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## **CITIZENS’ TRUST AS A RESOURCE FOR THE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES UNDER CONDITIONS OF INSTABILITY**

In the contemporary context of societal transformations, wartime challenges, economic instability, and the constant need to adapt public administration systems to emerging risks, the issue of citizens’ trust in local authorities is of particular importance. Territorial communities today represent the level at which managerial decisions are most directly implemented, and where a sense of security, participation, and belonging to a shared development space is formed.

During periods of institutional instability, public trust becomes a key intangible resource for the development of territorial communities, shaped by a chronic shortage of material factors necessary for effective governance. Unlike financial or infrastructural assets, trust cannot be created through administrative measures, nor can it be rapidly restored once lost. It is accumulated gradually through consistent governance practices that ensure transparency, adherence to ethical standards, achievement of measurable results, and constructive interaction with citizens.

Within the system of local self-government, citizens’ trust can be understood as a set of positive expectations regarding the openness, integrity, and accountability of public authorities. Trust thus represents a form of social capital that ensures cohesion, coordination of actions, and reduced social tensions [1].

From a governance perspective, trust is a crucial prerequisite for the effective adoption and implementation of strategic decisions. It primarily influences the degree to which the population accepts governmental initiatives. When citizens trust local self-government bodies, they are more likely to support changes, even when such changes require time, resources, or certain restrictions.

A high level of trust facilitates communication between authorities and the public and reduces resistance to managerial decisions. The perception of the significance of one's own voice stimulates citizens' participation in consultations, public hearings, volunteer activities, and partnership initiatives. Moreover, trust performs a stabilizing function: when local authorities are perceived as partners rather than distant administrative structures, communities are more easily consolidated to address common problems jointly. In this way, trust acts as a “social glue” that preserves community integrity and enhances resilience to external and internal shocks.

Institutional, communicative, and societal factors shape trust in local self-government. A key institutional factor is transparency, which involves openness in budgetary decisions, strategic planning, and governance outcomes, thereby reducing information asymmetry and risks of manipulation. The second factor is the quality of communication, which entails systematic, two-way dialogue that ensures understanding of the rationale behind decisions—an essential condition in an environment characterized by fragmented information. Another important factor is the accountability of public officials, including professional competence, adherence to ethical standards, and institutionalized responsibility. Conversely, a lack of transparency and corruption leads to rapid erosion of trust, requiring systemic institutional changes [2].

Special emphasis should be placed on citizen participation in decision-making processes. The greater the number of mechanisms for meaningful participation, the stronger the sense of shared responsibility for community development. These mechanisms may include public consultations, electronic petitions, participatory budgeting, local initiatives, and advisory platforms. Through such instruments, trust transforms from passive expectation into an active resource for development.

At the same time, under conditions of instability, several factors contribute to the erosion of trust. First and foremost is the overall crisis state of society, where prolonged wartime threats, economic difficulties, and social fatigue heighten public anxiety. Information manipulation is another factor that can undermine local government authority, distort facts, and provoke distrust even in the presence of tangible results.

Weak communication further exacerbates the problem, as citizens may not understand what authorities are doing, why certain decisions are made, and how these decisions align with community interests. As a result, a gap emerges between governing institutions and the population, negatively affecting social cohesion and development prospects [2].

Strengthening citizens' trust in local self-government requires a systematic approach. One of the priority directions is the development of e-governance, which ensures accessibility of information, efficient communication, and convenient participation tools. Equally important is a consistent policy of accountability, including regular reporting, public monitoring, auditing of decisions, and effective anti-corruption mechanisms. Professional development of personnel also plays a significant role. In modern governance, trust is closely linked to competence: citizens are more likely to trust institutions that demonstrate professionalism, consistency, and effectiveness. Supporting civic engagement is equally important, as trust is best developed where authorities and citizens act not as opposing sides but as partners in shaping joint decisions.

Thus, citizens' trust is a strategic resource of territorial communities under conditions of instability. It ensures the legitimacy of authorities, enhances the effectiveness of managerial decisions, and strengthens community resilience in the face of crisis challenges. Therefore, strategies for the development of territorial communities should include not only economic and infrastructural priorities but also a targeted policy aimed at strengthening trust as the foundation of high-quality public governance.

#### REFERENCES

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