

## ARTICLE

# ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY OF RUSSIAN MEGALOPOLISES IN EXPERT, CIVIL AND MEDIA DIMENSIONS (THE CASES OF KAZAN AND MOSCOW)

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## ABSTRACT

The article presents the results of a complex research of two Russian metropolises, Moscow and Kazan, reviewing the development of the environmental policy and public participation as its important element. Deep expert interviews, a mass population survey, and media discourse and content analysis in a comparative perspective were used as research methods. As a result, we drew conclusions about the main practices of public participation in the environmental policies of the cities, the necessity of increasing the involvement of the public and expert groups into the decision-making process and promoting more efficient cooperation between the stakeholders at different levels.

## INTRODUCTION

The national environmental policy has a long history in Russia, it has always reflected the changes in the economic interests and political forces, and according to the researchers, the position of the environment sector has always been rather vulnerable in the administration [1].

Scholars have noted such specifics of the Russian environmental policy as, firstly, the amalgamation of the structures responsible for the resource exploitation and the environmental organizations in 1990s, which reduced the role of the latter in the strategical decision-making and the implementation of the environmental monitoring. Secondly, another characteristic trait of the Russian environmental policy is the high preservation degree of the wildlife and the heavy pressure on the human environment. Even though the elimination of the Soviet industry in the 1990s reduced the impact on the city environment, it is still very high in large megalopolises [2]. Thirdly, the distribution of authority in the area of environmental management between the federal centre and regions was and remains a complex issue.

The relevance of environmental issues in the Russian cities is beyond all question. Taking cue from Boris Kochurov, we attribute "the changes in the environment caused by the anthropogenic impact that damage the structure and functioning of the natural systems (landscapes) and result in negative social, economic, and other consequences" to such issues [3].

According to official figures, at least in 21% of the Russian cities where atmospheric air pollution surveillance is conducted regularly, the level of air pollution is considered high and very high [4]. In 2018, according to VCIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center), 17% of the Russian surveyed considered the air pollution caused by factories as the most pressing issue, 15% were concerned by landfills, and 10% complained about the lack of measures aimed at river and lake purification [5]. At the same time, the majority of Russians (61%) believed that they could not affect the environmental situation at their place of residence on their own.

There is a certain consensus of opinion regarding the understanding of the factors of the environmental policies and their efficiency among the Russian researchers. In particular, it is considered that solving the environmental issues of the cities is impossible without a deliberate governmental policy envisioning an extensive engagement of the public, businesses, expert community, and environmental organizations [2, 11], as well as development of a certain environmental culture and environmental awareness of the population [1, 2, 6, 12].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The following are the results of a complex research of two Russian metropolises, Moscow and Kazan, reviewing the development of the environmental policy and public participation as its important element. As research methods, we used an expert poll (N=60), a mass population survey (N=1500, 750 in each city), and discourse and content analysis of the Russian media (of the federal and regional level).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Camel the opinion of experts from Moscow and Kazan on the condition of the environmental policies of the cities

### KEY WORDS

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In the end of 2000s, such important environmentalists as Aleksey Yablokov, considered the environmental policy of Moscow ill-defined and piecemeal due to the fact that many decisions on the improvement of the environmental situation were taken on the spur of the moment and did not lead to the achievement of the strategic goals; moreover, such goals were not well-defined. In the mid-2010s, Head of the Department of Natural Resources Management and Environmental Protection of Moscow Anton Kulbachevsky emphasized that the main goal of the Government was to preserve the balance between the environmental situation in the city and the reasonable use of its natural resources; he determined the physical well-being of the citizens as one of the main environmental indicators of the environmental well-being. Engaging the public, promoting the sense of environmental responsibility and an eco-friendly lifestyle is one of the goals of the "Environmental Strategy of Moscow for 2030". In addition, it is believed that Moscow is the Russian leader in the achievement of sustainable development goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. The 'Smart City - 2030' strategy has already been designed for Moscow; it offers a number of breakthrough innovations and technologies, changing consumer preferences, making manufacturing processes eco-friendly, etc.

However, according to expert opinion, despite the implementation of such public environmental programs as "My Street", "A Million Trees", etc., the environmental policy of Moscow lacks consistency, and its main problem is the absence of interdepartmental interaction: "...the interaction between different municipal departments is virtually non-existent, unless it is a program like "My Street", where the mayor explicitly announced that the departments must interact. In all other cases, the right hand is not aware of what the left hand is doing, and no one knows where the head is. This is why the environmental policy of the city is in a very poor condition".

Despite the fact that many experts highly appreciate the efforts of the Natural Resources Management, Transportation, and other departments, the non-systemic nature of the programs and solutions makes the environmental policy of the city insufficient and inexpedient to the economic interests of the city. The efficiency of the interaction between the subjects when implementing the environmental policy is considered to be "next to none".

The interaction between the city authorities and businesses, non-profit organizations, or the scientific community heavily depends on the particular department of the Government of Moscow. For example, the Department of Transportation works closely with different non-profit organizations (for example, on issues relating to urban cycling) and various commercial companies, for example, short-term car rentals. Such cooperation gives positive results, and the population actively utilizes the solutions provided. The Department of Housing, Utilities and Amenities, whose participation is vital for the solution of the environmental issues, in expert opinion, hardly interacts with anyone, similar to the Construction Department.

Yet another issue is the absence of subject matter experts in the governmental structures who could give professional advice to the civil servants prior to making socially significant decisions. There are community councils under the departments, but their job is to conduct researches whose results are of purely advisory nature. Experts regard public hearings as a formal procedure for informational purposes only. The public is only engaged into the environmental policy in case of an emergency when its environmental safety is in question. Currently, the public involvement is limited to local protests against the impairment of the right to a safe and healthy environment: "The public engagement into the environmental and municipal policies is limited to the citizens' attempts to preserve the environment outside their windows. Some people fight against the tree-felling in parks, some demand that the cut-down trees are restored, some fight the enormous amounts of reagents in the streets, some protest against the barbaric destruction of natural lawns and their substitution with single-season lawns that have to be replanted annually. All of this is an ecocide in essence. The public engagement is limited to fighting such things". Some experts believe that the situation used to be better a few years ago, there was more collaboration between the government and the population.

The sustainable development goals in Kazan are covered within the scope of one of the three strategic aspects of the Strategy of Social and Economic Development of Kazan for 2030 adopted in 2016. Local authorities admit that there is a number of environmental issues, and the following measures are taken to solve them and form a safe city environment against the backdrop of promoting Kazan as a tourist city: the implementation of program activities for air cleaning (transitioning to the utilization of city buses featuring an engine compliant with an emission standard equal to or above Euro 3), water bodies cleaning ("The Year of Water Conservation Zones - 2-16"), and urban greening ("The Green Record", "Blooming Kazan", "The City of Parks and Squares - 2015"). It is planned to increase the share of green spaces from 23.1% in 2017 to 40% in 2030 and to reduce the emissions from stationary sources and vehicles from 31.36 and 73.66 thousand tons annually accordingly (2017) to 27.52 and 69.01 thousand tons annually (2030). Moreover, in the Republic of Tatarstan, 2017 was proclaimed the year of environment and public spaces; the discussion regarding the waste management still continues [7]. Overall, the quality and results of the environmental management in Kazan are evaluated as positive in all-Russian environmental ratings.

Nevertheless, the data of expert interviews on the effectiveness of the environmental policy in Kazan reveals significant problems in the area. The majority of experts find it "unarticulated" and "ill-defined", there is no unambiguous representation of the standards of the environmental performance at different levels neither in the federal nor local legislation, there are no authorized power structures. Nonetheless,

experts distinguish the efficiency of planting and landscaping activities determined by the goals of the PR campaign of Kazan as a brand as the positive results of the environmental policy of the city. Thus, the goals of making environment-related decisions are mostly determined by the economic interests, and as a result, the opinions of environmentalists are not taken into consideration; on the contrary, suppressed by the government, the environmentalists are forced to hide or fudge the data they received if it contradicts the decisions that have already been taken. When it comes to urban planning, the public opinion is also taken into consideration, but the communication does not occur in the form of public hearings; experts point out that the authorities only react to public protests, including the protests of the environmentalists.

Overall, the goals, contents, and efficiency of the environmental policies in Moscow and Kazan show similarities. Despite the fact that the environmental issues are part of the strategic development goals of both cities, in reality, a number of problems arise, such as the ambiguousness of the environmental legislative provisions, lack of the interdepartmental interaction of the authorized bodies when making and implementing managerial decisions, and an almost complete exclusion of the professional environmentalists and population from the process.

### Public discourse in the media

When monitoring the environmental policy field in order to perform analysis in 2017-2018, we began with the names of the governmental bodies responsible for the environmental policies of the cities and names of heads of ministries and departments to understand which issues the authorities decided to make available for a public discussion. For the most part, one is under the impression that the environmental agenda in Moscow was determined by a number of general problems throughout the year, such as preparing the city for the separate waste collection, the urban beautification program of Moscow, the dangerous level of air pollution in the region, and gentrification. In early December of 2017, Mayor Sergei Sobyenin announced that Moscow needed a strategy of environmental development that would become the basis for the masterplans in different sectors affecting the environmental situation in the city. According to him, the environmental issues in megalopolises are the priority right now, but the environmental strategy of Moscow was mentioned very few times in the messages that we analyzed.

Waste management is a major issue in the agenda of Kazan. Throughout the year in Tatarstan, activists were actively protesting against the construction of a waste incineration plant, and the media reflects the positions of both sides of the conflict, the authorities and the population. The informational agenda also included the discussion of a new masterplan of Kazan that will determine the development of the city until 2035.

### Civil practices

The results of the mass population survey showed that over 70% of megalopolis residents took part in an event devoted to the protection of the environment at least once. At the same time, the structure of the pro-environmental activity is almost the same in Moscow and in Kazan. The majority of the events devoted to the environmental protection that the citizens took part in were tree and flower planting, cleaning the territory of garbage, signing letters sent to the relevant authorities (Notably, experts considered this type of activity the most efficient: "If there are two sides, the government and activists, being tedious is the most efficient strategy. It involves writing letters and claims to all authorities because things like protests are good for the morale of the people, but often enough, such events are distorted in the media and are presented in the wrong light. In such cases, paper can be of great help. Signing petitions, writing letters and claims to all governmental bodies and agencies. Things of the kind might be indeed helpful"). The citizens of Kazan planted trees or flowers slightly more often than the citizens of Moscow (49.5% against 44.3%) and participated in more territory cleaning events (46.8% against 39.3%), while the Muscovites signed letters to the relevant authorities more often than the residents of Kazan (20.5% against 15.5%).

The following activities became the most popular daily eco-friendly activities of the citizens: saving up energy (76.6%) and water (68.5%) and buying/planting eco-friendly products (37.1%). The economic investments that are expensive but allow to constantly reduce the consumption of electricity are unpopular among the population, alongside the automatic control systems. Approximately 25% of the citizens use smartphone or tablet home management apps. The citizens assessed the following as the most popular: the applications for home appliances management (11%), for home security (8.7%), for real-time power (7.3%) and water consumption tracking (5.7%), and for real-time thermostat control (3.7%).

More resource-consuming practices, such as participating in the events promoting environmental protection (15.1%) and in public environmental organizations (12.3%) are less appealing to the residents.

Muscovites tend to save up more water than the citizens of Kazan (73.1% against 63.9%) and more electricity (80.9% against 72.3%), while the dwellers of Kazan try to buy or plant organic foods more often than the Muscovites (40% against 34%). As for the other eco-friendly practices, the differences are statistically irrelevant. One third of the respondents do not separate their waste or do it seldom; only 10% of the population separate their waste. According to the citizens, one of the main impediments preventing their transitioning to the separate waste collection is the inconveniencing infrastructure of waste collection or its absence. Most citizens of Moscow (79.2%) and Kazan (81.9%) do not use bicycles as means of

transportation because they are used to the public transport, for safety reasons, due to the poorly developed bicycle infrastructure, and poor climate conditions.

The environmental policies of the megalopolises are reflected in the media from the perspective of the implementation of official municipal programs and controversies: as a rule, the media either covers the achievements in the area of urban beautification, or the conflicts arising from the current problems - last year, they were connected to the waste management and recycling in both cities.

For both cities, experts agree that the environmental policy as a focus area of the municipal authorities is ill-defined and unarticulated; in fact, it consists of different programs, but their implementation is poorly coordinated between different departments, and other stakeholders are hardly involved into them.

The structure of the pro-environmental activity is almost the same in Moscow and Kazan. The majority of the events devoted to the environmental protection that the citizens take part in are tree and flower planting, cleaning the territory of garbage (the citizens of Kazan participate in it slightly more often than the Muscovites), and signing letters for the relevant authorities (the Muscovites do it slightly more often than the citizens of Kazan). More resource-consuming practices, such as participating in the events promoting environmental protection and in public environmental organizations are less appealing to the residents.

Based on the primary analysis of our research results, it is possible to make several conclusions on the factors that can increase the efficiency of the environmental policies in the Russian megalopolises, first of all, through involving more participants into them: at the very least, it is necessary to improve the environmental awareness of the citizens, to create effective negotiation platforms for the interaction of the government, businesses, and the public, some of which should be initiated by the authorities, and to develop green economy [8]. On a greater scale, it is important to integrate the principles of sustainable development into all the focus areas of the governmental policies while viewing sustainability as a means of organizing social, economic, and environmental processes into a single system [9, 10].

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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None.

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