

Development of the Institution of Local Self-Government in Russia: Problems and Prospects



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Abstract. The relevance of the article is due to the active discussions of a draft federal law on local self-government in Russia in 2022. The purpose of the work is to identify prerequisites for and substantiate promising directions of reforming the institution of local self-government in Russia. To achieve the goal we use key general scientific research methods, a questionnaire survey of Vologda Oblast municipal formations' heads conducted in 2022, a methodology for grouping municipalities by level of development to identify the specifics of the answers of heads in the context of different types of territories and reveal the attitude of municipalities' heads toward the draft law. This is what constitutes scientific novelty of the study. It is established that the low financial and economic independence of municipalities remains the main problem of local self-government. In addition, over the past ten years a significant number of constituent entities of the Russian Federation witnessed cases of abolition of the settlement level of government as municipal districts were converted into municipal and urban okrugs. It is revealed that the key controversial and ambiguous points in the draft law under consideration are as follows: abolition of the settlement level of government; strengthening the responsibility of municipalities' heads to the top official of the RF constituent entity; insufficient attention to specifying the powers and functions of local self-government bodies and resources for their full-fledged and high-quality implementation. We put forward recommendations for improving the text of the draft law for each aspect specified above. The results of the research can be used in the work of federal authorities when finalizing the draft law on local self-government and in the practical implementation of the new reform; they can also serve as a basis for further research on this topic.

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Introduction

The municipal level of government is the closest to the interests and needs of the population; it is at the level of municipal formations that the maximum involvement of residents in the processes of direct management of territorial development is ensured.

In post-Soviet Russia, local self-government (LSG) is being constantly reformed. The 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation established the autonomy of local self-government and its independence from State power. Further, in 1995, the law “On the general principles of the organization of local self-government in the Russian Federation” was adopted (154-FZ, dated September 28, 1995); in 2003, a new similar law was adopted (131-FZ, dated October 6, 2003). By January 1, 2009, the reform of local self-government in Russia was formally completed, the provisions of 131-FZ entered into force throughout the country.

In the 2010s, important new stages of further reform of this institution of power were reflected in federal laws on amendments to 131-FZ (136-FZ, dated May 27, 2014, 62-FZ, dated April 3, 2017, 87-FZ, dated May 1, 2019). Law of the Russian Federation on amending the Constitution of the Russian Federation 1-FKZ, dated March 14, 2020, introduced a new paragraph into Article 132 of the Constitution: “Local self-government bodies and state power bodies shall be integrated in the unified system of public authority in the Russian Federation, and shall cooperate to most efficiently resolve tasks in the interests of population inhabiting the relevant territory”. The publications of a number of Russian scientists (Bukhval'd, 2020; Voroshilov, 2020; Zotov, 2021; Shugrina, 2021;

Shchepachev, 2021; etc.) give a systematic and objective assessment of these constitutional changes.

The current federal law on local self-government (131-FZ) for 16 years of its implementation (since 2006) has been amended many times (there are more than 180 federal laws on the amendments); this significantly transformed the original concept, the model of the law and the mechanisms of functioning of local self-government. In this regard, the development and adoption of a new federal law on local self-government is already an objective necessity, especially if we take into account the adoption of Federal Law 414-FZ, dated December 21, 2021, “On general principles of organizing public power in constituent entities of the Russian Federation”. On December 16, 2021, the draft federal law “On the general principles of organizing local self-government in the unified system of public authority” (draft law 40361-8) was submitted to the State Duma of the Russian Federation for consideration; the subjects of the legislative initiative are Senator of the Russian Federation A.A. Klishas and Deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation P.V. Krashinnikov). January 25, 2022, the draft law was adopted by the State Duma in the first reading; the second reading was originally planned for June 2022, but has been postponed due to discussions in various circles regarding the new reform of local self-government and a number of other significant events in 2022 (increased sanctions pressure on Russia from Western countries since February 2022 and the need for an effective response and reaction of the Russian state and society to the new challenges of national development).

It was planned that the general provisions of the law would come into force from the date of its official publication, Chapters 2–5 and 7 – from January 1, 2023; a transitional period was established until January 1, 2028, during which municipal districts would be transformed into municipal okrugs, certain organizational and legal issues would be resolved.

We note the following fundamental innovations laid down in the draft of the new federal law:

- the number of types of municipal formations in which local self-government will be carried out (urban okrugs, municipal okrugs and intraurban territories of federal cities) is reduced from eight to three; the settlement level of government is abolished, but at the same time, in order to ensure that the interests of the population in individual settlements are taken into account, it is provided that the structure of the local administration of the urban okrug, a municipal okrug, as a rule, will include territorial bodies of local administration;

- two lists of powers of local self-government bodies are established to address issues regarding direct provision of vital activity of the population (27 powers contained in the federal law and 28 powers that can be assigned to LSG bodies by the law of the RF constituent entity);

- there is a reduction in the number of ways of forming a representative body of a municipal formation (only from deputies elected at municipal elections) and electing the head of a municipal formation (at municipal elections; by a representative body of a municipality from its own composition or from among candidates represented by the highest official of the RF constituent entity);

- responsibility of heads of municipal formations and heads of local administrations to the top official of the RF constituent entity is increased;

- there is an increase in the role of territorial public self-government, village heads, participatory projects in the management of the development of the municipality.

The adoption of the law will ensure integration of local self-government into a single system of public authority, which was established by the 2020 amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. In this case, we are talking about a new, regular full-fledged reform of local self-government, which concerns all the issues of the functioning of the municipal level of government. The draft law has caused a significant widespread response among representatives of the municipal community, public authorities, scientists, experts and politicians. After the adoption of the law in the first reading in January 2022, the subjects of legislative initiative, expert, nongovernmental, and scientific organizations have already proposed more than 1,000 amendments to the text; active discussions continue on the possibility of maintaining the settlement level of government.

During the discussion of the draft law, scientists, experts, and politicians express different opinions on the prospects for further development of the institution of local self-government in Russia: from neutral (the law will not significantly worsen anything and will not fundamentally change, but only consolidate at the regulatory level the objective trends in the development of local self-government over the past 7–8 years) and extremely positive (the amendments will strengthen the status of the institution of local self-government and eliminate existing gaps in legislation) to extremely negative (the new law will complete the process of actual liquidation of real local self-government in the country and completely subordinate it to state authorities).

The publications of Russian scientists (Boldyrev, 2022; Bukhval'd et al., 2022; Gligich-Zolotareva, Luk'yanova, 2022; Kozlova, 2022; Uporov et al., 2022; Shirokov, Yurkova, 2022; etc.) have already provided a comprehensive assessment of the draft federal law: in the presence of a unified position on the objective expediency of adopting a new law on local self-government, they prove the necessity of its substantial revision with a clear justification

and understanding of the concept and further prospects for the development of local self-government in Russia. Adhering to the reasonable position expressed in these studies, we understand the need to unite the efforts of scientists, experts and practitioners to objectively analyze current problems of local self-government in Russia and develop sound recommendations for the formation of a new, effective law on local self-government.

We should note that reforms in the field of local self-government are being carried out in many countries. These reform processes are considered by many foreign economists, lawyers, political scientists, geographers, sociologists (see, for example: Ezeozue, 2020; Lockner, 2013; Meng, Cheng, 2020; Tan, 2020). A separate layer of publications (Blesse, Rosel, 2017; Blom-Hansen et al., 2016; Di Liddo, Giuranno, 2020; Erlingsson et al., 2020; Gendzwill et al., 2021; Hansen et al., 2014) is devoted to assessing the feasibility of transforming the municipal-territorial structure and its effects (unification, separation of municipalities, changing their status, borders, functionality, etc.) in various countries. Scientists agree that all transformations in the field of local self-government should be carried out taking into account the real need for them, goals, objectives, consequences (including assessment of various effects), and implementation mechanisms.

In this regard, it is important to use the methods of scientific analysis to identify real prerequisites and substantiate promising directions of reforming the institution of local self-government in Russia. This has become the purpose of the study. The following tasks are addressed: the current state of the institute of local self-government in Russia is analyzed and key problems of its functioning are identified (including with the use of the results of a questionnaire survey of municipalities' heads); the influence of political and managerial factors on the processes of socio-economic development of municipalities is shown; a generalized assessment of the main provisions of the draft new federal law on local self-government is given; the key

directions of finalizing (improving) the draft law are substantiated.

Describing the research methodology and substantiating its choice

To achieve the goal set in the article, we use standard methods of economic, statistical and comparative analysis, generalization and expert (questionnaire) survey, monographic method. The study is based on the publications of foreign and Russian scientists on regional economics, public and municipal administration.

In order to identify the attitude of the heads of municipal formations toward the draft of the new federal law on local self-government and the new municipal reform, in April – July 2022, the staff of RAS Vologda Research Center conducted a regular annual questionnaire survey of the heads of municipalities of the Vologda Oblast (questionnaires were sent to all 207 municipalities of the region; the number of filled-in questionnaires received made it possible to ensure sampling error of no more than 4–5%). Similar questionnaire surveys of municipalities' heads with varying degrees of regularity are conducted by other organizations: the All-Russian Congress of Municipal Formations, associations (councils) of municipal entities of RF constituent entities, interregional associations of municipalities (for example, the Association of Siberian and Far Eastern Cities), individual universities (for example, Tver State University). Distinctive features of VolIRC RAS questionnaire survey are its regularity (conducted annually), duration (since 2006 – since the beginning of the reform of the LSG in accordance with 131-FZ), consistency and complexity of the issues under consideration, relevance (the questionnaire is adjusted annually taking into account the specifics of changes taking place in the system of state and municipal administration in Russia and the Vologda Oblast).

Russia, like most countries, is characterized by a significant heterogeneity of economic space, manifested, among other things, in significant differences in the level of socio-economic deve-

Table 1. Grouping of Vologda Oblast districts by level of socio-economic development as of the end of 2020

Development level	Group of regions
High	1. Sheksninsky (1.536); 2. Gryazovetsky (1.406); 3. Vologoksky (1.298); 4. Kaduysky (1.246); 5. Sokolsky (1.210); 6. Nyuksensky (1.110); 7. Chagodoshchensky (1.106); 8. Velikoustyugsky (1.101)
Median	9. Cherepovetsky (1.015); 10. Totemsky (1.000); 11. Babaevsky (0.998); 12. Tarnogsky (0.956)
Low	13. Kirillovsky (0.898); 14. Mezhdurechensky (0.896); 15. Kharovsky (0.885); 16. Ustyuzhensky (0.873); 17. Belozersky (0.850); 18. Verkhovazhsky (0.843); 19. Vashkinsky (0.821); 20. Syamzhensky (0.821); 21. Vytegorsky (0.797); 22. Ust-Kubinsky (0.772); 23. Nikolsky (0.768); 24. Vozhegodsky (0.761); 25. Kichmengsko-Gorodetsky (0.718); 26. Babushkinsky (0.677)
Note: the value of the integral indicator of the level of socio-economic development of the corresponding municipal district is given in parentheses. Source: own compilation.	

development between municipal formations of each specific region (constituent entity of the Federation). In this regard, the specifics of the answers of Vologda Oblast municipalities' heads were revealed, depending on the level of development of the corresponding municipal district. The grouping of Vologda Oblast districts by level of development (*Tab. 1*) was carried out on the basis of the methodology we published previously (Voroshilov, Gubanova, 2018).

In order to assess the impact of the political factor (the policy on the development of territories carried out at the federal, regional and local levels, the key subject of the policy is, respectively, the President of the Russian Federation, the highest official of the RF constituent entity, the head of the municipal formation) on the development of municipal districts, the level of development of the district was studied in the context of the terms in office of the corresponding president, governor, and municipality head (we consider one district that in the whole analyzed period was in the group with a high level of development, and one district that in the whole analyzed period was in the group with a low level of development). The study is limited to the 2000–2015 period due to the fact that from 2014–2015 most of the constituent entities of the Federation began to switch to the model under which the head of the municipality is appointed and the positions of the head of the municipality and the head of the local administration are separated, the impact of each of them on the development of municipalities could be different. We also analyze

the territorial specifics (in the context of municipal districts and urban okrugs of the Vologda Oblast) of the electoral activity among the residents of municipalities (elections of heads of municipal entities).

Research results

First, let us briefly review the general situation with the functioning of the local self-government system in Russia on the threshold of the new municipal reform.

The total number of municipalities in the country for 2009–2021 decreased by 4,252 units, or by 18% (*Tab. 2*), which was due to the following:

- unification of urban and rural settlements in many constituent entities of the Russian Federation (the number of rural settlements decreased by 20%, in some federal districts – by more than 30%);
- transformation of municipal districts into urban okrugs (at the same time, such direct transformations were not provided for in Federal Law 131-FZ until 2019) by combining all settlements of the district into one municipal entity with the abolition of the district and settlements in 2011–2019 in the Belgorod, Bryansk, Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Kostroma, Magadan, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Orenburg, Sakhalin, Tver, Tula, Tyumen, Yaroslavl oblasts; Altai, Perm, Stavropol krais; Komi Republic; Chukotka Autonomous Okrug (Voroshilov, 2021);
- transformation of municipal districts into municipal okrugs (with the abolition of settlements) in 2019–2021 (in the Amur, Arkhangelsk, Bryansk,

Table 2. Number of municipalities in Russia in the context of federal districts, at the end of the year, units

Territory (federal district)	2006	2009	2021						2021 to 2009, %			
			Total	MD	MO	UO	US	RS	Total	MD	UO	RS
Russian Federation	24207	23907	19655	1544	180	612	1287	15742	82.2	84.4	119.5	80.4
Central	5444	5353	3902	343	20	140	331	2922	72.9	82.5	130.8	69.5
Northwestern	1636	1807	1299	133	28	38	168	821	71.9	83.6	95.0	64.5
<i>including the Vologda Oblast</i>	372	302	187	26	0	2	1	158	61.9	100.0	100.0	62.7
Southern	3166	1745	1972	157	0	42	96	1667	113.0	109.0	140.0	112.9
North Caucasian		1702	1417	88	16	40	28	1242	83.3	75.9	133.3	82.0
Volga	6805	6359	4886	346	71	104	266	4086	76.8	75.9	148.6	74.8
Ural	1351	1351	1196	84	8	111	69	917	88.5	90.3	100.9	85.7
Siberian	4190	4186	3145	246	20	71	160	2648	75.1	76.9	92.2	75.0
Far Eastern	1415	1404	1838	147	17	66	169	1439	130.9	117.6	137.5	135.6

Note: as of the end of 2021, there were also 4 urban okrugs with inner-city divisions (cities of Samara, Makhachkala, Chelyabinsk, Kirov) and 23 intraurban raions in them; 267 intraurban territories of federal cities (in Moscow – 146, in Saint Petersburg – 111, in Sevastopol – 10).
The Republic of Buryatia and Zabaikalsky Krai belonged to the Siberian Federal District until 2018, and since 2018 they have been included in the Far Eastern Federal District; this is due to a significant change in the number of municipalities in these federal districts.
MD – municipal district, MO – municipal okrug, UO – urban okrug, US – urban settlement, RS – rural settlement.
Compiled according to: The number of municipal formations in the context of constituent entities of the Russian Federation as of January 1, 2022. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/1-adm-2022.xlsx>

Kemerovo, Kirov, Kurgan, Murmansk, Nizhny Novgorod, Novgorod, Tver oblasts; Zabaikalsky, Kamchatka, Krasnoyarsk, Perm, Primorsky, Stavropol kraiss; Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, etc.) (Voroshilov, 2021).

Low financial and economic independence still remains the key problem of Russian municipalities: the majority of local budgets by more than 50% are

formed by grants, subsidies, subventions and other intergovernmental transfers from regional budgets; and their own (tax and non-tax) revenues amounted to only 34% of total revenues by the end of 2021 (the minimum value is 25% in municipal districts; *Tab. 3*). In districts and urban okrugs, the value of this indicator decreased in comparison with 2006 and 2009.

Table 3. The share of own (tax and non-tax) revenues in the budgets of municipal formations of Russia for 2006–2021 in the total revenue, %

Type of municipal formation	2006	2009	2019	2020	2021	2021 to 2006, p.p.	2021 to 2009, p.p.
Rural settlements	-	-	35.7	31.6	33.8	-	-
Urban settlements	-	-	52.7	47.8	45.0	-	-
Urban and rural settlements (on average)	33.3	40.6	42.9	38.2	38.5	5.2	-2.1
Municipal districts	27.6	24.9	24.5	23.4	24.6	-3.0	-0.3
Urban okrugs, municipal okrugs	49.6	51.6	38.8	37.2	38.0	-11.6	-13.6
Intraurban municipal formations of federal cities (IUMFFC)	77.0	55.0	66.6	63.2	48.1	-28.9	-6.9
Intraurban raions	-	-	34.9	44.2	45.8	-	-
Urban okrugs with inner-city divisions	-	-	39.0	34.7	38.2	-	-
All municipal formations	39.7	39.6	34.1	32.6	33.8	-5.9	-5.8

Own compilation according to: Reports on the execution of consolidated budgets of constituent entities of the Russian Federation and budgets of territorial state extra-budgetary funds. Federal Treasury of the Russian Federation. Available at: <http://www.roskazna.ru/ispolnenie-byudzheta/konsolidirovannye-byudzhety-subektov>

Table 4. Dynamics and structure of debt of municipalities of the Russian Federation in 2006–2021

Indicator	2006	2009	2019	2020	2021	2021 to 2006
Total amount of municipal debt, billion rubles	105.16	134.87	380.11	387.24	376.75	358.26
Structure of municipal debt, %	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.0	100.0	-
municipal securities	10.90	5.28	5.60	6.37	5.27	-5.63 p.p.
loans from credit organizations	32.92	45.15	68.26	68.35	58.40	+25.48 p.p.
budget loans from other budgets of the budgetary system	33.04	32.00	24.23	23.54	34.14	+1.10 p.p.
municipal guarantees	21.68	17.10	1.91	1.74	1.18	-20.50 p.p.
other debt obligations	1.45	0.46	0.001	0.001	0.001	-1.45 p.p.

Compiled according to: The volume and structure of the state debt of constituent entities of the Russian Federation and the debt of municipal formations. Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation. Available at: https://www.minfin.ru/ru/performance/public_debt/subdbt/

The lack of own funds in local budgets led to a significant increase in municipal debt obligations – 3.6 times over 10 years (from 105.2 billion rubles in 2006 to 376.8 billion rubles in 2021; *Tab. 4*). During this period, the share of commercial loans in the structure of municipal debt increased markedly and the share of municipal guarantees decreased.

Local self-government is primarily the participation of residents in the management of their municipality's development. Law 131-FZ "On the general principles of organizing local self-government in the Russian Federation", dated October 6, 2003, lists the main forms of direct implementation of local self-government by the population and participation of the population in the implementation of local self-government: local referendum; municipal elections; voting on the recall of a deputy, a member of an elected local self-government body, an elected official of local self-government, voting on changing the boundaries of a municipality, transforming a municipality; citizens' gatherings; citizens' law-making initiative; participatory projects (participatory budgeting, including, for example, "People's budget" projects); territorial public self-government (TPSG); village head; public hearings, public discussions; citizens' meeting; citizens' conference (meeting of delegates); citizens' survey; citizens' appeals to local self-government bodies, etc.

Various forms of residents' participation are distributed among Russian municipalities extremely unevenly (due to the unsettled nature of many issues of their functioning, as well as insufficient dissemination of best practices of their activities). Their efficiency and effectiveness also differ.

According to the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, "local referendums in 2021 were held 73 times in the municipalities of four constituent entities of the Federation (72 of them were referendums on the introduction of self-taxation). In 2021, 4.5 thousand election campaigns for local self-government bodies were held in 84 constituent entities of the Federation"¹.

According to the Ministry of Justice, "gatherings of citizens in 2021 were held 1.6 thousand times to elect village heads; 2 thousand times – to resolve issues about the introduction of self-taxation; 3 thousand times – on the issues of nomination and selection of participatory projects; 2.5 thousand times – on issues of exercising the powers of representative bodies of settlements; 149 times – to discuss issues of changing the territorial organization of LSG. Public hearings in 2021 were held

¹ Information from the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation (extract from the report on the results of the annual monitoring of the organization and development of local self-government in the Russian Federation in 2021). Committee of the State Duma of the Russian Federation on Regional Policy and Local Self-Government. Available at: [http://komitet4.km.duma.gov.ru/upload/site28/2._INFO_MINYuSTA\(2\).pdf](http://komitet4.km.duma.gov.ru/upload/site28/2._INFO_MINYuSTA(2).pdf)

67.6 thousand times, public discussions – 20.2 thousand times, citizens’ meetings – 38 thousand times, conferences (meetings of delegates) – 4.3 thousand times. Civil law-making initiatives were considered about 65 times by local self-government bodies, in 55 cases the result of such consideration was the adoption of relevant municipal legal acts. Surveys of citizens in 2021 were conducted 1.3 thousand times, and their results were taken into account when developing appropriate solutions by local self-government bodies (and in some cases by state authorities)”. “As of the end of 2021 there were approximately 35 thousand TPSG bodies, whose charters are registered with local self-government bodies, within the boundaries of 6.6 thousand municipal formations (34% of the total number of municipalities in Russia). At the same time, about 16.4 thousand TPSG bodies (46.8% of their total number) are located in rural settlements, 12.6 thousand (39.2%) – in urban okrugs, 4.2 thousand (12%) – in urban settlements, 5 thousand (4.4%) –

in municipal okrugs. About 2.9 thousand TPSG bodies (8.3% of their total number) have the status of legal entities and about 3.6 thousand TPSG bodies (10.4% of their total number) have concluded contracts (agreements) with local self-government bodies providing for the use of local budget funds in the implementation of TPSG activities for the improvement of territories and other economic activities. Village heads are appointed to 27.9 thousand settlements located within 5.9 thousand municipalities”.

Next, let us consider the results of a questionnaire survey conducted among the heads of municipal formations of the Vologda Oblast in 2022.

The lack of opportunities (financial; legal – in terms of the availability of appropriate powers; organizational, etc.) to solve key problems and tasks in many areas of municipalities’ development remains the major issue in the functioning of the municipal level of government. Thus, at least a third of the heads of Vologda Oblast districts (*Tab. 5*)

Table 5. Distribution of answers of Vologda Oblast municipalities’ heads to the question “Please evaluate the capabilities of local governments of your municipal formation to address issues in the following spheres”, proportion of respondents who chose the answers “extremely low” and “low” capabilities, %

Sphere	Type of municipal formation			
	MD	RS	High	Low
Providing housing to population	66.7	46.4	37.5	59.1
Increasing tourist attractiveness	41.7	50.0	43.8	45.5
Road construction and maintenance in relation to local highways	41.7	39.3	31.3	31.8
Housing and communal services	33.3	57.1	37.5	45.5
Unemployment and employment	33.3	55.6	37.5	38.1
Formation of the economic base of the municipality	33.3	46.4	37.5	36.4
Increasing the level of social activity	33.3	29.6	25.0	27.3
Providing residents with transport services	25.0	53.6	43.8	36.4
Ensuring social protection of population	16.7	32.1	31.3	18.2
Small business development	16.7	64.3	43.8	45.5
Improvement of the territory	16.7	25.9	31.3	9.5
Ensuring public order	8.3	42.9	37.5	18.2
Providing quality education	8.3	46.4	25.0	27.3
Environmental protection	8.3	32.1	37.5	13.6
Organizing recreation and culture	0.0	14.3	6.3	4.5

Designations here and in the following tables are as follows:
MD – municipal districts (on average, according to the number of heads of municipal districts who filled in the questionnaire);
RS – rural settlements (on average, according to the number of heads of rural settlements who filled in the questionnaire);
High – on average, according to the number of respondents from municipal districts with a high level of socio-economic development;
Low – on average, according to the number of respondents from municipal districts with a low level of socio-economic development.
Source here and further: the results of a questionnaire survey of the heads of municipal formations of the Vologda Oblast, conducted in 2022.

pointed out extremely low and low opportunities for managerial influence in the areas of development of housing, tourism, road construction and maintenance, housing and communal services, employment, economic base for the formation of the local budget, and civic engagement. In rural areas, transport services and small business development also have troublesome issues. Among the respondents from municipalities with a low level of development, there is a greater proportion of those who indicate poor opportunities for independent solution of relevant tasks and problems; this emphasizes, among other things, the reliability of the questionnaire survey of municipalities' heads and the adequacy of the methodology used to assess the level of socio-economic development of municipalities.

The attitude of Vologda Oblast municipalities' heads toward the key aspects of the new municipal reform (the draft of the new federal law on local self-government) is generally ambiguous. More than a quarter of all the municipalities' heads taking part in the survey (*Tab. 6*) show a negative attitude toward the establishment of two lists of issues of local self-government and the strengthening of the responsibility of heads to the highest official of the constituent entity of the Federation. Naturally, heads of rural settlements are extremely negative about the liquidation of the settlement level (43% of all respondents against 8% among district heads). From 17 to 37% of respondents also negatively

assess the increasing role of various forms of self-organization of the population (TPSG, village heads, participatory projects). This can be due to the fact that the functioning of these forms has not been streamlined so far, as well as the procedure of their interaction with local governments, their real role in the development of municipalities and specific localities. Heads of municipalities with a lower level of development generally have a more negative attitude toward the main provisions of the new local government reform.

Respondents point out the aspects and problems that should be solved within the framework of the new reform of local self-government, primarily related to increasing the financial and economic independence of municipalities (more than 74% of heads; *Tab. 7*), ensuring that the scope of powers corresponds to the volume of resources for their execution, and specifying the issues of local significance and the powers of local self-government bodies. Heads of rural settlements also highlight the importance of the possibility of maintaining an independent settlement level of administration.

As for raising financial and economic independence, according to the majority of the surveyed heads, the revenue base of local budgets needs to be more than doubled (33% of district heads and 30% of rural settlement heads chose this answer; *Tab. 8*). Many respondents also indicated the need to increase the revenue by more than 50%.

Table 6. Distribution of answers of Vologda Oblast municipalities' heads to the question "How would you assess the key changes in the system of local self-government provided for by the draft federal law "On general principles of organizing local self-government in the unified system of public authority"?", proportion of respondents who chose the answers "negative" and "sooner negative", %

Direction of the local self-government reform in the draft of the new federal law	Type of municipal formation			
	MD	RS	High	Low
Transition to a single-level organization of local self-government (abolition of settlements, transformation of municipal districts into municipal okrugs)	8.3	42.9	25.0	40.9
Establishment of a list of 27 powers of local self-government bodies to address issues of direct provision of vital activity of the population and a list of 27 powers that can be contained in the law of the constituent entity of the Russian Federation	25.0	25.9	20.0	31.8
Strengthening the responsibility of heads of municipal formations and heads of local administrations to the highest official of the constituent entity of the Russian Federation	25.0	29.6	31.3	31.8
Increasing the role of territorial public self-government, village heads, participatory projects in the management of municipality's development	16.7	37.0	18.8	36.4

Table 7. Distribution of answers of Vologda Oblast municipalities' heads to the question "What key points, in your opinion, should be reflected in the new federal law on local self-government and implemented as part of the new reform of local self-government?", % of respondents

Desired direction of local self-government reform, which should be reflected in the new federal law	Type of municipal formation			
	MD	RS	High	Low
Increasing the financial and economic independence of municipal formations, securing new revenue sources of local budgets (for example, directing part of the income tax to local budgets)	91.7	74.1	82.4	81.0
Unconditional provision of the principle of compliance of the functions and powers of local self-government bodies with the volume of revenue sources assigned to this level of local budgets for their implementation	83.3	59.3	64.7	71.4
Establishing a specific, closed list of issues of local importance, powers of local self-government bodies (specification, elimination of general or unclear formulations of powers, etc.)	66.7	48.1	58.8	42.9
Ensuring guarantees of real independence of local self-government in solving issues and tasks of local importance, eliminating excessive control and supervision of local self-government bodies on the part of state authorities and other inspection and control structures	41.7	37.0	47.1	47.6
Possibility of a differentiated approach to the territorial organization of local self-government in various constituent entities of the Federation (including possible preservation of the settlement level of management)	16.7	44.4	23.5	33.3
Ensuring the implementation of a differentiated approach to the directions and measures of state support for socio-economic development of territories, taking into account the demographic situation, characteristics of the settlement system, level and dynamics of economic development, and specific natural conditions	16.7	48.1	41.2	42.9
Ensuring real guarantees and the role of various forms of direct implementation of local self-government by the population (referendum, elections, citizens meeting, territorial public self-government) and forms of participation of the population in the implementation of local self-government (survey, public hearings, public discussions, citizens assembly, participatory projects, village head) in the development of municipalities	25.0	37.0	29.4	38.1
Creating conditions for the effective development of existing and new forms of intermunicipal cooperation (for example, the possibility of creating intermunicipal enterprises and intermunicipal companies)	8.3	18.5	11.8	23.8

Table 8. Distribution of answers of Vologda Oblast municipalities' heads to the question "By how many percent, in your opinion, is it necessary to increase the revenue base of the budget of your municipal formation for a complete and qualitative solution of all issues and problems of local importance?", % of respondents

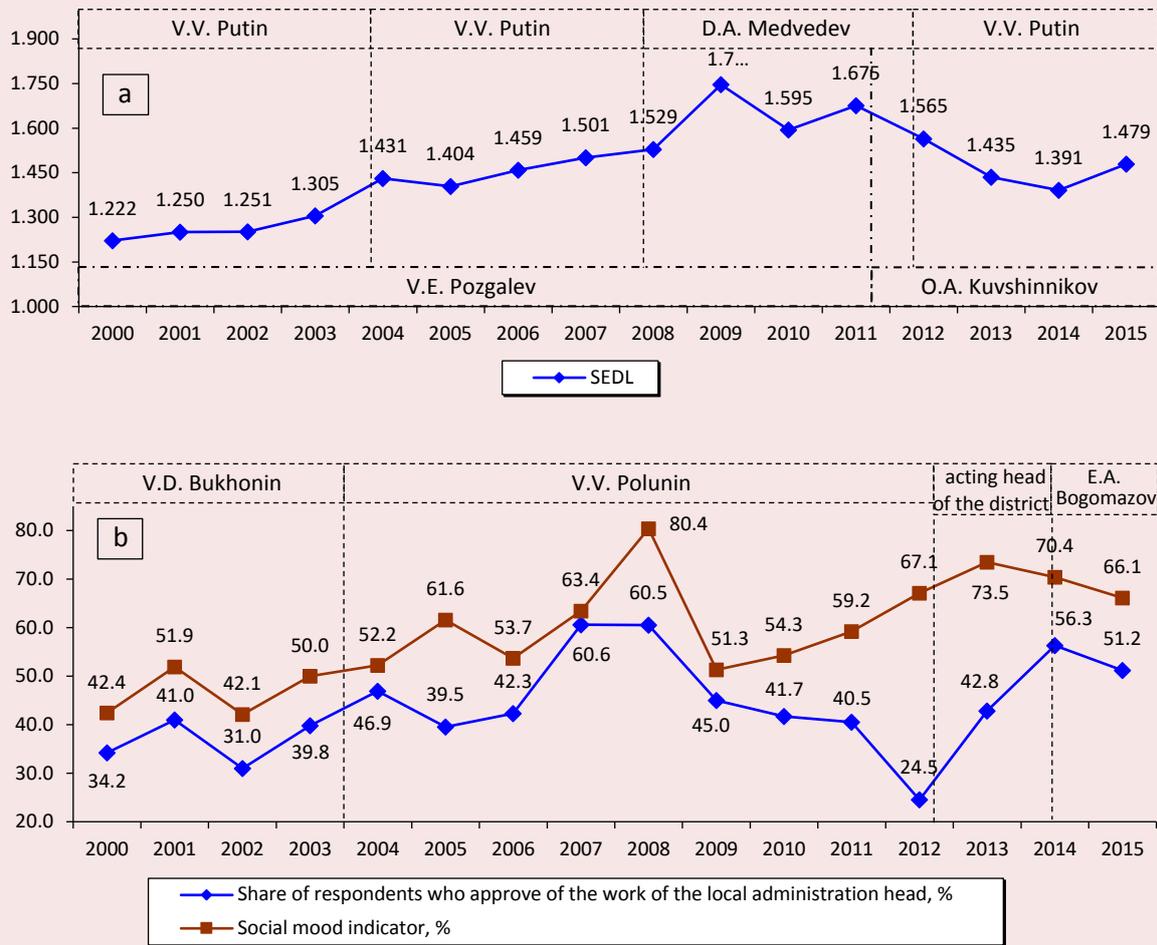
Desired percentage of increase in the revenue base of the local budget	Type of municipal formation			
	MD	RS	High	Low
By 10–20%	0.0	3.7	0.0	0.0
By 21–30%	0.0	3.7	5.9	0.0
By 31–50%	16.7	22.2	5.9	19.0
By 51–70%	25.0	11.1	11.8	23.8
By 71–100%	16.7	22.2	5.9	33.3
By more than 100% (more than twice)	33.3	29.6	58.8	19.0
It's difficult to answer	8.3	0.0	0.0	4.8

Next, let us consider the influence of the political and managerial factor on the development of two districts of the Vologda Oblast – one with a high and the other with a low level of socio-economic development.

Throughout the analyzed period (2000–2015), Sheksninsky District was included in the group with a high level of development. From 2000 to 2009, Sheksninsky District showed a positive trend in the values of the integral indicator of the level of socio-economic development, from 2010 to 2014 – their decline, and in 2015 – an increase (Fig. 1).

In 2000–2008, the level of approval of the work of the local administration head in the district increased from 34 to 61% (see Fig. 1b). However, in subsequent years, it changed: in 2012, only a quarter of the population approved of the activities of the head, which led to his resignation at the end of the year. The acting head of the district and the newly elected head E.A. Bogomazov on the whole managed to regain a sufficient level of public trust in 2013 and 2014. The value of the indicator of social mood in Sheksninsky District was the maximum in the pre-crisis 2008, 80%; it sharply decreased in

Figure 1. Dynamics of the level of development of Sheksninsky Municipal District of the Vologda Oblast and people’s estimates regarding the activities of the head of the municipality and their social mood



Designations hereinafter: SEDL – socio-economic development level; indicator of social mood – proportion of respondents who chose the answer option “Good mood, normal, fine condition”, %.

Source: Socio-Economic Development of Municipal Districts. 2000–2015. Issue 4. Vologda: VoIRC RAS, 2017. 64 p. (Public administration efficiency).

2009 (51%), and its growth was then observed in subsequent years.

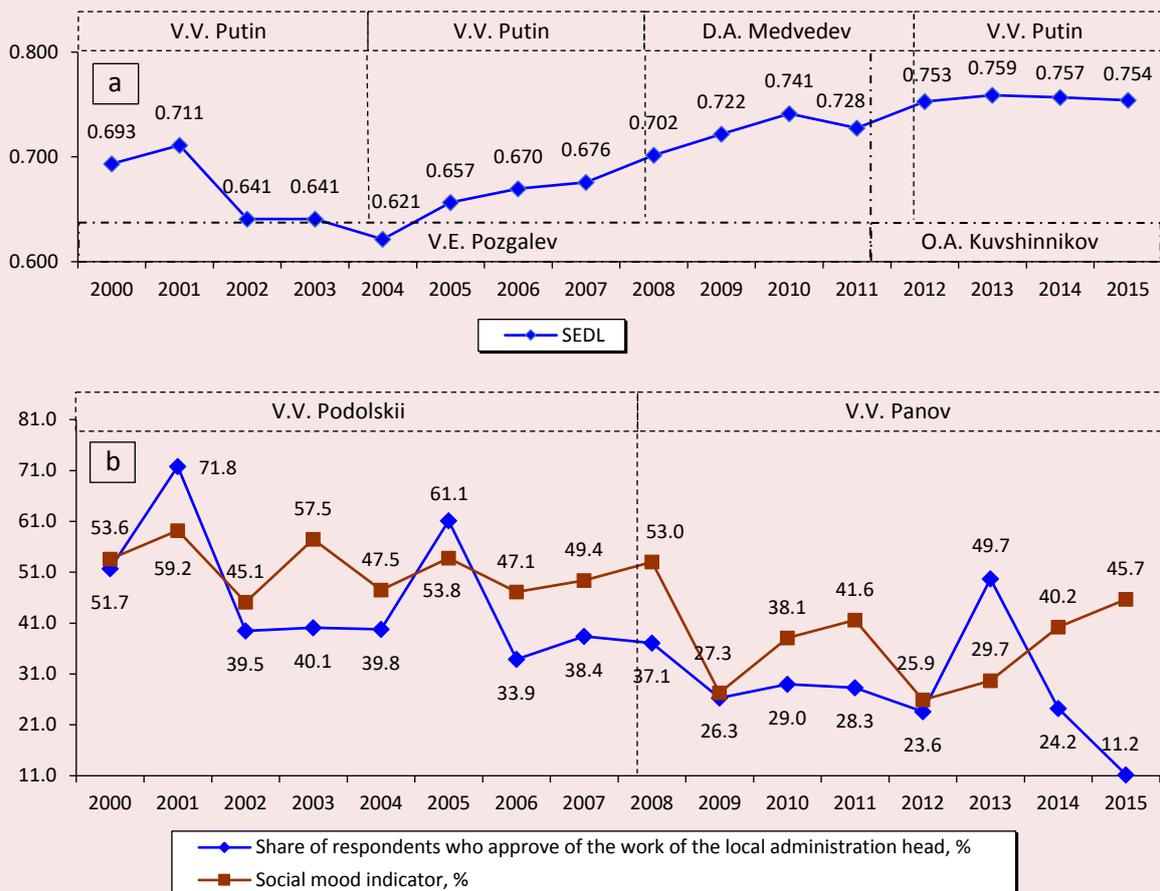
Nikolsky District was in the group with a low level of socio-economic development throughout the analyzed period, but since 2005 there has been a slight increase in this indicator (Fig. 2).

At the same time, there were significant fluctuations in the level of approval of the activities of the district head. The work of district head V.V. Podolsky during his entire term in office was assessed positively by 34–72% of district residents, which is more than his successor (V.V. Panov) – from 11 to 50% (see Fig. 2). Social sentiments are

also unstable: from 26% of district population in 2012 to 59% in 2001 noted a good mood and an even condition.

According to the presented assessments, we can conclude that the activities of certain political figures at the federal, regional or local level do not significantly affect the overall level of development of the municipalities under consideration. Current trends and problems in the development of local territories are due to many different factors, and the key ones are the state policy in the field of local self-government, the position and role of this institution in the unified system of public power in the country.

Figure 2. Dynamics of the level of development of Nikolsky Municipal District of the Vologda Oblast and population estimates regarding the work of the municipality head and their social mood



Source: Socio-Economic Development of Municipal Districts. 2000–2015. Issue 4. Vologda: VolRC RAS, 2017. 64 p. (Public administration efficiency).

Next, let us consider the specifics of the course of electoral processes at the local level². Among such processes, only the elections of rural settlements' heads are standard and regular (in accordance with the amendments made to federal and regional legislation, in many regions, including the Vologda Oblast, the heads of districts, urban okrugs and urban settlements are not directly elected by the

population, but are appointed by the representative body of the municipality, based on the results of a competition conducted by the relevant competition commission).

Analyzing the results of the elections of rural settlements' heads in the Vologda Oblast for 2018–2022 (77 election campaigns), we found that the turnout ranged from 18 to 71% (Tab. 9); the

Table 9. Results of voting at the elections of heads of rural settlements of the Vologda Oblast in 2018–2022

Date	Settlement, district	Permanent population at the end of 2020, people	Voter turnout, %	Number of candidates, people	Number of parties represented by candidates, units	Share of votes for the winning candidate, %
13.05.2018	Irdomatskoye RS, Cherepovetsky	2403	22.1	4	3	45.4
09.09.2018	Lipinoborskoye RS, Vashkinsky	3682	25.2	2	1	57.3
09.09.2018	Opokskoye RS, Velikoustyugsky	1016	62.2	4	3	66.6
09.09.2018	Verkhovazhskoye RS, Verkhovazhsky	5581	29.2	4	2	43.3
09.09.2018	Nizhnekuloiskoye RS, Verkhovazhsky	667	70.8	4	2	38.6
09.09.2018	Spasskoye RS, Vologodsky	4977	22.2	6	5	57.3
09.09.2018	Argunovskoye RS, Nikolsky	874	51.4	2	1	53.7
09.09.2018	Krasnopolyanskoye RS, Nikolsky	5254	33.4	3	2	73.8
09.09.2018	Zavrazhskoye RS, Nikolsky	982	52.5	6	3	45.8
09.09.2018	Zelentsovskoye RS, Nikolsky	873	47.6	2	1	86.7
09.09.2018	Kemskoye RS, Nikolsky	1231	35.6	2	2	85.6
09.09.2018	Semigorodneye RS, Kharovsky	1055	43.3	2	1	87.9
09.09.2018	Sizemskoye RS, Sheksninsky	1389	50.4	3	3	79.1
09.09.2018	Zheleznodorozhnoye RS, Sheksninsky	613	47.4	4	4	52.0
16.12.2018	Devyatinskoye RS, Vytegorsky	4070	18.0	3	3	56.4
24.03.2019	Nikolskoye RS, Kaduysky	1559	48.3	3	2	83.5
24.03.2019	Spasskoye RS, Tarnogsky	920	59.1	3	2	55.8
24.03.2019	Zhelyabovskoye RS, Ustyuzhensky	2035	44.4	3	2	62.9
26.05.2019	Fedotovskoye RS, Vologodsky	4183	40.5	6	3	41.8
08.09.2019	Ankhimovskoye RS, Vytegorsky	1491	58.4	3	3	53.6
08.09.2019	Talitskoye RS, Kirillovsky	1437	49.2	3	2	86.5
08.09.2019	Alyoshinskoye RS, Kirillovsky	861	56.4	3	2	76.4
08.09.2019	Lipovskoye RS, Kirillovsky	724	69.3	3	2	80.1
08.09.2019	Charozerskoye RS, Kirillovsky	578	55.6	3	2	81.4
08.09.2019	Verkhovskoye RS, Tarnogsky	502	66.1	2	2	77.6
08.09.2019	Nikolskoye RS, Sheksninsky	1359	55.3	2	2	77.5
15.12.2019	Ramenskoye RS, Syamzhensky	868	68.7	3	2	89.0
15.03.2020	Minkovskoye RS, Babushkinsky	2233	41.3	3	3	49.1
15.03.2020	Mardengskoye RS, Velikoustyugsky	1008	69.3	4	3	65.6
15.03.2020	Samotovinskoye RS, Velikoustyugsky	3011	53.4	7	3	54.6
15.03.2020	Chebsarskoye RS, Sheksninsky	1299	36.7	3	2	91.3
13.09.2020	Babaevskoye RS, Babaevsky	952	49.3	3	2	83.8

² The analysis of election campaigns at the federal and regional levels is presented in the issues of the information and analytical bulletin published by VoIRC RAS (see, for example: *Socio-Economic Development of Municipal Districts (2000–2021). Issue 9*. Vologda: VoIRC RAS, 2022. 108 p.).

End of Table 9

Date	Settlement, district	Permanent population at the end of 2020, people	Voter turnout, %	Number of candidates, people	Number of parties represented by candidates, units	Share of votes for the winning candidate, %
13.09.2020	Borisovskoye RS, Babaevsky	3092	44.9	3	2	91.3
13.09.2020	Podbolotnoye RS, Babushkinsky	1328	59.1	4	2	56.9
13.09.2020	Sholskoye RS, Belozersky	1193	39.6	3	2	73.3
13.09.2020	Antushevskoye RS, Belozersky	1026	45.3	3	2	76.4
13.09.2020	Artyushinskoye RS, Belozersky	1494	55.8	4	2	47.8
13.09.2020	Andreevskoye RS, Vashkinsky	1355	34.4	3	2	65.4
13.09.2020	Kisnenskoye RS, Vashkinsky	1342	37.3	3	2	73.3
13.09.2020	Krasavinskoye RS, Velikoustyugsky	996	36.8	3	2	86.9
13.09.2020	Tregubovskoye RS, Velikoustyugsky	1665	41.5	3	2	86.0
13.09.2020	Verkhovskoye RS, Verkhovazhsky	827	54.3	3	2	71.6
13.09.2020	Yuchkinskoe RS Vozhegodsky	1016	51.9	3	2	91.9
13.09.2020	Spasskoye RS, Vologodsky	4977	20.5	4	4	70.8
13.09.2020	RS Simezerye, Kaduisky	1496	39.7	3	2	52.9
13.09.2020	Ferapontovskoye RS, Kirillovsky	1528	51.5	3	2	90.5
13.09.2020	Staroselskoye RS, Mezhdurechensky	850	58.1	3	2	74.8
13.09.2020	Nikolskoye RS, Nikolsky	2028	43.9	3	2	65.6
13.09.2020	Nyuksenskoye RS, Nyuksensky	5569	43.9	5	3	55.4
13.09.2020	Dvinitzkoye RS, Sokolsky	733	46.4	3	2	56.6
13.09.2020	Prigorodnoye RS, Sokolsky	1701	33.5	3	2	81.2
13.09.2020	Kalininskoye RS, Totemsky	1382	49.3	3	2	79.9
13.09.2020	Pyatovskoye RS, Totemsky	5644	28.6	3	2	69.8
13.09.2020	Ustyanskoye RS, Ust-Kubinsky	4785	48.1	4	2	57.9
13.09.2020	Lentyevskoye RS, Ustyuzhensky	840	54.4	4	2	85.4
13.09.2020	Ilyinskoye RS, Kharovsky	464	55.7	3	2	89.9
13.09.2020	Kubenskoye RS, Kharovsky	1182	65.6	4	3	57.2
13.09.2020	Kharovskoye RS, Kharovsky	1150	58.2	3	2	89.0
13.09.2020	Shapshinskoye RS, Kharovsky	774	61.3	3	2	68.2
13.09.2020	Ulomskoye RS, Cherepovetsky	3085	40.3	3	2	49.9
13.09.2020	Ershovskoye RS, Sheksninsky	848	59.2	3	3	46.1
13.09.2020	Ugolskoye RS, Sheksninsky	4926	69.0	3	2	86.9
19.09.2021	Babushkinskoye RS, Babushkinsky	4724	39.9	2	1	80.2
19.09.2021	Yudinskoe RS, Velikoustyugsky	2803	50.0	2	1	52.8
19.09.2021	Nizhne-Vazhskoye RS, Verkhovazhsky	1673	-	2	1	-
19.09.2021	Nizhneslobodskoye RS, Vozhegodsky	591	56.8	2	1	84.8
19.09.2021	Igmasskoye RS, Nyuksensky	520	51.5	2	1	65.6
19.09.2021	Noginskoye RS, Syamzhensky	2483	55.2	2	1	61.2
19.09.2021	Markushevskoye RS, Tarnogsky	566	61.3	2	1	66.7
19.09.2021	Mezhenskoye RS, Ustyuzhensky	544	48.3	2	1	67.6
19.09.2021	Belokretskoye RS, Chagodoshchensky	2082	53.2	2	1	78.7
19.09.2021	Klimovskoye RS, Cherepovetsky	2370	48.4	4	2	44.6
19.09.2021	Yugskoye RS, Cherepovetsky	3931	45.2	6	4	42.6
28.11.2021	Nizhne-Vazhskoye RS, Verkhovazhsky	1673	45.5	4	1	94.0
30.01.2022	Ust-Alekseevskoye RS, Velikoustyugsky	1148	63.9	6	2	57.2
30.01.2022	Chebsarskoye RS, Sheksninsky	1299	28.3	4	3	78.2
27.03.2022	Zarechnoye RS, Velikoustyugsky	818	38.8	2	1	91.3

Compiled according to: Election Commission of the Vologda Oblast (State automated system "Vybory"): website. Available at: <http://www.vologod.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/vologod>

percentage of votes cast for the winning candidate – from 37 to 94%; from 2 to 7 candidates representing from 1 to 5 political parties in each individual election campaign participated in the campaigns. All this indicates a rather low participation of the population in the electoral processes and a rather weak legitimacy of the elected heads of settlements due to the extremely low turnout at the majority of municipal elections.

Let us proceed directly to analyzing the draft federal law “On the general principles of organizing local self-government in the unified system of public authority”. Without repeating most of the statements, opinions, judgments on this draft law, we will try to highlight some points that have not received widespread response and resonance, but are important for the new stage of municipal construction.

1. If the settlement level of government is liquidated (the abolition of urban and rural settlements), it is important to prevent a decrease in the accessibility of local authorities for residents. The possibility of creating territorial bodies of local administration provided for in the draft law (in the territories of urban and rural settlements being abolished) should be made mandatory, and all the details regarding their functionality, the number of employees, etc. should be elaborated thoroughly.

2. Municipalities will not be administrative-territorial units; thus, in some cases there will be a discrepancy between the municipal-territorial and administrative-territorial structure; this fact already causes many problems in the field of urban planning and land use (Bukhval'd et al., 2022), and also creates difficulties in the formation of reliable, complete and high-quality statistical information on municipalities. In the context of the new reform, it is important to eliminate all existing inconsistencies between the two types of territorial structure.

3. It is desirable to exclude the wording of one of the grounds for the removal of the head of a municipality (“systematic failure to achieve

performance indicators of local self-government bodies”, Paragraph 3 of Article 21 of the draft law); and if it is preserved, then it is necessary to make a specific regulatory and legal elaboration, taking into account the following points:

- determine the timing when there is “systematic failure to achieve the indicators” (six months, 1 year, 2–3 years, etc.);

- revise the list of indicators characterizing the effectiveness of the activities of local self-government bodies and the head of the municipality (currently, the indicators approved by Presidential Decree 607, dated April 28, 2008 and RF Government Resolution 1317, dated December 17, 2012 reflect the activities of not only one head of the municipality, but also all LSG bodies of the municipality, and the values of some indicators are formed under the influence of many various factors, not always connected with the direct activities of local self-government bodies (Bukhval'd et al., 2022);

- elaborate the criteria (threshold values, value boundaries) for achieving/not achieving performance indicators of the head of the municipality and LSG bodies as a whole and substantiate the very possibility of determining the values of performance indicators for several thousand municipalities of Russia that differ in many parameters (Bukhval'd et al., 2022).

In addition, Article 23 of the draft law provides for the following grounds for the dismissal of the head of the local administration: violations committed by the head when addressing issues of direct provision of the vital activity of the population. However, it is unclear what will be the criterion for this violation, given that the budgets of many municipalities objectively may not have enough funds to fully address all issues of local importance.

4. The new federal law on local self-government should contain not only restrictions, prohibitions, grounds for long-term termination of the

powers of officials (their number in the draft law under consideration is already clearly excessive), but also guarantees to local self-government bodies themselves to ensure their independence in addressing issues of local importance; guarantees of the necessary amount of financial resources for high-quality and effective execution of powers; guarantees of prevention of unjustified interference in the activities of local self-government bodies by state authorities, excessive control and supervision of their activities.

5. It is advisable to exclude or specify the authority of local self-government bodies contained in Article 32 to “ensure the availability of medical care”, given that all issues and tasks of the development of medicine at the regional level are currently being addressed by the state authorities of the constituent entity of the Federation.

6. Chapter 8 “Intermunicipal cooperation” lists the same forms of intermunicipal cooperation that exist in the current 131-FZ: participation in the associations of municipal formations, establishment of intermunicipal economic societies (in the form of PJSCs and LLCs), creation of non-profit organizations in municipal formations (in the form of autonomous NPOs and foundations), conclusion of contracts and agreements. However, as practice shows, cooperation between Russian municipalities is mainly carried out within the framework of the activities of various associations of municipalities, exchange of experience between local governments, conclusion of various “framework” agreements and agreements on cooperation and intentions of interaction, organization of joint events. The closest (“economic”) forms of cooperation (establishment of intermunicipal economic societies and nonprofit organizations) are distributed extremely poorly (about 500–600 municipalities out of 20 thousand are founders of such organizations) due to the presence of many regulatory, organizational, financial and other obstacles and restrictions. The

adoption of special normative legal acts in the field of intermunicipal cooperation would help to solve these problems. Thus, on September 4, 2020, the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation posted a package of draft laws (however, they have not been submitted to the State Duma for two years) on the federal portal of draft regulatory legal acts (<https://regulation.gov.ru/projects#npa=107906>); the draft laws are aimed at legal regulation of the development of urban agglomerations (draft federal law “On urban agglomerations”) and improvement of legal mechanisms of intermunicipal cooperation. In particular, it was envisaged to introduce new forms of intermunicipal cooperation: intermunicipal enterprises and intermunicipal companies.

In general, it seems that this draft law was developed most likely without any vision of the concept of the new reform of local self-government, without a detailed in-depth analysis of the real problems of municipal governance and the development of municipalities in Russia, without the broad involvement of representatives of municipalities, scientific and expert communities.

Analyzing and explaining the results obtained

The main question that needs to be answered based on the results of a detailed analysis of the situation related to the new reform of local self-government and an assessment of the current situation in this area: does the draft law solve all the existing problems in the functioning of the institution of local self-government? It is not yet possible to give an unambiguously positive or negative answer. And yet, we hope that the most fundamental shortcomings of the draft law will be taken into account in the framework of the work on its amendments before the adoption of the law in its final form, and the reform of local self-government itself (if it is implemented at all in the near future, and not postponed due to events taking place in 2022) will eventually be launched

taking into account the interests, positions, real requests, needs of local self-government bodies with the participation of leading experts, scientists and specialists in this field. For these purposes, it is also advisable for federal authorities to establish a special institution (for example, from 1999 to 2010, Federal State Scientific Institution “Russian Scientific Center for State and Municipal Administration” was functioning in Moscow), which will analyze the processes of the reform of LSG, communicate with municipalities, work out scientifically substantiated and coordinated proposals for improving local self-government and all legislation related to this institution of public authority, as well as other analytical and expert activities.

As a result of a questionnaire survey conducted in 2022 among the heads of Vologda Oblast municipalities, key directions for improving the state policy in the field of development of LSG were also identified (they were indicated by 25 to 92% of the surveyed heads of municipalities):

- revision of federal legislation regarding the assignment of additional sources of income to the local level of government and the clear establishment of the spheres of activity and powers of local self-government bodies;
- active development of clusters in the region (forestry, dairy, chemical, engineering, tourism);
- replacement of subsidies to the local budget with additional standards of deductions from individual income tax;
- development, together with municipalities, of a special state program of the constituent entity of the Federation to support and develop local self-government, including state support for territorial public self-government, local initiatives;

- constant dissemination of best practices of municipal management from the experience of the Vologda Oblast and other regions;
- mandatory search for compromise options together with the population and local authorities when optimizing the network of social institutions;
- inclusion of the territorial section in regional strategies and programs (targets, tasks and activities for each municipal district, etc.);
- assistance (consulting, methodological, etc.) in organizing various forms of intermunicipal cooperation.

The general directions outlined in the article concerning the revision of the draft federal law on local self-government and recommendations for the reform of this public authority institution certainly require further elaboration and substantiation so that they become real legal norms and appropriate effective management mechanisms. Our subsequent scientific research and publications will address these problems.

The ideas and recommendations proposed in the article are polemical; they open up opportunities for further effective discussions on this topical issue (among managers, scientists, experts and other interested persons). Thus, the contribution of the research, the results of which are presented in the article, to the development of theoretical science consists in a scientific understanding of the prerequisites and prospects for the functioning of the institute of local self-government in Russia, taking into account socio-economic, political and other factors; contribution to the development of applied science consists in substantiating specific recommendations for the adjustment of the draft of the new federal law on local self-government.

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