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LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN SOUTHERN UKRAINE IN THE 19TH CENTURY: INTELLECTUAL PRACTICES OF MUNICIPAL ELITES IN THE PROCESSES OF MODERNIZATION AND THE FORMATION OF THE URBAN PUBLIC SPHERE

Cheremisin Oleksandr Viktorovych,
*Doctor of Historical Sciences,
Professor at the Department of History, Archaeology
and teaching methods
Kherson State University
al.cheremisin@gmail.com
orcid.org/0000-0003-0173-0489*

Mykhaylenko Halyna Mykolayivna,
*Candidate of Historical Sciences,
Associate Professor at the Department of History,
Archaeology and teaching methods
Kherson State University
irida55@ukr.net
orcid.org/0000-0002-1160-8754*

The aim of this study is to examine the intellectual activities of local government representatives in southern Ukraine during the 19th and early 20th centuries as a means for shaping public opinion. Scientific novelty. This article analyzes the activities of local government in southern Ukraine from a social perspective. Within the framework of this study, the historical process is examined not as the evolution of political institutions, but through the lens of the intellectual history of the activities of local government representatives in the 19th and early 20th centuries. **Research methodology.** Methodologically, this study is based on a human-centered approach, which was applied to analyze the individual of municipal employees through the lens of the diversity of their experiences, allowing for the exploration of self-government as a personal phenomenon. The human-centered approach is complemented by a local research method, which makes it possible to highlight the uniqueness and individuality of each local government unit and outline its spatial configuration at the social level, thereby shedding light on the cultural dimension. Within the framework of local history, the concept of microhistory is employed, which helped explain the work of specific historical figures in unconventional contexts. The study focuses primarily on analyzing and reinterpreting the experience of self-governing institutions in southern Ukraine. **Conclusions.** The findings indicate that the intellectual work of local government deputies in southern Ukraine deserves attention, as it embodies the experience of the practical implementation of municipal work at the local level. Their work, for the most part, is not purely academic but applied. They convey information and draw upon sources that, unfortunately, have not survived to the present day. Various aspects of practical self-governing activities are conveyed and characterized through the prism of the authors' personal perceptions of the period under study.

Keywords: Southern Ukraine, urban self-government, municipality, representatives, intellectual history, microhistory.

МІСЬКЕ САМОВРЯДУВАННЯ ПІВДНЯ УКРАЇНИ У ХІХ СТ.: ІНТЕЛЕКТУАЛЬНІ ПРАКТИКИ МУНІЦИПАЛЬНИХ ЕЛІТ У ПРОЦЕСАХ МОДЕРНІЗАЦІЇ ТА ФОРМУВАННЯ МІСЬКОЇ ПУБЛІЧНОЇ СФЕРИ

Черемісін Олександр Вікторович,
*доктор історичних наук,
професор кафедри історії, археології
та методики викладання
Херсонського державного університету
al.cheremisin@gmail.com
orcid.org/0000-0003-0173-0489*



Михайленко Галина Миколаївна,
кандидат історичних наук,
доцент кафедри історії, археології
та методики викладання
Херсонського державного університету
irida55@ukr.net
orcid.org/0000-0002-1160-8754

Мета дослідження полягає у розкритті інтелектуальної діяльності депутатів міського самоврядування Півдня України в XIX – початку XX ст. як інструменту формування громадської думки. **Наукова новизна.** Стаття присвячена проблемі розгляду діяльності міського самоврядування Півдня України на соціальному рівні. В рамках визначеного дослідження історичний процес розглядається не в якості еволюції політичних інституцій, а крізь призму осмислення інтелектуальної історії діяльності представників самоврядування XIX – початку XX ст. **Методологія дослідження.** У методологічному плані основою роботи став людиновірний концепт, який застосовувався з метою аналізу індивідуального навантаження практик співробітників муніципалітетів крізь призму багатоваріативності їх досвідів, що дало змогу дослідити самоврядування в якості особистісного феномену. Концепт людиновимірності доповнений локальним методом дослідження, за допомогою якого можна відзначити неповторність та індивідуальність кожної самоврядної одиниці і окреслити просторову конфігурацію на соціальному рівні, що дозволяє підсвітити культурний шар. В рамках локальної історії виділявся концепт мікроісторії, який допоміг пояснити творчість конкретних історичних постатей у нестандартних досвідах роботи. Головна увага в дослідженні звертається на осмислення/переосмислення досвіду діяльності самоврядних структур Півдня України. **Висновки.** У висновках відзначено, що інтелектуальна робота депутатів міського самоврядування Півдня України заслуговує уваги, оскільки несе в собі досвід практичної реалізації муніципальної роботи на місцях. Їх роботи, здебільшого, носять не суто наукове значення, а прикладне. Вони передають інформацію і звертаються до тих джерел, які, на жаль, до нашого часу не збереглися. Передані та охарактеризовані різні сторони самоврядної практичної діяльності крізь призму особистісного сприйняття авторів досліджуваного періоду.

Ключові слова: Південь України, міське самоврядування, муніципалітет, депутати, інтелектуальна історія, мікроісторія.

1. Introduction

The relevance of this study stems from the ongoing reform of local self-government institutions and their alignment with the principles of decentralization, particularly in the context of Ukraine's resistance to Russian aggression. Ukrainian history provides a precedent for decentralized self-government in the late 18th to early 20th centuries. Therefore, the experience of the practical experience of self-governing institutions is of considerable interest to historians seeking to study mechanisms and practices of municipal governance.

Thus, the authors aim to examine the intellectual activity of local government deputies in southern Ukraine in the 19th and early 20th centuries as a tool for shaping public opinion.

The intellectual work of local government deputies in southern Ukraine took shape primarily in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and thus did not become part of the historiographical or source-based legacy of their contemporaries. Their works were overlooked during the Soviet period for ideological reasons, as they did not fit into the Marxist-Leninist concept. At the current stage of historical science, many researchers are focusing on the experience of pre-revolutionary self-government, including the example of Southern Ukraine. In O. Marchenko's work (Marchenko, 2019), the fundamental ideas behind the reforms for Odessa in 1863, 1870, and 1892 are subjected to comparative analysis. The work by V. Krot and V. Shabunina (Krot, Shabunina, 2019) is devoted to the analysis of historical sources that reflect the activities of the Kremenchuk Zemstvo in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In general, contemporary historical scholarship frequently cites the works of representatives of local self-government in southern Ukraine, but these works are not utilized comprehensively; rather, they are mostly treated as part of the source base for research. For example, among these works, those by L. Tsybulenko (Tsybulenko, 2001), A. Dorosheva (Dorosheva, 2009), G. Zlenko (Zlenko, 1997), and others stand out. In the studies by these researchers, materials from the works of local government deputies are presented selectively and are mostly tied to an examination of the problem-chronological sequence of the political or socio-economic development of government institutions. Therefore, given the fragmentary nature of the use of the intellectual legacy of local government representatives from the period under study, an attempt is made to examine their works more systematically.

2. Local Elites of the 19th Century and Representational Politics

Since the establishment of civil self-government institutions to southern Ukrainian cities in the late 18th century – operating within the imperial model of limited decentralization – urban social groups gradually gained experience in collective administrative activity and corporate representation of interests. The introduction of elements of municipal governance met the empire's pragmatic needs for the effective administration of newly incorporated lands and their integration into the national economic sphere. At the same time, the formation of city councils, magistrates, and estate-based institutions facilitated the emergence of local decision-making centers, which stimulated the

development of urban corporate self-perception and a sense of administrative agency.

Despite the persistence in the first half of the 19th century of a powerful system of administrative patronage and control by the governor's office and the ministerial bureaucracy, the urban environment of Southern Ukraine demonstrated growing activity in the sphere of self-governance practices. City councils gradually expanded the scope of local initiative within the imperial regulatory framework and became an instrument for articulating the corporate interests of the urban population, a trend that was particularly evident in the commercial and economic spheres.

Imperial economic policy had the most significant impact on the merchant class, which constituted a key segment of the region's urban economy. It was among the merchant class that organized groups of critics of the imperial center's customs and tariff policy emerged, which, in their view, hindered the development of Black Sea trade and the transit potential of southern ports.

Merchant guilds and city councils repeatedly initiated collective appeals to central authorities demanding a review of tariff schedules, an expansion of local self-government powers, and a reduction in administrative interference in economic processes. These petitioning practices should be viewed as a form of legitimate communication between the periphery and the center.

Representatives of the local administrative level in Southern Ukraine consistently advocated for the expansion of decentralization principles, viewing them as a tool for improving the efficiency of urban administration. They documented instances of administrative arrogance on the part of imperial officials, which was perceived as a violation of the corporate dignity of municipal authorities. In this context, the rhetoric of local elites appealed to the principles of legal balance and institutional respect within the existing system of governance.

In the mid-19th century, local elites in Southern Ukraine increasingly began to formulate the programmatic foundations for reforming municipal administration, drawing on the principles of liberal modernization, which included expanding representative functions and streamlining of bureaucratic procedures. It is important to emphasize that these discussions did not reflect opposition to the empire, but rather a desire to optimize administrative mechanisms in the interests of regional development and economic efficiency.

The region-wide civic upsurge of the 1840s–1860s, linked to the crisis of the serfdom system and the preparation of reforms, brought a wide range of socio-economic issues to the fore and contributed to the consolidation of urban communities. For local elites, this period became a time of intense intellectual activity, the formation of public discourse, and the development of publishing initiatives. In the southern

Ukrainian region, a series of practical works devoted to issues of urban governance, economic development, and administrative reforms emerged. In this context, the works of P. Zeleny (Zeleny, 1890), P. Braslavsky (Braslavsky, 1860), V. Vinogradov (Vinogradov, 1884), M. Vladimirov (Vladimirov, 1887), G. Gorlovsky (Gorlovsky, 1890), A. Pashutin (Pashutin, 1897), G. Ge (Ge, 1890), K. Komarnytsky (Komarnytsky, 1849), and others. They reflect the evolution of administrative thought and attempts to understand the role of municipal self-government in the processes of liberal modernization. In previous research, these works have mostly been used as sources describing cities and preserving a wealth of documentary information: municipal revenues and expenditures, taxes, and so on. In the context of this article, they are of interest for their practices of public self-presentation, legitimization, trust-building, and the production of public arguments. A significant portion of the intellectual work of the urban elite can be characterized as an early prototype of public communication technology for managing public opinion.

After analysis the main body of work by municipal officials in Southern Ukraine, it can be asserted that their texts served a comprehensive communicative function aimed at publicly constructing the authority and competence of municipal authorities. Anniversary publications, summary reviews, historical and statistical essays, and comprehensive reports on the activities of local government bodies demonstrated the municipality's ability to act rationally, manage finances effectively, formulate a budget, develop infrastructure, expand the medical and educational networks, organize charitable activities, and regulate trade and business. Such a demonstration of administrative competence fostered a public discourse of evidence, in which statistics, tables, and documentary references served as markers of reliability, accountability, and administrative rationality, thereby building trust in institutions by demonstrating their capacity for systematic management without oversight or supervision from the provincial administration.

At the same time, these texts served as a tool for legitimizing local authorities in the eyes of various urban audiences. For the urban population, they served an explanatory role, justifying the need for taxes, demonstrating how funds were allocated, and justifying modernization projects – water supply, sewer systems, schools, hospitals – as a prerequisite for the civilizational development of the urban environment. For the provincial administration and the imperial center, such publications served as a form of accountability, attesting to the city's governability, loyalty to the rule of law, and, at the same time, the need to expand the powers of self-government.

For local elites – merchants, entrepreneurs, and civil servants – they served to foster internal cohesion and shape a corporate identity. The adaptation

of rhetoric to different audiences clearly indicates the existence of deliberate public communication strategy aimed at maintaining trust and social harmony.

The genre complex, comprising anniversary publications, historical and statistical reviews, journalistic pieces, and summary reports, can be viewed as a historical form of the media infrastructure of the regional public sphere. Managing public opinion in a late-imperial city was impossible without authoritative formats of public expression that were legitimate within the framework of the censorship and administrative regime. Anniversary books created a symbolic representation of success, statistical reviews ensured objectivity, and journalistic essays allowed for permissible criticism under the guise of improving administrative efficiency. Within these limits, even political demands – in particular, calls for greater autonomy – were framed as technical and administrative issues of competence, financial capacity, and efficiency, which aligned with the communicative practices of the political culture.

These texts clearly reveal a strategy for constructing the city's image as a modern, dynamic, and civilized commercial and cultural hub that goes beyond a purely historical description. Anniversary publications and summary reports served a symbolic positioning function, presenting the city as a successful urban entity capable of claiming greater autonomy and resources. Such positioning was not necessarily manipulative; to a greater extent, it served as a form of competitive representation within the imperial space, where cities vied for administrative attention, investments, infrastructure projects, and human resources. In the modern world, this is close to the term “territorial branding,” but in the context under study, it is more accurate to speak of the city's representational policy.

Also notable is the strategy of managing expectations through the construction of sewer systems, water mains, trams, electricity, railways, and so on. Texts that document bureaucracy, personnel incompetence, or procedural inertia may, at first glance, appear to be discrediting. However, institutional criticism, presented in the form of an audit or a final report, can serve the legitimizing function of acknowledging problems, and demonstrating a willingness to address them strengthens trust in the institution as an agent of reform. In a context where a flawless picture of governance would seem implausible, such a strategy helped shape the image of a responsible government capable of self-correction.

It is also empirically significant that these publications accompanied, reinforced, and justified specific administrative decisions. The release of statistics, reports on successes in combating epidemics, the expansion of the school network, or arguments in favor of infrastructure projects served to mobilize support for the continuation of modernization programs. Such

public justification of municipal policy created a favorable social environment for the implementation of administrative decisions.

3. The Intellectual Legacy of Local Elites

First and foremost, we should turn to the work by P. Braslavsky, a member of the Odessa City Council, titled “On the Current State of Public Administration in Odessa” (Braslavsky, 1860: 23), which holds a special place in the intellectual history of southern Ukrainian cities in the mid-19th century. Its significance lies in the formation of a public discourse aimed at influencing urban public opinion. The text represents the ideologeme of “urban patriotism” – a form of local political consciousness that emerged in the urban environment of southern Ukraine as a reaction to imperial administrative and fiscal restrictions. This construct should be interpreted as a manifestation reflecting a collective aspiration to protect local economic interests, mobilize the urban public around common development goals, and foster a conviction in the necessity of effective municipal governance. In this sense, the work serves as an instrument for shaping collective urban self-perception.

As a member of the city council, P. Braslavsky drew on a wealth of factual material to highlight the structural contradictions between Odessa's economic potential as a port and commercial hub and the restrictive mechanisms of the imperial administrative system. In his argument, the city emerges as a promising urban hub whose development is hindered by excessive regulation, fiscal pressure, and bureaucratic control. At the same time, the author did not limit himself to criticizing state intervention but drew attention to internal dysfunctions within the municipal environment, thereby fostering an understanding of the need for a self-critical reevaluation of urban governance. Among the factors hindering stable development, he cited flawed electoral procedures, official corruption, class conflicts, disparities in the tax burden, and institutional inefficiency. This dual critique laid the groundwork for the formation of responsible public opinion oriented toward supporting reforms.

The approaches proposed by P. Braslavsky to address these issues are of particular significance. He argued for the need for a systematic reform of the principles governing local self-government and a rethinking of the role of municipalities in urban development. It should be noted that his reform program was aimed not only at optimization but also at shaping a new administrative culture that was understandable and acceptable to the urban population. He considered the creation of a comprehensive educational infrastructure for the professional training of employees of self-governing institutions to be one of the key elements of this program, which demonstrates an early awareness of the importance of administrative competence as a

prerequisite for effective governance and public trust in the authorities.

Although P. Braslavsky's writings do not take the form of a systematic theoretical monograph and are largely practical observations on the functioning of the Odessa municipality, their influence extended beyond the local context. The deputy's documentary materials were reviewed by government institutions, and certain provisions were taken into account during the drafting of the 1863 City Charter for Odessa. This attests to the inclusion of local expert opinion in the process of imperial lawmaking and, at the same time, demonstrates that the writings of municipal figures could serve as intermediaries between the urban community and state authorities, shaping the field of argumentation for the revision of administrative practices

An important contribution to the development of municipal administrative thought and the formation of public perceptions regarding the effectiveness of government was the work by Odessa Mayor P. Zeleny, "Municipal Justice on the Eve of Reforms" (Zeleny, 1890: 2–9). The author combined practical administrative experience with journalistic and analytical work, which allowed him to develop a comprehensive vision of the functioning of public institutions in the southern Ukrainian region. His focus was on magistrates, town halls, and the interaction of municipal institutions with police and judicial structures. These issues were crucial for building trust in civil self-government as an alternative to police-bureaucratic control.

The primary source material for the study consisted of reports by the governors of the Kherson Governorate, which contained critical assessments of the activities of police agencies. These documents reveal tensions between the administrative-police hierarchy and civil administration bodies. P. Zeleny noted the negative attitude of police structures toward municipal authorities, characterizing the state of police administration as ineffective and failing to meet the needs of urban development. The publication of such assessments contributed to the formation of a public conviction regarding the need to strengthen municipal institutions and transition to civilian forms of governance.

Although the author was the head of Odessa, his work has a broader regional scope and covers a number of cities in the Kherson Governorate. He sharply criticizes the state of municipal self-government in the county seats, while offering a much more restrained assessment of the Odessa experience. According to his observations, the functioning of magistrates and town halls was characterized by a low level of administrative discipline, poor record-keeping, and a lack of professional training among civil servants. The author documented numerous violations in financial reporting and procedural accounting, which fostered a perception among the public of the need to reform the personnel and administrative hierarchy of government.

Particular concern was raised by institutional inertia and civil servants' lack of understanding of their own duties. The account of a protracted investigation into a counterfeiting case, which remained unresolved for years, illustrates the systemic inefficiency of administrative and judicial procedures while simultaneously raising public awareness of the need for institutional modernization. Overall, the author assessed the state of municipal governance in county towns even more critically: cases were shelved without review, officials violated labor discipline, and administrative activities became purely formal. During the survey of the cities of Ananiv, Yelisavetgrad, Dubossary, Kherston, and Ochakiv, systemic violations, professional incompetence, and sluggish procedures were documented. Summarizing his observations, the author drew attention to the prevalence of mutual denunciations among civil servants, which indicated a low level of institutional trust. It is quite plausible to assume that the publication of these facts served as institutional criticism aimed at fostering public demand for effective governance.

In his conclusions, P. Zeleny highlighted the deep staffing crisis in municipal administration – a phenomenon that his contemporaries viewed as routine—and expressed pessimistic predictions regarding the prospects for reform, noting the resurgence of archaic practices following the 1870 reform. In fact, he shaped public awareness of the need for further radical changes.

At the end of the 19th century, a significant source for shaping public perceptions of urban governance was the work by Yelisavetgrad Mayor A. Pashutin, "History of Yelisavetgrad" (Pashutin, 1897: 267–302). Along with a general historical overview, the work devotes considerable attention to the functioning of local government bodies, the financial state of the city's economy, and administrative practices. The high level of documentary detail and the thorough description of revenues and expenditures, civil service salaries, material losses, and economic indicators created an image of an active and well-managed municipal administration. The restrained, neutral style of presentation, focused on statistical representativeness, helped build trust in the municipal government by demonstrating its accountability.

Of particular value are the inventory lists of municipal property, infrastructure, and green spaces, as well as information on revenue-generating properties, prices, charitable initiatives, and municipal holiday traditions. Such a detailed presentation formed a comprehensive administrative and economic portrait of the city and, at the same time, served a communicative function, demonstrating the maximum efficiency of municipal governance. The author's evident familiarity with the materials of the city archives made it possible to preserve a significant body of documentary information that

has not survived to the present day. In this sense, the work serves as a tool for publicly affirming the administrative competence of the city government.

A thematically related work is D. Gorlovsky's "Results of 25 Years of Local Self-Government in Kherson" (Gorlovsky, 1890: 3–178). The author, who served as mayor for a long time and was a member of the city council, had direct access to administrative documentation. The central focus of the analysis is the activity of municipal self-government in the context of its institutional development and effectiveness. The systematization of materials and the generalization of research findings shaped public perceptions of the achievements and limitations of municipal administration, steering public opinion toward a positive view of self-government activities.

D. Gorlovsky demonstrates the duality of the assessment of municipal practices: while acknowledging the positive results of local government activities, he simultaneously draws the conclusion that self-governing institutions are structurally unviable in an urban environment. For the proposed research analysis, it is fundamentally important that this duality functions as a rhetorical and discursive tool for influencing urban public opinion. The author constructs a communicative framework within which the reader is presented with both a confirmation of the significance of urban institutions and a reasoned demonstration of their systemic flaws. This strategy serves as a means of managing the expectations of the urban public: positive examples foster a sense of tangible achievements and grounds for trust, while the argument regarding their lack of viability establishes a framework in which these achievements do not negate the need for deeper structural changes. Ultimately, the work serves as a mechanism for the public legitimization of the reformist impulse, as it produces a socially acceptable framework for its interpretation.

This position is indicative of an institutional crisis in urban public administration under the imperial administrative model, where the theoretical ideals of self-government (representation, accountability, local competence) clashed with the everyday experience of institutional functioning, determined by bureaucratic regulation, staffing shortages, and financial dependence. Discursively, D. Gorlovsky brings the conflict of normative reality into the public sphere as a problem that must be collectively acknowledged and, consequently, can become the subject of a collective demand for change. The author's dissatisfaction with "ideals in theory" when contrasted with practice should be interpreted as an attempt to foster among urban readers a sense of disillusionment with the formal trappings of self-government and, at the same time, to lead them to the conclusion that systemic transformations are necessary. It is precisely at this point that his discourse on arbitrariness takes on the

function of a communicative marker: it condenses negative experience into a comprehensible and emotionally impactful formula capable of structuring public perception of the reality of governance.

A key point for this study is that the diagnosis offered by D. Gorlovsky is presented as a public narrative intended to organize the scattered impressions of city residents and transform them into a coherent picture of the problem. In other words, he is effectively offering the urban community a ready-made framework for interpreting their own everyday experiences of interacting with municipal institutions. Such a framework is a crucial component of public opinion management, as it defines what should be considered the norm and what constitutes deviations, who is the responsible party, and where the boundaries lie between "self-governance" and "administrative oversight."

D. Gorlovsky's critical attitude toward the 1785 City Charter is illustrative. In his interpretation, this act did not provide real autonomy to urban communities and did not transform them into the primary institution for resolving local problems. This assessment challenges the illusion of "granted autonomy" and highlights the limitations of the imperial project of urban self-government, which institutionally allowed for certain elements of representation but failed to create an effective system of powers and resources. It seems important that this critique, while historical and legal in form, serves a communicative function in the contemporary context: it explains to the urban reader why the gap between the declaration of rights and actual governance is not a coincidence but a consequence of the very legal design of the imperial system. In this way, D. Gorlovsky fosters the political and legal literacy of the urban audience, equipping it with evidence to evaluate existing administrative systems.

D. Gorlovsky's argument regarding the "overburdening" of public institutions is significant as an indicator of structural constraints: an excessive number of responsibilities, coupled with a lack of adequate staffing, funding, and procedural support, has led to bureaucratic bloat and administrative inefficiency. Consequently, local self-government emerges as an institution that proved too complex for "normal" and "adequate" functioning in the context of real urban daily life, where fiscal obligations, dependence on the administration, and underdeveloped mechanisms of control and accountability prevailed. However, as it is addressed to the reader, this conclusion serves as a means of "translating" administrative techniques into a plane understandable to the public: bureaucratic cumbersomeness is described as a cause that can be seen, discussed, and potentially corrected. Clearly, D. Gorlovsky conveys not only criticism but also a logic of causality that disciplines public discourse and channels it toward rationalization.

D. Gorlovsky's conclusions are characterized by internal logic and are supported by documentary evidence, which reinforces their authority as a source and increases their impact on public opinion. His work falls under the genre of a "summary study," which serves an evidential function: statistics and tables served as tools to demonstrate the actual financial state and administrative imbalances, rather than merely as an illustrative appendix. In a communicative sense, numerical data functioned as a mechanism for persuasion and objectification of the problem: they created an effect of transparency, inspired trust, and shaped perceptions of the author's competence and his right to speak on behalf of urban governance experience. This is precisely why D. Gorlovsky should be viewed as a proponent of the empirical-statistical approach, typical of late-imperial administrative journalism, where "numbers" legitimized the diagnosis and became an argument in the debate over urban governance reform, as well as established a public standard for evaluating the "success" or "failure" of municipal policies.

Despite his critical stance toward the foundations of self-government, the author's overall tone does not amount to outright pessimism. On the contrary, his position contains an element of hope for modernization: he envisioned the possibility of "coming to one's senses" and reorienting toward a more productive path of development. For managing public opinion, this element of optimism is fundamental, as it does not leave the reader in a state of hopelessness but offers a perspective that transforms criticism into a program of action. D. Gorlovsky interpreted the preceding period as a "foundation" and a preparatory stage – that is, a phase of accumulating experience, from whose mistakes a subsequent, more rational model of governance could emerge. In doing so, he offered the city a specific moral and political framework: failures and dysfunctions are not a reason to abandon self-governance; they are an argument in favor of its reform and professionalization.

His economic optimism is particularly evident in his interpretation of trade as a strategic resource for regional prosperity. It is important to emphasize that, for cities in southern Ukraine, trade was a systemic factor in urban development, shaping financial opportunities, social structure, and the pace of infrastructure modernization. In the public sphere, the appeal to trade as the "key to future prosperity" is also instrumental: it unites various groups of the urban population around a common interest, shapes the concept of "urban welfare" as an economically measurable category, and lays the groundwork for supporting specific administrative decisions. Therefore, D. Gorlovsky's work should be viewed more broadly – as an element of persuasion aimed at mobilizing support for modernization measures.

The 1870 municipal reform provided the context for the publication of Mykolaiv public figure G. Ge's work "Historical Sketch of the City of Mykolaiv" (Ge, 1890: 3–127), in which considerable attention is devoted to themes related to the management of public opinion. It is important to emphasize the genre of this text, as it combines a historical sketch with a local administrative perspective, where the leading agent of urban modernization is not the city community but the central administrative leadership. Such an apologia for the administration creates a normative framework for the reader's perception of authority: modernization is presented as the result of the leadership's comprehensive efforts, while self-government is portrayed as a useful but subordinate mechanism. Therefore, G. Ge's publication serves to publicly allocate responsibility and, at the same time, shapes citizens' perceptions of who is the primary driver of progress in the city.

G. Ge's assessment of municipal self-government is largely neutral, reflecting a cautious distancing from direct criticism while simultaneously noting the subordinate status of public institutions. While acknowledging the practical benefits of self-governing bodies in the city's financial support, the organization of tax collection, and the management of economic affairs, the author simultaneously emphasizes the lack of real autonomy: self-government does not shape the "forefront" of urban relations and remains secondary to the administrative hierarchy. A telling statement is that even issues of urban improvement were largely decided by state officials, not by elected community representatives. This thesis has a clear public function: it normalizes the administration's dominance by setting the limits of the urban population's expectations regarding self-governing institutions and explaining why certain decisions are implemented "from above" rather than "from below."

In G. Ge's account, urban communities appear as poor and underprivileged entities that do not actively participate in the formulation and use of budgets and do not demonstrate initiative in addressing pressing issues. The emphasis on the waning of the "vigorous activity" of self-government by the mid-19th century effectively documents a phase of institutional apathy, but simultaneously shapes public perception: the cause of self-government's weakness is attributed not only to "administrative oversight" but also to public participation and civic competence. An analysis of the consequences of the 1870 reform leads G. Ge to conclude that its effectiveness was limited in the Mykolaiv region, and this view also carries communicative weight: it prevents inflated expectations and creates a more restrained horizon of faith in reform as a universal remedy.

At the same time, G. Ge does not deny the fundamental value of self-government. His argument that the foundations of a conscious attitude toward

the importance of municipal work have yet to mature in urban communities is, in fact, a program for “cultivating” public opinion: the effectiveness of self-government depends on a culture of participation, an awareness of responsibility, and a willingness to act within one’s sphere of competence. By suggesting that the Mykolaiv City Council could eventually become a city leader provided it gains confidence in its own authority, the author creates for the reader a vision of future possibility that serves as a gentle mobilizing incentive.

In conclusion, G. Ge cites a substantial body of documentary sources on the contemporary state of Mykolaiv, with an emphasis on municipal economic indicators. For the researcher, these materials, in addition to their source value, also serve as a marker of the author’s legitimization strategy, where “facts and figures” are intended to convince the public of the usefulness of administrative efforts. In the logic of public opinion management, statistics here serve to objectify and substantiate successes and problems, creating an impression of transparency and competence on the part of the authorities.

Another important factor in the production of intellectual texts by local elites was the commemorative publications of the late 19th century, particularly those marking the centennial of the founding of cities in southern Ukraine. Anniversary culture served as a form of public review and communication mobilization: it created a legitimate platform for taking stock of achievements and shortcomings in the work of local public administrations, reinforced urban identity, and set the framework for representing success. As a result, a series of publications was released in which historical accounts were interwoven with administrative reports and plans for further modernization. This established a clear message: a well-governed city is the key to future success.

One of the most representative examples is the collective work “The Centenary of Odessa, August 22, 1894”, whose authors include A. Albrandt, P. Zeleny, and K. De Azart (Zeleny, Albrandt, De Azart, 1890: 3–135). Alongside the script for the celebrations, it systematically presents the experience of Odessa’s local government in organizational, economic, commercial, financial, and cultural activities. Such texts should be viewed as a genre of municipal self-representation, designed to construct an image of the city as a modern urban center capable of acting rationally, planning development, and demonstrating effectiveness in key areas of urban life. The presentation of exhibitions, cultural events, modernization initiatives, and the results of a century of municipal work serves as a public tool for fostering pride, trust, and a willingness to support further reforms.

The overall tone of the anniversary discourse is aimed at constructing a positive vision of the

future and serves as an indicator of the city elite’s self-assessment. Odessa is portrayed as one of the wealthiest cities, with its local government presented as an active participant in modernization programs and seeking greater autonomy in decision-making. At the same time, it is scientifically important to clarify that the rhetoric of “complete independence” reflected more a desire to minimize administrative oversight and expand the scope of local autonomy than a real possibility of legally breaking free from the imperial hierarchy. Nevertheless, this rhetoric itself is important as an element in the formation of the city’s political self-perception, where self-government is conceived as a structure capable of independently resolving the complex problems of the urban space and thereby deserving the community’s trust.

Commemorative publications dedicated to other cities in southern Ukraine (Mariupol, Katerynoslav, Feodosia, Ananiev, and others) served a similar communicative function. They described the initial conditions for the cities’ development and the trajectories of the formation of public institutions, comparing the pre-reform and post-reform periods in terms of organizational, financial, economic, commercial, and tax parameters, as well as in the spheres of philanthropy and culture. Despite their apologetic tone, such works contained a substantial body of facts, statistics, and normative references and, at the same time, demonstrated how the local elite “explained” the city to itself, which achievements it considered key, which problems it acknowledged, what arguments it used to legitimize its own activities, and what model of the future it proposed to the local public.

Also noteworthy is the work prepared by M. Vladimirov, secretary of the Katerynoslav City Council (Vladimirov, 1887: 5–279), which should be viewed as a tool for public communication between the city authorities and the local community, as well as with higher levels of the administrative hierarchy. Under the guise of summarizing the “century of the city,” the municipality put forward the thesis of its own usefulness, competence, and social necessity in the public sphere. It is no coincidence that the history of the city itself is presented relatively concisely in M. Vladimirov’s work, while the main focus is on the achievements of public figures within the provincial context. This structure underscores the institutional nature of the author’s concept, in which the city is presented as an administratively managed entity capable of self-reflection and disciplined accountability. It is precisely for this reason that the anniversary text effectively becomes a form of “public report” and, at the same time, a means of shaping public opinion regarding what constitutes effective urban governance and which results the public should consider significant.

The account of the history of local self-government in Vladimirov is distinctly representative in nature, at

times even bombastic; however, this bombast should be viewed as part of a communication strategy. It largely constructs the image of a “proper” city council and administration in the public sphere, where local self-government was forced to fight for recognition of its own role. In this sense, the contrast between the rhetorically elevated description of self-governing institutions and the fact of the limited perception of their effectiveness by the local administration and aristocratic forces is particularly telling. Where the provincial hierarchy often viewed self-government as the execution of orders and as a formal construct to be tolerated, the anniversary publication served a different purpose: to create an image of the Duma and the administration as bodies possessing their own historical significance, social function, and moral right to speak on behalf of the city. Ultimately, M. Vladimirov’s text can be interpreted as an attempt to shift the balance of symbolic capital in favor of the municipality – that is, to influence how city residents and administrative authorities assess the weight of self-governing power.

It is important to note that this communicative function is reinforced by the way the sources are handled. The work is based on a substantial body of documentation, and the author meticulously incorporates local government materials into the narrative. Here, the documentary nature of the work serves a publicly persuasive role. It creates an effect of objectivity and accountability, which is particularly important in the discussion of the legitimacy and effectiveness of municipal government. The fact that M. Vladimirov’s attention was most drawn to the financial aspects of local government activity is symptomatic. In late-imperial culture, the budget, accounting, revenues, and expenditures served as a universal language of competence. It was precisely financial reasoning that allowed one to speak to different audiences simultaneously: to city taxpayers (explaining needs and expenditures), to local elites (demonstrating economic rationality), to the provincial administration (demonstrating governability), and to the center (reinforcing rights and broader powers). One gets the impression that the author sought to prove to the provincial leadership the importance of the institution of public authority while simultaneously showing the city that self-government was not merely a decorative mechanism. His concern regarding the loss of the Duma’s autonomy and its subordination to the provincial administration also took on a public function. The reader is offered an interpretive framework in which this dependence appears as a cause of dysfunction and as an argument in favor of reforms.

4. Conclusions

Based on this study, it can be concluded that the body of works produced by members of the urban elite

in southern Ukrainian cities throughout the 19th century should be regarded as a distinct phenomenon in the intellectual and institutional history of the late imperial era. These works document the practical experience of local government operations, while simultaneously reflecting the formation of a distinct discourse of municipal modernization, in which administrative routine was transformed into a program of action. For this reason, they represent an important milestone in the development of key ideas characteristic of the period under study: from concepts of local competence and economic autonomy to an understanding of the city as a complex socio-economic system requiring financial discipline, institutional rationalization, a professional apparatus, and public legitimization of administrative decisions.

In terms of content, these works can be grouped into at least two categories. The first category consists of works shaped by a reformist imperative, in which authors analyze governmental dysfunctions, criticize administrative oversight, propose the de-bureaucratization of procedures, the professionalization of municipal service, the delineation of powers, and a rethinking of the role of urban institutions in economic and social life. The second consists of anniversary and summary publications that combined a memorial narrative, a statistical and documentary inventory, and a presentation of the municipal achievements. Rather, these two groups do not oppose one another but importantly complement each other. Together, they allow for the reconstruction of an intellectual landscape in which administrative practice, journalism, statistical and documentary descriptions, and normative and project-oriented thinking interacted, mutually reinforced one another, and developed the vocabulary of modern urban governance.

The analytical value of these works lies in the fact that they offer an inside look at the workings of local government: through the lens of those who directly carried out administrative procedures, were responsible for the budget, public services, social programs, and interactions with the police and judicial institutions, and were forced to constantly adjust management decisions in accordance with the regulations in effect at the time. Most of the texts outline development prospects, revealing local models of the future “effective municipality” as an autonomous, competent, accountable, and socially responsible entity. In this sense, the urban elite of southern Ukraine served as the bearer of a modernization program, the key elements of which were the de-bureaucratization of governance, the development of specialized education for civil servants, the raising of the general cultural level of the population, the institutional separation of functions, and the strengthening of local financial capacity. The authors’ critique of administrative oversight reflects the structural tension between the ideal of local competence and the reality of municipalities’

integration into the vertical structure of imperial administration, including control practices, legal restrictions, and fiscal obligations.

The current focus on decentralization reforms in Ukraine brings to the fore issues that municipal leaders in southern Ukraine were already raising in the 19th century: the balance between autonomy and oversight, the fiscal capacity of communities, the

professionalization of the administrative apparatus, the transparency of decision-making, the social responsibility of city authorities, and the role of public communication in fostering trust. Thus, the works examined here illuminate enduring challenges in urban governance, where modernization, institutional effectiveness, and public legitimization remain closely interconnected dimensions of development.

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