

segmentation and division of labor. Peasant migrants' reliance on social network further reinforces segregation in the urban labor market. Using multiple sources of macro-level and field surveys, I examine both quantitative and qualitative evidence of gender segregation and division of labor. The findings show that a high degree of gender segregation among rural-urban migrants exists in the urban labor market, that peasant women's urban work opportunities are short-lived, and that upon marriage women migrants are relegated back to the village and to the 'inside', in part to sustain gender division of labor as a household strategy.

*Au cours des deux dernières décennies, les gouvernements de transition ont connu des évolutions économiques et sociales aux conséquences nouvelles et variées. Cet article examine comment la transition chinoise a produit des effets différenciés selon le sexe, et en détaille la réalité. Durant la phase transitoire, l'État a transposé ses objectifs sur le terrain économique mais, contrairement aux pays capitalistes, il dispose encore d'instruments de régulation sociale. Rendue plus vulnérable, la population rurale doit compter sur les travailleurs migrants pour sa survie; cependant, une fois en ville, leur faible statut institutionnel en fait des travailleurs 'en marge'. Alliée aux traditions socio-culturelles qui limitent la mobilité des femmes et nourrissent les stratifications, cette situation a permis la création d'un système d'emploi tendant à la segmentation et la division du travail. La dépendance des migrants ruraux par rapport au réseau social vient renforcer la ségrégation sur le marché du travail urbain. A partir d'études de terrain et de niveau global, l'article explore les éléments quantitatifs et qualitatifs de ségrégation sexuelle et division du travail. D'après les résultats, il existe un degré important de ségrégation selon le sexe parmi les migrants sur le marché de l'emploi urbain, les possibilités de travail en ville sont de courte durée pour les paysannes et, quant au mariage, les migrantes sont ramenées à leur village et à 'l'intérieur', en partie pour soutenir une stratégie domestique de division sexuée du travail.*

**Vladimir Gel'man, *In search of local autonomy: the politics of big cities in Russia's transition*, pp. 48-61.**

Despite a series of local government reforms in the 1990s, Russia's localities still lack serious autonomy. Only big cities maintain hopes for the emergence of local autonomy and local democracy. City politics has produced multiple conflicts between regional and local authorities; however, regional-local relations merely reflect fundamental center-periphery controversies on a smaller territorial scale. While big cities and their metropolitan areas serve as centers of political, economic and social modernization, other regional areas are lost in the peripheries. During Russia's transition period, some large cities acquired more political and economic autonomy from regions than others did. This article concentrates on the crucial role of (1) political opportunities inherited from the late-Soviet period; and (2) strategic choices of political actors in the post-Soviet period. The constellation of initial conditions and outcomes of political conflicts have contributed greatly to the diversity of city politics and urban autonomy in Russia's cities. Finally, the article considers the possible impact of local autonomy in Russia's cities on national social, economic and political developments.

*Malgré la série de réformes des années 1990 sur les gouvernements locaux en Russie, les localités manquent toujours d'une véritable autonomie. Seules, les grandes villes espèrent encore l'avènement d'une autonomie et d'une démocratie locales. La politique urbaine a généré nombre de conflits entre autorités locales et régionales; ceux-ci ne sont pourtant que le reflet de la polémique fondamentale entre centre et périphérie à une échelle territoriale réduite. Alors que les grandes villes et leur métropole*

*concentrent modernisations sociale, économique et politique, le reste de la région se fonde dans les périphéries. Pendant la Russie de transition, quelques grandes villes ont acquis davantage d'autonomie économique et politique que d'autres par rapport à leur région. L'article détaille le rôle crucial qu'ont joué, d'une part, les ouvertures politiques héritées de la fin du régime précédent et, d'autre part, les choix stratégiques des acteurs politiques de l'ère post-soviétique. La pléiade de conditions initiales et de séquelles de conflits politiques a largement contribué à diversifier les politiques urbaines et le degré d'autonomie des villes russes. Enfin, l'article aborde l'impact éventuel d'une autonomie locale des villes sur les évolutions sociales, économiques et politiques de la Russie.*

**Patricia Kennett and Masami Iwata, *Precariousness in everyday life: homelessness in Japan*, pp. 62-74.**

The Japanese social structure was established and has been maintained through a mixed economy comprising a balance between the state, the market, the family and the company. Vital elements in maintaining this balance have been the traditional family, full employment and increasing prosperity. More recently, developments have seen a reversal of economic prosperity, rising unemployment, increasing pressure to restructure the employment system and a potential rise in the number of households experiencing housing difficulties. In addition, the predominance of the nuclear family, the increased employment of women and decreased fertility has put the enterprise, family and state dynamic under challenge. This article explores some of the implications of these trends as some of the certainties of the past are giving way to increasing insecurity and risk across a wider section of society. It begins by exploring the institutional and social structure of post-war Japan, when there was little evidence of poverty and homelessness. It goes on to consider the recent rise in the number of people living on the streets of Japanese cities and the policies put in place. The article then outlines some of the processes of social change that have contributed to the growth in the numbers of homeless people in Japan.

*La structure sociale japonaise a été créée et préservée grâce à une économie mixte, équilibre complexe entre État, marché, famille et entreprise. Les éléments essentiels à cet équilibre étaient la famille traditionnelle, le plein emploi et une prospérité croissante. Or, on a pu constater dernièrement un revirement économique, une hausse du chômage, une accentuation des forces visant à restructurer l'emploi et une progression latente du nombre de ménages confrontés à des difficultés de logement. De plus, la prédominance de la famille nucléaire, le travail croissant des femmes et la diminution de la fertilité ont remis en question la dynamique entreprise-famille-État. L'article explore certains effets de ces évolutions, alors que nombre de certitudes passées laissent place à un renforcement de l'insécurité et du risque dans une part plus vaste de la société. L'étude débute par la structure institutionnelle et sociale du Japon de l'après-guerre, lequel comptait peu de cas de pauvreté et de sans-abris. Elle aborde ensuite la hausse récente du nombre de personnes vivant dans les rues des grandes villes nippones et les politiques publiques mises en place, tout en décrivant certains des processus de changement social impliqués dans la multiplication des sans-abris au Japon.*

# In Search of Local Autonomy: The Politics of Big Cities in Russia's Transition\*

VLADIMIR GEL'MAN

## Introduction: municipal revolution and counterrevolution

The declaration on the autonomy of local government was one of the unexpected changes in Russian politics in the 1990s. Article 12 of the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation claimed that organs of local self-government are separate from state bodies. Local government is defined by federal law as 'independent and self-responsible activity of the population for the solution of ... matters of local significance' (Zakon, 2000: Article 2). During the next few years, the State Duma adopted major laws on local government, and in 1996 Russia joined the European Charter on Local Self-Government. Almost all municipalities across Russia had one or two cycles of local council elections, and most held elections of city mayors and/or heads of district administrations (Formirovanie, 1999). At first glance, it would seem that Russia took a decisive step toward local autonomy, and away from the Soviet tradition of completely subordinated and powerless local government. State Duma deputy Sergei Mitrokhin, one of the major proponents of local government reforms among Russia's politicians, even referred to the post-Soviet municipal project as a 'municipal revolution' (Mitrokhin, 1999: 29).

However, in the early 2000s the achievements of the 'municipal revolution' in Russia are meager at best. It is hard to consider Russian local government as autonomous or to perceive 'the discretion local government possesses to act free from control by higher levels of government' (Goldsmith, 1995: 235). Both the legal and political dimensions of autonomy in Russian local government are so limited that the reason for their existence is unclear. In fact, the political impact of local autonomy in Russia is largely limited to municipal elections, which are hard to regard as free and fair and which have much lower voter turnouts in comparison with national and regional elections. Contrary to legal declarations, the state does not delegate its powers (or resources) to local governments. At the same time, federal and regional authorities pursue policies of handing over the social obligations of the state (health care, education, public transportation, infrastructure etc.) to local governments, further contributing to the burden on local budgets. The municipalization of the social assets of privatized enterprises has a troubling impact on local government (Healey *et al.*, 1999). The state of municipal finances is highly dependent upon transfers from federal and regional budgets, while the number and amount of local taxes allowed are limited by the Tax Code. As a result, in 2001 municipal budgets carried responsibility for 32% of the overall expenditures of Russia's consolidated budget, but controlled only about 17% of its total revenues (Ivanchenko *et al.*, 2001). Finally, amendments to the federal law on

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local government, adopted in August 2000, declared that the president of Russia and regional governors could dismiss local assemblies and/or chief executives for violations of federal and/or regional laws (Zakon, 2000: Article 49). In sum, major elements of local autonomy — namely, the power of initiation and the power of immunity (Goldsmith, 1995: 231) — are definitely weak. Seen in this light, the early 2000s can be regarded, if not as a 'municipal counterrevolution', then as a partial restoration of the subordinate status of local government typical of the Soviet period.

Certainly, the reform of local government is only part of the general complexity of Russia's transition. But in no other policy area in Russian politics is the contrast between declarations of local autonomy and local democracy, on the one hand, and the realities of impoverished municipalities and overwhelming 'political machines', on the other, so sharp. The contrast is even more striking when Russia and post-Communist East-Central European countries are compared (Coulson, 1995; Baldersheim *et al.*, 1996), because the directions that reforms of local government have taken in these cases are extremely diverse.

The analysis below concentrates on political autonomy in Russia's cities, or autonomy Type II, according to Gurr and King (1987: 43–73). As indicators of the degree of autonomy, I shall focus on the constellation of (1) institutional design, i.e. the formal distribution of powers between regional and local authorities; and (2) practices defining the relationships between regional and local governments in terms of political decision-making. Although the dichotomy provides a very crude measurement of autonomy (or lack thereof), this may shed light on the enormous diversity of local governments across Russia's regions in the 1990s — from a complete absence of local autonomy to somewhat minimal conditions of local democracy.

First, I will discuss some elements pertaining to the structural conditions and transitional experiences of post-Soviet local autonomy in Russia's big cities. Next, I will compare two contrasting cases of local government development in the cities of Pskov and Saratov. Finally, some possible implications of local autonomy in Russia's cities for national social, economic and political developments will be considered.

## Centers versus peripheries: political opportunities, actors and strategies

In his analysis of the usefulness of western European practices of local government for new democracies in eastern Europe, Alan Norton noted that 'experience from the West shows that the nature of the political system as a whole is the most variable and problematic aspect of local government. It is also the most difficult area for learning across nations' (Norton, 1995: 279). In fact, the political foundations of local government could provide a necessary (though not sufficient) basis for local autonomy and local democracy (or lack thereof). In his classical study of institutional changes, Douglass North pointed out that borrowing similar institutions may have diverse consequences in societies with different institutional systems. While formal institutions (including local government) can be replaced, informal constraints can survive across time, thus limiting further institutional changes (North, 1990: 6). From this perspective, the legacy of Soviet local government provides an unfavorable environment for local autonomy in the post-Soviet period, which faces the twofold challenge of path-dependency coupled with the need for institutional reform.

The Soviet period saw the complete subordination of local governments vis-à-vis the Communist party and the central state (see Jacobs, 1983; Humes, 1991: 81–93). This meant not only political control of higher government over local authorities, but also dependency of municipalities on a centralized and hierarchical distribution of resources. The legacy of the Soviet period imposes certain constraints on the politics of institutional reform of post-Soviet local government. According to North, discontinuous institutional changes have more chance of success if they are reinforced by incremental

institutional changes (North, 1990: 89). However, post-Soviet reformers were faced with the task of reorganizing what had been ineffective, unpopular and completely subordinate Soviet local governments. It is no wonder that they opted for 'revolutionary' discontinuous institutional changes, based on the blueprint approach of installing local government from scratch. Yet constitutional norms separating local government from the state are borrowed practices that were not embedded in Russian society. As Kimitaka Matsuzato (1998: 13) pointed out, the Soviet model of local government was an extreme case of the western European continental model of local government. An evolutionary transition from the Soviet model to the North and Middle European variant of local government (Hesse and Sharpe, 1991) (the route East European countries followed) would be the more natural trajectory. He suggested that the installation of the constitutional Anglo-Saxon model of home rule in Russia in fact contributed to the limitation of local autonomy, because post-Soviet Russian municipalities have neither the economic resources nor political opportunities for the fully-fledged implementation of this model (Matsuzato, 1998: 19–21).

Moreover, post-Soviet municipal reform did not come about as a result of a consistent policy approach to the separation of local government from the state. It resulted from the case-by-case outcomes of conflicts between political actors at Russia's Center (i.e. national level) and the regions. Throughout the 1990s, the outcomes of these conflicts differed to a great extent. In March 1990, the first competitive elections of local councils were held. But already in November 1991, Russia's national authorities rejected the idea of popular local mayoral elections and restored the (so-called 'vertical executive') system of appointed mayors, thus limiting local autonomy. In October 1993 President Yeltsin dissolved all local councils in cities, towns and villages across Russia. Meanwhile, the new Constitution, which granted autonomy to local government, was adopted in a national referendum two months later. Certainly, it was difficult to expect a successful installation of local autonomy from the top when its foundations were being undermined at the grassroots level.

During the subsequent parliamentary debates surrounding national legislation on local government, various political goals provided a space for ad hoc coalition-building (for details, see Gel'man, 1997). Furthermore, responsibility for the implementation of policy toward local government was transferred from the Center to regional authorities, thus launching the regionalization process of local government reform (Ryzhenkov, 1998). Regionalization itself was merely an unintended consequence of the spontaneous devolution of the Russian state in the 1990s (Stoner-Weiss, 1999). It spawned an array of regional varieties of local governments across Russia, ranging from total absence of local government in some regions to a certain degree of local autonomy in others. In many regions, local government autonomy soon became the focal point of conflict between regional authorities and governments in large cities, primarily regional capitals (for some descriptions, see Ryzhenkov and Vinnik, 1999). These conflicts have a political dimension (the struggle for powerful positions) as well as an economic dimension (the redistribution of resources between relatively flourishing cities and impoverished small towns through control over the budget and property).

Although some scholars focused primarily on the contest of 'governors vs mayors' (Slider, 2000), the core of these controversies certainly extends beyond those personalities. Regional-local conflicts reflect fundamental center-periphery cleavages: the split between big cities as centers of modernization and the rest of the regional areas, which (with several exceptions) fall into the category of periphery or semi-periphery. Since most of Russia's regions have a monocentric spatial structure, the center-periphery dichotomy easily transforms into the binary opposition of 'regional capital vs rest of the region'. Center-periphery relations are commonly recognized as a crucial factor in political modernization (Huntington, 1968; Eisenstadt, 1978), including the formation of nation-states (Rokkan, 1975), party systems and patterns of voting behavior (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Similar developments have been noted in studies of post-Soviet politics. On the one hand, center-periphery cleavage was the major determinant of voting behavior in Russian national elections (Kolosov and Turovskii,

1996). On the other hand, the dynamics of center-periphery relations was a major explanatory variable in our comparative study of political regime transitions in six of Russia's regions (Gel'man *et al.*, 2000). How did this process affect the emergence of local autonomy in Russia's cities (or lack thereof)?

The following analysis of the genesis of local government in Russia's cities will take into account two basic dimensions of the institution-building process. First, the politics of institution-building depends upon the activities of actors who contributed to local autonomy during the process of local government reform — *agents* of local government — as well as the activities of their rivals who hindered local autonomy. Although the resistance of the latter seems to be a likely explanation for the failure of local autonomy, it cannot explain the wide diversity in the outcomes of institutional reforms. Second, institution-building politics depends upon the *structural conditions* of local government, which were developed before and during the institutional reform, independently of the activities of agents. Although structural conditions are related to certain social, economic and demographic characteristics of centers and peripheries, their influence on local autonomy is indirect. Rather, structural conditions contributed to *political opportunities*. This means, according to scholars of social movements, 'a set of resources that determine the degree of probability of the emergence of institutions and practices, their forms and performance' (Zdravomyslova, 1993: 74).

Political opportunities in local government in Russia were created long before the 'municipal revolution'. Even students of Russia's regional governance in the 1960s focused their analysis on two major trends, 'localism' and 'departmentalism' (see Hough, 1969), which were a by-product of the Soviet modernization project. The balance of these trends depends upon the sectoral specialization of regional economies (industrial or agrarian) and upon national and regional policies on resource redistribution between centers and peripheries. The domination of 'localism', especially in rural areas, leads to the emergence of highly integrated clientelist networks among elites and the diminished autonomy of elite groups, including urban bureaucracy, vis-à-vis regional leadership. This environment was not conducive to the formation of autonomous local government in the post-Soviet period. On the contrary, industrial regions with diverse regional economies demonstrated the rise of departmentalism. The vertical integration of central-regional elite networks provides some space for horizontal autonomy of segments of local elites. This embedded autonomy established the preconditions for the emergence of unavoidable center-periphery cleavages at the level of elites and their mass clientele. The consequences of Soviet regional policy, such as the rise of big cities and new industrial development in some areas, shifted the balance between 'localism' and 'departmentalism' after a certain time delay. The same is true for the consequences of post-Soviet economic reforms in terms of the shift in the balance of resources between centers and peripheries. Therefore, the Soviet legacy was the key factor in the formation of political opportunities for local autonomy at the initial stage of institutional reforms, however much its influence might be weakened over time.

The impact of the dynamics of political opportunities on local autonomy is evident in the case of Ul'yanovsk oblast'. Rapid urbanization and industrialization in this agrarian region was launched in the 1970s, and until the breakdown of Communist rule, departmentalism and the relative autonomy of the urban bureaucracy were not deeply rooted. Thanks to these features, highly integrated localist-based integration secured the domination of peripheral rural elites in the Ul'yanovsk oblast' in the early 1990s. The center-periphery cleavage was delayed, and agrarian leaders seized control over the center, thus preventing the emergence of urban autonomy in the city of Ul'yanovsk. However, in the course of market reforms in Russia, the resource basis of the periphery was undermined, while the strategy of regional elites for redistribution of resources from center to periphery was limited. Thus, the framework of political opportunities for local government became wider. In 1996, an opposition-backed candidate won the mayoral elections in the city. Soon after, the process of autonomization of local government, accompanied by several conflicts, was launched (Gel'man *et al.*, 2000: 257–93).

The background and recent developmental trends of Russia's regions and cities imposed certain constraints on the political opportunities for local autonomy. However, this does not mean that post-Soviet local government in Russia's cities is controlled by a historically determined path-dependency. Indeed, when one considers elements of path-contingency (the chain of interrelated causes and consequences), political opportunities are important, but not the sole 'point of departure'. In sum, even within similar frameworks of political opportunities, the practices of local government in cities depend upon the activities of agents and their strategies of resource mobilization. In other words, agents could use the potential for local autonomy in the form of economic, administrative or political resources only when these resources were successfully mobilized.

The formation of agents is a minimally required condition for the emergence of local autonomy. The natural groups of such agents were leaders of local governments (namely, city mayors and their clienteles) and, in several cases, regional branches of political parties (Ryzhenkov and Vinnik, 1999). These agents could seek urban autonomy in order to acquire resources for governor campaigns or to pursue other goals. Such political opportunities would appear to be favorable for the evolution of local autonomy. However, a favorable political environment alone does not lead to the formation of regional agents. Put bluntly, conflict among regional elites was beneficial for agents, while consolidation of regional elites could block the growth potential of agents. The case of Sverdlovsk oblast' illustrates the former case. In this region, irresolvable intra-elite conflict, provoked by the federal Center (Gel'man and Golosov, 1998), was a great help to agents of local autonomy, not only in the regional capital, Yekaterinburg, but even in small and medium sized towns (Matsuzato, 1998: 25–33). By contrast, in Tatarstan successful rent-seeking bargaining of the regional elite with the federal Center contributed to its organizational unity around the leadership of the president of Tatarstan, Mintimer Shaimiev. Under these circumstances, agents of local government did not emerge at all. Local government in the region simply turned into local branches of regional government, and city mayors were effectively appointed (and dismissed) by Shaimiev. No organized municipal opposition to Shaimiev was established in Tatarstan, and rebellions by city mayors were quashed without serious resistance (McAuley, 1997: 42–108; Matsuzato, 1999).

Finally, the mere existence of agents of local government in an atmosphere of favorable political opportunities does not guarantee the emergence of local autonomy. The strategic choice of agents can play a crucial role in this respect. Since this choice is subject to a high degree of uncertainty in the transition process, its outcomes can be different in various regional contexts, regardless of agents' intentions. At least two possible scenarios of failure of local autonomy are worth mentioning. First, the open conflict between city and regional authorities can be resolved in a zero-sum game, which excludes any autonomy of urban agents. The defeat of the mayor of the city of Vladivostok during the regional 'warlord' struggle in Primorskii krai (Kirkow, 1995) is a typical example. Second, weak mayors try to avoid open conflicts at any cost. Therefore, they turn to informal cartel agreements among regional and urban leaders, who share resources (including powerful positions), and agree on the subordinated status of city governments. The case of Tomsk oblast' demonstrates such a scenario. Although political opportunities for local autonomy and the activities of actors in the early 1990s were assessed as signals of 'pluralist' politics (McAuley, 1997: 156–220), developments in the late 1990s turned the reverse way. The mayor of the city of Tomsk, who announced broad plans for urban reforms and ran in the gubernatorial race, reached a deal with the regional governor. Both politicians avoided electoral contestation and secured their posts at the expense of local autonomy: they agreed on the preservation of the status quo, and local autonomy was thus limited by informal constraints (Tarusina, 2001).

Therefore, the path-contingent model of the formation of local autonomy in Russia's cities includes a chain of conditions: (1) favorable political opportunities; (2) the emergence of agents of local government; and (3) successful strategies of these agents

**Table 1** The 'path-contingent model' of the formation of local autonomy in Russia's cities

| Favorable political opportunities | Emergence of agents of local government | Successful strategies of agents | Local autonomy |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|----------------|
| (+)                               | (+)                                     | (+)                             | (+)            |
| (+)                               | (+)                                     | (-)                             | (-)            |
| (+)                               | (-)                                     |                                 | (-)            |
| (-)                               |   |                                 | (-)            |

(+) = *yes*; (-) = *no*

in terms of local autonomy. Table 1 demonstrates that the sum of various factors leading local government to an impasse of subordination seems to be more important than path-contingent local autonomy. Thus, I would propose a basic assumption that local autonomy has limited chances in Russia, but may be achieved in some cities. As a first step to testing this assumption, I will turn to a comparative case study of local autonomy in two of Russia's cities, Saratov and Pskov.

## Cities vs regions: toward an empirical analysis

### The case of Saratov: a grand failure?

Local government reforms in Saratov oblast' prevented the emergence of autonomy because of unfavorable political opportunities and a lack of local government agents.<sup>1</sup> Although the city of Saratov is the highly developed industrial hub of the Middle Volga area, with a population of 1 million (2.7 million in the whole region), the Soviet period left it with meager chances for local autonomy. Overwhelming localism led to the monopolistic domination of agrarian bosses within the regional elite. Suffice to say that most of the regional Communist party officials were recruited from the same rural district and through the same agricultural college. Deeply embedded patron-client ties were strengthened during the long period of patrimonial rule of the Communist head of the region Anatolii Shibaev (1959–76) due to the huge inflow of resources from the Center for the large-scale irrigation program in Saratov oblast'. Ruling cliques distributed these resources arbitrarily (in favor of their clients), and urban bureaucrats as well as industrial managers had minor significance in the decision-making process.

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s local political opportunities in Saratov increased as a result of national and regional political changes. The general processes of democratization and decentralization were accompanied by an end to centralized financing of regional irrigation projects. Thus, agrarian domination in the region was undermined, and personnel changes among the regional Communist leadership caused multiple conflicts among the regional elite (Stykov, 1999). Under these circumstances, the local government in Saratov was a tool of 'rebellion' against the formerly dominant periphery among urban actors, who represented the previously subordinate center. But the 'urban breakthrough' (Huntington, 1968: 72–8) has failed. Although former Communist rulers lost power in August 1991, urban politicians cannot seize control over major economic and administrative resources. City leaders were discredited and accused of corruption. President Yeltsin appointed colorless (and neutral) figures to major posts (governor and city mayor). The conflict was not stopped, and soon transformed into a 'war of all against all' against a background of economic decline in the region. After October 1993 the local council was dismissed, and local autonomy weakened.

However, first deputy mayor of Saratov, Dmitrii Ayatskov (also deputy of the upper chamber of the national legislature), used the slogan of local autonomy in his campaign

<sup>1</sup> Some paragraphs of this part of the article are borrowed from Gel'man *et al.* (2000: 109–45).

for governorship. Ayatskov and his allies in the regional legislature proposed a draft of regional law on local government, which would undermine the position of the incumbent governor through establishment of the institutions of an independent city council and a popularly elected mayor. After a series of intrigues, in April 1996 Yeltsin fired the Saratov oblast' governor and appointed Ayatskov to the post. Immediately after his victory, Ayatskov postponed local elections, replaced most mayors of the cities and towns in the region and proposed new regional legislation on local government. The new governor, who won in a zero-sum conflict, tried to eliminate any chances for local autonomy. According to formal institutional design, the mayor of Saratov (and other mayors in the region) was to be elected indirectly by deputies of the city council, and the governor was to nominate the mayoral candidate. This principle was incorporated into the city Charter (*Ustav*), adopted in the popular referendum in December 1996. The referendum was held simultaneously with elections to the local council in order to prevent amendments initiated by deputies. Needless to say, neither of the alternative proposals discussed before the referendum or information about the core of decisions were delivered to the voters. As for informal electoral practices, Ayatskov maintained control over the registration of candidates, campaigning and 'proper' counting of the votes, thus eliminating any chance of municipal opposition. Newly elected councils were agreed upon with virtually all mayors proposed by Ayatskov (Ryzhenkov, 1998: 177–80). The path-contingent formation of local government in Saratov caused a low level of local autonomy, in both legal and political aspects. The city Charter confirmed this choice in a legal (and legitimate) way.

Although formally dependent on the council, the mayor's actual powers exceeded those of the assembly. Legally speaking, this would render city government more autonomous. However, such autonomization could be achieved only under advanced practices of political representation at the local level. This was certainly not the case in Saratov nor in most Russian local governments (Formirovanie, 1999; Ryzhenkov and Vinnik, 1999: 107–48). Moreover, the plurality of electoral systems in local and regional elections hindered the development of political parties in Saratov. At the same time, the governor acquired corporatist-like control over the public sphere. The majority of local branches of national parties, interest groups and 'third-sector' NGOs turned out to be 'municipal clientele' of the governor (Ryzhenkov and Vinnik, 1999: 250–83). Among 29 deputies of the city council, only three Communists opposed the governor, while most assembly members were 'independent' (i.e. non-partisan) bureaucrats and enterprise managers who were completely loyal to Ayatskov. In other words, the case of Saratov demonstrates a combination of the formal organizational model of 'weak mayor' and the informal political practice of a 'weak council', which minimized the potential for local autonomy.

Although the lack of local autonomy resulted from the outcome of zero-sum conflict during the establishment of local government in the region, further developments in Saratov show some controversies surrounding the new local government. The city mayor, whose survival depends upon both governor and council, is faced with a dilemma. He must choose between: (1) complete subordination to the governor in exchange for arbitrary redistribution of city resources by regional authorities (threatening his performance and potentially causing protest from the council); and (2) initiating a new 'rebellion' against regional powers with unclear chances of success. A secure status quo in Saratov's local government provided no equilibrium because the large amount of resources in the regional center was contradicted by the informal practice of 'vertical executive' power.

The partial reconstruction of a Soviet-like hierarchical model of city government and the city of Saratov's subordinated status doesn't correspond with the real potential of the regional center in light of its economic growth under the market economy. In fact, political opportunities became more favorable for autonomy. Saratov as a regional center could defend itself from the periphery and seize more control over urban economic resources, such as budget and property. Regardless of the intentions of the governor and other actors, city government could develop according to its own logic of

institutionalization through the emancipation (Huntington, 1968: 8–20) of city governance. The potential to claim local autonomy might be considered as an unintended consequence of economic development.

But at least up until 2001, Ayatskov exerted sufficient efforts to control the loyalty of city actors, and no signs of movement towards autonomy were observed in Saratov. Although the mayor and some deputies of the city council demonstrated an interest in local autonomy in the wake of the 2000 council elections, they did not produce any meaningful moves in this direction. The center-periphery conflict between city and the region in Saratov oblast' has either been postponed or its time is not yet ripe.

### **The case of Pskov: signs of local autonomy?**

The local government in the city of Pskov throughout the 1990s developed according to two contradictory trends: deep economic crisis in the region and permanent political conflict between the city and regional authorities. The combination of these trends contributed to a widening framework of political opportunities and to the formation of agents of local government. The result is a certain degree of local autonomy in Pskov.

Political opportunities for local government in Pskov were produced by the regional social and economic conditions as well as government structure. Pskov oblast', occupying a relatively small area in northwest Russia (population around 0.8 million), was a typical peripheral zone with a weakly developed agricultural sector and some military industry enterprises located in the regional capital Pskov (population 200,000) and in small towns. Due to its minimal economic contributions, no strong localism or departmentalism emerged in the region in the Soviet period. Governance in Pskov oblast' depends upon centralized subsidies, and regional rules maintained a balance between regional center and periphery. In the post-Soviet period, the economic dependency of the region greatly increased: for example, the share of revenues in the regional budget decreased from 80% in 1990 to 36.7% in 1997 (Ryzhenkov and Vinnik, 1999: 437). Industrial production in Pskov oblast' in the 1990s declined by an estimated 70–85%, and employment in regional industry decreased twofold. Industrial managers and agrarians lost political influence in the region. Since the regional center was the only possible source of resource redistribution in Pskov oblast', the role of urban governments increased. Despite economic hardships (or even thanks to them), political opportunities for local autonomy in Pskov became more likely, thus promoting political entrepreneurship.

The mayor of Pskov, Alexander Prokofiev, was the major agent of local government in the region. He was appointed to his post in early 1992 due to the strong support of new local business and some industrial managers. Soon after, Yeltsin fired the regional governor, who was accused of corruption, and replaced him with Vladislav Tumanov, Prokofiev's ally and first deputy. But because of the diverse economic interests of urban and regional governments, the mayor's hopes for the governor's support were never realized. Tumanov pursued financial support of regional agriculture at the expense of the city budget. No wonder the mayor opposed the redistributive policy of the governor. Beginning in 1995, this conflict turned into open confrontation.

The lawmaking process in the regional legislature served as a basic weapon both for proponents and opponents of local autonomy. During the adoption of regional law on local government, deputies of the regional assembly elected from Pskov districts were active lobbyists for local autonomy, while Communists challenged the regional administration, blaming the governor for his poor performance. In sum, the coalition based on anti-governor consensus gained a legislative majority on this issue. The regional law on local government, passed in 1995, proposed direct popular elections of the mayor and local council, while the organizational model of local government was a matter for the city Charter.

The first mayoral and city council elections were held simultaneously in February 1996. As in Saratov, the mayor proposed a referendum on the city Charter. The draft

Charter minimized the powers of the assembly and maximized mayoral control over all decision-making in the city (the 'strong mayor weak council' model). But this attempt to impose unlimited mayoral rule in the city faced resistance from various actors, such as regional government, Communists and local businesses. After some bargaining, Prokofiev declined a referendum since it could potentially cause his defeat in the mayoral elections. The local council (outside of mayoral control) adopted the Charter in March 1997. Since the deputies were interested in playing a more important role in the policy process, they tried to take control over the executive. The Charter introduced an alternative model: 'strong mayor strong council'. Although the mayor maintains broad powers, the council must ratify his major decisions (including issues of personnel and finance).

This choice of institutional design was promising for local autonomy. On the one hand, it secured the immunity of a popularly elected mayor and local council from encroachment by regional government. On the other hand, it prevented excessive concentration of power in the mayoral hands. In the context of regional politics, the council was a major ally of the mayor in defense of local autonomy, but on the level of city politics, the powerful council contributed to the development of political pluralism. After the new council elections of 1998, these trends strengthened even more. Although all but one of 17 local deputies is a non-partisan, most of them are representatives of the educational and public health institutions with strong interests in the city budget. In contrast to most of Russia's local councils (Formirovanie, 1999; Ryzhenkov and Vinnik, 1999: 123), no enterprise managers or entrepreneurs were elected at all.

But the major battle was waged over gubernatorial and mayoral elections. Prokofiev lost the support of local business and some urban bureaucrats due to his conflict with the governor. He faced serious contestation in mayoral elections, but the incumbent won with a slim margin thanks to the lack of coalition among governor-supported opposition. For his part, Prokofiev openly opposed the election of Tumanov during the gubernatorial race in October 1996. Since Tumanov defeated the young member of the State Duma LDPR faction, Evgenii Mikhailov (backed by the nationalist party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskii) (Vagin, 1997), this election can be considered as a tactical victory for the mayor. However, Mikhailov tried to centralize control over all economic and political resources in the region (Alexseev and Vagin, 1999; Slider, 1999) and announced a plan for the redistribution of urban revenues to the rural districts. This threatened city autonomy and fueled the conflict between city and region. But both sides gained electoral legitimacy, and the rough equality of their resources guaranteed a stalemate: none of actors had a chance of securing a zero-sum game victory. Therefore, legislative and electoral contestations were the major weapons in this struggle.

In the wake of the new mayoral elections in early 2000, the first deputy of Prokofiev, Mikhail Khoronen, expressed open disagreement with the conflict-provoking policy, and announced his mayoral campaign. Prokofiev fired his deputy, but the local council did not approve of this decision. Following a legal suit, Khoronen returned to his office, while Prokofiev was finally discredited in the eyes of local notables. Along with the governor's candidate, he lost heavily in the elections. Khoronen, backed by the local council, won the race with an overwhelming majority. After the elections Khoronen proposed several amendments to the city Charter in order to limit the powers of the council and broaden his own influence. The council, however, rejected this claim. The election of the new mayor marked a short-term turn from confrontation to bargaining strategies. The timing was ripe for such strategies, since Mikhailov was faced with his own re-election bid, and was interested at the very least in the neutrality of urban actors. The mayor used this situation for broadening the budget autonomy of the city. In November 2000 Mikhailov won in the plurality gubernatorial race with a slim margin, thus fixing the status quo, although the budget conflict was raised again soon after.

In the early 2000s, local autonomy in Pskov became more and more indispensable and routinized in an impersonal manner. Nevertheless, the outcome of local government reform could be preliminary and intermediate. A shift of political opportunities and/or actors' strategies could strengthen or undermine local autonomy. The most important

problem is that political developments in Pskov oblast' (as in many of Russia's other economically backward regions) depend largely on the policies of the federal Center. Therefore, it is unclear to what extent local autonomy in Pskov will be sustainable over time.

## Post-Soviet municipal project: problems and prospects

Although the reform of local government right across Russia was initiated from the Center according to the same constitutional blueprint, the contrast between local government reforms in Pskov and Saratov demonstrate polar opposite varieties of local autonomy. Though without large-N analysis it is difficult to generalize about patterns of autonomy formation in Russia's big cities, some of the implications could be a starting point for a further research agenda.

The major differences between the two cases (see Table 2) can be explained within the framework of a path-contingent model. First, in the case of Pskov, seeds of local autonomy fell on soil more or less fertile from the past, while the Soviet legacy in Saratov left little space for such a scenario. Second, agents of local government in Pskov (either mayors or deputies of the local council) were functionally indispensable, and their activities embedded to some extent. In Saratov, on the other hand, Ayatskov utilized the 'rebellion' of city actors for the sake of achieving monopolistic control over the region. Third, in Pskov long-run conflict between the city and the region culminated in a form of stalemate without hope of a decisive victory on either side, which made possible the turn from a 'war of all against all' to bargaining. Again, Ayatskov in Saratov won in a zero-sum game, thus ending meaningful political contestation in the region and eliminating local autonomy as such.

Needless to say, the role of the federal Center in the local government reforms in both cases was relatively modest. It was limited to broad and vague legal frameworks of municipal policy. But this policy (as well as the Center's regional policy) neither resulted from a general strategy of state building nor was it addressed to concrete regions and cities (including Pskov and Saratov). The decline of state capacity and the patrimonial style of decision-making in Russia in the 1990s (see Shevtsova, 1999) strongly affected Russian federalism (Stoner-Weiss, 1999). The presidency of Putin, however, could change political opportunities for local government reforms. Putin's federal reform seems to be a step toward recentralization of power, even though its implementation is questionable (Solnick, 2000). In Putin's presidential address to the Federal Assembly in July 2000, the idea of transforming local government into a lower level of 'vertical executive' was stated clearly. Moreover, early drafts of Putin's laws on federal reform proposed abolishing mayoral elections in cities with a population over 50,000 and a return to the practice of mayoral appointment by regional governors. This proposal was buried by the State Duma, but the Center's policy change would pose a challenge to local government.

Nevertheless, potential negative consequences of the 'municipal counterrevolution' should not be overestimated. Local government reforms in the 1990s imposed limits on institutional changes; Article 12 of the Russian Constitution can be changed only with the adoption of a new Constitution, which is not now on the Russian political agenda. Simultaneously, other trends aid local autonomy, such as economic growth and the rise of regional activities of national financial-industrial groups as well as foreign companies. The emergence of new political and economic actors in regions would contribute to political and economic pluralism and competitiveness, thus improving the environment for local autonomy and local democracy.

The task of social and economic modernization of Russia openly claimed by Russia's president, cannot be solved without effective policy implementation in the regions. Otherwise, innovations from the federal Center could be blocked at the peripheries. The Center needs local allies as agents of its economic reforms. Undoubtedly, governments

**Table 2** Major features of political autonomy of local government in the cities of Pskov and Saratov

| Characteristics                                  | Pskov   | Saratov  |
|--|---|--|
| Initial political opportunities                  | Favorable (balance between urban center and agrarian periphery) | Unfavorable (domination of agrarian periphery)   |
| Dynamics of political opportunities in the 1990s | Widening  | Diminishing                                      |
| Agents of local government                       | Sustainable   | Temporary  |
| Strategies of agents in the region               | Conflict  | Conflict   |
| Outcome of center-periphery conflict             | Stalemate   | Zero-sum game                                    |
| Organizational model of local government         | 'Strong mayor - strong council'                                 | 'Weak mayor - weak council'                      |
| Electoral system in local elections              | Majority (mayor), Plurality (council)                           | No popular election (mayor), Plurality (council) |
| Political context of local government            | Political pluralism   | 'Municipal clientele of governor'                |
| Prospects for local autonomy                     | Moderately positive   | Negative, though not hopeless                    |

of big cities are the best candidates to serve this purpose. Therefore, alliances and coalitions between the pragmatic parts of federal bureaucracy and agents of local government reforms that contributed to the 'municipal revolution' in the 1990s (Gel'man, 1997) could be restored under new conditions.

Paradoxically, the policy of recentralization could open new political opportunities for local governments. There are grounds for assuming that the potential for a 'municipal counterrevolution' would differ among Russia's regions and cities. In cities where agents of local government are influential enough, it would be hard to expect the elimination of local autonomy. On the other hand, in those cities where agents of local government did not emerge, or performed poorly in the wake of the 'municipal revolution', local autonomy has few chances regardless of the Center's policies.

More broadly, in terms of local democracy the issue of local autonomy is crucial for Russia's transition. Local democracy in most of Russia's regions is reduced to non-competitive voting for the 'political machines' of regional bosses. Since Russia's regional politics is rural-based, big cities are the only counterbalance to governors' fiefdoms — in the form of competition between gubernatorial and mayoral 'machines' (Gel'man *et al.*, 2000). Such competition, however, is impossible without a certain degree of local autonomy. Otherwise, as the case of Saratov shows, political representation in cities (through elections, political parties or NGOs) amounts to little more than the 'transmission belt' of a monopolistic ruling group. But the struggle of city mayors for local autonomy requires at the very least competitive elections and, as occurred in the case of Pskov, would itself promote political pluralism. In other words, the formation of local autonomy not only depends upon the emergence of local democracy, but also strengthens it.

At the same time, the continuing subordination of local governments in big cities, as well as the policies of redistribution of resources from centers to peripheries, makes the formation of an effective market economy and successful state-building on the local level unlikely. From the perspective of national development, big cities play a major role in Russia's globalization. They serve as mediators and missionaries in terms of the spatial adjustment of Russian peripheries to the modern world. Not only do they accumulate capital and attract foreign investments; they also spread innovations on the

level of everyday life, ranging from information technologies to cultural patterns of behavior. But centers cannot perform these functions while politically dependent on peripheries. The very existence of electoral politics provoked Russia's national and regional politicians to sponsor the electoral loyalty of rural voters at the expense of cities. Forced redistribution of urban economic resources would lead to atomization of cities' innovative capital and to the peripheralization of centers.

The egalitarian solution to center-periphery conflict in Russia, i.e. the choice between freedom and equality in favor of the latter, would mean equal poverty for all. The two alternatives for development seem to be (1) to provide Internet access for all school classes in big cities and doom small towns and rural areas to be computer-illiterate; or (2) equally redistribute scarce resources on the principle of one computer per school, thus prolonging backwardness into the twenty-first century. If so, the future of local autonomy would define the future of Russia's cities — whether they will become part of modern global social, economic and cultural centers or remain hostages to the hopeless Russian periphery. It seems, though, that the issues of city politics are not yet on the agenda of Russian policy-makers, who still consider local government to be the 'backyard' of Big Politics.

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