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**The Formation and Function of Mechanisms of Electronic Participation in  
Russia's Regions**

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

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### **Statement of the research problem and characterization of the degree of its development.**

E-participation as a way for citizens and the state to interact on key public policy issues has become one of many frequent topics in studies of the governance<sup>1</sup>.<sup>2</sup> Since for the most part e-participation has developed in democratic countries (primarily the USA and Western Europe), researchers focus on studying such aspects of digitalization of governance as citizens' participation in government in general, their intentions to use digital services provided by state and local government bodies, the impact of e-participation on transparency and accountability of governance structures, as well as increasing institutional trust in the existing institutions of government on the account of providing procedural legitimacy. The introduction of e-participation tools in non-democracies has been ignored by the academic community for a certain period of time on the basis of theoretical assumptions that the main characteristic of non-democracies is legitimation and co-optation, as well as their focus on rent extraction, which a priori makes it impossible for any civic participation in state governance in conditions of authoritarian institutional organization<sup>3</sup>. Hybrid regimes were also ignored in the same way. The focus was on evaluating innovations in democracies, as they were supposed to foster greater political and civic participation of the society, as well as increased trust in democratic institutions<sup>4</sup>. In support of this theoretical assumption and ignoring the development of e-governance in non-democracies, the theory of democratic advantage from the field of comparative politics contributed: it is based on the claim that democracies are superior to any other type of institutional organization a priori in almost all governance areas - provision of public goods, welfare provision, economic growth, political and technological innovation and other areas<sup>5</sup>. The inclusiveness of institutions, openness and the resulting ability to correct deficiencies in the current organization are key to implementing such policy innovations, which also require significant technological and capital investments, human resources and efficient bureaucracies<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Santamarico-Philco A., Canos Cerda M, Penades Gramaje J. Advances in e-Participation: A perspective of Last Years // IEEE Access. 2019. Vol. 7. P. 155894 - 155916.

<sup>2</sup> Andersen K., Henrisken L. E-government maturity models: Extension of the Layne and Lee model // Government Information Quarterly. 2017. Vol. 23. P. 236-248.

<sup>3</sup> Brooker P. Non-Democratic Regimes: Second Edition. Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Kluver R. The Architecture of Control: A Chinese Strategy for e-Governance // Journal of Public Policy. 2005. Vol. 25. P. 75-97.

<sup>5</sup> Acemoglu D., Gallego F., Robinson J. Institutions, Human Capital, and Development // Annual Review of Economics. 2014. Vol. 6. P. 875-912.

<sup>6</sup> Halperin M., Siegle J., Weinstein M. How Democracies Promote Prosperity and Peace. Routledge. 2009.

Moreover, the spread of decentralized communication practices and free circulation of information has always been implicitly seen as a threat to the incumbent coalition of elites and their arbiter in a non-democratic context, which was thought to make it impossible to introduce participatory practices in the form of e-participation<sup>7</sup>. The few early attempts to explain the impossibility of developing e-participation and related technological innovations in non-democracies included the factor of the closed nature of the political system, which makes it impossible to disseminate and translate such policies, unlike democracies, which, through openness and a significant number of feedback channels, allow ideas and innovations to circulate<sup>8</sup>.

By 2012, however, it became apparent that these provisions diverged significantly from the empirical reality that researchers had ignored for more than a decade. One key piece of evidence was the United Nations' biennial E-Participation Index (*EPI*), which ranks countries on the extent to which they have implemented e-participation at the levels of information, consultation and participation in governance<sup>9</sup>. Throughout the study period, many non-democracies and hybrid regimes (in particular - Russia, as a representative of a hybrid regime) were in consistently high positions, often surpassing stable democracies in the level and quality of e-government and e-participation implementation<sup>10</sup>. In the first regional ranking of cities by the level of local digital services in 2018, Moscow ranked first and is in 5th place among all cities in the world as of 2022<sup>11</sup>.

One of the most successful autocracies in terms of adopting deliberative practices has been China. While some ground has been broken for the emergence of digital tools of civic participation in China in the form of a shift from centralized control to the creation of a limitedly independent civil society, this does not detract from the fact that in a relatively "hostile" environment there is an institution of civic participation in the governance process<sup>12</sup>. Within studies of deliberative practices in non-democracies, a plethora of terms have emerged to describe the expanded capacity of citizens to influence the content, quality, and outcomes of policies. Among the main ones are

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<sup>7</sup> Stier S. Internet diffusion and regime type: Temporal patterns in technology adoption // Telecommunication Policy. 2017. Vol. 41. P. 25-34.

<sup>8</sup> Knutsen C. Democracy, dictatorship and technological change // Governance and Knowledge. 2012. P. 13-28.

<sup>9</sup> The Future of Digital Government. URL:

<https://desapublications.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/2022-11/Chapter%205.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Intact Democracies at the top levels of the Polity IV, FH, EIU and other democracy indexes.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Teets J. C. Let Many Civil Societies Bloom: The Rise of Consultative Authoritarianism in China // The China Quarterly. 2013. Vol. 213. P. 19-38.

"consultative authoritarianism"<sup>13</sup> , "authoritarian responsiveness"<sup>14</sup> , "nonparticipatory consultation"<sup>15</sup> and others, largely similar in meaning. As B. He and M. Warren point out, consultative authoritarianism is "...a form of government in which the elites in power use communication channels to collect preferences in order to take them into account in the process of making policy and managerial decisions"<sup>16</sup> . Thus, in the early 2010s, researchers' interest in public deliberation in a non-competitive context emerged.

Among those few works (numbering hardly a couple of dozen works by various authors) on the role of e-participation in autocracies, two main directions can be distinguished. The first group of researchers tries to assess the motivation for the introduction of such institutions at the country, subnational and municipal levels. Others try to establish the conditions and factors that influence the decision to introduce and the direct implementation of this policy innovation<sup>17</sup> . In many respects, the results in both directions of research remain ambiguous.

On the one hand, as J. Chen, J. Pan and Y. Xu point out, authoritarian responsiveness is a multifaceted phenomenon. Despite the fact that responsiveness is understood as an essential reaction of the representatives of power to the requests of civil society actors, in autocracies its "sources" can be quite different<sup>18</sup> . If in democracies in a standard situation the responsiveness of the institutions of power is usually dictated by pressure from below in the form of incentives within electoral institutions or conventional or unconventional political participation, in the case of autocracies the representatives of the authorities may be responsive in order to show their competence and to advance in their careers (in the case of China it means also in the political ladder), as well as to prevent the threat of collective action through the satisfaction of societal demands<sup>19</sup> .

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. P. 25

<sup>14</sup> Kornreich Y. Authoritarian responsiveness: Online consultation with "issue publics" in China // *Governance*. 2019. Vol. 3. P. 547-564.

<sup>15</sup> Truex R. Consultative Authoritarianism and Its Limits // *Comparative Political Studies*. 2017. Vol. 50. P. 329-361.

<sup>16</sup> He B., Warren M. Authoritarian Deliberation: The Deliberative Turn in Chinese Political Development // *Perspectives on Politics*. 2011. Vol. 9. P. 269-289.

<sup>17</sup> Jho W., Sung K. Institutional and technological determinants of civil e-Participation: Solo or duet? // *Government Information Quarterly*. 2015. Vol. 32. P. 488-495.

<sup>18</sup> Chen, Pan and Xu. Op. cit.; Truex R. Op. cit.; Kornreich Y.. Op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Cleary M. Electoral Competition, Participation, and Government Responsiveness in Mexico // *American Journal of Political Science*. 2007. Vol. 51. P. 283-299; Fukuyama F. Political order and political decay: from the industrial revolution to the globalization of democracy. Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York. 2009. 668 P.; Grose C. Field Experimental Work on Political Institutions // *Annual Review of Political Science*. 2014. Vol. 17. P. 355-370.

On the other hand, there are works that point to a different motivation for the introduction of limited but consultative tools in an authoritarian context. Thus, R. Truex in his work on the limits of consultative authoritarianism points out that the true purpose of such innovations is not to collect preferences, but to create a psychological effect of participation<sup>20</sup>. He notes that when analyzing the interaction between citizens and the state, the fact of heterogeneity of the population structure by various socio-economic indicators is missed. Citizens with different class status will evaluate digital interactions with government institutions differently. In his work, he uses an unconventional approach involving the theory of "social exchange" from social psychology, which implies that an actor evaluates the quality of interactions on the basis of his experience and his expectations<sup>21</sup>. In turn, actors who lack access to governance and who have low expectations of the current political order will change their opinion of government in a positive direction when using digital deliberation. *Vice versa*, citizens who have either political access to governance or, due to their economic and/or educational status, are able to compare real democratic governance with the facade tools of the Chinese government will not experience such a positive effect<sup>22</sup>. Thus, the main motivation for the introduction of online deliberation is to ensure procedural legitimacy among citizens with low educational and social status, of which there are a relatively large number in China<sup>23</sup>.

There is a third view on the nature of e-civic participation, albeit in the context of party autocracy and "consultative authoritarianism". Y. Kornreich points out the shortcomings of the experimental studies on authoritarian responsiveness conducted by previous authors and concludes that authoritarian governments can demonstrate responsiveness and incorporate the views of the target audience of a policy into its final content and implementation<sup>24</sup>. Thus, e-participation in autocracies is not a façade institution and facilitates the elimination of information asymmetries, which contributes to the quality of policy outcomes<sup>25</sup>.

As for the factors that ensure the successful implementation of e-participation mechanisms as an independent policy, the number of studies is also very small. One of the few works is devoted to cross-sectional assessment of e-participation development in democracies and autocracies<sup>26</sup>. Considering the technological and institutional determinants of the implementation of this

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<sup>20</sup> Truex. Op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Emerson R.S. Social Exchange Theory // Annual Review of Sociology. 1976. Vol. 2. P. 335-362.

<sup>22</sup> Truex R. Op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Kornreich Y. Op.cit.

<sup>25</sup> Brancati D. Democratic Authoritarianism: Origins and Effects // Annual Review of Political Science. 2014. Vol. 17. P. 313-326.

<sup>26</sup> Jho W., Sung K. Op. cit.

innovation, W. Jho and K. Sung offer a set of explanations based on the literature more related to democratic countries. Thus, in research essays on structural factors one can find assumptions about the relationship between the level of information and communication technology development in a country and the level of e-participation<sup>27</sup> ; as well as institutional configuration such as political regime, parliamentary or presidential form of government<sup>28</sup> , electoral system<sup>29</sup> and their relationship with political and civic participation in any form. Among the main factors, socio-economic indicators, the level of technological development and the number of digital citizens, and the level of democracy stand out. Y. Zheng and M. Holzer come to similar results (importantly, except for the level of democracy in the country)<sup>30</sup> .

**The research problem** that this dissertation study aims to address is based on the following points. According to a brief overview of the research field, there are several significant contradictions in the current research literature regarding the *adoption and implementation factors of e-participation mechanisms in non-democracies of different forms*.

The problem stems from the uncertainty as to what ensures the successful implementation of e-participation as a policy. Apart from the fact that there is virtually no work *in* this vein, the implementation of e-participation as a *policy* within non-democracies automatically imposes an explanatory framework from the field of political economy, suggesting that the successful implementation of policies is, if not impossible, at least difficult in non-democracies due to the institutional configuration and rent-seeking behavior of interest groups. Also important here is the fact that research suggests that e-participation is most often implemented at the subnational level to avoid the digital principal-principal dilemma<sup>31</sup> . Most of the studies focus on China and Eastern monarchies and practically do not consider the conditions and factors of e-participation implementation. The more remarkable is the Russian case, where at the regional level there is a pleiad of tools of digital interaction between citizens and the state, but there are no explanations for the success of these electronic platforms, except for rare works on pockets of efficiency<sup>32</sup> .

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<sup>27</sup> Freschi A., Medaglia R., Norbjerg J. A Tale of Six Countries: eParticipation Research from an Administrative and Political Perspective // Lecture Notes in Computer Sciences. 2009. P. 1-36.

<sup>28</sup> Norris P. Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited. Cambridge University Press. 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Blais A., Carty R. K. The Psychological Impact of Electoral Laws: Measuring Duverger's Elusive Factor // British Journal of Political Science. Vol. 21. P. 79-93.

<sup>30</sup> Zheng Y., Holzer M. Explaining E-participation Diffusion at the National Level: An Examination of External Environmental Influences // Administration & Society. 2013. Vol. 49. P. 423-442.

<sup>31</sup> Distelhorst K. The Power of Empty Promises: Quasi-Democratic Institutions and Activism in China // Comparative Political Studies. 2017. Vol. 50. P. 464-498.

<sup>32</sup> Kabanov Y., Chugunov A. Electronic "Pockets of Effectiveness": E-governance and Institutional Change in St. Petersburg, Russia // Janseen M., Axelsson K., Glasey O. (eds.) Electronic Government, Springer International, 2017. P. 386-398.

However, the specifics of implementing e-participation in the Russian case, which differs from the Chinese case at least in terms of constitutional design and type of political regime, have not been practically subjected to consideration. Therefore, the first part of the dissertation research problem is to *establish the factors of implementation of e-participation mechanisms at the sub-national level*.

It is also worth mentioning that one cohort of researchers argues that the motivation behind the introduction of e-civic participation is the desire to create a façade institution that mimics democratic procedures in order to provide procedural legitimacy and combat public discontent. By creating channels of e-participation, elites can "channel" citizens' anger and discontent, defusing the level of tension and in parallel gaining information about specific discontents. Another cohort also points to the limitations of these forms of deliberation under authoritarianism, but experimentally proves that these mechanisms do allow responding to citizens' demands, especially if they threaten collective action or show loyalty to the current government. The third cohort argues that authoritarian regimes need to provide quality public goods as well as adopt policies that are in the interests of at least those they target, so they allow for "non-participatory consultation" and, in parallel, eliminate information asymmetries. In this vein, it is important to establish *what is the key factor influencing the decision to implement e-participation*.

At its core, the introduction and implementation of development policy projects, economic measures aimed at economic growth, as well as any policies in Russian studies are viewed through the prism of V. Gelman's approach<sup>33</sup>. This argument is based on the assumption that the political regime prevailing in Russia is the most suboptimal form possible, and undermines any opportunities to implement modernization policies in general, and individual policies in particular. According to the author of the concept, as well as other researchers, the policy process in Russia is significantly complicated due to: a) the parallel governance structures laid down in the 1993 Constitution b) the impossibility of relying on the bureaucracy as the basis for implementing policies due to its low quality and inconsistency with Weberian standards c) the presence of political business cycles that change the planning horizon of elites and narrow it<sup>34</sup>. The governance process in this case is reduced to the fact that elites take any action only for the purpose of implementing rent-seeking behavior, even when they really pursue the goals of economic or technological modernization<sup>35</sup>. The only possible condition for the implementation of large

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<sup>33</sup> Gel'man V. *The Politics of Bad Governance in Contemporary Russia*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Gel'man V., Starodubstev A. *Opportunities and Constraints of Authoritarian Modernization: Russian Policy Reforms in the 2000s // Europe-Asia Studies*. 2016. Vol. 68. P. 97-117.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* P. 9

modernization projects, according to V.Y. Gelman, is the presence of policy entrepreneurs. This thesis goes in the development of the concept of pockets of efficiency, assuming the personal interest of elites and their ability to protect the policy from rent-seeking behavior in the long term (usually more than 3 years)<sup>36</sup>. Also, within the framework of this theorizing it is noted in parallel that all policies in Russia had an extremely low life cycle and quickly disintegrated under the pressure of interest groups in the existing institutional configuration. In general, this approach assumes that all policies created and implemented in the Russian policy process will be doomed to failure, and even if all the necessary components "for success stories" are in place, their results will be mediocre at best.

Similar arguments are presented in the context of a rather limited assessment of e-participation and elements of participatory digital governance at the subnational level. For example, in their works, D. Gritsenko and A. Indukaev reduce the evaluation of regional portals to the problems of legitimization of the existing order, control over activists, and the fact that these digital tools work only in a limited number of policy domains<sup>37</sup>.

Without disputing the assessment of interest group incentives in the context of hybrid regimes, these arguments, in our opinion, are not sufficient in explaining variation in policy outcomes, especially at the subnational level. The same applies to the introduction of e-participation as a policy.

Contrary to the provisions of existing theoretical concepts, e-participation is actively developing in Russian regions<sup>38</sup>. At the time of writing the dissertation research, there were over 190 and 150 e-participation channels at the sub-national and municipal levels, respectively, including platforms for open budgets, participatory budgeting, problem reporting, as well as e-voting portals and crowdsourcing platforms, which were institutionalized channels created by state and local governments<sup>39</sup>. Meanwhile, problem reporting portals, the most common mode of e-participation in all countries, were present in 52 regions. A researcher critical of the possibilities of innovation in the context of hybrid regimes could argue that the introduction of e-participation

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<sup>36</sup> Roll M. *The Politics of Public Sector Performance: Pockets of effectiveness in developing countries*. Routledge, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Gritsenko D., Indukaev A. *Digitalizing City Governance in Russia: The Case of the 'Active Citizen' Platform* // *Europe-Asia Studies*. 2021. Vol. 73. P. 1102-1124; Schlauffer C. *Why do nondemocratic regimes promote e-participation? The case of Moscow's active citizen online voting platform* // *Governance*. Vol. 34. P. 821-836.

<sup>38</sup> Panfilov G.O., Chugunov A.V., Kabanov Y.A. *E-participation in Russian regions: results of monitoring 2020-2022* // *State and citizens in the electronic environment*. Issue 6 (Proceedings of the XXV International Joint Scientific Conference "Internet and Modern Society", IMS-2022, St. Petersburg, June 23-24, 2022. Collection of scientific articles). - St. Petersburg: ITMO University, 2022. C. 62-71. (in Russian)

<sup>39</sup> Panfilov, Chugunov, Kabanov. *Cit. op. cit.*



was the result of pressure from the federal center within the model of vertical coercion<sup>40</sup>. However, as part of the systematization of the process of developing digital participatory governance in the regions, it has been shown that they developed in several phases, where the first big experiments to implement such platforms started in 2012, and only by 2020 the federal center got involved in the agenda, potentially pointing to the reverse effect of "policy laboratories"<sup>41</sup>. Another argument in opposition to our formulation of the research problem could be the need for international socialization: in contemporary comparative politics there is a well-known phenomenon when non-competitive regimes try to prove their worthiness and gain legitimacy through the introduction of advanced innovations in their public policy<sup>42</sup>. The most frequent benchmarks are international rankings and participation in international organizations in general<sup>43</sup>. However, at the time of the 8-year heyday of e-participation in the regions, there were no such rankings to guide the regions. In addition, the federal center was focused on the spread of e-government and the concept of "state-as-a-platform" (*GaaP*), paying little attention to policy experiments with digitalization in the regions<sup>44</sup>.

Another important problem for our research puzzle is that despite attempts to conceptualize the role of various democratic institutions in hybrid regimes, there is virtually no theory about the place and role of participatory governance in such an institutional configuration<sup>45</sup>. Researchers in this case assume that rough typologization of political regimes contribute to ignoring the fact of development of such channels in non-democracies, as well as the factors of their introduction, functioning and effectiveness<sup>46</sup>. In this regard, it seems to us incorrect to use existing theory regarding policies and the provision of public goods in non-competitive regimes to explain the introduction of e-participation. Moreover, the arguments that hybrid regimes are the most

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<sup>40</sup> Kabanov Y., Sungurov A. E-Government Development Factors: Evidence from the Russian Regions // *Digital Transformation and Global Society*. Springer International. P. 85-95.; Sabatier P. Cit. op.

<sup>41</sup> Chugunov A. V. Digital interaction between citizens and authorities in the Russian Federation: the trend towards centralization // *Opportunities and threats of the digital society*. 2022. C. 10-17. Volden C. States as Policy Laboratories: Emulating Success in the Children's Health Insurance Program // *American Journal of Political Science*. 2006. Vol. 50. P. 294-312.

<sup>42</sup> Kneuer M., Demmelhuber T. Gravity centres of authoritarian rule: a conceptual approach // *Democratization*. 2016. Vol. 23. P. 775-796.

<sup>43</sup> Lee C., Chang K., Berry F. Testing the Development and Diffusion of E-Government and E-Democracy: A Global Perspective // *Public Administration Review*. Vol. 71. P. 444-454.

<sup>44</sup> Styrin E., Mossberg K., Zhulin A. Government as a platform: Intergovernmental participation for public services in the Russian Federation // *Government Information Quarterly*. 2022. Vol. 39. P. 101627.

<sup>45</sup> Gorgulu N., Sharafutdinova G., Steinbuks J. Political Dividends of Digital Participatory Governance: Evidence from Moscow Pothole Management // *Policy Research Working Papers*. 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

politically inefficient forms of political regime have already been challenged back in 2015 by M. Miller<sup>47</sup>.

Summarizing, it can be noted that both the theoretical component of the problem and the empirical reality demonstrate that at the moment it is impossible to conclude unequivocally about what influences the decision to implement e-participation in the regions, as well as what factors facilitate its development in the conditions of a hybrid political regime.

By e-participation in this paper we will understand institutionalized channels of digital interaction between citizens and the state on public policy issues, according to the official UN definition<sup>48</sup>. In the context of our study, this is one of the key points, because unlike initiative and private petition and crowdsourcing platforms, they assume that they exist and function according to certain rules and norms, and are embedded in the system of public administration.

### **Characterization of the research design.**

The posing of the research question is conditioned by the following. Explaining the causes of various social processes in terms of the prevalence of certain individuals or structures that determine their behavior has long-standing roots in the social sciences<sup>49</sup>. In political science, the debate between representatives of the two schools is usually settled in the field of studying democratization<sup>50</sup>: either through a modernization prism or through a transitological one. The first paradigm explains the processes through various resources and constraints that shape the behavior of actors, while the second paradigm highlights the key ability of actors to act independently at a given point in time and choose strategies depending on the situation. Despite the fact that our work is far from democratization studies, in our opinion using these approaches as a starting point for forming further theoretical expectations is appropriate. Given the fact that current research on agency and structure in the social sciences emphasizes the duality rather than duality of these approaches, we can use both to structure our hypothetical explanations<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Miller M.K.. Electoral Authoritarianism and Human Development // Comparative Political Studies. 2015. Vol. 48. P. 1526-1562; Miller M.K.. Elections, Information, and Policy Responsiveness in Autocratic Regimes // Comparative Political Studies. 2015. Vol. 48. P. 691-727.

<sup>48</sup> Le Blanc D. E-participation: A Quick Overview of Recent Qualitative Trends. URL: <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/papers/25206656/158>

<sup>49</sup> Sibeon R. Agency, structure, and social chance as cross-disciplinary concepts // Politics. 1999. V. 19. №3. P. 139-144.

<sup>50</sup> Ajagbe S. Aligning the two main approaches to the study of democratization // Transcience: A Journal of Global Studies. 2016. Vol. 7. №1. P. 83-99.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

In the course of the thesis research and in accordance with the research problem statement and literature review on the topic, we will try to answer the following **research question**: *"What agency and structure factors influence the implementation of e-participation in Russian regions?"*.

**The aim of the dissertation research** is to establish the main agency and structure factors that affect the implementation of e-participation mechanisms in Russian regions, as well as the motivation for the implementation of e-participation through the assessment of its real (or missing) effects. In order to achieve the set goal, we have developed the following **tasks**:

1. To provide a theoretical and conceptual description of e-civic participation, its role and place in the governance process in different types of political regimes, and the potential effects on the quality of governance from digital interaction between elites and society, as well as to identify the main determinants that may have an impact on the implementation of e-participation as a policy.

2. Conceptualize the relationship between the characteristics of regional political regimes, the socio-economic situation of the region, the characteristics of the political and technical competencies of the first person of the region and the outcomes of policies in the form of e-participation mechanisms of Russian regions.

3. Identify the factors that determine the extent of e-participation adoption in the region in 2020-2023.

4. To describe the effects of e-participation mechanisms on the quality of public management on the example of the road management sub-domain, establishing the facade or reality of the functioning of e-participation mechanisms in Russian regions.

### **Theoretical and methodological basis of the study. Empirical basis of the study.**

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this study, as well as the relatively small number of papers on the topic, we need to test the assumptions of several middle-range theories potentially capable of providing explanations for the patterns of factors in the adoption of e-participation, as well as the motivation for making such a decision.

One of the bases of our theoretical assumptions is the theory of "authoritarian responsiveness"<sup>52</sup>. Typically, terms from concepts of authoritarianism that are in one way or another responsive to the demands of societal groups are used interchangeably, with the remark that it is necessary to distinguish between deliberation and consultation as forms of permissible

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<sup>52</sup> Teets J., Qiaoan R. Responsive Authoritarianism in China -- a Review of Responsiveness in Xi and Hu Administrations // Journal of Chinese Political Science. 2020. Vol. 25. P. 139-153.

public debate on public policy issues and an institutive system for gathering information about policy preferences<sup>53</sup>. Responsive political regimes create institutionalized channels and allow civic engagement under the rules set by elites. In addition, they may exhibit elite tolerance of localized political activity. Together with semi-open information flows, this allows elites to obtain reliable information about citizens' preferences, make concessions in the field of public policy, and fight societal discontent by satisfying citizens' interests<sup>54</sup>.

Also, in our opinion, the implementation of e-participation can be influenced by the characteristics of the regional political regime. By regional political regime we will raise "...the set of actors in the political process, institutions of political power, resources and strategies of struggle to achieve or retain power"<sup>55</sup>. In recent years, interest in this variable as a determinant of appointment issues as well as the effectiveness of regions in terms of economic growth and other aspects of development policy has increased significantly<sup>56</sup>. Thus, according to the current empirical results, in regions where complete dominance of the party in power is established, elites may focus on achieving socio-economic policy indicators and implementing courses. On the contrary, with relative competitiveness, the governor and his team primarily focus on balancing resources to calibrate the political machine and achieve the necessary results.

As the research focuses on the determinants of e-participation adoption as a policy, one of the key theories is the policy diffusion theory<sup>57</sup>. Non-competitive regimes and the policies embedded in them have rarely been investigated in terms of how policies diffuse in them. However, recent work has increasingly argued that the familiar frameworks for policy analysis used in democratic regimes can work well in other types of regimes, and researchers have proposed theoretical developments in "regime-sensitive" frameworks for policy analysis<sup>58</sup>. It has also been

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Maquis C., Bird Y. The Paradox of Responsive Authoritarianism: How Civic Activism Spurs Environmental Penalties in China // *Organization Science*. 2018. Vol. 29. P. 948-968; Zhelnina A.A., Tykanova E.V. Formal and informal civic infrastructures: modern studies of urban local activism in Russia // *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*. 2019. T. 22. B. 1. C. 162-192 (in Russian); *The City of Forking Streets: trajectories of urban conflict development in Russia* // (eds.) Tykanova E. Moscow: Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2021.

<sup>55</sup> Gelman V., Ryzhenkov S., Bree M. *Russia of Regions: Transformation of Political Regimes*. Moscow: Ves Mir, 2000. C. 19-20. (In Russian)

<sup>56</sup> Gibson E. Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries // *World Politics*. 2005. Vol. 58. P. 101-132.

<sup>57</sup> Mooney C. Modeling Regional Effects on State Policy Diffusion // *Political Research*. 2001. Vol. 54. P. 103-124.

<sup>58</sup> Tosun J., Croissant A. Policy Diffusion: A Regime-sensitive Conceptual Framework // *Global Policy*. Vol. 7. P. 534-540.

demonstrated in Chinese authoritarianism, which we have already mentioned, that horizontal learning, imitation, competition, and other mechanisms can work in autocracies<sup>59</sup>.

It cannot be said that the phenomenon of policy diffusion has not been considered by Russian political scientists. Thus, A. Y. Sungurov in his book considered the main mechanisms of policy diffusion, and also described the channels of innovation diffusion in Russia and their examples<sup>60</sup>. V. Y. Gelman and T. V. Lankina studied institution building in the 2000s, pointing out democratic and authoritarian diffusion as determinants of the consolidation or fading of democratic institutions<sup>61</sup>. Podshibyakina T. A. also paid attention to diffusion models, where she singled out regulatory impact assessment as one of its methods, as well as various practices of public-private partnership and centralized activities of public authorities<sup>62</sup>. In recent works, theoretical arguments about policy innovation, and its diffusion between elites and citizens, have been presented by I. S. Semenenko and A. I. Soloviev<sup>63</sup>. Nevertheless, research using the diffusion framework is underrepresented in Russian political science.

Policy diffusion refers to a situation where policy choices in one unit are made under the influence of such choices in other units<sup>64</sup>. Since the interdependence of different structural units (such as countries, or in our case, regions) is understood as a defining characteristic of policy processes, all fundamental choices in terms of decisions made can be explained through the goals and strategies that actors adopt in the course of implementing strategic behavior<sup>65</sup>. Also, like many processes in autocracies, policy diffusion can be explained through the election of certain strategies

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<sup>59</sup> Zhang Y., Zhu X. Multiple mechanisms of policy diffusion in China // *Public Management Review*. 2019. Vol. 21. P. 495-514.

<sup>60</sup> Sungurov A. Yu. *How Political Innovations Emerge: Thought Factories and Other Mediating Institutions*. Moscow: Rosspan, 2015. 376 p. (in Russian)

<sup>61</sup> Gelman V. Y., Lankina T. V. Political diffusion in the conditions of spatially hybrid regime // *Polis. Political Studies*. 2007. № 6. C. 86-109. (in Russian)

<sup>62</sup> Podshibyakina T.A. Theory of innovation diffusion and practice of innovation policy implementation in Russia // *Theories and Problems of Political Studies*. 2016. Vol. 5. No. 6A. P. 129-137. (in Russian)

<sup>63</sup> Semenenko I. S. Tradition and innovation as concepts of political science and guidelines of development policy: dialectics of compatibility // *Polis. Political Studies*. 2023. № 5. C. 45-65 (in Russian); Solov'ev A. I. Political innovations: obvious meanings and non-obviousness of reality // *Polis. Political Studies*. 2023. № 5. C. 120-140. (in Russian)

<sup>64</sup> Graham C., Woodfield W., Harrison J. A framework for institutional adoption and implementation of blended learning in higher education // *The Internet and Higher Education*. 2013. Vol. 18. P. 4-14.

<sup>65</sup> Gilardi F. Who Learns from What in Policy Diffusion Processes? // *American Journal of Political Science*. 2010. Vol. 54. P. 650-666.

and utility maximization, so we have reason to believe that this approach can provide an explanation of why certain regions do or do not participate electronically<sup>66</sup>.

Among the many theories explaining diffusion of innovation and policies, one relevant for our study is the internal determinants model<sup>67</sup>. According to the theory, subnational units of larger size in terms of available financial and organizational resources are more likely to be more innovative<sup>68</sup>. Determinants are not limited only to the availability of economic capacity to overcome organizational and technical problems in the course of innovation implementation, and a wide range of structural and agency factors can have an impact. In developing this approach, it is possible to use the theory of state fitness, which refers to the ability of the state (or in this case, the region) to implement policies and support the governance process<sup>69</sup>. In recent academic texts, researchers increasingly refer to the variability of resources and organizational capabilities at the subnational level during the implementation of policies, including in Russia, so we assume the relevance of this theory for our work<sup>70</sup>.

In general, our work draws on elements of the structural approach, which involves the interaction between components such as agency and structure<sup>71</sup>. Each variable we use is categorized into one of the elements of the structural approach, which allows us to provide a theoretically grounded explanation of the influence of various regional e-participation adoption factors mentioned in the literature, be it the agency of the first person of a region or the structural features of a sub-national unit. In addition, this approach is in line with earlier attempts to explain political processes in comparative politics by analyzing transitions from one type of political regime to another, where either agency or structure was also put at the center of the research focus.

### **Methodological basis of the study.**

*Methods.* The methodological basis of the dissertation research is the use of spatial statistical methods, as well as methods of statistical causal inference. The choice of this approach

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<sup>66</sup> Braun D., Gilardi F. Taking 'Galton's Problem' Seriously: Towards a Theory of Policy Diffusion // *Journal of Theoretical Politics*. 2006. Vol. 18. P. 298-322.

<sup>67</sup> Sabatier P. Op. cit.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. P. 234

<sup>69</sup> Centeno M., Kohli A., Yashar D. Unpacking States in the Developing World: Capacity, Performance, and Politics // Centeno M., Kohli A., Yashar D. (eds.) *States in the Developing World*. Cambridge University Press, 2017. P. 1-32.

<sup>70</sup> Jaros K. Rethinking subnational government capacity in China // *Journal of Chinese Governance*. 2016. Vol. 1. P. 633-653.; Ross C., Turovsky R., Sukhova M.. Subnational State Capacity in Russia: The Implementation of the 2012 Presidential "May Decrees" // *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*. 2022. Vol. 30. P. 263-282.

<sup>71</sup> Giddens A. *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. - Univ of California Press, 1984.

is conditioned by the field under study, as well as the structure of data used in analyzing policies. The standard approach in social sciences is the use of various variations of regression models with the use of the least squares method, which is the "workhorse" of the modern social researcher. However, researchers often fail to take into account the peculiarities of data structure, such as cross-sectional dependence. To put it in more theoretical terms, we can note that policies and in principle any policy decisions are not made by actors "in a vacuum", without taking into account the decisions of other actors, as we mentioned in the description of the theory of diffusion of innovations. Thus, spatial models help to measure the mutual influence of units of analysis based on spatial proximity (and other adjacencies) and avoid biased estimates in the models.

*Data.* The data for the statistical part of the research design were obtained by a combination of database and data manipulations in order to adequately operationalize them in line with the theoretical framework. To create the **dependent variable**, we used data from the Monitoring of e-participation<sup>72</sup>, evaluating regions on 15 criteria of participatory digital governance development, including real interaction aspects (possibility of feedback from authorities, updating relevant information on authorities' activities, monitoring the implementation of decisions) and technical aspects (digital interaction interface, accessibility for different categories of citizens, etc.). The remaining independent explanatory and control variables were constructed from various data sources - the Unified Interagency Information Statistical System<sup>73</sup>, data from the CEC of Russia on subnational assemblies, data from the Government of Russia on the level of human development, data from the Minchenko Rating of Heads of Regions 2.0<sup>74</sup>, data from the rating of the Agency for Political and Economic Communications<sup>75</sup> and the National Rating of Governors<sup>76</sup>. Data on the resource component in the form of organizational and technical factors were operationalized and measured on the basis of the rating of the quality of public services of the Ministry of Economic Development<sup>77</sup> as a proxy variable of e-government implementation. As a result, the final data set was obtained in the format of region-year with N = 340 between 2020 and 2023.

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<sup>72</sup> Monitoring e-participation of the Center for e-Government Technologies. URL: [https://news.egov.itmo.ru/photo/documents/2023\\_report\\_e-participation\\_short.pdf](https://news.egov.itmo.ru/photo/documents/2023_report_e-participation_short.pdf) (in Russian)

<sup>73</sup> EMISS. (in Russian)

<sup>74</sup> Rating of regional heads. URL: <https://map.minchenko.ru/> (in Russian)

<sup>75</sup> Rating of management efficiency in the subjects of the Russian Federation. URL: [http://www.apecom.ru/projects/item.php?SECTION\\_ID=91&ELEMENT\\_ID=9046](http://www.apecom.ru/projects/item.php?SECTION_ID=91&ELEMENT_ID=9046) (in Russian)

<sup>76</sup> National rating of governors. URL: <https://russia-rating.ru/info/22002.html> (in Russian)

<sup>77</sup> Rating of the quality of public services. URL: [https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/directions/gosudarstvennoe\\_upravlenie/vnedrenie\\_novyh\\_principov\\_predostavleniya\\_uslug/ocenka\\_kachestva\\_gosuslug/](https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/directions/gosudarstvennoe_upravlenie/vnedrenie_novyh_principov_predostavleniya_uslug/ocenka_kachestva_gosuslug/) (in Russian)

For quasi-experimental modeling, a dependent variable was used in the form of roadway quality at the municipal level for the reporting period, based on Rosstat datasets. To create an indicator variable of the intervention, open project documents and social networks of the authorities were analyzed, as well as the mentioned e-participation rating. Thus, a dataset with  $N = 988$  from 2008 to 2020 was compiled. GRP per capita, population density and Internet penetration were used as variables for weighting the observation units.

*The first hypothesis is* related to the first person of a region in which mechanisms of e-participation are (un)implemented. Initially, the theory in Russian politics assumes that an actor with sufficient political loyalty is appointed as the head of the region, with the selection of such an actor being based on the principle of weighing loyalty against competence<sup>78</sup>. Accordingly, *per se* such a governor will have at best mediocre managerial abilities, which should be expressed in the maintenance of basic socio-economic indicators and at best - the implementation of any federal initiatives at a sufficient level. However, empirical reality (as exemplified by the subject of this study) demonstrates that the regions are actively implementing digital innovations, including e-participation. Here our assumption comes out of a rather unnoticeable theoretical nuance described in the previously mentioned work of A. Zakharov. In the case when the principal chooses from a large pool of potential agents, there is a probability of appointing both a loyal and simultaneously competent agent. Accordingly, such an agent (in our case, the head of the region) will be able to ensure not only a certain quality of public policy, but also the introduction of various innovations. In addition, his agency will consist in this case in the ability to act in spite of "environmental factors", for example, insufficient resources or institutional resistance. Another important aspect of the loyalty/competence trade-off is that the original model (in our view) assumes competence only as a set of technocratic skills. However, competencies themselves can also be political, such as managing intra-elite conflicts<sup>79</sup> and meeting the political demands of the federal center<sup>80</sup>. This same political part of the competencies may also include the ability we mentioned in the theory to understand the political dividends of innovation<sup>81</sup>. Our assumption runs as follows: by definition each agent (governor) is politically loyal, but differs in the level of technical and political competencies. If a technically competent agent was selected at the time of appointment, he will be

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<sup>78</sup> Egorov G., Sonin K. Dictators and their Viziers: Endogenizing the loyalty-competence trade-off // Journal of the European Economic Association. 2011. Vol. 9. P. 903-930.

<sup>80</sup> Ledyayev V., Chirikova A. Governors and local elites in Russia: patterns of interaction // European politics and society. 2019. Vol. 20. №. 3. P. 315-332.

<sup>81</sup> Gorgulu N., Sharafutdinova G., Steinbuks J. Political Dividends of Digital Participatory Governance: Evidence from Moscow Pothole Management // Policy Research Working Papers. 2020.



able to implement an innovation such as e-participation in the region. If he is both politically **and** technically competent, the level of implementation of such an innovation will be even higher, as he will understand its value both for the quality of public policy and for the legitimacy of the ruling party. In a sense, this thesis echoes findings from Western empirical material. For example, in the case of *Decide Madrid*, one of the first and most successful e-participation platforms, researchers have noted the almost absolute role of the first person in the introduction of electronic forms of citizen participation, which can contribute to the integration of classical governance structures with the digital process and a general change in the way regional and local administrations work<sup>82</sup>. This pattern is reproduced both in European countries, such as Estonia, and in North American states, most notably the United States, where it is noted that the direct personal desire of the "senior administrator" and his or her level of education, especially if it is related to governance greatly increases the likelihood of adoption and successful implementation of digital citizen participation<sup>83</sup>. Thus:

**H1:** Having a competent governor is positively related to the introduction of e-participation in Russian regions.

*The second hypothesis* of our study concerns the structural part of the explanation in the variation of e-participation adoption. Let us consider the first component of the structural part - the rules of the game. As a basis for hypothesizing we take the model of the regional political regime of Y. O. Gaivoronsky as a development of R. F. Turovsky's model<sup>84</sup>.

Let us consider the axis of *dependence*. Although as such political independence of the regions is practically absent at this point in time, they still differ in the degree of economic dependence on the federal center. First of all, this is expressed in the volume of inter-budget transfers that a constituent entity of the federation receives. The very mechanism of distribution of such transfers until approximately the beginning of the 2010s was politicized, but as time went on it became more oriented towards the so-called "equalization of the economic situation" of the regions. In fact, evidence of the use of grants, subsidies and subventions as a reward and

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<sup>82</sup> Panapoulus E., Tambouris E., Tarabanis K. eParticipation Initiatives in Europe: Learning from Practitioners // Tambouris E., Macintosh A., Glassey O. (eds.) *Electronic Participation*. Berlin: Heidelberg, 2010

<sup>83</sup> Zheng Y., Schachter H. The Impact of Administrator Willingness on Website E-Participation: Some Evidence from Municipalities // *Public Performance & Management Review*. 2018. Vol. 41. P. 1-21.

<sup>84</sup> Turovsky R.F. Regional Political Regimes in Russia: towards a methodology of analysis // *Polis. Political Studies*. 2009. Vol. 2. P. 77-95; Gaivoronskii Y. Regional Political Regimes in Russia: Conceptual Innovations and Measurement Possibilities // *The Journal of Political Theory, Political Philosophy and Sociology of Politics Politeia*. 2015. Vol. 77. P. 21-37.

punishment mechanism is now completely absent. However, nevertheless, they can also have an impact on realized policies. This can be described as the federation factor. If a region does not have its own resources to meet the requirements of socio-economic development, it will be dependent on the federal center. The federal center, in turn, is most often interested in the implementation of its requirements in the region. If we are talking about political courses, it is primarily the implementation of indicators of national programs and indicators of Putin's May decrees. Accordingly, regional elites are limited in choosing their strategies: they are forced to follow the federal priorities, especially those that have a legal framework. In the absence of such dependence or its low level, regional elites can prioritize the implementation of their own policies. At the speculative level, it can also be assumed that such regional political regimes will be more aligned with the local population and, in turn, will seek to satisfy their interests, including through the creation of electronic mechanisms of interaction.

If we talk about the "*democracy-authoritarianism*" axis, the logic of our reasoning is quite straightforward. First of all, starting from this axis, we consider the degree of electoral competition in the region. Despite the fact that, as we mentioned earlier, all regions in the Russian Federation are "authoritarian" to a certain extent, they differ in the level of dominance of the ruling party. In conditions when the degree of competition in the region can be classified as high, we can assume that regional politicians have to listen much more to the demands and requirements of the local population. This means, among other things, that they will be more inclined to create various participatory channels, such as e-participation. On the contrary, in hegemonic regions, where political machines work effectively and informal ties are the main focus, the introduction of e-participation mechanisms is not a necessity. It is worth saying that our reasoning somewhat contradicts the existing theory, which assumes that it is in hegemonic regimes, where elites no longer need to spend a significant amount of resources on "fine-tuning" political machines, that it is possible to allocate these very resources for the implementation of various policies.

The third component of the regional political regime - *patrimoniality* - can also presumably be associated with the introduction of e-participation. Patronage is characterized as the prevalence of informal ties and management practices, the presence of a wide network of patron-client relations, the provision of preferences through loyalty<sup>85</sup>. It is obvious that in such a management system one of the prevailing practices will be rent-oriented behavior<sup>86</sup>. This is also related to the general closedness of bureaucracy and lack of following formal procedures. In this

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<sup>85</sup> Theobald R. Patrimonialism // World Politics. 1982. Vol. 34. №4. P. 550-551.

<sup>86</sup> Araral E. et al. Neo-patrimonialism and Corruption: Evidence from 8,436 Firms in 17 Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa // Public administration review. 2019. Vol. 79. № 4. P. 580-590.

context, it can be assumed that the introduction of participatory governance, which in many respects implies transparency and accountability, as well as compliance with formal regulations, will not be a priority for the regional authorities.

Thus, we hypothesize:

**H2:** Regional political regime characteristics are correlated with the adoption of e-participation mechanisms.

H2.1 Regions that are more dependent on inter-budget transfers from the federal center are less successful in implementing e-participation mechanisms.

H2.2 Relatively high levels of electoral competition are associated with higher levels of e-participation adoption.

H2.3 Low penetration of patrimonial practices will be positively associated with the introduction of e-participation.

*The third hypothesis* relates to the resource component of the structure. Perhaps, this allocation may seem somewhat redundant, given that we have already described the potential resource component as the administrative solvency of the region. Nevertheless, the whole model of internal determinants and its components, in our opinion, fit well into the "big" division into agency and structure.

There is not much literature on the financial costs and staffing constraints in implementing e-participation, but using the Australian example, the authors demonstrate that it is often budgetary constraints that territories face, which in turn prevent them from hiring competent staff to implement the initiative<sup>87</sup>.

First of all, it correlates with our theory on the importance of administrative capacity as the ability to implement policies and provide public goods, which is ensured by financial, managerial, personnel and other organizational indicators. Thus, our hypothesis is that:

**H3:** The administrative capacity of a region has a relationship with the implementation of e-participation mechanisms.

H3.1 The opportunity to allocate funds for the digitalization of regional policy is positively linked to the introduction of e-participation mechanisms.

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<sup>87</sup> Gauld R., Goldfinch S., Horsburg S. Do They Want It? Do They Use It? The "Demand-Side" of E-government in Australia and New Zealand // *Government Information Quarterly*. 2010. Vol. 27. P. 177-186.

H3.2 The prior availability of ICT organizational, technical and human resources is positively associated with the introduction of e-participation.

Also, in line with the innovation model, we highlight an *additional hypothesis* about the interaction of subnational units on the basis of territorial proximity. Considering the diffusion mechanism in the context of geographical proximity, it is worth saying that this mechanism is generally quite rarely assessed in the study of policies outside democratic regimes, where they main predictors of policy performance are either basic economic indicators and selected metrics of governance quality, or directly the type of regime. It can be hypothesized that governors may borrow policies that have proven effective in maintaining stability and securing reappointments. In addition, some actors (at any level) may be genuinely interested in improving the quality of governance and are on the lookout for the best tools to do so. Thus, we hypothesize that:

**H4:** The level of e-participation adoption has a positive spatial dependency coefficient in the adjacent regions.

**Determining the scientific contribution of the study to the development of the subject field.**

The results obtained in the course of the research allow us to make a rather extensive contribution to several fields of political science at once: comparative politics, policy research, as well as the interdisciplinary field of studying electronic participation of citizens in the governance. The **novelty of the work** lies in the following: in the course of the work it was possible to prove that the mechanisms of diffusion of policies, as well as the framework through which they are studied, are also applicable to research in the context of non-competitive regimes. Policy analysis in general, and the assessment of policy diffusion, is in many ways an "American" discipline, and typically aims to study spillovers, course transmission, and practices of vertical coercion in the case of American federalism. However, this same explanatory framework can provide answers to how governance solutions are created and diffused in other countries (in this case, Russia). We were able to show that the spatial proximity of subnational units facilitates the spillover of experience and practices among regions within certain clusters distributed across Russia. Thus, spatial autocorrelation has a local character.

We have demonstrated that in the conditions of a hybrid regime, the introduction of e-participation as a policy innovation is influenced primarily by structural factors in the form of: a) the rules of the game in a particular region and b) the availability of resources necessary for the introduction of the innovation. The rules of the game for the implementation of digital engagement

mechanisms become the regional political regime, where all three components influence the outcome of policy implementation. We demonstrate that the degree of patronage of the regional regime, expressed in the degree of prevalence of informal interaction practices and the general closedness of the governance system, significantly reduces the probability of successful implementation of e-participation due to the contradictions that e-participation creates for rent-seeking behavior. In addition, the electoral competitiveness of a region is, on the contrary, positively related to the adoption of e-participation. We believe that this is due to greater competitiveness and the need to listen to citizens. The effect of competitiveness is not as high as the other variables, but has a statistically significant effect. Finally, the economic dependence of the region determines the priorities of regional elites, where high dependence on inter-budget transfers encourages elites to follow the requirements of the federal center, forcing them to abandon policy experiments. Financial and organizational-technical resources, which are expressed in sufficient funding of budget items on digitalization, as well as the availability of experience in implementing digital innovations and a team of specialists, are also important.

Overall, we demonstrate that the analysis of Russian politics from a *policy perspective* should not focus exclusively in a framework that defines the sole goal of all regional elites as rent-seeking behavior. Overemphasizing the interests of elites as the sole explanatory variable makes it difficult to analyze courses universally in the Russian case.

#### **Provisions for defense:**

1. According to the results of quasi-experimental modeling, the *decision-making factor for implementation is the need to improve the quality of public governance* through the creation of feedback channels. According to the existing theory regarding participatory governance in non-democracies, there are two ways to understand the implementation of such tools in non-democracies: a) a facade institution to create an image of an advanced state or b) a mechanism to eliminate information asymmetry and improve the quality of governance. In the first case, such instruments should be dysfunctional and should not contribute to the quality of public goods provision. In the case of Russian regions, the situation is the opposite. Those regions that have successfully implemented e-participation mechanisms in the form of portals for the collection of complaints about public policy problems are noticeably better at providing public goods. Thus, we at least confirm the possibility of such motivation for the introduction of e-participation, contrary to the prevailing view of the purely demonstrative nature of this innovation under hybrid regimes. While we cannot say for sure that the effect in this case equals the motivation for adoption, our results also allow us to reject the unambiguity of the facade hypothesis.

2. According to the results of regression modeling, the *main factor of e-participation implementation in Russian regions is structural characteristics*, including the *rules of the game* and available *resources*. In social sciences, the main line of distinction in the study of social processes is between the characteristics of agents and the characteristics of structure. Agency is seen as the ability to act against structural constraints, while structure is understood as a set of constraining and facilitating factors. In the case of implementation of e-participation, the main agents are the governors of the Russian regions. The structural constraints here are the characteristics of the regional political regime and the resources available in the region. The characteristics of the agents did not demonstrate significance, i.e. in this interpretation they cannot act contrary to the rules. On the other hand, it is the characteristics of regional regimes (patronage, competitiveness and dependence) and available resources that determine the implementation of e-participation in the region.

3. *The patronage of the regional political regime is negatively related to the introduction of e-participation*. With a high level of patrimonial practices, including the general closedness of the governance system, low transparency of its functioning, as well as the prevalence of rent-seeking behavior and informal procedures and relations, e-civic participation mechanisms will not be implemented. This is due to the obvious potential costs that such an innovation entails, including the need to follow formal procedures and normative regulation, as well as transparency to societal groups.

4. *Electoral competitiveness is positively related to the adoption of e-participation*. The more competitive the electoral process in a particular region, the higher the level of e-participation implementation. Greater competitiveness leads to the need for greater consideration of citizens' opinions in the implementation of policies.

5. *Economic independence from the federal center is positively related to the introduction of e-participation*. A large share of inter-budget transfers in the revenue part of the regional budget structure means the inability of the region to independently implement even basic issues of public policy. The money received from the center should be directed to them, as well as to the implementation of the center's requirements, primarily - various national programs. Thus, regional elites are strategically limited in the choice of priorities, which makes it impossible to experiment with various innovations.

6. *The resource component of the framework influences the implementation of e-participation*. As with any policy, there is a need for resourcing. A greater degree of possible funding for digital transformation positively influences the level of development of digital engagement mechanisms. The greatest contribution is the availability of organizational, technical and human resources, as well as experience with similar innovations in the past.

7. *Spatial interdependence influences the implementation of e-participation.* Although the connection is not global (between all neighbors until the end of the neighborhood chain) but local, there are clusters where regions share experiences in implementing the innovation.

### **Approbation of the work.**

Papers with the results of the work, reflecting the development of the research at different stages, were presented at the following international conferences and workshops:

1. All-Russian Conference with international participation "Political in the conditions of digital transformation: philosophy, science, technology" (St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, 2021). Report "Feedback or ready-made solutions? The emergence of different models of e-participation in the regions of the Russian Federation".

2. All-Russian Conference of RAPN with international participation "Political challenges and political dialog in the conditions of global turbulence" (Moscow, 2022). Report "Citizens' appeals as a practice of citizens' influence on the formation of public policy on the example of the city - subject of the Russian Federation St. Petersburg".

3. XXIV Yasinskaya (April) International Scientific Conference on Problems of Development of Economy and Society, (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, 2023). Report "E-civic participation and the quality of public administration in the environmental sphere: the case of Russian regions".

The main results of the dissertation research have been published in the leading peer-reviewed scientific publications recommended by the National Research University Higher School of Economics:

1. Sungurov A.Yu., Arkatov D.A. Electronic and traditional public participation in modern public policy. Political science (RU). 2021, N 3, P. 54–71. (in Russian)

2. Arkatov D.A. E-participation issues in urban public policy: the case of St. Petersburg. Political Science (RU). 2022, N3, P. 296–316. (in Russian)

3. Arkatov D. A. Does E-Participation Improves Local Public Goods Provision: Road Repair In Russia// Urban Studies and Practices. 2023. V. 8. № 1. P. 47-61. (in Russian)

The **first chapter** presents a conceptualization of the main concepts in the interdisciplinary field of e-participation research due to the widespread fragmentation of terminological and analytical apparatus among researchers. In addition, it also provides a more detailed overview of the state of the field of e-participation research in non-democracies, and policy research in non-democracies, to further emphasize and frame the research problem.

E-participation as a concept builds on the broader notion of civic participation proposed by S. Arnstein in 1969. She was the first to present an exhaustive "ladder of civic participation" describing various forms of how citizens participate in the policy process<sup>88</sup>. A key work in the field of e-participation is E. McIntosh's article in which she, along with OECD experts, outlined specific practical implications for e-participation<sup>89</sup>. Her typology is based on both Arnstein's ladder and Pretty's typology and consists of levels of information, consultation and decision-making. In the case of this dissertation research we will focus on institutionalized e-participation channels, which aim at a public policy dialogue between civil society and government institutions on platforms created by the state and functioning according to specific rules<sup>90</sup>.

Analyzing the current state of research on e-participation in non-democracies, the following conclusions can be drawn. First of all, there is a significant fragmentation in the existing research in terms of approach, operationalization, measurement and general questioning of this institution in non-democracies. Authors focus largely on understanding why democratic innovation emerges in a non-competitive, hostile context and how this relates to democratization and political regime stability. Some authors argue the facade nature of the innovation and emphasize the authoritarian side of e-participation, where it is created to create an image of a caring, responsive and transparent state among under-educated and poor social classes. Other authors point out the democratic side of e-participation in authoritarian regimes, demonstrating that it can lead to an improvement in the quality of public goods provision, changing the content of policies in accordance with the preferences of target groups.

Speaking about the factors of e-participation implementation and policies in non-democratic regimes in general, a contradiction can also be noted, especially in the case of Russia. On the one hand, there is a perception in comparative politics that electoral autocracies are somewhat responsive to societal tensions as well as social group preferences, although they suffer from significant problems in the form of electoral manipulation, electoral business cycles, and rent-seeking behavior that undermine the effective implementation of policies and the prioritization of patronage distribution. On the other hand, studies of policies in Russia are represented by the works of few authors, among whom V.Y. Gelman's approach dominates: policy implementation is considered exclusively as a derivative of rent-seeking behavior, which is, they claim, the sole goal of all representatives of power at all levels of government. Thus, successful

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<sup>88</sup> Arnstein S. R. A Ladder Of Citizen Participation // Journal of the American Institute of Planners. 1969. Vol. 35. P. 216-224.

<sup>89</sup> Macintosh A. Characterizing e-participation in policy-making // in 37th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2004. P. 1-10.

<sup>90</sup> Le Blanc. 2020. Op. cit.



policies are analyzed through the framework of policy entrepreneurship and pockets of efficiency, and the analysis of courses is reduced to emphasizing them as "success stories" and exceptions to the rules created in spite of low-quality institutional design. Speaking specifically about e-participation, different authors identify a different set of factors, largely derived from common sense or research in related fields. Different metrics are used as dependent variables, as well as different samples of countries or regions, so there are few unambiguous conclusions about the main predictors. Thus, the authors highlight ICT penetration and sophistication, socio-economic globalization and international socialization, GDP, level of human development (in some cases) and quality of political institutions (which is an unstable predictor).

Considering the development of e-participation in Russia, the following features can be emphasized on the basis of few works. First, e-participation in Russia has gone through 3 stages of development. At the first stage, the platforms were developed in the initiative-public order, where informal channels of interaction between public authorities and citizens were created on the basis of open solutions, for example, OpenStreetMaps. At the second stage - initiative-regional - institutionalized e-participation platforms appeared at the level of the subjects of the federation. Although the start of such initiatives was given by the discussion of the E-Democracy program at the federal level and the need to create an electronic system for assessing bureaucracy, most of the e-participation is developed in Russia at the regional level. There is a high variability of e-participation channels, which includes problem reporting portals, open budgets, e-voting, initiative budgeting, crowdsourcing, petitions. The current third phase is characterized by centralization, where the federal center is attempting to create a digital infrastructure of control over regional and local elites. The regional channels themselves are characterized by varying degrees of regulatory and legal support, where there are mainly internal regulations without orientation to the federal legislation on working with citizens' appeals.

Taken together, all this substantiates the need for a more detailed study. First of all, we demonstrate that the current theory contradicts the empirical reality: e-participation as an innovative policy is developing in many regions and municipalities of Russia, clearly exceeding the number of potential pockets of efficiency, as well as demonstrating sustainability in spite of the institutional environment. Accordingly, Gelman's concept is insufficient in explaining the implementation of this innovation. On the other hand, studies of EI in general lack sustainable explanations for its development at the subnational level in all political regimes. What can serve as a facilitator of decision-making on the introduction and implementation of this innovation?

In **Chapter 2**, we develop a theoretical framework that will form the basis of this thesis. First of all, we consider e-participation as a policy, or more precisely, a policy innovation. A unified framework of diffusion of innovation and policies is taken as the basis of the theory. It

assumes two main models - the regional diffusion model and the internal determinants model. The regional diffusion model assumes that the introduction of policies by territorial units at any level is conditioned by their interdependence, primarily on the basis of geography. Neighboring regions can enter into interaction on the basis of multiple mechanisms. First and foremost is policy learning - regional governments observe the successes and failures of policies in neighboring units and adapt successful courses within their jurisdiction, or abandon them in favor of another policy alternative. In turn, the internal determinants model determines that the adoption or rejection of a policy in a subnational unit is driven by its internal characteristics. Traditionally, these traditionally include socio-economic indicators, but they can also be political characteristics of the region. Given the significant differentiation of regions in Russia, this allows us to consider these features in more detail. We divide internal determinants into agent-based and structural categories, in line with the already established approach in other disciplines of political science, such as modernization theory and transitology. Thus, in the course of constructing the theoretical framework, we assume that policies such as e-participation are influenced by an agentic factor in the form of the characteristics of the head of the constituent entity and a structural factor in the form of the rules of the game (regional political regime) and resources (administrative soundness). Subject heads, despite the availability of elections after 2012, are in many ways appointees of the first person of the state. In turn, such agents are selected by the principal on the basis of the prevalence of political loyalty over competence. However, based on game-theoretic models by other authors, we also hypothesize that first persons are not necessarily only loyal agents, but can be both politically and technically competent. Regarding the regional political regime, we can note that regions, on the one hand, being authoritarian in general, differ in the degree of electoral competitiveness, patronage and openness. It has been demonstrated by other authors in the framework of economic policy analysis that the regional political regime can influence the actions of elites, therefore we introduce it as an internal determinant. Finally, resources in the form of experience of innovation implementation, as well as specialists, financial resources and infrastructure, in our opinion, can be both facilitators and constraints of e-participation implementation, therefore we also include them in the general theoretical model.

In **Chapter 3**, we conduct a direct statistical analysis using spatial statistical methods in the form of spatial panel autoregressive models. For this purpose, we constructed a matrix of contiguity of Russian regions according to the "queen's walk" principle, meaning that regions were designated as neighboring if they had common boundaries in all directions. The matrix was constructed using open geographic datasets on the administrative-territorial division of the Russian Federation. To test the hypotheses formed in the course of theoretical work, we operationalized and measured the variables identified earlier in the text of the summary. Thus, we obtained a data

set with the number of observations equal to 340, covering the years 2020-2023. The methodology applied in the chapter is justified on the basis of the methodological literature as well as through the formal tests presented therein. These tests demonstrate to us the necessity of using a SAR model with a spatial lag of the dependent variable and without lags of explanatory variables and errors. Initially, three model groups are constructed that separately examine the components of our theoretical model. Initially, in the first group the thesis of political and technical competence of the first person of the region is confirmed, demonstrating the possibilities of agency as a factor of innovation implementation. The second group of models tentatively confirms the hypothesis of structure as a constraint and facilitator of e-participation implementation depending on the degree of patronage, competitiveness and economic dependence of the region. In the third group of models, when considered separately, we also find preliminary confirmation of the hypothesis about the importance of the resource factor as a facilitator of action in the region. However, this approach, despite the economy of degrees of freedom, raises the problem of endogeneity.

Thus, several complete models are built, where the final one is chosen based on the Akaike and Bayesian information criteria. Considering the hypotheses, we manage to conclude that **H1** about agent characteristics **does not find** its confirmation. Neither the education nor the technical and political competencies of the governor are related to the implementation of e-participation. On the other hand, we **fully confirm H2** about the importance of structural constraints in the form of regional political regime. Regions characterized by greater electoral competitiveness perform better in implementing e-participation. We attribute this to the need to respond to societal demands in a more competitive electoral environment. Regime patronage is inversely related to the adoption of e-participation. The more widespread are patrimonial practices in the form of rent-seeking behavior and informal procedures, the less incentives regional elites have to implement this innovation. Economic dependence is also inversely proportional to the introduction of e-participation - due to the fact that receiving funds from the federal center imposes a restriction in the form of the need to follow its instructions. We also **find support for hypothesis H3** on the resource component of the framework. Regions that are able to allocate funds for informatization, as well as those that have experience in the implementation of e-government, its infrastructure and specialists have at their disposal facilitating factors that promote the implementation of e-participation. Thus, the structural part of our theoretical reasoning is confirmed. Finally, considering **hypothesis H4** about spatial interdependence, we find a **partial confirmation of it**. The nature of interdependence is localized, where regions are formed into small clusters, within which they share experience in innovation implementation. We can conclude that we confirm the relevance of using the innovation diffusion framework to analyze policies in Russia, as well as

demonstrate the priority of game rules and resources over agency in the regional context when implementing such an innovation as e-participation.

Further, through a quasi-experimental approach using the generalized synthetic control method, we also demonstrate that e-participation in hybrid regimes is not only not facade-like, but is an effective tool for improving the quality of public goods provision. In our case, it is the quality of municipal roads.