

# *Mongolization of Civil Society Development in Rural Mongolia*

## EVALUATION REPORT

Final version March 2018

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The project '*Mongolization of Civil Society Development in Rural Mongolia*' was co-designed and jointly implemented by CICED/Community for International Cooperation in Education and Development, Denmark and MAPSSD/Mongolian Association for Primary and Secondary School Development, Mongolia. The project received DKK 1,690,052 financial support from CISU (Civil Society Development Fund, Denmark) – CISU ref. 13-1409-SP-dec – 1 April 2014 – 30 November 2016 with a no-cost extension to 31 May 2018.

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## Foreword

At the time of planning the external evaluation for the summer 2016 it was clear that the project was well on track with regard to conducting planned activities and delivering expected outputs. What was not crystal clear, however, was what *Mongolization* implied in terms of approaches to civil society development in rural Mongolia.

As argued in the project application we had noticed that standard Western concepts of and approaches to civil society development did not seem to work efficiently in rural Mongolia which is largely shaped by a nomadic lifestyle.

One overall justification for the project was thus to give space and time for our Mongolian partner and its local branches across the country to develop adequate organizational forms and ways of communication and collaboration within their respective communities. It was these multiple and locally contextual approaches that we from the outset and without any particular expectations or interpretations labelled *Mongolization*.

The external evaluation was considered a unique opportunity to explore and analyze what our Mongolian partners, i.e. the project's key stakeholders and target groups, would actually see as particular Mongolian qualities of civil society development, or in other words what they themselves would consider *Mongolization* of civil society development in rural Mongolia.

Exploring and analyzing the (cultural) meanings that participants give to their engagement and contributions to an intervention like the present project requires thorough knowledge of rural Mongolian socio-cultural life and mastering of the Mongolian language is a pre-condition for conducting interviews and grasping the nuances and maybe hidden messages in written statements.

With these requirements in mind we asked an internationally recognized Mongolist, professor Ines Stolpe of the Department of Mongolian Studies at Bonn University to undertake the evaluation. Professor Stolpe has done extensive field research across various topics in rural Mongolia and she was also engaged in the external evaluations of the forerunner to the current project, i.e. The Rural School Development Project (2004 and 2008). Putting the topic of *Mongolization* in the focus of the evaluation we also opted for an explorative and discursive evaluation rather than a standard evaluation report.

When the first draft of the evaluation report arrived in late summer 2016 we were granted a no-cost extension of the project and thus we also postponed the final version of the report in order to incorporate more information, experiences and lessons learnt about *Mongolization*.

As the project is now coming to an end in May 2018 we publish another final and updated version of the evaluation report hoping that other readers will find it as enlightening as we did.

Copenhagen, March 2018

Johnny Baltzersen, vice-chairman/CICED

## Introduction

The project ***Mongolization of Civil Society Development in Rural Mongolia*** was implemented by the Mongolian Association for Primary and Secondary School Development (MAPSSD) and the Community for International Cooperation in Education and Development (CICED) from April 2014 until November 2016 with the financial support from CISU (Civil Society Fund Denmark). It was a follow-up of the pilot project “Civil Society Development in Rural Mongolia” conducted as a partnership activity with financial support from CISU in 2012-13. Key players in the implementation of the project are 57 local branches of MAPSSD across all *aimags* (provinces) of Mongolia.

The most reoccurring topic in **criticism directed at approaches of development cooperation**<sup>1</sup> is an apparent lack of understanding of local conditions and concepts, particularly of those that constitute social life. Therefore, *Mongolization* was chosen as a heuristic frame and as a tool that helps to better understand the social dynamics in rural Mongolia. In rural areas, social life is very much constituted by mobile pastoralism (nomadism), which is not only a way of production but also a way of life. Usually, pastoralism is not given the credit and recognition it deserves, as the following quotation with regard to Mongolia may illustrate:

„[...] government and donors show inadequate insight into the basic mechanism of pastoral production. In particular, they have not been able to depart from the common perception of conventional herding as subsistence means, backward and unproductive, despite the substantial contribution of agriculture to BNP throughout the modern period. [...] With low socioeconomic priority comes the denigration of rural people.” (BRUUN 2006: 182).<sup>2</sup>

However, it is not only the traditional nomadic background that shapes the particularities of social life in rural Mongolia, but also the institutional frameworks most of which were originally established during socialism. Furthermore, in remote rural areas, features and characteristics of the locality very much influence the range of activities, and it is especially the local knowledge that provides for turning the challenges of remoteness into potentials for resilience and sustainability. Mongolia’s nomadic lifestyle is very much displayed when it comes to

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive overview and compilation see: Ziai, Aram (2006): Zwischen Global Governance und Post-Development. Entwicklungspolitik aus diskursanalytischer Perspektive. Einsprüche 17, Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot and Dryzek, John S. (2005): The Politics of the Earth. Environmental Discourses. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Bruun, Ole (2006): Nomadic Herders and the Urban Attraction. In: Ole Bruun; Li Narangoa (Eds.): *Mongols from Country to City. Floating Boundaries, Pastoralism and City Life in the Mongol Lands*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press: 162-184.

the country's identity policy, while the social realities of people who are actually living in the countryside are less and less represented in real politics with a growing urban population. Their perspectives are also less heard due to the gap of interests between rural and urban spheres, even more so since rural-urban migration has increased due to a shortage of attractive opportunities for making a living in the countryside. This is why civil society development in rural areas is of prime importance, not only as a voice but also as an active player with the potential to contribute to curbing the rapid rural-urban migration.

Since the transition from socialism started in 1990, Mongolia was discursively moved from the Second into the Third World, more recently referred to as "Global South". Much attention had been paid to civil society in post-socialist countries, which was widely framed in Western terms and concepts. Thus, there was much focus on urban contexts, and it is not surprising that the majority of NGOs was registered in the capital Ulaanbaatar and a few other cities.

However, in 2014, at time of the beginning of the project, out of the 6,000 NGOs officially registered in Mongolia it was estimated that only about 10% were actually active. Average citizens in rural areas were usually not well-informed about opportunities to become part of and engage in civil society. Many Western advisors were criticised for their ignorance of local conditions:

„Foreign consultants tend to come in with answers before they know the questions – these are answers they have produced in other countries and they don't really have the time to develop the true needs for Mongolia.” (THE MONGOL MESSENGER 1997: 7).

Thus, the project *Mongolization of Civil Society Development in Rural Mongolia* has a decidedly holistic, open and innovative approach, since it provides support for civil society development based on research done by the *local* partners in order to cooperatively identify meaningful fields of action (instead of prescribing let alone dictating them).

Therefore, the overall objective was to enhance efficient modes of organisation and communication that take into consideration the manifold aspects which constitute social interaction, as well as the forms of public engagement in societal affairs. Whereas activities and their outcomes are visible, the underlying rationales of how *Mongolization* of civil society is understood in rural Mongolia, is rather complex and requires a contextualised examination.

### **Procedure/Line of Action**

The first feedback on a first draft of the analysis for the report was received in September 2016 after the onsite-field trip of the evaluator in July and August 2016. This was followed by a skype-conference with MAPSSD and CICED in October 2016. Due to the elaborate reporting of the local branches it was decided to include the final assessment of the Mongolian partners and to include new ideas. When the extension was approved, the external evaluator utilized

the opportunity to include latest experiences provided by MAPPSSD and to include them into the final version of the report in March 2018.

According to the reports of the local branches and other project documents there is no doubt that the project is delivering its measurable outcomes as outlined in the project documents, which was also convincingly confirmed during the on-site visit of the external evaluator. What, however, is less obvious, are the actual manifold local understandings of the notions *Mongolization*, which is why this is in the focus of the present report.

## Project description

The project's **main objective** is the *Development of citizen's capacity to engage in societal development in their respective rural communities in Mongolia*. Therefore, the local branches of MAPSSD embarked on informing and engaging stakeholders in their local communities to use legal frameworks for developing civil society capacities. They conducted training sessions on legislation, methods and instruments on how to engage civil society in rural development. The existing school-based professional development and the established school-community-collaboration provided a valuable basis and starting point.

When talking about communities in the context of rural Mongolia, the administrative unit in question is usually a *sum* (county), which, being the second level of administrative divisions, is part of the larger unit *aimag* (province) and subdivided into several *bag*, the smallest units. Whereas a rural *bag* might not have any solid structures, *sum*-centres host modern institutions with the school usually being not only the biggest building but also the prime employer and the most well-connected institution in terms of outreach. Thus, a well-performing school-community collaboration is likely to have a substantial impact on rural development. This is largely due to the potential of schools to act as one central connection between the state and the citizens, especially since teachers are well-respected in Mongolia.

Apart from involving their own communities, MAPPSSD branches involved a total of 100 neighbouring *sum* by systematically sharing their approaches in order to build the foundation of a larger network of rural NGOs in Mongolia. Furthermore, the networking was designed to contribute to the enhancement of visibility and respect for the manifold local traditions of the nomadic culture.

### Why Mongolization?

The choice to include the term *Mongolization* into the follow-up of the pilot project was deliberately made in order to focus on how the project's objective is *transformed when localised*. Given that Mongolia is a country with diverse regions, which are home to a variety of cultural characteristics and traditions, the term *Mongolization* was also used as a heuristic tool to learn

what ‘transforming when localising’ actually means considering the diversity of respective cases. Moreover, the term of *Mongolization* was also chosen in order to explore in what ways imported concepts (such as civil society) are challenged, re-interpreted, domesticated and, perhaps, reinforced. But most importantly, calling the process *Mongolization* (instead of implementation), was designed in order to learn what is considered relevant in respective contexts where we always find more than one set of semiotics (i.e. not only “tradition” and but also economic, political, professional and institutional settings that contribute to the culture of places and areas). The term *Mongolization* was thus chosen in order to enable and encourage the project participants to develop and promote sources of valid knowledge that carry legitimacy in rural Mongolia.

Positive experiences gained earlier with the Learning through Action (LTA)-approach, which had proved to boost knowledge production that is informed by theory (action research) on the one hand and anchored in and compatible with local practice on the other, were supposed to be tested for their potential to be transformed from the school-based context into civil society work.

Among the many positive experiences mentioned by participants in relation to LTA was the propelling of self-development, the role of team work based on respect and mutual learning as a key for sustainable collaboration, the enhancement of mutual understanding, the improvement of communication with members of the community and, not least, the encouragement to embark on more demanding endeavours which might take time and patience.

Therefore, *Mongolization* was also dedicated to encourage the project participants to transform experiences gained into their own model of how civil society should work in rural Mongolia by creating new forms of action that carry legitimacy in local communities and inspire new initiatives in the future.

## Project objectives achieved

- Local branches of MAPSSD have developed the capacity to inform and engage their communities on civil society development by utilizing legal frameworks and the respective local socio-economic potentials.
- Local MAPSSD branches retain and enhance their capacities to support school-based professional development and school-community collaboration.
- Local MAPSSD branches share the context-based approaches of civil society and school development with a total of 100 neighbouring *sum*-communities in order to create an NGO network in rural Mongolia.

## Questions

- To what degree have local branches of MAPPSD initiated new social society activities and successfully engaged members of their communities in participating in local policy making?
- Did it prove to be possible to transform the Learning-through-Action (LTA) approach with the valuable experiences gained in schools (particularly in terms of self-governing capacity) into effective capacity building of civil society development by establishing school-community collaboration?
- What kind of new and innovative interactions have been organised in the field of civil society development?

## Methods applied and documents reviewed

- MAPPSD local branches biannual reports
- Project publications of MAPPSD “Information 2014, 2015, 2016”
- Files at MAPPSD-office
- Evaluation research on-site visit with participation in rural workshops in July/August 2016, methods and ways of proceeding:
  - Participant observation
  - Questionnaires
  - Interviews
  - Analysis and discussion of workshop materials provided by participants
  - Portfolios and posters displaying activities, provided by workshop participants
- MAPPSD report 2014-2018

## Starting Points

From the outset, the project was designed to encourage participants to develop a model for civil society which is in accordance with not only Mongolian cultural features and traditions but also with the particular settings and problems in contemporary rural communities. In order to find ways to accomplish this goal, participants were asked to answer the question why a *Mongolization*, from their perspectives, was needed.

Their answers confirmed the need for an appropriate approach that can successfully deal with the complexities of challenges in remote rural areas while at the same time address the problems with a focus on valuable insider knowledge. This respect for and appreciation of Mongolian epistemologies and local knowledge turned out to be a constant driving force for motivating not only the immediate participants but also to win other partners over to engage in civil society activities.

Another strong supportive factor was the recognition of the Mongolian's deep respect for their rural homelands (*nutag*), which provides for being a vital force to connect people from the same place of origin (*neg nutgiinkhan*) across spatial and social borders and can thus hardly be overemphasized. Nearly every citizen in the Mongolian countryside is aware and proud of the characteristic features of his/her homeland and ready to give her/his best to strengthen and promote the development of her/his *nutag*. This close affinity and rootedness is at the same time a countrywide Mongolian phenomenon, thereby contributing to strengthening the local, regional as well as the nationwide pride for the homeland. Furthermore, the distinct fondness for competition (*uraldaan*)<sup>3</sup> between regions inspires efforts to improve local conditions while proudly sharing experiences with others and readily incorporating new ideas.

During meetings and regional workshops, Academician B. Jadambaa presented updated insights into Mongolian philosophical concepts of the interaction between state and citizens, while the Danish project coordinator from CISED, Johnny Baltzersen, introduced critical dimensions of international discourses on civil society. These were also included in the MAPPD annual publications "*Information*" and could therefore easily be shared and distributed.

Soon, the discussions of workshop participants became focused on traditional Mongolian values and their potentials and boundaries in a modern world. Given that Mongolia has always had a very strong and lively tradition of exercising oral literature in everyday life, genres such as proverbs, teaching aphorisms (*surgaal*) and songs became inspiring starting points for developing activities. This was, as expressed by workshop participants, also largely due to peoples' weariness of any kind of policy top-down-declarations. Instead, sayings such as "working lets you develop as a human being" (*ajil khij khun bolgono*) were enthusiastically discussed and searched for their contemporary implications.

During the workshops, which the evaluator has witnessed, this was done at the example of what people understand to be a truly wise and knowledgeable (*erdemtei*) person, a concept that carries a particularly high reputation in Mongolia because it reflects what is at the core of local knowledge cultures and indigenous epistemologies. Interestingly, in most of the cases it was nomadic pastoralists (*malchid*; i.e. herders) who were chosen as being the respective locality's most *erdemtei* people.

Another interesting finding was that many of the examples given for living role models were not people with a high formal education but rather with an outstanding reputation for being knowledgeable, proactive against all odds, creative and with ingenuity and staying power, modest, responsible-minded and socially competent.

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<sup>3</sup> In English, there is only the word 'competition', while Mongolian distinguishes between competing for the same goals (*uraldaan*) and rivalry (*örsöldөөн*), with the first being a strong stimulus for collective action.

For identifying areas of action, the already familiar method of LTA with the circle of action learning (group and individual development – powerful questions – active listening – learning and sharing – reflection – action) proved to be a useful tool. It was solidly based on already existing capacities of rural schools and was chosen by the project participants to be expanded to civil society development.

## Findings and Discussion: What does *Mongolization* imply?

### Answers and perspectives provided by interview partners:

The term *Mongolization* has a spectrum of meanings and implications. Its wording is can be different, depending on the focus and context. In the interviews conducted by the evaluator during the on-site field study, the following spectrum of notions was brought up:

- The verb 'to mongolize' (*mongolchlokh*) spontaneously evokes smiles and laughter, because it is associated with adapting things in creative, even ingenious, yet usually quite improvisatory ways. Mongolians consider themselves, as several interview partners underlined, as people who do not care too much about rules (which are often characterized as bureaucratic, if not square-minded), but their acting is rather guided by a solution-oriented pragmatism. Thus, the verb *mongolchlokh* also stands for an outstanding capacity to solve problems under even most difficult conditions and is therefore often interpreted as a potential for resilience in challenging circumstances. What causes smiles and laughter when mentioning the verb is the awareness of the alienation from the original context in many cases of improvisation, and those re-framings may from the outside look as if something was misunderstood. With a wink, the smiling also implies awareness of the ambivalence of not adhering to the rules, which has, of course, its limitations and not only positive connotations.

Considering some of the rather amusing associations that the verb *mongolchlokh* evokes, MAPPSD representatives decided to translate the project title as “**Stepping up the development of civil society in rural areas based on/guided by traditional Mongolian culture**”. Even though project participants did not mind the humorous connotations of the verb *mongolchlokh*, there was a concern that outsiders might not take the project serious if it would as such appear in the title. Asked to elaborate further on the semantic spectrum of *Mongolization*, the interview partners gave the following accounts:

- *Mongolization* means to do something with Mongolian know-how (*mongol ukhaanaar*), it is the capacity to find ways and methods to get all kinds of things done
- *Mongolization* is the ability to be flexible and to find opportunities instead of waiting for things to develop in prescribed ways (*tiim baikh yostoi gej khuleej kharalguigeer busad bolomjig khaikh*), it means not to go with fixed rules

- *Mongolization* means to make use of the Mongolian peoples' tacit knowledge (*khar ukhaan*), it is an intellectual and mental resource
- *Mongolization* is the capacity to build on the characteristics of development of Mongolian people in connection with Mongolian customs, traditions and culture
- *Mongolization* is the ability to connect to and appropriate foreign experiences by starting from Mongolian capacities and traditions; Mongolian knowledge cultures are in this context an important resource for development
- *Mongolization* is a way of self-articulation that makes local concerns more visible
- *Mongolization* is the ability to change things in a way that they become appropriate to the real-life settings
- Mongolian social life is to a large degree influenced by customs and symbolism – whenever people do something, the outcome is what eventually counts, and *Mongolization* is often what is needed, i.e. the ability to pragmatically search for ways and methods to get there
- *Mongolization* is a characteristic of the Mongolian way of thinking – people are open-minded and have a rather unbound mindset, though sometimes with a tendency of preferring shortcuts, but in general it helps often to go along with difficulties such as the weak Mongolian infrastructure and other shortcomings
- *Mongolization* means to be able to act without too much depending on others<sup>4</sup>

These statements from the interviews show a quite close connection to the philosophy of pragmatism where acting is matched to the conditions given and not bound to fixed, unalterable principles.

In order to understand not only the concept and semantic field of *Mongolization*, but also its diverse foci and their respective relevance for the project participants, the evaluator had prepared questionnaires, which were distributed during the regional workshops held in Bayan-Öndör-Sum and in Chuluut-Sum in July and August 2016.

#### Questionnaires (49 of 50 returned):

Aimag, Sum	Profession, current occupation
1. Dundgobi, Gurvansaikhan	1. Technology Teacher
2. Dundgobi, Gurvansaikhan	2. Teacher for lifelong learning, primary class
3. Dundgobi, Gurvansaikhan	3. Archive worker (archivist)
4. Dundgobi, Gurvansaikhan	4. Teacher, leader, school director
5. Dundgobi, Tsagaandelger	5. Teacher
6. Dundgobi, Tsagaandelger	6. Teacher
7. Dundgobi, Tsagaandelger	7. Teacher

<sup>4</sup> Interviews with teachers, teaching managers, dormitory porters, school principals, firemen, bookkeepers, and methodologists during regional workshops in Bayan-Öndör-Sum and Chuluut-Sum in July/August 2016.

8. Dundgobi, Deeren	8. Teacher, Teaching manager
9. Dundgobi, Deeren	9. Driver
10. Dundgobi, Deeren	10. Teacher
11. Dundgobi, Deeren	11. Zootechnician in retirement
12. Dundgobi, Deeren	12. Economist, member of citizens' <i>khural</i>
13. Övörkhongai, Bayan Öndör	13. Primary class teacher, dormitory teacher
14. Övörkhongai, Bayan Öndör	14. State administrator, resp. for family issues
15. Övörkhongai, Bayan Öndör	15. Teacher
16. Övörkhongai, Bayan Öndör	16. Accountant
17. Övörkhongai, Bayan Öndör	17. %
18. Övörkhongai, Bayan Öndör	18. parent's representative
19. Övörkhongai, Bayan Öndör	19. leader of administration
20. Övörkhongai, Bayan Öndör	20. teacher, director
21. Övörkhongai, Esönzüil	21. teacher, primary teacher
22. Övörkhongai, Esönzüil	22. teacher for Mongolian literature
23. Övörkhongai, Esönzüil	23. English teacher, teaching manager, interpr.
24. Övörkhongai, Esönzüil	24. Teacher
25. Bayankhongor, Bayankhongor	25. Teacher
26. Bayankhongor, Bayankhongor	26. Teacher
27. Bayankhongor, Bayankhongor	27. Teacher, working for Educational Centre
28. Bayankhongor, Bayankhongor	28. Teacher
29. Selenge, Dulaankhan	29. Teacher, teaching manager
30. Selenge, Dulaankhan	30. Physicist, teacher
31. Selenge, Dulaankhan	31. Teacher
32. Selenge, Dulaankhan	32. Teacher
33. Selenge, Dulaankhan	33. Vice <i>darga</i> (chief) of state administration
34. Ulaanbaatar, MAPSSD	34. MAPSSD-member
35. Dornod, Khulunbuir	35. Dormitory <i>jijüür</i> (person on duty)
36. Dornod, Khulunbuir	36. Fireman ( <i>galch</i> )
37. Dornod, Khulunbuir	37. Fireman ( <i>galch</i> )
38. Dornod, Khulunbuir	38. Teacher, now dormitory teacher
39. Dornod, Khulunbuir	39. Dormitory <i>jijüür</i> (person on duty)
40. Dornod, Khulunbuir	40. Worker at the school
41. Dornod, Khulunbuir	41. { - }
42. Dornod, Khulunbuir	42. teacher
43. Dornod, Khulunbuir	43. teacher, librarian, archivist, secretary
44. Sukhbaatar, Khalzan	44. teacher
45. Sukhbaatar, Khalzan	45. teacher
46. Sukhbaatar, Asgat	46. fireman
47. Sukhbaatar, Asgat	47. <i>nyarav</i> (bookkeeper)
48. Sukhbaatar, Asgat	48. teacher, secretary
49. Dornogobi, Erdene	49. methodologist

The questionnaires started with asking: **Should civil society be mongolized? (yes/no & why)**. Participants were asked to explain their answers shortly. Only 2 of 48 who had answered this question, had crossed “no”, with the following explanations:

- **No**, we are an independent state and have our own language and culture
- **No**, it is the consciousness and mentality of individuals

While in the second case indicates that it (i.e. *Mongolization*) would be there anyways, the first emphasizes that the Mongolian ways should in general be the benchmark.

All other participants had crossed “yes”. Their explanations given can be summarized around the following foci:

- Mongolians want to develop their own ways, not just import concepts, *Mongolization* provides great opportunities to act on the basis of our own culture
- Local people should be allowed to adapt and change so it is based on our language and fits with our culture and customs
- characteristics of *nutag* (locality) are important, Mongolians always appropriate their livelihoods accordingly, and by doing so, the Mongolian mindset appears (*Mongol arga ukhaan garna*)
- If concepts fit well with Mongolian ways, the outcomes will be good
- Mongolians are used to develop solutions by involvement and togetherness
- It transforms the environment and society of people involved
- On our own grounds (*ööriin khörsön deerkh*) development should be based on the national culture and local characteristics
- Mongolians have come to develop their ways from early times, but this does not mean nationalism
- development always happens on the basis of cultural heritage and customs and then reaches out
- in order to revive and develop Mongolian traditions
- to let the culture and heritage of other countries land on our own grounds
- on Mongolian grounds things should fit with the Mongolian psychology/mindset
- because this is our own independent country with our own culture
- one should work on making things fit to the Mongolian state and the situation of the Mongolian people so it is in accordance with the characteristics of nomadism and other realities
- it is a way to learn methods how to change all kinds of things, to study and compare the civil society with the experiences of developed countries
- otherwise the country will fall behind in terms of development when only imitating the models of other countries
- it is very important to increase the participation in local places and individuals

- Yes, in order to increase the creativity and participation of individuals, to utilize the realities (*bodit bololtsoo ashiglan*) and to let ideas develop
- to develop by reviving Mongolian customs and to make citizens knowledgeable and to increase the participation of local people
- to connect Mongolian traditions with world development
- because the citizens themselves are Mongolians it is important to find the right addressing and order to raise consciousness
- it is a possibility to develop by increasing the communication and connection between people in the community

There appear several recurring topics, such as confidence and pride, creative ingenuity, flexibility, processes of domesticating, selective reframing and reinterpreting, but also underlying identity-political statements showing the wish to have a say in what development of civil society should be about. However, none of the people asked expressed the kind of “mongolo-centrism” that Mongolian nationalists often display. In the talks, they rather started from their respective professional viewpoints, which in a modern society naturally contain more dynamic possibilities, semantic fields and dimensions than those usually sorted under the label “culture”. One interviewee expressed the importance of grasping the realities of life in the Mongolian countryside and turning them into a productive source of inspiration, as the notion of *Mongolization* does.

The second question openly asked: **What do you associate with *Mongolization* in general?**

Answers given can be summarised in the following points:

- to appropriate and combine things that are not fitting with our ways (28x)
- to develop civil society in accordance with our traditions and culture, to adapt it to the characteristics of Mongolians, our economy, *nutag*-characteristics and culture (6x)
- a resource and possibility to be activated, a capacity to get things done by using the life-world-understanding (*khar ukhaan*), Mongolian knowhow (*Mongol ukhaan*) (4x)
- not to insist that things have to be done in a certain way but to look for other opportunities that lead to results, the capacity to change and to let other things be part (4x)
- to connect to international experiences on the basis of Mongolian capacities and traditions (3x)
- things that are promoting the development of a certain *nutag*, community based on Mongolian culture and customs, on the Mongolian mentality and certain *nutag* characteristics whatever fits with the needs of citizens as joint action (3x)
- to exchange ideas and information and learn from each other while carrying out activities that value our heritage and traditions (3x)
- everything in connection of revival of traditions and revival of communication between state and citizens (2x)
- to base things on Mongolian ways of life, to make something land on our ground in accordance with a certain *nutag*'s characteristics, something that is not according to

fixed rules and regulations (*togtoj khevshsen durem jurmyn daguu bish*), something that Mongolians do throughout their life in order to improve activities and knowhow

The next question asked for examples: **Please give 3 examples of civil society activities that contained *Mongolization in practice*.** The following examples were given:

- we brought into existence (*bii bolgосon*) new ways of participation, to decide problems in our own ways, it's a force to keep trying (*khavtyn khuchin charmailt*)
- helping (*tuslamj uzuulekh*)
- democratic election activities (13x), (participation of many parties – *olon namyn oroltsoo*)<sup>5</sup>
- red cross activities were changed to do more needed things, for example in cases of *zud*<sup>6</sup> (6x)
- society of horse trainers/horserace association, activities in tourism, transport, trade (8x)
- genealogy research<sup>7</sup> (4)
- wrestling, *shagai*<sup>8</sup> association, archery association (8x)
- modern clothing - it can be combined with national models, clothing-pairing<sup>9</sup> (4x)
- NGO for young people and women (4x)
- repairing, to change the technical parts of foreign cars so they can go in Mongolia
- to write the addresses of the institutions in classical Mongolian script, to revive and beautify the Mongolian *deel*,<sup>10</sup> to work on reviving Mongolian customs
- our decisions are made on the level of *khорoo*, *bag* etc.
- the citizens' *khural*,<sup>11</sup> the school development
- to improve information delivery, to create all kinds of cooperations, to make farming
- To use proverbs, teaching phrases (*surgaal*), to enlighten (*khümüüjilj ukhaaruulakh*)
- to support local and national production
- to revive traditions like long songs, national games etc.
- citizens organise seminars on the basis of their own possibilities in order to improve the conditions and the situation
- to revive all kinds of things that have almost been forgotten, to teach children how to make knot buttons, to use a *khökhүүr*<sup>12</sup> instead of plastic, camel races
- elderly peoples' association (*akhmadyn kholboo*), youth association etc. to connect between the organisations and to network

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<sup>5</sup> This indicates a quite remarkable effort, since the two dominating parties in Mongolia are at enmity with each other to a degree that people with different party association do not work together.

<sup>6</sup> *Zud* is a serious disaster for nomadic animal husbandry: it denotes the mass mortality of livestock caused by climatic as well as social factors. Its dramatic consequences largely contribute to rural-urban migration.

<sup>7</sup> Since hereditary diseases are widespread in rural Mongolia, this is an important preventive measure.

<sup>8</sup> *Shagai* is a traditional Mongolian game featuring knucklebones of sheep.

<sup>9</sup> During festivities, this is a custom that was developed to show who belongs together and to express pride.

<sup>10</sup> *Deel* is the traditional Mongolian clothing.

<sup>11</sup> *Khural* means assembly – here it refers to the citizens' assembly.

<sup>12</sup> *Khökhүүr* is a Mongolian receptacle to produce fermented mares milk (*airag*).

- to revive things that have been forgotten, to learn from each other, to gain capacity to implement the things learned into life, increasing the capacity for activation and motivation of people
- to organise a day of national and nationalities pride, to connect old and young people and make them work together, to learn from each other, to improve the cohesion of the society

According to the information provided by the participants during the workshop on posters and in portfolios, **activities to increase the participation** furthermore included:

- mapping of the existing organisations and NGOs in the *sum*, finding out more about their activities and experiences
- research about reasons why many people so far are not yet active in any kind of civil society activity – one of the main reasons found was very high rate of unemployment and a high involvement with alcohol in many places (*ajilgui, arkhiny khamaaraltai khümüüs olon baina*)
- seminars about laws and regulations for NGOs and civil society
- creating websites and Facebook-accounts to provide information and mobilize people
- develop a newsletter with civil society focus
- organise workshops for elderly on how to use e-mails
- create phone connections, also with citizens from neighbouring *sum*
- gatherings of different social groups to learn about their needs and to mobilise them
  - ◇ youth (initial meeting: “Where are our young?” – looking for opportunities to actively involve young people to participate in the *sum*-development)
  - ◇ women – including of workshops for political leaders with the title “Let’s listen to our women” (*emegteichüüdee sonsyo*)
  - ◇ parents/mothers
  - ◇ elderly
  - ◇ herders – some herders’ meetings have been organised in the steppeland in herders’ *ger* (mobile dwellings)
  - ◇ young teachers
  - ◇ businesspeople
  - ◇ young men in army-age (*tsergiin nasny zaluuchuud*) before they were conscripted to the army
  - ◇ special hearing days for teachers, students, citizens; organized monthly
- thematic gatherings and follow-up initiatives/campaigns on:
  - ◇ opportunities to create work-places
  - ◇ *nutag*-appropriate tree planting campaigns (every family, one tree for each citizen, each teacher, each school class etc.)
  - ◇ essay-writing competition on “Parliamentary and local elections in our *sum*”
  - ◇ ideas to improve the conditions and options for spare-time activities
  - ◇ “garbage-free environment”

- ◇ “alcohol-free environment”
  - hearings and discussions about alcoholism – plans how decrease the abuse were discussed and successfully implemented, starting from individual cases
  - in many places, alcohol was banished from public institutions
- small journeys of groups to accomplish good deeds (*sain üilsiin ayan*)
- history travel to learn more about the *nutag*
- creation of *nutag*-brands for local products
- teachings of the traditional Mongolian script
- sports competitions as a start for discussions about health issues, such as:
  - ◇ better coverage of vaccination
  - ◇ organising regular dentist visits for children
  - ◇ discuss dangers of abuse (alcohol and tobacco)
- competitions “Men and traditional customs”, “Women and traditional customs”

Traditional games or culinary schools to prepare special Mongolian dairy products were often organised as vehicles to create social gatherings and bring people together in order to discuss civil society matters in an atmosphere, which was very different from what people came to know in party meetings and would rather refuse as alien to their true needs. Another reason given for organising this kind of events was that it can bring generations together and creates a relaxed atmosphere as a basis for discussions and mutual learning. All these examples considerably increased the participation of citizens. They also fostered a creative atmosphere that helped to give birth to always new ideas. Successful approaches were included as good practice examples into the dissemination seminars with the neighbouring *sum*.

In order to find out more about the boundaries of the concept, the next question was: **Are there any realms where *Mongolization* does not work? Which? Please give 3 examples.**

Interestingly, 21 out of 48 people who answered this question did not see any realm where it would not work. One participant gave a longer explanation: Mongolians in general are a very free/freestyle people that have a mindset without standards (*Mongolchuud erönkhiidöö chölöötei, standart bus setgedeg ard түмен*). Other answers circle around the following foci:

- implementation of laws
- the cooperative of moneysaving and lending, banks (5x)
- other countries’ national language, cultural heritage, values (12x)
- certain cultural elements from foreign countries like the Japanese tea ceremony – one should follow the customs of whose water one drinks (*Usyg ni uuval yosyg ni daga!* – ‘Once you drink their waters, follow their customs!’)
- foreign NGOs
- high technology from foreign countries, gentechnic food (4x)
- bureaucracy (4x)

Interestingly, the answers emphasize two main focal points: First, they refer to the above-mentioned meaning of the verb *mongolchlokh*, and thus indicate that there are areas (such as law or the banking system) in which fixed standards are considered either necessary or unavoidable. Second, they refer to the respect for other cultures’ characteristics and values.

The next question openly asked: **What, in your opinion, are the most important Mongolian values? Please give 5-9 examples.** Answers given by the participants listed the following aspects most frequently:

- homeland/motherland, waters and places of *nutag*
- nomadic way of life, Mongolian economy featuring animal husbandry / herding
- Mongolian *ger* (traditional mobile dwelling)
- Mongolian mindset, human capacity, life skills/Mongolian know-how
- Solidarity, customs of respect (*khündetgekh yos zanshil*)
- culture, language and Mongolian script
- history, memory, traditions and customs
- Cultural heritage
- Longsongs (*urtyn duu*), horse-headed fiddle (*morin khuur*), throat-singing (*khömii*)
- National Mongolian costume *deel*
- *Tsagaan Sar* (lunisolar new year) and *Naadam* (national holiday)
- Horseracing, wrestling, archery
- *Tsagaan idee* (‘white dishes’ – i.e. Mongolian dairy products)
- National independence, unity of Mongolian people, patriotism (*ekh oronch üzel*)<sup>13</sup>

The answers given unanimously confirmed the above-mentioned attachment to places as well as the rootedness in the nomadic way of life, while also emphasizing the importance of national independence.

Next, the participants were asked: **What, in your opinion, is at the core of Mongolization of civil society? Please mark; multiple answers are possible.** Only two participants did not answer this question; the others have stated their priorities as follows:

a) increasing mutual respect within different actors of the community	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 21
b) promote and articulate Mongolian customs and traditions	xx 36
c) promote and articulate local (i.e. <i>nutgiin</i> ) customs and traditions	xx 24
d) increasing solidarity and social cohesion	xx 31
e) creating mutual trust	xxxxxxxxxxx 9

<sup>13</sup> Literally, it is not ‘patriotism’ but ‘matriotism’ since in Mongolian the fatherland is a motherland.

f) promoting a new sense of community	xxxxxxx 7
g) mobilising people	xxxxxxxxx 9
h) promoting equality between social strata	xxxxxxxxxxx 10
i) mutual learning and sharing knowledge and information	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 21
j) creating new alliances and synergies	xxxxxx 6
k) increasing possibilities for cooperation of different generations	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 22
l) empowerment of rural communities	xxxxx 5
m) creating new modes of participation	xxxxxxxxxxxxx 13
n) avoiding bureaucracy	xxxxxxx 7
o) promoting real democracy at the grassroots	xxxxxxxxx 8
p) providing room for creativity and flexibility	xxxxxxxxxxx 11
q) using historically rooted experiences of Mongolian lifeworlds for change	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 24
r) developing future visions for people who want to stay in the countryside	xxxxxxxxx 8
s) not copying Western models – enforcing the right to solve problems our way	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 18
t) distancing ourselves from party politics	xxxxxxxxx 8
u) solving problems in our own ways in our domain of spatial governance	xxxxxxx 7
v) creating collective spaces of experience	xxxxxxxxx 8
w) using local networks to gain access to scarce resources	xxxxxxx 6
x) promoting the rights and increasing the prestige of the countryside	xxxxxxx 6
y) other, please specify:	

The answers show, that *Mongolization* does not only focus on the revitalisation of century-old traditions, but also on aspects such as solidarity and social coherence, which have, in these forms, been introduced during socialism.

This was also confirmed by the answers given to the next question, that was a follow-up, asking: **Which of the points you have marked are the most important? Please choose 3.** The participants attached weight as follows:

a) increasing mutual respect within different actors of the community	xxxxxxx 7
b) promote and articulate Mongolian customs and traditions	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 24
c) promote and articulate local (i.e. nutgiin) customs and traditions	xxxxxxx 8
d) increasing solidarity and social cohesion	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx 16
e) creating mutual trust	x 1
f) promoting a new sense of community	xx 2
g) mobilising people	xxx 3
h) promoting equality between social strata	xxx 3
i) mutual learning and sharing knowledge and information	xxxxxxx 9
j) creating new alliances and synergies	x 1
k) increasing possibilities for cooperation of different generations	xxxxxxx 7
l) empowerment of rural communities	
m) creating new modes of participation	xxx 3
n) avoiding bureaucracy	x 1
o) promoting real democracy at the grassroots	xxxx 4
p) providing room for creativity and flexibility	xxxxx 5
q) using historically rooted experiences of Mongolian lifeworlds for change	xxxxxxxxxxxx 13
r) developing future visions for people who want to stay in the countryside	xxx 3
s) not copying Western models – enforcing the right to solve problems our way	xxxxxxx 10
t) distancing ourselves from party politics	xx 2
u) solving problems in our own ways in our domain of spatial governance	xxxx 4
v) creating collective spaces of experience	xxx 3
w) using local networks to gain access to scarce resources	xx 2
x) promoting the rights and increasing the prestige of the countryside	xxx 3
y) other, please specify:	

The last question asked: **What can MAPSSD do better than your *Nutag*-Council?** *Nutag*-Councils are rural-urban networks which emerged after the end of socialism in order to provide support for rural communities. The board of *nutag*-councils usually consist of people who have moved to cities and are holding influential positions, which allow them to promote their places of origin (and – not least – their own reputation). Answers given to this question did highlight some quite interesting capacities of MAPSSD, which can be summarized as follows:

- to enlighten / make wise (*erdemjüülekh*) the citizens, to support the intellectual developments, to find ways of financing, to provide information and to run seminars
- to promote the unity and collaboration of the citizens, to promote solidarity and reach out
- downsides of *nutag*-councils are, for example, that they do not activate/mobilise their members and do not solve problems
- to stay away from party and state politics (*nam, uls töröös ангид баигaa*)
- to help creating new ways to increase the participation of the citizens and for the citizens
- to find out about the pressing needs of the *nutag* and to support the work to solve them, to connect different NGOs and to provide necessary information
- to improve the capacity of the civil society in the countryside and promote development
- to get ideas that came out of the public to connect with NGOs and GOs
- to support the ideas that come from of local people to develop the local place
- to make the citizens change, to have a foresight/providence (*alsyn kharaa*)
- to revive the customs in the respective places

These answers clearly indicate that it is particularly the intellectual support that is considered valuable and sustainable for local development. They also provide insight in some reasons for the widespread disenchantment with politics in Mongolia, since the fierce fighting between the two main rivaling parties led to an extreme politicization of administration, which is particularly harmful in the countryside, where it has become a real threat to the social climate of the communities, but also the development of the whole country: After each election, most of the state employees are exchanged, leading to a paralysis before and after each election, which is why there is a lack of planning security for all kinds of undertakings, but also for individual lives. Hence, every initiative capable of overcoming this far-reaching stalemate situation and supporting more sound and sustainable forms of social acting, appears to be highly appreciated by the participants of the project. It also helps to re-establish trust in democracy, since the voter turnout during presidential and also parliamentary elections has increased in all of the rural *sum* involved (8-16%). Thus, *Mongolization* seems to be a viable means to create resilience against political apathy as one of the most far-reaching obstacles for development and cooperation.

## Summary

*Mongolization* turned out to be a heuristic approach and a useful tool to capture and understand processes of cultural production by providing an alternative way to explicate phenomena, a different access to topics, thereby enhancing culture as practice. It is not a magic formula but, as we have seen, carries the potential of engaging citizens of rural areas in long-term sustainable commitment, so people have a voice in the development of their respective communities. Notions of *Mongolization* appear as important functions of the social and can therefore act as an eye-opener for socio-logics by revealing local perspectives on imported concepts as well as cultural mindsets and relevances in particular contexts. The term and the concept helped to make social forms of acting and their knowledge cultures / epistemologies visible beyond the range of Western mainstream thinking what civil society is or could be. Thereby, the *Mongolization*-approach follows what Dipesh Chakrabarty in his works on post-colonial theory and subaltern studies has suggested, namely by encouraging researchers and practitioners to engage in “consciously working through the limits of European thought”.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it can help to get informed insights into entanglements of topics, institutions as well as people who are part of the process. Finally, the concept of *Mongolization* is a non-normative approach with a potential to contribute to an intellectual pluralism of perceiving activities and to be open for alternative horizons and approaches. For Mongolia, it is most suitable to discover what Arjun Appadurai, with reference to the contemporary dimensions of cultural flows, has framed as “situatedness”.<sup>15</sup>

The project has successfully given room and space to the development of authentic and viable methods and forms of organisation which are not just a replication of foreign ideas but grown on Mongolian grounds and with Mongolian reasoning. Therefore, the project idea was received with great enthusiasm and further developed with a true sense of ownership. *Mongolization* has appeared as a viable tool for needs assessment. The evaluator is confident that the concept of *Mongolization* has the potential to continuously provide for capacity building within the development of civil society in rural Mongolia and contribute to not only making a difference but also to systematically reflecting on how to make cooperation in rural areas more sustainable.

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<sup>14</sup> Chakrabarty, Dipesh, ‘Place and Displaced Categories or How We Translate Ourselves into Global Histories of the Modern’, *The Trans/National Study of Culture. A Translational Perspective*, ed. by Doris Bachmann-Medick (Berlin & Boston: Walter DeGruyter, 2014), 53–68; here: 67.

<sup>15</sup> Appadurai, Arjun (1996): *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Public Worlds, Vol. 1, Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press: 33.

## **Abbreviations**

<b>CICED</b>	Community for International Cooperation in Education and Development
<b>DANIDA</b>	Danish International Development Assistance
<b>LB</b>	Local branch
<b>LTA</b>	Learning Through Action
<b>MAPSSD</b>	Mongolian Association for Primary and Secondary School Development
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Government Organization
<b>RSDP</b>	Rural School Development Project