



The Participation of Russian Citizens in Local Self-government: Potential and Real-life Social Practices

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ABSTRACT

The article attempts to identify the social groups in the Russian communities, which are characterized by the highest degree of real and potential civil society participation. It outlines the data of sociological monitoring conducted in the region of Tver over the period from 2009 to 2014. The data sample consisted of people living in urban and rural settlements. The study was conducted by formalized interviewing. It allowed us to identify a system of indicators for analyzing self management potential of the population. The article also outlines a level of engagement and main forms of the Russian citizens' participation in the present system of local self-government practices, and considers people's potential willingness to civic participation. It reveals the constraints on participation of citizens in local self-government. In view of the aspects described, four differentiated categories of respondents, who represent the values of subject and activist types of political culture, were defined: Inactive, potentially active, active and initiative citizens. The last two categories reveal a higher level of self-management potential unlike the two previous ones, and so potentially they constitute a support base and the driving force for local self-government in Russia.

Keywords: Local Self-government in Russia, Civic and Political Participation, Local Self-management Potential, The Values of Subject and Activist Types of Political Culture, The Constraints to the Participation of Citizens in Local Self-government

JEL Classifications: R38, R50, Z13

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Urgency of the Issue

The research of citizen participation in local self-government is an important challenge for the Russian society today. It is known that there is a relationship of civil society, democracy, and the local self-government development processes. Local self-government is an element of the democratic state and an important institution of the civil society that allows citizens to participate in governing their lives. A level of maturity of local self-government can be seen as an indicator of the level of citizens' self-management and communities' development. The issue is especially topical in the context of the current complex geopolitical situation.

At present, Russia is focused on the formation of civil society and democratic political system trying to create conditions for

local self-government development. The Russian local self-government legislation is based on the ideas and guidelines of the European Charter of Local Self-Government ratified by Russia in 1998 (Council of Europe, 1985). The Constitution of the Russian Federation defines local self-government as one of the basic elements of the constitutional system (the RF Constitution). Adopted in 2003, Federal Law No. 131-FZ On General Principles of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation established the principles of local government forming and functioning, determined their structure and terms of reference, prescribed the forms of citizens' participation in local self-government activities. The law also introduced a two level model of local self-government in the Russian Federation (Federal Law No. 131-FZ).

In practice, however, there are a number of contradictions and challenges using the two level model of local self-government.

Among these, the researchers distinguished the following: A variety of local self-government models in various parts of Russia, the limited autonomy of municipalities, the unclear delimitation of competences between governmental bodies at different levels, and the financial dependence of the local authorities upon the federal and regional budgets (e.g., Butitova 2009, p 53; Institute of Modern Development 2009, 70-71; Samodin 2007, 9-10; Matveev 2008, 25-27; Zazulina and Samsonov 2010, 41-42; Nuvakhov 2010, 76). A substantial contradiction emerged: On the one hand, the Russian legislation treats local self-government as a basic element of self-managing civil society, on the other hand, local authorities are identified as government bodies at different levels by the Russians. According to the researchers, this preserves the dependency attitude of the population to the authorities, civil and political passivity of inhabitants of various settlements in solving the problems of local significance (Nuvakhov 2010, 76; Popova 2008, 13).

In general, the institutionalization of local self-government is believed by the Russian researchers to be incomplete. They point out that this social institution should be developed not only by the public authorities but with “from the bottom up initiative,” i.e., citizens need to solve local problems by themselves. The quantitative and qualitative characteristics of citizens with a proactive social position and oriented to the independent solution of local issues determine the direction and pace of the local self-government development in the regions of modern Russia.

1.2. Non-fiction Literature Review

The problems of origin, historical development and functioning of local self-government systems have been discussed for a long time by researchers of various countries, including Russia. Currently, the studies are interdisciplinary in nature. There are different theoretical approaches to the analysis of local self-government institutions: Systematic, legal, political, sociological, sociocultural, civilizational, etc. They promote a comprehensive and in-depth study of the issue.

The theoretical frameworks for the analysis of the present local self-government were set up by classical liberal thought (J. Bentham). The concept of local self-government was developed by the Western scholars (B. Constant de Rebecque, J. Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, G. Preuss, L. von Stein, et al.), as well as by the Russian scientists (A. Gradovsky, A. Vasilchikov, N. Korkunov, M. Sveshnikov, B. Nolde, et al.). For instance, B. Constant de Rebecque believed that municipal authority is a special form of public authority, which is not directly subordinated to executive authority. Elaborating this provision, Alexis de Tocqueville and John Mill noted that individuals constituted a primary source of authority, and they should be viewed as the bearers of inalienable rights and freedoms. Therefore, urban and rural communities should be voluntary associations of individuals, and so they should manage their lives and solve the problems of local significance independently (Salov 2007, 93-94).

Also the classics of sociology (Tönnies, Weber, et al.) considered a territory as a base of local self-government while a local

community (rural or urban), in their view, should be understood as a subject of local self-government (Weber 1994; Tönnies 2002, 25-28, 53-62, 340-343). The modern Western science has formed the concept of community building. It is a theoretical summation (or synthesis) of social practices, which put itself forth as a response to the “loss” of local community, the lack of solidarity, mutual trust and interconnections between persons in local communities, as well as atomization and exclusion of individuals, a tendency toward passively avoiding involvement in social life (Lyska 2013, 99). The proponents of this concept (M. O. Weil, A. G. Blackwell, R. A. Colmenar, J. P. Kretzmann, J. L. McKnight, M. R. Warren, et al.) consider a local community as subject of management, which is capable to mobilize internal resources to address both local and broader social issues, such as crimes, poverty, homelessness, illiteracy, etc. (Kretzmann and McKnight, 2006, 15-17). The role of citizens as residents of urban and rural municipalities in the development of local self-government is also emphasized by contemporary Russian scientists (e.g. Aliev, 2008; Makogon, 2011; Mersiyanova 2008; Popova 2008; Toshchenko and Tsvetkova, 2006).

In general, at the present time, the issues of local self-government have attracted enough attention from a lot of Russian researchers. They study the peculiarities of the Russian local self-government system, analyze the processes of its institutionalization and performance, identify main trends in the development of local self-government and reformation, analyze the forms of citizens’ involvement in solving local problems (e.g., Vozmitel and Kukonkov 2014; Zazulina & Samsonov 2010; Zinchenko, 2013; Mersiyanova, 2008; Institute of Modern Development 2009; Popova 2008; Toshchenko and Tsvetkova, 2006). However, Russian scientists emphasize the negative sides of local self-government practices and believe that the potential of local self-government in modern Russia is not high enough. They report, first of all, the immaturity of local self-government institution, the prevalence of paternalistic attitudes towards the authorities, the population’s preference for the central strong power, and the low social activity of citizens.

Our study conducted for a few years (2009-2014) found that about two thirds of citizens identify local self-government with public powers. They are mainly characterized by paternalistic and dependency attitudes to the authorities and social passivity (Maikova and Simonova, 2014, 91-93). However, the poor every day management practices of the majority of citizens even in developed democracies were pointed out by American political scientists G.A. Almond and S. Verba. They depicted the real culture of democratic societies by the term of “civic culture,” which is a specific configuration of characteristic features of parochial, subject (subservient) and activist types of political cultures. The scientists noted that the majority of people are, as a rule, prepared for potential social activity, if some problems arise that require their participation (Almond and Verba, 2014, 37, 454-466).

Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the study of both forms and patterns of citizen’s participation in local self-government practices and their potential willingness to such participation.

1.3. Purpose, Objectives and Hypotheses of Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze self-management potential of the population in one of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation (for example in the region of Tver).

The main objectives of our study are as follows:

1. To examine a level and main forms of Russian citizens' participation in the existing practices of local self-government;
2. To determine people's potential willingness to participate in local self-government;
3. To find out the constraints to the participation of citizens in local self-government;
4. To distinguish the groups of citizens, who potentially constitute a support base and driving force for local self-government in Russia.

In the course of research, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Local communities in Russian regions are heterogeneous, so we can distinguish the groups of citizens with different degree of real and potential socio-political activity;
2. The main limiting factors of citizens' participation in local self-government are: The conviction in the impossibility to exercise considerable influence over the activities of public powers; low public confidence in local self-government bodies and officials; people's inadequate awareness of their opportunities to participate in local self-government;
3. We have distinguished the groups of citizens with a high level of self-management. These groups potentially constitute a support base and driving force for local self-government in Russia.

The need to address these challenges and test the hypotheses has entailed the study techniques and methods.

2. STUDY TECHNIQUES AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the region of Tver, a typical region of Central Russia. There are two levels of local self-government here. According to the information provided by the Regional Electoral Commission in the spring of 2014, the region of Tver consists of 385 municipal units including 36 municipal districts, 7 urban districts, 44 urban settlements, and 298 rural settlements.

Members of the local government representative bodies are elected directly: 360 municipal units use the first-past-the-post voting system (3,345 deputies), and only 2 municipal units give preference to the mixed-member proportional voting system (405 deputies). The representative bodies of three municipal units are formed through the delegation of authority (86 deputies). Besides, the election of deputies for urban district representative bodies are organized on the basis of the mixed mixed-member proportional voting, for municipal districts and urban settlements - on the basis of the first-past-the-post and mixed-member proportional voting mixed systems respectively, for rural settlements - on the basis of the first-past-the-post system. In fact, 353 heads of municipal units are elected out of the deputies of representative bodies, 32 heads are elected in direct municipal elections (by the population)

(Election commission of the region of Tver 2014). The regional center, Tver, is managed with a city manager model.

The study was conducted by a research group in the Department of Sociology and Social Technologies of Tver State Technical University. The research is a survey questionnaire to municipal unit residents relating to the issues of the local self-government system. We used an opinion poll (structured interviewing method).

Between 2009 and 2011, the survey was conducted among the residents of Tver. It was carried out in three stages: 2009, 2010, and 2011. The size of data sample was 400 persons at each stage (the statistical error of the survey findings is 4%). The data sample is representative. It was carried out by quotas (sex, age, urban area of residence). During the period from 2012 to 2014, the case study was conducted in various municipal unities of the region of Tver (towns, urban communities and rural settlements). The size of data sample in 2012 was 624 persons, in 2013 - 628, in 2014 - 633 (the statistical error of the survey findings is 4%). The representative data sample was conducted by quotas (sex, age, type of settlement). The data collection was held in June-July every year.

During monitoring, the research tools were tested and revised. Therefore, the results for some issues obtained in different periods are compared among themselves percentagewise. The results for other entries in the questionnaire, the wording of which was changed, are compared at the conceptual level, as well as at the level of observations, findings, and trends.

While we were conducting the study, we used the following indicators: An overall level of publicity and visibility for local self-government issues; the views on the nature of local self-government and evaluations of its bodies' activities; a level of public confidence in local authorities; a level and nature of citizens' participation in local self-government, as well as their willingness to address local problems; the experience of cooperation with municipal authorities; citizens' ideas of their own opportunities to influence the local self-government activities.

The survey data processing was carried out by means of creating an electronic database and using basic descriptive statistics package SPSS 16.0.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Citizens' Participation in Real Local Self-government Practices

A number of questions concerned the level and forms of Russian citizens' participation in real social practices of local self-government.

So, one of the significant forms of people's engagement in direct local self-government is their participation in elections. Based on the results of our study, about half of the respondents mentioned that over the past five years they had participated in the elections of the President of the Russian Federation (from 41.6% in 2012 to 46% in 2014), about a quarter of them had participated in the elections of the Russian State Duma (from 21% in 2012 to 21.1%

in 2014), and only about 1/10 had taken part in municipal elections (from 13.9% in 2012 to 11.4% in 2014). At the same time, the level of electoral activity in the older age group is higher than that of young people and middle-aged citizens.

In addition to participating in local elections, Russian citizens mainly participate in the following forms of local self-government: Landscaping of cities, villages, streets, yards, etc. (37.3% in 2014), collaboration in citizens' gatherings, meetings, and assemblies (from 21.1% in 2012 to 21.7% in 2014), assistance in organizing community's festivals and other events (19.9% in 2014), association of residents in house committees, street committees directed at the solution of household and municipal problems (15.6% in 2012-2014), repair work in houses (14.9% in 2014). Only about one tenth of citizens realize such important rights as applying to local self-government bodies (with proposals, complaints, petitions on various local issues), taking part in municipal referendums in everyday life of a town (village) community, constructing playgrounds, and organizing the youth's leisure activities.

At the same time, young people undertake occasional light activities compared to other groups. Rural population, in contrast to the urban, takes a more active part in the life of their community. For example, 86.9% of rural population takes part in landscaping of their settlements, 57.4% votes in the local elections, 49.1% participates in citizens' gatherings and meetings (2014).

3.2. Activist Views of Russian Citizens

A series of questions concerned people's potential willingness to participate in the solution of local problems and in the activities of local self-government. First of all, citizens' common attitude to accept and approve the norms of activist political culture has been identified. In this way, only about one-third of respondents reported that the activity of people was useless and prevented local authorities and municipal services from being more responsible and accountable for the settlement environment. Most respondents agreed with the statement that people's active civic stance and their enthusiasm provide a better situation in a municipal unit (from 82.7% in 2009 to 51.6% in 2014).

The poll showed that one third of the respondents admitted the importance of elections to local self-government bodies, while another third of the respondents acknowledged the equal importance of all elections including those to local authorities. They believe it is through the active participation in the elections that an ordinary person can influence the situation in the country (Grigoryev, 2013, 74).

Russian citizens wish to retain direct elections to local self-government bodies. According to the poll results, the majority of respondents believe that a mayor should be elected by residents (from 83.3% in 2009 to 62.9% in 2011). Only a small proportion of citizens think a mayor should be elected by municipal Duma (council) (from 5.8% in 2009 to 28% in 2011). According to the study conducted in urban and rural municipal units in the period 2012-2014, approximately one third of the region's population consider direct municipal elections to be the most effective way

to fill the position of a head of a municipal entity (a town, district, etc.) (from 30.5% in 2012 to 24% in 2014). About a quarter of respondents support a resolution of a general meeting (assembly) of residents to elect a head (from 24.6% in 2012 to 22.3% in 2014). This attitude is mainly typical for rural settlements. And only about one fifth of respondents supported the appointment of a head "from above" (by the superior bodies of state authority: The Governor, the Legislative Assembly of the region, etc.).

3.3. Potential Willingness of Citizens to Participate in Local Self-government

Adoption by citizens the values and norms of activist political culture affects their potential electoral activity. About one third of the respondents expressed their willingness to participate in the elections of local authorities (25% in 2013 to 34.3% in 2014).

An important indicator of the population's self-government potential is the percentage of citizens ready to be elected to local bodies. The poll showed the unwillingness of the majority of respondents to be elected to such bodies (from 78% in 2012 to 73% in 2014). The respondents mentioned the following main reasons for the refusal of implementing their positive suffrage: A lack of abilities to perform this kind of work (from 29.8% in 2012 to 21.1% in 2014), a loss of interest in this activity (20.6% in 2012 to 26.4% in 2014) and, more generally, in political life (from 14.4% in 2012 to 15.2% in 2014), the recognition of the ineffectiveness of this work (from 11.2% in 2012 to 11.3% in 2014), and lack of willingness to accept responsibility (from 11.9% in 2013 to 11.2% in 2014). This tendency can be explained by the fact that Russian citizens are poorly informed of the area of municipal deputies' responsibility and authority, so they believe that their work is inefficient, and do not seek to defend their interests through participation in deputy work. However, there is a small group of citizens, about one fifth of the population, whose members are ready to be elected to local self-government bodies.

At the same time, the higher the respondents assess the degree of influence of an ordinary citizen on the activities of the authorities, the more they expressed their readiness to implement suffrage and be elected to local government bodies as officers, and *vice versa* (Table 1).

In addition to taking part in municipal elections, the respondents envisage the other forms of civic participation. So, about a

Table 1: Willingness to be elected to local self-government bodies depending on the evaluation of the average citizen's influence on power structures (2014)

Evaluation of the average citizen's influence on the government body activities	Willingness to be elected to local self-government bodies as an officer (%)	
	Yes	No
Very high	66.7	22.2
High	14.7	64.7
Average	3.8	67.1
Low	11.1	74.2
No influence	3	90.3
Difficult to answer	6.5	64.5

quarter in the Region of Tver inhabitants are ready to take part in gatherings, assemblies (from 22.5% in 2013 to 26.2% in 2014), municipal referendums on their settlements' life (from 27% in 2013 to 21% in 2014), to apply to the local authorities with suggestions, offers, complaints, petitions on various local issues (from 23.1% in 2013 to 21% in 2014), as well as to participate in territorial self-government (from 23.7% in 2013 to 23.3% in 2014). Approximately one fifth of the population is ready to take part in public hearings (from 25.6% in 2013 to 19.2% in 2014) and provide voluntary assistance to the local authorities (from 26.1% in 2013 to 20.2% in 2014).

The majority of the surveyed residents expressed willingness to participate in solving the following issues of local self-government: Landscaping and site finishing of their settlements (2014 - 34.4%); organization of the youth leisure time (2014 - 30.9%) as well as of holidays and special event in their communities (2014 - 29.6%); construction of children's playgrounds (2014 - 27%) and repair activity in their residential buildings and communal entrance hallways (2014 - 23.4%); municipal territory development (2014 - 21.4%); insurance of public order and security in their cities, towns, districts, villages (2014 - 21.3%); participation in the activities of local branches of non-governmental organizations (2014 - 17.7%). According to the study conducted, people with low level of material well-being intend to be more actively involved in municipality life-support system. The most passive residents are urban-type settlers, whilst rural population exhibits greater activity.

3.4. Willingness to Use Personal Resources for Solving Social Problems

When answering the question of what particular personal contribution to local self-government one is ready to make and what personal resources he or she is ready to spend for the public good, about a third of respondents expressed a willingness to spend their personal time on it (2012 - 32.6%; 2013 - 35%; 2014 - 21.5%). In addition, a proportion of the population is ready to spend other personal resources for solving local problems, for example, their organizing abilities (2014 - 15.7%) and creativity (2014 - 15.2%), knowledge and skills (2014 - 14.3%), private finances (2014 - 14.3%). However, about a fifth of respondents are neither willing to participate in local self-government (2014 - 13.5%), nor find it difficult to spot their potential contribution to the local problems solution (2014 - 5.2%). At the same time, in contrast to the rural population, urban dwellers display greater passivity.

As the key reasons for their passivity in solving local social problems, respondents named the inability to affect anything (from 26.4% in 2012 to 13.6% in 2014), a loss of interest in public activities (from 16.8% in 2012 to 23.2% in 2014), a reluctance to accept responsibility (from 12.7% in 2012 to 14.5% in 2014), a loss of interest of local authorities in citizens' activity (from 11.1% in 2012 to 10.3% in 2014), a lack of information on participation opportunities (from 8.3% in 2012 to 10.3% in 2014), a lack of funds (from 7.8% in 2012 to 7.6% in 2014). About one seventh of the region population shows a welfare mentality; they believe that municipal authorities are to deal with local problems (from 10.4% in 2012 to 17.1% in 2014).

Rural population associates the citizens' inactivity with a lack of interest in public activities, and the inhabitants of towns and urban-type settlements - with inability to affect the operation of local self-government bodies.

3.5. Citizens' Perceptions of Local Self-government, its Performance Appraisal, and Creditability to Self-government Bodies as Factors of Participation

Based on the study conducted results, we can distinguish such factors affecting civic engagement, as the level of trust in local government, the nature of evaluations of its organs, the specific perception of the citizens of the local self-government and awareness of the spirit and their ability to participate in its work.

Our study outlines a fairly low level of people's confidence in local authorities (do not trust them to some extent from 67.6% of respondents in 2012 to 54.6% in 2014). But by 2014, Tver region people confidence in the local self-government system has increased almost twofold (from 17.8% in 2012 to 36% in 2014). It should be noted that the highest creditability of respondents belong to the Russian Federation President, whilst representative bodies of regional and local authorities (the region of Tver Legislative Assembly, the representative body of a settlement) enjoy the lowest confidence. At the same time, a growth of confidence in executive bodies of regional and municipal level has been observed in recent years, but the level of creditability to representative bodies remains extremely low, in the same way as before.

The growth of confidence in municipal authorities is likely to come from gradual decline of negative assessments of local authority activities which we denoted in the course of our sociological monitoring. A tendency for a growth of positive attitude to the work of public authorities of various levels, including the municipal one, has been observed. This tendency is probably related to the gradual formation of optimistic social well-being of the Russians. It undoubtedly affects the social activity of population.

We also consider the specific nature of local government perception as a factor influencing the level of civic engagement. Thus, the population in the region of Tver, for the most part, confuses local self-management with local authority. Local self-government is considered by about half of respondents (2012-2014) to be a lower level of executive authority focusing on the population problems, as well as the challenges posed by authorities of the federal and regional levels. These data fairly correlate with the results of our study conducted earlier. Thus, the idea of 'local self-government being a representative of the state on situ' was endorsed by 44.1% of respondents in 2011. Such a public perception of the local self-government system stems from the fact that administrative authorities play a major role at the local level. Consequently, the whole local government and management structure is very similar to the lower link of the state vertical (Nuvakhov, 2010, 76; Popova 2008, 13).

At the same time, more than one third of citizens perceive the local self-government either as the collaborative activity of residents and local authorities, or the local residents' efforts to solve problems of local significance. According to the 2009-2011 survey, the percentage of respondents taking a position that "self-government

is a form of the population self-organization” also came close to one third (38.1%) by 2011.

As a part of the study it was found that there is a correlation dependence of the local self-government perception on such factors as the respondents’ financial situation and the type of locality they live. Thus, respondents with low and middle-income tend to manifest their paternalistic attitudes, to greater extent, whilst people with a high level of material wealth attach great importance to civic initiative and proactive attitude. Residents of rural and urban-type settlements to a greater extent than townfolk recognize the role of population in local managerial processes. Probably, these population groups have higher self-management potential.

3.6. Public Awareness of Local Self-government as a Participation Factor

Intensity, content and effectiveness of community participation in the local self-government activity are affected by public awareness of its work. The study in question showed that the population, as a whole, has a low level of awareness of Federal Law No. 131-FZ, as well as the system of local self-government and the functions of its bodies. Citizens often do not have clear understanding of the division of jurisdictions between the regional public authority and local self-government. Thus, data of sociological monitoring allow ascertaining the relative recognition of the local self-government concept (from 83.3% in 2009 to 86.5% in 2011) by majority of citizens. However, when trying to determine the semantic meaning of this term, about one fifth of citizens, as a rule, had difficulties answering it and about half of people in the region demonstrate the statist views on the nature of the local self-government.

Low awareness of the above mentioned Federal Law indicates a modest level of legal literacy in the field of local self-government. About half of the polled heard about the Law for the first time during the survey. With regard to the above mentioned, the youth shows the lowest level of awareness of Federal Law No. 131-FZ. However, about a third of the region residents “heard something” about the Law and a small percentage of citizens are familiar with it (from 9.8% in 2009 to 6.3% in 2013).

The Tver Region inhabitants’ awareness of heads of their municipal units proved to be quite low too. Thus, only a third of population knows the name of their municipal head. At the same time, après-thirty women living in rural locality show the superior awareness of this matter.

According to the 2009-2011 study, about two thirds of people are informed about the community-based associations dealing with problems of local importance (homeowners association, territorial public self-government, etc.). In this respect, the share of informed citizens increased by 2011 (from 58.4% in 2009 to 66.6% in 2011). However, this awareness is superficial; citizens do not have a clear idea of the functionality of such public associations.

3.7. Public Concepts of Problems in Local Self-government Functioning

The 2012-2014 study reveals public concepts of local self-government bodies’ functioning problems that can reduce the

efficiency of local self-government bodies and have an impact on their performance appraisal and, consequently, the public proactive attitude. Thus, among the most important problems hampering the work of local self-government, we can highlight the lack of its own financial base, the absence of specific legislative instruments for self-government exercising, the malpractice, corruption and nepotism of local self-government employees (Table 2). In this context, the lack of financial (resource) base is more relevant for rural population and residents of urban-type settlement. Both rural people and town dwellers are anxious about unskilled level of employees in local self-government bodies. Citizens, worry more about corruption and nepotism of local self-government representatives, whilst urban-type residents fret over their low pay.

It should be noted that the poor quality of personnel inconsistent with the nature and objectives of local self-government is defined by the population as a main problem in functioning of these bodies. The share of respondents reflecting this position amounts to about one-third.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Discussion of Study Results

The results of sociological monitoring show the following status quo. Values of subservient and activist political cultures really dominate in majority of the Russian citizens’ minds. A significant part of the polled population in our region takes local self-government as a low level of state authority, a part of a single vertical power structure. The region inhabitants tend to paternalistic attitudes; people look for support and protection from the authorities, including the local self-government bodies. In everyday life many people are socially passive and perceive themselves as objects of managerial influence. In the context of eligibility, our citizens, in general, are characterized by absenteeism. Compared with the elections at various levels, the

Table 2: Problems impeding the work of local self-government (% of total responses)

Highlight the most significant problems that can hamper the work of local self-government	2012	2013	2014
Excessive monitoring of the local self-government performance by federal and regional authorities	2.7	5.3	7.9
Absence of specific legislative instruments for self-government exercising	14.9	10.7	17.7
Lack of its own financial base	17.1	17.7	18
Unskilled level of self-government employees	15	13.9	15.3
Corruption and nepotism of local self-government employees	22.1	16.5	9.8
Fair amount of powers devolved on local self-government bodies	5	3.3	5.9
Unnecessary duplication of state government functions at the level of local self-government	2	4.5	5.2
Low pay of local self-government employees	2.8	5.7	5.7
Lack of staff size in local self-government bodies	1.6	6.2	3.8
Lack of proper technical support of local self-government bodies (office equipment, means of transportation and communication, Internet)	5.3	7.2	3.4
Other	0.2	0.3	0.7
Neither agree nor disagree	11.3	8.8	6.5

local electoral activity of the population is extremely low. All of these results are consistent with those of many empirical studies conducted in various regions of Russia and confirm the conclusions made by numerous Russian researchers.

However, in our opinion, it is important for residents not so much to be integral to government, as to approve and accept the standards of activist political culture, as well as to have the potential willingness to participate in solving the everyday problems that can arise in their locality. We adhere to the theoretical position of Almond and Verba. In this respect, our findings are indicative: The values of activist political culture are proved to be subsistent to different categories of Russian citizens. The differences lie only in the level of awareness, acceptance and approval of these value orientations and their corresponding behaviors. This conclusion is out of step with the views of many Russian researchers. In our opinion, the problem of creating appropriate conditions for development and fulfillment of participation culture is to be further developed.

According to the survey results, more than a third of citizens perceive local self-government either as a form of self-organization, or collaborative activity of residents and local authorities they are elected, or residents' efforts to solve problems of local significance. The relationship between the population and the authorities are treated as partnerships, with the particular emphasis being put on the initiative and activity of inhabitants themselves. Herewith, the share of population with such concepts tends to be upward, though slight.

Acceptance and approval of activist political culture standards by the region inhabitants is well seen in the attitude of respondents to the mechanism of elections. About two thirds of the Russian citizens consider the elections as an important mechanism for the formation of state and local self-government bodies, as well as an instrument of influence on the situation in their settlement, region and country, as a whole. More than half of the respondents were in favor of the direct elections of municipal heads.

It should be noted that the proportion of respondents willing to participate in the local self-government was greater than the proportion of people really involved in various local self-government practices. About a third of the respondents expressed their willingness to participate in the elections of local authorities, and about one fifth of citizens are ready to be elected as official functionary to local self-government bodies. At the same time, about a third of citizens consider the lack of their own resources and unfavorable performance conditions to be limiting factors of their voting rights. In general, respondents expressed their willingness to take part in various forms of local self-government, to promote the solution of local importance problems. A large part of the population is ready to spend a certain amount of personal resources to meet community needs.

4.2. Discussion of the Study Hypotheses

Let us review our hypotheses.

The results of our study are in considerable agreement with the first hypothesis. Local communities in different regions of Russia are

heterogeneous, and it is possible to distinguish groups of citizens with different levels of real and potential socio-political engagement.

We have found that approximately one third of the Russians can be characterized as individuals acting under a subservient type of political culture, with virtually no elements of a participation culture in their minds. This is a group with passive civic position and thus, at present time, they cannot be regarded as a social resource of the local self-government institution development.

Around two thirds of the region population could be referred to as potentially active citizens. Their minds combine the elements of both subservient and activist political cultures. This group of citizens expresses their willingness to participate in the work of local self-government if their activity is organized and adequately motivated "from the outside."

A higher level of civic engagement is typical to about a half of the community discussed above (they represent about one third of the total population). Compared to other categories of citizens, representatives of this group have a greater awareness of the local self-government system, their ideas about the nature of this social institution and the principles of its functioning being sufficiently molded. People of this category are well motivated to participate in public life and, under favorable conditions, can become a social base for the local self-government institution development.

Among these active citizens, there can be distinguished a smaller category of citizens, whose local self-government potential is the highest. They are characterized by initiative and responsibility. They are a significant part of the local community (about one fifth of the municipality-dwellers), and, under certain conditions, are able to become the initiative group of local self-government, to direct the activity of active citizens as well as to enlist the cooperation of potentially active citizens.

Considering the second hypothesis, it should be noted that the most fully analyzed aspect is the relationship between the assessment of common citizens' impact on the authorities' activity and citizens' readiness to realize active suffrage and be elected to the bodies of local self-government as officials. Indeed, respondents' awareness of their inability to influence the authorities seriously hinders their social activity. This factor was also a possible answer suggested to the question about the reasons for citizens' passivity in solving the matters of local importance. However, the effect of this factor on citizens' activity in respect to other forms of their participation in local self-government is still to be checked statistically.

The situation is similar with regard to citizens' awareness of their opportunities to participate in local self-government. We can only hypothetically consider the trust influence as the relationship of this factor and citizens' consciousness patterns and behavior models still needs statistical verifying. Our study has also revealed some other factors, the profundity of which, as well as the influence on the social activity of Russians require further investigation.

Our third hypothesis has also, to a large extent, been confirmed. There can be distinguished groups of citizens, who have a

significant level of activity and initiative. Thus, the rural population has been very active in many matters, in contrast to the townspeople. Speaking of age groups, the most passive are the young, social activity is more characteristic to senior people. Low-income people are more eagerly participate in municipality life-support, despite the fact that they, more than better-off citizens, tend to manifest their paternalistic attitude. Probably, these groups of population have higher self-management capabilities. Nevertheless, the problem of socio-demographic, value and behavioral characteristics of the local self-government social base remains under-investigated, requires further analysis and statistical grounding.

5. CONCLUSION

To sum it up, the results of sociological monitoring allow us to state the multi-layered consciousness of the Russian citizens, this combining the values of different types of political cultures. The dominant values are those of subservient political culture, but at the same time, activist purposes are still characteristic to a large proportion of the population. Local communities are heterogeneous; in their environment there are groups of citizens who are able to become a social base for the local self-government development. Under certain conditions, some of these active citizens are able to organize themselves, to become the initiative group of local self-government, to direct the activities of active people and make potentially active citizens get involved in local problems solution.

The main directions for further research are: An analysis of socio-demographic, value and behavioral characteristics of different groups of local communities, particularly of the active and initiative ones; a deep and comprehensive study of both limiting and motivating factors of civic participation; an identification of conditions, mechanisms and tools to be used to activate citizens, to form local communities as management subjects, and to improve the system of local self-government in Russia.

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