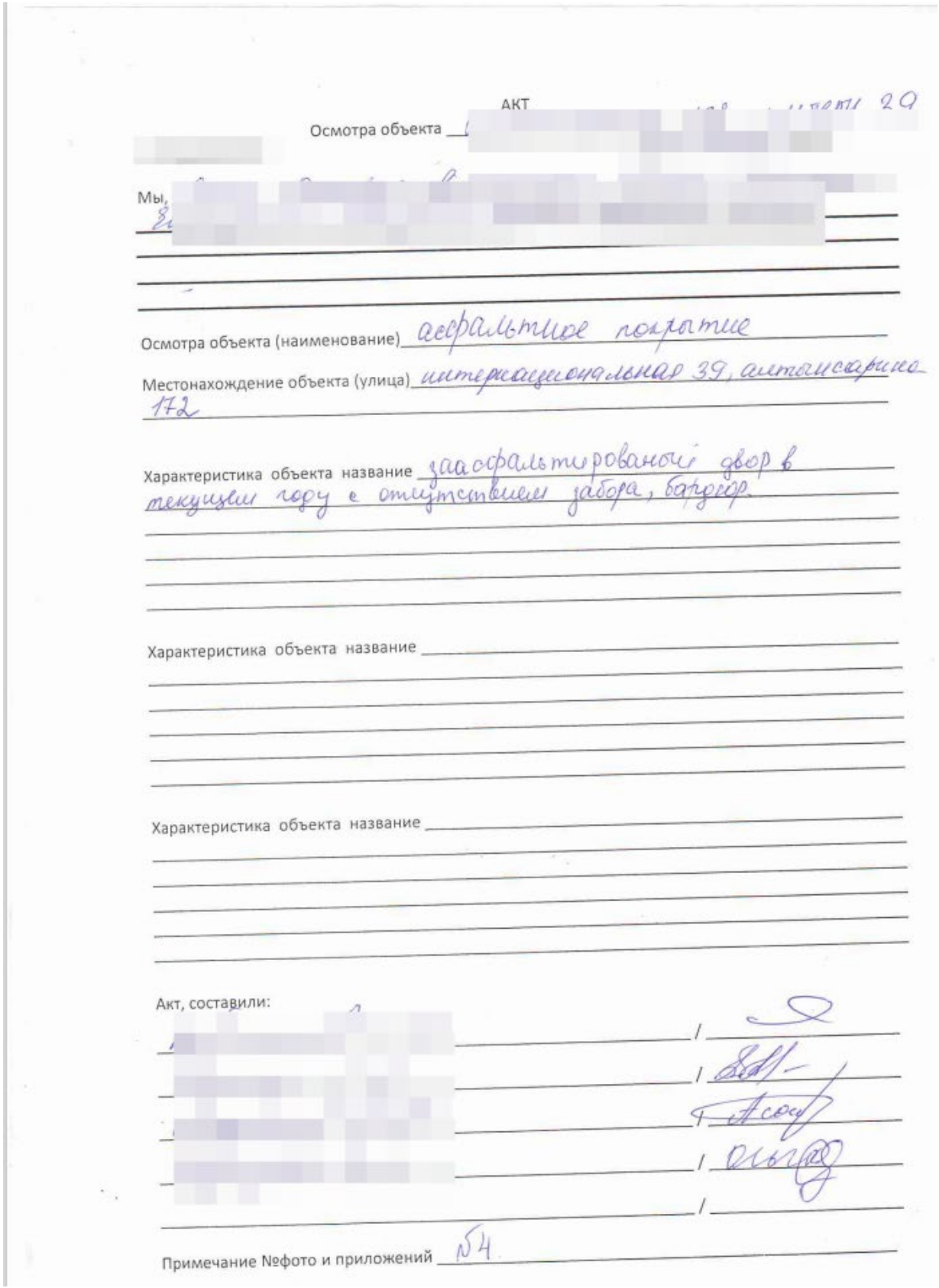
- provide full access to quality services for rural residents.

----------the end----------

ANNEX 3

Public monitoring by local NGOs with the involvement of members of PC D

Public monitoring of the asphalt pavement. The asphalt pavement lacks curbs.



АКТ

Осмотра объекта

Мы,

Осмотра объекта (наименование) асфальтное покрытие

Местонахождение объекта (улица) интернациональная 39, алтайский 172

Характеристика объекта название заасфальтированой двор в текущем году с отсутствием забора, бардюр.

Характеристика объекта название

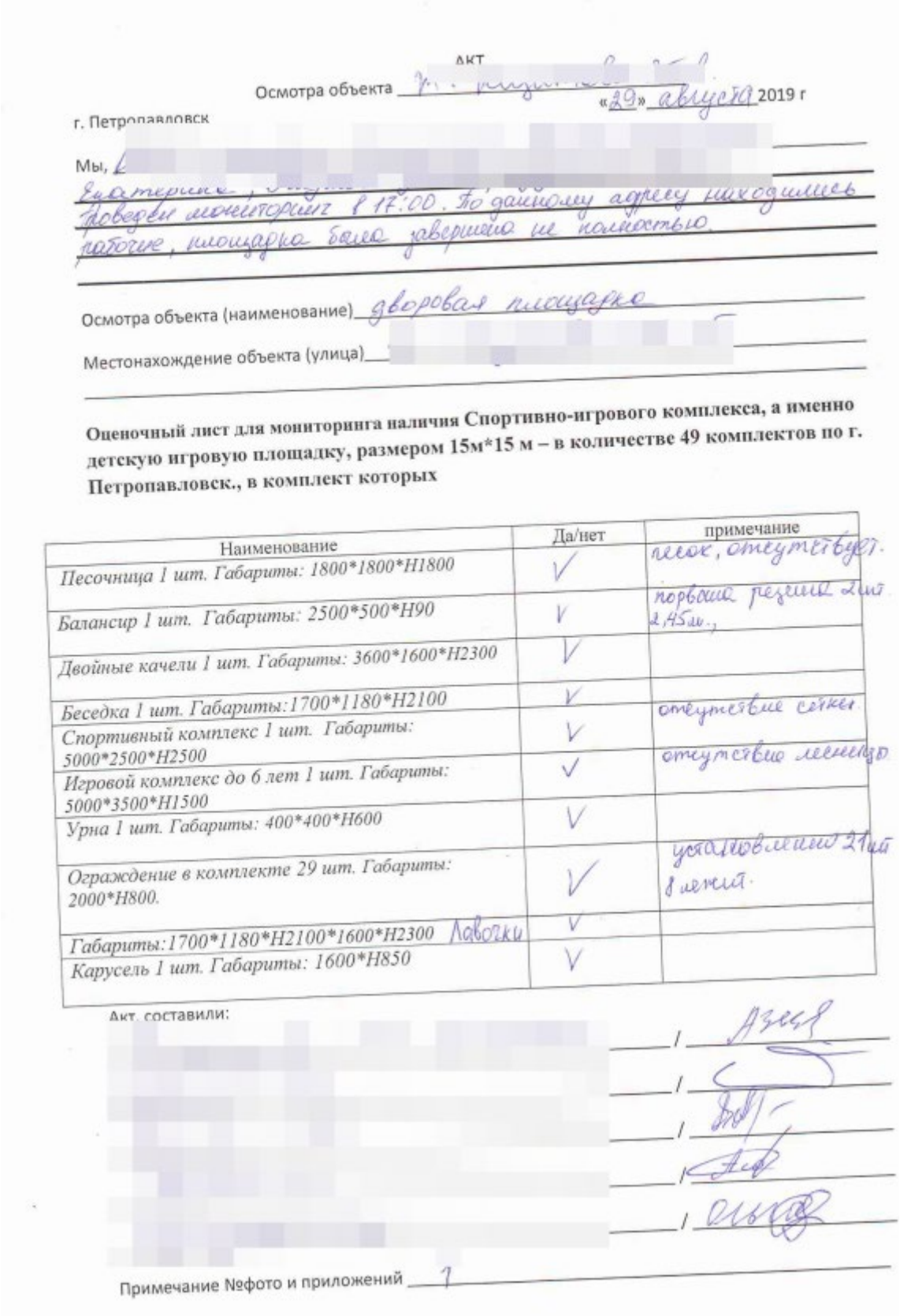
Характеристика объекта название

Акт, составили:

Примечание №фото и приложений №4

Приложение

Public monitoring of the playground which was constructed by private contractors with limitations.



АКТ

Осмотра объекта [redacted] «29» августа 2019 г

г. Петропавловск

Мы, [redacted]

Екатерина [redacted] провели мониторинг в 17:00. По данному адресу находились рабочие, площадка была завершена не полностью.

Осмотра объекта (наименование) дворовая площадка

Местонахождение объекта (улица) [redacted]

Оценочный лист для мониторинга наличия Спортивно-игрового комплекса, а именно детскую игровую площадку, размером 15м*15 м – в количестве 49 комплектов по г. Петропавловск., в комплект которых

Наименование	Да/нет	примечание
*Песочница 1 шт. Габариты: 1800*1800*H1800*	V	песок, отсутствует.
*Балансир 1 шт. Габариты: 2500*500*H90*	V	порвана резина 2шт 2,45м.,
*Двойные качели 1 шт. Габариты: 3600*1600*H2300*	V	
*Беседка 1 шт. Габариты:1700*1180*H2100*	V	
*Спортивный комплекс 1 шт. Габариты: 5000*2500*H2500*	V	отсутствие сетки
*Игровой комплекс до 6 лет 1 шт. Габариты: 5000*3500*H1500*	V	отсутствие лестницы
*Урна 1 шт. Габариты: 400*400*H600*	V	
*Ограждение в комплекте 29 шт. Габариты: 2000*H800.*	V	установлено 21шт в ямах.
*Габариты:1700*1180*H2100*1600*H2300* Лавочки	V	
*Карусель 1 шт. Габариты: 1600*H850*	V	

Акт составили:

[redacted] / Азеев

[redacted] /

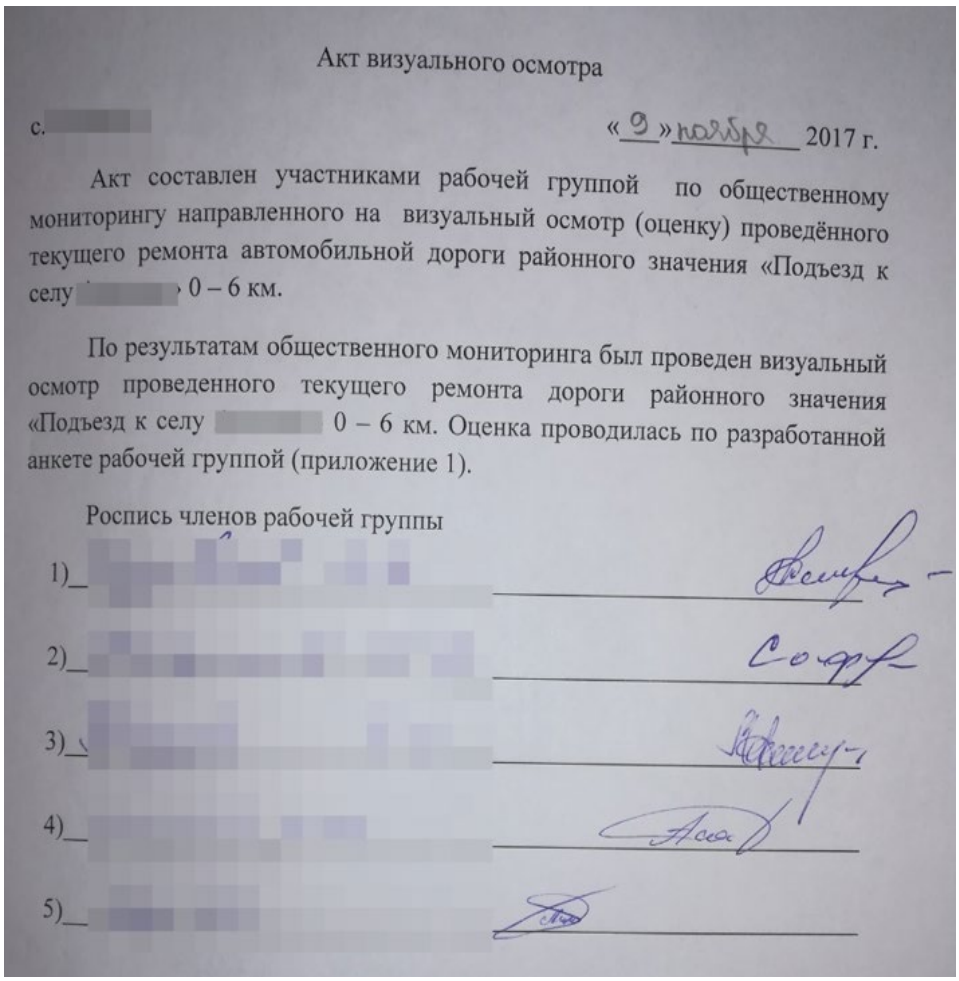
[redacted] /

[redacted] /

[redacted] /

Примечание №фото и приложений 7

Evidence from public monitoring of the automobile road renovation in rural district D., the observers measured the lengths, width and thickness; some of them are of unsatisfactory quality.



Акт визуального осмотра

с. [redacted] «9» ноября 2017 г.

Акт составлен участниками рабочей группой по общественному мониторингу направленного на визуальный осмотр (оценку) проведённого текущего ремонта автомобильной дороги районного значения «Подъезд к селу [redacted] 0 – 6 км.

По результатам общественного мониторинга был проведен визуальный осмотр проведенного текущего ремонта дороги районного значения «Подъезд к селу [redacted] 0 – 6 км. Оценка проводилась по разработанной анкете рабочей группой (приложение 1).

Роспись членов рабочей группы

1) [redacted]

2) [redacted]

3) [redacted]

4) [redacted]

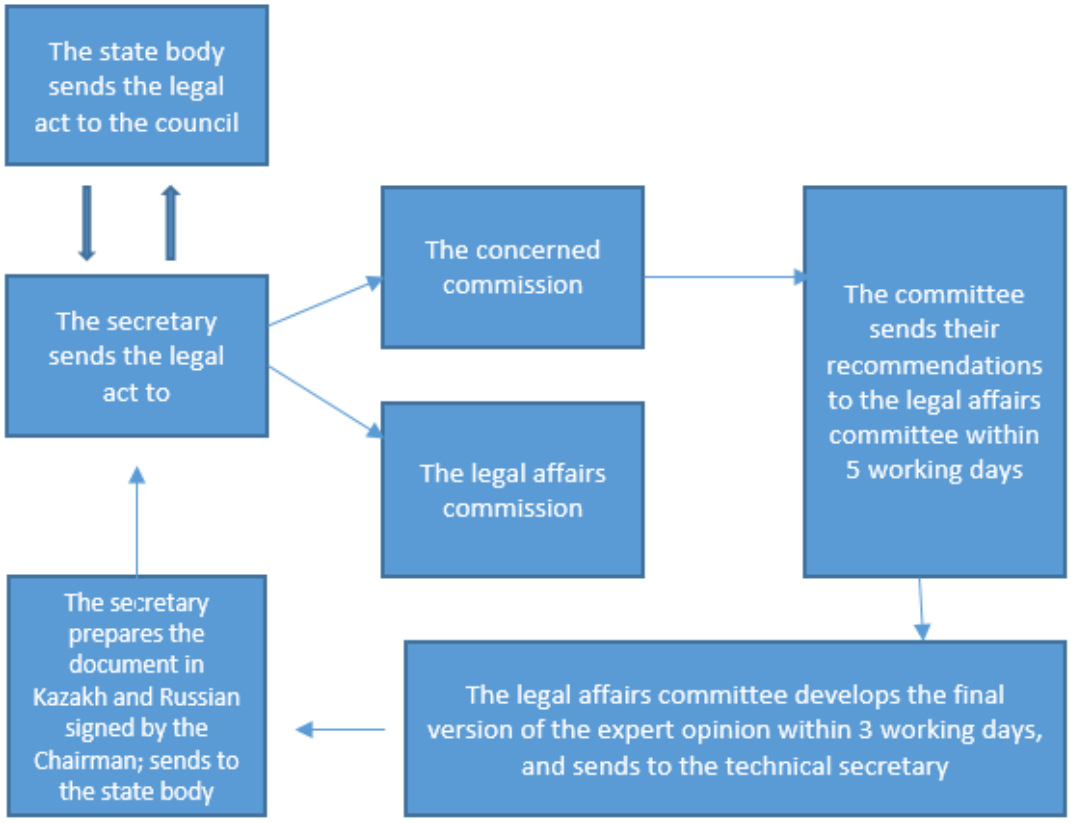
5) [redacted]

Визуальной оценки текущего ремонта автомобильной дороги

№	Длина, см	Ширина, см	Толщина, см	Состояние	Примечание
10	7,26	4,98	—	удовл.	в средине провал с трещинами
11	10,95	4,83	1 см	удовл.	местами ямки
11/1.	16,30	1,63	1 см	удовл.	
12	7,22	5,41		неудовл.	ямы, впадины трещины не полное покр тие асфальт
13	10,30	3,49		неудовл.	трещины, об асфальт, ямы
13/1	8,19	2,19		неудовл.	ямы.

ANNEX 4

The procedure of draft legal act review by PC A.



ANNEX 5

Questions for semi-structured interviews with PC members and civil society representatives in four regions of Kazakhstan

1. Can you tell me about the operation of your public council?
2. Do you think your public council is effective? Why?
3. What is an effective public council in your opinion?
4. Are you a member of a political party or a community organization?
5. Are there numerous regulations in your public council/region? Why?
6. Are PC members committed to PC goals? How?
7. What are the limitations and strengths of the public council?
8. Is there a consensus (trust) among PC members? If no, what factors divide the public council?
9. Give an example(s) of success that the public council has achieved.
10. Give an example of a failure on the part of the public council.

ANNEX 6

Survey questions

Respondent's ID_____ (will be provided by the interviewer)

Questions related to the oblast public council

1. **How would you evaluate an overall performance of the public council?**

a) Very bad b) bad c) good d) very good e) don't know

2. **The goal of public council is the "expression of civil society's views on social issues". How would you evaluate the achievement of goals by the oblast public council?**

a) Very bad b) bad c) good d) very good e) don't know

Evaluate the implementation of three tasks by the public council

	Very bad	**bad**	**good**	**very good**	**don't know**
3.Development of interaction of state bodies with civil society					
4.Representation of the interests of civil society and taking into account the opinion of the public when discussing and making decisions at local levels					

5.Organization of public oversight over local executive bodies					

Questions related to political culture, trust in others and institutions, group orientations of individuals and rules imposed on individuals.

Public councils are expected to frequently interact with the general public. In the process of resolving an issue of public significance people may or may not trust each other and institutions. Please respond to the following questions[60] by placing a checkmark (√) in the answer box that corresponds to your response.

	Trust completely	**Trust somewhat**	**Do not trust very much**	**Do not trust at all**	**Don't know**
6. Do you trust people you meet for the first time?					
7. Do you trust people you know personally?					
	A great deal	**Quite a lot**	**Not very much**	**Not at all**	**Don't know**
8.Do you agree that every citizen should invest his time and resources in common social issues?					

Do you agree with the following statements? Please respond to the following questions[61] by placing a checkmark (√) in the answer box that corresponds to your response.

	Agree completely	**Somewhat agree**	**Do not agree very much**	**Do not agree at all**	**Don't know**
13. **In my family, we try to advance family goals**					
14. In the public council, individuals try to pursue the goals of organizations					
In my region, state officials serve common goals					
16. In my family, regarding important issues the elders of the family decide what we do					

[60] Taken from World Values Survey (2017-2020)

[61] Adapted from Ripberger, Swedlow and collaborators (2016)

17. In the public council, the Chairman sets all rules					

Questions[62] related to civic engagement and membership in organizations

18. Are you a member of a professional, voluntary, or community organization?

a) Don't belong
b) Inactive member
c) Active member
d) Other, please specify _____

19. Are you a member of a political party?

a) Don't belong
b) Inactive member
c) Active member
d) Other, please specify _____

Questions related to socio-demographic characteristics

20. Which of these best describes your age? Circle one choice only

a) 16-20
b) 21-30
c) 31-40
d) 41-50
e) 51 and above

21. Please indicate your gender

a) Female
b) Male
c) Other, please specify _____

22. Which best describes your ethnicity?

a) Kazakh
b) Russian
c) Uzbek
d) Korean
e) Other, please specify_____

[62] Adapted from the World Value Survey (2017-2020)

ANNEX 7

NVIVO coding

Themes	**Lack of resources**	**Culture**	**Effective council**	**Agency**	**Informal state constraint**			**Progress**	**Members**	**Cases**	
Categories	Sanctioning power Human and financial resources	Erosion of trust (classification); Group commitments and interactions; Authority	Serve as a bridge between the state and citizens; Influence and impact the state policy; Members	Chairman's role Akim's (akimat's) role Specific PC members	Maslikhat's influence	Akimat's influence	State-led civil society	January events 2022 Collaboration with the state	Lack of competence; Affiliation with the state; Independent members; Consensus is needed	Unsuccessful	Successful
Sub-categories	Experts are needed Human Fieldwork expenses Technical secretary's salary Stationery	Erosion of trust: Spoken language; Institutional affiliation, Younger vs older generation;	Express straightforwardly; Criticize constructively; Implementation of	Chairman is loyal to akimat; Chairman is authoritarian; Akim/akimat supports PCs;	Members are deputies; Recruitment process; Staff and resources are	Informal approval of members; Indirect influence	Pseudo-NGOs Managed civil society	New convocation in 2022 Collaboration with akimat	Training is needed, some members need PR and lack knowledge;	**Agency:** Monopolist agencies; Interests of local and national elites;	**Agency**: local media; akim's role; PC (collaboration of PCs, members'

	Recommendations are without binding decision	Male vs female; Business and media representatives; Old Kazakhstan cadres vs new cadres Authority-directed; The role of Chairman; Group interaction Group boundaries	recommendations and policy impact; Active members; independent members	Some PC members have wider audience and are influencers; Some PC members are loyal to the state.	financed by the maslikhat; Maslikhat is in PC Presidium (highest body of PC)	via the maslikhat; Akimat provides staff and resources to PCs	Affiliation through state social orders	Collaboration with enforcement bodies (courts, anti-corruption department) Collaboration with other PCs	Erosion of trust and insulation among members	State intervention. **Cases:** Gas tariff; Inefficient resource allocation (150 buses); Livestock owners' appeal to the PC; Media was ousted out of PC meeting.	cooperation, Chairman's role); National government. Collaboration of various level PCs **Cases:** Communal; Ecological; Passenger transportation Usage of Kazakh language; Water pipelines
Codes											

ANNEX 8

		Organization	**Gender**	**Position**	**Interview type**
1	Public council D (May , 2022)	PC D technical secretary	Male	Technical Secretary	Offline
2		Regional civil society alliance	Male	Chairman of Association of Civil Alliance	Offline
3		Regional newspaper	Female	Journalist	Offline
4		PC D member	Female	Executive director of Association of Civil Alliance	Offline
5		Regional newspaper	Male	Journalist	Offline
6		Local TV channel	Male	Journalist, social media blogger	Offline
7		PC D member	Female	Businessmen	WhatsApp call
8		PC D member	Male	University instructor	Offline
9		PC D member	Male	Private sector	Offline
10		PC D member	Male	Political party	Offline
11		PC D member	Male	Businessman	Offline
12		PC D member, Chairman	Male	Newspaper	Offline
13		Civil society, NGO	Male	NGO member	Offline
14		PC D member	Female	Quasi-state	Offline
15		Civil society, NGO	Female	NGO member	Offline
1	Public council A (June, 2022)	PC A technical secretary	Male	Technical Secretary	Offline
2		PC A member	Male	Media	Offline
3		PC A former technical secretary	Female	Technical secretary	Offline
4		PC A member	Male	NGO member	Offline
5		PC A member	Female	Association of Entrepreneur	Offline
6		PC A member	Female	Journalist	WhatsApp call
7		PC A member	Female	Private sector	Offline
8		PC A member	Female	Public fund	Offline
9		Civil society	Male	NGO member	Offline
10		PC A member	Female	Public association	Offline
11		Civil society	Female	NGO	Offline
12		Civil society	Male	NGO	Offline
13		PC A member	Female	Businesswomen	Offline
14		PC A member	Female	Voluntary public fund	Offline
15		PC A member	Female	NGO	Offline
16		PC A member	Male	Civil servant	Offline
17		Civil society	Male	Labor union	Offline

1	PC B (June, 2022)	Civil society	Male	Association of civil alliance	WhatsApp call
2		PC B member	Male	Public association	Offline
3		Civil society	Female	Association of alliance	Offline
4		PC B member	Female	NGO	Offline
5		Civil society	Female	Public association	Offline
6		PC B member	Female	NGO	Offline
7		PC B member	Male	NGO	Offline
8		PC B member	Male	Public association	Offline
9		PC B technical secretary	Female	Technical secretary	Offline
10		PC B member	Female	Public fund	Offline
11		PC B member	Male	Civil servant	Offline
12		Civil society	Male	NGO	Offline
13		Civil society	Female	Labor union	Offline
14		PC B member	Male	Quasi-state	Offline
15		Civil society	Male	NGO	Offline
1	Public council C (July 2022)	PC C technical secretary	Female	Technical secretary	Offline
2		PC C member	Male	Businessmen	Offline
3		Civil society	Female	Association of civil alliance	Offline
4		PC C member	Male	Public organization	Offline
5		Civil society	Male	Public fund	Offline
6		Civil society	Male	Public association	Offline
7		Civil society	Female	Labor union	Offline
8		PC C member	Female	Quasi-state body	Offline
9		PC C member	Female	Quasi-state	Offline
10		PC C member	Male	Private sector	Offline
11		PC C member	Male	Active citizen	Offline
12		PC C staff	Male	Maslikhat staff	Offline
13		PC C member	Female	Private sector	Offline
Overall 60 respondents					