

ORIGINAL PAPER

DOI: 10.26794/2304-022X-2025-15-1-138-148
UDC 352 (045)
JEL H76



Territorial Self-Government: From Local Communities to Self-Governing Community

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ABSTRACT

Territorial self-government represents a historical stage in the development of human civilization, emerging as a tool for regulating social relations at the sub-state level within the boundaries of local communities. It operates in the interests of these communities and with their direct participation. This form of governance originated during the intensification of class struggles between feudal lords and the citizens of free cities, ultimately granting the latter special rights as municipal corporations. However, the concept of “territorial self-government” is not identical to “local self-government,” as it is not confined to city boundaries but serves as a mechanism for territorial distinction at various levels. The functional diversity of territorial self-government is explained by historical, economic, and political factors that shaped the administrative-territorial systems of modern states. Today, it acts as a means of distributing powers between different levels of public authority in addressing pressing social issues. The study aims to identify the characteristics and criteria of self-governance in territories and their role in enabling local communities to attain the status of self-governing entities. Recognizing these characteristics will help establish stable boundaries for the activities of self-governing communities using the so-called Functional Self-Governance Limit (FSG). This concept is necessary for evaluating (within socially accepted and rational limits) the costs of using a centralized governance model versus resolving community issues primarily through internal resources. Using the method of typological groupings, the study classifies different types of local communities in Russia based on selected criteria. The article also presents key indicators for assessing the FSG of municipal formations and examines conditions that facilitate both the transformation of individual civic attitudes into collective interests and the acquisition of self-governing status by local communities.

The findings contribute to the development of a modern concept of local self-government in Russia and inform adjustments to ongoing municipal reforms.

Keywords: territorial self-government; regional self-government; governance; local community; self-governance criteria; self-governing society

For citation: Roy O.M. Territorial self-government: From local communities to self-governing community. *Upravlencheskie nauki = Management Sciences*. 2025;15(1):138-148. DOI: 10.26794/2304-022X-2025-15-1-138-148

INTRODUCTION

Self-government is the most important achievement of civilization: a product of society to seek and solve a significant part of its problems independently, relying on the initiatives and public activities of ordinary citizens. It is a historical phenomenon emerging as an instrument able to solve traditional governance problems and it operates in opposition to the expansion of the subordinate sphere, which has limited possibilities for centralization. Initially, as an object of study, governance was analyzed from the perspective of the interests of a corporate entity, which seeks to improve the productivity of a company producing any product or service. This concept led us to turn to the experience of regulating complex processes and systems by identifying regularities and basic principles of effective managerial activity. The foundation of stable nation-state formations has led to the study of management mechanisms in order to rationalize ways of managing multiple territorial complexes, involving a combination of various political, economic and social aspects of functioning and reproduction of these complexes. The emphasis on the self-governance of territorial entities has led to an awareness of the need to separate state interests from local interests. Within the framework of self-governance, the need to meet the local interests began to be considered as a system of administrative activities based on current agreements between members of the local community. However, there arises the question of the specifics of territorial self-governance, its main types, criteria for self-governance and their implications in specific organizational forms.

MANAGEMENT AND SELF-GOVERNANCE

Man is a controlling creature. The ability to control is one of the generic properties of a human being. Man manages available resources, time, household chores, etc. Man builds a certain logic chain of actions in order to satisfy his needs. However, the ability to manage anything

does not arise immediately, but during one of the stages in the process of mastering the objective world, within which Man is developing in continuous interaction. To learn managing the composition of elements in this world, or somehow influencing the processes which occurs in the depths of the world, Man must study this world to understand how best to adapt to its changing nature and how to use it. Man fulfills these concepts, comprehends the secrets of the surrounding reality and begins to manage tiny fragments of such a complex-structured world, dividing his management activity into various functional blocks.

Management is a goal-setting activity of a subject to reach a target result by means of a specially developed system of actions. Management is always aimed at the sphere beyond the subject, one must reveal and implement the method of its influence.

Management is a timeframe-limited process that enables an individual to achieve his goals in an environment studded with many opportunities and limitations. To materialize the opportunities and neutralize the influence of limitations, the individual elaborates a behavior pattern designed to bring the goal closer by performance of at least four types of actions: observation, development of a sequence of actions, control and regulation. The observation stage implies the collection and preliminary processing of relevant information, as well as the identification of contributing and counteracting factors of influence. The stage of development involves a sequence of actions: designing a plan and a schedule to achieve the goal and objectives. The stage of control involves the implication of a preliminary scheme of intermediate indicators, which accompany the process of achieving the goal. The stage of regulation is the procedure aimed to adjust current activities and coordinate the inter-relationship of the participants in the process.

The need for self-management occurs when the objects previously are subject to managerial ma-

nipulation and begin to operate as supplementary centers of managerial influence. Their activities in this field can have no coordination with the activities of the subject of influence dealing with this object.

Self-management is a set of managerial functions of a certain subject, which, being an object of management, is able to perform managerial functions independently – in whole or partially. Domestic scientific literature formulates the main features of self-government, namely:

- independent style, associations of volunteers among citizens in a social community, formation by volunteer's bodies to manage activities of the given community, which are undoubtedly and unconditionally accountable and controlled by it;
- the right of the social community to determine the main objectives and directions of its activities;
- the existence of rules of behavior for the social community, determined in various corporate standards [1, p. 99].

Self-governance can possibly operate in the so-called entities of solidarity, which have three other factors: reciprocity, transitivity and consent. Individual contributions to these entities are caused by a pure altruism, when an individual ignores potential benefits or profit from his/her contribution. On the contrary, such an individual expects similar contributions of reciprocity from his/her counterparts, whose material well-being also depends on similar behavior of other members of the entity. The level of contribution depends on the extent to which other members expect to benefit from the implicit contract, thus enabling all of them to achieve the goals of their own personal interest.

Participation in decision-making in such entities of solidarity assumes that all participants have similar common skills and equal access to insider's information. If this is does not happen because of "bounded rationality", participants may find the activities of such an entity counter-

productive, which leads to a high level of tension [2, p.10]. In small enterprises that use common technologies individually or in small groups, such relationships of reciprocity use to develop much easier, than in larger entities. A self-managed solidarity-based entity would not operate in view of unequal access to information and different qualifications of its members. Individual self-interests always conflict with collective interests, they should be put in harmony by establishing certain institutions that promote the norms of reciprocity.

Reciprocity means the willingness of members of a social community to help each other on a basis of parity for the sake of an objective they are willing to reach. For example, it may be an uncultivated plot of land or a broken bridge that requires joint effort for reconstruction. A lack of reciprocity leads to alienation of the people living in the local territory, their lack of interest to work together and solve the current problem.

Mutual consent, as a concept of self-governance, implies both the ability to compromise by the members of the entity when making socially important decisions, and the development of rules and compromise restrictions that determines the foundation of the mechanism to unite and harmonize their interests. Consent is possible, when members of solidarity-based entity have an adequate assumption of the content of the transaction deals and equal access to the information regarding to the deals.

Transitivity is an indication of community's self-organization, which allows distributing different types of social services among its members through the community's institutions without any administrative support from above. Transitivity reflects the dynamic aspect of self-governance: its aim at the community's reproduction and at the expansion of its composition of elements. It is also an associate of stability of communication links meanwhile preserving certain roles in the community and ensuring its patterns of information's distribution. The property of transitivity

implies restrictions on potential participation of the third parties and processes of transmission of unauthorized traffics through internal channels beyond the control of the community members. Transitivity explains the diffuseness of boundaries between self-governing communities, their mobility and inclination to change.

Self-governance occurs in different areas: production, culture, social, etc. It can be corporate, sectoral, territorial, etc. An object acquires a self-governing status when it becomes autonomous within the established managed system. As a rule, this happens, when the latter can function furthermore only by means of self-development of its constituent parts, due to which it obtains the capability to be transformed qualitatively into a new kind of entity.

Initially, self-management was more inherent in the corporate sphere, as a follow up of decomposition of large production systems into relatively autonomous and specialized subdivisions. The labor movement developed and trade unions were organized to consolidate the interests of workers from different production units and to protect them from the employers, thus, it led to the emergence of corporate self-management [3]. As these professional associations grew in number and influence, the big capital owners had to reckon with them. Now the question arises: why should a manager of a company who runs a network of subdivisions has to give up the right to regulate processes at this level and allow the subdivisions to fulfill their functions independently and under their own responsibility? The reasons for such decentralization are the following:

- the impossibility of fully controlling the work of such units;
- high level of costs (material, organizational, personnel, etc.) for the administration of management activities;
- increasing efficiency of subdivisions which start to operate in an autonomous regime.

Thus, the logic of the development of industrial production, differentiation of the product range,

deconcentration of share capital, as well as active role of trade unions, contributed to the expansion of corporate self-governance.

Territorial self-governance emerged later as a follow-up of a network of national State authorities and the assumption of the need to consolidate the interests of the state and its regions. State authorities did not want and were unable to create a comprehensive set of control measures to ensure stability within their borders, which generated the need to involve regional elites in this process.

Hoping for the support of the elites, the State authorities considered granting the regions the right of self-governance as a concession.

Self-governance is the implementation of activity within the regulated subject itself, aimed to develop the governed sphere from inside, with no reference to the reaction of the third parties [4]. Thus, the distinction between management and self-governance can be regarded in the same way, as the definition between external and internal objectives. In the self-management regime, the object of management acts simultaneously as subject, whereas in management the first one is separate from the second one by a certain system of relations.

One of the most significant methodological problems is the transformation of governance into self-governance, within the framework of which the transfer of a certain part of administrative functions to the controlled subject allows it to gain benefits from the independent position. This means that the above-mentioned activities carried out at a lower management level will imply the replacement of purely administrative functions by measures of direct participation by citizens.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TERRITORIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN EUROPE AND RUSSIA

In the context of territorial development, management activities are subject to the same constraints as at the enterprise level. However, territorial management implies taking into account

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Management activities deal with the same limitations in territorial development as in corporate level. However, territorial management requires to take into account not only business efficiency, but also social, environmental and other issues.

As the sphere of control expands throughout the developed territories, the central power subsequently faces problems related to monitoring and blocking its ability to subdue the local elites in the sprawling periphery of the world-system.

The role of self-governance, as an instrument to rationalize governance at the territorial level, was described successfully by both M. and R. Friedmans: "As the scope and role of government expand to cover a larger area or population or to perform a wider range of functions, the connection weakens between the governed and the governors. Citizens no longer obtain reliable information — not only about all the current issues of a vastly expanded agenda, but also about all the issues of paramount importance. The bureaucracy needed for the functioning of the government is expanding and it becomes more and more wedged between the citizens and their elected representatives. The bureaucracy becomes, on the one hand, a mechanism to provide special interest groups with power to achieve their objectives, and, on the other hand, it operates as the instrument of an independent special interest, thus acting as an important component of a new class." [5, c. 331]. Self-government seems to be one of the possible options to overcome bureaucracy, to acquire the ability of society for independent decision-making on relevant issues.

The territorial or local self-government originated mainly due to the transition from feudal to industrial society [6]. Medieval cities became self-government centers, they concentrated material and productive assets regulated by their own legal institutions [7]. The decentralization process also occurred in the format of town mergers. Thus, such regions acquired a special political status,

distinguished by a significant autonomy and developed traditions of local self-government. One of the first examples of such a process in Europe was the formation of a vast territory stretching from Italy in the south to the Netherlands in the north [8].

With the emergence of the European Union (EU), the trend intensified towards the expansion of regional self-governance. The regions of European countries obtained the right to interact directly with centralized EU funds, bypassing the intermediary role of national governments [9]. However, not all EU members among Eastern European countries adopted regional self-governance, only a little more than half of them. [10].

The scientific literature of European countries gives different assessments of such process. For example, according to D. Leška, the creation of eight regions in Slovakia, within the framework of the new regionalization did not bring any benefits. The main indicators were lack of interest of citizens, low participation rate at elections to the regional government and the differences between the most and least developed regions of the country did not decrease [11]. In Poland, despite the trend towards recentralization since 2015, this process did not gain public support. Many local communities in these countries found out the capacity of regions to attract foreign investment directly as a very positive factor [12].

As a result, Western experts admit that the EU has not yet developed a single coherent research programme on regional self-governance, which could allow taking into account a variety and socio-economic levels of regions developing under the conditions of territorial self-government [13]. The system of territorial self-government at the level of municipalities seems to be much more sophisticated, developed in view of deep traditions of European cities. Self-governance in Europe has been visualized from the standpoint of freedom and democracy, reflecting the need of local communities to use their right to unite the population to solve pressing public problems.

Besides, not every country has a division into regional and local self-government, it makes no sense in a two-tier system of territorial government (state-province).

In Russia, the process of forming local self-governance was also developing ambivalently.

By the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Law “the General Principles of Local Self-Government and Local Economy in the USSR”¹ established a model of local self-government that did not provide for a clear separation of state and local authorities. According to this document, in addition to district, city, town, settlement and village councils of people’s deputies, local self-government bodies were regional and krai (area) authorities empowered to organize economic and socio-cultural services for districts and cities on a contractual basis, to carry out inter-territorial activities, and to provide financial assistance to balance local budgets. However, the adoption of the Constitution of the Russian Federation in 1993 made it possible to separate the system of state administration and local self-government. The article No. 12 of the country’s basic law, which provides for the separation of powers between the state and local authorities, contributed to the consolidation of the municipal status exclusively for subregional administrative-territorial units.² At the same time, uncertain legal status of local government and low level of budgetary allocations did not allow the self-governments to benefit well from their activities. In addition, the existing system of intergovernmental fiscal relations actually triggered an expansion of the format of local government bodies. As a result their number dropped dramatically from 28.000 to 12.500 starting from the late 1980s until the

entry into force of the provisions of Federal Law No. 154-FZ “On the General Principles of the Organization of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation” in 1996³ and an increase in the radius of municipal services to the population. The majority of local government units in this timeframe period were districts and cities.

Such a course of local self-government reform in Russia contradicted the basic principles of local self-government aimed to reduce the social distance between the authorities and the population and to involve ordinary citizens in the process of local community management. Therefore, in 2003, to support the municipal reform the Government adopted the Federal Law No. 131-FZ of 06.10.2003 “On General Principles of Organization of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation”.⁴ It was a step to return to the settlement level in the organization of local self-government, to create a two-tier system of local government and separate powers between its regional and settlement bodies.

However, by the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, economic and geopolitical trends did not allow the existing system of fiscal federalism to ensure the reproduction of most of municipal settlements in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Law No. 131-FZ “On the General Principles of the Organization of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation”. The transition to a single-tier system of local self-government (municipalities and city districts) planned within the framework of the 2024 counter-reform project will contribute to a sharp reduction in the number of municipal entities and their spatial expansion [14]. This raises an important methodological question about the

¹ Law of the USSR of 09.04.1990 No 1417-I “On the General Principles of Local Self-Government and Local Economy in the USSR”. URL: <https://base.garant.ru/5228211/>

² Constitution of the Russian Federation (adopted by popular vote on 12.12.1993 with amendments approved during the all-Russian vote on 01.07.2020). Art. 12. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_28399/ec531d2938f351bcb3a9b2f1b50a6f119eac231a/

³ Federal Law of 28.08.1995 No. 154-FZ “On General Principles of Organization of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_7642/9436b4e0a8aef2b83c35f4a11ce3c1ee4fb26354/

⁴ Federal Law of 06.10.2003 No. 131-FZ (ed. 08.08.2024) “On General Principles of Organization of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation”. URL: <https://www.zakonrf.info/doc-15671746/>

limits of self-governance of the territory, its legal and economic content.

CRITERIA OF SELF-GOVERNMENT

The territory at the local level singles out in the nation-state formation in accordance with the willingness of the inhabitants to develop it jointly and to establish certain rules within its borders. As to the localization, it can be made in accordance with a number of criteria. There are at least seven of them: *economic, ethno-national, geopolitical, communal, trans-territorial, religious and class criterion*. The choice of these criteria depends on the underlying factors: both for the formation of the boundaries of the self-governing community and for its ability to set and solve socially significant goals independently with support on its own sources.

The economic criterion implies the isolation of a territorial entity to obtain a certain material advantage related to the ability of receiving investment funds, benefits or preferences. For example, such a status may be granted to local communities the rights of a free trade zone, etc.

The ethno-national criterion presupposes the boundaries to be established in view of the affiliation of community members to a particular ethnic or national way of life. This can be determined in some legal acts of the settlement, its name and degree of autonomy. This regards mono-ethnic settlements, as well as those where more than one ethnic community is settled.

The geopolitical criterion is manifested in the establishment of the boundaries of a territorial unit, which are determined by the political interests of the country, security considerations, a specific nature of its geographical location, primarily near the border. According to this criterion, such a territorial entity is authorized to have a certain legal status, in combination of the interests of the local community with the interests of the nation.

An important role in determining the boundaries of municipalities has the *municipal criterion*,

regarding the ability of the municipal infrastructure formed in the territory to meet the needs of the community in terms of vital resources. Such infrastructure determines the parameters of development and the degree of anthropogenic development of the territory.

There is also a large number of territorial units formed by the merger of previously independently developing settlements. *The trans-territorial criterion* is intended to demonstrate the advantage that settlements derive from such consolidation.

The religious criterion manifests itself in the community's efforts to establish rules based on the dominant religion in the territory. In Russia, for example, certain religions, like Islam or Christianity are vividly visible. This criterion is usually reflected in a municipal legal act, but it may also be represented in traditions and rituals promoted by community members.

The class criterion is the least institutionally expressed in Russia, where settlements are represented by the type of construction and public utilities in accordance with material and property status of their inhabitants. It is rather difficult to ensure class homogeneity in a territory that has been formed within a long period of time, such territorial formations are established in newly built areas and try to acquire a certain autonomy in the form of homeowner association (HOA) or territorial public self-government (TPS). A peculiar example in the development of such a settlement is the TPS "Sokol Settlement" in Moscow.

Each criterion corresponds to formal and informal characteristics to identify different types of local communities (see *Table*).

Upon gaining the right to self-government, local communities are solving a number of important objectives, such as the following:

- preserving their national and socio-cultural identity;
- gaining economic advantages over other territorial entities;
- minimizing the cost of maintaining municipal infrastructure;

Table

Classification of types of local communities in accordance with self-government criteria

Criterion	Characteristic types of local communities	Forms of identification
Ethno-national	Auls, uluses, national districts, villages	The composition of ethno-national settlements approved by the laws of the constituent entities of the Federation
Geopolitical	Border area, geostrategic area	The Strategy for the Spatial Development of the Russian Federation up to 2025 establishes a list of geo-strategic territories and border municipalities that receive priority state support for the modernisation of their socio-economic sphere
Economic	Territories of advanced development, special economic zones, territorial development zones	The list of territorial (municipal) entities of the respective status established by decisions of federal and regional authorities
Class	Areas with high housing costs and quality	As a rule, it has no the status of an administrative-territorial unit, but is identified by the cadastral and market value of land resources
Transterritorial	Municipal and urban districts	Established by decisions of the legislative authorities of the constituent territories of the Federation through transformations and mergers of administrative-territorial units of the primary level
Communal	Rural, mountain and remote villages	Determined by the laws of a constituent entity of the Russian Federation through separate allocation of separate administrative-territorial units on the basis of their position in the centralised system of life support
Religious	Settlements and districts, mainly in Dagestan and Chechnya, where religious organisations of modern Islam (Juma mosques, madrassas, etc.) play an important role in society	The status of municipal units as religious settlements is informal, as the legislation excludes the substitution of secular power by religious institutions

Source: Compiled by the author.

- providing protection against unauthorized flows of people or goods into their territory;
- providing certain social groups of the population with the opportunity to live comfortably with an adequate level of income;
- widening the possibilities for development of the territory, improving the quality of the environment, connection to supply networks, etc.

However, not all of the criteria mentioned above are equally involved in the mechanisms of self-governance of municipalities, each region has its own model. The general picture is determined by circumstances that sometimes go beyond the scope of these criteria.

An increase in the size of a settlement usually leads to an erosion of its homogeneity and,

consequently, to a limitation of many aspects of these criteria. Therefore, the aspiration for self-governance may weaken with increasing area of the territory of a municipal unit.

One of the key and underdeveloped issues is the definition of the boundaries of self-governance. Its resolution determines the capability of a local urban or rural settlement to solve their objectives as a self-governing unit.

FUNCTIONAL LIMITS OF SELF-GOVERNANCE

The ability of a local community to exercise the right of self-governance is determined by the desire of the major part of the community members to obtain independence and the availability of internal reserves for self-development. It sets the parameters for the municipality boundaries and the optimal spatial framework for self-management. *The functional limit of self-governance* (FLS) can become a methodological basis for justification of establishment of such boundaries.

FLS reflects the socially accepted and reasonable limits of the cost ratio in case if the community chooses a model of centralized municipal management or makes a decision to become autonomous or independent.

Both economic and social factors can influence the choice of such a decision. In case of a local community, the transfer of powers regarding the issues of local establishment to a higher territorial level always presupposes the risk of losing control due to the changes, which may occur in its territory. Asymmetrical relationship in terms of contributing to the solution of national problems may lead to another risk situation, as well as receiving so-to-say “assistance” from above in solving local problems. At the same time, rejecting the principles of self-governance makes it possible to focus upon the implementation of the most important local issues. Besides, local communities use to delegate most of its powers to higher administrative echelons.

The degree of self-governance of any municipality can be assessed by means of several indicators, such as the following:

- the share of municipal own resources in its budget expenditure which is quite easily identifiable from the local government reporting;
- the value definition of the volume of municipal services provided to the community, which directly depends on the capacity of the municipal budget and the capacity of its social component;
- the ratio of local citizens’ participation in socially significant decisions, which reflects citizens’ activity in public life and their ability to timely use funds from external investors.

The expenditure in the system of self-governance usually has a narrower cycle. It is assessed primarily from the point of view of solving current public objectives.

Self-governance is such a state of the social system, which transforms individual aspirations into a collective interest that ensures the satisfaction of every citizen’s needs. However, the possibilities to ensure such harmonization are quite limited, besides, it is rather complicated to maintain it, when the territory of the local community expands.

In order to define the functional limit of self-governance, one should be ready to answer the question: at what territorial level do people begin to consider public problems as their personal ones? The answer is the following: the higher is the territorial level, the more distant these problems seem to be from an individual’s point of view in his/her everyday life.

A person is unable to cope with the majority of them. At the same time, he/she becomes less receptive to taking part in their discussion. The loss of the subject’s personal interest in solving socially significant problems of local importance leads to the risk of unbalanced integrated development of his/her settlement, growing apathy of citizens and dependence on support of the superiors.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has allowed us to analyse the nature of self-governance as a historically developed phenomenon of civilization and its certain characteristics and peculiarities. Some of its types, such as regional, local or territorial public self-governance, do not reflect the full diversity of possibilities of this legal format, which is the most important instrument of self-governance and self-organization of society. This diversity is determined by a certain set of criteria that characterize, both institutionally and conditionally, the types of self-governing communities. Their forma-

tion makes an objective process. It is regulated by public authorities by means of granting privileges and preferences, which provide additional rights and freedoms to the parties involved in different types of arrangements. Not each social community can become self-governing and obtain the status of a municipality: one must have proper characteristics and attributes. The article emphasizes the role of the functional limit of self-governance as an instrument to assess territorial self-governance within the boundaries of a particular type of territorial unit, characterized by the degree of independence in solving urgent public problems.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The article was written using a grant from the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia in the form of subsidies from the Federal budget for the implementation of large-scale scientific projects in priority areas of scientific and technological development (agreement dated July 12, 2024 No. 075–15–2024–639).

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Conflicts of Interest Statement: The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

The article was submitted on 15.10.2024; revised on 16.12.2024 and accepted for publication on 30.01.2025. The author read and approved the final version of the manuscript.