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Involving citizens in town improvement: a comparative perspective

In recent years, the driving force of Russian urban change has moved from a quantitative emphasis on construction volumes and urban growth, to a more qualitative focus on improving the comfort and quality of public spaces, and better accessibility for people with functional variation. Partly, this initiative has come from the federal level, through programmes such as the *Komfortnaya Gorodskaya Sreda* ('Comfortable Town Environment') and *Dostupnaya Sreda* ('Accessible Environment') programmes - but there is considerable scope within these for local citizens involvement in decisions about their towns. Based on extensive fieldwork conducted as part of the ICLD-funded LUPSRUSS project on Sustainable Urban Planning in Russia and Sweden, this paper examines the practices of two small Russian towns (*Kostomuksha* in the Republic of Karelia and *Aramil'* in Sverdlovsk Province) in involving citizens in town improvement projects – and makes compares the advantages and disadvantages of their approaches with similar-sized Scandinavian towns undertaking comparable initiatives.