PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES
OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Case studies of mid-sized cities in
Russia and the United States

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Introduction

Citizen participation is a vital tool of democratic governance. It not only communicates citizens’ interests and preferences to governmental officials but improves government legitimacy, responsiveness, transparency, and accountability. According to Arnstein (1969), citizen participation is citizen power. The degree of public participation varies from the absence of power, where citizens are excluded from participating in public affairs, to full inclusion of citizens in social, economic and political processes.

Under the influences of new public management and new public governance, public administration in some societies has shifted from highly bureaucratic, hierarchical, impersonal structures to horizontal systems that are open to the external environment and public participation systems. However, tensions between bureaucracy and democracy, closed versus opened systems, and expertise versus citizen participation remain.

Although governments around the world have made significant steps forward in promoting public institutions to be more responsive and open for civic engagement, citizen participation does not seem to be substantially increased. This can be explained by a lack of citizen trust in government (Hardin 1998; Yang 2005; Blind 2007; Wang and Wart 2007), or the poor quality of communication between public officials and citizens (Arnstein 1969; McLeod, Scheufele and Moy 1999).

The objective of this chapter is to explore challenges facing local governments in promoting civic engagement, and the practices used to try and do this. We apply a theoretical framework for civic engagement adapted from Cooper, Bryer and Meek (2006). The framework addresses five dimensions of citizen participation: size, scope, purpose, location, and processes of public engagement. The study focuses on the context and environment of local governments in the United States and Russia and explores the following questions:
How do local governments in mid-sized cities build a meaningful dialogue with citizens?
How do they promote citizen participation?
What challenges do such cities face when encouraging civic engagement?

The focus for exploration is through case studies of some mid-sized cities in Russia and the United States. As case studies, these represent examples from two societies that are vastly different in institutional design and socio-cultural context. The exploration sheds light on similarities and differences, reflecting both common concern at the most localised levels of government and addressing the perceived gaps in mutual respect and understanding that plague both societies despite difference political environments.

Theoretical perspectives

Under the umbrella of new public management and new public governance are a set of theoretical and practical tensions that prioritise expert-based decision-making or mass participation, reliance on rules for fair treatment or inclusion of diverse views and interests of stakeholders in communities. These are reflected in the dynamic balance between maintenance of bureaucracy and enhancement of democracy, between stabilisation of a closed system and the uncertainties introduced in an open system, and between negotiated responsiveness to diverse interests and commitment to technical guidance and expertise. These tensions are explored in the following pages and are then discussed within the context of Russia and the United States.

Bureaucracy v. democracy

The concepts of bureaucracy and democracy have many definitions and interpretations. However, generally scholars agree that bureaucracy is constituted of hierarchical impersonal institutions, with seniority and legitimacy based on expertise. In contrast, democracy represents horizontal institutions based on the values of equality, freedom, pluralism, openness, citizen participation, and legitimacy based on free elections and representation.

Some scholars believe that bureaucratic absolutism, which is characterized by unlimited centralized authority, is prevented by democracy (van Waarden 2015). Van Waarden (2015) suggested that the 20 century scholars like Mosca, Marx and Engels, and Michels saw bureaucratic government as a necessary tool to regulate ignorant and incompetent masses that exclude the possibility of full democracy. In their view, an efficient public institution is highly centralised and expert-oriented (ibid.).

At the same time, van Waarden (2015) argued that a second group of scholars believe that democratic values are threatened by bureaucratic norms and thus seek more participatory bureaucracy. Rights and equity in the interaction between the public sector agency and its clientele and the quality of its relationship, expressed in accountability responsibility, and responsiveness are the basis of democratic governance (Harmon and Mayer 1986). According to Hughes (2013), bureaucracy abrogates the power of citizens or the politicians and stifles creativity and innovation. Harmon and Mayer (1986) assume that ‘legal, political and bureaucratic sanctions induce competent and conscientious administrative performance’ (as cited in Berkley and Rousse 2004: 103).

Nevertheless, many contemporary scholars believe in the reconciliation of bureaucratic expertise and democracy. As indicated by van Waarden (2015), bureaucratic expertise is necessary for ‘implementing and specifying policies, enforcing laws, and reducing socio-economic inequalities’ (van Waarden 2015: 628). Bureaucracy is a necessary tool for democracy; it exists to accomplish tasks (Hill and Lynn 2009; Berkley and Rousse 2004) and bureaucracy can be enhanced by democracy.
Closed v. opened systems

Closed systems experience little or almost no access from external forces and fail to understand and develop the processes of feedback that are essential for survival (Harmon and Mayer 1986). Although open systems bring structural and cultural changes, uncertainty and interdependence (ibid.), Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) believe that public sector organisations are not intrinsically self-sufficient. They ‘must engage in exchanges with their environment in order to survive’ (Shafritz, Ott and Yang 2015: 343). Social and cultural pressures make public institutions change their structures and values based on efficiency and effectiveness (ibid.).

Participative administration and civic engagement

In recent years, various Western societies have witnessed the rise of populist movements, which favour personal power, strong leadership, direct forms of majoritarian democracy, expression of people’s voice through referenda, opinion polls and representative bureaucracy (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). Such populist movements sees the ‘virtue of ordinary people (the silent majority) over the ‘corrupt’ establishment’, which includes big businesses and banks, ‘elected officials, government officials, intellectual elites and scientific experts’ (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 6).

Hughes (2013) argues there is a trend to reform government structures into participative administrations, when governmental systems become open in their relations to the citizenry. The role of managers is ‘to involve the public to manage public responses to new initiatives’ (Hughes 2013: 245). There are multiple functions of public participation tools (Arnstein 1969; Rosener 1975). However, the manner and the feasibility of implementation to achieve desired results relies on:

- local political culture;
- administrative culture; and
- citizen trust, efficacy and competence (Cooper, Bryer and Meek 2006).

![Figure 18.1 Conceptual framework](image-url)
Figure 18.1 summarises the relationships across these concepts. As the above cited literature shows, populist movements push against bureaucratic structures and expertise and give impetus to governance change at all levels of government.

Governance, characterised by a high demand for open systems and participative administration, allows citizen participation in decision-making processes, protection of minority rights, and promotion of horizontal checks and balances. However, the tension between bureaucracy and democracy still exists and is reflected in different societies, such as those of Russia and the United States.

**Conceptual application to Russia**

The dynamic development of recent Russian society has brought with it multiple and complicated tasks and objectives for public authorities (Kozbanenko 2006: 323). In 2000, public administrative reforms were started in Russia aiming to introduce the model of 'new governance', a development borrowed from the experience of administrative reform in western countries. The idea of reforms is to change models of interaction between the state and civil society (Osborn and Gaebler 1992). The basic attributes of the new governance (or as it is often named in the research literature, ‘state or public management’), are the following:

- Evaluation of governance efficiency by its results.
- Competition between governmental organisations and between governmental and commercial organisations in providing services to citizens.
- Allocation of state functions to private organisations, usually under contract.
- Decentralisation of powers based on the principle of subsidiarity which makes it possible for local authorities and nongovernmental organisations to participate in developing state policy (Bukhard 1998).

However, in Russia, a ‘new public management’ model has generally failed. The western experience does not translate to Russia effectively. The Russian model of public administration is characterised by strong executive power and can predominantly be described as the bureaucratic type where all political decisions are made by public authorities. As a result, the role of civil society and business is minimised, and the changes and reforms are designed by political elite (i.e. officials of the upper levels of authorities). They are primarily interested in exact and rapid implementation of their own decisions by the lower levels of the administrative hierarchy.

In these conditions, there is a conflict between the present political and administrative system and new public management technologies borrowed from the Western experience. The effective functioning of these technologies is based on a well-structured mechanism of internal and external control over the activities of officials at different levels. Some researchers believe that such a conflict occurs because Russia is unable to accept new institutions of modern public management. A new public management system might be possible in Russia only if the state system implements the basic administrative mechanisms of the traditional bureaucratic model (Polterovich 2007). Various empirical studies show that rational bureaucracy can contribute to the successful modernisation of society. A comparative analysis of the activities of state bureaucratic bodies in a number of developing countries has shown the connection between the modern rational bureaucracy and the economic growth of these states (Evans and Rauch 1999).

In Russia, many public authorities have recently achieved a certain level of rational bureaucracy. However, the basic principle of the Russian public management remains ‘top-down’ and,
generally, the interest of the bureaucracy prevails. Some horizontal links are noticeable, but in most cases they are artificial and are used mainly to create a positive image of state power. In these circumstances, the inclusion of representatives of business and civil society in the process of reform and decision-making is becoming a key factor.

Local authorities and the private sector have the potential to become the driving force of administrative reforms. They can motivate public authorities to be more flexible and innovative in their decision-making. Russia needs new laws on public service, new approaches to the budgetary process, and reforms of regional and local government that will become the foundation for a new state administration aimed not at the interests of bureaucrats and oligarchs but on the social and economic needs of ordinary people. However, these new approaches have not yet developed in a single and clear action plan. They have not become a coherent strategy for public administration reform in Russia.

Conceptual application to United States

The dynamic balance between bureaucratisation and democratisation has spurred numerous reform and counter-reforms in the United States. The first governance approach can be classified as a ‘government by gentlemen’ system, whereby only elite men ruled, debated issues through official institutions, and set policy. This gave way to the ‘spoils system’ that opened government offices to the masses, so long as appointees supported the party and the politicians in power. Rule by elite was considered to be undemocratic as such; opening the spoils of victory – government offices – to the common man was a response to this elitism. However, the spoils system led to corruption and also to violence, including the assassination of President James Garfield by a supporter disappointed by his failure to benefit from the system. Thus emerged administrative reforms that placed emphasis on technical merit and experience as the mechanism to, as John Rohr (1986) puts it, ‘run the Constitution’.

Merit systems were developed and embedded within bureaucratic systems that are stereotypically framed within Weber’s ideal-type bureaucracy and typified by Taylor’s scientific management procedures. These are decidedly not systems that are conducive to engagement with citizens in democratic discourse; they also are considered as antithetical to innovation and achievement of results. Thus emerged three governance reform efforts that maintained different foci: new public management focused on reducing bureaucracy, treating the public as customer, and encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship akin to private sector models; new public administration similarly sought to reduce bureaucracy but sought to redirect administrative practices towards socially good outcomes such as social justice and equity; new public service did not specifically seek to reduce bureaucracy but to formalise roles for citizens within bureaucratic systems. Each of these reform efforts remain a part of current administrative procedures across levels of government.

With reforms built on top of each other, the resulting governance systems consist of a cacophony of competing goals and objectives for the administrative system as a whole and for individual public administrators. Administrators have conflicting objects of their responsiveness: to their political bosses (dictated responsiveness), the rules of their agencies (constrained responsiveness), to customers of government (entrepreneurial responsiveness), their own policy goals (purposive responsiveness), and to any agreements they develop in consultation and deliberation with citizens and other stakeholders (collaborative responsiveness). The result is a need to negotiate responsiveness to potentially conflicting and equally legitimate demands (Bryer 2007).
Methodology

Although there are a large number of theoretical articles identifying the correlation between open governments and citizen participation and empirical studies on specific programmes in large cities that promote civic engagement, there is little of empirical research on civic participation in mid-sized cities that lack the financial support and resources as their larger peers.

The aim of this study is to compare and contrast different approaches to public participation in mid-sized cities and communities, within and across the United States and Russia. We seek to answer the following questions: How do local governments in mid-sized cities promote citizen participation? What are the challenges the municipalities face when they encourage civic engagement? Responses are compared across countries.

The current research is a qualitative multiple case study. Case studies provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon, events, people or organisations. The comparison of cities in Florida, United States, and the Tyumen Region of Russia is introduced in order to understand public participation in local government decision-making processes. Locations were selected for convenience as well as theoretical interest, given different population sizes and geographic locations.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected government leaders in the towns. Interviews addressed five dimensions of civic engagement, based on the framework developed by Cooper, Bryer and Meek (2006):

- Who is involved?
- Who initiates the engagement?
- Why are citizens involved, or not involved?
- How are citizens involved?
- Where does the engagement happen?

According to the authors, these five factors, which include the size, scope, purpose, location, and process employed to engage citizens, identify the government’s ability to ‘maximize citizen efficacy, competence, and trust, as well as government trust, responsiveness, and legitimacy’ (Cooper, Bryer and Meek 2006: 84).

Interviewees identified the challenges that such local governments face and lessons they have learned based on their past experience when promoting civic engagement practices. The research also used secondary data sources, such as websites and government reports in order to provide the demographic information, identify the form of government, and access details on initiatives and programmes that promote civic engagement. The study applied qualitative thematic content analysis, which inductively determined themes of commonalities and contrasts across the cities.

Case selection and introduction

Russia

In the Russian Federation, there are several types of local governments.

The Russian Federation is divided into 6 types of federal units that are:

- Republics: 23.
- Territories: 9.
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- Regions: 45.
- Autonomous region: 1.
- Autonomous districts: 4.
- Federal cities: 3.

The Russian municipal jurisdictions are divided across two levels and seven types:

- Municipal cities with intra-urban districts: 3.
- Intra-urban districts: 19.
- Municipal cities (urban okrugs): 560.
- Municipal districts: 1,788.
- Urban settlements: 1,592.
- Rural settlements: 18,177.
- Intra-urban territories of federal cities (Moscow and St Petersburg): 267.

Federal Law No 131-FZ (2003) ‘On General Principles of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation’ in Chapter 5 specifies forms of public participation. However it has a special provision allowing citizens to choose any additional form of participation provided their activities do not contradict the Constitution of the Russian Federation, or federal and regional laws. The same legislation specifies the duty of public authorities and their officials to assist citizens to implement their rights of participation in local self-government. Many forms of public participation related to local issues have been developed in Russia, which require to be based on two core principles on. The principle of legality means that the procedure for citizens’ participation in the decision-making on local affairs should not contradict any law. The principle of voluntary participation requires that people are not coerced to any form of participation, and there are no sanctions for those who do not participate.

Nevertheless, local governments in some cases are obliged to organise citizens’ participation in certain forms: regular elections and public hearings, for example. Most forms of citizen participation are mandatory only if they are initiated by an organisation, a group of people or one person (referendum; voting on the recall of a deputy or an elected official of local government; citizens’ appeal to public bodies and to officials of local government). There are also forms of citizens’ participation that are not necessarily required; they are conducted at the discretion of local authorities, or in rare cases, initiated by state authorities (for example: a survey of citizens’ opinions when making decisions on changing the purpose of the municipal land for objects of regional and interregional value).

Only a few forms of public participation lead to a mandatory decisions – elections, referenda, recall of a deputy or an elected official of local government, or a citizens’ forum exercising the powers of a representative body of the municipality. All other forms can be defined as public consultation. Forms of public participation do not differ in the mid-sized cities of the Russian Federation with the exception of one form – that is the citizens’ forum exercising the powers of a representative body of the municipality. This form is used in the municipalities with a population of fewer than 300 people. However, in practice, there is a significant difference in the forms of public participation used in larger settlements.

In 2014–2015, amendments to the Federal Law No 131-FZ delegated most powers related to local government to the regional level. The consequences were considerable and four of them should be pointed out: (1) a significant loss of local powers in small towns, (2) a strengthening of the executive power at the local level, (3) a weakened role of the citizens in the process of local executive branch formation in favour of the executive authorities of the regions, and (4) an increased capacity of regional authorities to exert influence on local governments.
United States

In the United States governmental jurisdictions are divided across seven distinct units. According to the most recent census of governments, there are approximately 87,900 unique governmental units across the country, as follows:

- Federal government: 1.
- State governments: 50.
- County governments: 3,034.
- Municipalities: 19,431.
- Towns: 16,506.
- School districts: 13,522.
- Special districts: 35,356.

These numbers change incrementally quite regularly particularly for governmental units that are subordinate to that of the state. County governments are akin to municipal districts in Russia; municipalities are generally akin to the urban okrugs, and towns are akin to the villages or hamlets. School districts are sometimes established in full alignment with the boundaries of a district/county or city municipality, but they can also across these boundaries to encompass multiple district or city municipalities. Special districts often span district and city municipalities and are focused on specific functions and services, such as water districts, fire districts, or library districts. The districts thus formed permit multiple municipal governments to pool scarce resources and achieve economies-of-scale while providing needed services to populations across multiple geographical and jurisdictional boundaries.

Tiers and spheres of government

The relationship between different levels of government is based on the principles of federalism, which establish and sustain a formally clear though sometimes ambiguous set of responsibilities between each level of government. This division of powers has multiple motivations, such as protection against oppressive government that might readily be found within a heavily centralised authority structure, enablement of policy experimentation that can lead to innovation that might be replicated or scaled up, and provision of more opportunities for direct citizen participation in affairs that affect citizens quality of life.

For our case studies in Russia we selected two different types of municipalities. Both are located in Tyumen Region, which is the third largest region in the country. As in Russia, the cases selected represent jurisdictions of different sizes. All are located in the State of Florida, the second largest State in the United States by population. Two mid-sized cities are Gainesville and St Augustine.

Case introductions

Russia

The city of Tobolsk was founded in 1587. For several centuries it was the administrative center of Siberia (Siberian, Tobolsk province, Tobolsk governorship). Tobolsk is the second largest town in the Tyumen Region. The population is 102,000 people; the territory is 23,920 hectares (59,108 acres).
Tobolsk is governed by the city administration with one Head of Administration who is elected for five years by the representative authority of the Tobolsk urban district – ‘Tobolsk city Duma’ which comprises 25 commissioners/deputies elected for 5 years from candidates chosen by competitive commission of the regional Governor.

Zavodoukovsky urban okrug is located in the south-eastern part of the Tyumen region. The total area of the municipal city is 295.9 hectares (731.2 acres).

The territory of the Zavodoukovsky urban okrug includes the city of Zavodoukovsky, as well as surrounding areas, consisting of twenty big villages, twelve hamlets, and eleven rural settlements. The total population is 46,400 in the urban population, 21,000 in the rural area.

The type of government is the same as in Tobolsk: the city administration with a Head who is elected for five years by the representative authority of the Zavodoukovsky urban district – ‘city Duma’. Zavodoukovsky city Duma consists of 20 commissioners/deputies elected for 5 years.

United States

St Augustine (www.citystaug.com) is the oldest city in the United States, founded in 1565. The city is located in northeastern Florida with a population of 13,676 for the year 2016. The population density is relatively low, at 1450 people per square mile. It is governed by a commission-manager form of government. Five elected commissioners are responsible to enact policies and ordinances, and approve spending. The city manager is appointed by the commission and responsible for administrative functions and day-to-day operations of the city. One of the city’s commissioners serves a two-year term as a mayor, while the other four have a four-year term. Every two years, the elections are held for the two four-year seats and for the mayor’s seat.

The City of Gainesville (www.cityofgainesville.org) was founded in 1896. The city is located in North Central Florida. The population is 128,460. The population density is average, accounted for 2,666 people per square mile. It is governed by a Council-Manager form of government. The city council and mayor make policy decisions, and the city manager implements them.

Findings

Russia

In many parts of Russia, the public does not have many opportunities to significantly influence the executive bodies of local government. Nevertheless, the authorities are interested in civil society with checks and balances system, allowing for participatory actions by local governments and municipal employees. Local authorities are becoming more and more dependent on the regional executive authorities, mostly on the Governor who demands they build a dialogue between local authorities, business and civil society.

In our interview in the research sites, the majority of respondents mentioned that the relationship between business and public authorities has been improved in the last 2–3 years. Also, respondents from both the local authorities and the public and business named several forms of public participation which can help to find solutions to local issues and better interactions between authorities, civil society and business. The most successful participation occurs through the large public organisations, such as:

- veterans’ organisations;
- public chambers;
• territorial public self-government;
• business councils (for interaction of power and business); and
• public hearings.

Each of these types of organisations are described below and the manner in which they assist public participation.

Veterans’ organisations are public organisations uniting active pensioners. Originally, such organisations were formed in the USSR by veterans of the Second World War to assist the authorities in solving various kinds of issues, including control over officials. The initial structure was the councils of veterans, which determined the traditions, the forms of work, and the scope of their interests.

Representatives of veterans’ organisations mentioned the very successful, constant and effective interaction in organising mass cultural events, joint events for young people and the elder generation, and patriotic meetings with schoolchildren (for example, ‘courage lessons’ or topical events such as ‘a persona is famous for his work’).

The Public Chamber is one of the forms of public engagement. This is a fairly young institution that has become active with the adoption on 21 July 2014 for the Federal Law No 212-FZ ‘On the Basics of Public Control in the Russian Federation’. Public chambers (councils) of municipal entities are regulated by regional laws.

The representatives of the local authorities say that citizens still lack confidence in the authorities. When addressing civil servants, citizens feel as if the interests and objectives of the population and the officials are totally different. This opinion is provoked by the intricacies of Russian legislation, as well as by the high cost of legal assistance. Public chambers help to overcome this situation. Ordinary people can come to the public chamber and feel better able to engage in discussion. The public chambers consult the citizens, assist in drawing up an appeal, and also monitor the consideration of the appeal in the local government bodies. Public chambers organise their work in the form of discussions on various kinds of local issues; they invite representatives of local bodies to the meetings, and, in turn, representatives of public chambers participate in the commissions of both the local administration and the representative body of the municipality. In our research sites, local government bodies provide public chambers with rooms for meetings and receptions of citizens.

For example, the response of the public chamber of the Zavodoukovsky urban okrug to the citizens’ requests was a questionnaire on issues related to poor quality of medical care. As a result, a number of problems were identified, an appeal was submitted to the Head of the municipality, who organised the meeting and invited the Chief physician of the Zavodoukovsky City Hospital, as well as representatives of the public chamber. The existing problems were voiced and admitted. The Chief physician asked the public chamber to draw up a roadmap for solving the identified problems. The map was compiled and sent to the Chief physician, who did not act on it. The Head of the municipality was informed and later dismissed the Chief physician. The representatives of the public chamber have acknowledged that the new administration of the Zavodoukovsky City Hospital is implementing the new roadmap.

The network of the local administration and the public chamber of the Zavodoukovsky urban okrug is very efficient; the public chamber even participates in the certification commission for municipal employees. The certification commission evaluates the professional and personal qualities of the candidates for municipal service. The procedure of evaluation includes professional and psychological testing, interviews, a questionnaire, after which the commission recommends the applicant and the city manager makes the final decision on the employment.
The third type of large public organisation is territorial self-government (TSG). Territorial self-government, in contrast to veteran organisations and public chambers, is regulated by the Federal Law ‘On General Principles of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation’. According to this law, territorial self-government means the self-organisation of citizens at the place of their residence.

The Federal law vests TSG with the right to initiate legal acts in local government bodies. The Statutes of some municipalities provide for the participation of TSGs’ representatives in commissions of a municipal representative body with the right to a consultative vote. In the case study locations such a provision is not legally fixed, nevertheless TSGs use it in practice. The respondents – representatives of the legislative branch of the considered middle towns – explained that representatives of TSGs are provided with all materials by the legislature of middle towns in advance, and they can freely participate in the discussions and meetings of the legislature. In Zavodoukovsky urban okrug, the vice mayor holds regular meetings with active TSG members. In the city of Tobolsk, some training is organised for TSG members, and local authorities sponsored a meeting of TSG members with their colleagues from Tyumen to share experiences.

The main interest of TSG is townscaping. In Zavodoukovsky urban okrug, the townscaping can be funded by budgetary sources. However, very often TSGs collect money from citizens residing on their territory, and invite the municipality to finance additional works. In this case, local governments co-finance the townscaping works in the following way: three rubles from the local budget to match the funding of each ruble from residents. Another example of cooperation is public space cleansing. In this case, TSGs provide their members’ participation, and the local government provides transport for garbage disposal, working tools and supplies. The joint activities have improved the relations between the local authorities and TSGs, and they reached the next level of efficient interaction – regulatory.

In the city of Tobolsk, two of the existing territorial self-governments are very active in townscaping issues – for example, planting flowers and organising ‘flower competitions’; representatives of the authorities point out that such events involving people of all ages make a link between generations and teach attentiveness to the problems of another generation. The administration and local businesses also join such events giving organisational, informational and financial support.

Another peculiarity of the city of Tobolsk is a large number of students living there, with branches of two universities (the Basic Regional Industrial University and Tyumen State University, a member of the leading Russian universities group). Young people living in the city of Tobolsk are very active and many of them are involved in the work of the Youth Parliament of Tobolsk. Among other things, young people conduct moot sessions of the Parliament, and they are allowed to participate in the meetings of the municipal representative body.

Entrepreneurs can be involved in all the organisations mentioned above and in addition, issues related to business are resolved in other forms of participation. The main mechanism of interaction between the local government and business are the advisory councils of entrepreneurs created under the auspices of the local administration in our study sites. In these, the Councils for the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises have been established. These councils are initiated and supported by the head of the municipality; nevertheless, the majority of their members are business people. The business councils also include representatives of federal authorities exercising control functions over entrepreneurs who are permanently located in middle towns. The work is conducted in the form of meetings. The agenda is formed according to the proposals of entrepreneurs and the local administration, as indicated by
interviewees about 50/50. The municipal administration is the main organiser of the meetings. The business community is interested in issues of changing federal legislation, business development issues, land issues, and development of communal infrastructure.

The two study locations (Tobolsk and Zavodoukovsky) resolve issues related to changes in legislation differently. In Tobolsk there is a strong branch of the all-Russian public organisation of small and medium-sized business ‘OPORA RUSSIA/ Reliance of Russia’ and legislative initiatives of the regional and federal level are transferred to the top-level management of this organisation. In Zavodoukovsky urban okrug, the same issues are resolved by giving powers to the members of the regional parliament (the regional parliament has the right of legislative initiative to the Federal Parliament). It is interesting to note that the presence of the business organisation ‘OPORA RUSSIA/ Reliance of Russia’ in one of the case sites determined the special forms of public participation that are unavailable in the other locations. One of the efficient forms both for the public authorities and business society is ‘business lunch’ sponsored by the ‘OPORA RUSSIA/ Reliance of Russia’ every two weeks.

In Zavodoukovsky urban okrug there is not such a strong organisation of entrepreneurs, and the public authorities have made efforts to organise a platform for communication with entrepreneurs. A successful form of interaction between representatives of business and government is weekly meetings with the mayor. Any business person can come to such a meeting without warning and ask a question or ask for help. However, respondents from both sides consider pre-determined questions for discussion are more effective – in this case, the authorities can get prepared, for example, to invite representatives of state authorities and municipal corporations.

All respondents admit that the relation between public authorities and business society is good, becoming even better over the last 2–3 years. One respondent described his case; he addressed the local administration several times with one and the same issue. In 2013, his request was rejected; the background of this rejection was a lengthy and bureaucratic procedure for resolving his issue. In 2016, he attended a meeting with the mayor, and the organisers helped him to write down a well-structured appeal letter. Thereafter the administration helped with the issue.

United States

The City of St Augustine is widely known for its historic architecture. In 2016, together with citizens and experts from the National Alliance Preservation Commission (NAPC), the Planning and Building Department has developed the Historic Preservation Master Plan. Citizens have participated in the survey, which identified strengths and weaknesses of the historic preservation of properties, and citizen suggestions on improvements, followed by public workshops and presentations held by the experts from the NAPC.

However, according to the city’s mayor, such large numbers of visitors leads to parking and traffic congestion. In addressing this problem, the city’s government created a Mobility Initiative, which engaged different stakeholders, government departments, local businesses and NGOs. City officials gathered information through citizen surveys about mobility issues in the city and developed strategies for addressing concerns based on feedback. Currently, the Neighbourhood Mobility programme allows residents to meet and walk with city staff and discuss specific concerns. This is a highly personal process that has given officials the opportunity to literally walk in the shoes of their citizens, and for citizens to get to know city officials more.

Among other urban planning issues, citizens show a high interest in the issues of stormwater drainage. Every year the city conducts a citizens’ survey that identifies these and other mobility and infrastructure issues. As the mayor identified, in addition to the state-mandated...
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public hearings, the city initiates a large number of meetings and programmes organised through the Planning and Building Department open for public participation. Public forums and workshops, neighbourhood councils, and online surveys using Survey Monkey are the main tools to engage citizens.

The city staff reached out to citizens mainly through social media: website, news, notes. However, people who live outside the city and the elderly population receive flyers that encourage citizen action. The mayor considers their governmental website very responsive and encouraging of electronic participation. However, city officials report they get more feedback through their personal Facebook and Twitter pages.

However, the number of people participating is relatively low, which makes public meetings not very representative. In case of the Mobility Initiative, the city government hired a consultant, who was responsible for advertising the event. Only 100 people participated in the Mobility workshop, which aimed to help in understanding planning issues. The consultant, who was not a full-time member of city staff, demonstrated a lack of ability to connect with citizens. According to the mayor, one of the barriers to such engagement is ‘poor ability to communicate the way people understand. People in the government cannot devolve to jargon. The hardest thing to do is to simplify the hardest issue’ (N. Shavers, mayor of St Augustine, personal communication, 4 April 2017).

The situation in Gainesville is not significantly different. As in St Augustine, city officials have experimented with different approaches to engaging citizens. However, in similar way, the desired outcomes for quality, quantity and responsiveness of engagement have not been met.

In 2015, the City of Gainesville created a uniquely named Department of Doing. The department, formerly known as the Planning and Development Services department, has shifted its focus from policy-orientation to service-orientation. According to the director of the department, its responsibility is to provide helpful and transparent information in a timely manner to residents, focus on accomplishments, assist residents in establishing new businesses in the city and engage citizens in decision-making processes related to urban planning and building services.

The issues that attract citizens’ attention include construction of very tall buildings, creation of adult-oriented businesses such as strip clubs, and location of gas stations. Also the city government requires that residents be invited to participate in neighbourhood workshops prior to a development application being approved. Review and advisory boards make decisions on development applications according to state requirements.

The citizens are informed about meetings through newspaper advertisements, plastic signs, and flyers. When city staff have a specific concern they communicate to people through neighbourhood email lists. When it comes to broader issues, emails are sent to all citizens. Also residents have access to the city’s Facebook and Twitter pages, and Facebook Live is often used to broadcast meetings online.

The city government created the Open Government platform, initiated by the mayor to make government ‘as open and transparent as possible’. The platform improves access to city data and encourages citizens to participate in local decision-making processes. According to the mayor, residents use city data for economic purposes, modelling their economic analysis and establishing new business enterprises. The platform is available for computer and mobile devices. Residents can also submit their concerns online via a virtual City Hall. For example, 311GNV portal allows submission of complaints on a variety of issues including graffiti and damaged or missing signs. Then the issue is channelled to the relevant department. The city also creates open discussions with the community through the EngageGNV portal. In more traditional in-person meetings, the City organises public hearings and neighbourhood councils.
Despite the successful efforts of the city to increase citizen participation, both the mayor and the director of the Department of Doing still indicate a small number of residents engaged in public decision-making processes. The City is struggling to engage a true cross-section of residents with socio-economic diversity. Similarly, the mayor stated that ‘the area is not represented. Citizen activists do not always represent populations around the city’ (N. Shavers, personal communication, 4 April 2017). The mayor suggests that the City should find better ways to reach out to the community, and for models they look to bigger jurisdictions such as Boston or San Francisco.

Although the cities differ according to their location, population size and density, racial makeup and poverty level, both cities are home to a low level of civic engagement and significant challenges in reaching out to the population. City officials of both cities indicate the lack of proper means of communication on the part of government and lack of interest on citizens’ part. As was indicated in interviews, these factors lead to a low representativeness of population.

Discussion

Our findings show that attempts to create open systems and processes do not necessarily lead to open outcomes. Although there are notable capacities developed and being implemented to increase civic engagement, the lack of tools to measure the outcomes of participation and to ensure robust and representative participation limit the good intentions of the ideas. According to Nichols-Barrer and colleagues:

> although citizen participation is often cited as a principal or ancillary objective in governance reform initiatives, outcomes related to civic participation are rarely evaluated rigorously.

\[\text{(Nichols-Barrer et al. 2015: 1)}\]

Officials from both Gainesville and St Augustine in the United States observed that low non-representative civic participation leads to a very weak input in decision-making processes. McLeod and colleagues (1999) believe that the willingness to participate depends on information and motivation. As indicated by both cities, one of the main reasons of low participation is lack of appropriate communication with citizens. Although the city governments facilitate a variety of tools for online and in-person engagement, the same groups of people come to meetings. McLeod et al. (1999) argue that both media and interpersonal communication are crucial in incentivising citizens participation. As was mentioned by the mayor of St Augustine, that the best way to reach out to residents is to go directly into the community to talk to them. This suggests that City staff should pursue more interpersonal communication when media fails to incentivise public participation.

The cities are forced to more closed systems and expertise because of a small number of citizens engaged. However, Kalu (2017: 83) suggests that ‘citizens are already participating in government through their elected representatives’. Citizens do not necessarily seek direct participation; rather, they expect depoliticisation of the bureaucratic system, representation and accountability. In this case the open system is not necessary, if elected officials show a high level of representativeness and expertise. This is the standard ‘loop model’ of democracy (Bryer and Sahin 2012).

In contrast to Kalu’s (2017) argument, the findings show that citizen participation in both Russia and United States does improve policies and programmes enacted by government. As Irvin and Stansbury (2004: 55) indicate, ‘with citizen participation, formulated policies might
be more realistically grounded in citizens’ preferences, and the improved support from the public might create a less divisive, combative populace to govern and regulate’. This suggests that citizen participation can lead to increases in citizen efficacy and competence and trust in government (Cooper, Bryer and Meek 2006).

Nicholas-Barrer and colleagues (2015) explain the decrease in civic participation, due to the fact that open governance reforms and transparency raise public awareness about governmental issues and reduce people’s satisfaction with government performance. Consequentially, perceived administrative performance decreases public trust in government (Vigoda–Gadot and Yuval 2003). According to van Ryzin (2007: 532), citizen satisfaction can indeed predict future behaviour and attitudes of interest, such as ‘staying in a jurisdiction or trusting local government’.

However, Olken’s (2010) study provides empirical evidence, that citizens, who do not directly get involved in decision-making processes, are less likely to be satisfied with outcomes. In this case, if government officials initiate the engagement of citizens in administrative decision-making processes on specific community issues in order to gain information or get assistance from the public, that can increase trust and lead to positive outcomes in government performance and citizens’ satisfaction (Yang and Holzer 2006; Stumbraitė-Vilkšienė 2012). Eventually, citizen satisfaction is more likely to improve trust in government. Furthermore, public trust strengthens the quality of governmental responsiveness (Yang and Holzer 2006).

The preceding themes suggest commonalities between Russia and the United States. There are also potentially important differences. Overlaid across the bureaucracy–democracy ‘divide’, we can suggest differences in the centre of control of participatory processes. As Cooper et al. (2006) suggest, ‘who’ develops and implements the participation is a central question of concern for understanding the efficacy of participatory processes.

At least in the cases examined herein, we might label Russian participatory processes as ‘state-centred’ and the American cases as ‘market-centred’. By that we mean the participation at the local level in Russia is heavily influenced by State actors performing State-mandated functions. Though there are state-level (Florida) laws that establish parameters for participation at the local level, there are no national level mandates. Further, the parameters established in Florida law tend to be ambiguous and thus open to diverse interpretations (Bryer 2010).

This ambiguity opens the door to private actors managing public participation processes in the United States, rather than State-level actors. These are For-Profit consulting firms that have established profitable models ‘selling’ participatory processes in packaged formats to cities. Such market-oriented mechanisms are not seen in Russia, and they represent perhaps a third element of the bureaucracy–democracy divide – that of marketability (Lee 2015; Walker 2014).

**Conclusion**

The study found that citizen participation is an important tool that enhances representativeness, transparency and responsiveness of local governments. We identified potentially successful practices in promoting civic participation in mid-sized cities. Among them are the participation of citizens in surveys, workshops for development applications, development of cities’ historical preservation plans and planning code, engagement with diverse stakeholder groups, public chambers, territorial public-self-government, and business councils. However, together with cities’ successes, the study discovered that lack of communication is one of the main challenges that prohibit a high level of participation. The literature suggests that interpersonal communication between city officials and residents can incentivise their participation. Interviewees also indicated the lack of citizen interest as a reason for low engagement. Although the study supported that idea with the literature review, further empirical study is needed to identify the
genuine reason for low participation on citizens’ part and the barriers to utilising the full capacity of state and market mechanisms to enhance local democratic practice across these two cultures. This will provide a broad perspective on the reasons for and benefits of civic engagement in government decision making processes – processes that are important across societies as different as the United States and Russia.

References


