

ELECTIONS AS A TOOL TO FORM LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA: THEORY AND REAL MUNICIPAL PRACTICES

Eleonora Yurievna Maykova* and Elena Valeryevna Simonova*

This paper makes an attempt to identify various models of local self-government (government) organization within Russian municipal practices depending on the level of development of self-government potential of the population and local territorial specifics as well as the potential to use the electoral mechanism while forming municipal bodies. Sociological monitoring data done in Tver region in 2009-2015 were submitted. The sampled population included urban and rural people. The study was made via formalized interviewing method. Also, empirical data were used obtained in the course of deep interviewing the regional expert community in April-August of 2015 (45 persons). The attitude of the Russian citizens and experts to the use of the electoral mechanism in the system of local self-government was studied. The level of electoral activeness of the population during municipal elections was identified. The factors affecting the level of public electoral activeness and the nature of public attitude to municipal elections were studied. Three basic models of local self-government (government) were identified to be possibly used for various types of Russian territories: 1) the paternalist model with developed administration system and minimized electoral mechanism while forming the authorities for low-populated areas with little resources; 2) the model using the institutions of village chiefs (still keeping the main elements of the classic model of local self-government) for small low-populated areas of municipalities and/or municipal entities with little level of self-government potential of the population; 3) the classical model of local self-government with high activeness of the local population and opportunity to use various variants of elective procedures to form representative authorities and fill posts of heads of municipalities.

Keywords: local self-government, forming municipal bodies, municipal elections, electoral activeness, self-government potential.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Urgency of issue

The study of elections as a democratic mechanism to form municipal authorities in the system of local self-government (LSG) is rather prominent and urgent for the contemporary Russian community. As Russia is oriented at development of the civil society and democratic political system a rather important role is assigned to improvement of the local self-government system.

The Russian regulations on local self-government are based on the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government ratified by Russia in 1998 (Council of Europe, 1985). It provides for the principles of the LSG authorities to be formed and operate and their structure and competence (Federal Act No. 131-FZ “On General Principles of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation”,

* Tver State Technical University, 22, Nab. Af. Nikitina, 22, Tver, 170026, Russia

2003). Meantime, the interpretation of local self-government given in the regulations provides for subjectivity of the population, its ability and opportunity to solve local issues via various self-organization forms. The population may carry out local self-government directly via referendums, municipal elections, public hearings, applications to LSG authorities, etc. (Federal Act No. 131-FZ “On General Principles of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation”, 2003), and indirectly via forming a special system of bodies ensuring everyday solution of local issues. As the local self-government institution provides for broad participation of citizens in public government, it undoubtedly causes the use of the principle of electivity to form LSG bodies.

However, in 2000s the federal authorities initiated gradual rejection of the elective mechanism to form authorities/bodies. It referred mainly to the electivity of governors and members of the Council of Federation. The local self-government also saw a trend to limit public participation in formation of government entities. In general, the point on the procedure to elect a head of a municipal entity is the most debating. The contemporary Russian regulations provide for the alternative procedure of being elected to that post via both direct and indirect electoral procedures (Federal Act No. 131-FZ “On General Principles of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation”, 2003). Charters of Russian municipal entities determine the following alternatives for a head elected directly by the population via direct elections. He/she may either head the local administration, or be a member of the representative body of LSG with the right of decisive vote and chair it, or head both representative and executive bodies of LSG (the latter model is allowed for rural communities and in-city municipal entities of federal cities). It should be noted that the practice of electing heads of municipal entities via direct elections was dominating in Russia before 2009-2010 (in about 2/3 of municipal entities). Since 2010, the practice has been such that the head of a municipal entity is elected by the representative body of that municipal entity from the deputies and the new elected LSG head becomes its chairman (Verizhnikova, 2012, p. 26; Pravdin, 2011, p. 8; Moskalyev, & Busygin, 2011, pp. 31-32).

Sharpening discussions on possible models to elect heads of municipal entities occurred in connection with amendments to the Russian regulations on LSG in 2014-2015, in compliance with which the head of a municipal entity, if elected by the representative body of the municipal entity from the candidates introduced by the contest committee, becomes the head of the local administration. Meantime, the procedure to form the contest committee provides for appointment of half of its members by the representative body of the municipality and half – by the highest official of the region or the head of a municipal entity (depending on the type of municipal entity).

However, in December 2015 an order of the Constitutional Court of the RF was issued declaring unconstitutional the non-alternative variant of filling a post

of a head of a municipal entity and setting his/her position in the structure of LSG bodies allowed by the regulations on local self-government and used as the dominating model to arrange LSG in many Russian regions (Order of the Constitutional Court of the RF No. 30-P, 2015). In a few regions, the population began to claim to return back the procedure of direct elections of city mayors (Domanov, 2015).

So, a great contradiction emerged in the Russian municipal practices. On the one hand, to develop the democratic fundamentals of the Russian state and society, it was legally accepted and governed to develop the local self-government system, the main subject in that connection being the local population/communities. On the other hand, on the level of legislative and regulatory enforcement practices in LSG, direct participation of citizens in formation of municipal self-government bodies is continuously being limited. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the mechanism of municipal elections, seeking to further improve it, is currently deemed one of the most important areas of the academic research.

1.2 Review of academic literature on the topic

Various issues of local self-government, formation of its bodies and participation in carrying it out by common citizens have been the topics of focus of western and Russian scholars for a long time.

The issue on the subject of local self-government was put by the classicists of sociology (F. Tönnies, M. Weber and others), who considered as such the local community (a rural or an urban community) (Weber, 1994; Tönnies, 2002, pp. 25-28, 53-62, 340-343). The followers of the contemporary western concept of community building (Weil M.O., Blackwell A.G., Colmenar R.A., Kretzmann J.P., McKnight J.L., Warren M.R. and others) consider the local community as a subject of government, capable to mobilize internal sources to solve both local problems and broader social problems (crimes, poverty, homelessness, illiteracy, etc.) (Kretzmann, & McKnight, 2006, pp. 15-17). Many contemporary Russian scholars also point to the exclusive role of citizens, living in urban/rural municipal entities, in the development of the local government (Aliev, 2008; Makogon, 2011; Mersiyanova, 2008; Popova, 2008; Toshchenko, & Tsvetkova, 2006).

One of the most important directions of the LSG system analysis developed by Russian and foreign scholars is the study of elective procedures in the course of formation of municipal bodies. Those problematics are studied within municipal regulations and electoral sociology paradigm. The problematics of the electoral law were studied by A.S. Avtonomov, Yu.A. Vedeneev, S.D. Knyazev, L.N. Linnik, A.Ye. Postnikov and others. Various aspects of using direct democracy forms are covered by V.I. Avseyenko, A.I. Kovler, A.L. Marshak, S.I. Chaschina and others (Ischenko, 2005).

Concerning the issue of municipal elections, it, in some or other way, was covered within electoral and political sociology. Under two scientific doctrines, formed at the Columbian and Michigan Universities of the USA, respectively, sociological and socio-psychological approaches were established to study the electoral behavior. The most famous representatives of the Columbian school are P. Lazarsfeld, S. Lipset, and M. Rokkan. Among the factors affecting the electoral behavior, they put first the social affiliation of the electorate. The representatives of the Michigan school (A. Campbell and others) who developed socio-psychological approach were paying attention to the importance of party identification as a factor which determines the electoral choice of an individual (Savchenko, 2012, p. 5). T. Dye, R. Dalle, C.R. Mills and others are studying various issues of the contemporary democracy, including in the aspect of making political decisions and affecting political decision-making of individual citizens. In particular, C.R. Mills, speaking from the Marxist positions, underlines that the real effect on decision-making is exercised by political and economic elites which actually do control the course of elections via manipulation of the electorate's behavior (Mills, 1959).

Russian scholars N.V. Anokhina, V.R. Markaryan, A.M. Palikova, S.V. Patsynko and others study the issue of affecting the electoral behavior of mass media and various communications, prominent for the contemporary Russia. To study the specifics of the Russian electorate's behavior, of great importance are the works by Russian sociologists (A.S. Ahiezer, M.K. Gorshkov, T.I. Zaslavskaya, N.I. Lapin, Yu.A. Levada and others) analyzing the social structure of the contemporary Russian society, attitudes of the contemporary Russians related to values, views and behavior (Savchenko, 2012, pp. 6-7). In connection with the processes flowing in the current Russian system of local self-government, the scholars have been actively discussing the issues related to the use of elections procedure as a way to fill the post of a municipal entity head (Danilov, & Volodina, 2015, pp. 69-71; Verizhnikova, 2012, p. 27; Moskalyev, & Busygin, 2011, p. 34).

It should be noted that Russian scholars analyze, first of all, the system of elections considering it as an instrument to form democratic institutions of power and to ensure democratic processes in the LSG system. Scholars often consider the institution of elections from axiological positions, giving it, as a rule, somewhat positive assessment. In turn, scholars regard in a negative way passive behavioral models and political absenteeism of the Russian citizens. From our standpoint, mental and behavioral attitudes of people in the LSG sphere, like models to form local bodies, defy such certain assessment. In our research, we keep to the provisions of socio-ecological approach formed in works by R. Park (Park, 2000) and R. Mackenzie (Mackenzie, 2000). That approach singles out, based on statistical data, "socio-ecological units" in which the interaction of natural, historical, economic, political, sociocultural and other factors occurs, affecting the type of local self-

government (government) organization, models to form government structures, behavioral models of the population, its values and electoral attitudes. That approach is combined by us with the typology of self-government potential of the population, represented in our previous studies (Maykova, & Simonova, 2015, pp. 147-148). We opine that as applied to the Russian system of local self-government it is required to analyze the opportunities to use the legislative models to form local self-government bodies taking into account the specifics of the conditions under which a municipal entity has to operate. Russian territories including regions need zoning and classification of the allocated zones based, first, on the total number of local population, second, on the portion of people with higher education in various professional areas among the local population, and third, on the extent among the local population of consciousness attitudes and behavior models typical for activist political culture (as per the terminology of G.A. Almond and S. Verba) (Almond, & Verba, 2014, pp. 37, 454-466). Our research is mainly aimed at sociological analysis and classification of public and expert perceptions in local self-government sphere on the mechanism of municipal elections.

1.3. Objective, tasks and hypotheses of research

The objective of this research is to identify the problems and to analyze the opportunities of using the mechanism of elections in practices related to forming of local self-government bodies in municipal entities of a region of the Russian Federation (Tver Oblast).

The main tasks of our research are:

- (1) Identification of attitude of people from various types of municipal entities and experts to the use of the elective mechanism in the local self-government system.
- (2) Identification of the level of citizens' electoral activity during municipal elections.
- (3) Study of the factors affecting the level of citizens' electoral activity and the nature of their attitude to municipal elections.
- (4) Identification of the model to arrange the local self-government (government) system and to form its bodies depending on the level of development of self-government potential and local territorial specifics.

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

- (1) The attitude of the public and experts in LSG is differentiated; there are groups of respondents characterized by positive and negative attitudes to both the mechanism of elections as such and models to elect heads of municipal entities.
- (2) Public electoral activity and public attitude to the use of elections mechanism in the local self-government system are limited by a number

of factors: low assessment of the qualification and professionalism level of municipal entities' population to exercise the self-government activity; low level of public confidence to municipal bodies; persuasion in inability to affect much the activity of authorities; insufficient public information on opportunities to participate in local self-government.

- (3) The opportunities to use various local self-government models, arrange the local self-government system and form its bodies are differentiated depending on the territorial specifics. Based on the number of population, the portion of people with higher education and the level of self-government potential of citizens, territories and municipal entities may be classified into a few groups: 1) territories where only local self-government is possible with external government effect; 2) territories with possible self-government via implementation into self-government of the practices of village chiefs institution; 3) territories where local self-government development is possible with high level of involvement of most citizens into the processes governing their lives.

The need to solve the said tasks and to check the hypotheses predetermined the methodology of our research.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was done in a typical region of the Central Russia – Tver Oblast. Here, a two-tier system of local self-government was established. Currently, Tver Oblast comprises 351 municipal entities, including: 35 municipal districts, 7 city districts, 2 closed administrative territorial entities (ZATOs), 43 urban and 265 rural communities.

Representative bodies of municipal entities of Tver Oblast are formed via direct election of deputies. As on January 1, 2014, most heads of municipal entities (353 persons) were elected from deputies of representative bodies and only 1/10 (32 persons) – in the course of direct municipal elections (by population) (Election Commission of Tver Region, 2014). In 2015, upon the amendments to the Federal Act No. 131-FZ, the regional regulations were amended. In particular, the procedure to fill the offices of heads of municipal entities and to form the LSG bodies was governed based on competition procedures.

The research was done by the academic group of the Department of Sociology and Social Technologies of Tver State Technical University. The object of the research is the population of municipal entities of various types in Tver Oblast at the age of 18 and over and the regional experts.

The kind of research is analytical by the character of tasks to be solved and applied by functions. Sociological monitoring of the regional municipal entities' population was done in connection with the local self-government system, as well as the questionnaire of the regional experts on the issues of operation and

development of the LSG system and ways to solve them. The empirical data collecting method is sociological questionnaire (formalized public interviewing and deep interviewing of experts).

Within 2009-2011, the research was done among the population of Tver city. It was done at three stages (2009, 2010, and 2011). The volume of the sampling at each stage was 400 persons (statistical error 4%). The sampling is representative. It was formed using quotas (gender, age, urban area of residence). In 2012-2015, the sociological research was done in various municipal entities of Tver Oblast (cities, urban-type settlements, rural settlements). The sampling volume in 2012 was 624 persons, in 2013 – 628 persons, in 2014 – 633 persons, in 2015 – 739 persons (statistical error 4%). The information was collected annually in June-July.

The research results were processed via establishment of electronic database and using descriptive statistics in package SPSS 16.0.

In deep interviewing of experts, the sampling was 45 persons. The representativeness of the sample was ensured by the method to form it under the following criteria: place of work, position occupied. The following groups of experts participated in the research:

- (1) representatives of regional state authorities (Legislative Assembly of Tver Oblast, Government of Tver Oblast) – 4 persons;
- (2) representatives of mass-media and non-commercial organizations – 4 persons;
- (3) representatives of municipal bodies (heads (or heads of administrations) of municipal districts, urban and rural settlements, members of representative bodies of municipalities) – 37 persons.

The respondents were recruited by snowball sampling. The period of collecting empirical information was April-August 2015. The information was collected using a special toolkit (expert interview form), including the formulation of the key questions on the subject of research, which had to orient the respondents in the subject of conversation. The interview was deep, free and frantic talk with respondents and was about 1-1.5 hours in the average. To analyze the information obtained during expert interviews, traditional analysis methods were used.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Attitude of common citizens and experts to the mechanism of elections

A number of research issues were aimed to identify the attitude of the population and experts to using the mechanism of elections to form authorities, including municipal government. It was found that one-third of the respondents/citizens assumed for them the need of elections into local self-government bodies while another one-third – *the equal importance of all elections including those into local*

bodies opining that via active participation in elections a common individual may influence the situation in the country (Grigoryev, 2013, p. 74).

The analysis of expert assessments of the current Russian institution of elections identifies the uncertainty of experts' positions. On the one hand, heads of municipal government entities consider the system of direct elections one of the prominent parameters of the democracy of the socio-political societal structure. Elections are an act of direct people's will, enabling people to defend their interests by delegating power to the elected deputies of representative bodies and LSG officials. However, as experts opine, the efficiency of the electoral system directly depends on its quality. The contemporary electoral technologies are imperfect and, due to the impact of mass-media, manipulation of public opinion, bribery of voters, municipal residents may make a non-optimal choice ("...people come to power which are not only incapable to work as managers from the professional viewpoint..., but... also, due to ethic, moral and other reasons... they cannot be allowed... ruling a city or a village with any budget..."). Besides, the population of the current municipal entities as such "...has not grown up... to direct elections...", is not ready to take the responsibility for own decisions, manifesting paternalist attitudes to the power of any level.

3.2. Readiness of citizens to implementation of active electoral right

Some issues of the research were aimed to identify the level of readiness of common citizens to the implementation of their active electoral right. So, in the course of interviewing the population of municipal entities, some information was obtained on the unwillingness of the overwhelming part of the respondents to be elected into local self-government bodies as officials (from 78% in 2012 to 80.4% in 2015). The main reasons for such behavioral model, as opined by the respondents, are: lack of sufficient abilities, knowledge and qualification to do that activity (from 29.8% in 2012 to 23.5% in 2015), lack of interest to such kind of activity (from 20.6% in 2012 to 19.1% in 2015) and political life in general (from 14.4% in 2012 to 10.3% in 2014), *inability to affect something, low performance and efficiency of that work pointless to spend time and efforts on, respectively* (from 11.2% in 2012 to 15.7% in 2015), *unwillingness to take the responsibility to solve the current local problems* (from 11.9% in 2013 to 6% in 2015).

Most respondents in polls of 2012-2014 opined that specially trained professionals should work in the local self-government system (from 71.6% in 2012 to 67.4% in 2014), while about one-third of respondents opined that local self-government bodies should be formed from the local population (from 25.1% in 2012 to 31.4% in 2014). In the research toolkit of 2015, one more variant of answer to that question was included ("both"), which was chosen by half of the respondents. Respectively, the level of citizens for whom the extreme positions are typical has dropped (specially trained professionals (36.5%), local population (10.7%).

The correlation analysis done by us has shown that the higher respondents assess the level of influence of a common citizen on the activity of authorities, the more they are ready to implement their active electoral right and be elected in LSG bodies as officials, and vice versa (Table 1).

TABLE 1: READINESS TO BE ELECTED IN LSG BODIES DEPENDING ON ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL A CITIZEN'S INFLUENCE ON THE OPERATION OF AUTHORITIES/ BODIES (2014)

<i>Assessment of the level of a citizen's influence on the operation of authorities/bodies</i>	<i>Readiness to be elected in LSG bodies as an official (%)</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Very high level	66.7	22.2
High level	14.7	64.7
Average level	3.8	67.1
Low level	11.1	74.2
No influence	3	90.3
Hard to say	6.5	64.5

The portion of citizens ready to exercise their active electoral right and be elected into local self-government bodies as officials is about 1/10 of the population.

3.3. Electoral activity of citizens and exercising their passive electoral right

It should be noted that in exercising passive electoral right absenteeism is typical for citizens in general. So, compared to elections of various levels, the electoral activity of the population during elections into LSG is rather low. Only 1/5 of the respondents constituted the participation in municipal elections within the latest 5 years. However, the comparison of the empirical data obtained in various years shows the trend to the growth of electoral activity of the population during elections into LSG bodies (20.7% in 2015 compared to 13.9% in 2012). That trend was manifested during municipal elections of September 13, 2015 on the single voting day, when in Tver Oblast deputies of representative bodies of LSG were elected. Voter turnout was 34.5% (In Tver Oblast the Voting Turnout Was 34.46%, 2015). Meantime, the level of electoral activity in youth is lower than in other age groups. The most passive electorally are the persons with no professional education and citizens with high income. The population of rural communities expresses higher electoral activity in electing local self-government bodies compared to urban and urban-type settlements residents. Meantime, in the course of the research the following dependency was found: the more informed the respondents are about FZ No. 131, the more active they are in local elections and vice versa.

However, despite the low level of real electoral activity of citizens during municipal elections, their potential readiness to participate in local self-government elections proved much higher (from 25% in 2013 to 34.3% in 2014).

3.4 Perceptions of common citizens and experts on the ways to fill posts of municipal entities' heads

The analysis of public perceptions on such a currently discussable issue as the ways to fill posts of heads of local self-government is prominent. As per the results of the research, most respondents opine that a city's mayor should be elected by its citizens (from 83.3% in 2009 to 62.9% in 2011). Only an insignificant portion of citizens is convinced that mayors should be elected by city дума deputies (from 5.8% in 2009 to 28% in 2011). During the research of 2012-2015 in various municipal entities of Tver Oblast, it was found that from the point of view of the regional population the most efficient way to fill a post of a head of a local self-government (city's mayor, head of a district, etc.) is direct municipal elections (from 30.5% in 2012 to 32.5% in 2015). Some quarter of the respondents stand to the way in the form of general assembly (meeting) of residents, also providing for electivity of that post (*from 24.6% in 2012 to 28.8% in 2015*). Such a position is mainly typical for rural settlements. In 2015, the percentage of citizens standing for electing a head of LSG by representative body's deputies greatly dropped (from 30.6% in 2014 to 9.2% in 2015). Such a way to fill in the post of a head of a municipal entity as "vertical appointment" by higher state authorities (governor of a region, Legislative Assembly of the region, etc.) is traditionally supported by about 1/7 of the respondents (from 17.5% in 2012 to 14.9% in 2015).

The data obtained on the preceding matter are confirmed by answers to the question first put in the research toolkit in 2015. The respondents, in particular, were offered to assess the new procedure for filling posts of a head of a municipal entity introduced in the regional LSG practices since 2015 and related to contest procedures. It should be noted that over one-third of citizens negatively assessed that change in the formation of LSG bodies system (37.2%), arguing that within democratic political systems direct elections are a must, otherwise causing clanship and corruption in authorities.

Followers of the new procedure to fill a post of a head of a municipal entity (26.2%) rationalize their position by a probability of a non-optimal choice in the course of direct electoral procedures by the population due to missing the required and reliable information on a candidate while an expert commission in a more efficient way will assess candidates for the post of a LSG head and will offer a representative body the most professionally *trained candidates with management experience*.

The analysis of opinions and assessments by representatives of authorities on that issue allows identifying three key positions of experts.

The first group of experts negatively treats the liquidation of direct elections of heads of municipalities opining that selection of candidates by a contest commission half consisting of the representatives appointed by district (for rural settlements) and regional (for municipal districts) bodies is not somewhat

democratic. The followers of that position understand the goals of the new model to fill posts of heads of municipalities (“...it is... a certain filter so that citizens were unable to elect an inadequate head...”). As a significant disadvantage of the new model, they see actual deprivation of the population from participating in formation of LSG bodies and government inside their communities.

The second group of experts positively treats the introduction of competition procedures in the system to fill posts of heads of municipalities opining that competition “...is the most optimal variant...” for current Russian municipal practices. Competition procedures cut financial costs on the process of LSG body formation, allowing to call for territorial management competent and highly professional citizens being some sort of “insurance” from various populist decisions. However, such a model is considered by them as temporary, to be further liquidated and replaced with a more democratic model in the event of social maturity and responsibility rise in Russian citizens (“...it should be used for some ten years and then it is required to see, to come back, maybe people will be ready for direct elections...”).

The third group of experts negatively treats the system of direct elections of heads of municipal entities, nevertheless, standing for the electivity of a representative body of LSG. The followers of that position consider the system of choosing candidates to the post of a LSG head by contest commissions half formed by regional governors the solely right and the most efficient. The influence on the LSG system by any external parties, as per the followers of that position, will be inevitable in the course of implementation of any model to fill posts of heads of municipalities. That influence will be either by a governor (“...governors directly appoint the contest commissions – it is understandable that choosing candidates will depend on who... governors see...”), or by an entity or an individual who funded elections (“...money should be taken from somewhere and then paid back... who assisted in funding will exert influence... on the future heads ...”).

3.5 Attitude of common citizens and experts to the issue of combining posts of head and head of administration of a municipal entity

The polls have shown that the elimination of direct elections of heads of municipal entities is assessed by Tver Oblast population negatively in general and quite unambiguously by experts, while the orientation to combine powers of a head of a municipal entity and a head of its administration is positively perceived by both citizens and experts. As per the questionnaire results, 43.9% (2015) of Tver Oblast residents positively assess such regulating provision. The supporters of combining posts of a head of a municipal entity and a head of its administration note that two posts available in a municipal entity cause the operating efficiency to fall, officials tend to shift the blame for each other to solve local issues. That group of respondents opines that all prominent powers to solve local matters should be

“in a single pair of hands”. That will cause the efficiency of works of a municipal entity’s head to rise (“order will grow”, “no discrepancies”), as well as his/her responsibility to the public (“there is someone to claim from”). Besides, less number of officials, as they opine, will ensure saving funds on the administrative staff of a municipal entity. It should be noted that older age groups are more positive about combining both top posts in administration of a municipal entity. Higher education level also is a factor affecting the establishment of positive assessments of such types of municipal practices. Positive attitudes are also typical for the rural population.

Negative attitude of some citizens (2015 – 24%) to the system combining posts of a head of a municipal entity and a head of its administration are linked with their views that, first, a single official cannot efficiently exercise the scope of emerging liabilities and, second, too much power is concentrated in a single pair of hands, which may cause corruption and other negative results. Urban-type settlements residents are the most negative about combining municipal posts.

Experts expressed their positive attitude to the system of municipal government based on combining the posts of a head of a municipality and a head of its administration and were for liquidation of so-called two-head model of LSG. Combining two highest posts of municipal power is considered by experts as the most efficient to date. First, under the conditions of insufficient funding of municipal entities strategic and tactical administration by a single official will be contributing to more efficient solving of local issues (“...it is more important to ignore some elements of democracy and discussion... efficient government is better... it is more right where... a single person is responsible and may be claimed by everyone...”). Second, efficiency of operation of municipal bodies is improving as a result of liquidation of the conflict between a head of a municipal entity and a head of its administration input in the two-head model of LSG model as the nucleus (“...*despite our wishes, the sparkles are around there as people apply both to the first man and the second and both make promises and... contradictory decisions are made...*”). Third, *cooperation of authorities is becoming more efficient as one leader (single power principle) is more understandable for common citizens. Fourth, administrative costs go down.*

3.6. Prospects to arrange government of territories and local communities: expert assessment

One of the research objectives was to study possible models of government systems based on local territorial and community specifics.

Municipal experts link local self-government with autonomous operation, resource self-abundance, active participation of the population in solving local matters, formation of municipal government entities by citizens for the interest of local territorial development and social services in local communities. However,

the specifics of local conditions and the general economic situation do not allow fully implementing the LSG principles suggesting differentiation of the approaches to forming the local self-government system. Within the expert interviews, three such models were formed.

The first model is the classical variant of local self-government which may be implemented in cities, urban-type settlements and large rural settlements. The said types of municipalities are characterized by the number of socially different population, high self-government potential and various resources available to ensure self-sufficient activity and autonomous operation. Here, various variants of electoral procedures are applied to form representative authorities and fill posts of heads of municipalities, and implementation of various programs is possible to actively involve the population. In such municipal entities, all categories of citizens are represented which keep in their consciousness the value of subordinate and activist types of the political culture: inactive, potentially active, active and initiative citizens (Maykova, & Simonova, 2015, p. 148).

The second model to arrange local administration may be applied in small low-populated settlements and/or municipalities with low level of self-government potential of the population. It presumes, along with keeping the main elements of the classical model of LSG, implementing the institution of village chiefs being the most active and initiative citizens of a settlement (village/community) acting as middlemen between the population and authorities (heads of settlements/districts). The social stratum of village chiefs will have special importance in case of making rural settlements larger (“...in each village should be both a chief and a head, ...unless the meeting acts, meeting of chiefs will. Village chief... should speak on behalf of the village... Before making a decision, he/she should... get the whole village for a meeting... Village chief is to become the primary link... with who the head of a settlement will work, having the deputies in parallel...”).

The third model to arrange local administration relates to formation of direct administration system by either state authorities or municipal districts’ bodies. This approach needs to be used in arranging the administration of highly dotation-dependent settlements with limited resources and low population mainly comprising pensioners. The use of electoral mechanism to form local bodies in that case seems unreasonable. Meantime, areas of such a kind still (subject to the compliance with the provisions of LSG regulations) form paternalist models for cooperation of both authorities and the population, and between authorities (“...exercising single power in my district... no matter, 10 or 20 persons will live in the street. They need electricity, road, truck-shop to arrive... to make those 20 study in their school... I am proud of heads of settlements, they are always supporting each other, mutual support and assistance is available... communicating via phone first, discussing... then settle with me here via district deputy heads... each is assigned to some settlements/communities... that’s how our house works...”).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Discussion of research results

The results of the sociological monitoring of perceptions of common Russian citizens on the institution of elections and deep interviewing experts in municipal self-government show the following. Both people in general and experts give core attention to elections as a tool to form local self-government authorities. For most respondents, electoral mechanism has positive connotations and is linked with perceptions of democratic values, people's power, and opportunities for common citizens to affect decision-making to improve public order and preserve public interests. However, the efficiency of the electoral system directly depends on its quality (such a position is most consistently observed in experts). Electoral technologies used in the contemporary Russia are rather imperfect, not always ensuring the quality of LSG bodies. That, as opined by respondents, is one of the reasons why direct electoral procedures were partially rejected, at least, in filling posts of municipalities' heads.

In general, if the models to form administrations of municipal entities (executive and distribution bodies operating under single power and appointment principles) and representative municipal bodies operating under electivity and collegial decision-making principles do not call for any hot discussions, models to elect heads of municipalities are discussed by authorities and public. Meantime, the trend for power centralization is clearly seen, including at the local level, as well as the growing influence of state authorities on LS activities and shrinking public opportunities to participate in forming authorities.

The said trend is strengthened under the impact of the factors like traditionally low activity of the population of municipalities, including absenteeism in the implementation of active and passive electoral rights, high paternalist views and behavioral models typical for subordinate type of political culture (*as per G. Almond and S. Verba*). *All those results are compliant with the data of numerous empirical researches in various Russian regions and confirm the conclusions made by many Russian researchers.*

Meantime, our research shows that both common citizens and experts admit great role of the population in the work of LSG system with public responsibility for the public life and activeness in solving the LSG matters. Most respondents fairly note that everyday government should be exercised by specially trained professionals or citizens with respective level and area of education to ensure quality management of municipal affairs. The point here, as we opine, is not in making the local public the subject of only passive management but in the need to understand the differentiation of functions of various categories of citizens in LSG system, in perceiving the opportunity to exercise various kinds of civil activity (both in management structures and, for most people, outside of the municipal government

bodies). In that case, the electoral mechanism may be assigned one of the key roles.

In that connection, the significance of the results obtained by us in the course of this research is growing, acknowledging mostly unacceptance by the public and the experts of the non-alternative variant to fill posts of municipal entities' heads. Most respondents consider the probability and need to return the procedure of direct elections of head of municipalities in the near or in the remote future (when the public gains social maturity and responsibility and learns activist behavior). In fact, as per the data of our research, potential public readiness to implement the electoral right is, as a rule, much higher than the real public electoral activity. Besides, comparison of the empirical data of various years demonstrates the trend for growth of public electoral activity during the 2015 elections into LGS.

The research shows that forming the local government model should be in an alternative way and conditioned by various factors: certain number of population, capable to form local communities, level of public self-government potential, various kinds of resources available enabling to arrange and implement self-government local practices. Some areas may be self-sufficient municipal entities having certain resources for autonomous self-government. There, a wide use of various electoral procedures to form local self-government bodies is possible. Other areas having insufficient electoral potential should be managed by state local authorities. The use of electoral procedures in that case will be minimized. Therefore, based on the provisions of the socio-ecological approach, applied scientific studies should be aimed, first, to zoning of areas by the core criteria, identifying the type of local government system and, thus, the extent and nature of using the electoral tool in procedures to form municipal bodies. That approach is rather new in Russian studies of the local self-government system.

4.2. Discussing the research hypotheses

Our research results to a great extent confirmed the first hypothesis. Indeed, the public and LSG expert attitude both to the electoral mechanism and models to elect heads of municipal entities is differentiated. We specified 2 large groups of common citizens characterized by differences in perceiving the role of the electoral mechanism to form municipal bodies. The first group (comprising about 2/3 of the population and including both active and passive individuals) admits the importance of municipal elections and stands to keeping direct electoral procedures not only in the course of formation of representative bodies but also to fill posts of LSG heads appealing to democratic values. The second group of common citizens (about 1/3 of the population with paternalist views and civil passiveness) does not admit that the electoral mechanism is of core significance to form municipal bodies, positively perceives competition procedures in the course of electing LSG heads opining that only such approach will ensure the

quality of local self-government system and guarantees professionalism of candidates for posts of municipal heads.

Experts positively treat the use of the electoral mechanism to form municipal bodies considering it a prominent feature of democracy of the existing public and political order. However, the full use of that mechanism will be possible only under the conditions of improved electoral technologies and increased social activeness of common citizens. Regarding the models to elect heads of municipalities, the experts divided into three groups: 1) keeping direct electoral procedures; 2) temporary use of competition procedures and return to direct elections upon the establishment of favorable conditions for quality flow of the electoral process; 3) keeping competition procedures to fill posts of heads of LSG and direct elections in the course of formation of local representative authorities.

Considering the second hypothesis, it should be noted that the most fully was analyzed the mutual relation of the extent of influence of a common citizen on the operation of authorities and the readiness of citizens to implement their active rights and be elected into LSG bodies as officials, as well as the level of population's awareness of their opportunities to take part in LSG and the level of public electoral activeness. The influence on the public electoral activeness and on people's attitude to the use in the electoral mechanism of the LSG system of such limiting factors as low assessment of qualification level and professionalism of the local population to be engaged in self-government and low level of public confidence to municipal bodies partly were confirmed still calling for further statistical rationalizing. In the course of the research, other factors have also been identified, the depth and nature of influence of which on the electoral activeness of Russians need to be studied.

The third hypothesis was much confirmed as well. Indeed, these opportunities to use various models of government and arrangement of the LSG system and to form the LSG bodies are different for various areas. Three main models may be identified: 1) the paternalist model with a developed system of administration and minimized electoral mechanism while forming bodies of power for the areas where only local management is possible with outside management impact applied due to low population, lack of local resources, etc.; 2) the model using village chiefs institution (but keeping the main elements of traditional model) for areas of small low-populated municipal entities and/or municipalities with insignificant level of self-government potential of the people; 3) the classic model of local self-governance characterized by high activeness of the local population and opportunity to use various variants of electoral procedures to form representative bodies and to fill posts of heads of municipalities. That model is applicable for areas with sufficient number of socially variable population to form local communities, high level of self-government potential and various resources available ensuring self-sufficiency of life and autonomous operation. However, that typology requires statistical rationalizing as it is required to identify the dependency of using local self-

government (government) model on the number of population portion of persons with higher education, level of self-government potential of local people and other factors.

5. CONCLUSION

So, the results of our research show the unambiguity of the attitude to the electoral mechanism in the LSG formation bodies system both of the people and regional and municipal bodies. Its use in the procedures of forming territorial management system is determined by the specifics of socioeconomic conditions of a municipal entity, dominating public system of values and behavioral patterns, etc. The research results evidence that the state, regional and municipal authorities and local communities are seeking for an optimal model of LSG to use, in particular, the procedures to fill posts of heads of municipal entities. The recent years' trends are demonstrating growing centralization of power including at the local level, growing impact of governmental structures on the LSG activities and shrinking public opportunities to take part in formation of authorities/bodies. On the other hand, rejection of direct elections of heads of LSG is considered a temporary measure related to inefficiency of the current electoral technologies, weak readiness of people to take part in various LSG forms and insufficient understanding by citizens of their acts/omissions for the development of a municipal entity. Our interviews fix striving of the public and representatives of municipal bodies to keep the main democratic elements in LSG system including direct elections. Return to the model when a head of a municipal entity is elected by public via direct elections will be possible through gradual change of mentality of the regional population, establishment of activist views, growing responsibility for anything happening in a municipal entity.

The main directions for further research are: deep and overall study of both limiting and motivating factors of public electoral activeness at the municipal level; development of guidelines to assess the mutual relation of territorial specifics, those of local communities and models to arrange local self-government (government); statistical rationalizing of zoning territories and classification of local management models; identification of conditions, mechanisms and tools to activate citizens, form local communities as subject of government and improvement of the LSG system in Russia.

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