Municipal Elections: Using the Resource of Local Identity

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ABSTRACT

The study is devoted to the problems of analyzing the ideas developed in modern science on the role of local identity in the elections of local governments. The authors consider the specific features of electoral behavior in municipalities, as well as they highlight the features of the electoral identity of locals under the influence of various socio-political factors. Using a number of municipal divisions as an example, it is shown how identity factors influence municipal elections. The process of using the resources of social networks by local electoral actors is considered. The authors conclude about the prospects of studying local identity and determine the specifics of the election campaign in small towns and rural settlements.

Keywords: local identity, local government, electoral behavior, municipal elections, formation of local communities, social networks

I. INTRODUCTION

The process of identity formation and transformation occurs simultaneously at many levels. They include spatial and territorial levels which are divided into national, regional and local ones [1]. Closer attention to the processes of identification with a "Little Motherland" in the socio-political dimension is a consequence of glocalization [2]. The transfer of symbols and elements of identity (including political ones) into practice becomes the fundamental process for organizing effective interaction with authorities at the local level. We were interested in the possibility of using the resource of local identity in the electoral process, namely, how the local identity specific correlates with the system of municipal elections.

One of the most relevant institutes for democracy for modern society is elections which serve as an indispensable attribute of modern society and the state because the citizens' hopes for a qualitative change in living conditions and the development of the territory of residence depend on the elections. Municipal elections are the most important institute for direct democracy at the local level. This characteristic follows from the provisions of the Constitution of the Russian Federation that determine the significance of elections, in

particular, at the municipal level.

Specific features of municipal divisions as socio-territorial communities are that their most important task is to ensure their viability. Achieving this goal is carried out through the implementation of the functions of municipal and local self-governments through which power relations are realized at the level of municipal divisions. In accordance with the legislation, local self-government is carried out through participation in local referenda, municipal elections, as well as other forms of expression of will that include elected and other bodies of local self-government.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Identity politics performs an important function of political socialization. Political socialization is a process through which an individual assimilates the attitudes, stereotypes and values transmitted by the elites. Thus, the individual acquires an idea of the reference group and his or her position in it [3]. British researchers P. John and E. Cole distinguish the idea of "exceptionalism" among the conditions for the favorable formation of urban political regimes. It is aimed at preserving and enhancing the uniqueness and originality of a city or a town [4].

E.V. Morozova, E.V. Ulko note the need for local authorities to understand the mechanism of local identity formation for the possibility of using it as a resource for the development of the local government system [5]. The study of P.M. Kozyreva indicates an

increase in the share of respondents identifying themselves with the inhabitants of their city, town or village. According to the author, this trend is explained by the fact that "social interaction is closer, and bonds between individuals are stronger in smaller communities [6]".

The result of actualization of local identity can be the formation of local communities that are organized outside the locality they represent. Such communities can be informal or formalized structures of civil society [7]. The article by V.Ya. Gelman states a thesis that is applied to local identity. On the one hand, it can be considered as a tool for working with external actors (the Federal Center, economic actors, foreign and international organizations). On the other hand, "it is addressed within the region (both in relation to intraregional political and economic actors and to voters). It is aimed at maximizing power and either legitimize the status quo (for ruling groups), or, on the contrary, undermine its legitimacy (for counter-elites)" [8].

III. RESOURCES OF LOCAL IDENTITY IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

The main methodological framework of this work is an identifier approach that gradually gain important positions in the methodological arsenal of political science. It will allow us to interpret socio-political and socio-economic changes in terms of identity transformation and identification processes.

The network approach was no less significant for this study. Its application is due to network principles that are increasingly expressed in the organization of various political processes of modern states. In the framework of this approach, the interaction between the subjects of the electoral process in rural areas is considered. According to some researchers, the network approach has the advantage of identifying and analyzing the motives of all political actors involved in the decision-making process.

As part of the analysis of social networks, D.V. Vinnik interprets social interactions in terms of the network theory that studies the connections between individual agents. Based on interdisciplinary research, he comes to the conclusion that social networks acting from individual (personal) to national levels have a significant impact on the organization of people's lives, communities, as well as on the success of these agents.

The researchers distinguish the following factors affecting the municipal electoral process in Russia among the socio-demographic ones: age and sex characteristics, level of education, settlement belonging of the voters and peculiarities of the territories, as well as zonal and geographical conditions of their living. Sedentary lifestyle, stability of family relations, a sense

of one's historical and national community leading to patriotism, respect for the law and civic responsibility should be added here. A place of residence as a motivation factor has a significant impact on the nature and intensity of electoral behavior. Urban citizens tend to be more involved in the participation process than rural ones. The style of activity of various formal organizations greatly influences the citizens' lifestyle. Citizens are torn from traditional family and neighboring environment. Participation of urban citizens has less control on the part of the individual's environment, which creates a wide range of political orientations and preferences in the elections.

The actualization process of local identity through political action is described by K.A. Sulimov. Thus, a civil coalition called "For direct Perm elections" was created in Perm at the end of 2009. Its aim was to prevent the cancellation of direct mayoral elections by the citizens [9].

Considering political activity in municipal divisions as a factor of local identity, T.N. Gordeeva concludes that there is a correlation dependence between the indicator of desire for children and grandchildren to live in a Little Motherland (Pearson coefficient is equal to 0.036) and between the assessment of the activities of local authorities. There is also a correlation dependence between the assessment of the activities of local authorities and the assessment of the prospects for the development of the settlement (Pearson coefficient is 0.029). The author also notes that citizens tend to shift all responsibilities to the authorities (in particular, municipal ones) instead of solving problems on the basis of self-organization, introducing innovative social practices, ensuring personal participation in improving life in specific territories [10].

Case of Chusovoy (a town in Perm Krai). Let us consider how political and managerial practices depend on economic actors that are carriers of local identity. In many industrial cities, owners or management of enterprises are actively involved in the formation and implementation of urban policies, which meets the expectations of most citizens. Representatives of enterprises are motivated by considerations of personal and corporate gain, and their political activity is, above all, not a response to the expectations of the population, but a way to realize their own practical goals.

The main way for plants to be included in municipal policy and management is to finance the election campaigns of loyal local politicians, as well as to provide them with organizational and informational support. Elected company representatives can also appoint candidates loyal to the plant for key municipal positions like first deputy chief, chairman of the accounts chamber, etc. A common tactic is to appoint employees or former employees of the enterprise to the position of a mayor and to municipal deputies. As a

rule, plant representatives receive voter support in municipal elections. It is demonstrated by the composition of local governments in industrial cities. The example of this is a city called Berezniki which is "a capital of chemistry" in Perm Krai. 15 out of 25 deputies in the Berezniki City Council represent chemical enterprises ("Azot", "Uralchem", "Avisma", "Uralkali", and "Bereznikovsky soda plant").

The city-factory "link" is used in the election campaign conducted by the leadership of city-forming enterprises primarily in situations where citizens are worried about the prospects of closing the plant, reducing production volumes or job losses. A single-industry town Chusovoy in Perm Krai is an illustrative example. Its population is currently worried about the economic difficulties at the plant, which will entail socio-economic problems for the entire town. Chusovoy is included in the list of single-industry towns with the most difficult socio-economic situation. This list was compiled by the Government of the Russian Federation. In 2013, when the election of the mayor of Chusovoy and the election of the City Council deputies took place, the plant management conducted a campaign of candidates supported by him relying on the thesis on the reconstruction of the town-forming enterprise and the construction of a new pipe-smelting complex that would provide jobs for citizens. "A New Plant - A Rich Town" was a slogan of this election campaign. As a result of it, a candidate loyal to the plant was elected as a mayor, and 14 out of 20 pro-factory candidates received deputy mandates [11].

Thus, the economic specific of municipal divisions of cities and towns has a significant impact on various aspects of their development: from the formed local identity and symbolic attributes to emerging political and managerial practices.

Case of Golubitskaya Stanitsa (a village inside a Cossack host). The prospects for studying the local identity of rural communities, its structure and types and identity policies are important from a political and managerial point of view. First of all, without understanding the identity essence, it is impossible to correctly carry out strategic planning for the development of rural territories and see the resources of this development. Many discoveries can be made at the intersection of the problematic fields of political psychology, political culture, the study of migration processes, as well as rural identity. Finally, changes can be made to the formation of the agenda and understanding of their own social support for socio-political movements and parties of both the mainstream and the agricultural and "green" spectra [12].

The factors of rural identity also influence the formation of local governments. The results of a focused interview in Golubitsky rural settlement of the municipal division of Temryuksky district in Krasnodar

Krai found that the villagers position their area as a resort territory and a tourist attraction despite the presence of infrastructure problems regarding the deterioration of water supply and municipal sewage systems.

Describing the local identity of this rural settlement from the standpoint of civic values, it is revealed that respondents have low subjectivity, which is expressed in unpreparedness and inability of the population to take an active part in the life and development of the settlement: "It is not really so, we are just not the same age as youngsters, that is why it is necessary to attract them." It is also expressed in positive subjectivity which, on the contrary, shows itself in a willingness to provide the settlement with their support: "Of course, we just wish there would be more sufficient support from the authorities."

The analysis showed that local identity is most expressed in the cultural and educational social network "school — place of culture — museum". It is the very place where the main categories characterizing this village are kept and reproduced. The resources of this social network are quite successfully used by electoral actors for the purposes of their election campaigns. Speaking of important people in the village, residents mention the director of the "Golubitskaya" agro-industrial company, PJSC: "he "repaired" electrical equipment at school No. 21. Besides, on New Year's Eve he bought stationary and New Year's presents for children from the Sunday school of Golubitskaya village." In this regard, the attention paid to the problems in the village on the part of the head of one of the central enterprises made him popular among the people and gave the chair of the deputy in the Council of Temryuksky Municipal District. Identification with the "important people" marker has a much more pronounced effect and affects the electoral process more in rural settlements than in larger territories (district, region). In addition, the audience of social networks is used for campaigning.

IV. CONCLUSION

The presence of pronounced local identity is one of the conditions for the consolidation of the efforts of political actors. The institute of elections for inhabitants of a certain territory is a driver of the reproduction of their identification unity as participants in a single socio-political and symbolic ritual. Local symbols and meanings reflecting the specifics and uniqueness of the locality form the idea of a "Little Motherland", local patriotism which, in terms of identity politics, can be a factor in political mobilization including the electoral process.

Thus, based on the identification of local identities, we determined the specifics of the election campaign in small towns and rural settlements. It consists in the

predominance of traditions, the identification of voters with their place of residence and paternalistic moods that turn out to be focused on two types of objects: heads of power structures of a particular territory or on the leadership of corporations, city-forming enterprises economically efficient in a given area of production.

In rural areas, personal meetings of candidates with voters and personal work of election campaign team with target groups give the greatest effect. A huge role is played by the recognition of a candidate as an "iconic" figure of the locality. Campaigning in rural areas involves a combination of agitation and developing the process of communication with the administrative resource. At the same time, the optimal campaign strategy is based not so much on the agitation and propaganda as on specific matters (meetings, assistance / conclusion of contracts for the purchase of products, targeted programs for villages).

Modern researchers emphasize gender and age characteristics, level of education, settlement belonging of the voters, as well as zonal and geographical conditions of living. These characteristics can be combined into a group of socio-demographic indicators. Sedentary lifestyle, stability of family relations, a sense of one's historical and national community leading to patriotism, respect for the law and civic responsibility should be added here. A place of residence as a motivation factor has a significant impact on the nature and intensity of electoral behavior. Urban citizens tend to be more involved in the participation process than rural ones. The style of activity of various formal organizations greatly influences the citizens' lifestyle. Citizens are torn from traditional family and neighboring environment. Participation of urban citizens has less control on the part of the individual's environment, which creates a wide range of political orientations and preferences in the elections.

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