

PUBLIC CHAMBERS ARE THE BEST WAY FOR SOCIETY TO ORGANIZING ITSELF

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The Public Chamber is entitled to discuss any issues in connection with city life that is in the public interest. The Public Chamber gauges public opinion, studies it and then gives recommendations to the relevant state administrative bodies.

The Moscow City Duma is also entitled to hold public discussions, and it does, although such discussions are not as extensive as in the Public Chamber. However, I cannot agree with those who say that the Moscow City Duma does not hold such public discussions at all. It is simply that the Public Chamber has a wider remit in this area. Nevertheless, there are still contradictions between the public organizations and the municipal administrative bodies. And there are also contradictions in the general Moscow development plan. We have admitted that public consultations in some prefectures were held pro-

forma and didn't take into account the opinions of the citizens.

There is also a professional community: the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences, the Main Architect Expert Advisory Board (EKOS), and VOOPIK. Of course, they should have received for discussion the plans for the general projects much earlier than they actually did. The delay meant that the professional community didn't have enough time to give their specific professional input. It is for this reason that there has been such an emotional outburst.

We sent concrete suggestions to the Moscow City Duma, but have seen no movement in response or mutual understanding, and no feedback and no response to our suggestions; we do not know if they have been accepted or not. If they haven't, then why not? We are not satisfied with the current policy since it does not preserve cultural heritage to the extent that it should. While monuments are more or less adequately maintained, the historical buildings that are not monuments are suffering greatly as a result of the newer buildings that are being built across the city.

Certainly cities are governed by administrations and mayors, **and no public can encroach upon the rights to govern the city.** And according to the Constitution they are still people's will executors. So they should hear the public. The Russian Public Chamber and local Public Chamber should become a kind of collective public councils. But such Public Chambers are still to be found not in every region. In some they are still very weak, though in general the activity of public chambers are getting more organized.

It is important that these councils pay attention to all crucial issues including town planning activity, which of course is a very significant issue. For instance, in Saint Petersburg there is a very strong Governor's council which is occupied with the issues of urban plan-

VOOPIK Центральный совет Всероссийского общества охраны памятников истории и культуры

The All-Russian Society for the Protection of Monuments of History and Culture (VOOPIK) is a social organization that was founded in 1965. It has a number of areas of authority, including the authority to coordinate planning projects in those cities and towns with historically and culturally significant monuments, as well as projects that affect such monuments or their surrounding areas.

ning and heritage conservation. The council consists of reputable people, but they are not always listened to. The same thing happens in other cities. But still **I see the best form of public self-organization in public chambers.**

Though I would be more cautious speaking about possible 'urban resistance'. There is a normal, right order of public organizations work. Even their highest level - the Public Chamber - works out recommendations on different problems for the state administration's bodies. There should not be any substitution of one thing for the other. **Neither public chamber nor other councils are the bodies of resistance, they are the bodies of communication between state governmental institutions and public groups in the name of collective goal.** If the executive power is not right the public has an opportunity to express their opinion and press for close attention to their demands. But it does not have to be resistance or enmity.

We are living in the same state. And the activity of state and public institutions should be aimed at social stabilization, not at conflict escalation. The task for the public councils or public chambers is to solve the problems together. Mostly we succeed in that and we are heard, but when we fail, we apply for the second time, for the third, for the fifth... What else can we do? **We are doomed to co-operation. ■**

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