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## IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AS A CATALYST FOR THE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES

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**Summary.** The article is devoted to the study of promising directions for strengthening the competitiveness of territorial communities in the conditions of overcoming the challenges of war and post-war reconstruction. The decentralization reform, the main direction of which is to strengthen the effectiveness of management processes at the local level and strengthen the financial stability of communities, became the starting point for increasing the managerial independence of territorial communities. The author reviewed the practices of project management implementation in the conditions of territorial communities, identified the main obstacles and conditions for achieving project maturity by local self-government bodies. The importance and socio-economic effectiveness of the implementation of the project approach under the conditions of transformation of the strategic planning process with limited financial, technological and human resources is substantiated. Based on the development of the results of sociological research on the issues of determining the effectiveness of management processes and the stability of territorial communities, the basic principles of territorial community management were formed: cooperation, communicativeness, priority of common goals, competence, proactivity, responsibility, adaptability and competitiveness. The article draws attention to the fact that territorial communities, depending on size and financial capacity, have significant differences in terms of experience gained and ability for short- and long-term planning. The processes of determining goals and deadlines will also have significant differences. There will also be differences in the sources of financing, the scale of the project, methods and tools of its implementation and other components. The article examines the characteristics of the levels of readiness of local self-government bodies to implement the project approach in management. The author analyzed the main gaps in the qualifications of managers during the development and implementation of the project. Standardized project management practices were considered, and an algorithm of actions for the implementation of project management was formed. The short-term and long-term effects of the implementation of the project approach in management at the level of local self-government bodies are determined.

**Key words:** local self-government, territorial communities, strategic planning, sustainable development, project management, financial stability, competitiveness.

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## УПРОВАДЖЕННЯ ПРАКТИК ПРОЄКТНОГО МЕНЕДЖМЕНТУ ЯК КАТАЛІЗАТОРА СТРАТЕГІЧНОГО РОЗВИТКУ ТЕРИТОРІАЛЬНИХ ГРОМАД

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**Резюме.** Присвячено дослідженню перспективних напрямів зміцнення конкурентоспроможності територіальних громад в умовах подолання викликів війни та повоєнної відбудови. Відправною точкою для підвищення управлінської самостійності територіальних громад стала реформа децентралізації, основним спрямуванням якої є посилення ефективності управлінських процесів на місцевому рівні та

зміцнення фінансової стійкості громад. Автор здійснив огляд практик упровадження проектного менеджменту в умовах територіальних громад, визначено основні перешкоди та умови досягнення проектною зрілості органами місцевого самоврядування. Обґрунтовано важливість та соціально-економічну ефективність упровадження проектного підходу за умов трансформації процесу стратегічного планування при обмежених фінансових, технологічних і людських ресурсах. На основі опрацювання результатів соціологічних досліджень з питань визначення ефективності управлінських процесів і стійкості територіальних громад сформовано базові принципи управління територіальними громадами: співпраця, комунікативність, пріоритет спільних цілей, компетентність, проактивність, відповідальність, адаптивність та конкурентоспроможність. Вказано на той факт, що територіальні громади залежно від розміру та фінансової спроможності мають суттєві відмінності щодо набутого досвіду й здатності до коротко- та довготривалого планування. Суттєві відмінності матимуть і процеси визначення цілей і термінів виконання. Відмінності також будуть у джерелах фінансування, масштабах проекту, методах та інструментах його реалізації й інших складових. Розглянуто характеристики рівнів готовності органів місцевого самоврядування до реалізації проектного підходу в управлінні. Автор здійснив аналіз основних прогалів у кваліфікації менеджерів при розробленні та реалізації проекту. Розглянуто стандартизовані практики управління проектами, сформовано алгоритм дій для упровадження проектного менеджменту. Визначено короткотерміновий та довготерміновий ефект від впровадження проектного підходу в управлінні на рівні органів місцевого самоврядування.

**Ключові слова:** місцеве самоврядування, територіальні громади, стратегічне планування, сталий розвиток, проектний менеджмент, фінансова стійкість, конкурентоспроможність.

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**Problem statement.** In the context of the prolonged full-scale war and European integration processes, the reform of local self-government in Ukraine is focused on strengthening the resilience of territorial communities (hromadas), ensuring economic well-being, employment, adequate wage levels, and proper social guarantees for the population. Currently, local self-government continues its transformation from traditional management toward the implementation of more effective market-based approaches. Today, the most progressive method is the project-based approach, which has already proven successful in the business sector and many leading territorial communities.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The study of innovative approaches to managing territorial communities is of significant interest to scholars and practitioners in the field of public management and administration.

The peculiarities of strategic management for territorial community development have been analyzed in scientific publications by Z. V. Kvasniy, O. R. Kondra, and O. R. Kvasniy [8], where the authors examined communities in the Western region of Ukraine, considering their economic, social, and natural-recreational potential. They also developed proposals for an integrated management approach aimed at ensuring sustainable development.

The problems of local self-government's transition from traditional management to project portfolio management were studied by Z. M. Buryk and O. P. Poprotskyi [6]. The authors reviewed international experiences and determined that the foundation for an effective project and program management system lies in international and national standards that synthesize global best practices. They also examined the most common organizational project maturity assessment models and the maturity levels of Local Self-Government Bodies (LSGBs).

V. F. Proskura, O. V. Zarichna, and A. V. Kashyn [1] identified priorities for managing territorial communities under conditions of significant risk and uncertainty caused by the war. They developed a mechanism for implementing a project-program approach to community management and a scheme for evaluating the «project maturity» of local authorities.

The importance of the project-based approach for sustainable development is also recognized by such scholars as I. Yu. Semeniuk, H. V. Ivanchenko, and Ya. V. Veslova [11]. They define projects as effective tools for achieving strategic development goals in the context

of socio-economic issues. Based on an analysis of existing practices, the researchers identified key advantages, as well as problems and obstacles to applying the project approach at the community level.

Despite the significant attention given to these issues, the lack of practical experience, strategic vision, resource constraints, and constant challenges related to military aggression mean that this topic requires further study and adaptation to current realities.

**The purpose of the study** is to identify the main problems of strategic management of territorial communities, the features and advantages of the project-based approach, and to examine existing experience and the primary obstacles to the large-scale implementation of project management in the practice of local self-government.

**Statement of the task.** Given the stated purpose, the transformation of territorial communities from an "object of management" to a «subject of management» is of particular relevance, alongside changing management practices and creating conditions for project management implementation. In the context of territorial communities, project-oriented management is what can provide strategic vision, financial stability, economic well-being, and sustainable development in the long term.

**Statements of the main material of the study.** Decentralization (the reform of local self-government and territorial organization of power) in Ukraine began in 2014. Its primary focus is to enhance the efficiency of management processes at the local level and form self-sufficient, competitive communities capable of ensuring comfortable living conditions and economic prosperity. The decentralization reform has already shown positive results: trust in LSGBs has increased, and communities have gained greater autonomy.

Decentralization became especially critical during the full-scale war, providing an opportunity to increase the financial resilience of regions and strengthen horizontal ties. Local self-government bodies-city, village, and settlement councils-are the ones addressing food, civil, and information security at the local level, restoring destroyed infrastructure, and solving numerous other complex issues.

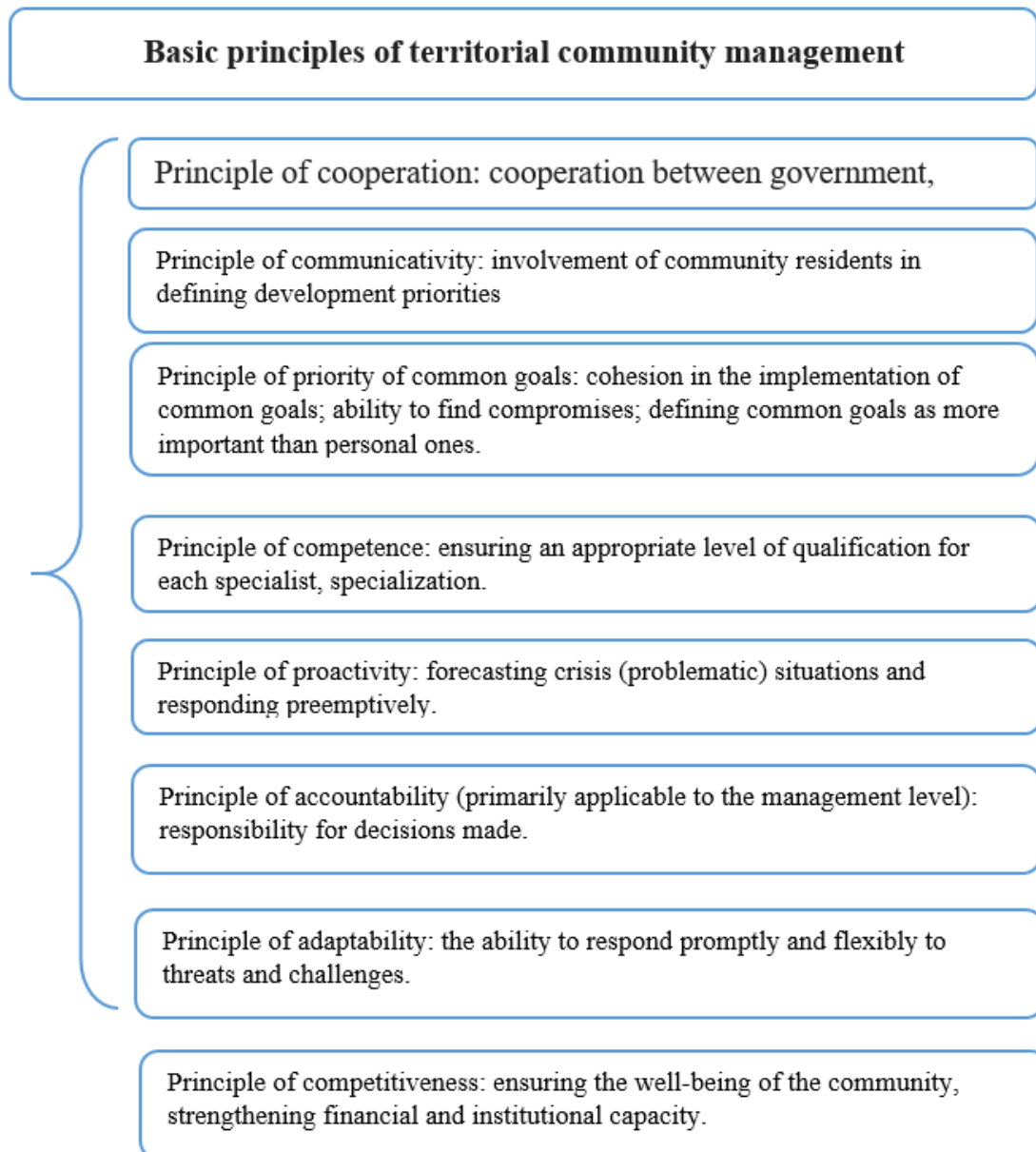
Under the conditions of full-scale war, communities found themselves in diverse situations: some under occupation, some suffering from daily shelling, and others in relatively safe rear areas. Consequently, there arose a need to combine a unified management approach with various mechanisms for rapid response to wartime challenges. Despite significant difficulties, communities demonstrated unique resilience and unity. This allowed most of them not only to withstand military aggression but also to actively support the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and generally strengthen the country's defense and economic stability.

However, not all communities showed equal resilience. Some, even under temporary occupation or constant shelling, managed to mobilize all efforts, unite, and ensure spatial socio-economic development. In contrast, others, even in more favorable conditions, failed to adapt and ensure community resistance to the challenges of war. The main reason for these differences is the community's ability (or inability) to self-organize, the effectiveness of its management, the leadership qualities of its heads, and the capacity for strategic thinking, planning, and implementing anti-crisis measures.

Thus, management at the level of territorial communities has acquired exceptional relevance during military aggression. Communities face a multitude of complex issues (supporting national defense, restoring damaged infrastructure and housing, electricity supply challenges, internal and external migration, labor shortages, business relocation) that require immediate resolution. As Z. V. Kvasniy, O. R. Kondra, and O. R. Kvasniy rightly point out, financial stability is one of the most critical conditions for achieving sustainable development today. Prudent and flexible budget planning, along with financial transparency, allows LSGBs to ensure the effective use of available resources and gain the community's trust.

The digitalization of financial processes plays a vital role in controlling expenditures, effectively allocating funds, and monitoring project implementation results. Local budgets are formed through tax revenues, state subventions, private investments, and other income. Given the scarcity of internal resources, international financial support plays a key role, allowing for the attraction of funds for development, reconstruction, and social or educational projects.

The analysis of published sociological studies on the effectiveness of management processes and community resilience has allowed for the formulation of basic principles of territorial community management (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Basic principles of territorial community management

Formed by the author based on sources [1, pp. 26–27; 2].

The identified difficulties in the development of territorial communities indicate the need to search for more effective management approaches at the level of local self-government.

Today, project management demonstrates high efficiency, allowing local self-government bodies to respond promptly to the needs of the community and rationally distribute available resources.

A project is a specific process (or event) with clearly regulated timeframes aimed at obtaining an innovative result. In itself, a project is an integral part of the real life of any community, as every community has certain development plans and, accordingly, defined goals and implementation measures. It is important to understand how everyday actions differ from a project. First and foremost, every project has its own uniquely formed goal and a deadline for its achievement. Every project eventually ends upon reaching its planned goal, whereas everyday actions are endless, and their primary purpose is to maintain the vital functions of the community.

Project management is a modern and distinct type of management activity that is being actively implemented in the management of various economic, technical, social, and other objectives, both at the state level and the level of LSGBs. Sustainable regional development cannot be ensured without effective management and proper resources, including human and financial ones. A significant problem for the implementation of a project-based approach at the LSGB level today is the lack of knowledge, experience, and resources.

Transparency International Ukraine (TI Ukraine), which is an accredited representative of the global Transparency International movement, has been actively working since 2012 on the development and implementation of changes aimed at increasing the transparency of LSGBs. The «Transparent Cities» program (Transparency International Ukraine), launched in 2017, deserves special attention as it conducts research and forms practical advice for implementing effective management at the local self-government level. The main areas of the organization's activity include: monitoring the activities of LSGBs and promoting integrity practices; supporting the implementation of innovations and open data by LSGBs; and involving broad segments of the public in monitoring and controlling LSGB activities. Starting from 2017, the program annually forms a transparency ranking of the 100 largest cities in Ukraine and an accountability ranking of 50 cities [4].

For instance, even before the full-scale invasion, Mariupol and Kryvyi Rih practiced the implementation of project management to increase the efficiency of specific areas of activity. For example, in Mariupol, with the support of the EU, the EU Projects Office operated, the main purpose of which was to coordinate programs supporting decentralization and the fight against corruption. Thanks to the introduction of project management, for several consecutive years prior to the full-scale invasion, Mariupol topped the Transparency and Accountability Rankings of city councils [4].

Kryvyi Rih City Council also had its own Development Strategy and a step-by-step plan for its implementation in the medium and long term before the full-scale invasion. The practical implementation of the Kryvyi Rih city strategy differs significantly from operational activities. The main difference lies in management approaches. Operational activity is mostly focused on performing repetitive, cyclical tasks that do not involve clearly established deadlines. In contrast, a project is distinguished by limited finances and time. To avoid a cross-functional gap, a «Project Management Office» (PMO) was formed in the city of Kryvyi Rih, consisting of qualified and motivated specialists. The functions of the PMO can include both the management of a strategic project and the coordination (planning, scheduling, control) of a large number of smaller projects. That is, the PMO is essentially a connecting link between project implementation and the city's development strategy. Under conditions of constant internal and external changes, the PMO allows for changing management algorithms and maintaining team productivity [5].

According to data from the Center for Sociological Research, Decentralization, and Regional Development, before the full-scale invasion in 2021, 20% of the surveyed communities

did not engage in project management at all, and in 62% of the surveyed communities, such work was handled by the head or by proactive employees on their behalf [3]. In 2023, the Ministry of Infrastructure presented the concept of Reform Support Teams in communities, whose tasks include providing advisory support for the implementation of recovery projects [2].

The implementation of project management at the local self-government level requires proper managerial qualifications, experience, and a systematic approach. Let us formulate a tentative list of problems related to the inadequate qualification level of project groups (Table 1).

It should also be noted that territorial communities, depending on their size, have significant differences regarding their experience and capacity for short- and long-term planning. Before the start of the decentralization reform, planning powers were held only by large and, partially, medium-sized communities. This means that at least 84% of territorial communities had no experience in short- and long-term planning in the period preceding the reform.

**Table 1.** Key gaps in manager qualifications during project development and implementation

<i>Problematic issues</i>	<i>Causes</i>	<i>Consequences</i>
Weak strategic thinking skills	Insufficient attention is paid to studying the problem before forming the project solution	Efforts of performers and local budget funds are spent on solving mostly operational tasks or on implementing a subjective vision of the strategy
Low facilitation and communication skills	Lack of cohesion and ability to work for a common result, lack of a leader	Failure to promote the project both within the LSGB and at the state level
Lack of partnership potential building skills	Lack of skills in establishing first contact with partners, ability to persuade, and maintain long-term relationships	Complete lack of or limited investment
Inconsistency of project goals with the public	Lack of communication with the community, lack of (or inadequate level of) alignment between community needs and project goals	Lack of broad support for the project, complications in project implementation
Lack of technical skills	Lack of analytical skills and ability to use quantitative and qualitative indicators for persuasion, lack of ability to structure text (reports). Low level of computer literacy. Low level of English proficiency	Unconvincing project applications. Unclear justification for project implementation feasibility. Low level of project visualization and use of digital project management tools. Difficulty in using digital tools and communicating with foreign partners
Resistance to innovation	Lack of (or low level of) innovative thinking. Lack of incentives for implementing innovations. Lack of (or inadequate level of) talent development. Lack of openness to new ideas, lack of generators of new ideas	Complications in the implementation of innovative projects
Lack of institutional memory	Acquired experience and accumulated information are not transferred during full or partial changes of project teams	Lack of learning from own experience; the new team is forced to restart the process of learning and accumulating experience

Formed by the author based on source [2].

Additionally, the real financial and personnel capacity for communities to form structural units for strategic planning and development must be considered. Currently, such an opportunity exists only for cities with a population of over 100,000, which accounts for only 3% of all communities in Ukraine. Besides objective obstacles to implementing project management, there is also a certain degree of resistance from local and state authorities, where such innovations are perceived as a formality or as significant complexities that will not yield practical results [2].

The implementation of project management in territorial communities depends on meeting the expectations and needs of stakeholders (community residents, business, donors). Furthermore, LSGBs today mostly have to operate with limited financial, human,

and technological resources, as well as a lack of knowledge and experience. Consequently, sound planning and the rational allocation of these limited resources are extremely important.

To increase the efficiency of using the project approach in territorial community management, experts recommend implementing standardized project management practices – PMO (Project Management Office) [4]. This approach is essentially a standardized algorithm for project implementation. The main goal is to coordinate project development and implementation, increase the efficiency of teamwork, and achieve planned goals quickly and qualitatively. A PMO allows for a transition from vertical management decision-making processes to horizontal ones, thereby avoiding the process of waiting for a decision from above. Project teams are empowered to make such decisions independently. The implementation of standardized project management practices in LSGBs has already proven its effectiveness in foreign countries. It is the standardization of the project management process that will significantly increase the chances of its successful implementation. For this purpose, it is advisable to adhere to a specific algorithm of actions:

- Communicate the prospects of the project approach in community management and the importance of project managers to community residents via authoritative sources.
- Project managers should work directly on project development and implementation rather than being overloaded with operational work.
- Appoint a responsible person or create a separate unit (depending on the size of the community, availability of financial resources, and project complexity) to execute the project.
- Formulate or refine the strategic development strategy of the territorial community.
- Determine exactly what results are planned to be achieved through PMO implementation in the short-term (2–3 years) and long-term (10 years) perspectives.
- Conduct an analysis of current activities, identify priority development areas, and ensure they do not contradict the community development strategy and can be supported by available financial, human, and time resources.
- Establish a clear distribution of powers among project participants.
- Provide project participants with the opportunity for growth within their competencies.
- Implement a project management policy – this involves creating databases with systematized information, developing document templates, methodologies, tools, and project implementation procedures that will save time and resources and achieve the expected result.
- Ensure access to educational resources and opportunities for professional development.

To achieve the highest possible result with available resources, it is important to determine which type of PMO is appropriate to implement:

- Organizational – helps a structural unit or department achieve specific defined goals.
- Project or Program Office – temporary, oriented toward supporting a specific project or program.
- Global, Strategic, or Corporate – oriented toward aligning a project or program with the development strategy and ensuring proper governance.
- Center of Excellence or Competence – performs a supportive role, providing assistance to the team and project through the organization of training, mentoring, and the development of management standards and methodologies. This type of PMO ensures adaptability to changes in external factors and allows for a more prompt response to stakeholder requests.

The implementation of project management will allow communities to achieve both short-term and long-term results:

- Short-term results are related to the execution of operational tasks and the annual budget cycle.
- Long-term (strategic) results include the optimization of resources and time, and a systematized and controlled situation formed according to the principle of project portfolio management.

To ensure more effective monitoring of project implementation status, the use of Microsoft software is being introduced. Such software allows for tracking task execution in near real-time and responding promptly to changes in internal and external factors. Monitoring task execution allows for more accurate forecasting of project deadlines, reduces costs, and increases the likelihood of achieving a positive result. Despite the fact that project management practices are not yet widespread, some LSGBs actively use elements of project management, such as unified reporting approaches, standardized document management databases, standardized procurement instructions, and more. It is advisable to start implementing project management practices gradually, beginning with individual units, which will allow for learning how to approach planning thoroughly, manage available resources, ensure an adequate level of employee qualification, establish communications, and objectively determine the suitability of the chosen model for scaling.

Projects implemented at the level of territorial communities, depending on many factors, will have significant differences in their defined goals, execution terms, funding sources, scale, implementation tools, level of innovation, reporting, and other indicators [1, p. 25].

It should be noted that the incorrect use of project approach technologies can lead to excessive (irrational) use of resources, including financial ones, and the failure to achieve planned results. The reasons for the inadequate level of LSGB readiness to implement the project approach lie not only in the incorrect application of project management technologies but also in the existence of the so-called «soft» factor, related to the inadequate level of qualification of project developers and executors.

To assess the level of readiness for implementing the project approach in management, it is important to determine the project maturity of the LSGB (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Levels of LSGB readiness for the implementation of the project approach in management

<i>LSGB Readiness Level</i>	<i>Characteristics of LSGB Readiness for Project Management Implementation</i>
Initial	Low level of awareness in the field of project management. Lack of qualified personnel. Lack of teamwork skills
Basic	Presence of fragmentary knowledge in the field of project management. Insufficient level of personnel qualification. Initial teamwork skills
Maturity	Proper mastery of project management terminology and methodology. Qualified personnel. Developed instructions and work regulations. Organized teamwork
Development and Improvement	Project management processes are formalized and regulated. High-quality organized teamwork. The team includes certified project managers

Formed by the author based on sources [6, p. 250; 1, pp. 28–29].

The implementation of the project approach will allow for the formation of the following competitive advantages at the level of territorial communities:

- ensuring an integrated approach to community recovery and development;
- acquiring skills in prioritizing community development during the strategic planning process, involving business and the public in the community development planning process;
- acquiring skills in forecasting possible risks in the medium and long term and developing an appropriate set of measures to prevent and/or minimize their negative impact;
- forming the investment potential of the community;

- creating conditions for business development;
- implementing social projects.

**Conclusions.** In 2014, the government adopted the Concept of Local Self-Government Reform, which became the starting point of the decentralization reform. The essence of the reform is the transfer of powers and budget revenues to local government units in order to form the capacity of territorial communities to solve local issues at the expense of their own resources, that is, to use their own potential for development, formation of economic stability and ensuring the well-being of the population.

The effectiveness of the reform was most clearly manifested with the beginning of a full-scale war, because, as practice shows, it was territorial communities that became the foundation of security and financial stability.

After the end of the war, post-war reconstruction awaits Ukraine, focused not only on the restoration of the destroyed, but also on intensive development, which will require a change in management approaches at the level of local self-government, increasing the productivity and social responsibility of the state, business and society in general.

The implementation of project management will allow not only to raise management standards at the local level, but also to improve the quality of life of community residents. The main advantages of implementing project management in the conditions of local self-government can be distinguished as follows:

- rational management of available resources in conditions of financial and personnel deficit;
- ensuring a well-founded approach to planning the goals of the program or individual projects, implementation terms and budget;
- coordination of target programs or projects with the territorial community development strategy;
- improving approaches to control, monitoring and reporting, which will ensure an increase in the level of accountability and transparency of resource use.

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