

Improving the model of sociological support for the Municipal Public Chamber

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Совершенствование модели социологического сопровождения деятельности муниципальной Общественной палаты

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Аннотация: В статье рассматривается вопрос включения деятельности муниципальной Общественной палаты в целевую модель по привлечению социально-территориальной общности при реализации проектов городской среды. В ходе исследования были определены итоговые институциональные функции по формированию общественного мнения – от внедрения Общественной палаты в целевую модель по привлечению социально-территориальной общности, бизнеса для осуществления проектов городской среды до адаптивного понимания и использования в новых рекомендованных форматах. Сложившаяся ситуация в моногородах Уральского федерального округа давно подсказывала необходимость построения и внедрения стратегии социологического сопровождения работы общественных палат в муниципалитетах. После построения такой модели выбор по проведению эксперимента (апробации социологического сопровождения) выпал на Кrasnoturyinsk – разнопланово развивающийся город. Деятельность муниципальной Общественной палаты в 2020 году была внедрена в целевую модель по привлечению граждан для обсуждения проектов комфортной городской среды. Целью исследования является разработка и обоснование более совершенной модели социологического сопровождения деятельности Общественной палаты по формированию общественного мнения на муниципальной территории. Это позволит существенно упростить процедуры обсуждения проектов формирования комфортной городской среды, а также других вопросов жизнеобеспечения муниципалитета представителями социально-территориальной общности.

Ключевые слова: муниципальная Общественная палата, общественное мнение, взаимодействие органов власти с населением, органы местной власти, целевая модель, форматы вовлечения граждан

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IMPROVING THE MODEL OF SOCIOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR THE MUNICIPAL PUBLIC CHAMBER

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract: The article considers the issue of including the activities of the Municipal Public Chamber in the target model aimed at involving the social and territorial community in the implementation of urban environment projects. The study obtained the final institutional functions for forming the public opinion – introducing the Public Chamber into the target model for involvement of the social and territorial community, business for urban environment projects, and adaptive understanding and usage in the new recommended formats. The current situation in monotowns of the Ural Federal District suggested the need to develop and implement a strategy of sociological support for the work of public chambers in municipalities. After designing such a model, the choice to conduct the experiment (testing sociological support) fell on the city of Krasnoturyinsk because of its diversified development. In 2020, the Municipal Public Chamber's activities were incorporated into the target model for engaging citizens into discussions about projects aimed at comfortable urban environment in the city. The goal of the study is to develop and substantiate a better model of sociological support for the Public Chamber's activities to form public opinion in the municipal territory. This will significantly simplify the procedures for discussing upcoming projects, as well as other issues of supporting the municipality by representatives of the social and territorial community.

Keywords: Municipal Public Chamber, public opinion, interaction between government and citizens, local authorities, target model, citizen engagement formats

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Introduction

The author's previous articles analyzed the institutional functions of the Public Chambers [Plotnikova, 2021. P. 17–22]. They used the provisions enshrined in legal acts and concluded that the legal introduction of the Public Chamber institute does not guarantee the effectiveness of its activities, which determines the need to define the actual place of the Public Chamber within the interaction between the population and the authorities. The sociological approach allowed us to determine the nature of the Public Chamber's influence on public opinion.

A normative legal act of the Sverdlovsk region created a target model for organizing the participation of the socio-territorial community in implementing urban environment projects by the authorities¹. Based on this model, the Center for Urban Competencies of the Agency for Strategic Initiatives, together with the Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities of the Russian Federation, developed the Standard for Citizen Engagement in Urban Environment Development (hereinafter – the Standard), which structures the stages of citizen engagement to obtain the possible beneficial results for the municipality from civic participation².

We should note that the Standard is not finished and requires further refinement. It does not have a «bridge», a social institution that brings together the public, government, and business sectors. Its primary function is to involve the population in solving life support issues, including the improvement of city infrastructure.

Discussing the territorial development programs

We can inform the population about the need to participate in the sphere of housing and communal services and the implementation of various projects on urban infrastructure; we can monitor publications in the mass media concerning citizen awareness of these projects, but in the absence of opinion leaders gathered within a single social institution for forming the public opinion, especially considering a historically established distrust of public officials, the effect will be minimal.

In literature, there are no positive images of officials, which contributes to the population's distrust towards the authorities [Chevtaeva, 2009. P. 86]. Officials are perceived as «an unfriendly force towards the people», E. Karnovich wrote. People are dissatisfied with the state authorities and officials, «because of their lack of honesty and the illegitimacy of their activities» [Berends, 1913. P. 7–8]. Therefore, in the territory of monotowns with a low initiative of citizens

due to the traditional distrust of the population toward the authorities, as confirmed by the literature and sociological studies, the effect of implementing the Standard alone will not be enough [Plotnikova, Ustinov, 2017. P. 12]. The model is ineffective and needs further refinement regarding the citizens' involvement into the city life.

The researcher proposed to refine the Standard and include the Public Chamber's activities into the model for engaging the social and territorial community in the implementation of urban environment projects, making it much easier to discuss decision-making on a comfortable urban environment and finalizing the Standard. Involving residents to determine the architectural appearance of public space and the territory's development program – is just part of what it takes to engage residents to improve the quality of life and urban development.

The Public Chamber and its institutional functions

The specifics of the Public Chamber and its institutional functions are the basis for identifying the leading neo-institutional approach, whose peculiarity lies in recognizing the role of public practices in the institution's development according to the order of its formation and definition of its functions by sociological methods.

The work applies the method of sociological research – modeling, a mediated study of the process of forming the public opinion of a socio-territorial community, obtained as a result of synthesis – a comparable description of capabilities, functions of the model or its components, from implementing the Public Chamber in the target model. The obtained institutional functions allow the formation of public opinion in the municipal territory in the new formats of citizen engagement.

In 2021, an experiment was organized in the city district of Krasnoturyinsk to implement the final institutional functions of the received model and its components – new formats for involving citizens to participate in the Public Chamber in forming the public opinion. To confirm the results of the model implementation in the city of Krasnoturyinsk, on the municipal Chamber's activities, in 2021, the author used the method of sociological research – a population survey. During the survey, 1,090 citizens were interviewed (25 % were men and 75 % were women). The survey covered representatives of the municipal budget and state institutions (60 %), industrial enterprises (30 %), and other groups of the population (students, pensioners, unemployed, and entrepreneurs – 10 %).

To obtain the final institutional functions of forming the public opinion in the municipal territory in the new formats of citizen engagement, the levels of civic engagement established by the Standard were compared with the institutional functions of the Public Chamber. We described in detail the final characteristics of the more advanced model and its components for public opinion formation in the municipal territory (see **Table**).

As a result, a better model for addressing a wide range of life support issues and interactions in the municipality was obtained (see **Figure**).

The introduction of institutional functions of the Public Chamber into the Standard allowed clarifying its responsibili-

1 "On the approval of the state program of the Sverdlovsk region "Forming a modern urban environment on the territory of the Sverdlovsk region for 2018–2024": Decree of the Government of the Sverdlovsk region of October 21, 2017, No. 805-PP. <https://energy.midural.ru>

2 Standard for Citizen Engagement in Urban Environment Development / Center for Urban Competencies of the Agency for Strategic Initiatives, together with the Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities of the Russian Federation. https://100gorodov.ru/attachments/1/ad/7f04fc-75c2-4397-9fe4-5e58246ae252/Стандарт_гражданского_участия.pdf

Table. Final (comparable) description of the capabilities, functions of the model, or its components resulting from the implementation of the institutional functions of the Public Chamber to form the public opinion

No. pp	Levels of civic engagement established by the Standard	Public Chamber's institutional functions in public opinion formation	Institutional functions for the public opinion formation in the municipal territory in the new formats of citizens' engagement
1.	Informing – providing citizens with information on the initiatives, results of implementation, key project results, existing opportunities, and the rights of citizens to participate in preparation, approval, and implementation of the initiative	1.1. Informing the population at various levels by the Public Chamber. Reporting on the activities of the chambers at different levels. 1.2. Protective function. Implementing civil initiatives aimed at protecting the rights and freedoms of man and citizen, the rights and legitimate interests of public associations and other non-state non-profit organizations	1.1. Informing citizens about the authorities' initiative and the consequences of its implementation. 1.2. Protecting the interests of citizens, their rights, and freedoms from possible government arbitrariness
2.	Consulting – identifying the opinions, wishes, and attitudes of citizens or representatives of certain communities on the existing hypotheses, alternative solutions, and proposals for the project implementation	Consultative function. Forming the proposals and ideas on various social and political issues	Consulting – identifying the opinions, views, formation of recommendations to the authorities
3.	Cooperation – collegial activity in the development and implementation of an initiative/project that has been successful, and the result is satisfactory for all parties.	Regulatory. Resolving relationships as well as conflicts between different groups, the public, and the authorities	Participatory (regulatory) function. Cooperation with citizens; during the development and implementation of the initiative, regulates the relationship in conflict situations between different social groups, the public, and the authorities and ensures the relief of social tensions in the territory
4.	Cooperation – joint development and implementation of a project with citizens, in which citizens are delegated with some of the functions (responsibilities of the developer, initiator of the project)	Directive function. Public opinion can dictate or indicate to the institutions of power what they should do to solve urgent problems	4.1. Cooperation with citizens. Developing measures to adopt decisions on topical and fundamental public issues to be submitted to a referendum and amendments to legislation. 4.2. Interaction with public authorities at all levels of chambers on their activities
5.	Empowerment – cooperative work with citizens, where residents are given the final decision-making power on several essential issues in project development and implementation	5.1. Evaluation function. Assessing the citizens' satisfaction with the authorities' activities on life support issues; public evaluation of normative documents, prioritized in the provision of state and municipal services 5.2. Control function. Observing the activities of authorities and organizations* in the forms of public monitoring, inspection, expertise, and other forms, or simultaneously in several formats	Evaluation, control: cooperation with the population through observation over the activity of the authorities to publicly verify the acts issued by the authorities and the decisions taken in the form of public monitoring, public discussions, and hearings
6.		6.1. The social-constructivist function of the public opinion formation; the formation of new social structures, such as public chambers, public councils, city councils, various communities, and territorial self-government bodies resulting from civic initiatives	6.1. Creating social institutions: forming public councils from opinion leaders, city councils under the Public Chamber, potential communities, and territorial self-government bodies for interaction and additional elections to the Public Chamber

* Federal Law of July 21, 2014, No. 212-FZ «On fundamentals of public control in the Russian Federation». URL: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_165809/

ties aimed at forming the public opinion of the social and territorial community (in the form of new types of public involvement: informing, protecting interests, consulting, participation in projects, participation in life support issues, creation of social institutions). This will increase the level of citizens' trust in the authorities, the Municipal Public Chamber, anti-corruption actions, resolve conflict situations between different social groups of the territorial community, and develop measures for decision-making on topical and fundamental public issues.

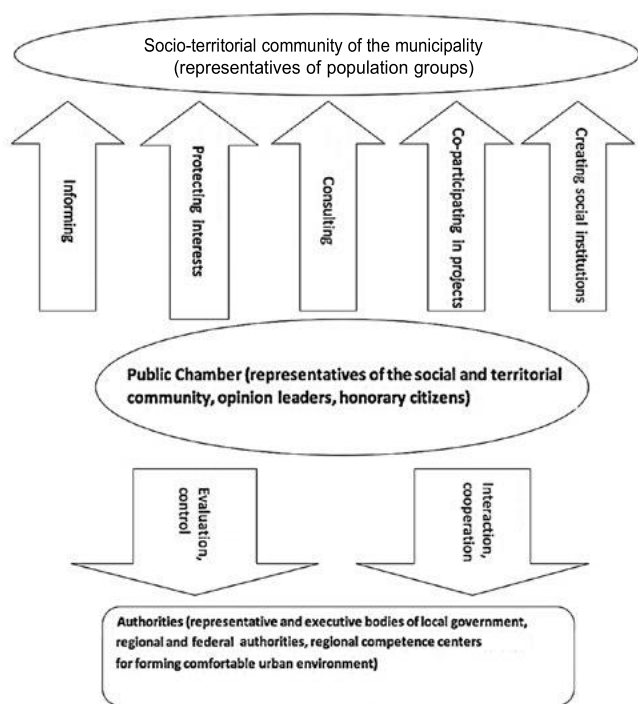
At the same time, it is critical to exclude problematic areas of interaction between the authorities and the citizens, to avoid replacing real meanings with a formal reproduction of procedures for approving issues and projects [Chevtaeva, 2020. P. 531]. We should eliminate unnecessary formality, provide information in an accessible form to the public on

solutions for life support issues, the implementation of social projects, identify public opinion moderators, and learn to cooperate with them and their objections.

The sociological aspect of this problem is related to the study of potential of the socio-territorial community, which is activity determined by the presence of feedback from the population; in this regard, our work applies a territorial approach [Barazgova, Vandyshev, Likhacheva, 2012. P. 5]. In a previous study, the author reviewed and analyzed the mechanisms and factors of variability and constancy in the socio-economic development of monotowns in the Ural Federal District [Plotnikova, 2021. No. 4. P. 19], which are considered the “red zone” cities that deserve the most attention [Bezverbny, Smirnov, Fomin, 2020. P. 34], with the city of Krasnoturyinsk being among them.

социум

Figure. Model of sociological monitoring over the activities of the Municipal Public Chamber (based on the applying the model for involving citizens in solving life support issues)



The situation in the city showed the need to build a new strategy of sociological support for the Public Chambers in the municipalities and the search for public practices. After creating the final model of such support, the choice to experiment fell on the city of Krasnoturyinsk because of its diversified development. In 2020, in the activities of the Public Chamber, a target model was implemented aimed at engaging citizens to discuss projects for a comfortable urban environment (a design project to enhance the Park of Culture and Recreation on Z. Kosmodemyanskaya St. in Krasnoturyinsk, posted on a unified federal online platform).

From April 26 to May 30, 2021, on a unified federal platform, citizens of the urban district of Krasnoturyinsk voted for the best design project of the Park of Culture and Recreation, located on Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya Street (M. Shakh-ta), under the curatorship of the Municipal Public Chamber. The project got the necessary votes for its implementation, which confirmed the effectiveness of the resulting model of sociological support for the formation and activities of the Municipal Public Chamber.

The potential of socio-territorial community and new formats for citizen engagement

During the experiment, other formats of citizen involvement were also introduced.

Informing. The solution to the inefficient work of the Public Chamber was the informatization of its institutional functions. The Chamber began to post information on the official website of the Administration of the city of Krasnoturyinsk, in the mass media, and on social networks (VKontakte). Announcements, events, meeting protocols, information about

the professional activities of Chamber members, appeals to join the Public Chamber, and other reports are posted on the social network. Given the modern trends, by using social networks as tools for obtaining information, the Public Chamber began to involve young people in solving the life support issues of the municipality.

Consulting. While studying family policy measures aimed at increasing the birth rate and improving the well-being of families with children, members of the Chamber formed proposals to develop a support system for families with children. The Chamber also conducted surveys on cargo transportation and formulated and sent proposals to local governments.

Co-participation in projects, and life support issues. In 2020, the Public Chamber held ten meetings concerning the organization of an accessible environment for the disabled (the purchase of specialized transport for their transportation, the organization of passenger transportation, the quality of public and municipal services, and catering in educational institutions). Also, the Chamber is actively considering appeals to restrict the passage of vehicles, garbage collection from the territory of the Metallurg district, the expansion of parking spaces for visitors to the city clinic and city hospital No. 1, etc.

Creation of social institutions. Implementing the social constructivist function to form public opinion was an additional institutional function of the Public Chamber. That allows for the formation of city and community councils under the Public Chamber, whose heads shall be its members.

In the course of sociological support of the activities of the Public Chamber by the Decision of the Duma of the urban district of Krasnoturyinsk No. 278 on June 18, 2020, some significant amendments were introduced to the charter. According to them, the Public Chamber has the right to form commissions and working groups, as well as the City Council under the Public Chamber, which will include residents of the urban district of Krasnoturyinsk who applied but did not pass into the Public Chamber during the selection procedures.

After sociological research in 2018, a survey of officials, and interviewing experts, the author proposed a new order of forming the Public Chamber: three seats from the Head, three from the Duma, three from the previous composition; six representatives of public and non-profit organizations are included in the composition based on the results of selection procedures. The project was publicly discussed and submitted to the Duma and approved by a decision of the Duma of the urban district of Krasnoturyinsk as a municipal legal act.

Interaction, cooperation. The Chamber discussed the plan to combat corruption in the city district of Krasnoturyinsk. The results of the discussion were sent in the form of a protocol to the City Administration to address the remarks. Municipal control projects are considered.

Evaluation and control are the prime objective of the Public Chamber and require certain competencies. That is why officials from the City Administration, jointly with members of the Chamber, were trained to implement public control in November 2020. At the end of 2020, during its regular meeting, the Chamber adopted the Regulations on Public Control and formed a work plan for 2021.

Parallel sociological research took place in the course of the experiment. Together with representatives of local authorities, the author sent questionnaires to enterprises, organizations of the city, preschool and educational institutions, and the fund to support entrepreneurs to fill out 2,000 questionnaires. In 2018, 1,571 people (1,052 women and 519 men) were questioned; in 2019 – 1,303 (958 women and 345 men); in 2021 – 1,090 people (827 women and 263 men) all of different ages and education levels. Representatives of different population groups took part in the survey.

To the question: “Do you know about the existence of the Public Chamber in Krasnoturyinsk City District, including the names of its head and some of its members?” – in 2021, 37.1 % of respondents answered “I know” (33 % in 2018), an increase of 4 %; in 2021, 41.7 % of respondents answered “I do not know” (45 % in 2018), a decrease of 3 %.

To the question: “In your opinion, for what purpose was the Public Chamber created?” the most significant number of responses (33 % in 2021) respondents indicated mediation between the public and the government, promotion of civic initiatives (20 % in 2018), an increase of 13 % compared to 2018; “Created to protect interests” was answered by 25.6 % of the total number of respondents in 2021 (16 % in 2018), an increase of 9.6 % compared to 2018.

To the question: “Do you know about the city projects (for example, removal of solid waste, city, and settlement improvement projects) in discussions in which the Public Chamber takes part?” in 2021, 54.8 % of respondents (majority of respondents) answered affirmatively.

Thus, the introduction of the Public Chamber into the

target model of engaging citizens in discussing projects for a comfortable urban environment development can be considered efficient. The Public Chamber performs its function, winning the interests of the residents of an average city while forming public opinion. Data from sociological surveys conducted in 2018 and 2021 confirmed this fact, demonstrating a positive trend. The validity and necessity of introducing the Public Chamber into the target model for engaging citizens in discussing projects for developing a comfortable urban environment are confirmed.

Conclusion

Thus, a model for solving the issues of a comfortable urban environment and other tasks of life support and interaction was formed. During the implementation of the institutional functions of the Public Chamber into the Standard, the clarified institutional functions of the Public Chamber aimed at forming the public opinion in the new formats of citizen engagement, which contribute to increasing the confidence of citizens in representative authorities, intolerance for corrupt behavior, protection of citizens' interests, settlement of conflict situations between different social groups of the territorial community, development of measures for decision-making on topical and fundamental public issues. When performing clarified institutional functions in the form of engagement formats, additional criteria of municipal chamber efficiency appear, such as the digitalization of institutional functions and the level of competence of its members, which may be of interest for further research.

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