

## Artículo de investigación

**Economics and Democracy: The Problems of Democratic Maturity of Local Communities in The Context of Regional Spatial Disbalances**

Экономика И Демократия: Проблемы Зрелости Демократии Местных Сообществ Сквозь Призму Региональных Пространственных Дисбалансов

Economía y democracia: Los problemas de madurez democrática de las comunidades locales en el contexto de los desequilibrios espaciales regionales

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[https://elibrary.ru/author\\_items.asp?authorid=255815](https://elibrary.ru/author_items.asp?authorid=255815)**Abstract**

The article analyzes the spatial imbalances of municipalities of the Kaluga region in terms of socio-economic development. Subsequently, the estimates obtained were compared with the spatial grouping of regional municipalities in terms of institutional democracy. On the basis of the obtained comparisons, conclusions are made about the impact of socio-economic conditions on the development of grassroots democracy.

**Keywords:** Spatial imbalances, municipal democracy, Kaluga Region

**Аннотация**

В статье проведен анализ пространственных дисбалансов муниципальных образований Калужской области по уровню социально-экономического развития. В дальнейшем полученные оценки были сопоставлены с пространственной группировкой муниципальных образований региона по показателю институциональной демократии. На основе полученных сравнений сделаны выводы о влиянии социально-экономических условий на развитие низовой демократии.

**Ключевые слова:** Пространственные дисбалансы, муниципальная демократия, Калужская область

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## Resumen

El artículo analiza los desequilibrios espaciales de los municipios de la región de Kaluga en términos de desarrollo socioeconómico. Posteriormente, las estimaciones obtenidas se compararon con la agrupación espacial de municipios regionales en términos de democracia institucional. Sobre la base de las comparaciones obtenidas, se hacen conclusiones sobre el impacto de las condiciones socioeconómicas en el desarrollo de la democracia de base.

**Palabras clave:** Desequilibrios espaciales, democracia municipal, región de Kaluga.

## Introduction

The regulatory framework of local self-government in Russia defines various forms of citizens' participation in the solution of the problems related to the development of municipalities. In this case, the only question is the various forms of citizens' participation in the electoral process. The existing organizational and legal mechanisms for the solution of local problems provide the possibility of replacement of direct control functions with the participative forms of participation, including the involvement of the representatives of civil society in the solution of social problems and management of significant processes. In practical terms, this participation can be ensured by the activity of initiative groups, the involvement of the "network crowd" resources in the solution of social problems, the formation of feedback in the "government-citizen" system using the crowdsourcing technologies and actions of specific groups of interested parties that form the extra-institutional landscape of the local self-government in the territories. It should be noted that the population of a significant number of Russian territories has not formed the request for direct participation in the solution of local problems, and the current state of local democracy is characterized by passivity and tendency toward paternalism. In the authors' opinion, the reasons for this phenomenon are related not only to historical and cultural features but also to the modern economy.

The study is based on the information on the Kaluga Region and implies the assessment of the differentiation of the socio-economic development of the territories of the region and the evaluation of the institutional constraints for participation in the management of municipal development performed by the representatives of local communities.

## Statement of the problem

The attempt is made herein to assess the maturity level of democracy in the communities in terms

of the influence of a complex of socio-economic factors on this process. It is obvious that the economic processes occurring in specific territories form the totality of social conditions of life activity for the local community. In the authors' opinion, the quality of environmental conditions and structures of everyday life is an important determinant of the initiative from below, determining the ability and willingness of the representatives of the local community to participate in the management of the socio-economic development of the municipality. In this regard, the research problem can be stated as the assessment of the socio-economic position of the municipalities and the evaluation of the perceptions of the representatives of local communities regarding institutional constraints for participation in the municipal development management. Based on the results of the socio-economic development of the municipalities and the indicator of institutional democracy, it can be concluded that there is a request from the local communities to participate in the municipal development management.

## Methods

The statistical methods for multidimensional classification of the territories based on statistical indicators were used to assess the socio-economic level of development of the Kaluga Region municipalities. The grouping of municipalities was carried out based on demographic, economic, investment and infrastructure development. On the basis of these criteria, three groups of municipalities were formed, characterized by similar conditions of socio-economic development. At the next stage, an index of institutional democracy was determined on the basis of a sociological survey of the representatives of local communities of municipalities of the Kaluga Region. The estimates obtained were plotted on the map of the Kaluga Region, which made it possible to make a conclusion about the presence of a request from local residents for participation in the management of the municipal development of

territories characterized by differentiation of the socio-economic development conditions.

## Results

Democracy is a governmental form in which a significant part of citizens has the opportunity to participate in government. Being a global, supranational phenomenon in the modern world, democracy projects its imperatives into territorial systems of various levels – the state, the regions, and the municipalities. “No state can be democratic if its citizens ignore political life ... Live democracy at the local level is the key to viable democracy at the state level” (Resolution 91 (2000) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, 2005).

In this context, the local level of democracy – the democracy of local communities or municipal democracy, where a citizen has the opportunity to participate directly in the solution of local problems, is of some interest. Considering the manifestation of democracy in the system of local self-government, Bondar points out that this is “a based on the unity of freedom and responsibility, self-governing form of implementation of public authority, collective and individual citizen rights by the population at the place of residence by independent solution of local problems, direct support of life services in the interests of the local community and individuals within the limits established by the Constitution and current legislation” (Bondar, 2008).

The studies on the analysis of the relationship between economic development and political regimes show that economic well-being facilitates the path to democracy. Nicolas Bouzou in his book “Behind the Noise of a Falling Tree, We Do Not Hear How the Forest Grows” (On entend l'arbre tomber mais pas la forêt pousser) notes: “Democracy takes roots only from a certain level of economic development, and it is not cheap. It requires the holding of free and, therefore, controlled elections. It needs honest politicians and officials who must resist corruption and, therefore, receive a good salary. It is very difficult for poor countries to afford such an expensive structure as democracy. At the same time, in rich countries with a high level of education, democracy almost invariably prevails over systems detrimental to freedom. The market and democracy reinforce each other” (Bouzou, 2013). Of course, in modern realities, it is impossible to consider the issues of democracy in isolation from the economic component. In this context, the opinion

of Novoselov, pointing out that “local (municipal) democracy is a dynamically developing system with many interrelated and constantly changing components, within which local actors such as supranational forces and institutions, national and local governments, civil society, nongovernmental organizations, as well as various pressure groups, interact in the process of development of generally significant decisions” (Novoselov, 2006).

The attempt to correlate the development of municipal democracy with the problems of socio-economic development of the territories shows that, from the point of view of the representatives of local communities, the relevance of local issues is perceived indirectly through personal satisfaction and the achievement of individual (family) goals. The involvement of citizens in the solution of local problems is determined by the socio-economic background, the state of the everyday life structures, the state of which is significantly differentiated even within the borders of an individual region. In the authors' opinion, this is a serious managerial task, since the majority of the subjects of the Russian Federation have retained the problems of spatial imbalances of the territories. The current state of spatial development of the Kaluga Region is not critical in terms of differentiation and territory; at the same time, the municipalities with a high level of socio-economic dynamics and a significant share of localized development resources, and the municipalities with low demographic, infrastructure, and investment and budget indicators can be distinguished within the region. As part of a multidimensional classification, a grouping of municipalities of the Kaluga Region was carried out according to the sets of indicators characterizing the social, economic, and infrastructure development of the region.

It should be noted that during the formation of the assessment procedure, none of the indicated sets of indicators was identified as a priority; however, the indicators of a socio-demographic set were used as the input criterion for multidimensional classification. The argument in favor of this choice is obvious: in modern conditions, business, capital, and development resources are redistributed in the territories in favor of those places where the core competence is localized – human capital, people. The concentration of residents in the territory determines both its advantages, in terms of potential growth potentials, and problems, in terms of environmental conditions, infrastructure conditions, availability of jobs, including high-

performance ones. In modern realities, humanitarian (human) flows are redistributed in the direction of those places where comfortable and favorable environmental conditions are combined with the presence of relatively high-performance jobs. Conversely, the concentration of population in areas with poor quality of everyday structures will create a certain burden on the social and the physical infrastructure of the territory, and the absence (shortage) of jobs and, consequently, the stagnation of the economic base of the territory, will reduce the opportunities for local authorities to implement development projects. In this logic, the second criterion for assessing spatial imbalances is the indicators of the development of physical and social infrastructure.

The third criterion for the multidimensional classification of municipalities of the Kaluga Region was financial and economic indicators and indicators of investment development of the territories. Thus, the analysis performed makes it

possible to state the existence of spatial imbalances in the socio-economic sphere of the Kaluga Region. In particular, Tyutin *et al.* note: “all municipalities of the Kaluga Region, in terms of development problems, can be assigned to one of the groups. The red group (with “bad” demographics and “bad” economy), is the most numerous. The territories with relatively good demographics and stagnant economies are attributed to the second (yellow) group. The third (green) group represents the territories with relatively good demographics and a good level of economic development. The undisputed leaders of this group are the municipalities that formed the leading group in the process of various groupings: the urban district of Kaluga and Obninsk, Zhukovsky, Borovsky and Maloyaroslavetsky municipal districts, the so-called “Moscow wedge” (Tyutin et al., 2019).

The grouping of the Kaluga Region municipalities on the basis of socio-economic indicators is presented in Figure 1.

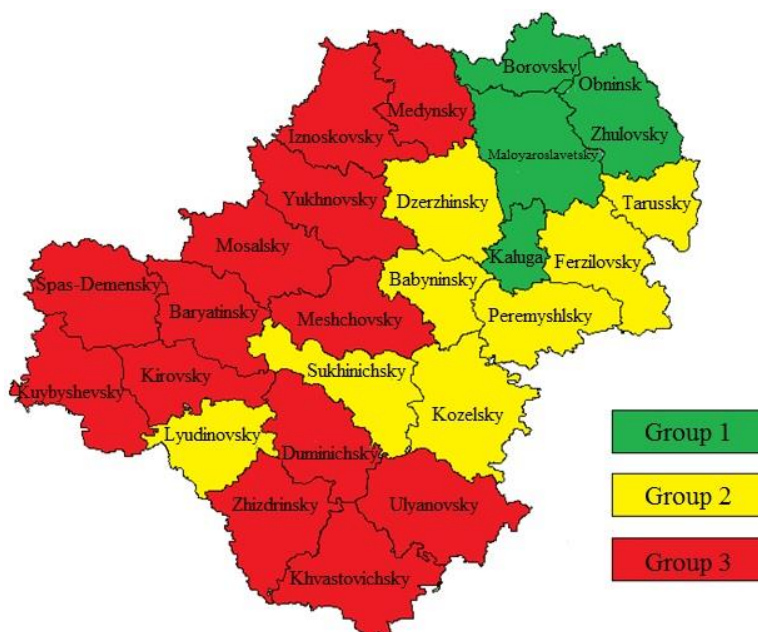


Figure 1. The grouping of the Kaluga Region municipalities on the basis of socio-economic indicators

According to the above grouping, all the municipalities of the Kaluga Region, in terms of development problems, can be attributed to one of the groups.

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that the leading (green) group of municipalities in the region is formed by the

territories with the best demographic indicators and relatively developed infrastructure. On the contrary, the territories characterized by the lowest rates of demographic development, but with a high level of social infrastructure, in economic terms are assigned to the third (red) zone. This confirms the previously made conclusion that the stagnation that has developed

in recent years in the economic base of these municipalities has led to an outflow of residents from the territories and a corresponding decrease in investment attractiveness.

At the next stage, the Garr index of institutional democracy (Polity IV) was calculated for the municipalities of the Kaluga Region. "When creating the indexes of institutional democracy Polity I, Polity II, Polity III and Polity IV, Tadd Garr drew attention to the limits of democracy and autocracy and singled out six indicators: formation of executive power, competitiveness in its formation, openness of formation, restriction of activity, control of activity, competitiveness of participation. In accordance with this index, a fully institutionalized democracy in the country has the highest-grade score of +10, and a grade score of a full autocracy is 10" (Sokolov, Knyazeva, 2017).

Since Polity IV was developed and applied for national political regimes, it was adapted for current research and evaluation of democracy at the municipal level. Given the characteristics of local democracy, certain state institutions were taken into account by the Polity IV assessment:

- 1) The competitiveness and openness of the formation of power institutions;
- 2) The existence of a system of institutional containment of power institutions;
- 3) The presence of institutional channels for free and equal political participation of the population.

The result of the study was a comparison of two maps: a map of spatial imbalances in the region and a map representing the differentiation of municipalities according to Garr's institutional democracy index.

The analysis result presented in Figure 2 shows the closeness of the estimates, although the composition of the "green" group has decreased, limited to only three municipalities, characterized by higher rates of institutional democracy.

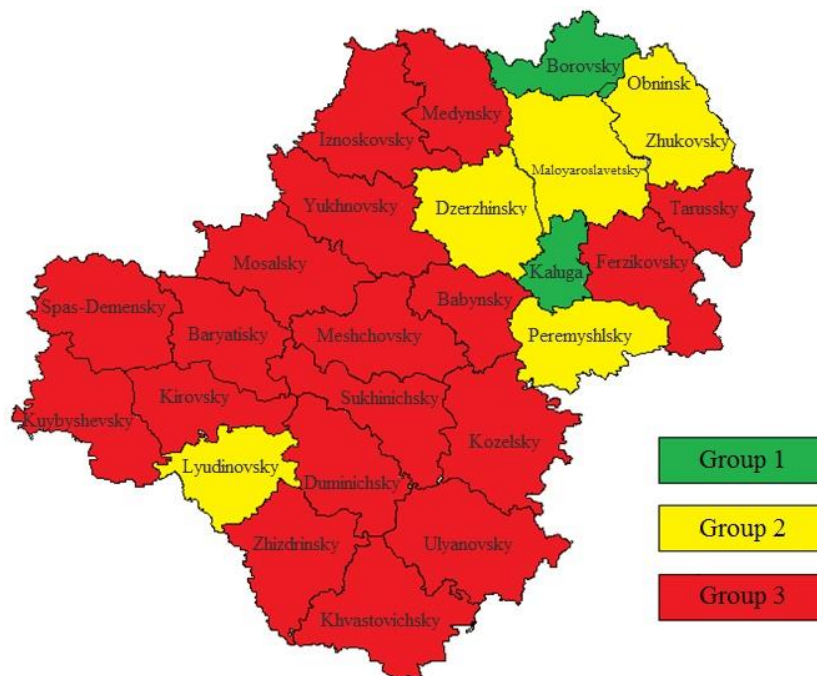


Figure 2. The grouping of the Kaluga Region municipalities based on the index of institutional democracy

Back in 2010, the President of the Russian Federation Medvedev said: "... poverty is one of the main threats to democracy. After all, it is obvious that a poor person cannot be free" (Medvedev, 2010). In the authors' opinion, this factor is one of the key reasons for the refusal of citizens to participate in democratic processes. Local communities do not form a request for participation in the solution of the problems of local importance due to the fact that for a significant number of their representatives in the current value system, this request is replaced by primary material and sometimes everyday life problems. This contains a highly undesirable trend. Being the democracy of "small spaces", municipal democracy is territorially implemented at the local level public power organization, implemented within the boundaries of the municipality; thus, it provides the possibility of direct participation in government. "People who live in a democratic society without seeing any superiors or subordinates, who are deprived of their usual and obligatory social connections, willingly become unsociable and consider themselves free from society. ... People almost always find it difficult to tear themselves away from personal affairs in order to take up public affairs; therefore, it is natural for them to shift these concerns to the only obvious and permanent speaker for the collective interests, which is the state" (Tocqueville, 1994).

In modern conditions, one of the factors of territorial development is the dynamics of social relations and the formation of social capital of municipalities and regions. "Community members interact on the use of shared resources, during which people whom they trust are selected and self-organization becomes possible. Living in such conditions, as well as the formation and operation of institutions, is the condition for the formation of social capital" (Ostrom, 2010). The constitutional foundations of the Russian Federation provide the right of citizens to participate in local government. This right is exercised through participation in management activities, decision-making on the basis of an assessment of the interests of the representatives of local communities. Local markets and territories, characterized by the presence of a transparent decision-making system, generate higher confidence of the participants, activate the investment processes due to the fact that the authorities are forced to respond to statements which under other circumstances they could ignore. Such forms of local government organization not only contribute to the development of local democracies but also lead to the search for social rent (Diskin, 1997), that

is, potentially monetized effects arising from the formation of favorable conditions of social organization, existing in a particular area.

## Conclusion

According to the results of this study, the democracy and the level of citizens' well-being are mutually dependent. The request of local communities for participation in the solution of municipal administration problems is higher in territories with higher rates of socio-economic development. However, it would be wrong to put the level of development of democracy in the local communities exclusively in direct dependence on economic factors. It is impossible to solve the problems related to the development of democracy using exclusively economic methods: to ensure the achievement of economic results and only on this basis to start the formation of local democracy. Moreover, democracy, as a form of government, is itself capable of influencing economic dynamics.

Democracy is not an attribute of economically successful territories, and welfare is not the only condition for democracy. Certainly, economics and democracy are interconnected, since the latter determines the possibilities of adjustment of the economic course even prior to the emergence of any problems. The mechanisms of democratic promotion of competent and talented people in local government structures contribute to the formation of a polycentric model of the representative management of municipal development. The democratic forms of governance are adaptable, and political rivalry ensures the search for new solutions, including the economic ones. The advantage of democracy is not to guarantee the economic progress, but democracy can guarantee a repeated change of the management model until the achievement of economic progress.

The capacity of democracy for systemic transformation and even for the change of elites not only at the level of local communities, defines the problems of the search for new competencies. One of the directions of modern state policy should be the work on the development of public initiative, which is formed directly in the local democracy structures. This may be one of the innovative areas of activity of regional authorities and local governments, associated with the formation of new mechanisms for involvement of members of local communities in the active life-sustaining activity.

### Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that the data presented herein do not contain a conflict of interest.

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