

Solving Global Challenges Locally: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Local Governance

Anna Phirtskhalashvili¹ , George Gvartadze² 

¹Georgian National University SEU, Tbilisi, Georgia

²Akaki Tsereteli State University (ATSU), Kutaisi, Georgia

Email: a.phirtskhalashvili@seu.edu.ge, george.gvartadze@atsu.edu.ge

How to cite this paper: Phirtskhalashvili, A., & Gvartadze, G. (2024). Solving Global Challenges Locally: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Local Governance. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 12, 624-638. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.124041>

Received: March 21, 2024

Accepted: April 26, 2024

Published: April 29, 2024

Copyright © 2024 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

In today's turbulent global landscape, characterized by crises, pandemics, and conflicts, the fundamental human rights and principles often find themselves relegated to the background. This interdisciplinary paper delves into the pivotal role of local self-government in shaping a nation's trajectory towards European integration, shedding light on the challenges it faces and presenting viable solutions. Recognizing the indispensable nature of local self-government in the lives of citizens, this study explores its constitutional significance, particularly in alignment with Chapter 9 of Georgia's Constitution. With a strong focus on enhancing citizen participation and addressing public needs, the paper advocates for a balanced distribution of governance powers between central and local authorities. It underscores the importance of decentralization, democratization, and the efficient functioning of local self-government systems in effectively addressing localized concerns. Through an in-depth analysis, this research offers a comprehensive understanding of these critical facets, taking into account their implications in our ever-evolving global landscape. By reiterating the significance of upholding human rights and democratic principles at the local level, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on the sustainable development and integration of nations in an increasingly complex world. The aim of the article, in general, is to make clear to the readers and the narrow professional community the importance of the role of local self-government in the process of democratization, which is largely due to the activity of the local civil society. The article, based on the competence of its authors (law and economics), relies on an interdisciplinary research method. This means that legal and economic theories regarding the democratization of local self-government are discussed in a complex manner. Therefore, the discussion about the issue, as well as the conclusions and recommendations are not only presented in a narrow context, but it also reflects the legal and

economic synthesis of the development of local self-government. Based on interdisciplinary research, the article uses sources such as international and national legal acts, economic judgments and definitions belonging to leading scholars in the field.

Keywords

Local Self-Government, European Integration, Decentralization, Devolution, Democratization

1. Introduction

The contemporary world is increasingly taking on the appearance of a place full of contradictions and unpredictability, posing a serious threat to the regular pattern of pursuit, development and even the existence and viability of nations, economic entities or individuals. Coincidentally, global processes, including economic and political crises, pandemic, full-scale war, etc., contribute to gradually shaping an unstable situation and ignoring fundamental human rights and principles.

The prospects that materialize from today's outlook do not really allow for reassurance. The situation is very dire and the initiation of opportunities to change it for the better is becoming an increasingly complex and multifaceted endeavor that can no longer be accommodated within the framework of any single field. The problems raised in the article, which are typical for modern Georgia, have been the focus of attention of economists, lawyers and practicing professionals for several decades. A number of studies, articles, analytical materials, etc., were devoted to the mentioned issues. By the end of the 20th century, the problems of local self-government were mainly of interest to the authors of the developed countries of the West. Most of them, quite rightly, connected the issue of development of local self-governments with guaranteeing the protection of fundamental human rights.

However, in the last 20 - 25 years, many researchers from developing countries have been involved in the analysis of this problem. In this regard, not only the works of theoretician scientists are interesting, but also the regulatory and policy documents of individual states, research conducted by leading financial institutions and relevant analytical materials, and so on.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the importance of local self-government along with the progress the state makes on its path to Europe, as well as to identify the problems, and at the same time, to offer general opinions on ways how to solve them. It can be said that regarding local self-government, decentralization and other similar issues, researchers' opinion is divided into two. Some support delegation of power and deconcentration of power, seeing it as the main support for the development of the country as a whole. The latter, on the contrary, support the centralized model of governance, because they consider it the only con-

dition for ensuring statehood.

In the present article, the authors develop an argumentative reasoning in the direction of supporting the decentralization of governance and examine the issue with inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches in order to analyze the research object from multiple perspectives, which creates the possibility of developing more correct and time-stable recommendations. Legal analysis is critically important as the issue, given its importance, is raised to a constitutional rank. Chapter 9 of the Constitution of Georgia examines this point at issue.

In order for the governance system to sufficiently respond to public needs and ensure citizen participation in the decision-making process, it is necessary to optimally redistribute governance powers and relevant resources between the central and local self-government bodies. Decentralization, democratization and the establishment of an effective system of local self-government will ensure the solution of issues of local importance in accordance with the interests of the population (Oueslati, n.d.).

Along with decentralization, the term “devolution” is actively used. It refers to the evolving process of decentralization of power to the lower regional and local levels of government, which aims to adequately respond to the needs of planning, state modernization, democratization and management of national diversity. World practice knows different models of devolution, such as: administrative; functional; corporate; Multi-functional and optional.

The process of devolution is mainly realized by: the constitutional status of devolved governments, by division of competences, by distribution of financial powers, with intergovernmental relations, in compliance with international and European policies. Decentralized governance systems are in constant evolution. Taking into account the reality of a particular country, some of them are moving towards federalism, while others are returning to centralization Costambeys-Kempczynski (2000).

These are the very issues that will be discussed in this paper.

In the process of working on the article, the authors were interested in examples from different countries. However, more attention was focused on the states that emerged as a result of the collapse of the socialist system, because it is in such countries that the issue is more relevant and getting to know their experience can have a positive impact on the development and implementation of relevant state policies in Georgia.

2. Trends Shaping the Contemporary State and Civil Society

In the very wide range of problems, which the world is becoming increasingly entangled with, it is almost impossible to set priorities, given the importance of each of them. However, taking into account the experience and research advantages of the authors, this article focuses on the problems of perception of the contemporary state and the possibilities of securing civil consent, which, in our opinion, goes into the involvement of human rights and interests into the state development.

It would not be appropriate to raise the issue if, along with human rights, we do not focus on our responsibilities to one another, to society, to the state, and even to the world. Such a position is the foundation of modern democracies and is based on the upbringing of new generations, the formation of a citizen, which ensures the soundness of the situation and stability over time. At the same time, the civilized West, in this regard, cares not only for its own citizens, but also for the inhabitants of all those countries which identify their own future with the democratic development.

These and other related issues have repeatedly been the subject of research by the authors and together with many of our colleagues, we have arrived at a common conclusion that “the precondition for the future development of Georgia should be found to be the mutually agreed and harmonious actions taken by the government, NGOs, business circles, academia and citizens in general, requiring the formation of closer ties. In other words, we are talking about a new common responsibility, which should be based on sustainable participatory cooperation” (Gvartadze, 2015).

In terms of improving the relationship between civil society and the state, European civilization has argued that “cooperation” between the state and civil society is a priori, where a free citizen is a partner for whom the government (especially the local one) acts as a moral force and supporter to its initiatives.

Since the realization of citizens’ rights and freedoms takes place more at the level of local self-governments, this necessitates the existence of the development-oriented local self-governments, active involvement in their activities based on cooperation from citizens, business circles or non-governmental organizations.

All of the above implies a constructive, active contribution of citizens to state development (especially in the regional and local context) and support for the formation of a civil society, rather than rigid opposition. At the present stage, the following paradigms are increasingly discussed: “**Collaborative state**”, “**Participative cooperation**”, “**Good governance**”, etc. All of the above is aimed at a more complete internal arrangement of the state and concerted actions focused on perspective.

However, due to recent developments, the existential issue of the state in the form of voluntary unity based on values and agreed principles has suddenly become more active. Without any preconditions, Russia’s intervention in Ukraine endangered the existence of one of largest states of Europe, completely changed the world’s development vectors, and put the forms of state-civil society relations in a completely different light, reinforcing the issue of its joint survival. What unfolds in the example of Ukraine reaffirms the superiority of a nation-state, created by free citizens and based on democratic development and strategic thinking, over tyrannical and corrupt dictatorships. However, this is not happening for the first time. The same can be said about the V-IV BC Greco-Persian Wars as well, when the Greek city-states, formed on the principles of democracy and born in the 6th century, successfully confronted the larg-

est empire in the world, which was known before.

Accordingly, we believe that the reconstruction of Georgia as a state with multinational and significant regional differences must fully take into account and be based on the achievements and attitudes, where “born” in “Old Europe” and on which the development of “New European countries” (countries, which have regained or gained independence after the collapse of Soviet Union and the socialist camp, in general) are based.

The issue is multifaceted and requires the active involvement of professionals from various fields. That is why, in this article, we aim to explore some of the fundamental issues related to the functioning of a “Legal State” based on the principles of “Good Governance”, at the intersection of economy and law, and to develop specific recommendations for Georgia.

There is no doubt that the current legislative or structural changes in our country should also result in a transformation in worldview in the society. This is vital because society will not be able to create what it does not believe in itself. The forty-year wandering by the Biblical Moses in the wilderness was not caused by ignorance of the road. He brought into the “Promised Land” only a new generation born in freedom, war-torn, and consciously freed from Egyptian bondage.

In contemporary Georgia, a lot of problems have accumulated in this regard, and among them nihilism, hopelessness among young people, making their own destiny abroad, the loss of faith in the homeland and similar alarming issues could be identified. This, in turn, is caused by the current situation in the country, the economic downturn, insufficient employment potential and self-realization prospects, and more. However, these and other problems are especially acute in the regions, which indicates a high degree of inequality in the development of the country and the polarization of society.

Placing emphasis on financial motivations should not be sufficient to relieve the situation. Further improvement of the legal environment, outlining the future orientation and perspectives of the country and developing appropriate effective mechanisms, strengthening the conditions for guaranteeing security, expanding the area of realization of personal potential and citizen participation in public administration, etc. are of equal importance. However, the room for putting the latter in practice is more at the level of local self-government, unlike other problems, the overcoming of which falls more into the capacity of the central government.

Accordingly, for the purposes of this article, we will limit ourselves to highlighting the role of local government in expanding the opportunities for civil unity, cooperation between the state and civil society. However, based on identifying a specific problem, we will offer our modest visions for overcoming them.

We believe that the issue of disconnection of the state and society is at the center of the problems. Despite numerous attempts by both sides, a dialogue between them failed on a number of critical issues, due to their diametrically opposed positions. This, once again, was confirmed on the example of reaction to the Russian intervention and the discourse on supporting Ukraine. We think

that the root of the problem lies in the lack of a culture of dialogue and a desire to engage in it, especially when such attitude is totally unacceptable for modern civil society. Obviously, it is impossible to make progress, at once and instantly, but it is necessary to start the march in this direction and, critically required by modern times.

We should intensify the dialogue on the relationship between the state and civil society through consultations and talks on human and civil rights, equality, the promotion of democratic values and the development of broader, open involvement opportunities for each of its members in public life, bound to inspire the citizen to take advantage of individual freedom over subordination (Boni, 2008). It is the sense of freedom and its full perception that forms the basis of the individual, society, state and their activities and interrelationships on recognized, agreed principles, the rule of law, high moral criteria and values, a solidary civil society, willing to take part in state-building, based on the creation of appropriate conditions by the latter.

We truly believe that in exactly such conditions a “New state” based on free thinking, active involvement of civil society, delegation of government, innovative knowledge economy will be born, which will be based on the rule of law, with regulating and orienting function, providing ever-growing services, oriented on social issues and remaining adequate.

As a result, instead of a “superior”, we get a “cooperative” state, which allows new room for sharing responsibility, greater involvement of civil society in governance-related decision-making undertakings, implementing effective monitoring and evaluation processes, and ultimately forming a new type of “Inspiring state”. It is envisioned as the implementation of sustainable processes based on participation, in the context of achieving joint responsibility, where equal conditions are provided for all parties involved to make full use of their potential to achieve common good and sustainable development (Franke & Magel, n.d.).

Within the “Cooperative state”, the citizen is perceived as a full-fledged co-creator and client, while the state as a service provider. Once again, such a relationship is, for the most part, realized at the local self-government level. Ultimately, as a partner for a free citizen, local government acts as a motivator and supporter of initiatives, and conversely, civil society becomes an active and constructive contributor to state development¹. At the same time, a similar self-awareness must be developed in every citizen from an early age, so that people with the appropriate worldview can form a society that will be the foundation of the state.

Some preconditions for the situation described are already being observed in Georgia, where the government’s stated priority and number one goal for sustainable development is to alleviate poverty by creating new jobs and training qualified staff². We maintain the idea that this will be a very important basis for

¹G. Gvartadze Perspectives of Improving State Governance and Deepening Civil Cooperation in Georgia, “ATSU Moambe”, #1(5), 2015, p. 225.

²Read more: Materials of the Interagency Council for Sustainable Development of Georgia, available at: <https://sdg.gov.ge/goals-details-inner/> 1 (10/02/2022).

the full realization of personal potential, for the formation of a highly labor-oriented state and a society striving for prosperity, or the social capital of development. Such an approach fits well with the concept of the so-called “New public administration”, the success of which, among other important issues, plays a crucial role in the involvement of citizens, necessitating putting focus on local government again during its implementation to ensure active participation of community members in the implementation of the very concept³.

Keeping in mind all above, we think that we should look for opportunities to improve the situation in our country by further strengthening local self-government. This direction is tested both in highly developed countries and in new democracies.

3. Local Self-Government as the Type of Government Standing Closest to the People and Its Role in the Development of Democracy

At the current stage of world development, the role of local governments is steadily growing and they are taking on more and more new functions on their own. These include: regulation the income of the population, promotion of employment, social protection, coordination of local production activities, etc. In many cases, regional formations and local self-governments significantly contribute to the dynamic socio-economic development of the administrative-territorial units, the expansion of international connections, the attraction of investments, the legal provision of accompanying processes, etc.

Based on the above, one of the biggest problems of modern Georgia and, at the same time, the potential for state progress lies in the improvement of the governance system, the purposeful distribution of responsibilities among the various branches of government and the improvement of the degree of decentralization⁴. In resolving and genuinely implementing this issue, the biggest role is given to freely elected local self-governments, which, from the Western point of view, is one of the main foundations of a democratic system. There are a number of arguments in favor of this. Basically, at the self-government level the following is possible:

- Firstly, the citizen should be protected legally and by rights;
- Secondly, the person should fully realize his/her potential and ensure the effectiveness of the activity;
- Thirdly, to guarantee the translation of the social demands of the society into a direct goal.

For putting the above-mentioned into practice, in developed countries, the powers of local authorities are increasingly expanding through transferring the functions of central state bodies (respectively property, funds) to them, as real

³Information used from the conference: Regional conference: Building democratic governance in the basis of EU administrative principles in the Caucasus Region, NISPAcee, Visegrad Fund, Tbilisi, Caucasus University, 05. 03. 2015.

⁴Also used the term “Devolution”, as a decentralization of the power to lower regional and local levels of government.

self-government is “the right and real ability of local self-government bodies to regulate a significant part of public affairs and to govern it within the law, under their own responsibility and in the interests of local people”⁵.

At the same time, it is important to equip local governments with full and special powers. They should have the right to define their own internal administrative structures to meet local requirements and ensure effective governance.

In democracies, two principles are used to distribute power: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal division implies the separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers, while vertical separates the distribution of powers between central, regional, municipal and district authorities⁶. The latter is the starting point of democracy in the state, as it ensures the involvement of the population in the process of resolving important issues.

With the rules of control (restraint) and balance, it is possible to limit the abuse of power. Local self-government is considered to be the government standing closest to the people and, consequently, the indicator of indirect democracy. This is further evidenced by Paragraph 3 of Article 4 of the Charter: “As a rule, the exercise of state rights and duties is carried out by the body of government that is closest to the citizens. Responsibilities should be delegated to another body, taking into account the scope and nature of the respective tasks, as well as the requirements of economy and efficiency”.

Based on the above, the exercise of powers by applying the principle of subsidiarity increases the participation of citizens in the exertion of powers. It is one of the important principles of the Constitution⁷. The principle of subsidiarity underlies the policy of prudent and rational management. This means that the issues that can be addressed at the local self-government level cannot be appropriated to a higher level of government, if they are able to perform this function equally effectively.

Accordingly, local authorities should have full discretion in the implementation of their own initiatives in matters within their competence and area of interest. Relevant departments and agencies should conduct any research in which they are interested in developing a territorial unit; developing proposals for the coordination and rational use of capital investment by local teams; participating in the financing of events of regional importance, etc.

However, in the exercise of their powers, branches of government should not be allowed to overrun other branches of government. To ensure this, a system of mutual restraint and balance operates in the mechanism of separation of powers.

It is the vertical division of power that requires decentralization. The powers of local self-government units come from the central government. At the same time, it has a definite independence from the state government⁸:

- **Jurisdictional independence**, which is exercised in parallel with the state jurisdiction within the powers of the local self-government and its territory;

⁵European Charter of Local Self-Government, Article 3.1.

⁶Constitutionalism by O. Melkadze, Tbilisi 2008 p. 99.

⁷The first sentence of Paragraph 4 of Article 7 of the Constitution of Georgia.

⁸Good Governance Initiative in Georgia, Civil Service Bureau, USAID-GGI. 2021.

- **Legislative independence**, exercised by the local self-government representative body and manifested in the establishment of legal regulations.

- Within the framework of **financial independence**, the local self-government regulates the financial issues of its activities in accordance with the rules established by law and under its own responsibility.

- **Organizational independence** means that the local self-government determines its own organizational arrangement in order to effectively exercise its powers.

- **Independence in personnel policy**, despite the principle of unity of public service, local self-government decides on its own competencies the number and schedule of its own bodies, the salaries of employees, etc.

Despite autonomy, there is scope for supervision, which implies the state central government exercising legal control over the activities of the self-governing unit. Such oversight, in order to ensure the expediency of decisions, is permissible only in relation to decisions made on the basis of delegated authority. State supervision is exercised in accordance with the rules established by organic law, in accordance with the principle of proportionality⁹.

Extending powers does not mean leaving local authorities out of control. However, any administrative control of local authorities should be exercised only in proportion to the degree of interference of the supervisory authorities and the importance of the interests of the local authorities. Moreover, prior control over the decisions of local governments, including in the field of finance, is completely unacceptable. The limits of self-control should be curbed and only the compliance of decisions with the law should be checked.

At the same time, it should be noted that according to the legislation of Georgia, state authorities make decisions on issues related to local self-government in consultation with self-governing units.

4. Development of Local Self-Government and Its Current Legal Status

As early as the end of the 19th century, in 1878, Ilia Chavchavadze, in his letters on the role of local government, wrote that the competence of an officer and the capacity to perform the job is a prerequisite for an effective and stable public service: “Everywhere there is a whole bunch of officials between the supreme government and the people, who are engaged in expressing the intentions, direction and policies of the supreme government. People identify these officials with their governments, since they keep a touch with them on daily basis. Consequently, electing the right government and the selection of conscious officials takes an important role in forming a descent government, otherwise public might face a constant chaos”¹⁰. “It is evident that those officials, the pillars of the state, must be wise enough to lead the people and clearly define the objectives of common good that must be the object to be achieved by any type of government.

⁹Paragraph 5 of Article 75 of the Constitution of Georgia.

¹⁰Selected Letters by I. Chavchavadze (1837-1907) Chapter Two 1879 p. 340.

That is exactly what each government must be striving for”¹¹. Ilia Chavchavadze perfectly reflected the immeasurable importance of competent public servants for both state governance and public service. In his publicist letters, Ilia argued for developing a culture of civic thinking.

In general, (in a narrower sense) the history of the development of local self-government bodies in Georgia dates back to 1919, when secular and city council elections were held. An important post-soviet event proved to be the universal, equal, direct elections held on March 31, 1991, which were held in multi-member constituencies. With the elections, local government bodies were formed as well. In the first stage, councils were formed, followed by the formation of executive bodies. The elections back then proved that our country had a desire to build a democratic state. As a result of the coup, the levers of government were taken over by the Military Council, which first abolished the institution of prefect and introduced local councils instead. Though the military council recognized the powers of the local self-government bodies—the city councils, they limited the powers of the district and city governors¹².

In 1995, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Constitution of Georgia. The adoption of the Supreme Law established the most important principles of local self-government. Soon, on October 16, 1997, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on Local Self-Government and Governance. And in 1998, local elections were held.

Since 2004, the legislation has been refined and the European principles have been shared in terms of local self-government. Ratification of the European Charter began in the same year. In 2005, Parliament passed the Organic Law on Local Self-Government. In 2010, an amendment was made to the Constitution and a new chapter on self-government emerged, defining the importance of local self-government for the establishment of a democratic state. With this constitutional change, the seventh Prime Chapter was formed, separating the powers between the self-government of the state (Phirtskhalashvili & Mirianashvili, 2018).

In 2014, the Parliament adopted the Organic Law on Local Self-Government Code of Georgia, which corrected the main shortcomings of the previous Code and brought it one step closer to the provisions of the European Charter. In 2017, the Parliament of Georgia created new, additional constitutional guarantees for the implementation of local self-government. Subsequent changes came into force in 2018.

In particular, the Constitution recognizes that the separation of powers between the state government and the self-governing units will be based on the principle of subsidiarity, according to which the state undertakes to ensure the compliance of financial resources with the powers established by the organic law of the self-governing unit. It was also recognized that the self-governing unit's own powers should be **exclusive and complete**. These additional guarantees provided by the Constitution of Georgia allow the main legal basis for further

¹¹Selected Letters by I. Chavchavadze (1837-1907) Chapter Two 1879 p. 341.

¹²Georgian Municipalism by O. Melkadze, Tbilisi 2009, p. 108.

deepening of the decentralization process and the establishment of a strong local self-government in line with European standards.

In addition, the important news is that the self-governing unit has been given the right to take decisions on its own initiative on all issues that do not fall under the exclusive authority of the state government or the autonomous republic and on which decision-making is not excluded by law from the self-governing unit. This is an important achievement on the road to decentralization and requires raising the professionalism of the human resources of the municipal bodies (institutions) to carry out these responsible powers¹³.

The main priorities for the decentralization strategy document for the period 2020-2025 include the following items:

- 1) Increasing the powers of local self-government.
- 2) Material and financial strengthening of local self-government.
- 3) Establishing credible, accountable, transparent and result-oriented local self-government.

The historical development of local self-government led to the request of the society for transparency and openness to the activities of local government bodies, which can be considered one of the important achievements of modern times.

5. Openness in the Development of Local Self-Government Policy

Open approaches to local self-government policy development enable the government to achieve more informed and better policy outcomes through participatory approaches based on different perspectives and experiences. Through citizen involvement, more informed decisions can be made.

Policy-making at the central and local levels in Georgia incorporates elements of transparency and citizen involvement. But openness is often limited by specific political processes¹⁴. As there is no uniform legal framework for open policy development in Georgia, the degree of transparency and citizen involvement is different in all central and local public institutions.

At the central level, although there is no legal framework for open policy development, the Local Self-Government Code of Georgia provides guarantees and forms of citizen involvement in open policy development¹⁵. In particular, municipal public institutions and public servants are required to provide organizational and technical capabilities that enable citizens to meet with municipal representatives, attend public hearings of municipal meetings, and participate in the decision-making process.

¹³Approval of the Decentralization Strategy 2020-2025 and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Decentralization Strategy 2020-2021. Government of Georgia, Resolution №678, December 31 2019.

¹⁴<https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/beopen>.

¹⁵The Local Self-Government Code envisages the existence of such forms of open policy development as general assembly for citizens; petition; establishment of civic advisory councils with the mayor / district governor; participation in the meetings of the Municipality Council and the Municipality Council commission; hearing reports on the work done by the mayor and a member of the municipal council.

Despite the legal possibilities, the degree of citizen involvement in municipal policy-making still remains low.

It is important to take into account existing European standards¹⁶ for open policy development, which aims to raise awareness along with legal regulations.

6. Georgia's International Obligations in Terms of Bolstering Local Self-Government

The current decentralization in Georgia is conditioned by two factors: external and internal ones. The external factor is the Georgia-EU Association Agreement, which was signed by the Government of Georgia in June 2014 and soon ratified by the Parliament of Georgia. It aims to deepen political and economic relations between Georgia and the European Union. To this end, a number of important reforms were arranged in the country. Since 2015, the public administration reform has been implemented in accordance with the annual action plans and relevant activities. Public Administration Reform in Georgia is planned in 6 main directions.

One of the central ones, out these six, is decentralization, which is accompanied by a process of supporting and strengthening local self-government. Given that Georgia has Euro-Atlantic aspirations, it is necessary for public administration to be based on European values both at the central level of government and at the level of local self-government. European standards and Western aspirations require the citizen to be provided with a common standard of public service, and consequently, a culture of governance based on a democratic, conscientious, transparent, accountable and efficient system.

The fulfillment of these commitments is served by the 3 priorities set out in the Decentralization Strategy Document for 2020-2025.

“Citizen participation is the driving force behind the idea of democracy, and citizens who are committed to democratic values and aware of their civil rights are a vital element of any democratic system”¹⁷, recommended by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on citizen participation in local public affairs. Local self-government ensures the participation of citizens in democratic processes.

7. Conclusion

This paper focuses on factors that are closely related to each other. The assur-

¹⁶Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority, CETS No. 207.

Council of Europe's Guidelines for Civil Participation in Political Decision Making;

Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe's Recommendation on the participation of citizens in local public life;

The Congress of the Council of Europe's Resolution and Recommendation on Transparency and open government;

OECD Recommendation on Open Government;

A good practice document on citizen participation in the decision-making process;

Citizen participation in decision-making—Review of Standards and Practices of Council of Europe Member States, European Center for Democracy and Governance (ECNL).

¹⁷<https://www.coe.int/ka/web/tbilisi/recommendations>.

ance of the realization of local self-government is created by the modern understanding of its essence and function, which in turn, has the purpose of democratization of the society and the state, through which the involvement of citizens in local politics increases.

Georgia does not span many years of experience in local self-government. The steps taken towards its development, though insufficient, are still obvious. In the first stage of gaining independence, local self-government had rather limited powers and was dependent on the central government; however, local self-government reforms provided a basis for positive expectations.

Despite the importance of local self-government, its full implementation in Georgia is accompanied by factual problems, which cannot be regulated at this stage. Despite progress and the repeated recognition of its independence, local self-government activities still fail to operate independently. It is therefore important to consider the following:

- With more budgetary independence and consequently such revenues, local self-government will become more independent. They should have the right, within the framework of national economic policy, to have sufficient financial resources that they can freely use in the performance of their functions, and these resources should be commensurate with the rights and obligations conferred by law;

- Local democracy is often seen as a tool to facilitate community participation, improve service delivery, strengthen local communities, and encourage development. It is hard not to agree with that. The involvement of citizens in this process is most important because they are the guarantors of democracy. It is therefore very important that citizens have the opportunity to participate in decision-making through referendum/direct democracy on issues of local importance. In such a case, the population will have more authority and a sense of responsibility as they will be involved in the decision-making process;

- Although citizens have legal/formal capacity to develop policies on issues of local importance, the degree of self-involvement in municipal policy-making is still low. It is therefore important that more effort has to be put in this regard;

- Referendum is a source of participation in the adoption of resolutions by local self-governments and a condition for the realization of direct democracy¹⁸. Local referendums are most widespread in Council of Europe member states. Local referendums are necessary to express the will of citizens on specific issues that directly affect their daily lives. Referendum in Georgia can be held only in the whole territory of the country. The law does not allow holding a local referendum. A referendum may be mandatory or advisory in nature for a local government. Such practices are very common in the practice of Western countries. According to international norms, this form of direct democracy is quite well

¹⁸When a referendum is initiated by citizens or stakeholders, it can become a kind of campaign for urban development, or any other issue. Consequently, this would be a very important lever for further activation of civil society, as well as to strengthen their real involvement in decision-making on local issues.

regulated¹⁹.

- In order to ensure greater development of the country, it is necessary to further improve the quality of coordination of the activities of local government bodies. First of all, it concerns the development of joint targeted programs for socio-economic and scientific-technical development of the regions, which contemporary Georgia lacks so much;

- The main task of the implementation of joint programs between the regions should be, first of all, the development and implementation of innovative projects that will address resource constraints and ensure the social, cultural and economic development of territorial units, the necessary quality of the environment, raising the cultural-educational level of the population and, consequently, the development of opportunities for the use of highly skilled labor and the use of this advantage.

As a result of the above-mentioned factors, the local government is an institution whose criteria for quality management will be dynamism, purposefulness, initiative, perspective and which will have the right to make final and operational decisions on the main moments of development of the administrative-territorial units under them. At the same time, the successes achieved by the individual self-government will not remain inaccessible to other administrative-territorial units and their own practices and experiences will be shared for their further implementation, if cooperation between local self-governments and inter-regional self-governments is significantly increased.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Boni, M. (2008). *How to Build the Strategic Orientation in Governance? The Future of Regions in the Perspective of Global Changes. Regional Development Forum*. Ministry of Regional Development, Vol. 3, Part 1, Warsaw, 15.
- Costambeys-Kempczynski, R. (2000). A Poetry of Devolution. In T. Harris (Ed.), *Collection of Works: (Re)mapping the Centres Membership and State* (pp. 47-55). Presses universitaires François-Rabelais. <https://books.openedition.org/pufr/4326>
- Franke, S., & Magel, H. (n.d.). *Changing Peoples Attitudes—Capacity Building for Local Sustainable Development*. https://www.fig.net/resources/proceedings/fig_proceedings/fig2006/papers/ts74/ts74_02_franke_magel_0729.pdf

¹⁹The Venice Commission, the Code of Good Practice for Referendums, offers the principles of holding referendums and practical advice for the implementation of these principles. Declaration of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the Code of Practice on Referendum calls on member states to follow the Code of Practice on Public Referendum. **Resolution 472 (2021) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on Holding of Local Referendums** provides guidelines for member states to take responsibility for local referendums and to use them in accordance with Council of Europe standards; **UN Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; Goal 16.7: Ensuring responsible, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.**

- Gavtadze, G. (2015). Perspectives of Improving State Governance and Deepening Civil Cooperation in Georgia. *ATSU Moambe, 1*, 220.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360541261_Field_Public_Management_Perspectives_of_Improving_State_Governance_and_Enhancing_Civil_Cooperation_in_Georgia
- Oueslati, S. (n.d.). The Decentralization of Power within the US Congress since 1937: Pluralism or Elitism? In T. Harris (Ed.), *Collection of Works: (Re)mapping the Centres Membership and State* (pp. 193-204). Presses universitaires François-Rabelais.
<https://books.openedition.org/pufr/4354?lang=en>
- Phirtskhalashvili, A., & Mirianashvili, G. (2018). *Basis of State Organization of Georgia, Tbilisi*.