National Minorities' Inclusion and Representation in Local Government Policy-Making in Latvia: A Case Study of Riga Municipality

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to assess the extent of cooperation between municipalities and Latvia's Russian-speaking minority towards the goal of securing its inclusion in the local governance of the nation. The research is split into two main parts. First, an analytical framework is established using governance theories, with a particular focus on the criteria of fairness and competences. Second, an empirical framework analyses various determinants on the basis of a case study of the Riga city municipality. The authors conclude that there is notable progress in the creation of formal frameworks fostering inclusiveness, in particular in public administration and legislation. However, several disadvantages are still observed when the attempts at inclusion encounter the two aforementioned criteria. As a result, the overall forms and initiatives towards cooperation fail to engender an environment that would foster new competencies or values for the general public or particular stakeholders.

Introduction

Public participation in administration is highly valued in contemporary democratic societies (Cooper, Bryer & Meek, 2006; Yang & Pandey, 2011; Quick, Bryson, Slotterback & Crosby 2013; Quick & Bryson, 2016), giving rise to questions of how to best achieve a holistic representation of the various layers of society. For several decades, one of the greatest challenges in this context has stemmed from the increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity in European societies (Eelbode, 2010; Bell, 2010). Monolingualism, a historically standard characteristic of European high modernity, has recently been put under significant pressure (Kraus, Garcia, Frank & Climent-Ferrando, 2017). Building "social cohesion" via a range of inclusion processes, such as strengthening a common sense of citizenship, is considered one of the primary solutions (Kymlicka, 2011).

In this regard, local governance can be considered one of the key domains for effectively implementing inclusion processes. This derives from its primary role in fulfilling the formal requirements of democratic processes and other public participation mechanisms. Equally important for the creation of a comprehensive society is the inhabitants' specific subjective identity of place. Concurrently, it must be pointed out that while ethnic factors have been recognised in various European countries (Celis, Meier & Wauters, 2010; Eelbode, 2010; Kymlicka, 2011; Lanz, 2016; Doboz, 2016; Audickas & Apostolova, 2017), the connection between the linguistic and functional status-related divisions can be described as

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insufficiently explored (Kraus, 2011), in particular those related to societal participation in policy-making processes. Contrary to the rest of Europe, the challenges of diversity have long been debated by the Latvian public, policy makers and researchers. Since regaining independence, the nation has had the highest proportion of Russian-speakers in the European Union, at one third of the total population. As the minority does not share linguistic and other cultural roots with Latvian-speakers, its integration is a sensitive and difficult issue to resolve. One of the greatest challenges in building a comprehensive society is the "question of minorities' participation in Latvian public space and connecting this participation with the development of the concept of Latvia as an ethnical nation" (Hanovs, 2012)[1]. Several factors are cited as significant disincentives for the inclusion of Russian-speakers in societal and political processes at state and local levels of government: existence of the non-citizenship regime; poor or non-existent knowledge of the state's official language; low level of interest in administrative processes; and a weak civil society. In turn, the minority representatives themselves highlight a low level of interest and an unwillingness on the part of the administrative institutions to cooperate.

Although the amount of research dedicated to the issue on a national scale is notable (Muižnieks, 2010; Rozenvalds & Zobena, 2014; Rozenvalds, 2014; Bērziņa, Bērziņš, Hiršs, Rostoks & Vanaga, 2016), less attention has been paid to the local communities and municipalities as a broader inclusion in society's base sections. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to assess the extent of cooperation between municipalities and the Russian-speaking minority of Latvia towards the goal of securing its inclusion in the local governance of the nation. The research methodology is split into two main parts. First, an analytical framework is established using governance theories, with a particular focus on the criteria of fairness and competences. Second, an empirical framework analyses various determinants on the basis of a case study of the Riga city municipality.

Theoretical framework

In societies where ethnicity is a primary part of forming self-identity, challenges related to difficulties of inclusion processes of various minority groups are particularly noticeable (Schopflin, 2000). In such societies, ethnic tensions, exclusion and isolation discourses are commonly seen an integral part of the state's agenda at all levels of social life, including local communities and their administrations. Municipalities provide "room for a conflicting topic, disagreements about the understanding of history, parallel versions of time, events and processes, including those of identities and participation, thus it is relevant for deeper analysis. Those are exactly the local settlements [..], that become a manifestation of the so-called *different/other*" (Hanovs, 2012). In addition, the ability to consolidate common interest, identity and other links between different groups living in the same area, municipalities provide opportunities for building a coherent territorial community (Olson, 1982; Prior, Steward, Walsh, 1995; Kusenbach,

2008). Thus, there is a substantial interest in how the *other* is included in social and political processes, with an aim of ensuring its full-fledged and lawful existence as a part of the local community.

The agenda of discussions on the issue of public participation and inclusion of minority groups in political and social processes consists of several dimensions. Among others, they include such layers as legitimacy, representation, knowledge, and transparency. These aspects partly relates to the understanding of the notions "participation" and "inclusion" themselves. Meaningful public participation for the citizens as stakeholders provides influence on the decisions made by the government. These decisions, in turn, can range from solving individual problems to instituting broader strategic plans and policies. Accordingly, there are several forms of activities in which societal participation of the stakeholders can take place. They include elections, public hearings or serving in advisory boards. For governmental institutions, in turn, this kind of collaboration has a potential to provide legitimacy, and enhance the quality of decisions among other benefits.

Accordingly, already by the early 2000s, when co-operation had become a routine and expected feature of governance, academics as well as practitioners devoted their attention to the quality of societal representation. It was found to have significant benefits for decision-making, citizenship and inclusion (Bryson et al 2013; Quick, Bryson, 2016). "Inclusion", in a narrower sense, in this research is viewed as a question towards such provision of representation in the administration that includes all the corresponding parties of interest, even those which traditionally are excluded from decision-making (Young, 2000; Sclozman, Brady, 2012; Quick, Bryson, 2016).

On the basis of the aforementioned, diversity of the members of society can be referred to in light of representation in decision-making as well as to the depth of their inclusion. This is particularly important, as "most public participation is not inclusive: it does not involve deliberation and creating new understandings together, but is rather orientated towards "consulting" with the public to gather input or just allowing people to express different perspectives" (Quick, Bryson, 2016).

In order to address the concerns mentioned above, the authors propose measuring the efficiency of public participation to deduce the inclusion of different minority groups in decision-making. Certain trends will be investigated in particular. One of the trends investigated is based on goal setting. The focus is placed on both the setting and implementation of practices and results. Several challenges are associated with the use of these approaches in the analysis of public participation. Nevertheless, the Authors are convinced that the main challenge is related to setting of the criteria of the determination of efficiency.

Many researchers agree, that the framework of analysis based on principles of *fairness and competence* offered by Thomas Webler[2] has become a foundation for the development of the measurements of appropriateness and quality of public participation practices. According to this approach (which has been developed from the ideas of Fox and Miller, as well as Hansen), three guiding criteria – inclusivity, self-regulation, and policy outputs – shall be used to judge

the quality of discourse (Webler, Tuler, 2000). The two aspects are important as "fairness must be granted to achieve a communicative discourse which enables affected persons to take part and to influence the decision-making process. Competence is needed to ensure an effective communicative discourse process and to guarantee that present knowledge about the problem at hand is taken into account" (Messner, Zwirner, Karkuschke, 2003).

Fairness is understood to mean: equal rights to attend and participate in public decision-making processes; equal rights to initiate discourse (make statements); and equal rights to participate in discussions. Moreover, "these necessary opportunities are relevant in each of the three basic activities that comprise a public participation discourse: agenda and rulemaking, moderation and rule enforcement, and substantive discussion of the issue" (Webler, Tuler, 2000).

"Competence refers to the construction of the best possible understandings and agreements given what is reasonably knowable to the participants at the time the discourse takes place. It is conceptualized as two basic necessities: access to information and its interpretations and use of the best available procedures for knowledge selection" (Webler, Tuler, 2000). Access to information is understood as bringing in outside experts (truth claims), ensuring that all relevant interest groups are represented (normative claims), or simply making certain that people have time to get in touch with their own authentic desires and concerns (expressive claims).

Knowledge is not a uniform concept. There are several types, levels, and forms of it. The knowledge of experts often is much deeper than the knowledge of representatives of public administration or stakeholders. The difference in knowledge is even higher with the general public. People are incapable of making appropriate conclusions and judgements for full-fledged participation in a case if they do not get all the objective and complete information required (Creighton, 2005). The International Association for Public Participation argues that the necessity of informing participants is one of the core values for best practice in any public participatory process: "Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way" (IAP2, 2016). In a broader context sufficient access to information is of the utmost importance for democratic societies, and a lack of information hampers political discourse and democratic dialogue (Jaeger, 2007).

Another issue is whether stakeholders believe the information they receive. If they do not or they do not trust the institutions which are responsible for their involvement, the two-way communication will not be authentic. In addition, this is highly connected with the satisfaction of stakeholders. Although often considered as an indicator or proxy for the quality of a policy, satisfaction does not necessarily equate with good public policy. Moreover, participant satisfaction is an incomplete measure because it excludes those who do not participate" (Abelson, Gauvin, 2006). Another no less important issue is the specific perceptions/misperceptions, as well as expectations of stakeholders who participate. This is supplemented by "the issue of measuring *perceived vs. actual impacts* is problematic in any evaluation" (Abelson, Gauvin, 2006).

These scenes of inclusion processes within public administration perceived specifically by stakeholders will be considered as a basic data for analysis. The Authors underline that this paper is a perspective on a method of viewing the participation processes from the stakeholders' point of view regarding the manner in which involvement practices are conducted. Furthermore, the *Road map* for the questionnaire for participants and, as a result, also criteria, are based on several important aspects: theoretical literature on the topic and previous studies; analysis of publicly available information about the public involvement processes in local communities in this case study; semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and experts, as well as focus-group interviews with representatives of general Russian-speaking public in specific municipalities.

In the light of this, the first layer of analysis, which the Authors wish to put forward, will cover the analytical steps developed according to two general criteria – *competence* and *fairness* – offered by Webler (Ortwin, Webler, Wiedemann, 1995) (*see Table 1*), whereas the second layer of analysis will cover another dimension of participation: the social trust of members of community, their socio-political engagement, as well as the description of the organized Russian speaking civic society.

Table 1: Adapted public participation criteria for the representation of interests of diverse groups[3] (Authors' creation)

Competence
Common discourse of communication with society (media; public hearings; events e.g.) Is it informative and inclusive for all the groups of society?   **Agenda setting**: Is the public informed about the priorities? Do they know the principles of agenda setting and the key actors participating in it? Are stakeholders informed about their possibilities to influence the goal setting, agenda setting? How do they value their knowledge and capacity to influence agenda-setting? Can they acess the information?   **Decision-making**: Does the general public know about the decision-making mechanisms and the possibilities to influence it? How do the individuals value their capacity to influence it? How do stakeholders value their knowledge and capacity to participate in the decision-making process? Do they have acess to all the information needed? Are all the stakeholders informed about the criteria of choosing participants (public councils e.ct.) and the way they are founded?   **Implementation of policies**: What are the ways general public is informed about the implementation of decisions/policies e.tc.?   **Evaluation**: Are the stakeholders informed about the outcomes of policies? Do they know how the efficency of these policies is measured? How do they value the effecency of work of the municipality?   Does the process of participation give the possibility to build new partnerships? Do they trust each other?

Fairness

- **Communication with general public:** Do inhabidants have equal possibilities to obtain information?
- **Agenda setting**: Are there any mechanisms for initiating the discourse, goal setting? Are tey fair? Are there any mechanisms for initiating the discourse, goal setting? Are tey fair? Are all relevant interest groups represented in goal setting e.tc.?
- **Decision making:** voting rights; legal regulation
  Do the stakeholders value the mechanisms of participation as inclusive? Are there equal rights to participate? Do they have conflicting interests and do they evaluate the end decisions as a consensuss or the outcome of "zero sum game"? Are all relevant interest groups included in the process?
- **Implementation of policies**: Does the municipality delegate any functions to other stakeholders? Are all relevant interest groups included in the process?
- **Evaluation**: Can stakeholders participate in decision making about the measurement of efficency of policies implemented by local government and partners? Whst level of participation do stakeholders see as the weekest link? Are the possibilities of participation equal on all levels?

Research methodology

The contribution examines the content of performance of the Riga Municipality towards the inclusion of Russian-speaking minority in policy-making processes. The effort explores whether and how the discourse and other implemented activities, offered by the local municipalities, help the Russian–speaking people to fit in the local community. Also, the engagement between NGOs (as a form of a civic society's representation) and agencies of this local municipality are investigated. More specifically, the number and types of the inclusion's performance practices are analysed. Respectively, the authors engage research on the basis of social constructivism through a theoretical perspective, according to which the knowledge of an individual is constructed through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1987), but perception and behaviour of individuals and groups are caused by peculiarities of identity, which are being constructed in accordance with historical, social and political circumstances.

The chosen strategy of investigation is a qualitative case analysis of the Riga municipality, focusing on two emphasized cooperation criteria: fairness and competence. The analysed period of time is 2015 – 2016. Content and critical discourse analyses are the main research methods. The processed data is compiled from survey data, data provided by official documents of the municipality of Riga, data obtained by the Authors of the paper during semi-structured interviews with the representatives of Russian-speaking non-governmental organiza-

tions, as well as focus group interviews conducted within the scope of the study entitled "Societal Security. Inclusion-Exclusion Dilemma. A Portrait of the Russian-Speaking Community in Latvia" and additional semi-structured interviews carried out with representatives of municipalities, as well as experts in the field. The overall data is used from two focus group interviews with the Russian-speaking citizens of Riga, semi-structured in-depth interviews with six Russian-speaking NGO representatives, five municipality employees and three policy experts.

A secondary data analysis was also conducted. The Authors researched the available statistical data of the Russian-speaking citizen positions in society, as well as their subjective perception, orientations and values. Additional attention was devoted to the political and civic dimensions. Subsequently, the official documents and white papers of the Riga municipality were reviewed by content analysis. In this case, the specific topic, which separately includes keywords like cooperation, public involvement, public councils, civic society, Russian-speakers, non-governmental organisations etc., served as a unit of analysis. With this method, the Authors also analysed the data gathered from focus group interviews, as well as semi-structured interviews. As a result, with the mediation of this method, a possibility is provided for determining the topicality of civic participation and Russian-speaking inclusion issues in municipalities, as well as in Russian-speaking peoples' own daily routines. This also provides an opportunity to emphasize the situations and issues, according to which the raised topicalities will be highlighted and reflected upon.

The content of the Riga City Council Facebook page, as well as the Facebook profile of its chairman – Nils Ušakovs (Nils Ushakov), was analysed using critical discourse methodology. Such a discourse analysis method is a means to identify signs and expressions of power in various messages, as well as to determine their context. Consequently, the use of critical discourse analysis provided assistance in understanding how Riga municipality, with the help of daily discourse, positions its relations with the representatives of community actively influenced the development of its affiliation to the local community, as well as constructing motivation for cooperation. Other ideological functions were also practiced in the discourse, which may serve as a factor for creating and sustaining various forms of inequality (Zepa, Kļave, Šūpule, 2014).

While examining the possible obstacles which may arise during data gathering and interpretation, the factors concerning inner and outer validity should be emphasized. The prior gives notice to the issue of whether the research results correspond with reality. To reduce the possibility of using incorrect data for the research, a vast amount of data was reviewed, analysing the available materials and accepting the quantitative majority as valid. Furthermore, the interviews were based on anonymity, allowing a chance of skewing their data. However, given the sensitivity of the issue, as well as the stakeholders' rare readiness to openly debate about it, anonymity was a crucial factor. Also, the actors, participants, and experts from the NGOs (non Russian -speaking), chosen for the realization process, were chosen as randomly as possible. In accordance with outer

validity, it must be noted that the conclusions made by gathering the interview results most likely cannot be applied to any statistical generalizations.

Case study

In this chapter, the place and role of the Russian-speaking community in the common cultural space of the discussed municipality will be examined. Also, the formal institutional framework and the public discourse which is being offered by the municipality in the process of creating an inclusive will be analysed. Similarly, Russian-speakers in general, as well as a civic society-NGOs group, which specifically support the interests of Russian-speakers, will be assessed for their participation in this process and what their subjective evaluation of the processes is.

According to the data provided by the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the total population of Riga as of 1 July 2016 was 703,224 (OCMA, 2016)[4]. Russian is spoken daily in the homes of 55.9% of the inhabitants of Riga (SKDS, 2014). Historically, Riga has been a multi-national city[5], however, the present Russian and Russian-speaking population is there as a result of forced migration waves from different countries of the former USSR, as well as their offspring. As a result, after the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Latvia, many migrants, who came to Latvia as USSR citizens based on an adopted legislation, became permanent inhabitants of the state without citizenship (*non-citizens*)[6]. As of 1 July 2016, the number of inhabitants of Riga, whose legal status is *non-citizen*, was 127,563 (OCMA, 2016).

Lack of citizenship imposes several important limitations for these individuals, including removing voting rights. *non-citizens* are thus excluded from the opportunity to influence the execution of local administration. Moreover, data demonstrates that all the *non-citizens* surveyed during in-depth interviews conducted in 2013 expressed the wish to participate in municipal elections (Šūpule, Bebriša, Kļave, 2014). Consequently, this becomes one of the factors contributing to low trust in the state and local governments among Russian-speakers and negative attitude towards implemented policies[7]. For example, 41.3% of Russian-speaking inhabitants (and 40.7% *non-citizens)* in Latvia feel discriminated to such an extent that they see possible interruption by Russia as necessary and justified. In Riga, 36% of all population support this opinion (Centre for Security and Strategic Research, NDA, 2016). Also, it should be noted that the population in general do not believe in their ability to influence political processes. Only 16.8% of inhabitants of Riga believe that they can influence decision-making processes and 5.5% have contacted municipal officials or deputies to address any personal or societal challenges. (Latvijas Fakti, 2013).

The participation in public activities is not popular among minority members. Only 6.8% of Russian-speaking people in Riga have participated in some kind of public activity, such as collecting signatures or public hearings etc. (Latvijas Fakti, 2013). In general, Russian-speakers do not find membership or participation in the work of some organizations dealing specifically with minority

issues as relevant[8]. The results of focus group interviews in Riga demonstrate that Russian-speakers do not see these organizations as a tool to promote their interests and rights at any level of government, including the local level. Furthermore, quantitative data highlights the low level of confidence of minority members living in Riga in NGOs' ability to influence regional development. Regarding asking for any kind of support, in 2013 3.8% of respondents in Riga turned for help to NGOs. This correlates with low trust in almost all social institutes, including NGOs. Only 1/3 of Latvia's population express trust in the non-governmental sector (Caune, Neilande, Krieviņa-Sutora, Pīpiķe, 2016). It should be noted that, as the findings of focus group interviews show, the members of the Russian-speaking population living in Riga rarely, or with difficulty, can name or identify specific NGOs that deal with the protection or promotion of their interests or strengthening of minority identity (Ozoliņa, [Ed.], 2016), despite the fact that more than 60% of NGOs are registered in Riga[9]. As a result, most of the Russian-speaking NGOs can be described as having transformed into bureaucratic or professionalized organizations.

This can be partly explained with a specific sense of belonging Russian-speakers have. The quantitative data demonstrates that self-identification with a city or village, where the person lives, is on the top of identities Russian-speakers mention when asked to define their sense of belonging. The first is family (85%) followed by a specific place or area (77%) and the state (75%) where they live (SKDS, 2014). Going into greater depth of understanding this sense of belonging, it can be underlined that it is mainly about identifying oneself with a specific territory one lives, but not with the community. It bears noting, that such a conclusion can be drawn not only from quantitative data. The results of focus-group interviews conducted in Riga show similar trends. People do not feel as a part of a specific community, but rather feel close ties with the territory they live in (Ozoliņa [Ed.], 2016). One can agree with the opinion that "the identity of place, regional identity is a crucial component of the national identity" (Zobena, Paula, 2014). At the same time, without a specific sense of belonging to a certain community and tolerance towards others, an identity can lose an important mission - the unification of different entities into that of a national community.

The lack of knowledge of Latvian as the official language has been claimed as a source of discrimination and limitation of possibilities to access certain services or participate in socio-political processes. Approximately 56.5% of Russian-speakers in Latvia support the opinion that those who do not know Latvian are discriminated against (Center for Security and Strategic Research, NDA, 2016). However, different data related to the use of the language in everyday life does not confirm this. For example, in Riga, 47% of all respondents use mainly or only Latvian in local governmental institutions in different situations, whereas in public places, such as shops or streets, 43% of the population use mainly or only the Russian language (SKDS, 2014). Data demonstrated below highlights that Riga is bilingual, more than a monolingual city. The element that has changed is the use of language. Latvian today is used in higher functional

domains, while Russian – in lower ones. At the same time, it does not vastly restrict access to public services or information. However, this does not contribute significantly to the creation of a coherent multinational community, as the lack of exchange and sharing practices among its different members hamper the building of a unified community. Russian-speakers in Latvia (and particularly in Riga [auth]) have their own cultural space where they feel comfortable and can maintain their identity (Sūna, 2007).

Communication practices with the public implemented by Riga Municipality

Another explanation for the lack of integration is related to communication practices between the local government and the public. For the past few years, the Riga municipality has not only actively used traditional communication channels, but is also vigorously working on the popularization of itself using several different routes provided by new technologies – 57.9% of inhabitants of Riga obtain information about the events or services provided by the municipality via Internet, 47.1% via TV and 28.4% via Radio. In contrast, special information leaflets or municipal institutions are not popular sources of information. A closer examination of the internet portals demonstrates that online sites most often used by Russians in Riga are *Delfi.lv, Facebook.com*[10]*, Odnoklassniki.ru* (SKDS, 2014). The content of these websites is mainly related to the news (*Delfi*) or entertainment. Comparatively, the content of the official website of Riga Council www.riga.lv provides a wide range of information on the Riga municipal institutional networks, mechanisms of action, as well as public participation opportunities and current events. The information is provided in the Latvian language as well as in Russian language. However, the structure of the website is complex and difficult to understand, limiting the opportunities to gather information for all the interested parties, regardless of the level of internet skills.

When looking closer at the common discourse practiced by the Riga municipality in every-day communication with the population, it can generally be described as information to inhabitants as consumers of specific services, while information technologies and the modernization of public events carried out by the authorities of municipality contribute to the creation of new identities of the inhabitants of Riga. At the same time, the discourses used by the municipality are not noticeably welcoming in terms of getting members of a certain territorial community involved in decision-making or being educated and responsibly active.

This correlates with data gathered from focus-group interviews. Russian-speakers in Riga lack information about the priorities, planned or implemented policies and other strategic development visions or orientations of the officials of the municipality. In contrast, the Mayor of the Municipality Nils Ušakovs is highly popular among the representatives of the minority. During focus-group interviews, he was characterized as a person who actively supports the interests of the Russian-speaking population, including the preservation of the Russian identity (Ozoliņa, [Ed], 2016). Some Russian-speaking NGO's representatives during the interviews explained this phenomenon as a political project, where the

required public support is achieved by activating certain sentiments and resentment or protest feelings regarding the titular nation.

Analysis of the environment of collaboration between the stakeholders and the Municipality's activities towards the support of NGOs

In the recent years there has been observable progress in the development of the NGO sector in Latvia. The changes implemented in the legal environment have been remarkably positive for the sector. Although the fundamental legal regulations — the Law on Associations and Foundations and the Public Benefit Law – have not changed, a number of initiatives focus on new ways of strengthening a civic society (for example, the work on the formation of National NGO Fund) and sector activity arrangements (Caune, Neilande, Krieviņa-Sutora, Pīpiķe, 2016), as well as the strengthening of societal security through closer monitoring of activities and funding mechanisms of NGOs.

The Riga municipality has also created a normative basis for further development of the public sector. For example, one of such adopted documents is the Development Program of Riga 2014-2020, which includes some initiatives towards broader cooperation and support for the non-governmental sector. The program places an accent on the support of youth initiatives and organization of free time. Focus-group interviews with Russian-speakers demonstrate a lack of knowledge about such policy-planning documents and the mechanisms of their adaption. However, when it comes to NGOs, their representatives do not see participation in such collaboration with the municipality as important and have a low interest in joining it. They do not know the criteria determining whether civic actors will be included in the setting of objectives and strategic visions of the development of the municipality.

A similar situation can be observed when it comes to the broader decision-making process. For example, in most cases the results obtained during in-depth interviews with the representatives of the Russian-speaking NGOs were marked by low confidence in the work of this specific and other similar advisory councils. The reasons mentioned for this type of attitude are, among others, previous negative experience of cooperation, discriminatory attitude, an attempt to impose the Latvian cultural experience and Latvian values, as well as a different historical understanding (Ozolina, [Ed.], 2016). Another problem marked by the representatives of the sector relates to the paternalistic attitude of state and municipalities' officials towards NGO activists, and the inclusion in decision-making usually takes place during the last stages of the process.

In the meantime, the results of several in-depth interviews with Russian-speaking NGO leaders denote that the main interest they have in collaboration with the local government is about material support (Ozolina, [Ed], 2016). Furthermore, despite the fact that there is a wide enough range of public funding instruments available to NGOs and one of the most often used sources of finance is grants provided by the state and municipalities, including the leverages of EU funds (Rozenvalds [Ed.], 2014), and Riga municipality also offers considerable material support mechanisms for NGOs[11], it was repeatedly acknowledged dur-

ing the interviews that in the recent years many of the Russian-speaking organizations have not even attempted to apply for the project tenders. Moreover, this applies not only to Riga municipality, but also to national and the proposed financing from EU funds (Ozoliņa, [Ed.], 2016).

When it comes to the redistribution of municipal budget spending or other initiatives supporting the civic sector, the leaders of organizations view the process as a *zero-sum game*, instead of a collaborative planning process seeking a compromise for a common community (Ozoliņa [Ed.], 2016). This also correlates with a certain amount of distrust among NGOs themselves. Every 10th NGO representative does not trust other NGOs (Latvijas Fakti, 2013). Interestingly, the results of in-depth interviews demonstrate certain disunity within the network of the Russian-speaking organizations based on political sympathies and support for certain political forces. The mainstream Russian-speaking non-governmental discourse mainly uses pro-Russian narratives and efforts against the European value system as a common denominator. In contrast, the pro-European Russian organizations are positioned as "pocket organizations" (organizations operating under the banner of official institutions). Another element existing within the network of the Russian-speaking NGOs in Riga is related to the ties organizations have or not have with the ruling political party of Riga municipality – *Saskaņas Centrs* (Concord Democratic Party). Consequently, the satisfaction of the Russian-speaking NGO leaders with the cooperation with the municipality highly depends on this factor.

Independently from the amount of support received from local, national, or European level funds, the members of organizations most often reflect on the respective leadership mainly in a negative sense. (Ozoliņa, [Ed], 2016) The discourse used by mainstream Russian-speaking NGOs is mainly self-exclusive, deprecatory, and hostile. Many of the leaders of such organizations are under supervision of the Security Police as the representatives of organizations used as a non-military tool for destabilization and other threats to societal security in Latvia. As a result, the views of the NGOs expressed by their leaders are not always in line with the public opinion of Russian-speakers. They are more radical and carry deeper sympathies towards policies implemented by the Russian Federation. This is one of the challenges for the authorities of the municipality in dealing with the selection of stakeholders for inclusion in decision-making processes identified during in-depth interviews with the representatives of Riga municipality.

Another challenge the officials of the municipality underlined quite often during the interviews conducted within this research is the low-level competence provided by NGOs to give expertise, as well as lack of potential to assume certain delegated functions and lack of willingness to establish dialogue and cooperation. Another factor not mentioned by the representatives, but which can be inferred from the information provided during interviews, was the often-encountered major obstacle with the elderly NGO representatives showing very low Latvian language skills and oftentimes even an unwillingness to learn the official language. Also, this age group sometimes featured another set of prob-

lems associated with a low level of knowledge about the project application process, project preparation and writing, as well as other important fund-raising mechanisms. When asked about whether they had attended any courses to acquire the needed skills, the answer was frequently that they had never received an invitation to do so (Ozoliņa, [Ed.], 2016). Besides, the results demonstrated that the problems and challenges of communication and cooperation with the local administration often were perceived more as societal and not personal. Therefore, the circumstances described below demonstrate lack of trust and ability to cooperate in an effective and mutually beneficial manner towards a coherent development among all parties included in the process. However, as George Schopflin points out, successful processes of inclusion can be implemented only if interpersonal trust is complemented with the trust between rulers and their subjects. Besides, balance should be achieved between ethnicity, civic society and administration. Without this, successful development is not possible (Schopflin, 2000).

Conclusion

To summarize the findings, the Authors conclude that there are several disadvantages when the process of inclusion meets the two general criteria of efficiency of public participation in the policy-making process of Riga municipality. In terms of competence, it should be noted that common discourse used by Riga municipality in the public space is inclusive for inhabitants of Riga, regardless of nationality. However, the main problem is that it communicates with them mainly as recipients of certain services or customers, instead of inviting and educating them to join the policy-making process. In light of this, all agenda setting, decision-making and implementation activities, as well as evolution of policies made so far cannot be considered only formal, but also open and public-friendly. As data provided herein highlights, Russian-speakers in Riga generally are not informed about the priorities of the development of the municipality, and have no knowledge of the principles of goal setting and other important details of this policy-making stage. Formally they have access to this information, but it is not easy and clearly visible for the general public, including Russian-speakers. Potential benefits are not illuminated. Russian-speakers do not value the participation in any of the policy-making processes of the municipality as important and meaningful. They have a low level of knowledge even about the political or other types of leaders involved. At the same time, Russian-speakers recognize the head of municipality Nils Ušakovs as representing their interests as a national minority, as well as inhabitants of Riga.

However, when it comes to Russian-speaking NGOs, they have low interest in participating in agenda setting or decision making, as well as implementation or evaluation processes. The level of competence needed for participation can mainly be described as quite low. When it comes to the opinion of the leaders of Russian-speaking NGOs about policy-making in Riga municipality as such, they

mainly demonstrate low trust and see the cooperation with the municipality basically as a source of material support.

The principle of fairness is also implemented incompletely. The communication process with the inhabitants of Riga does not differ depending on the nationality. In turn, when it comes to policy-making, the formal regulation of all policy-making stages is fair and involves all basic principles of good governance, including those related to openness and inclusion. Nevertheless, practical implementation of this collaboration framework does not meet the many requirements needed.

For example, the leaders of Russian-speaking NGOs do not, in general, value the overall work of the municipality and politicians who represent the interests of Russian-speakers or inhabitants in particular. Moreover, their viewing participation mainly as a struggle for material resources results in perceiving it as a "zero sum game" and kind of competition, instead of seeing it as a way to achieve common goals in close collaboration of all parties involved. And the municipality's support of certain organizations has often been described as a result of close ties with the ruling party – *Saskaņas Centrs* (Concord Democratic Party). Also, the surveyed representatives of the NGOs in Riga have repeatedly emphasized that democratic participation has frequently been executed, depending on how agreeable and accepting the cultural and historical position of the ethnic majority is. Such hierarchy in theory confirms domination of the ethnic, rather than civil inclusive discourse. However, in reality, any attempt to find direct evidence has failed.

Also, self-organization is vitally important. The factors mentioned above constitute the weak links, which greatly reduce the effectiveness of the Russian-speaking NGOs. One of the major problems hindering the process of self-organization and, thus, wider cooperation with other non-governmental actors, is the subjective opinion and understanding within the Russian-speaking population in Latvia and, consequently, also within the civic organizations they are represented by, on the issue regarding what Latvia really means to them. For some, it is home, while for others it is a state full of representatives of the titular nation - an important *stranger*. Unfortunately, as shown in the interviews conducted within the scope of this study, most representatives of non-governmental organizations belong to the latter group, which greatly hinders the process of inclusion.

When it comes to general public, there are several important aspects to be underlined. Traditionally the Western political idea sees the participation of individuals in different social networks as a mechanism contributing to the creation of a sense of belonging to a national community. The case study of the Riga municipality demonstrates such a sense of belonging by Russian-speakers towards a specific territory, the place they have been born or have lived, but not the national state or the local or national community. Low trust in any political or social institution, including NGOs, negatively affect the process of creation of new local identities, albeit the strategies used by mainstream Russian-speaking NGOs do not promote this process either. This leads to the problem that the

community does not consider NGOs a real instrument for defending its interests or its identity. Further questions are thus raised about the representability and the fairness of claims of leaders of Russian-speaking NGOs when defining themselves as who understands and defends Russian-speakers.

A no less important problem is the lack of opportunity for a reasonable part of Russian-speakers in Riga to participate at a fundamental level through voting. Remaining with the legal status of non-citizenship causes further alienation, although, as George Schopflin has pointed out, successful processes of inclusion can be realized only if interpersonal trust is complemented with the trust between rulers and the managed. Besides, balance should be provided between ethnicity, civic society and administration. Without this combination, a successful development is not possible (Schopflin, 2000).

Another no less important aspect is a need to intensify the development of civic competence of the members of Russian-speaking NGOs. According to Bernstein, this denotes the improvement of several important components of civic competences useful for further collaborative efforts: "an individual's skill and ability to make sense of vast amounts of political information; to work with others (and in civil opposition to other people's ideas), where appropriate; and to develop effective strategies for political action" (Bernstein, 2008).

The aspects discussed in this research highlight that a full-fledged inclusion of Russian-speakers in the social and political life of Latvia has not been reached. The efforts undertaken by municipalities like Riga to remedy this present a bleak picture; inclusion of Russian-speakers in the territorial community of Riga goes slowly and with low efficiency.

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Notes

[1] Authors translation to English from Hanovs, 2012.

[2] Webler's ideas on this subject are highly supported. There have been many adaptions of his ideas implemented by such authors as Smith and Wales (1996), Pratchett (1999), Petts, (2001), Abelson (2004). There are many other authors offering different approaches or ideas, which complement those offered by Webler. For instance, Pestman (1998), Lemos (1998) and other.

[3] Original idea of two criteria for public participation is offered by Webler in: Webler, Thomas (1995), ""Right" Discourse in Citizen Participation: An Evaluative Yardstick", in Renn Ortwin, Webler Thomas, Wiedemann Peter M. (eds), *Fairness and Competence in Citizen Participation: Evaluating Models for Environmental Discourse*, Kluver Academic Publishers, Dordrecht. In this article, authors are adjusted these two criteria in table for our research.

[4]According to the data provided by CSB, the number of inhabitants in Riga is 638,784 (CSB, 2016)

[5]Already in the inter-war period, the ethnic composition was complex with the Russian, Jewish and German communities forming an influential part of the society. However, it is important to discuss the qualitative change in the composition of the population, which took place as a result of World War II and the Soviet occupation. Populations of Jewish and Germans, as well as ethnical Russians who lived in Riga before the War have diminished

[6] In 1995 29% of inhabitants of Latvia were *non-citizens*, but in 2016 this indicator was less than 12% (MFA, 2016)

[7] Low trust in local governments is a common feature for the population in general. Only 13.9% of inhabitants fully trust municipalities (Latvijas Fakti, 2013)

[8] 0.3% of inhabitants of Latvia have admitted that they were members or participated in the work of some organization specifically dealing with minority issues

[9] Not only city-level non-governmental organizations operate here. There are also the central offices of national-level networks that have their seat here. This is especially characteristic to the case of Russian-speaking NGOs

[10] For example, Facebook official profile of the Mayor of Riga Nils Ušakovs has been recognized as an instrument for promoting personal popularity by several media experts

[11] A so-called NGO House has been opened, where the NGO representatives are being offered rooms for organizing various events, as well as for holding different types of seminars and training events for organization capacity building, working on fundraising, etc. In addition to this, there is a Consultative Council for Integration, which provides help with carrying out various integration events with the assistance of and through various project competitions