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ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE MODELS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN UKRAINE DURING POST-WAR RECOVERY

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Abstract
The article examines the formation of adaptive governance models for rural development in southern Ukraine in the context of post-crisis and post-war recovery. The study aims to identify the key socio-economic factors, institutional mechanisms and governance instruments influencing the adaptive capacity of territorial communities, and to develop an indicator framework for assessing the effectiveness of local development management. The methodological approach combines qualitative and quantitative methods, including benchmarking, stakeholder analysis, expert assessment and multi-criteria analysis. The empirical basis of the research comprises 4 territorial communities of southern Ukraine: Kutsurubska, Kostiantynivska, Voznesenska and Shevchenkivska – which differ in terms of economic structure, financial capacity and levels of entrepreneurial activity. The analysis reveals a significant differentiation in the socio-economic potential of these communities. Communities characterised by a more diversified economic structure and a higher density of entrepreneurship demonstrate greater financial capacity and a higher level of resilience to socio-economic challenges. The multi-criteria assessment identifies key constraints on territorial development, including infrastructure damage, limited accessibility of basic public services, strong dependence of local economies on the agricultural sector, population decline, and institutional coordination challenges among development actors. These factors significantly influence the ability of communities to respond to socio-economic changes. The study proposes a framework system of adaptive governance indicators integrating economic, infrastructural and institutional dimensions. The proposed indicator system may serve as an analytical tool for monitoring local development policies, evaluating management effectiveness and supporting evidence-based decision-making in the process of rural recovery and long-term territorial development.
Keywords: adaptive governance, rural development, territorial communities, local self-government, post-war recovery.

Introduction

Rural areas play a crucial role in economic stability, food security and social cohesion in Ukraine, but structural transformations, demographic shifts and institutional pressures significantly complicate their development.

The decentralisation reforms in Ukraine have significantly expanded the powers of territorial communities and transformed approaches to local development policy. Greater financial autonomy has created new opportunities for strategic planning and the implementation of territorial development programmes. Previous studies emphasise that rural development largely depends on the ability of local institutions to establish effective governance mechanisms and coordinate the use of resources (Davydenko et al., 2022). These transformations stimulate the search for governance models capable of combining long-term strategic planning with adaptation to rapidly changing socio-economic conditions.

Governance challenges intensify during post-war recovery due to infrastructure damage, disrupted logistics and limited financial resources, requiring local authorities to simultaneously restore services and support economic stability.

In international academic discourse, increasing attention is being paid to the concept of adaptive governance as the capacity of governance systems to respond to uncertainty, risks and dynamic socio-economic changes. Research demonstrates that such models combine strategic planning with the continuous adjustment of management decisions (Manevska-Tasevska et al., 2021), thereby strengthening institutional resilience and improving coordination across different levels of governance. The experience of European Union countries confirms the growing importance of multi-level governance and partnerships between the state, business and civil society (Pollermann et al., 2020).

Ukrainian scholars also emphasise the transformation of public governance systems in the context of contemporary challenges, particularly the adaptation of local self-government to the conditions of martial law and the dependence of post-war recovery effectiveness on the quality of public administration (Kruglashov & Shvydiuk, 2025; Fedyk S. & Fedyk O., 2024). At the same time, it is highlighted that the effectiveness of territorial development is determined by the ability of public authorities to implement integrated policies that combine economic, social and institutional dimensions (Borshchevskyi et al., 2024), as well as to modernise governance mechanisms and develop cooperation between authorities, businesses and local communities (Nazaruk & Rud, 2025).

The southern regions of Ukraine are characterised by specific socio-economic conditions, particularly agrarian specialisation and the dependence of economic activity on the state of engineering and transport infrastructure, which necessitates the development of effective governance models capable of aligning strategic development priorities with the use of community resources.

Despite the growing academic interest in rural development, the formation of adaptive governance models in the context of post-crisis and post-war recovery remains insufficiently explored, while existing approaches rarely combine the analysis of socio-economic characteristics of communities with the assessment of governance institutions and

indicator-based methods for evaluating their adaptability.

Therefore, this study aims to substantiate approaches to the formation of adaptive governance models for rural development in southern Ukraine during the post-crisis recovery period. The study focuses on the socio-economic characteristics of territorial communities, stakeholder interaction, key development challenges and the development of an indicator-based framework for assessing governance adaptability.

Materials and Methods

The methodological framework of the study is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to the analysis of rural development, ensuring both the depth of institutional interpretation and the reliability of empirical results. The research design integrates comparative analysis, institutional mapping, expert assessment and multi-criteria analysis (MCDA), which together form a coherent methodological basis for obtaining and validating research findings.

The empirical basis of the study comprises four territorial communities in southern Ukraine – Kutsurubska, Kostiantynivska, Voznesenska and Shevchenkivska – selected as representative cases of agrarian-oriented territories affected to varying degrees by hostilities. The selection of communities was based on three criteria: rural socio-economic profile, exposure to war-related disruptions, and differences in financial capacity and entrepreneurial structure**.** The study employed a staged analytical procedure combining statistical, expert and institutional analysis. This approach ensures methodological validity and enables the identification of key development challenges and the evaluation of governance effectiveness.

In the first stage, socio-economic characteristics were assessed using an indicator-based approach, including budget revenues per capita, the structure of entrepreneurship and the density of economic activity. The data were collected from open analytical sources (Clarity Project, statistical materials and community budgets) and used for comparative analysis of economic capacity and the level of diversification of the studied territories.

In the second stage, stakeholder analysis was conducted to identify key actors involved in rural development governance and to evaluate their influence on decision-making processes. The empirical results of this stage were obtained through expert assessment. A total of 12 experts participated in the study, including representatives of local self-government bodies, regional development specialists and academic researchers in the field of public administration and rural development. The expert survey was conducted during September–November 2025 using a structured questionnaire. Five stakeholder groups were evaluated: local self-government bodies, agricultural enterprises, non-agricultural business entities, civil society organisations, and regional or donor institutions. Experts assessed their relative influence on managerial decision-making using a five-point scale, where 1 indicated very low influence and 5 indicated very high influence. The final scores were calculated as average values followed by normalisation to ensure comparability between groups**.** This procedure increased the objectivity and reproducibility of the obtained results.

In the third stage, the identification and evaluation of key development challenges were carried out using MCDA. Five groups of constraints were assessed: infrastructure damage, dependence on agricultural production, limited entrepreneurial diversification, demographic decline, and institutional coordination problems. Each factor was evaluated according to three criteria: scale of impact, duration of influence and managerial response capacity, using a five-point scale where higher values indicated stronger significance.

The selected criteria reflect key dimensions of territorial development constraints within the adaptive governance framework. The scale of impact captures the extent of influence on local development, the duration reflects the temporal persistence of challenges, and managerial response capacity indicates the ability of local authorities to address them.

The integral significance index was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the three criteria. Equal weights were assigned to each criterion, reflecting their assumed equal importance and ensuring methodological neutrality in the absence of a justified basis for prioritisation.

This approach enabled the ranking of territorial constraints and provided a transparent and reproducible basis for interpreting the results. This methodological approach ensures the consistency between the evaluation procedure and the subsequent interpretation of results presented in the study.

In the fourth stage, the level of adaptability of the territorial governance system was assessed using a system of adaptive management indicators. These included the availability of public services, infrastructure recovery capacity, economic sustainability and the level of coordination of managerial decisions. The evaluation combined quantitative data with the qualitative analysis of strategic documents and community development programmes, which enabled the identification of gaps between declared strategic objectives and their actual implementation.

The findings should be interpreted with certain limitations, including the relatively small number of case studies and the partial reliance on expert judgement. At the same time, the application of methodological triangulation enhances the reliability of the results and provides a comprehensive understanding of rural development governance in the context of post-war recovery.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic characteristics determine the resource base and development capacity of territorial communities (Borshchevskyi et al., 2024). The analysis of these characteristics makes it possible to assess the resource base of local development and determine the level of economic diversification of territories.

The empirical analysis covers the Kutsurubska, Kostiantynivska, Voznesenska and Shevchenkivska territorial communities of southern Ukraine and allows a comparative assessment of their economic structure and development diversification. All four communities were significantly affected by hostilities in 2022, which caused infrastructure damage and disrupted economic ties. The Kutsurubska community remains the most vulnerable due to recurring infrastructure destruction, which complicates local economic recovery.

The economic structure of most studied communities is dominated by the agricultural sector, which increases their dependence on agricultural production and seasonal fluctuations. The Voznesenska community demonstrates a more diversified economy, with developed trade, transport and service sectors, which expand its tax base and financial capacity.

Key indicators of economic activity and financial capacity are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparative Analysis of Socio-Economic Capacity of Selected Territorial Communities of Southern Ukraine (based on Clarity Project, 2026; Decentralization Portal, 2026)

Territorial community	Budget for 1 resident, UAH	Share of agricultural sector enterprises, %	Density of entrepreneurial activity (per 1000 inhabitants)	Main directions of economic activity
Kutsurubska	11,200	72	26	Agricultural production, agricultural services
Kostiantynivska	12,500	65	27	Agricultural production, processing activities
Voznesenska	16,800	38	34	Industry, transport, trade, services, agricultural production
Shevchenkivska	10,600	69	23	Agricultural production, trade, small business

A comparative analysis of the indicators presented in Table 1 demonstrates a significant differentiation in the socio-economic potential of territorial communities. The highest levels of budget revenues per capita and the density of entrepreneurial activity are observed in the Voznesenska community, reflecting a more diversified economic structure, whereas in the Kutsurubska, Kostiantynivska and Shevchenkivska communities, agrarian specialisation prevails, making them more dependent on the dynamics of agricultural production. At the same time, such communities play an important role in ensuring food security, while the combination of agricultural orientation and limited diversification necessitates the application of more flexible approaches to territorial development governance.

The results of the analysis indicate that differences in financial capacity, economic structure and levels of entrepreneurial activity create varying preconditions for the implementation of local development policy, while economic indicators only partially reflect the characteristics of the governance system. Contemporary studies emphasise the decisive role of effective interaction between public authorities, business and civil society in ensuring the effectiveness of territorial development policy (Borshchevskyi et al., 2024).

The system of territorial community development governance is formed through the interaction of key stakeholders, with local self-government bodies playing a leading role by ensuring strategic planning, management of budget resources and coordination of development programmes in cooperation with business, non-governmental organisations, regional authorities and international support programmes. Expanding stakeholder participation in decision-making processes enhances governance effectiveness and promotes a more coordinated use of resources (Davydenko et al., 2022), while the development of inclusive institutions facilitates broader engagement of local actors and prevents practices that may constrain the potential of rural areas (Zawojska & Siudek, 2025).

Agricultural enterprises play a key role in shaping local economic activity, employment and budget revenues. In addition to the economic function, agricultural enterprises often participate in the implementation of social and infrastructure projects, forming partnership models of interaction between business and local governments. Similar forms of cooperation are considered in scientific literature as an important element of modern systems of multi-level governance (Pollermann et al., 2020).

Public organisations and local initiative groups enhance inclusiveness in community development processes. Active interaction between local authorities and civil society contributes to the formation of more inclusive mechanisms for managerial decision-making (Storonyanska et al., 2022).

A supporting function in the community development

management system is also performed by regional authorities and international donor programmes, whose participation is related to the attraction of financial resources, the implementation of technical assistance programs, and the strengthening of the institutional capacity of communities (OECD, 2022).

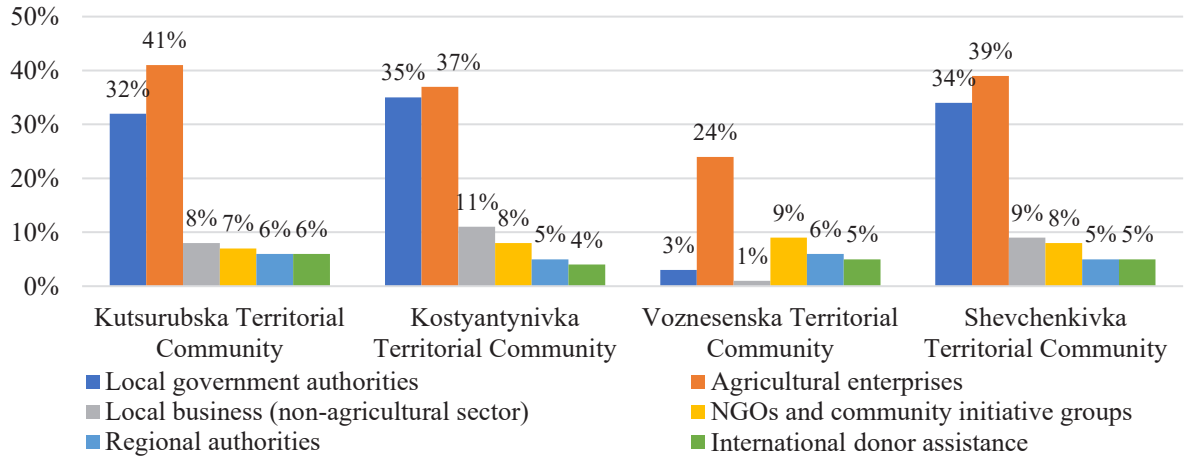
Using an expert assessment method, the relative importance of different groups of actors in the processes of managerial decision-making within territorial communities was determined. Experts assessed the level of influence of each stakeholder group on managerial decision-making at the local level. The obtained assessments were generalised through the calculation of average values and the subsequent normalisation of the results.

The results of the expert assessment made it possible to determine the institutional structure of management of the development of the studied territorial communities and to compare the ratio of influence of different groups of actors in the processes of managerial decision-making.

The comparative structure of the influence of key stakeholders in the community development management system is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Stakeholder influence on local development decision-making in selected territorial communities of Southern Ukraine (based on expert assessment)



The results confirm the dominant role of local authorities and agricultural enterprises in decision-making processes. Such a distribution of influence is due to the significant role of agricultural production in the formation of economic activity of territories, ensuring employment of the population and the formation of the revenue side of local budgets. At the same time, in the Voznesenska Community, there is a more tangible influence of non-agricultural business entities, which reflects a more diversified structure of the local economy.

Other groups of stakeholders, including civil society organisations, regional authorities and international support programs, perform an auxiliary function in the management system of territorial development. Their participation contributes to attracting additional financial and institutional resources and strengthening the managerial capacity of communities. At the same time, the effectiveness of territorial development policy directly depends on the inclusiveness of governance models and the active involvement of local actors. This approach is fully consistent with the principles of the European initiative LEADER, which is based on the bottom-up approach and the activities of local action groups (LAGs). The experience of EU countries, in particular France, Germany and Italy, confirms the effectiveness of the LEADER program in ensuring territorial resilience (Pollermann et al., 2020), which correlates with our data on higher community adaptability under the condition of systemic coordination between local authorities and agribusiness.

However, in contrast to the stable environment of the European communities, Ukrainian realities form a specific challenge – the need to simultaneously combine security recovery measures and strategic development planning. A comparison with EU studies on financial mechanisms for rural development (Storonyanska et al., 2022) demonstrates that domestic adaptive models remain focused on operational crisis management. At the same time, European governance practices have already moved to the stages of long-term digital and environmental transformation.

The significant role of international donors in the community management system confirms the scientific theses on the priority of strengthening municipal governance as a foundation for the effective absorption of external aid (OECD, 2022). The evolution of governance models in Ukraine should involve a gradual transition from a ‘survival’ strategy towards the implementation of institutional tools similar to LEADER and broader integration into the European governance space (Nazaruk & Rud, 2025). The effectiveness of municipal governance in the

context of European integration largely depends on the implementation of the principles of good governance.

The analysis of stakeholder interactions in territorial development governance provides a basis for identifying the main development challenges. The effectiveness of local development policy depends on the ability of authorities to identify structural constraints in a timely manner and determine priority areas of intervention (Borshchevskyi et al., 2024; Nazaruk & Rud, 2025). In the context of post-crisis recovery, such analytical work becomes especially relevant, as communities simultaneously face economic, infrastructural and demographic challenges.

The analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of communities and the peculiarities of local development management made it possible to identify several key groups of factors influencing the development of territories. These include infrastructure constraints, economic factors, demographic trends, and governance barriers. Each of these groups forms specific challenges for territorial development and requires appropriate management decisions at the level of local self-government.

One of the most tangible challenges in the development of the studied communities remains the state of engineering and transport infrastructure. Damage to infrastructure and limited access to transport and public services significantly constrain economic activity and reduce investment attractiveness.

The structure of the local economy is also an important factor in development. The high share of the agricultural sector in the entrepreneurial environment of most of the studied communities forms their dependence on the dynamics of agricultural production. The seasonal nature of agricultural activity and fluctuations in agricultural markets create additional risks for the economic stability of territories (Nehrey et al., 2025). In such conditions, the development of small business, the service sector and the processing industry becomes an important factor in increasing the economic sustainability of communities.

Demographic processes also have a significant impact on the socio-economic development of territories. Population reduction, labour migration and population aging reduce the labour potential of communities and complicate the development of the local economy.

To systematise the identified development challenges of territorial communities, the study applies a multi-criteria analysis approach, which enables the assessment of the relative importance of various factors. Within the framework of the study, the assessment was carried out according to three criteria: the scale of the impact of the factor on the development of the territory, the duration of its action and the possibilities of managerial response. The results were aggregated into an integral index, enabling the prioritisation of development challenges.

The results of the multi-criteria assessment made it possible to establish the priority of the key challenges in the development of the studied communities (Table 2).

Table 2

Prioritization of Key Development Challenges in Selected Rural Communities of Southern Ukraine Based on Multi-Criteria Assessment (based on Borshchevskyi et al., 2024; Nazaruk & Rud, 2025; OECD, 2022)

Challenge Group	Specific development factor	Scale of impact (1–5)	Duration of exposure (1–5)	Managerial response capacity (1–5)	Integral significance index
Infrastructure	Damage to transport and engineering infrastructure	5	5	3	4.33
Economic	High sectoral dependence of the local economy on agricultural production	4	4	3	3.67
Entrepreneurial	Limited diversification of the structure of local entrepreneurship	4	4	4	4.00
Demographic	Population decline and increasing labour migration	3	5	2	3.33
Institutional	Limited management resources and coordination between stakeholders	3	3	3	3.00

Note: The integral significance index is calculated as the arithmetic mean of the three evaluation criteria.

Higher values of the integral significance index indicate more critical constraints that require immediate managerial attention, while lower values reflect challenges with either limited impact or greater controllability within the existing governance system.

The results of the assessment indicate that infrastructure constraints demonstrate the highest impact, followed by economic and entrepreneurial factors.

The second most significant group comprises economic

constraints, particularly the high dependence of local economies on the agricultural sector and the insufficient diversification of entrepreneurial activity. This structure is typical for most rural areas of southern Ukraine and leads to increased sensitivity of communities to fluctuations in agricultural markets. Scientific studies emphasize that the diversification of economic activity and the development of small businesses are important prerequisites for increasing the economic sustainability of rural areas (Nehrey et al., 2025).

Lower values of the integral index are characteristic of demographic and institutional factors. At the same time, their impact is long-term, since demographic processes determine the potential of labour resources, and institutional constraints affect the effectiveness of local development programs.

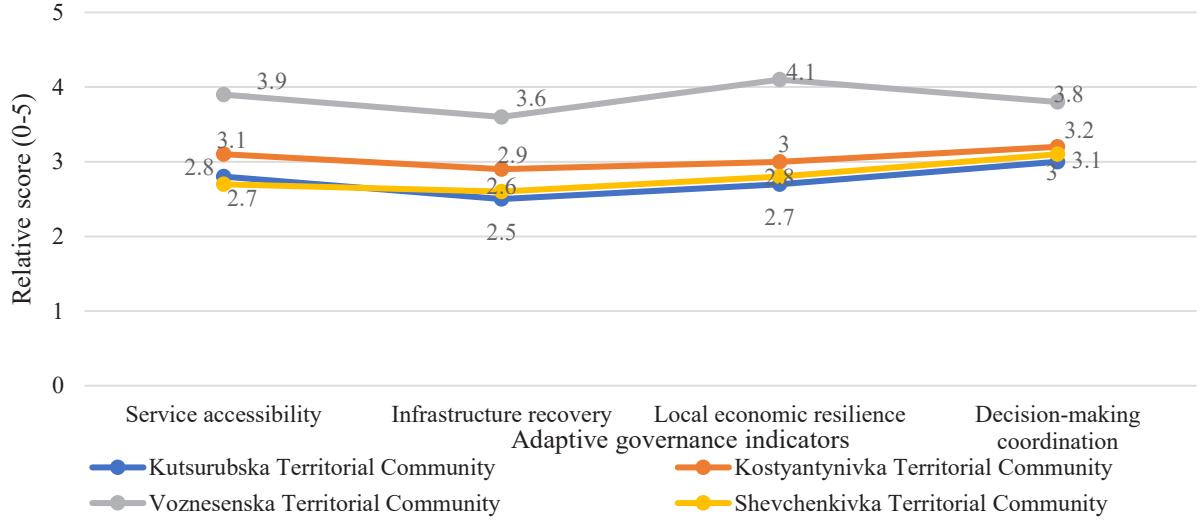
The results obtained indicate that the challenges of development of the studied communities are complex and are formed under the influence of interrelated economic, infrastructural and institutional factors. In such conditions, it is of particular importance to assess the effectiveness of mechanisms for managing the development of territories and to identify gaps between strategic development goals and the practice of their implementation.

For this purpose, the study conducted a comparative assessment of the key indicators of adaptive management in the development of territorial communities. These indicators include the availability of basic public services, the capacity for infrastructure recovery, the economic resilience of the local economy, and the level of coordination of managerial decisions among the main stakeholders in territorial development. The integral values of these indicators make it possible to assess the relative level of adaptability of the management system in the communities under study.

The results of the comparative assessment of the indicators of adaptive management in the development of territorial communities are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Comparative Assessment of Adaptive Rural Governance Indicators in Selected Territorial Communities of Southern Ukraine (based on expert assessment and community development indicators)



The comparative assessment reveals substantial differences in institutional capacity across the studied communities. The highest integral values are observed in the Voznesenska Territorial Community, which can be attributed to a diversified economic structure, a high level of entrepreneurial activity, and a well-developed system of public services.

In the Kutsurubska, Kostiantynivska and Shevchenkivska communities, lower values are recorded for most indicators, reflecting their dependence on the agricultural sector and limited opportunities for economic diversification. This is particularly evident in the indicators of economic resilience and infrastructure recovery capacity, which determine the ability of communities to respond to contemporary challenges.

At the same time, the indicators of coordination of managerial decisions are relatively homogeneous across all communities, indicating the presence of basic institutional mechanisms of interaction between public authorities, business and civil society. Effective coordination, as highlighted in academic studies, is a key factor in enhancing the effectiveness of territorial development policy (Davydenko et al., 2022).

The findings confirm that the adaptability of territorial development management systems is shaped by a combination of economic, infrastructural and institutional factors. This necessitates the application of integrated approaches based on strategic planning, systematic monitoring, and the flexible adjustment of managerial decisions.

An important tool for improving governance efficiency

is the use of adaptive management indicators. In modern studies of territorial development, the indicator approach is considered as one of the key tools for increasing the transparency of management and the validity of managerial decision-making (Borshchevskyi et al., 2024; Nazaruk & Rud, 2025).

The proposed framework of adaptive management indicators integrates economic, infrastructural and institutional dimensions of territorial development and assesses the capacity of local governance systems to adapt to socio-economic change. Its key feature is the combination of quantitative development indicators with measures of management quality, allowing the assessment of both development outcomes and governance effectiveness.

The structure of the system of indicators for adaptive management of rural development is given in Table 3.

Table 3

Indicator Framework for Adaptive Governance of Rural Development in Territorial Communities (author's elaboration based on Borshchevskyi et al., 2024; Nazaruk & Rud, 2025; OECD, 2022)

Adaptive Governance Dimension	Key indicators	Quantitative and qualitative indicators	Data sources	Managerial importance
Accessibility of public services	Level of availability of basic public services	Number of healthcare and educational institutions per 10,000 population; number of administrative services provided through Administrative Service Centres (ASCs); proportion of the population with access to basic public services (%)	Community statistics; reports of local self-government bodies	Assessment of the level of provision of the population with basic services
Restoration and development of infrastructure	Capacity of the community to restore infrastructure	Share of restored infrastructure facilities (%); length of repaired roads (km); share of restored engineering networks (%); volume of investment in infrastructure restoration (UAH/year)	Local budgets; infrastructure recovery programs	Determining the capacity of communities to modernize infrastructure
Economic sustainability of the territory	Level of economic activity and diversification of the economy	Density of entrepreneurship (number of enterprises per 1000 inhabitants); share of non-agricultural business (%); budget revenues per capita (UAH); rate of change in the number of enterprises (%)	Clarity Project; open budget data; regional statistics	Assessment of economic stability and adaptability of the local economy
Institutional capacity of management	Quality of management processes	Number of partnership projects between local authorities and businesses (units); number of public consultations per year; level of transparency of budget information; share of implemented local development projects (%)	Reports of local self-government bodies; expert assessments	Assessment of the effectiveness of the local government system
Adaptability of management decisions	Management ability to respond to changes in the environment	Frequency of updating development strategies (years); share of the development budget in the structure of the local budget (%); the number of innovative management tools (programs, digital services, grant projects); number of implemented development projects per year	Strategic documents of communities; local development programs	Assessment of the level of adaptability of the territorial development policy

Note: Quantitative values of indicators can be calculated on the basis of statistical data of territorial communities, open budget sources and analytical databases of regional development.

The proposed framework is based on universal indicators of budgetary capacity and institutional interaction. These indicators are derived from the Clarity Project open data and statistical reports of territorial communities. This provides an opportunity to extrapolate the results of the study to other rural areas of Ukraine facing similar challenges of post-war recovery, depopulation and infrastructure constraints. The generalisation of the study results indicates that the effectiveness of rural development management is determined by the interaction of economic, infrastructural and institutional factors and depends on the ability of communities to combine strategic planning with adaptive responses to socio-economic changes. The proposed system of indicators of adaptive management can be used as an analytical tool for monitoring territorial development policy and supporting management decisions.

Conclusions

1. The effectiveness of rural development governance in southern Ukraine is determined by the interaction between the socio-economic capacity of communities and the institutional characteristics of local governance. A comparative analysis of communities in the south of Ukraine revealed significant differences in financial capacity, economic structure and level of entrepreneurial activity. Communities with a more diversified economic structure are characterized by higher budget revenues and a higher density of entrepreneurship, which increases their ability to respond to socio-economic challenges.

2. The analysis of the structure of interaction of stakeholders showed that local self-government bodies and enterprises of the agricultural sector play a key role in the formation of managerial decisions. At the same time, the participation of civil society organizations, regional authorities and international support programmes contributes to strengthening institutional interaction and attracting additional resources for community development.
3. Multi-criteria analysis made it possible to determine the main limitations of the development of the studied communities. The most significant among them are infrastructure problems, particularly damage to transport networks and limited availability of basic public services. Important factors are also economic constraints associated with the high dependence of the local economy on the agricultural sector and insufficient diversification of entrepreneurial activity.
4. The study confirms that rural governance effectiveness in southern Ukraine depends on the interaction between economic capacity, infrastructure resilience and institutional coordination. Communities with a more developed entrepreneurial environment and a higher level of institutional interaction demonstrate greater resilience to socio-economic changes.
5. The study proposes a framework system of indicators for adaptive management of rural development, which integrates economic, infrastructural and institutional indicators. The proposed approach forms a methodological basis for monitoring the effectiveness of local development policy, allows to identify key limitations of territorial development and increase the validity of managerial decisions. The use of such an indicator system can contribute to the formation of more flexible models of rural development management in the context of post-crisis recovery.

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