

The Role of Local Communities in the Development of Small Territories



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Abstract. The paper studies the participation of local communities in the development of small territories and the conditions that increase public involvement in the processes of spatial development at the local level. We apply a socio-spatial approach to study local communities combined with an action-activist concept to spatial development. In the theoretical part, we consider the main approaches to the study of local communities and their role in the territories' development. We define the basic characteristics of the local community: social community; a common space, place; common interests, living conditions; ties, interaction. We provide the mechanisms of local community's participation in the development of territories. The empirical part of the study is based on data from the opinion poll, conducted in two large cities and five small ones of the Vologda Oblast in 2021 (N=1550). We consider the average values for large and small cities and compare the indicators of the local community's participation in the development of territories to reveal the features of this process. According to subjective estimates, we find that the main actors of territorial changes are the governing bodies and the local community, while business is practically not responsible for the development of the territories in which it operates. In small cities, compared to large cities, the local community is more focused on the development of territories and is aware of its responsibility. The local community shows a higher potential and level of participation in initiatives. In almost all practices, the share of participants in small cities is higher than in large cities. We determine that a lack of teamwork experience hinders community engagement in spatial development issues. As promising areas, we consider institutionalized mechanisms of local community participation in territories' development, such as participatory budgeting and project activities as part of the work of non-profit organizations.

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Key words: local communities, small territories, large city, development, social issues, participatory budgeting, non-profit organizations.

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Introduction

The present and future of the country is largely determined by the socio-economic development of the territories, which is noted in the “Strategy of spatial development of the Russian Federation through to 2025”, in which the leading role in the economy is assigned to megacities and large agglomerations. At the same time, the policy of spatial development should not lead to the desolation of small territories (Bukhval’d, Kol’chugina, 2019) – settlements with population of up to 50 thousand people, which include small and single-industry cities, urban-type settlements and rural settlements.

An important factor for the development of small territories is the administrative transformations aimed at the consolidation of municipalities. In recent years, there has been a trend to transform municipal districts into urban and municipal okrugs with the elimination of the settlement level of administration, which, according to research, does not show real significant economic and budgetary effects (Voroshilov, 2021). However, this process causes contradictory and skeptical assessments on the part of the population. This is due to the fact that the new administration is focused exclusively on the development of the central territory and does not communicate with small municipalities, which creates difficulties in interacting with local governments for residents when solving issues of local importance in various spheres (Pozarenko, 2015).

Meanwhile, 50% of the country’s population lives in small territories, as evidenced by statistical

data. In Russia, the number of small cities exceeds the number of large cities. As of 2021, there were 240 large cities and 801 small cities in the country, the largest group, which accounts for 71% of the total number of administrative-territorial entities. Small cities are home to 16.6 million people, and large cities to 24.4 million people. There are 16,332 rural settlements with a population of 29.2 million people¹.

Small territories have significant socio-cultural development potential, which consist in the special role of small cities and rural settlements in preserving cultural heritage and traditions (Aksenova, 2015; Titarenko, 2020; Khalii, 2008). At the same time, small settlements have favorable environmental conditions, natural resources and territories to expand economic activity, and develop industries related to tourism and health care (Kuznetsov, Chernysheva, 2012). Small territories ensure the food and national security of the state. Experts note, “small cities are real pillars of Russia on its vast territory; it is small and medium cities, primarily district centers, that provide a diverse connection between the territory and the state, form the territorial frame of governance on the scale of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation”².

¹ Population of the Russian Federation by Municipality. *FSSS*. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/compendium/document/13282>

² The importance and ways of development of small cities in the Spatial Development Program of Russia. The Union of Small Cities and Towns of the Russian Federation. Available at: <https://smgrf.ru/znachenie-i-puti-razvitiya-malyh-nebolshih-gorodov-v-programme-prostranstvennogo-razvitiya-rossii/?ysclid=1h10s412uy921541170>

Despite of the socio-cultural and economic potential, small territories have a set of problems that are considered in research, proved by statistical data and sociological surveys. Development trends indicate a decrease in the population of small cities and rural areas, including labor migration due to the lack of jobs and leisure facilities, a weakening of economic potential (Chernysh et al., 2020). There are acute problems of providing financial resources, the shortage of own income to address issues of socio-economic development (Bukhval'd, Pechenskaya, 2017), maintaining the necessary level of social infrastructure, the quality of life of the population and a comfortable living environment, the improvement of public space (Sekushina, 2020).

The above problems of small territories taking into account their advantages require the search for resources for their development with the help of the following actors: representatives of authority, business community, associations, trade unions, NPOs, state institutions, solidarity groups and individual citizens (Markin et al., 2019), who are part of the structure of the local community or are stakeholders of spatial transformation (Ukhanova, 2023). Research shows that development planning at the local level requires a bottom-up approach that increases the effectiveness of actions (Moallemi et al., 2021). It is important when the initiative comes from “below”, residents are ready to take responsibility for the future fate of the territory or an object (Smoleva, 2021). The effectiveness of the elements of this approach is due to the fact that local actors and the population are closely connected with their territory, aware of the main problems that require the development of local solutions (Manzo, Perkins, 2006).

Thus, the aim of the work is to generalize the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of local communities and to identify the features of their participation in the development of small territories.

Theoretical and methodological framework for the study

There are several basic approaches to the study of local communities and their role in territories' development in the scientific literature. The theoretical review is organized in the following sequence: first, we consider the scientific approaches that define basic characteristics (features) of the local communities (“consolidated territory”, “social capital” “citizen participation”). Second, the analysis perspective includes concepts that discuss the management component, planning and results of the functioning of local communities in the development of territories (“Theory of Change”, concept of local self-government).

1. In classic theory, local communities are interpreted from point of view of a “consolidated territory”. It refers to a place characterized by a homogeneous social structure where most people have the same opportunities and standard of living (Tykanova, Khokhlova, 2014; McKnight, 2016). This definition is close to the communitarian approach to (local) communities (Etzioni, 1995). Studies also determine that communities are formed in certain paces (within the boundaries of territories of various ranks). Living in a common location is a connecting factor for representatives of the community (Sharygin, Osorgin, 2018). Representatives of the Chicago School of Sociology (R. Park, L. Wirth) followed a similar approach; they considered urban communities as a spatial configuration with a certain urbanized lifestyle of the population (Park, Nikolaev, 2006).

2. One can consider the functioning of local communities from the perspective of the concept of social capital, which examines the characteristics of social life – a network based on trust and norms. It contains the premise that people are “embedded” in a network of social relationships that influence decisions and actions (Putnam, 2000). In this context, social capital is interpreted as a predictor that forms additional opportunities for

the development of local communities based on the ideas of cooperation, solidarization and trust (Rogach, 2020; Leping, Hon, 2019).

3. The Theory of Citizen Participation addresses the issue of the development of local communities. Citizen participation is seen as a tool for community development (Staples, 2012). This theory suggests that efforts to change at the community level are most achievable with the cooperation of local residents and their involvement in the process of solving problems in various forms, both formal (nonprofit organizations, public councils, territorial public self-government, etc.) and informal (initiatives groups, activists, online communities and others). There is a common criterion in the research of supporters of citizen participation – this is a socially significant result from the participation of the local community, and as a consequence, a common interest among community members (Ukhanova, 2022).

4. In managerial discourse, the local community is considered as the basis for territorial self-organization and self-government (Pyasetskaya, 2015, Maikova, Simonova, 2021). The management concept can be adapted to the issues of government relations with local communities based on determining the range of issues to be solved jointly, including management methods. The research notes that “local self-government bodies with the participation of local communities are able to solve such tasks for which the state does not have enough time. Effective local self-government frees public

authorities from many “small” cases and allow them to focus on solving strategic problems (Babun, 2017).

5. Noteworthy is Theory of Change – a tool for managing activities and results in local communities. It is based on a project and program approach to change and actions. The theory is used to plan and evaluate social outcomes (Funnell, Rogers, 2011; Msila, 2013).

In this discussion of theoretical approaches to local communities, we provide several of the most common conceptualizations of the phenomenon. In a loose sense, “local community” means a group of interacting people living in a common location. Therefore, the basic characteristics of a local community are shared identity (population); common location or place; common interests, standard of living; ties, interaction or communication. Although these crossing elements do not cover all possible characteristics of a community, they provide a starting point for examining the issues inherent in this phenomenon (Fig. 1).

A number of scientific works focus on the study of forms and mechanisms of participation of local communities in the development of territories. Foreign sources pay attention to such mechanisms as participatory budgeting (Sintomer et al., 2008; Zhang, Liao, 2011), community foundations (Azevedo et al., 2022), and online initiatives (Paricio-Esteban et al, 2020). Russian researcher A.A. Chernega singles out the following

Figure 1. Basic characteristics of a local community



Source: own compilation.

mechanisms: citizens' meetings, public discussions; participatory budgeting; crowdfunding; project activities through the implementation of grants; creation of nonprofit organizations (NPOs); information networks; constructions of tourist attractions; social investment (Chernega, 2020). M.L. Shagalov and A.Yu. Rubin consider territorial public self-government as a way to develop territories (Shagalov, Rubin, 2019).

The analysis of literature shows that there are many mechanisms of local community participation in the development of small territories. Nevertheless, it is necessary to identify the main mechanisms that

are most frequently encountered in the Russian reality, studied in scientific circles, and enshrined in legal and regulatory sources, including the key law "On general principles of organization of local self-government in the Russian Federation" (*Tab. 1*).

Based on the involvement of the local community, the presented mechanisms can be divided into active and passive forms. Active forms are distinguished by the direct participation of the local community in the implementation of projects, activities, actions for the development of residential areas, improving the quality of life, labor participation, monetary contribution. Passive forms

Table 1. Mechanisms of local community participation in territorial development

	Mechanism	Content	Source
Active forms of mechanisms (direct)	Participatory budgeting	A set of practices involving citizens in the budget process, united by the ideology of citizen participation, as well as the sphere of state and municipal regulation of public involvement in identifying and selecting projects to be financed from the funds of the respective budgets and subsequent control over the implementation of selected projects by citizens.	Methodological recommendations for the preparation and implementation of participatory budgeting practices in the Russian Federation (approved by the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation), amended December 22, 2021
	Projection	Activities related to project initiation, preparation, implementation (including monitoring and changes to projects) and completion. Project – a set of interrelated activities aimed at obtaining unique results under time and resource constraints.	RF Government Resolution 1288, dated October 31, 2018 (amended March 1, 2023) "On organization of project activities in the government of the Russian Federation"
	Territorial public self-government	Self-organization of citizens at their place of residence on a part of the territory of a settlement, intra-urban territory of a city of federal significance, municipal district, urban district, intra-urban district, as well as in settlements located on the inter-settlement territory (or on a part of their territory) for independent and on their own responsibility implementation of their own initiatives on issues of local significance.	Federal Law 131-FZ, dated October 6, 2003 (revisions dated May 29, 2023, amended May 30, 2023) "On general principles of organization of local self-government in the Russian Federation"
Passive forms of mechanisms (indirect)	Public hearings and discussions	A variety of the form of citizens' participation in the implementation of municipal governance, which provides the possibility of taking into account the opinion of the population of the municipality when solving issues at the local level.	Federal Law 131-FZ, dated October 6, 2003 (revisions dated May 29, 2023, amended May 30, 2023) "On general principles of organization of local self-government in the Russian Federation"
	Citizens' meetings	A form of collective resolution of local issues.	
	Opinion polls	It is carried out on the entire territory or part of the territory of the urban okrug to identify the opinion of the population and take it into account when making decisions.	
Source: own compilation based on regulatory and legal sources.			

are the involvement of citizens in the processes of initiation, discussion and control, which do not involve the investment of physical or financial resources from a person.

Thus, the undertaken review of the scientific literature shows that certain aspects of the study of local communities' participation in the development of territories receive sufficient coverage in both foreign and Russian publications. At the same time, integrating the theoretical knowledge obtained, this study relies on a socio-spatial approach to the study of local communities in combination with an activity-activist concept for the development of territories.

Materials and methods

We choose the Vologda Oblast for the analysis because small territories with a small population prevail there. The administrative-territorial structure of the Vologda Oblast includes only two large cities with population of more than 100 thousand people – Vologda and Cherepovets (an industrial center), 13 small cities with the population of less than 50 thousand people, 21 urban settlements and 158 rural settlements (as of January 1, 2022)³. In the Russian context, small territories are understood broadly as a socio-economic, natural and historical-cultural complex, that includes urban and rural population (up to 50 thousand people), as well as the territory within the official boundaries of the municipality.

The collection and analysis of the material took place in two stages, depending on the tasks set. At the first stage of the study, we assessed the main problems of small territories and studied the level of citizen participation based on the data from a sociological survey conducted on the territory of the Vologda Oblast in two large cities (Vologda, Cherepovets) and five small ones (Nikolsk, Sokol, Veliky Ustyug, Gryazovets, Sheksna) in 2021. The

³ The Vologda Oblast in Figures. 2021: Brief Stat. Coll. (2022). Vologdastat. Vologda. P. 130.

sample totaled 1,550 respondents. We considered average values for the types of cities included in the survey, as well as compared large and small cities in terms of indicators of local community participation in the development of the territory to identify the characteristics of this process. The choice of territories, in particular cities, rather than rural settlements, is due to the availability of the necessary data.

At the second stage, we analyzed the mechanisms of participation of the local community in the development of territories based on regulatory and legal sources, reports of federal authorities, public structures at the regional and local levels, open data of the Presidential Grants Fund, which supports nonprofit nongovernmental organizations involved in the development of civil society institutions and implementing social projects on a competitive basis.

The empirical base, depending on sources and indicators, covers the period 2017–2022.

Findings and discussion

Subjective assessments of the territories' main problems and assessments of the local community's participation (the Vologda Oblast)

First of all, to choose the directions of small territories' development involving the local community, it is essential to outline the problems that are the most acute for the residents of these territories and require solutions. It is possible to reveal these problems using the materials of official statistics and reports of the authorities⁴, which are reflected in many studies. However, from the perspective of the research goal, subjective assessments of residents as a local community are of interest. Sociological data show that the priority problem for the population is a low standard of living and a constant increase in prices (62–56%),

⁴ For example, the Consolidated Report of the Vologda Oblast on the results of monitoring the effectiveness of local self-government bodies of urban okrugs and municipal districts by the end of 2021. Official portal of the Vologda Oblast Government. Available at: https://vologda-oblast.ru/dokumenty/mestnoe_samoupravlenie/

Table 2. Distribution of answers to the question “What problems of modern life do you consider the most acute for your locality?”, %

Respond option	Large cities*	Small cities**
Low standard of living, constant price growth	62	56
Poor quality of medical services	35	47
Poor quality of educational services	14	29
Low housing affordability	30	25
Stratification of the population into “poor” and “rich”	29	23
Ecology, environmental pollution	34	22
Absence (lack) of conditions for recreation, leisure activities	12	20
The need to master digital technologies	13	19
Unfavorable conditions for small business development, lack of state support	18	16
Violation of civil rights	17	12
Excessive strengthening of executive power	17	11
High crime rate	8	3
<p>* Vologda and Cherepovets **Nikolsk, Sokol, Veliky Ustyug, Gryazovets, Sheksna (here and further in the tables and figures on the opinion poll, the average values for large and small cities are presented). Ranked according to the indicators for small cities. Source: opinion poll, Vologda Oblast, 2021, N=1,550.</p>		

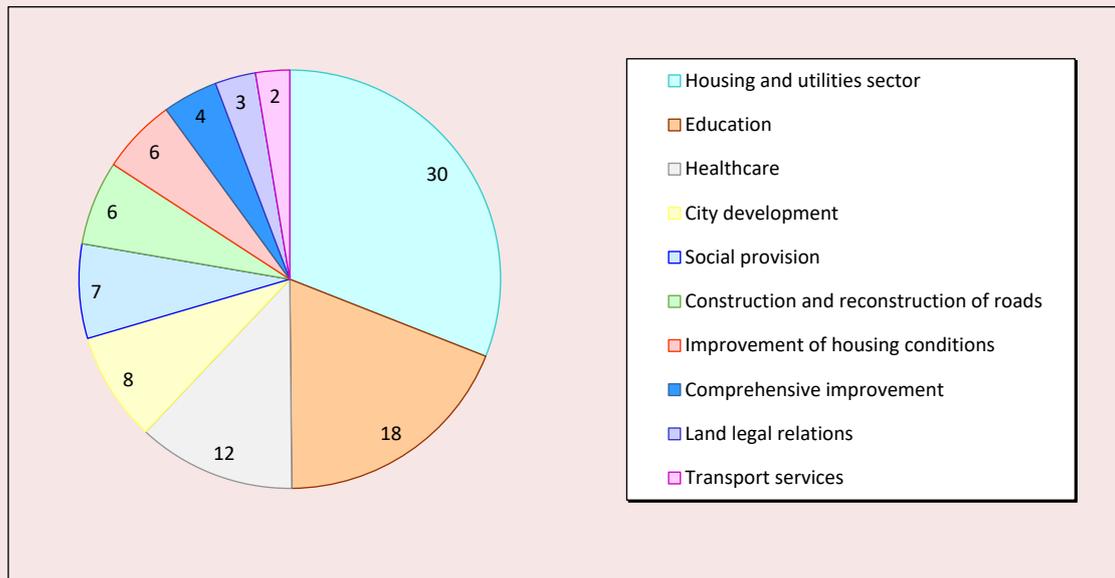
while in the estimates of residents of small cities, this problem is felt less acutely than in large ones. The low quality of medical and educational services is of the greatest concern to the local community of small cities, at the same time, the issue of low housing affordability is more significant for the population of large cities in the oblast. Among the problems noted by the population, social inequality occupies a high place in the rating, but the local community of small cities is less sharply stratified into “poor” and “rich” than in large municipalities. There is a different attitude toward environmental problems. The most acute state of the environment is assessed by residents of large cities of the Vologda Oblast (33%) than small ones (22%). It should be noted that for small territories, the issue of creating conditions for recreation and leisure activities is relevant (*Tab. 2*).

In addition to opinion polls, problems that concern the local community can be identified based on such a data source as citizens’ appeals. According to the Department of Domestic Policy of the Vologda Oblast, which monitors the consideration of citizens’ appeals, in 2021 the population of the oblast sent 44.2 thousand appeals

to local self-government bodies. The received requests are considered taking into account the subject matter of the issues raised in the appeals. So, in 2021, citizens most often applied about problems in housing and communal services (30% of the total), education (18%), healthcare (12%). The next groups of issues of concern for the local community are urban planning, social security and the condition of roads (*Fig. 2*).

Thus, there is a request from the local community of small territories to solve problems in the social sphere that serves the basic needs of the population. At the same time, by the nature of the impact on the noted problems, their solution mainly belongs to the prerogative of the authorities of the federal center, region or local self-government. This raises the question of the readiness of the population to be involved in the process of improving the living space, and the identification of those problems and gaps which the local community could deal with. The study shows that among the main problems that can be successfully solved by the joint efforts of people, the population of both large and small cities includes poor ecology, environmental pollution (23–25%) and a low standard of living (22%).

Figure 2. The subject of citizens' appeals received in 2021, in %



Source: Information on the consideration of citizens' appeals received by the Government of the Vologda Oblast and local self-government of the oblast in 2021

An important indicator that determines the involvement of the local community in the development of the place of residence is the awareness of responsibility, which includes the definition of the main subjects of the process of territorial transformation. The analysis of the data obtained shows that in large cities, in comparison with small ones, the proportion of those who assign responsibility for development to federal, regional and local authorities is noticeably higher (61–44%). At the same time, 34% of respondents in large cities of the oblast feel their own respon-

sibility for the state of affairs. On the contrary, in small cities, the local community is more focused on the development of territories and is aware of its responsibility (52%). The role of the federal, regional authorities and the head of the municipality in the development of the territory in the views of residents of small territories is less than the potential contribution of the local community. We should note that in the estimates of the population, business is practically not responsible for the development of both small and large cities (Tab. 3).

Table 3. Assessment of responsibility for the development of the place of residence*, %

Respond option	Large cities	Small cities
Local self-government bodies	61	53
Residents	34	52
State authorities of the oblast	59	41
The head of the municipality	37	40
Federal authorities	44	39
Private business	11	11
Public organizations	13	9

Ranked according to indicators for small cities.
Source: opinion poll, Vologda Oblast, 2021, N=1,550.

Based on the data obtained, we can conclude that according to subjective estimates of the population, two main actors of territorial changes are identified – these are government bodies and the local community. At the same time, residents of small cities are aware of their own subjectivity in setting up a favorable environment in their place of residence. The distribution by territories revealed a high level of responsibility for the development of their locality of residents of small cities, which may be explained by their positive attitude to the place of residence and local identity. It is significant, in this

regard, that more than a third (35%) of respondents in small cities answer “I am glad that I live here”, in large cities only 23% hold this opinion, residents of large cities express indifference to the place of residence more than small ones (Fig. 3.).

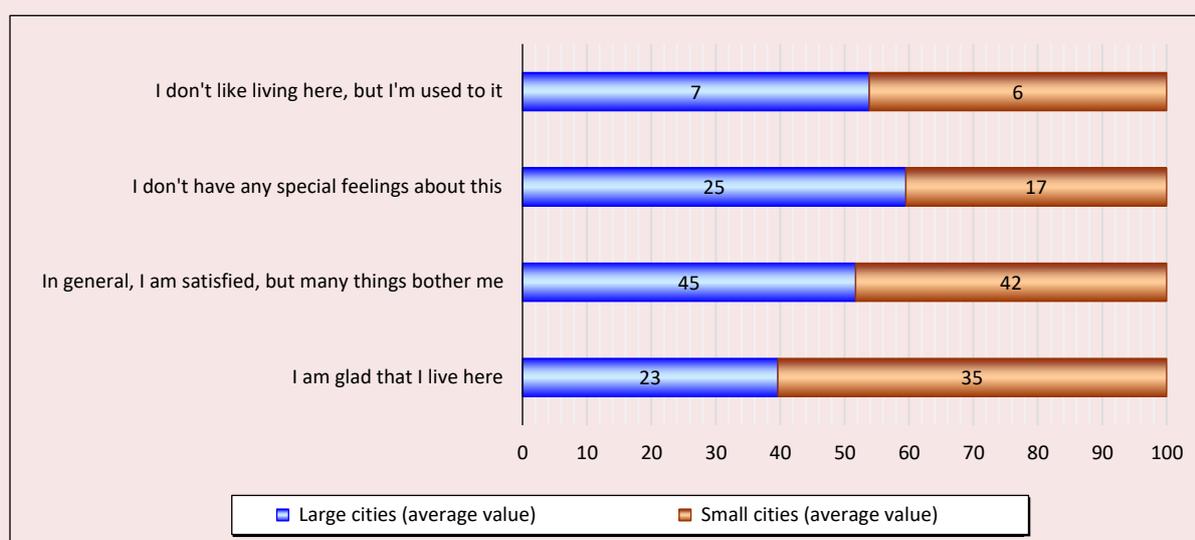
According to the results of the study, residents in small cities show a greater potential readiness for collective action (public involvement) to solve problems in their place of residence. When asked about personal interest (individual involvement) in joint activities to solve common issues, 62% of the population of small territories noted that

Table 4. The potential of the involvement of the local community in the development of territories and the solution of common issues*, %

<i>The potential of public involvement (assessment of others)*</i>			<i>Potential of individual involvement (personal assessment)**</i>		
Respond option	Large cities	Small cities	Respond option	Large cities	Small cities
Yes	12	16	Of course, I am with those who are ready to unite	10	16
Rather yes	42	41	I am rather ready to unite	37	46
Rather no	31	30	I am rather not ready to unite	39	30
No	15	13	I am absolutely not ready to unite	13	9

*Distribution of answers to the question “Do you think the surrounding people are ready to unite to solve problems in the place of residence?”;
 **Distribution of answers to the question “There are people who are ready to unite with others for joint actions to solve common issues, and there are those who prefer not to unite with others. What would you consider yourself to be?”
 Source: opinion poll, Vologda Oblast, 2021, N=1,550.

Figure 3. Attitude of the population of large and small cities of the Vologda Oblast toward their place of residence, %



Source: opinion poll, Vologda Oblast, 2021, N=1,550.

“Of course, I am with those who are ready to unite” and “I am rather ready to unite”, and only a small proportion (9%) exclude the option of inclusion in general practices of the development of territories by the local community. In large cities, the potential for unification and civic participation among the local community is much smaller (*Tab. 4*).

Most people do not take part in public life events whatever their location. The average data for Russia shows that one third of the country’s residents are involved in public initiatives and the activities of nonprofit organizations⁵. Regional measurements showed a higher level of participation in local community initiatives in small territories. Inclusion of citizens in self-organization practices was 18% for large cities and 23% for small cities. Almost for all practices, the share of those participating in small cities is higher than in large cities. Moreover, out of the proposed 13 practices of public participation of small cities’ residents, the most demanded were charitable actions, activities aimed at improving the territories where they live and activities aimed

at interaction with the authorities. Institutionalized forms of participation within the framework of nonprofit organizations and territorial public self-government are somewhat less frequently noted (*Tab. 5*).

Thus, an empirical study reveals a rather significant contradiction. Despite the high potential readiness of small cities’ residents to participate in the solution of common issues, the level of actual participation is estimated as rather low. This is confirmed by the studies carried out at the all-Russian level in the context of small cities (Chernysh et al., 2020) and in the author’s analytical works directly on the Vologda Oblast and Northwestern Federal District regions (Ukhanova, 2021). The problem of participation of local communities in the formation of a favorable environment for the development of the economy and social sphere is much less often considered in the context of comparing small and large cities, which is of interest from the perspective of identifying territorial features.

Table 5. Participation of local community in public life events*, %

Respond option	Large cities	Small cities
Charity events (including cash donations to those in need)	38	41
Community work at the place of residence (litter picking, residential and public landscaping, meeting of residents, etc.)	41	35
Signing of appeals, petitions to the authorities	19	25
Public hearings, reports of local authorities	10	23
Participation in self-management of the house, entrance	29	23
Public discussion of socially significant issues (in a team, at a meeting, etc.)	13	22
Participation/support of the environmental movement (separate garbage collection, conservation of green spaces, animal protection, etc.)	26	20
Volunteer work	17	19
Public actions on important nonpolitical issues (for example, deforestation, construction of parking lots, spot development, etc.)	12	18
Elimination of the consequences of natural disasters	9	18
Keeping the peace (citizen patrol, etc.)	9	18
Activities of a nonprofit (public) organization	7	17
Territorial public self-government	6	17
Level of participation (average value by practice)	18	23
Source: opinion poll, Vologda Oblast, 2021, N=1,550.		

⁵ “To trust and participate: What do citizens know about NPOs?”. Monitoring the State of Civil Society of the Center for Civil Society and Nonprofit Sector Research of the National Research University Higher School of Economics. Available at: <https://www.hse.ru/monitoring/mcs/presentations>

For a clearer understanding of the obstacles to self-organization at the level of local communities, respondents were asked the appropriate question. Uniting people with each other to solve a common problem in the large cities of the region is primarily hindered by disbelief in the possibility of changing something. The second and third places in the rating of obstacles are occupied by the answer options – the disunity of people and individual human qualities. In small cities, the distribution of reasons for nonparticipation looks different. Among the proposed list of obstacles to joint actions aimed at achieving the common good, the leading option is the lack of experience in working together, and the following obstacles are uncertainty in the results of their activities and insufficient resources to solve a particular problem. At the same time, the least significant obstacles were the absence of community members with whom one would like to unite (*Tab. 6*).

In our opinion, the data obtained can be interpreted as follows. First, the population of small settlements, for the most part, does not actually participate in finding solutions to problems on their territory of residence and does not use the practices of participation formed at the local level, despite the awareness of problems affecting the individual space of everyday life. However, the population is aware of its own responsibility for the development

of territories. Another positive point is that there is a relatively high potential and attitudes toward the need for cooperation to solve common problems in small cities in relation to the same indicator in large cities.

Second, the prerequisite for increasing the involvement of the local community in the formation of a favorable environment for living is that the main obstacle in small cities is the lack of collective work experience. When forming the necessary institutional conditions for obtaining such experience, taking into account the above positive aspects, we can expect an increase in the level of self-organization of citizens to implement their own initiatives on issues of local importance. In this regard, the formation of institutional conditions for the collective activity of local communities becomes important, which include the practices of participatory budgeting and project activities enshrined in the Russian regulatory framework, which is noted in the theoretical and methodological part of the study when systematizing the mechanisms of participation of the local community in the development of territories.

Mechanisms of participation of the local community in the development of territories: participatory budgeting (1) and project activities within the framework of the work of nonprofit organizations (2)

Table 6. Rating of obstacles to uniting people to solve a problem that concerns them*, %

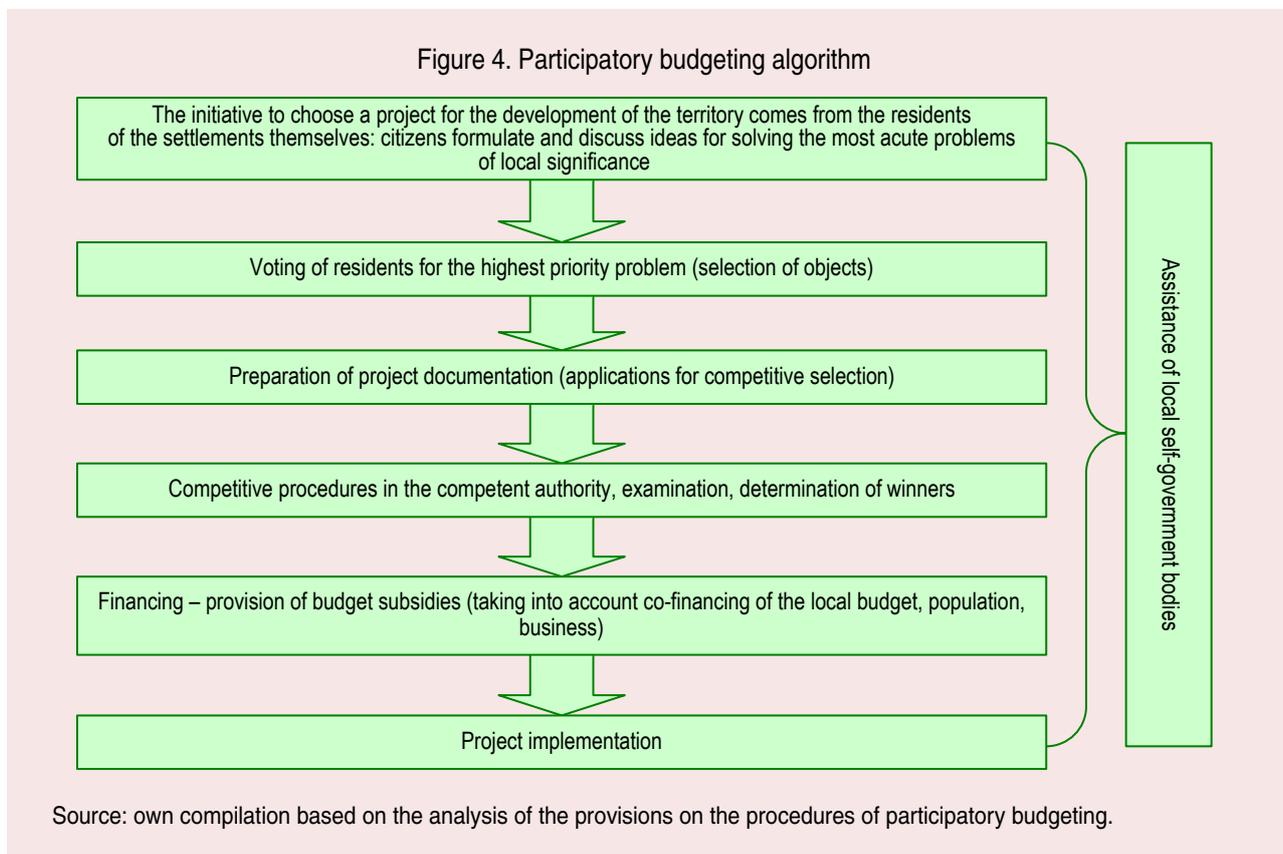
Respond option	Large cities	Small cities
Lack of teamwork experience	40	48
Disbelief in the possibility of changing something	66	47
Lack of resources (including financial ones) to solve a particular problem	36	44
Human qualities (laziness, selfishness, etc.)	44	41
Disunity of people, everyone is busy with their own affairs	47	36
People just don't want to do something for others	23	32
Lack of support from regional and local authorities	38	29
The absence of leaders in the locality who are able to lead	32	27
The opportunity to take advantage of what others have done	14	26
Lack of information about someone's success (in other cities)	17	20
Fears of being in opposition to the local government	24	16
There are no people with whom I would like to unite	11	10
Source: opinion poll, Vologda Oblast, 2021, N=1,550.		

When considering the issues of participation of the local community in the development of territories, the issue of citizens' involvement in the budget process within the framework of participatory budgeting projects deserves special attention – a mechanism for attracting additional financial resources aimed at solving issues of local importance with the direct participation of the population of a particular territory. As A.N. Didenko and I.V. Babichev note, “solving problems of local importance in participatory budgeting is accompanied by a number of additional economic, managerial, and social effects” (Didenko, Babichev, 2023). Thus, the managerial effect is to create comfortable conditions for interaction between local self-government bodies and the local community, and to increase the efficiency of municipal finance management by involving the population and business in decision-making processes on their use. The economic effect is to attract financial resources for the development

of territories. The social effect is the willingness to invest personal resources that are converted into other socially significant processes such as the increase of social capital in the local community, the growth of civic culture, solidarity and local identity.

In Russia, the mechanism of participatory budgeting is applied at the federal (for example, the national project “Housing and urban environment” and its federal project “Formation of a comfortable urban environment”; the state program “Integrated rural development”), regional (“People’s budget” in the Vologda Oblast) and local levels.

The implementation of participatory budgeting, depending on the legal regulation in the constituent entity of the Russian Federation, is somewhat modified. However, the general features are that the procedure takes place in most cases on a competitive basis with the participation of residents and in general the algorithm includes the following actions reflected in the diagram (Fig. 4).



According to the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, based on the analysis of data received from 75 regions, there is a significant increase in the number of practices of participatory budgeting from 212 in 2020 to 323 in 2021. The total number of applied practices involving citizens' participation in budget decisions has grown from 290 to 406. We should note that the group of municipal practices demonstrates the best dynamics: from 2018 to 2021, their number increased more than three times (from 91 to 274). In 2021, the Vologda Oblast became one of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation leading in the Northwestern Federal District in financial support of participatory budgeting projects, depending on the indicators: the share of funds allocated to projects in the regional budget of the constituent entity of the Russian Federation and budget support per inhabitant (Tab. 7).

In the Vologda Oblast, the practice of participatory budgeting is carried out within the framework of the "People's budget" project, which has been operating in the region since 2015 and is part of the state program "Regional Finance Management of the Vologda Oblast for 2021–2025" (Subprogram 2 "Maintaining the sustainable

execution of local budgets and improving the quality of municipal finance management"). This project provides for the selection of initiatives of residents on the condition of co-financing: from donations of citizens in the amount of at least 5% of the project cost; 25% from the local budget of municipalities or business funds; 70% – a subsidy from the regional budget. The main directions of the projects are the improvement of territories, the organization of mass sports, leisure and cultural life, the solution of problems in the field of housing and communal services, communications and public order⁶. According to S.G. Zhestyannikov, "minimal co-financing from the population is more correctly regarded as an engaging mechanism that promotes immersion in the process of discussing and implementing the project, and then using its results" (Zhestyannikov, 2021).

The analysis of the indicators of initiatives of local communities within the framework of the "People's budget" project indicates a significant increase in the volume of subsidies from the regional budget from 2017 to 2022 (more than 8 times) to support the project ideas of residents to improve living conditions in small territories. Perhaps this is due to the fact that initially subsidizing initiatives of

Table 7. Regions-leaders in the Northwestern Federal District in financial support of participatory budgeting projects in 2021

Constituent entity of the Northwestern Federal District	Number of participatory budgeting practices	Share of funds for participatory budgeting in the RF constituent entity, %	Budget support of information security for one person, rubles
Republic of Karelia	3	0.65	711.95
Komi Republic	1	0.25	316.25
Vologda Oblast	1	0.27	256.86
Kaliningrad Oblast	3	0.42	479.84
Novgorod Oblast	6	0.88	721.32

Source: Report on the best practices of development of participatory budgeting in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and municipalities for 2022. Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation. Available at: https://minfin.gov.ru/common/upload/library/2022/09/main/0512_Doklad_2022_V4.pdf

⁶ Consolidated annual report on the progress of implementation and assessment of the effectiveness of the Vologda Oblast state programs for 2022. Available at: <https://kgzsisb.gov35.ru/gosudarstvennaya-sluzhba>

Table 8. Dynamics of indicators of local communities' initiatives within the framework of the "People's Budget" project in the Vologda Oblast

Indicator	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022 to 2017, times
Amount of subsidies provided in the regional budget for the implementation of the project, million rubles	48.8	59.6	88.7	156.5	305.8	405.8	8.3
Number of settlements participating in the competition	124	128	168	163	175	171	1.4
Number of municipal districts and okrugs participating in the competition	25	25	26	25	22	24	1.0
Number of winning projects	373	458	818	976	1,472	1,335	3.6
Share of residents of the oblast directly involved in the process of solving issues of local importance of the municipalities of the oblast within the framework of the implementation of the "People's budget" project, %	8.2	11.0	11.0	11.5	11.5	12.0	1.5
Source: data of the Vologda Oblast Department of Finance "Budget for Citizens"; Consolidated annual report on the progress of implementation and on the assessment of the effectiveness of state programs of the Vologda Oblast for 2017–2022.							

the population at the expense of the regional budget was 50%, starting in 2020 it increased to 70% of the total cost of the project. From the point of view of the development of small territories, the revealed trend of growth in the number of municipalities participating in the competition by 1.4 times (2017 to 2022) is positive, settlements have become especially actively involved in the project since 2019. In 2022, 171 settlements out of 179 formed by the administrative-territorial division of the region applied for the competition, i.e. the project covers almost the full volume of urban and rural settlements that belong to small territories of the oblast. The "People's budget" project involved 12% of the oblast's residents in the process of solving local issues of municipalities within the framework of implementation, an increase in the indicator for 2017–2022 is 1.5 times (*Tab. 8*).

Despite the positive dynamics of the regional project "People's budget", independent practices of participatory budgeting in the Vologda Oblast have not been widely spread in municipalities. This allows concluding that it is necessary to form a comprehensive approach to the development of this mechanism in the oblast, including the introduction of municipal practices of organizing participatory budgeting with financing from local budgets with

the relevant regulatory and legal tools for involving citizens. As a practical case, we can cite the experience of Vologodsky Municipal Okrug as the first emerging practice of municipal participatory budgeting in the oblast. Since 2022, the local project "People's decision" has been operating in the okrug. By the end of 2022, more than 9 million rubles were allocated from the municipal budget for the implementation of people's initiatives. The project involves initiatives of residents mainly on improvement of territories, which were not selected at the regional level⁷.

A mechanism of direct community participation in stimulating new activities and attracting resources to the territory is the formation of non-governmental nonprofit organizations by active groups⁸ (Chernega, 2020). A characteristic feature of the formation of nonprofit organizations is that they are created on the initiative of citizens and

⁷ Public participation as a resource for development: Experience and prospects for the implementation of initiative budgeting projects in Vologodsky Municipal Okrug of the Vologda Oblast. Materials of the round table, dated March 23, 2023. State Duma of the Russian Federation. Available at: http://komitet4.km.duma.gov.ru/upload/site28/12._ZhESTYaNNIKOV_SG.pdf

⁸ Public associations, public organizations, social movements, foundations and other organizational and legal forms of nonprofit organizations.

Table 9. Number of nonprofit organizations in the context of municipalities, 2020–2022, units

Type of territory	2020	2021	2022	2022 to 2020, %
Large cities	1,148	1,153	1,189	3.6
Small territories	484	475	455	-6.0

Source: own compilation based on: Priyatelev V.V., Voskresenskaya O.V. (2022). Report on the state and development of civil society institutions in the Vologda Oblast in 2022. Public Chamber of the Vologda Oblast, Resource Center of the NPO "Initiative". Vologda, 2022. P. 118.

assume their integration to solve social problems and obtain public goods. However, the dynamics of the number of NPOs in the provincial territories of the Vologda Oblast shows a negative trend. Thus, the growth in the number of NPOs is typical for large cities in the region (+4%). On the contrary, in districts (okrugs) and small territories, there is a gradual decrease in the number of NPOs, from 2020 to 2022 it amounted to 6% (*Tab. 9*). Detailed breakdown by municipal districts and okrugs shows that there is a decrease in NPOs in 16 out of 26 municipal districts and okrugs. There is a positive trend in only 5 territories of municipalities⁹.

Thus, the analysis revealed one of the factors affecting the development of NPOs and, consequently, local community initiatives: the concentration of nonprofit organizations in large economically attractive centers and a decrease in their number in small cities and municipalities. We identify a high level of territorial differentiation of nonprofit sector representation within the same region.

Nevertheless, NPOs are an active actor in the territory and act as a tool for attracting grant funds and an aggregator of nonfinancial resources, a channel for articulating the interests (needs) of the local community. These organizations attract federal funds for the development of small territories and solving problems in the social sphere,

⁹ Priyatelev V.V., Voskresenskaya O.V. (2022). Report on the state and development of civil society institutions in the Vologda Oblast in 2022. Public Chamber of the Vologda Oblast, Resource Center of the NPO "Initiative". Vologda, 2022. P. 118.

which is proved by the open information of the Presidential Grants Fund, which supports nonprofit nongovernmental organizations implementing social projects on a competitive basis. In the course of the study, we find that a limited number of NPOs operate in small territories, in this regard, there is a significant gap in the amount of funds raised, the number of projects in the spatial distribution of "large city—small territories". The total volume of support provided for social projects in 2017–2022 in large cities of the oblast amounted to 432.4 million rubles, in small territories – 129.2 million rubles. However, there are insignificant differences in the average amount per supported project, which indicates the implementation of resource-intensive initiatives of the local community in small settlements within the framework of the activities of nonprofit organizations. A detailed analysis of the initiative projects that have received financial support from the Fund, in the context of small territories of the Vologda Oblast, allows identifying a leader in the funds raised. The nonprofit sector of Totemsky Municipal Okrug implemented 27 projects totaling 69.7 million rubles at the expense of federal competitive financing in 2017–2022. In 2022, the volume of funds raised in the okrug amounted to 26.9 million rubles. During the period under review, positive changes are recorded for both small and large cities. At the same time, despite the positive trends and growth, there is some instability in the dynamics of indicators (*Tab. 10*).

The financial support of NPOs is implemented by the Presidential Grants Fund in several directions, the list of which gives reason to believe

Table 10. Dynamics of indicators of participation of nonprofit organizations of large cities and small territories of the Vologda Oblast in the social and project activities of the Presidential Grants Fund 2017–2022

Indicator	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Large cities*						
Amount of funds raised, million rubles	56.8	51.8	98.0	97.9	44.4	83.5
Number of supported projects, units	40	43	80	75	40	50
Average amount per project, million rubles	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.7
Small territories**						
Amount of funds raised, million rubles	6.9	17.2	31.6	22.7	14.2	36.6
Number of supported projects, units	8	15	17	21	12	15
Average amount per project, million rubles	0.9	1.2	1.9	1.1	1.2	2.4
* Vologda and Cherepovets						
** Okrugs and municipal districts of the Vologda Oblast.						
Winning projects were selected according to the following filters: region, municipality, date – January–December of the respective year.						
Source: own compilation based on the data of the Presidential Grants Fund (available at: президентскиегранты.рф) according to all competitions held by the Presidential Grants Fund since the start of its work on April 3, 2017.						

Table 11. Directions of supported projects of nongovernmental nonprofit organizations of the Vologda Oblast (Presidential Grants Fund 2017–2022), %

Direction	Large cities	Small territories
Strengthening interethnic and interreligious harmony	0.3	1.6
Preservation of historical memory	16.4	18.1
Protection of citizens' health, promotion of a healthy lifestyle	16.7	11.0
Support of projects in the field of culture and art	4.9	10.2
Support for family, motherhood, fatherhood and childhood	15.1	4.7
Environmental and animal protection	5.9	13.4
Support for youth projects	1.9	14.2
Development of public diplomacy and support of compatriots	0.9	0.0
Social services, social support and protection of citizens	20.7	19.7
Support of projects in the field of science, education, enlightenment	9.9	3.1
Development of civil society institutions	4.9	3.1
Protection of human and civil rights and freedoms, including protection of prisoners' rights	2.5	0.8
Total:	100.0%	100.0%
Source: own compilation based on the data of the Presidential Grants Fund. Available at: президентскиегранты.рф.		

that these organizations have the capacity to solve a wide range of socio-economic problems of territories and improve the quality of life of the population. In small territories, the largest number of supported projects under federal funding is aimed at preserving historical memory and social support for citizens. In large cities, with the exception of those noted, the solution of problems in the sphere of citizens' health is a priority (*Tab. 11*).

We should note that the list of areas in which the Fund supports nonprofit organizations does not include landscaping and creating a comfortable living environment. However, a meaningful analysis of the projects shows that initiatives to improve and create tourist attractiveness of small territories are being implemented within the framework of the most supported direction – the preservation of historical memory.

Thus, the mechanism of socio-cultural design within the framework of the activities of nonprofit organizations is aimed at involving the active part of the local community in practices for the development of small territories. It is noteworthy that the study revealed a decrease in the number of NPOs and their small number in small territories, as well as an insignificant level of participation of the population as a whole. We assume that with the progressive and sustainable development of the nonprofit sector, the share of socially significant projects involving inactive groups of the local community and their contribution to solving the problems of the social sphere of the territories that were identified at the first stage of this study will increase.

Conclusion

The results obtained indicate the importance of the development of small territories and the participation of the local community in this process, especially in the context of limited budgetary opportunities and resources to solve social problems and meet the needs of the population.

In accordance with the aim of the study, we identify the characteristics of the local community of small cities by comparing them with large settlements based on an array of data provided by the opinion poll. In small cities, the local community is more focused on the development of territories and is aware of its responsibility than in large cities of the oblast. We reveal a higher potential and level of participation in initiatives in the local community of small territories. In almost all practices, the share of participants in small cities is higher than in large ones. We determine that a significant barrier to the involvement of the population in the processes of solving the problems of the place of residence is the lack of collective work experience. Subjective assessments show that the main actors of territorial changes are the governing bodies and

the local community, and business is practically not responsible for the development of territories.

Institutionalized mechanisms of participation of the local community in the development of territories are considered as promising directions in overcoming these barriers: participatory budgeting and project activities within the framework of the work of nonprofit organizations.

The implementation of the “People’s budget” project for participatory budgeting in the Vologda Oblast shows positive dynamics of indicators: the project covers almost all major issues of local importance at the settlement level, but the priority remains for the improvement of territories; the number of participating settlements and projects that have received support increases; there is an increase in the amount of subsidies from the regional budget; the share of residents of the Vologda Oblast increases, involved in the process.

We establish that there is a certain disproportion within the oblast regarding the representation of nonprofit organizations that act as a unifying channel for the activities of the local community in the direction of territorial development: concentration in large cities and a decrease in their representation in small cities and municipalities. However, we have found that the mechanism of project activities of NPOs is an additional opportunity to attract financial resources on an extra-budgetary basis to the social sphere of small territories with the participation of the local community and the effect of such activities will allow closing part of the problems of development of these territories. The potential social effect of such a mechanism is the involvement of a wide range of local residents in projects to create a favorable environment and comfortable living conditions.

The further research plan includes an in-depth analysis of factors, barriers and prospects for the participation of the local community in overcoming

social contradictions and the development of their settlements, depending on the presence of social small territories, as well as the development of a problems there and the degree of development of methodology for typologizing small cities and rural social potential.

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