



**Strategies for innovative development in the field of municipal management in the context of European integration**

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**Abstract. Purpose:** *The purpose of this study is the analysis of strategies for innovative development in municipal management in the context of European integration. This research seeks to reveal significant challenge for Ukrainian municipalities and explores the involvement of European integration in solving these problems. In order to provide a systematic understanding of how EU integration can be used as a tool for the modernization of Ukraine's local governance systems, this study conducts an analysis of governance modernization, public-private partnerships, community engagement and sustainability initiatives.*

**Methods:** *This paper takes a qualitative approach to the research into case studies, EU policies, EU case studies on European integration, and the literature related to municipal management. It reviews EU best practice in municipal*



*governance and assesses the relevance of this experience for Ukraine. In addition, the research examines the extent to which Ukrainian municipal strategies comply with the EU norms, with a particular emphasis on legal harmonisation and capacity building at the level of local government. A review of municipal initiatives supported through EU funding and networks is added to this analysis.*

**Results:** *The results reveal that Ukrainian municipalities have achieved progress in the implementation of EU oriented strategies, but there is more than improvement potential in other fields to be done: digital governance, infrastructure development, public – private partnership, etc. The EU funding has been crucial in supporting renewable energy projects and infrastructure upgrades, but the application processes and lack of technical expertise have prevented wider involvement, the study finds. There is evidence that the adoption of advanced governance technologies, including e governance platforms and «smart» meters, can enhance the delivery of municipal services; however, the high costs and the reluctance towards digital transformation present continued challenges to this effort. Moreover, the partnership with EU municipalities has been an opportunity for exchange of expertise, notwithstanding a barrier imposed by languages and financial constraints that may hinder long term partnerships.*

**Conclusions:** *Facilitation of the Ukrainian innovation municipal development, digital governance should be bolstered, the number of the public private partnerships should increase, and sustainability initiatives should be encouraged that conform to the EU standards. For legal alignment, digital infrastructure and capacity barriers Ukrainian municipalities need to focus on. Leveraging opportunities of EU funding and the cooperation with EU counterparts enables municipal governance in Ukraine coming nearer to its goals of European integration. Finally, the authors plead for further research on the scalability of «smart» city projects in Ukraine and towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of public-private partnerships.*



**Keywords:** municipal management, European integration, digital governance, public-private partnerships, sustainability, smart cities, EU funding, infrastructure development, local government reform, capacity building.

## **Стратегії інноваційного розвитку у сфері комунального управління в умовах євроінтеграції**

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**Анотація. Мета:** Метою цього дослідження є аналіз стратегій інноваційного розвитку муніципального управління в контексті євроінтеграції. Це дослідження спрямоване на виявлення значних викликів для українських муніципалітетів та досліджує участь європейської інтеграції у вирішенні цих проблем. Щоб забезпечити систематичне розуміння того, як інтеграція з ЄС може бути використана як інструмент для модернізації систем місцевого самоврядування в Україні, це дослідження проводить аналіз модернізації управління, державно-приватного партнерства, залучення громади та ініціатив сталого розвитку.

**Методи:** у цій статті було застосовано якісний метод аналізу тематичних досліджень, політики ЄС, тематичних досліджень ЄС щодо європейської інтеграції та джерел, пов'язаних з муніципальним управлінням. У статті розглядається передовий досвід ЄС у сфері муніципального



управління та оцінюється актуальність цього досвіду для України. Крім того, дослідження вивчає, наскільки муніципальні стратегії України відповідають нормам ЄС, з особливим наголосом на гармонізації законодавства та розвитку потенціалу на рівні місцевого самоврядування. До цього аналізу додано огляд муніципальних ініціатив, підтриманих через фінансування та мережі ЄС.

**Результати:** Результати показують, що українські муніципалітети досягли прогресу у впровадженні орієнтованих на ЄС стратегій, але є більше, ніж потенціал для покращення в інших сферах: цифрове управління, розвиток інфраструктури, державно-приватне партнерство тощо. Фінансування ЄС було вирішальним у підтримці проектів у сфері відновлюваної енергетики та модернізації інфраструктури, але процеси подачі заявок і відсутність технічного досвіду перешкодили більш широкому залученню, як показує дослідження. Впровадження передових технологій управління, включаючи платформи електронного управління та «розумні» лічильники, можуть покращити надання муніципальних послуг; однак високі затрати та супротив до цифрової трансформації залишають ряд проблеми. Крім того, партнерство з муніципалітетами ЄС стало можливістю для обміну досвідом, незважаючи на мовні та фінансові обмеження, які можуть зашкодити довгостроковим партнерствам.

**Висновки:** Для сприяння інноваційному муніципальному розвитку в Україні слід посилити цифрове врядування, збільшити кількість державно-приватного партнерства та заохочувати ініціативи сталого розвитку, які відповідають стандартам ЄС. Українським муніципалітетам необхідно зосередитися на бар'єрах у сфері законодавства, цифрової інфраструктури та потенціалу. Використання можливостей фінансування ЄС та співпраця з партнерами з ЄС дозволяє муніципальному врядуванню в Україні наблизитися до своїх цілей європейської інтеграції. Нарешті, автори закликають до подальших досліджень масштабованості проектів «розумних» міст в Україні



та забезпечення довгострокової стійкості державно-приватного партнерства.

**Ключові слова:** муніципальне управління, європейська інтеграція, цифрове управління, публічно-приватні партнерства, сталий розвиток, смарт-міста, фінансування ЄС, розвиток інфраструктури, реформи місцевого управління, розвиток спроможності.

**Problem statement.** The problem this research focuses on is advancing innovative development of Ukrainian municipal management under conditions of European integration. Ukraine is moving to bring its municipal systems in line with EU standards, but there are several important barriers to overcome. Municipal governance is inefficient, infrastructure outmoded, inadequate funding, and implementing digital transformation at local level is problematic. The purpose of this research is to develop an understanding for how European integration can act as a stimulus to overcome these barriers, and facilitate innovation in local government procedures.

It is scientifically useful for the understanding of how external factors (e.g. European integration) affect the local governance structures modernization in the post transition countries. It also depicts how municipalities can better line up with European best practices in modernization governance, public private partnerships, inclusive community engagements, and sustainability. Its practical importance consists in the possibility of offering to local government officials and policymakers a framework to respond to municipal challenges and better govern, in line with EU expectations.

The research is intended to fulfill these challenges by providing insights into how Ukrainian municipalities can adapt to these innovative strategies to ensure better governance and sustainability. Furthermore, it aims to analyse the part that EU support instruments, for example money, skills and networks are engaged with potential changes of that kind. Formulating actionable recommendations based upon the practical needs of Ukrainian municipalities and the ongoing scientific



advancements will be developed by understanding how these factors can be leveraged to address the ongoing challenges. An analysis of these key aspects will allow conducting a detailed study of the barriers and opportunities in Ukrainian municipal management, which in its turn will yield important theoretical contributions to the scholarly discussion on European integration as well as practical implications for local government reform.

**Literature review.** Analysis of recent studies proves that discussion of interregional cooperation and Ukraine integration into the EU is still current. One particular work carried out by Amosha, Liashenko and Pidori cheva examines the role of the integration processes in innovative regional development, in particular, related to the interregional and cross border space through the prism of smart specialization which allows better understand the importance of integration processes for the development of innovative regions [1]. While the broad discussion of ideas of regional economic integration is carried out, further research is needed in the practical application of these approaches to Ukraine.

As an example, Borzenko and Burlay study Ukraine and the EU socio – economic divergence with some new challenges for the Ukrainian economy in the integration process [2]. While their analysis falls short of exploring the particular mechanisms through which these divergences can be overcome, the main thrust of this study will concern itself with these. Some other works, for example, Burlay's monograph, consider the theoretical side of socio-economic convergence, but they do not propose specific recommendations for its practical implementation, specifically for Ukraine in the current process of its European integration [3].

Jewell, Vetier and Garcia-Cabrera conduct international technological cooperation and their field of study concerns only energy sector, without covering other areas as innovation collaboration which are extremely important for creation of interregional ties of Ukraine with the EU [4]. Finally, the work by Li et al. also examines the structural characteristics of international green technologies but emphasizing the crucial role of technological cooperation [5]. Nevertheless, this





theme does not pay sufficient attention to the particulars of collaboration between the EU states and the neighboring countries so essential for such research.

The research shows that cross border cooperation can be used for local and regional economic development, but does not examine an interaction of cross border regions with the economic and political processes in the European Union (this is important for this study) [6]. Here it is worth noting the research by Melnyk et al. on Ukraine - EU security relations that include the analysis of the current state of partnership but did not consider the economic aspects of cooperation required in understanding the complexity of integration processes [7].

From the analysis of contemporary publications, several key issues emerge: the absence of a deep analysis of the use of European standards in the real economic environment of Ukraine, lack of attention to the practice aspects of technological cooperation, and restriction of studies on cross border cooperation within the EU integration context. To fill the gaps, the authors use the study of the interconnection of European integration processes and local governance development in Ukraine, and the practice of the use of European technological and economic models in local conditions. Therefore, the previous studies are not able to fully cover the issues of the particular mechanisms of integration and implementation of the European standards in Ukraine, which makes the relevance and urgency of this study.

**Identification of unresolved aspects of the general problem.** Although a lot has been done in municipal management in Ukraine, there are a number of key issues which still need to be researched and still not resolved. Some of the challenges include digital governance tools which are being adapted for smaller municipalities, with limited resources. Digital transformation of all regions calls for tailored approaches and a mechanism for funding. Although public private partnerships (PPPs) create challenges in terms of sustainability over the long run and equitable benefits to local communities, they do blaze a trail of experience and knowledge. Best practices need to be explored and barriers overcome to successful implementation, and more research is needed.



Smart city projects, and sustainability initiatives in general, are not widespread across Ukraine, as of yet. More research is needed to scale these projects and choose standards that match with the EU as well as local conditions. At last, Ukrainian municipal strategies are not yet sufficiently aligned with EU legislation as there are absence of legal harmonization and efficiency of capacity building programs. To fill these gaps, and to fully comply with EU directives, research is needed. Not resolved these issues indicate problems for the further research agenda, presenting a timely opportunity to make a practical contribution to improving municipal management in Ukraine in connection with European integration.

### **Formulation of the article's objectives (task setting)**

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. This study aims to analyze the role of European integration in determining the strategies of municipal management in Ukraine.
2. To find/assess main avenues for innovation including digital transformation, public private partnerships and sustainability.
3. The focus of the study is Ukrainian municipal institutions and ways to overcome barriers against the EU standards alignment.
4. In order to supply local governments with suggestions on how to effectively implement EU aligned strategies.

The general objectives of the article consist in providing a comprehensive analysis of the existing state of municipal management in Ukraine, determining potential areas of innovation and thus making a contribution to the European integration and local governance agenda.

**Presentation of the main research material.** In Ukraine there are systemic problems of municipal management, which hampers its efficiency and effectiveness. High levels of bureaucracy remain one of the most pressing problems as this slows decision making processes down and cedes flexibility needed for adaptive governance [8]. Problems are created by excessive administrative procedures which delay project implementation and promote to discourage innovation. Only made more challenging by the absence of available funding given that most local





governments are under very tight budgets, which make them unable to allocate resources to modern infrastructure and technology as well as capacity building initiatives [9]. Additionally, many of the existing municipal infrastructure are outdated resulting not only in giving service delivery a blow but also increase the cost of maintaining them, and more reliance on energy that is not efficient.

Ukrainian municipalities stand a unique chance to deal with long overdue problems by reconciling themselves to EU governance standard and practices [10]. The process of integration is an instrument for institutional reforms in fields such as streamlining of administrative functions, adoption of e-governance systems and reducing the bureaucratic inefficiencies. Not only do these changes streamline procedures but they make governance utilizing core EU principles of transparency and accountability more transparent and accountable. This provides an important source of investment for municipalities, by giving them access to European funding mechanisms such as grants and financial support for regional development projects where they can thus improve their infrastructure and put into practice innovative solutions [10].

In addition, European integration start the process for knowledge exchange and technical assistance; Ukrainian municipalities become able to receive lessons from their European counterparts. By participating in cross border collaborations and EU funding programs, local government can learn international latest state of the arts of urban planning, public private partnership models and citizen engagement mechanisms. Interaction support helps local officials build the capacity and provide them with tools to address the challenges effectively [10]. Taking advantage of these opportunities, municipal management in Ukraine can help go it towards a more efficient, inclusionary, sustainable model in line with the European standards.

These opportunities are explored in Table 1, which further examines the detail of relevant areas, impacts and potential benefits of such fields of research and development, and their relevance with the European integration goals.



**Table 1**

### Opportunities for innovative development

| №  | Opportunity                                  | Details                                                                                                                    | Examples                                                                                        | Potential impact                                                                                      |
|----|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Access to EU funding                         | Ukrainian municipalities can tap into EU financial instruments such as grants, loans, and co-financing programs.           | Participation in the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).                           | Increased financial capacity for large-scale infrastructure projects and innovative solutions.        |
|    |                                              | Funds are available for regional development, innovation, and sustainability initiatives.                                  | Use of Horizon Europe funds for digital transformation projects.                                | Enhanced resource allocation to underfunded sectors such as transportation, housing, and energy.      |
|    |                                              | Access to green finance for environmental and sustainable development projects.                                            | Funding from the European Green Deal for renewable energy projects in municipalities.           | Reduction of energy costs and improvement in ecological sustainability.                               |
| 2. | Adoption of advanced governance technologies | Encourages the integration of digital solutions in municipal management, such as e-governance platforms and digital tools. | Implementation of e-governance systems like online public service portals.                      | Improved administrative efficiency and faster service delivery to citizens.                           |
|    |                                              | Adoption of data-driven decision-making technologies to optimize resource allocation and urban planning.                   | Use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for urban planning and resource management.         | More informed and strategic decision-making capabilities for municipal leaders.                       |
|    |                                              | Promotion of smart city technologies for real-time monitoring and service optimization.                                    | Installation of smart meters for water and energy consumption management.                       | Enhanced quality of life for residents and reduced operational costs.                                 |
| 3. | Collaboration with EU municipalities         | Exchange of best practices and expertise with well-established EU municipalities.                                          | Partnerships under the EU Covenant of Mayors initiative to promote sustainable energy policies. | Knowledge transfer leading to the modernization of governance structures.                             |
|    |                                              | Development of joint projects in areas like infrastructure, waste management, and urban development.                       | Joint urban mobility projects between Ukrainian and EU cities.                                  | Strengthened international cooperation and improved project implementation outcomes.                  |
|    |                                              | Participation in EU networks and forums to build partnerships and foster innovation.                                       | Membership in Eurocities for exchange of policy ideas and innovation strategies.                | Broader access to innovative concepts and technologies, facilitating faster adoption at local levels. |

*Source: authors development using [10,11].*



Ukrainian municipalities have substantial potential to improve the quality of governance and service delivery through European integration [12]. The ESIF has allowed access to EU funding for renewable energy projects under the European Green Deal, while on the other hand, infrastructure developments. Yet, there are the challenges of complex application processes and lacking technical competences to solve. If granted with elevated status of nearby specialized units that assist with grant applications, it would unlock additional funding for smart city and sustainability projects.

Advanced governance technologies, including e-Governance platforms, Smart meters, have improved efficiency which reduced service delivery times by 40% and energy consumption by 25% [11]. The challenges are resistance to digital transformation (low level of adoption), and high initial cost for digital transformation. With an eye towards expanding AI driven analytics and enabled by EU support, smart solutions are possible to be adopted on a broader scale.

Exchanges about green policies and joint projects to improve public transport have taken place through collaboration with EU municipalities. However, the language barriers also act as a barrier; and resource limitations become a constraint of sustaining the partnerships. Further deepening national engagement with EU networks and continued innovation, a national program to support municipal collaborations could complement an international program. Maximizing potential of the EU integration as an object for innovation and modernization of Ukrainian municipalities is possible by addressing these challenges.

Finally, there are tremendous opportunities for innovative development of Ukrainian municipalities within the European framework [13]. What emerges from the analysis is that the access to EU funding has made possible to kick off critical infrastructure and sustainability projects, albeit that difficulties in dealing with the application process represent an obstacle. While the implementation of advanced governance technologies has resulted in measurable improvements to service and resource efficiency, high up-front costs and reluctance to change remains an issue. By inviting EU municipalities to collaborate and knowledge exchange has been

achieved and innovation is being fostered with the potential to scale the partnerships toward more transformational outcomes.

Table 2 presents strategic directions and practical applications and examines their potential benefits to Ukrainian municipalities.

**Table 2**

Strategic directions for innovation

| №  | Strategic direction               | Key actions                                                                 | Objectives                                                                                    | Examples/benchmarks                                                     |
|----|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Governance modernization          | - Implement digital transformation and e-governance initiatives.            | - Improve service delivery efficiency and transparency.                                       | - Estonia's e-governance model.                                         |
|    |                                   | - Streamline administrative processes.                                      | - Reduce bureaucracy and enhance responsiveness.                                              | - EU guidelines on digital public services.                             |
| 2. | PPPs                              | - Engage private enterprises in municipal projects.                         | - Mobilize resources and expertise for infrastructure and service delivery.                   | - PPP frameworks in Germany and the Netherlands.                        |
|    |                                   | - Adopt best practices from EU municipalities.                              | - Foster innovation and cost-effective project implementation.                                | - EU urban renewal projects funded through PPPs.                        |
| 3. | Community engagement              | - Leverage citizen participation in governance.                             | - Enhance trust and accountability in decision-making.                                        | - Participatory budgeting in Poland and Spain.                          |
|    |                                   | - Use digital tools for inclusive decision-making.                          | - Ensure diverse community involvement in policy and project development.                     | - Digital participation platforms like Decidim in Barcelona.            |
| 4. | Sustainability and smart cities   | - Focus on green infrastructure and smart city solutions.                   | - Promote environmental sustainability and resource efficiency.                               | - Copenhagen's smart city and sustainability initiatives.               |
|    |                                   | - Align with EU benchmarks for urban sustainability.                        | - Achieve compliance with EU climate and environmental goals.                                 | - European Green Deal and Urban Agenda for the EU.                      |
|    | Alignment with European standards | - Undertake legal harmonization of municipal policies with EU requirements. | - Ensure compliance with EU directives and regulations.                                       | - EU acquis communautaire framework.                                    |
|    |                                   | - Build capacity for local government officials.                            | - Equip officials with the skills and knowledge to implement EU-aligned policies and systems. | - Training programs under the European Structural and Investment Funds. |

Source: authors development using [10].



A key priority is modernizing governance with digital transformation and through e governance initiatives [14]. Streamlining administrative processes by municipalities helps to increase efficiency and transparency. Which shows, for example, how Estonia's e-governance model can help to decrease bureaucratism, and increase service delivery through digital tools. An additional avenue to resource mobilization and innovative project implementation is through PPPs. Ukrainian municipalities can draw on successful PPP frameworks in other countries such as Germany and the Netherlands and work with a private enterprise, to finance and administer infrastructure projects more effectively.

Modern governance requires a primary role of community engagement [15]. Moreover, opportunities for citizen participation in decision making developing trust and accountability. Barcelona's Decidim is an example of digital platform acting as a benchmark for inclusive governance with participatory budget and policy input tools. This aligns municipality's with EU benchmarks on urban resilience while simultaneously strengthening sustainability and smart city initiatives. Copenhagen's smart city strategies also include green infrastructure which cities can further optimize resource efficiency and environmental sustainability.

Given that these strategies must be implemented effectively, alignment to EU standards is a prerequisite. The goal is achieved through legal harmonization of municipal policies with EU directives, as well as through the capacity building initiatives for local officials in order to implement and sustain the reforms. The European Structural and Investment Funds funded programs are a source of valuable resources for training and institutional development to allow municipalities acquire EU requirements.

**Conclusions.** The development of innovative municipal management in Ukraine is considered from the standpoint of its transformation with respect to European integration. The research analyzes a number of strategic directions, the governance modernization, the public-private partnerships, the community engagement, and the sustainability initiatives to point out the opportunities and



challenges, municipalities have when harmonizing with the EU standards and increasing their capabilities.

The results confirm the positive impact of digital transformation and e-governance on enhancing administrative efficiency and transparency in tackling the long-standing bureaucratic inefficiencies. Analogously, public–private partnership has been demonstrated as a resourceful mechanism for mobilizing resources and expertise; further efforts are needed to develop institutional capacities for sustaining such collaboration. As such, community engagement manifests itself as a key driver to developing trust and inclusivity, digital tools being useful tools for improving citizen participation. Aligned with EU benchmarks, sustainability and smart city initiatives constitute a clear path to reaching environmental goals and resource efficiency.

The study stresses the legal harmonization and the training of local officials as fundamental factors of the success of the European integration. This will help municipalities to comply with EU directives but also to be able to implement other innovative policies in a better and more effective way.

The research proves that the overall aim of strategic direction exploration and alignment with the European standards was accomplished. Finally, future studies should assess the long-term impacts of these projects, consider models for funding the sustainability initiatives, and closing capacity gaps in the smaller municipalities. Further examination of best practice in EU municipalities could provide useful means to translate and adapt practices to the Ukrainian context.

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