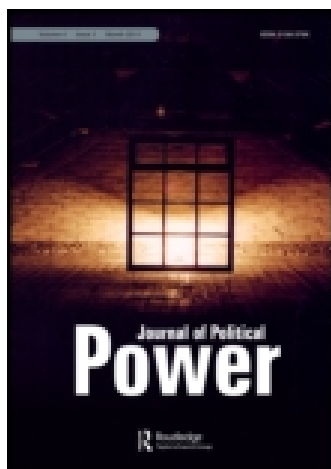


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Who governs? Power in the local Russian community

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This article presents the outcomes of a research project conducted in two small towns in the Perm region. The study of power in the two communities focused on two major themes: (1) the composition of influential actors and institutions and the power hierarchy; (2) relationships between them and coalition building. The discovered configuration of actors and relationships between them demonstrate, on the one hand, quite a lot in common with European and North American communities, on the other hand, a number of features that reflect the systemic and institutional properties of Russian politics and society. The social base of the local power structure is very narrow. The local elite composed of the heads of the executive, business leaders, and the most influential representatives of urban and district legislatures actually holds all the power in the local community, having no serious opponents or a real alternative in the foreseeable future. This power structure is supported by informal institutions and personal relationships within the elite and between the elite and those who are forced to accept the existing system of relations; it allows them to successfully protect their personal and/or corporate interests. A wide range of opportunities to use official position and/or relationships with public officials for personal enrichment stimulates the formation of various kinds of coalitions for the furtherment of the personal interests of its members.

Keywords: power; local politics; urban communities; local elites; urban regimes; Russian politics

Introduction

Who governs in local Russian communities? In contrast to Europe and especially America where the study of power and regimes in local communities has become one of the most advanced branches in social sciences (Harding 2009), Russian cities and towns are still waiting for political scientists and sociologists. During the past two decades,¹ Russian scholars were actively involved in the study of power on the regional level (Lapina 1998, Lapina and Chirikova 1999, Gel'man *et al.* 2000, Chirikova 2010, Oleinik 2010, Gel'man and Ryzhenkov 2011) and very few research projects directly studied power in urban communities (Gel'man *et al.* 2002, Seltser 2006, Tev 2006, Podvintsev 2007, Nazukina and Sulimov 2008, Panov 2008, Ryabova 2008, Ryabova and Vitkovskaya 2011). Therefore, many important themes and issues including the above-mentioned have not been properly discussed by scholars. Our study has been designed to fill this gap.

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As the debate continues regarding the applicability of foreign research models for the study of Russian politics, the second aim of the study is *to apply the urban regime concept in the specific Russian context*. The long tradition of community power studies started by Hunter (1953) and Dahl (1961) has continued with the emergence and growing popularity of the urban regime theory in American and European political science and sociology. Now the urban regime analysis is one of the most prevalent approaches to the study of urban politics (Mossberger 2009, p. 40) and a favored way of explaining the power structure of urban communities (Davies and Imbroscio 2009, Dowding 2011).

Initially, the concept of the urban regime was used in the 1960s (Agger *et al.* 1964). However, the origin of the theory is usually associated with the Clarence Stone's 'Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946–1988' (Stone 1989) where the basic tenets of the theory were formulated and used to study the process of governance in Atlanta.² The theory was developed in an effort to understand the growth of public–private partnerships in 1980–1990s. Regime theorists focus attention on how governing coalitions are constructed and how they achieve political goals over the long term.

The idea of the coalitional nature of power in urban communities reflects the limited capacities of local politicians and public officials to control material and other important resources usually concentrated in the hands of nongovernmental actors. The need for cooperation is strengthened by the growing complexity of the political process: local public institutions can no longer just play the role of a control body or arbiter regulating interest groups activities. *How is long-term governance achieved in complex systems?* This is the key question in the urban regime analysis.

Thus, the urban regime is

a set of arrangements or relationships (informal as well as formal) by which a community is governed ... a set of actors who come together to make governing decisions ... Individual actors may have their private agendas, but their coming together involves opportunities and responsibilities to act that are greater than what any individual actor may have had in mind. (Stone 2006, p. 27)

Urban regimes *are not just electoral coalitions* but presuppose a wide spectrum of interrelationships without clear subordination between actors. Informal relationships play a substantial role in regime formation contributing to the stability and effectiveness of cooperation. *Cooperation is not taken as given* but has to be achieved by the joint efforts of actors. Therefore, regimes cannot be assumed to exist in all cities. In contrast to traditional pluralists who emphasize a fluid nature of politics and coalitions, Stone and his followers view politics as less open and more structured (Stone 2005, p. 310–313); regimes are *relatively stable*, they do not strictly depend on the issue and can span a number of administrations. Regimes are necessarily *cross-sectoral; complementary resources* along with *congruent goals* help to shape and strengthen the nature of arrangements (Stone 1989, p. 3–9, Dowding 2001, p. 7–19, Mossberger and Stoker 2001, p. 813–814, Stone 2001, p. 20–23, Holman 2007, p. 440, Mossberger 2009, p. 40–54).

The composition of regimes varies by community but is 'constrained by the accommodation of two basic institutional principles of the American political economy: (1) popular control of the formal machinery of government and (2) private ownership of business enterprise ... Popular control is modified and compromised

in various ways, but nevertheless remains as the basic principle of government. Private ownership is less universal, as governments do own and operate various auxiliary enterprises from mass transit to convention centers. Even so, government conduct is constrained by the need to promote investment activity in an economic arena dominated by private ownership' (Stone 1989, p. 6–7). Therefore, *the most influential actors in (American) urban politics and major members of regime are (usually) public officials and business groups; in most cases, politicians are not the dominant actors but have to use their limited controls and incentives to forge relationships with business interests: 'while elected politicians preside, they may not rule: only coalitions which can amass and control resources can do that'* (Hill 2000, p. 60).

Accordingly, *development regimes* that are concerned with changing land use to promote growth, thereby providing the basic interests of local business which are the most common in American cities. *Maintenance regimes*, which focus on routine service delivery and low taxes, have less need for resource mobilization but generate few benefits for the participants; they are more likely to appear in small communities, rather than large cities. *Middle-class progressive regimes*, whose aims include environmental protection, historic preservation, affordable housing, and linkage funds, may clash with development-oriented business elites and generate fewer selective incentives. In contrast to the previous types of regime, progressive agendas appear to be short-lived or limited in scope since American cities are largely dependent upon own-source revenues and are therefore more sensitive to capital mobility. *Lower class opportunity expansion regimes* are most problematic and rather hypothetical (Stone 1993, p. 1–28, Mossberger 2009, p. 44–45).

The application of the regime model for the study of power outside of US usually leads to substantial modifications of Stone's interpretation of an urban regime. Defined with a minimum defining criterion, the concept of urban regime has become more flexible. In contrast to Stone, European scholars are not usually inclined to reduce urban regimes to (necessarily) stable and cross-sectoral coalitions; but rather focusing upon the more institutionalized forms of collaboration, they assume that regimes are in every local community and can be made up of actors from a single institutional sector (Harding 1999, p. 682–684, Dowding 2001, p. 8, Mossberger and Stoker 2001, p. 814–817). The classifications of urban regimes also changed and gave rise to references to 'elitist,' 'radical,' 'appearing,' 'bureaucratic,' and other types of regimes where cross-sectoral cooperation was practically absent. This is quite reasonable and allows us to take into account the specific nature of European local politics.

There were also attempts to apply the original version of urban regime theory (e.g. Strom 1996, Harding 2000, Holman 2007). These studies show that urban regimes (in Stone's interpretation) are not widespread in European cities. Research on Western European cities describes the different institutional settings as a major difference between Europe and the US. *In contrast to American cities, actors from the public sector dominate in urban decision-making though globalization and the transition from government to governance increases the power potential of private sector actors; the urban political agenda is less focused on growth and more on welfare, distributive and ecological issues.*

Successful application of (American) urban regime model for the study of power in Western Europe (Kantor *et al.* 1997, Dowding *et al.* 1999, Harding 2000, John and Cole 2001, Holman 2007) and post-socialist countries (Kulcsar and

Domokos 2005, Sagan 2008, Koch 2009a, 2009b) allows to expect that this is possible and can put the study of local politics in Russia in comparative perspective. Focusing on the formal and informal resources of actors from public and private sectors, the modes of collaboration between them, and the dynamics of coalition-building regime analysis allow us to explain local power as a complex interdependent network of agents which is simultaneously relatively stable and fluid. It helps to avoid the reduction of local politics to local government and the overestimation of formal power (governmental) structures typical of Russian scholars. It can also contribute to a better understanding of the role of external players in local political processes and identifying institutional rules and customized practices governing Russian communities. Since the Russian social, political, and cultural contexts are different from both the American and Western European contexts, we expect to discover new patterns of power and regime coalitions in Russian local communities.

‘Power in the local Russian community’ is the output of a comparative research project conducted by the authors of this article in two small towns in the Perm region – Kungur and Chusovoy. We selected these communities for several interrelated reasons. First, they are typical Russian towns of comparable size (68,100 and 58,500 citizens, respectively); both are subsidized and depend heavily on regional and federal transfers. Second, they represent two different (although typical) types of towns. One of them has a diversified economy, while the other is a mono-industrial company town with a city-forming enterprise playing the dominant role in local politics. The article is based on 34 in-depth face-to-face interviews with local politicians, public officials, businessmen, local and regional experts. Interviews were conducted in July and August, 2011.

Although the research project covered various themes and issues in the study of power in local communities, we tried not to dilute the analysis with secondary issues and concentrated on two major themes which constitute the core of power studies: (1) influential actors and institutions in a small town and the power hierarchy; (2) relationships between them and coalition building. This focus allows us to compare patterns of power in Russia with those discovered by American and European scholars.

1. Influential actors in a small town and power hierarchy

Who are the most influential actors in a local community? The mayor and his team? Heads of town and/or district (‘rayon’) legislatures? Members of external (federal and/or regional) governmental bodies? Owners and/or top managers of large industrial enterprises? In what spheres of community life do they dominate? Do they have a virtual monopoly in decision-making, or is power in local communities dispersed between the main actors? What are the relationships between them? These questions, in turn, touch on many other relevant themes and issues concerning the power potential of different policy sectors, institutions, and particular positions in the social, economic, and political structures of local community.

In fact, it was not difficult for us to define a *set of influential actors* in the two communities.³ The set is *very small even considering the size of the chosen communities*. This is not just a consequence of strong authoritarian tendencies in Russian politics in general: in many small communities, there are fewer people with sufficient human (leadership) potential and topics able to politicize the population.

The limited possibilities of (underdeveloped) civil society restrict the set of real players in urban politics to public officials and businessmen.⁴

The hierarchy of influential people in the two towns is different. Kungur: (1) mayor, (2) business leaders (owners and top managers), (3) representatives of the law enforcement agencies ('siloviki'), (4) deputies of the Duma (town's legislature), (5) district (rayon) administration, (6) small business, (7) local branch of the 'United Russia'; Chusovoy: (1) administration of the city-forming enterprise,⁵ (2–3) mayor/district (rayon) administration,⁶ (4) small business, (5) local branch of the 'United Russia'.⁷

In general terms, the study confirmed a widely accepted view that *leadership position in a local executive body usually gives its occupant, the most significant set of instruments to influence key spheres of local politics* (Ryabova and Vitkovskaya 2011, p. 118–119). Experts agree that the mayor of Kungur is undoubtedly the most powerful person in the community. In Chusovoy, the mayor is less influential (on the whole) than the administration of the metallurgical plant but in some areas of local politics (e.g. organization of financial support from the regional and federal sources) he is the dominant actor. The substantial power potential of mayors in Russian local communities is based not only on their formal (legal) position and official powers but largely depends on their possibilities to use other resources of influence. Experts point to two of the most important 'additional' resources of the mayor in Kungur. First, *close ties with influential persons at regional and federal levels* that help to get financial support from above and strengthen the mayor's position within the local power network by empowering him as the main representative of the local elite. Second, the 'administrative resource,' the ability to use formally independent governmental agencies (fire inspection, sanitary service, energy sector, etc.) as instruments of force and coercion towards actual and/or potential opponents.

The leadership position of mayors is not automatic: high personal authority, ability to build relationships with other actors, and (relatively) successful professional activities provide support to the mayors by both local elites and population of the towns. The mayor of Chusovoy calls himself 'a tough guy,' while experts emphasize his 'ability to negotiate and reach an agreement with anybody.' In Kungur, the mayor 'is trying to maintain his authority and power by real work. He does not speak much but possesses professional qualities,' says one of the experts.

How typical is the dominant position of the mayors in the two communities? *Why mayors, not heads of district (rayon) administration?* The study does not allow us to conclude that the power potential of city hall (city administration, municipality) exceeds the power potential of the district administration. At the moment of investigation in Kungur, the head of the district administration had been recently appointed and could not effectively use the resources and advantages of his position. In Chusovoy, the head of the district administration had poor leadership skills, lost control over his team, and became dependent on his deputies. In our view, *the power potential of the two main administrative positions is comparable* and the differences between the actual influence of their incumbents on local politics in the two towns depend *not on the structural properties of the positions*⁸ but *the personal characteristics of particular actors*.

Our list of the most influential actors did not include representatives of the regional and federal levels. The study showed that the latter, although having substantial *capacity* to influence the situation in the communities *usually do not*

intervene. Therefore, they should be considered more as a structural background, force field, and in some cases as a power resource used by local actors to achieve their goals. It is hardly possible to extrapolate this conclusion to other small towns. We assume that *this situation is typical for the small towns dependent on external resources* which are not the subject of interest from the part of regional and federal authorities. 'We do not have enough money to be interesting to the regional Governor,' one of the respondents explained the situation.

Nevertheless, the presence of the governor is felt in both towns, especially in Kungur. The town is actively involved in several regional economic and cultural programs (Centre for development of design, the youth theater project, etc.), so the governor and his team visit Kungur more often than other towns in the region. Since the cost of direct intervention is obvious, it usually takes place only in cases when 'the rule of anticipated reactions'⁹ does not work. For example, the head of the administration of the Perm region quickly stopped a sharp conflict in Chusovoy between the mayor and the head of the district administration over the local (municipal) power structure because it became an obstacle to receiving transfers from the federal government for the modernization of the Chusovoy metallurgical plant.

As expected, local representative institutions – deputy corps, party, and civic organizations – have a significantly lower potential impact on urban politics. This is not just a consequence of strong authoritarian tendencies in Russian politics in general, as mentioned above, but also a result of weak social orientation of their representatives. The study showed that local legislatures in both towns were often used for personal gain and did not properly fulfill their basic functions. Most of the deputies confirm, our local experts are nothing but 'ballast' and do not really contribute to the collective power potential of the legislatures which is therefore 'less than expected' although 'they pass laws.'¹⁰ Finally, the weakness of the local representative bodies is due to low personal authority of their members including senior staff.

Party organizations in both towns are even less influential than legislatures. Even United Russia has no real opportunities to effectively use its formal powers ('party control') and largely depends on the local administrative elite. Local party officials have approximately the same orientations as the deputies ('they are all "businessmen"', and 'work for themselves'; 'United Russia does nothing but take a cut'). This substantially limits the political potential of the 'party of power,' which, like the power potential of the local legislatures, has not been properly mobilized. All the informants agree that political authority and support for the party is decreasing. The only real resource of the party is its close relationship with the influential persons in local executive bodies and, consequently, the possibility of using the administrative resource.

Local business is ranked higher in the power hierarchy of both communities than party organizations, but its power potential is relatively small and cannot be compared with the political role of the business sector revealed in Lynds' Middletown, Hunter's Atlanta, and other local communities studied by American scholars where businessmen were generally more influential than local officials. However, the predominance of the public sector in the structure of power in urban communities is not a purely Russian feature, as evidenced by empirical studies of urban regimes in European communities. Domination by public sector actors in urban decision-making is usually explained by references to a more centralized system of government, a high level of fiscal support from central government, more

comprehensive planning controls, more public ownership of municipal land, and other factors which lessen the need for business involvement in local politics (Harding 1999, p. 673–698; Mossberger 2009, p. 46–47).

Throughout Russia the dominant position of local politicians and public officials is based not only on a similar structural context,¹¹ but is also predetermined by a wide spectrum of opportunities and resources available to local administrative elites. An inefficient legal system supports office-holder opportunism, inspires frequent changes in the formal and informal rules of the game, and limits the abilities of society to control the process of government (Ledyaev 2008). This allows them to use not only formal powers but gain access to some ‘extra’ resources which are usually prohibited and/or blocked in countries with a stable rule of law. ‘The administrative resource’ often plays a decisive role in local power hierarchy in favor of those who can use it.

The relatively weak power potential of small local business in the two towns is also due to its poor integration and the absence of real business organizations able to speak for the common interests of the most of the private sector.¹² Therefore, it cannot play the role of an *autonomous actor* in urban politics and in many cases, as we shall see, is a subject of power rather than a power holder.

Large enterprises *have high power potential* and resources comparable with the power resources of the local political elite: our informants are sure that they *are able to effectively intervene in the local political process*. However, like regional and federal authorities, big business does not place its interests too much on a local political space and its involvement in urban policy-making is very limited and/or episodic. In both towns, mayors and other local politicians and officials are not inclined to quarrel with big business (‘Big business in the town is represented by “Knauff”, it is not local and practically does not depend on the local authorities ... I think that the mayor depends more on “Knauff” than “Knauff” on him ... he can’t bring big business to its knees ... and he is forced to build a relationship with it’, says a Deputy of the city Duma from Kungur).

It is not easy to assess the role of *the law enforcement agencies* (Interior Ministry (MVD), Federal Security Service) in local politics. Formally they are depoliticized; but in reality the activities of ‘people in epaulets’ is not always limited by prescribed duties. It is not clear whether this institutional structure is powerful *in itself*.¹³ However, members of the Kungur elite especially emphasize the fact that two former MVD chiefs occupy senior positions in the town administration; one of them became the initiator and leader of an informal association comprising many local influentials (which I will return to). Therefore, strong (largely interpersonal) relationships have been established between the Kungur administration and the local representatives of the law enforcement agencies, which substantially increased the power potential and authority of the latter. Besides, enforcement agencies were regularly used to put pressure on business (‘There are old police methods of influence ... I gripped them once ... and they understood ... Very effectively’; ‘“silo-viki” can put pressure on anyone ... since our business has largely criminal roots.’ And they have complete information. It played a major role in suppressing the uncooperative’).

It is even more difficult to assess the role of criminal forces. Interview data indicate their presence in urban political life. There is a certain logic in the activity of this group in post-Soviet Russia. At first, criminals earn money then try to

launder it, and finally, establish contacts with public authorities and/or to obtain their own political legitimacy.

In Chusovoy, until the middle of the 2000s, criminals not only controlled a particular set of business structures and, consequently, their relationships with municipal authorities, but also tried to influence major local politicians. In recent years, the role of criminal forces has decreased.¹⁴ Now criminals ‘look much more civilized’ but still attempt to establish close relationships with economic and political actors and penetrate into administrative structures – both through elections and ‘informal channels,’ explained one respondent.

Thus, configuration of the most influential actors in the two towns reflects the domination of the two groups with the largest sets of resources – top figures in the local executive (and law enforcement) bodies and large business. The political (administrative) elite is the leader in this pair. Mayors are key figures in local elites though in other circumstances we admit the leadership of the heads of the district administration which possesses comparable (or possibly superior) resources. Big business, however, remains a visible actor in urban politics and cannot be ignored by politicians. Therefore, in the one company town (Chusovoy) where the city-forming enterprise has considerable financial resources and provides jobs for the majority of the active population, it is difficult to determine which of these two is actually more influential. The political opportunities and influence of other groups are very modest, although they can considerably vary and change depending on the personal leadership characteristics of their representatives.

2. Relationships between actors and coalition building

Resources of major local actors themselves cannot explain power relations in urban communities. Manifest through a complex network of interactions, power reflects the *degree of opposition/cooperation between actors, the ratio of stability/fluidity of power relations, the configuration of power forms used by power holders, the patterns of subordination (compliance) from the part of power subjects, etc.*

As in any local community, in the two Perm towns, there is a complex set of relationships between the main actors, reflecting the existing balance of their interests and opportunities. The potential for conflict between them is quite high; this is due to both the natural desire of agents to expand or conserve control over particular spheres of urban life and personal ambitions and group interests.

Open conflicts in the public space usually occur between actors representing different branches of the urban political and administrative structure: local business does not dare to participate in public political debates or to articulate its disagreements with the local authorities.

Stable tensions between town and district (rayon) administrations take place in Kungur. Our informants point to the major source of conflict: unclear division of competences and absence of formal subordination between them. Conflict also has a clear personal dimension (‘it is difficult to work with him’) and economic background: both sides often refuse to pay ‘other expenses’ (maintenance of the objects of common use, garbage removal, etc.) and are dissatisfied with the distribution of revenues for the use of land. Although some experts are rather pessimistic in assessing the prospective of the relationships between these branches of local government (‘town and district administrations never had normal (friendly) relationships, these never occur’) conflict is unlikely to grow into a stage of acute

confrontation. 'It is a conflict within the elite,' explained one of the respondents. 'It manifests itself in some discontent, in verbal expressions, in the unwillingness to negotiate.' However, this conflict is the most notable in local political realm.

In Chusovoy, the relationship between town and district (rayon) authorities is also rather tense. The mayor of the town ran for the post of head of the district administration but could not defeat the incumbent candidate, who became the head of the district. This led to mutual grievances and attempts by both sides to diminish the role of each other in the local system of government. As a result, district and town authorities have in practice refused to act together, each blaming the other for numerous errors. In this situation, a coalition between them is hardly possible.

Different kinds of relationships in both towns have been established between *the administration and the local legislature: open conflict between them is in practice reduced to a minimum*. This is quite natural. First, the majority of deputies in Kungur have been in practice selected by the mayor who thereby has a 'controlling stake' in the Duma. Selection is carried out in such a way that most local deputies can hardly speak out against their real owners. 'It is trite, but we need more or less manageable candidates. A substantial part of the candidates we select from the public sector because we have a possibility to control them. If he is a doctor and works in our area, it is clear that he depends on us ... Or a school director ... But some candidates are not public sector employees ... They have to meet other requirements: they should be known by townspeople. Otherwise is difficult to elect the candidate,' says one of the leaders of the local Council.

Second, if difficulties arise in making decisions, the mayor of Kungur skillfully interacts with the deputies preferring not to 'go ahead' but to postpone the decision: 'I put aside the controversial question until it ripens, consult with commissions and working groups, sometimes suggest compromises ... conduct individual conversations, seeking the cause of the disagreements,' the mayor of Kungur explains his decision-making tactics.

Third, *disagreements between the mayor and the Duma usually do not relate to the principal questions*. In the latter case usually, there is a stable consensus – either initial, or achieved by the mayor with the help of effective communication strategies. The passivity of the (majority of) deputies and the prevalence of personal and/or corporate motives in their activities restrict the range of issues interesting to the Deputy corps. There are no representatives of local big business in the Duma: over the last few years, they have lost interest in local politics. United Russia (other parties can be ignored) acts, according to representatives of the local elite, as a «bureaucratic machine»; it has no coherent program ('it is not clear, what they fight for') and is not (very) focused on political debate and autonomous participation in the decision-making process.

Finally, the traditional domination of executive bodies over legislatures reduces the incentives of the deputies to openly clash with the mayor. In many cases, their relationships can be explained as 'the rule of anticipated reactions.' Although in his interview the mayor of Kungur assured us that he never used coercive resources to influence the deputies, we suspect that they are well aware of the (possible) consequences of conflict with the mayor. 'There is just no reason to quarrel with the mayor. Deputies are scared of being more actively involved in financing social programs,' one of the Duma deputies explains. In Chusovoy, relationships between the mayor and Duma developed in similar fashion: 'If we have no consensus,' says the mayor, 'we will postpone the decision and return to it later.' If the conflict

remains, he allows time to settle the issue. ‘So usually we manage to avoid conflicts though there is tough talk,’ says one of the deputies. Other deputies interviewed in both towns confirm this view.

Executive bodies and their leaders dominate not only local legislatures but local business as well. The relative dominance of the Executive power takes place not only in relation to representative structures, but also to local business.¹⁵ But there are no open conflicts between them. It is *either hidden conflict, bargaining, or (what seems to be more likely) a combination.*

What are the reasons for speaking about elements of hidden conflict (and coercion) in relationships between local officials and local business? All the interviewed representatives of local elites confess that *the main motive for business participation in social programs is a desire to preserve a loyal relationship with the authorities.* The loyalty of the authorities is an important prerequisite for the survival and/or the prosperity of business. ‘Our authorities have so many ways to put pressure on me. And my business is finished ... Therefore, one should not quarrel with the authorities. If they ask – you have to obey,’ explains the Director of the plant in Kungur. He himself apparently participates in all urban projects initiated by local officials, never daring to refuse. *Other businessmen apparently do the same (‘None of them refused to sponsor’).*

Local authorities also prefer to avoid open confrontation with business: ‘Any enterprise that brings in taxes – it is the goose that lays the golden eggs ... I’d rather talk to him and try to make a deal than “suffocate” him,’ confess local officials. The possibility of ‘suffocation’ is clearly recognized by both sides. The interviewees cited many examples of negative sanctions in cases when business refused to sponsor city events (‘if you are stubborn, then you will not have a land plot’).

However, businessmen have opportunities to influence local politicians: (1) business is able to create difficulties for local authorities (‘they can “crush” all the tradesmen ... just to harm local leadership’) and (2) local politicians need financial resources for the election campaigns. Power potential of local business depends on its size: *the larger the business, the more self-sufficient and less dependent it is on the local authorities.* This trend is widely recognized by scholars investigating urban regimes in American and European communities, and is clearly seen in Perm towns. Interviewees argue that local officials ‘can’t bring big business to its knees.’ Moreover, they are even more dependent on some enterprises (e.g. Mashzavod, Knauff) than enterprises dependent on local authorities. Here, relationships are much more symmetrical than with small business. Finally, business/government relationships are complicated through widespread involvement of local officials in various kinds of business activity.¹⁶ *Therefore, in many cases, conflicts between businessmen and members of the local administrative elite actually stem from purely economic reasons, as conflicts within business community.*

The configuration of power resources largely predetermines *the nature of governing coalitions.* The latter occur in virtually every urban community since normal community development is impossible in both ‘the war of every man against every man’ and complete dominance of one of the actors.

*In these Perm towns, stable coalitions were formed by different structures and actors from the public sector.*¹⁷ In both towns, there were *coalitions between mayors (local administrations) and legislatures.* Although in both communities elections are far from democratic standards (local elections are under the control of local and regional administrations) and the executive bodies initially dominate over

the legislatures, *relationships between them are not purely relationships of command and obedience*. Some preliminary arrangements are formed at the stage of electoral coalitions and many future deputies initially agree not to confront the mayor but to support him. On the other hand, local administrators prefer to build relations with deputies on the basis of compromise and trade rather than direct pressure.

However, in Stone's version of regime analysis the urban regime is described as a *stable cross-sectoral coalition of actors, representing different spheres of community life*. The most common configuration of major (regime) actors (at least in American communities) consists of local businessmen and officials since these groups possess the most significant collections of complementary resources. In accordance with their common interest in the development of the territory and economic growth, regimes are usually formed with a congruent agenda and relevant set of auxiliary players.¹⁸ Although we have not found full-fledged (by Stone's standards) regimes in both Perm towns, the relationships between actors demonstrate many similarities with American and European patterns.

In particular, both business and local authorities initiate coalition building seeking to benefit from cooperation. Some of them are quite stable and do not break up with changes in the personal composition of public and/or private partners, e.g. the long-term relationships of the town's administration with Knauff and housing companies in Kungur. As in other countries, urban coalitions are usually based on a combination of formal and informal arrangements which Stone considered a necessary condition for durability and efficiency of a regime. Along with stable coalitions there are a lot of episodic (temporal) coalitions created to solve specific problems. The latter do not play a decisive role in local politics but contribute to the formation of the overall climate of community life and maintain the established rules of the game.

Why do existing coalitions not constitute urban regimes (in Stone's sense)? In our view, there are three main obstacles to regime formation in Perm towns: (1) the not quite voluntary character of cooperation on the part of many business actors, (2) the obvious prevalence of selfish (egoistic, corporate) motivations in the real agenda of urban regime (quasi-regime), and (3) the large informal component in coalitional interactions.

Business cooperation with local authorities, as has already been noted, is often compulsory. In contrast to the USA and Europe, where business expects to achieve benefits from cooperation with community officials (without fear that non-participation in joint projects may create problems), the main motive for cooperation in Perm towns is to *maintain normal relationships with and thereby escape (possible) difficulties from public sector leadership*. Refusal to cooperate is risky ('without a coalition businesses cannot survive'). But cooperation is often accompanied by various kinds of extortion – either in the form enforced financing of public events, organized by local authorities, or through bribes and other kinds of 'voluntary support' to particular people. The most evident example is the so-called 'social responsibility of business',¹⁹ which often masks the enforced character of relationships between interacting agents. *Authorities are able to 'squeeze' businessmen ('It will be as I said!') and, no doubt, often do so. At local level 'using your position' can be even more effective than in large communities because of the difficulties of avoiding it.*

From this point of view, it is hardly possible to speak about an urban regime – a nonhierarchical coalition of actors with relatively comparable sets of resources; this pattern of relationship can be explained in terms of *local elite rule – domination of one group over the rest of the community*. ‘Power over’ clearly outweighs ‘power to’ (Ledyayev 2008).

However, relationships between local authorities and business in the two Perm towns cannot be explained purely as enforced coalition. It is better to say that in the Russian communities they are more asymmetrical and unequal in comparison with countries where business is better protected from such kinds of ‘cooperation.’ Moreover, a weak (in terms of maintaining legal norms) institutional environment creates not only a security problem for businesses but also *gives them some extra opportunities to achieve benefits in cooperation with local authorities*. In particular, business can successfully participate in the appropriation of public funds. Very often cooperation (‘cooperation’) is aimed exclusively at getting kickbacks (‘otkat’) and ‘distribution’ of public funds (‘raspil’) (‘business gets access to budgetary money, officials – kickbacks. Everyone is happy’). In this case, relationships between actors are (quite) voluntary, and in a sense correspond to the main idea of the urban regime – extra benefits from cooperation.

However, this contradicts another defining property of the (classical) urban regime: *coalitions are not really aimed at the achievement of important public goals but ensure the implementation of purely corporate (personal, selfish, egoistic) interests*. For businessmen, this motivation is quite natural. But local officials are supposed to work for the common good. Interviewees are sure that most of the local officials in the two towns are motivated by personal preferences (enrichment): ‘What does he do? He used to extort money from the budget through his firms ... They strive for power in order to get material resources. The saddest thing is that they do nothing for the development of the territory. They pursue just their personal interests,’ says one of our respondents. At the same time, business is interested in avoiding fair competition: ‘Town – is a place to wring out money’; ‘Local officials are interested in the victory of their protégé and kickbacks.’²⁰

Thus, in coalition building in Russian urban communities, on the one hand, egoistic motivations of actors play a substantial role, on the other hand, it reflects the dependence of business on government officials (and, in some cases, the dependence of government officials on big business, that is well illustrated by Chusovoy) and (partly) the enforced nature of their interaction. This confirms the idea that the most successful businessmen in modern Russia are public officials (Gaman-Golutvina 2004) who thereby have a dual (people’s representatives + businessmen) identity. Quite often, relationships between community actors do not differ from relationships between business groups and the political nature of urban coalitions disappears. The most telling example is the relationships between local authorities and housing companies in Kungur. In the permanent process of negotiations and bargaining between them, both sides often focus on the *specific* interests of *individual* actors but not on community problems and basic principles of business/government relationships.

This situation is largely a result of *the disunity of local business* in Kungur. The businessmen interviewed confess that they do not trust either the local authorities or other businessmen. Therefore, they hope to survive on their own and prefer to solve problems by negotiating with the authorities on an informal basis without seeking to coordinate their efforts and shaping organizational structures. Thus, the

business/government interaction lacks the basic *political* component of coalitional interaction – alignment and coordination of interest groups.

Another feature of these local coalitions in Perm towns is that *the informal component substantially prevails over the formal*. There were no serious attempts to create organizations that could provide a legal platform for the local regime: informal patterns of cooperation are more congruent to the real agenda ('raspil') and the nature of relationships between the main actors (evident asymmetry in favor of the administrative sector). Organizations focused on the interests of local citizens act in a public realm and do not hide their priorities. Such organizations were absent: both urban officials and local business (taking into account its dependent position) prefer to solve their problems behind closed doors. Local politicians and officials are passive, and this is the most serious obstacle to the formation of *stable relationships with the relatively wide spectrum of participants* (regime); more tenacious in this situation are shady agreements between a limited set of persons on specific issues.

The prevalence of informal practices together with the weak legal system and ineffective law enforcement may actually stimulate the creation of structures designed to offset the failures of public institutions. A good example of such a kind of structure was an 'Officers Club,' an informal association initiated by the former chief of the local police department to confront criminals. This association brought together many influential persons and (in contrast to some formal associations like 'Board of Directors') was quite durable. The slogan of the association was clearly expressed by its founder: 'Guys! Not bandits, but you, community and business leaders, must govern the town!' In fact, the activities of the association were not limited to an 'anti-criminal' function but concerned other important issues of urban life, too. However, the club did not become the center of a stable coalition; purely informal association, even the most authoritative, does not have enough resources to support governing coalitions. Therefore, *the balance* of formal and informal bases in urban coalitions is, according to Stone, a necessary prerequisite for the formation of an urban regime.

Thus, in Kungur there is no durable cross-sectoral coalition playing a central role in local politics. Situational coalitions proved unstable and cannot be the basis of a regime-type coalition; authoritative actors in the private sector who are able to become fully fledged partners of the local administrative elite are absent; big business interacts with the local authorities occasionally and mostly on a personal (informal) basis. *The community is actually governed by the local elite, consisting mainly of chief executives, business leaders, and, to a lesser extent, representatives of local (town and district) legislatures*. Almost all of them are members of the 'Officers Club,' playing the role of an informal organization of the local power elite. Its functions, membership, and the nature of internal communication are quite similar to elite clubs described by Hunter (1953). Like them, it cannot claim the status of a regime. But Atlanta's clubs provided a consolidated position of the elite and ensured the fulfillment of the agreements reached, while in Kungur many important issues (e.g. the nomination of candidates for the mayoralty) were not discussed at all. Therefore, the situation in Kungur corresponds not only to the classical concept of urban regime but even to its more flexible European versions.

In Chusovoy, the situation is somewhat different. It has developed a *power structure comprising three intensively interacting actors (the administration of the city-forming enterprise, the mayor, the district administration) with a decisive*

influence on urban policy-making. Their power potentials are quite comparable though the administration of the city-forming enterprise seems to be the most influential. The nature of their interrelationships (during the period of study) allows us to speak about a *coalition between the town administration and the leadership of the city-forming enterprise* ('There is a tandem between the town and the plant interested in each other'). However, the coalition is not stable and during the tenure of the current mayor, relationships between the partners changed several times. So it is hardly possible to speak about an urban regime in Chusovoy (in Stone's sense). Representatives of the local elite are not sure that the coalition will last a long time and changes in its composition are really possible, e.g. the replacement of the town administration by the district administration. The reason is clear: local politics in Russia is highly dependent on personal relationships.

However, the current agenda is relatively stable, comprising elements of development (growth) and service (status quo). In most cases, the coalition successfully implements its interests. Some respondents are sure that the coalition is beneficial for the town²¹ since 'the town has nothing to offer to the plant.' But apparently this is not quite so: (1) the plant needs social stability and (2) wants to be represented in the local legislature which is impossible without the cooperation of the local authorities. Finally, the private business of the director of the plant (associated with cleaning of the territory) is presumably based on local government orders.

Coalition building in Chusovoy is largely caused by structural factors: *it is not possible to govern a one-industry town ignoring the interests of the main enterprise.* The organizational activities of both leaders – the mayor and the director of the plant – helped to maintain a constant negotiation process and the achievement of collective goals despite disagreements remaining. It is difficult to say which of these two factors was more significant in terms of coalition building. Some respondents believe that the structural factor plays a decisive role: the plant is not necessarily directly involved in local politics as its interests are always taken into account ('there is no reason to think that the town does something wrong for the plant'). But there is the opposite view: the plant does not need to be actively involved in politics ('the distribution of money in the territory') to ensure the optimal conditions for its development. However, almost all the interviewees are convinced that the leaders genuinely want to maintain good relationships; they are sure that personal benefits for the two major local chiefs *as economic actors* hardly play a lesser role in the motivation of their joint activity than considerations of the common good and welfare for the urban residents and factory workers.

The third major local actor – the district administration – often acts as an opponent to the first two. Conflicts between them have a personal component,²² but their main source is the *mutual desire to dominate the local space.* The most intense conflict arose when the parties proposed alternative projects for local government structures: the mayor and his team tried to realize the idea of an 'urban district' that would lead to the virtual elimination of the district level of government while district leaders insisted on the 'Leningrad variation' in which the district administration became the most powerful local institution. The conflict was eliminated only after the intervention of the regional authorities. Another sharp conflict between the coalition and the district administration occurred as a result of attempts by the plant to deprive the district of some of the managerial functions in the social sphere.

Certainly, the district leadership does not always lose in conflict situations. However, in general, the plant and the mayor dominate. According to respondents, this situation has developed largely because *the head of the district is not the most influential figure in the district administration*. Until recently, power in the district administration actually belonged to his two deputies.²³ This situation though is somewhat unusual, but quite understandable in the apparent weakness of formal institutions.

The governing coalition in Chusovoy was formed in the *absence of organizations coordinating the efforts and activities of key actors*. This is in contrast to regime formation in many American and European cities where formal organizations were both the place for negotiations and the instrument of implementation of the agreements reached by regime actors.²⁴ We can assume that this is quite typical for Russian communities. It is the result of the predominance of informal institutions in Russian politics, the underdevelopment of civil society, the weakness of local party structures, limited human resources in small towns leading to a concentration of people with high personal resources in public, and commercial structures.

Why do the coalitional processes in Perm communities differ? In our view, this is a consequence of the same regularities that were found in the study of urban regimes in American and European communities. In particular, our study confirmed that *the integration of local business is a necessary condition for effective regime formation*. But the question is how real is the very formation of a relatively independent and politically significant business in small communities? And here, we also agree with scholars (Stone 1989, p. 185, John and Cole 1998, p. 388) who argue that *regimes are likely to form and stay in place in large metropolitan contexts*: in small communities, actors usually have less incentive to cooperate and it is more likely that real power is concentrated in the hands of a small group (elite) while other participants play clearly secondary roles. The emergence of other types of coalitions in Russian communities different from the coalition in Chusovoy seems likely. In the absence of the city-forming enterprise, coalitional relations may occur between actors representing different administrative structures, e.g. between local government and regional officials involved in local politics.

Conclusion

The configuration of actors and relationships between them in the two Perm communities demonstrate, on the one hand, quite a lot in common with the European and (even) North American communities, on the other hand – a number of features reflect the systemic and institutional properties of Russian politics and society.

As in other countries, the most influential actors in Russian local communities represent local governmental structures and big business. Other configurations of major actors, in our opinion, are practically impossible. It is unlikely that local party structures, civil organizations, and movements can become equal partners in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the probability of ‘middle-class progressive regimes’ (in Stone’s classification) in Russian communities is even lower than in the US. In the ‘business/local administration’ pairing different ratios of power potentials are possible. Most likely, in our view, is the dominance of actors representing local administrative (town and/or district) structures. Business leadership is natural for single-industry towns (Gel’man and Ryzhenkov 2011, p. 452). In the absence of city-forming economic enterprise, private sector dominance is less likely

because it requires a certain level of business integration. But, as the study shows, this is a problem.

This situation is quite typical for European urban communities as well where the public sector usually plays a leading role. But in Russia, the boundaries between sectors are less clear since many local politicians and public officials are quite successful businessmen. The 'double identity' of the local political and administrative elite not only complicates the question about the comparative impact of public and private sectors on urban politics, but makes the answer to this question much more dependent on particular circumstances.

The minor role of representative institutions in comparison with European local politics not only significantly restricts the democratic potential of local government but creates problems in building urban coalitions because it limits the number of possible participants. A noticeable presence of security forces and criminals in local politics is quite natural given the weakness of legal principles and the high level of corruption.

The role of external actors – state and federal – largely depends on how significant the territory is for the realization of their professional and/or personal (corporate) interests. Their power potential is quite sufficient for successful intervention in the local political space, but in the absence of special motives or *force majeure* they generally tend not to be involved directly in urban political life, leaving it to local elites.

The interaction between different actors is quite diverse, dynamic, conflicting, and admits the possibility of various kinds of coalitions. Although the authoritarian nature of the Russian political regime imposes limitations on particular aspects of urban politics, local actors retain a sufficient range of freedom and autonomy: at sub-national level 'politics (still) matters.' Therefore, and due to, the wide range of economic, social, territorial, and other differences between Russian towns, we can assume a considerable variability of power structures and political processes in local communities.

The degree of conflict/consensus between the actors largely depends on the community sector they belong to. Open conflicts usually take place between representatives of different government structures; conflict is often exacerbated during election campaigns and in cases when the opponents try to change the balance of power between them. But in general, hidden or suppressed conflicts prevail: substantial differences in power resources and the vulnerability of many local actors to coercive practice and the abuse of power by executive structures and security forces limit the potential of open discontent and resistance. This largely reduces the political mobilization of small business, interest groups, and civil organizations limiting the possibility of democratic control and citizen participation.

As a result, *the social base of local power structure is very narrow (elitist)*. In contrast to the 'optimistic democratism' of Dahl's description of politics in New Haven, *Kungur and Chusovoy can hardly be explained as pluralistic democracies*. The local elite, composed of the heads of the executive, business leaders, and the most influential representatives of urban and district legislatures actually concentrates all the power in the local community, having no serious opponents or a real alternative in the foreseeable future. 'Democratic creed' and 'indirect influence of citizens on the decisions of leaders' which played, according to Dahl, an important role in the functioning of the pluralistic political system in New Haven were almost not felt in the Russian towns. The power structure in both communities is

supported by informal institutions and personal relationships within the elite and between the elite and those who are forced to accept the existing system of relations; it allows local influentials to successfully implement their personal and/or corporate interests. The outcomes of the study show that the achievement of their own well-being is probably the most common motivation of actors in local political realm where there is a wide range of possibilities to use official positions and/or relationships with the public officials for personal enrichment.

It stimulates the formation of various kinds of coalitions for the implementation of the personal interests of its members. Such coalitions have proved to be very widespread, fairly durable, and effective. Some of them are actually forced and driven by a need for «junior partners» to maintain good relations with key actors and/or avoid the inevitable cost in the event of real confrontation. It is difficult to estimate the actual amount of overt and/or covert coercion in local political practices. Apparently, it is high and could hardly be otherwise because the law enforcement system is weak and ineffective.

These and some other features of the local political process are largely determined by the modality of social and political institutions at national level. Therefore, the vector of possible changes in the structure and nature of local power primarily depends on the direction of the evolution of Russian society, especially its political system. In any case, the variability of local power structures will continue, as will the relevance of their careful scrutiny.

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Notes

1. For evident reasons, there were no real opportunities to study power relations in Russia (USSR) before 1990s.
2. Other founders of the urban regime theory are Elkin (1987) and Fainstein (1994) However, it was Stone who convincingly demonstrated the advantages of the new theory.
3. We had no possibility to use a combination of the three classical (positional, reputational, and decisional) methods of identifying community leaders recommended by scholars. But through the interviews with positional leaders of the two communities, we collected information about their power reputation and role in decision-making processes. The reputational indicator, perhaps, was the most significant for the explanation of power structure in the towns since almost all the persons mentioned by the interviewees were respondents (experts).
4. Civic society actors in both communities occupy marginal positions in local politics. Though the general level of discontent and dissent is pretty high, people are not inclined to participate in community decisions: 'Active people are absent,' regrets one of the local experts.
5. The Chusovoy metallurgical plant.
6. We could not unambiguously identify which of the two public actors was more influential.
7. The power hierarchy and the rank order of the main actors in Kungur is less clear than in Chusovoy, where the political influence of the first three actors is comparable and experts' evaluations of their power potential split.
8. Formally, the district administration is 'higher' than the town administration although there is no clear subordination between them.

9. The term has been introduced by Carl Friedrich to describe cases when the subject of power acts in accordance with a power holder's will in fear of repercussions for doing otherwise (Friedrich 1937, p. 16–18).
10. Theorists of power explain such situations in terms of low resource mobilization (Wrong 2002).
11. Here we mean, first of all, a strong dependency of local government on regional and federal financing and a more centralized system of government ('power vertical') built in the last decade.
12. In Kungur, a few years ago, there was an association of entrepreneurs; but today it has collapsed, although formally it still exists.
13. That is regardless of the particular activities of its representatives as was the case in Latin American cities during the study of Delbert Miller (1970).
14. Mainly because of the death of the local criminal leader.
15. Here, I am not taking into account the leadership of the city-forming enterprise in Chusovoy.
16. They really control business assets though formally the latter belong to members of their families and/or friends.
17. This is quite typical for European cities too, where government officials play a major role in local regime formation (Strom 1996, John and Cole 1998, p. 382–404, Harding 1999, Mossberger and Stoker 2001).
18. In European cities, this type of regime is less popular since the state remains a political center of gravity, the most important ties are vertical and horizontal links within the public sector, and organized business interests do not play the leading role that they do in American cities (Strom 1996, p. 475–477).
19. Business organizations are supposed to (voluntarily) participate in financing social programs and public events because they are 'socially responsible' and 'care about society.'
20. Certainly, one should not assume that «growth machines» in America are guided solely by the desire to benefit community and its residents. Harvey Molotch, the founder of the 'growth machines theory,' argues that the benefits of growth are distributed extremely unequally, often at the expense of particular groups. Growth increases the exchange value of the territory and objects located on it but does not necessarily improve the living conditions of its citizens (Molotch 1976, Logan and Molotch 1987). However, in American and European cities there is a real public agenda which is not merely a cover for the personal enrichment of local influentials.
21. The plant is the major employer for the town, it provides jobs, and tax revenues.
22. Sharp conflict between the district administration and the plant's leadership arose when the plant refused to support the district's candidate in the mayoral election.
23. Recently one of them was arrested.
24. Such as 'Central Atlanta Association' in Stone's Atlanta (Stone 1989), 'Alegheny Conference of Community Development' in Pittsburg during the study of Ferman (1996), 'Portsmouth and Southeast Hampshire Partnership' described by Holman (2007).

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