

# LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND LOCAL POLITICAL MANAGEMENT: CONCEPTUAL INTERDEPENDENCE

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**Abstract.** The study focuses on local democracy and the associated management of local politics. The article aims to demonstrate the interdependence of these two concepts. The study employed a neo-institutional approach. The authors argue that local democracy provides a systemic, multidimensional environment in which local political management can acquire resources, legitimacy and institutional opportunities. Local democracy improves the quality of local governance, facilitates the formation of professional political elites and shapes effective management mechanisms within territorial communities. Local democracy is described as a value-institutional dimension that focuses on community participation, the legitimacy of power and the transparency and accountability of decision-making processes. In contrast, local political management is characterised as an organisational and managerial dimension that focuses on adopting and implementing decisions at a local level. It has been proven that local democracy establishes the rules within which local political management operates and implements decisions. The authors argue that local democracy is a prerequisite for the legitimacy of political management, and that political management is a mechanism for implementing local democracy. They conclude that local democracy cannot be implemented without the necessary management technologies, procedures, and competencies – in other words, political management. The dialectical relationship between local democracy and political management has been established. Local democracy shapes the environment in which political management operates, and political management either strengthens or weakens democracy. The authors observed that local democracy and political management institutions can either reinforce or undermine each other. They derived a conceptual formula that conveys the essence of this relationship: firstly, local democracy provides the institutional, value-based and procedural foundation of local governance; secondly, local political management, based on local democracy, ensures the development, adoption and implementation of political decisions; thirdly, together, they form a coherent system of democratic community governance, in which democracy defines the framework and management ensures its effective implementation. The authors argue that the interdependence of local democracy and local political management is evidenced by the fact that democratic procedures, instruments and institutions create opportunities for effective political management, and that high-quality political management, in turn, ensures the viability and effectiveness of democratic practices. This approach allows both phenomena to be studied not in isolation, but as mutually reinforcing elements of the contemporary model of local governance. Although the Russian-Ukrainian war has clearly altered the landscape, the conceptual logic of the 'local democracy–local political management' coordinate system remains intact.

**Keywords:** local democracy, local political management, management initiatives, local political order, public discussions, decision-making, Russian-Ukrainian war, post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, prevention and combating corruption.

**JEL Classification:** D72, R58

## 1. Introduction

Local democracy is a modern political science concept that combines key aspects of political participation, engagement and civic action with the institutional

foundations of popular sovereignty. In accordance with the prevailing working hypothesis, within the paradigm of local political management, local democracy is posited as a prerequisite that determines the direction of

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decision-making mechanisms, the nature of interaction between the authorities and the public, and the normative foundations of political behaviour.

Local democracy and local political management are considered to be pivotal elements of contemporary political science, and this is due to a number of factors. Firstly, theoretical approaches to democracy have expanded significantly. The present focus is on issues such as public and political participation, institutional accountability and accountability mechanisms at the subnational level. The term "local democracy" is employed to denote this phenomenon within the discipline of political science. This phenomenon is intricately linked to the notions of legitimate power and state capacity. The establishment of effective local institutions has been demonstrated to foster trust and promote democratic practices at the local level.

Secondly, local authorities implement state policies relating to the provision of services, spatial planning, local economic development, and social integration. In the contemporary context, the field of political science has come to regard local government as a pivotal instrument in the implementation of inclusionary policies, the assessment of adaptability to socio-economic transformations, and the introduction of innovations.

Thirdly, the global trends of urbanisation and decentralisation imply that local political institutions are strategic actors in a global context, playing a role in everything from combating climate change to attracting investment and implementing international governance standards. A conceptual analysis of the interdependence between local democracy and governance enables political scientists to identify the mechanisms through which local democracy influences socio-economic outcomes and political stability.

In the context of Russian aggression, Ukraine's task of ensuring the sustainability of local development, internal unity, and community resilience is becoming increasingly urgent. The capacity of communities to surmount obstacles and execute European integration reforms is contingent on the augmentation of democratic expression and the articulation of needs. The adequacy of the institutional practices of local democracy is a parameter that can be used to predict the adequacy of local political management decisions, particularly with regard to political accountability, transparency, and the legitimacy of decisions made.

During the Russian invasion, local authorities in Ukraine played a pivotal role in the provision of essential services, the organisation of evacuations, and the coordination of aid deliveries. The events that transpired during the war years have demonstrated that the resilience of local institutions is directly related to national resilience. The development of

recommendations for the enhancement of community capacity during and following periods of war is facilitated by a scientific understanding of this role. The efficacy of local self-organisation and decentralised governance models in facilitating the recovery of communities in areas liberated from Russian occupation has already been demonstrated.

It is anticipated that Ukraine's post-war reconstruction will encompass a multitude of projects, each with a distinct scope and scale. This necessitates the establishment of transparent resource management mechanisms. Local institutions will be involved in post-war reconstruction. In the absence of scientifically sound mechanisms for community participation in these processes, there is an increased risk of inefficiency and corruption. Consequently, the enhancement of institutional capacity at the local level, in conjunction with the examination of the mechanisms underpinning these processes, is imperative for the eventuality of post-war reconstruction.

The focus on the research topic is thus justified by the understanding that effective, transparent and accountable management decisions at a local level are paramount for the successful execution of post-war reconstruction. The relationship between local democracy and political management, on the one hand, and post-war reconstruction, on the other, is a direct one. The legitimacy of decisions, the efficient use of resources, and social stability in communities are all ensured by these two factors. In other words, the implementation of well-funded reconstruction programmes is subject to a multitude of risks in the absence of democratic and capable local institutions.

The present article aims to demonstrate the importance of local democracy as a foundation for effective local political management. The objective of this study is to ascertain the fundamental practices of local democracy that facilitate such management.

## 2. Literature Review

The study of local democracy is undertaken by scholars in a variety of institutional, regulatory and administrative contexts (Aasland & Lyska, 2016; Banerjee et al., 2025; Keudel & Huss, 2025; Melnykovska & Sokhey, 2025; Rabinovych et al., 2025; Schmäing, 2025). The decision to consult their research was motivated by the focus on issues of local democracy within the context of the Russian–Ukrainian war and the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. A plethora of studies on local democracy and local political management have been conducted in previous years. However, the present study focuses on publications from recent years that were prepared with the full-scale war and/or the prospect of a further period of post-war reconstruction in mind.

Firstly, a series of studies by A. Khaletska will be highlighted. The researcher (2025, p. 61) noted that "citizen participation, trust building, the development of participatory practices, and the adaptation of global models to local conditions are key factors in the formation of sustainable local democracy". Its potential lies not only in its ability to respond to challenges, but also in its contribution to shaping a global agenda that unites different countries and regions around shared values and Sustainable Development Goals. A. Khaletska cited a number of projects and programmes aimed at providing psychological support to those affected by the large-scale aggression against Ukraine. These include initiatives by civil society organisations and local authorities, as well as infrastructure projects to rebuild transport links, bridges, roads, and energy facilities.

S. Bula and M. Savchuk analysed the prospects for post-war reconstruction in Ukraine, noting that "the only way to ensure rapid regional development is to build institutions of local democracy and establish a stable liberal subnational regime" (2025, p. 220). They defined the subnational political level as "the level closest to citizens", emphasising that their involvement is required for the post-war reconstruction of the country (2025, p. 221). These conclusions are reinforced by the fact that the assertion that subnational political processes and local self-government will play a leading role in Ukraine's post-war reconstruction is reflected in the relevant state strategies. The present discussion pertains specifically to the Plan of Measures for 2025–2027, which is intended to implement the State Strategy for Regional Development 2021–2027. This strategy was approved by the Ukrainian government. It is also worth noting that S. Bula has researched local democracy in Ukraine for many years. The conclusions she reached in her previous publications (2015, 2017) are valuable.

M. Baymuratov and B. Kofman (2022) use the concept of the "municipal person" to emphasise the significance of this public and political role in developing and operating local democracy and the rule of law. V. Zimoglyad (2015), meanwhile, identified the factors shaping municipal and regional policy within the local political process. In their 2024 publication, G. Muzychenko and B. Kofman paid considerable attention to local democracy as a fundamental category of political science research. They revealed the interconnection between the categories of "local democracy" and "local self-government", with a particular focus on legal guarantees for local democracy in Ukraine.

Although local democracy is the subject of significant scientific interest, it is important to consider it specifically as an institutional environment for decision-making within the framework of political management mechanisms. This is the focus of the research.

### 3. Method

The present working hypothesis posits that local democracy constitutes the institutional foundation upon which political management at the local level is built. It delineates the procedures, rules, mechanisms and norms through which political decisions are made and implemented, thereby ensuring their legitimacy, accountability and citizen participation.

From a political science perspective, local democracy can be interpreted as a set of institutions, norms, procedures and practices that ensure the participation of citizens and communities in the development, adoption and control of decisions relating to local self-government. The concept of local democracy extends beyond the realm of government bodies, encompassing the social sphere wherein interests are cultivated, representation is actualised, and community influence permeates government institutions. Local democracy is a framework for decision-making. Local democracy comprises the following four elements: (1) a legal framework comprising community statutes, regulations and transparency and accountability procedures; (2) organisational structures comprising local government bodies, advisory and representative bodies and institutions of direct democracy; (3) participation mechanisms comprising public hearings, electronic petitions, local initiatives and consultations; (4) a culture of political interaction comprising trust, participation, dialogue and partnership between the authorities and civil society. All these components together form the institutional space in which political decision-making takes place.

In the context of political management mechanisms, this means the following:

1. Local democracy acts as an "operating environment" for political management. Political management relies primarily on local democratic institutions to ensure the legitimacy of political decisions.

2. Decisions are made through institutionally defined procedures. These procedures may include council meetings and public consultations, for example. Local democracy establishes the rules that political management must adhere to.

3. In a democratic political regime, the community has every opportunity to participate actively in governance. Management mechanisms at the local level must consider the interests of citizens and communities (hromadas), and facilitate their feedback. This improves the quality and effectiveness of governance.

4. The institutional environment restrains power and ensures accountability. The main tools for restraining institutions of power are transparency, control, electability and accountability of local authorities.

5. Local democracy ensures the legitimacy of political decisions. Decisions that are made openly, with community participation, and within legally defined

procedures receive a higher level of public trust and support.

The neo-institutionalist approach (Kushnir & Yazgan, 2025) makes it possible to consider these aspects.

#### **4. The Regulatory and Legal Prerequisites for Creating and Operating Local Democratic Institutions**

The regulatory and legal foundations of local democracy comprise a multi-level system of laws, subordinate legislation, and local norms. These are designed to guarantee community autonomy, enshrine participation mechanisms, establish rules of transparency and accountability for authorities, ensure citizen inclusion and create conditions for legitimate, effective local-level decision-making. Whether local democracy is genuine, effective and inclusive depends on the quality of these norms and how well they are observed by all participants in the political process.

In order to form a local agenda, the political demands and needs of the community must be represented. The more transparent the representation of local political interests is, the more likely it is that political consensus will be achieved and decisions will be made in the community's best interests. Constitutional norms form the basis of any national legal system and have an important influence on the regulation of local democracy in any state. In Ukraine, for example, it is the constitution that lays the foundation for the development of local democracy (Mishyna, 2014).

The regulatory and legal foundations of local democracy at the constitutional level create the conditions necessary for improving the expression of positions within the framework of local political competition. At the same time, the rights of all participants must be protected. Most political actors are interested in extending the democratic environment to the local level. This creates new opportunities for local political management. However, it should be noted that this only occurs in countries with high-quality democracies. Various defects in democracy can reduce its quality, meaning that the legally enshrined norms of local democracy will remain mere populist declarations.

Therefore, the regulatory and legal framework for local democracy must include:

1. Constitutional and legal foundations. At this level, the constitutional guarantees of local self-government are defined. Communities (hromadas) are recognised as public authorities, and the population's right to participate in solving local problems is enshrined. The competences of state authority and local self-government are also delineated at this level. This level also establishes the legal autonomy of local communities. This includes the right to adopt local

legal acts, establish their own administrative structures, and manage their own budgets.

2. Regulatory and legal acts governing local democracy. These cover a variety of areas, some of which will be highlighted here. For example, the formation of various local democratic bodies is regulated, as are the definition of their powers and working procedures. Legislation should also clearly regulate local referendums, public hearings, local initiatives, electronic petitions, participatory budgeting and public consultations. It is important that legislation not only enshrines these mechanisms, but also obliges decision-makers to take public opinion into account.

3. These are legal acts that define the procedure for creating and operating self-government bodies. These norms should outline how these bodies are created and registered, their powers and resources, the mechanisms for controlling and holding them to account, and how they interact with other institutions.

4. Standardising anti-corruption procedures enhances transparency in decision-making processes. This includes open data, electronic registers and document flow, public procurement, and mandatory reporting by authorities to the community.

5. Subordinate legislation and regulations at local level. This includes the statutes of territorial communities (hromadas) and the regulations of local councils, as well as the provisions relating to commissions and advisory bodies involving public participation.

6. Legal regulation of local democracy financing. Real democracy requires financial support. It is therefore important to be clear about communities' own and fixed revenues, and to ensure transparency in the budget process and financial participation instruments.

7. Control and accountability procedures. The following must all be regulated: the mandatory nature of regular public reports by the authorities; citizens' access to information about decisions and finances; public audit mechanisms; the community's right to evaluate the activities of local self-government bodies and officials; and the procedure for holding these bodies and officials accountable.

8. Defining guarantees of inclusion and non-discrimination. The legitimacy of local democracy requires norms that ensure equal access to participation for all population groups, as well as special mechanisms for young people, people with disabilities, and minorities. It also requires mandatory consideration of gender balance and the protection of citizens' language rights.

#### **5. The Conceptual Relationship Between Local Democracy and Local Political Management**

Local democracy and local political management are two closely linked aspects of local governance. Local

democracy is a value-based and institutional dimension that focuses on citizen participation, the legitimacy of authority and transparent, accountable decision-making processes. It establishes the institutions, norms and rules of interaction that govern the actions of local authorities. Local political management, on the other hand, is an organisational and managerial dimension. It focuses on how political decisions are made and implemented at a local level. This involves managing community development, resources, and communication. Therefore, although local democracy establishes the rules, local political management operates within these rules and puts them into practice.

It is the opinion of the present authors that:

The legitimacy of political management is contingent upon the presence of local democracy. The legitimacy of local management is contingent upon the presence of citizen participation through direct and representative mechanisms, transparency and accountability, competition between political interests, and compliance with the norms and procedures of local democracy, including hearings, consultations, initiatives and petitions. In the absence of a democratic foundation, political management is prone to becoming bureaucratic administration.

Local political management can be defined as a mechanism for implementing local democracy. Democracy is defined by its values and rules, while political management provides strategic planning, decision-making, communication with the community, policy implementation and monitoring of relevant processes. Consequently, the implementation of local democracy is contingent upon the existence of management technologies, procedures and competencies, which are furnished by political management.

It is acknowledged that a dialectical relationship exists between local democracy and local political management. The existence of a two-way connection and interdependence between the two is evident. In particular, local democracy has been demonstrated to shape the environment in which political management operates. Conversely, effective management has been demonstrated to strengthen democracy, fostering trust, participation and transparency. In contrast, ineffective management has the potential to undermine local democracy. Consequently, the phenomenon of mutual reinforcement or mutual weakening is observed.

The following conceptual formula is postulated to convey the essence of the relationship between local democracy and local political management. Local democracy can be defined as the institutional, value-based and procedural foundation of local governance. Local political management constitutes a management mechanism that ensures the development, adoption and implementation of political decisions based on

this foundation. Collectively, these elements coalesce to establish a comprehensive system of democratic community governance, wherein democracy serves as the overarching framework and management is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring its effective implementation.

## **6. Local Democracy and Local Political Management in the Context of the Russian–Ukrainian War and Future Post-War Reconstruction**

Despite the profound shifts wrought by the Russian-Ukrainian war, the conceptual underpinnings of the "local democracy – local political management" paradigm endure. In the context of Russia's full-scale aggression, local democracy in Ukraine has evolved to become more adaptive. In light of security concerns, certain participation mechanisms have been restricted, with the emphasis being shifted towards mobilisation, solidarity and self-organisation. The legitimacy of democracy for local authorities is rooted in its ability to foster trust, social cohesion, and civic resilience (Khoma, Kresina, Nikolaiev & Patalakha, 2025).

Local political management in wartime performs critical functions. These include crisis management, the strengthening of communities' defence capabilities, the provision of assistance to internally displaced persons, the rapid restoration of damaged infrastructure, the establishment of a rehabilitation system and the implementation of programmes to repatriate Ukrainians from abroad. The management of these communities has been found to become more efficient and centralised whilst maintaining contact with the community through local participatory institutions operating in secure online and offline formats. The war has demonstrated that, in the absence of trust and the engagement of local communities, effective management alone is insufficient.

In the post-war period, the relationship between democracy and political management will evolve. The reconstruction of the nation will entail strategic challenges that necessitate robust management, founded upon democratic institutional foundations. The legitimacy of post-war decisions must be founded upon a robust foundation of local democracy. In the aftermath of the war, Ukrainian communities will be confronted with numerous challenges, including the reconstruction of infrastructure, the redistribution of resources, the establishment of development priorities, and the return and integration of veterans and displaced persons. Given the potential for such decisions to be contentious, it is essential to ensure broad citizen participation, consultation mechanisms, public oversight, and budget transparency. In the absence of inclusive democratic processes, the post-

war reconstruction phase has the potential to become a source of social discord, corruption, and mistrust. In the context of the recent revelations of corruption in Ukraine, the significance of these issues is evident.

Post-war reconstruction will require strategic planning, management of potentially large amounts of external aid, infrastructure modernisation, effective communication and control over contractors and resources. The aforementioned functions pertain to the domain of management. The aforementioned individuals will be expected to demonstrate the highest standards of professionalism, responsibility, transparency, accountability, and adherence to democratic norms and principles.

During wartime, local democracy promotes social stability and community cohesion by providing a framework through which local political management can carry out crisis and defence management. During the post-war reconstruction period, this framework is expanded to encompass democratic principles, such as inclusivity, citizens' rights and transparent decision-making processes. Meanwhile, political management oversees the implementation of strategic projects to facilitate recovery, modernisation and development. Local democracy thus remains a source of legitimacy, and local political management remains an effective decision-implementation mechanism. The balanced interaction between the two is important for Ukraine's sustainable post-war reconstruction.

## 7. Conclusions

Local democracy comprises the institutions, procedures and practices that enable citizens to participate in local governance. It provides the foundation for the development of local political management, including planning, organisation, decision-making and the management of resources within the local political sphere.

Firstly, inclusiveness and the active involvement of citizens are conducive to the professionalisation of political management. Regular interaction between local government bodies and the community, facilitated through elections, public hearings, consultative bodies and e-democracy tools, fosters demand for competent managers capable of responding to the population's genuine needs.

Secondly, transparency and accountability, which are fundamental principles of local democracy, ensure control over the activities of local political actors. This approach fosters the development of managerial approaches to governance that focus on results, efficiency, and adherence to ethical standards. In such circumstances, political management is increasingly

reliant on data, policy evaluation and public monitoring mechanisms.

Thirdly, the presence of competitiveness within the political process at a local level has been demonstrated to facilitate the emergence of new leaders, institutions and management practices. The existence of healthy political competition has been demonstrated to have a stimulatory effect on innovation in local government, resulting in a broadening of the range of available management tools and an improvement in the quality of political decisions.

Fourthly, local democracy contributes to the institutionalisation of political management by establishing stable rules, procedures, and decision-making mechanisms. The combination of political leadership, strategic planning, stakeholder participation and effective administrative capacity can be achieved naturally within a democratic local environment.

Consequently, local democracy establishes a systemic, multidimensional environment in which local political management is furnished with the requisite resources, legitimacy and institutional opportunities for development. Local democracy provides a context for the discussion, and also functions as an active catalyst for improving the quality of local governance, establishing professional political elites and forming effective management mechanisms in territorial communities (*hromadas*).

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Fourthly, local democracy contributes to the institutionalisation of political management by establishing stable rules, procedures, and decision-making mechanisms. It is within a democratic local environment that political leadership, strategic planning, stakeholder participation and effective administrative capacity can be combined naturally.

Consequently, local democracy establishes a systemic, multidimensional environment in which local political management is furnished with the requisite resources, legitimacy and institutional opportunities for development. Local democracy provides a methodology that facilitates the examination of both phenomena in a manner that is not merely isolated, but rather as components that are mutually reinforcing of the modern model of local governance. Collectively, these phenomena determine the level of openness, effectiveness and legitimacy of local authorities.

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