

# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND MECHANISMS OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT OF COAL COMMUNITIES IN THE CONDITIONS OF MODERN CHALLENGES

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the study of communication strategies and mechanisms of public governance of coal communities in the face of modern challenges through the analysis of new approaches to public administration. The subject of the present study is communication strategies and institutional and managerial mechanisms of public governance of coal-mining territorial communities (hromadas) in the context of modern socio-economic, environmental and security challenges, in particular in the context of the transformation of the coal industry, energy transition and decentralisation of power. The research adopted a systematic approach, encompassing the comparative analysis of public administration postulates, the analysis of best practices in process-oriented management, and the utilisation of generalisation and institutional modelling methods. This comprehensive approach was undertaken to formulate practical recommendations for local authorities. The paper provides a comparative analysis of the principles of process orientation of local government activities and recommendations for improving public administration, taking into account the principles of good governance. The application of the good governance cycle as a tool for increasing the efficiency of management processes in communities undergoing transformational changes is proposed. The objective of the present article is to provide a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for effective mechanisms of public governance in coal communities in Ukraine, particularly in the context of transformational processes. To this end, the article employs the concept of good governance and institutional innovations, such as Project Offices, as a means to achieve this aim. The article proposes the use of the good governance cycle as a methodological basis for improving public administration in coal communities. The establishment of Project Offices is recommended as a mechanism for coordinating transformation processes, developing strategic development programmes and implementing innovative management practices. The present study seeks to explore the hypothesis that process-oriented management contributes to increasing the efficiency of local government bodies, reducing social risks and ensuring the economic sustainability of communities. A particular emphasis is placed on the viability of establishing Project Offices as an organisational framework for implementing process-oriented management within the local government apparatus. The implementation of the proposed mechanisms is expected to enhance the efficiency of public administration in coal communities, ensure effective coordination of transformation processes, and mobilise local resources for strategic development. The application of the good governance cycle, in combination with the functioning of Project Offices, will foster the development of a new management culture at the local level, increasing transparency and accountability of public authorities. This is especially critical in times of profound societal change. The scientific novelty of this study lies in the substantiation, for the first time, of the integration of the good governance concept with institutional innovations in the form of Project Offices as a systemic tool for public administration in coal communities undergoing structural transformation. The research contributes to the scientific understanding of process-oriented management in the context of decentralisation and socio-economic challenges.

**Keywords:** public administration, coal communities, good governance, transformation processes, project offices, local government, regional development.

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## 1. Introduction

In contemporary conditions, coal communities in Ukraine face a number of complex challenges related to the transformation of the energy sector, mine closures, socio-economic instability and the need to find new ways of development. "Dependence on coal creates risks for the economic stability of the region. Reduced demand for coal, changes in the global economy and environmental problems can lead to reduced production, job losses and reduced local budget revenues. This creates uncertainty for entrepreneurs and investors, which complicates business development." (Levytska, Ivankova, 2025) These processes necessitate a re-evaluation of conventional approaches to public administration and the implementation of novel management mechanisms that can guarantee the sustainability and competitiveness of territorial communities (hromadas). The application of the concept of good governance, with its emphasis on transparency, efficiency, accountability, and public involvement in decision-making processes, is becoming especially relevant.

In the context of decentralisation and local government reform, public governance of coal communities necessitates novel organisational forms and tools capable of ensuring process-oriented change management. A particularly promising area of research is the establishment of Project Offices, which have the capacity to function as coordination centres for the implementation of strategic initiatives and the management of transformational processes. "The concept of a just transition can provide an integrated, whole-system view of justice (procedural, distributive, recognition and restorative) that can help identify systemic solutions to address environmental and socio-economic challenges." (Abram et al., 2022) In this context, there is a need for scientific understanding of public governance mechanisms that meet modern challenges and contribute to the sustainable development of post-coal territories.

## 2. Literature Review

The issue of transformation of coal regions and communities is increasingly becoming the subject of scientific analysis in connection with the global challenges of energy transition (Kuzemko, 2020; Oei et al., 2020). In the course of restructuring the economy in a way that is beneficial to coal-producing communities and solving complex problems of their development based on the principles of just transition, European and Ukrainian scientists are exploring the possibilities of adapting European experience (Zablodska & Rohozian, 2020; Snihova, 2023; Reitzenstein et al., 2021). They also outline the specifics of implementing a just transition policy in coal communities, analysing the resulting

economic diversification of these territories in terms of resources, investment and entrepreneurial potential (Snihova, 2024; Michalik, 2022; Churski et al., 2021; Drobniak, 2022). The necessity to implement not only economic measures, but also technical and technological solutions, necessitates consideration of the prospects for the development of coal communities through the prism of innovations in the energy sector, in particular, the utilisation of the infrastructure of closed mines for energy projects (Vovk et al., 2021; Snihova, 2024). It is the opinion of some scientists that the solutions to the problems of such regions can be found in the elimination of the social and environmental consequences of the activities of coal enterprises (Liventseva et al., 2022; Sych, 2023). Furthermore, emphasis is placed on the importance of geological deformations and changes in underground water and gas flows, which are critical factors for the successful revitalisation of industrial areas (brownfields) (Cherevatskyi, 2023). Researchers emphasise the importance of public policies that combine social support, infrastructure investment and institutional reforms (Caldecott et al., 2017). Conversely, scholars contend that the imperative for decarbonisation presents a pivotal opportunity to decisively orient societies towards a more environmentally and socially inclusive trajectory, reflecting "the desire to live in a different society, not simply a low-carbon version of the current one" (Healy & Barry, 2017, p. 453). The concept of good governance, which emphasises transparency, public participation and the accountability of authorities, is regarded as a key methodology for reforming public administration (OECD, 2019).

This text focuses on innovative governance mechanisms, with a particular emphasis on the establishment of Project Offices. These offices are designed to facilitate coordination of transformational processes within communities (Wiesner et al., 2019). When employed in conjunction with process-oriented management methodologies, these approaches facilitate effective change management during periods of structural adjustment (Hammer & Champy, 2009). In the context of Ukraine, the decentralisation process engenders novel opportunities for the self-management of community development. However, it concomitantly imposes elevated standards on the quality of management decisions (Vasylyk, 2021; Melnyk, 2023).

## 3. Research Methodology

The research adopted a systematic approach, encompassing the comparative analysis of public administration postulates, the analysis of best practices in process-oriented management, and the utilisation of generalisation and institutional modelling methods. This comprehensive approach was undertaken to formulate practical recommendations for local authorities.

## 4. Findings

In the context of the ongoing transformation of coal regions in Ukraine, the identification of effective methodological approaches to enhancing public administration at the local level has become a pressing necessity.

### 4.1. Practical Mechanisms for Improving the Management of Coal Communities of Ukraine

The necessity for effective mechanisms to improve the management of coal communities in Ukraine is due to the need for a response to the challenges of structural transformation and gradual abandonment of the coal industry. Scientists emphasise that: "Active restructuring processes in the mining industry of many countries have led to the physical closure of enterprises, accompanied by measures to mitigate their environmental and social impact." (Cherevatskyi et al., 2023) The utilisation of proven management tools has been demonstrated to contribute to the diversification of the local economy, while concurrently ensuring social stability and an enhancement in the quality of life of the population. The introduction of contemporary public administration mechanisms enables communities to become competitive participants in regional development and to attract investments in new sectors.

One such foundation is the cycle of good governance, which combines the key principles of openness, participation, accountability, efficiency and the rule of law. The utilisation of this cycle facilitates a systematic and consistent approach to the management of the development processes of coal communities, particularly in the context of the gradual winding down of the coal industry and the necessity to diversify the economy. In this connection, scientists

note that: "Limiting the danger of climate change requires a rapid transition from fossil-fuel energy, agro-food and transport, to low-carbon systems based on green technologies and new infrastructures, policies, consumer practices, cultural meanings and scientific knowledge." (Healy, & Barry, 2017)

The cycle of good governance commences with the stage of policy formation through inclusive consultations with all stakeholders, including community residents, businesses, trade unions and authorities. In 2021, a series of public hearings and strategic sessions were held in the city of Chervonohrad, Lviv Oblast, with the participation of experts from the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). These sessions were held within the framework of the project "Fair Transformation of Coal Regions of Ukraine". The results of these hearings and sessions were the development of the Concept of Integrated Development of the Chervonohrad Community until 2030. In the city of Myrnohrad in the Donetsk Oblast, local authorities have held discussions with young people and representatives of the business community about plans to create an industrial park on the site of decommissioned mines.

The subsequent stage is to make decisions based on the collected data and analysis of socio-economic challenges. For instance, in Novovolynsk, Volyn Oblast, the local council adopted a Sustainable Energy Development Strategy in 2022. This strategy was based on the results of sociological surveys and research conducted with the support of the EU4Climate project. The strategy provides for a gradual abandonment of coal and the development of the processing industry and renewable energy sectors. The subsequent stage of policy implementation involves the utilisation of strategic planning, project management and monitoring tools. In Vuhledar,

Table 1

**Examples of effective mechanisms of public governance of coal communities (hromadas) in Ukraine in the context of transformation processes**

Community / city	Public governance mechanism	Description of implementation example	Partners / programmes
Chervonohrad (Lviv Oblast)	Public hearings and strategic planning	Developed the Integrated Development Concept until 2030 through a series of open consultations	GIZ, "Just Transition" project
Myrnohrad (Donetsk Oblast)	Public discussions of industrial projects	Formation of an industrial park plan on the site of closed mines	Local authorities, business community
Novovolynsk (Volyn Oblast)	Energy strategic planning	Adopted a Sustainable Energy Development Strategy with community involvement	EU4Climate, UNDP
Vuhledar (Donetsk Oblast)	Partnership with NGOs for monitoring	Implementation of solar power plant project with transparent public oversight	EBRD, USELF III program
Pavlohrad (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast)	Participatory budgeting and ecological planning	Introduced a Participatory Budget mechanism to fund eco-rehabilitation initiatives	World Bank, local authorities
Chervonohrad Hromada	Electronic public monitoring platform	Launched the "Open Community" platform for development project oversight	Local council, IT initiatives with donor support

Source: compiled by the authors based on Ukrainian and international cases

located within Donetsk Oblast, the construction of solar power plants has commenced as part of the USELF III program, which is financed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Local civil society organisations have been instrumental in the implementation of this project, with a view to monitoring and ensuring procedural transparency.

Just transformation is the process of transitioning a region's economy from extractive industries to more environmentally friendly and sustainable activities. This brings significant changes to administration, public management, the economy, ecology and energy (Levytska & Ivankova, 2025). An important component of this process is the assessment of results, which is carried out through a system of accountability and public control. Since 2023, the Chervonohrad Community has operated an electronic platform called "Open Community", which allows residents to track project implementation and budget expenditure in real time, as well as leaving comments. In 2024, plans for the reconstruction of industrial zones were adjusted based on the analysis of citizens' feedback to create new production clusters.

Another exemplary instance of the effective implementation of the good governance cycle can be observed in Pavlohrad, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, where the Coal Community Transformation Plan, meticulously crafted with the backing of the World Bank, is currently being executed. In accordance with the provisions of the aforementioned plan, the community has established a Participatory Budget, by virtue of which residents themselves are able to determine the priority areas for financing local initiatives, including projects for the environmental rehabilitation of mining areas.

The implementation of the good governance cycle as a methodological framework enables coal communities to transition to more sustainable and effective models of public governance, engender increased trust in local authorities, and ensure balanced socio-economic development in the post-coal period. The experience of Chervonohrad, Myrnohrad, Novovolynsk, Vuhledar and Pavlohrad demonstrates that the systematic application of the principles of good governance is a key factor in the successful transformation of coal territories in Ukraine.

#### **4.2. Foreign Experience of Using the Good Governance Cycle in Managing Coal Communities**

The experience of European Union countries that have undergone structural transformation in coal regions indicates the key role of the good governance cycle in ensuring the sustainable transition of such communities to the new economy. For instance, in

Germany, the period of transformation of the Ruhr Basin extended from 1968 to 2018, encompassing the closure of over 150 mines and the subsequent creation of approximately 300,000 new employment opportunities in the industrial, logistics and service sectors. The overarching management framework was the "Integrated Ruhr Development Plan", which was predicated on the principles of transparency, community participation, and collaboration between government, business, and civil society organisations. The most significant success in the transformation of coal mining enterprises has been achieved in Germany, Great Britain, the United States of America, Canada, Poland and other European countries. In the majority of countries, the transformation of coal mining enterprises is occurring in two primary directions: the establishment of separate enterprises (business projects) or technological parks (Liventseva et al., 2022).

In Poland, the Territorial Just Transformation Plan of the Silesian Voivodeship has been in effect since 2020, providing for investments of over EUR 2.2 billion, of which 1.6 billion EUR is financed by the EU Just Transition Fund. As per the proposed plan, the closure of mines by 2049 is to be accompanied by the retraining of up to 70,000 workers, the development of green energy, and the launch of new industrial parks on former mining areas. The governance cycle in this instance is ensured through annual public consultations and monitoring by the European Commission. In the Czech Republic, the RE:START programme, with a budget of 1.14 billion EUR, was initiated in 2021. This initiative is focused on the ecological rehabilitation of over 5,000 hectares of disturbed land, the establishment of educational centres for the retraining of approximately 20,000 former miners, and the construction of industrial hubs. The programme employs a comprehensive approach to governance, encompassing strategic planning, extensive stakeholder consultations, phased funding, ongoing monitoring, and external audit of outcomes.

Moreover, the European Commission's Platform for Coal Regions in Transition initiative, which has been operational since 2017, has already facilitated the transformation of 41 regions in 11 EU countries, attracting over 10 billion euros in investments by 2030. All these programmes are based on good governance standards, such as transparency, participation, accountability and efficiency. This ensures not only an economic transition, but also social cohesion within communities and the restoration of trust in the authorities.

Consequently, foreign experience has demonstrated that the implementation of the good governance cycle is instrumental in the effective management of coal community transformation, thereby facilitating the



attainment of a balance between economic, social and environmental objectives.

### 4.3. Communication Strategies for Managing Coal Communities in Ukraine in the Face of Modern Challenges

The effective management of coal communities in Ukraine in the face of modern challenges necessitates the implementation of effective communication strategies that promote open dialogue between authorities, citizens, business and international partners. In the contemporary era, these communities (hromadas) are confronted with a multitude of challenges, including economic transformation, the closure of mining facilities, social tensions, and environmental hazards. In such conditions, communication plays a pivotal role in establishing trust in management decisions and ensuring stability at the local level.

In the contemporary context of coal regions, effective public communication strategies must be founded on the principles of transparency, community participation in decision-making processes, and regular provision of information to the population regarding the progression of transformation processes. The utilisation of conventional media, digital platforms, social networks and open public hearings facilitates the engagement of diverse demographic groups and ensures their participation in the discourse. It is imperative to establish effective communication channels with mine workers and youth, who are particularly in need of new perspectives and support

during a period of significant change. The effective management of Ukraine's coal communities in the context of transformation is impossible without investing in human capital, in particular by developing retraining and increasing their competitiveness in the labor market. The significance of the issue of enhancing human capital is predominantly attributable to the fact that it is the quality and practical implementation of this capital that determine the fate of humanity (Semenets-Orlova, 2022).

A prerequisite for solving the problems of national innovation-oriented development is the implementation of an approach that allows for the overcoming of the institutional weakness of the state, taking into account the presumption of instability and uncertainty of its existence (Sytnyk, 2022).

A conceptual understanding of the peculiarities of managing innovation-driven development of the state in the current conditions is required. Successful examples demonstrate that communities which implement proactive information campaigns, crisis communication plans, and media partnerships are better equipped to overcome the challenges of transformation and attract investors and donors to local projects. Consequently, communication strategies have become an integral component of the mechanisms of public governance of coal communities in Ukraine, contributing to their resilience and sustainable development.

The examples of communication strategies presented demonstrate that the success of the transformation of Ukraine's coal communities is contingent on

Table 2

#### Examples of communication strategies for the governance of coal communities in Ukraine

Strategy	Description	Implementation Example
Open public hearings	Dialogue between authorities and citizens on transformation plans	Hearings in Myrnohrad on mine closures (2021)
Digital consultation platforms	Online surveys, forums, and proposal collection	"Dialogue for Donetsk Region" – civic consultation platform
Media partnerships	Co-operation with local media to inform the public	Special projects on "UA: Donbas" channel about new jobs
Crisis communication campaigns	Responding to protests and social conflicts	Briefings in Chervonohrad during miners' strikes (2020)
Educational and informational programs	Training in new professions and explaining benefits of change	GIZ training sessions in Pavlohrad region (2022)
Social media as communication channel	Active use of Facebook, YouTube to explain reforms	"Just Transition" page on Facebook
Regional branding	Creating a new image for the community to attract investors and tourists	"Green Silesia" brand (Poland) after mine closures
Involvement of opinion leaders	Using influential figures to promote reforms	Local activists' involvement in Lusatian region transition (Germany)
Public information campaigns	Advertising, billboards, videos about regional prospects	"New Life for Donbas" campaign (USAID project, 2023)
Dialogue platforms between government and business	Joint forums and conferences for coordinating actions	"Just Transition Forum" in Katowice (Poland, 2022)

Source: compiled by the authors based on Ukrainian and international cases (USAID, 2023; GIZ, 2022)

high-quality and multi-level interaction between the authorities, the public and business. The experience of both Ukrainian and foreign regions confirms the effectiveness of combining traditional forms of dialogue (e.g., public hearings, forums) with modern digital tools (e.g., platforms, social networks). It is evident that strategies which attract opinion leaders and construct a favourable brand of the region, orienting it towards new markets and investors, are especially efficacious. The efficacy of communication campaigns in mitigating social tensions and establishing the foundations for sustainable economic development following mine closure has been well-documented. Consequently, systemic communication should be regarded as a pivotal mechanism of public management in the context of structural changes.

#### 4.4. Project Offices as a Systemic Mechanism of Public Management of Coal Communities of Ukraine Undergoing Structural Transformation

In the context of structural transformation of coal communities in Ukraine, project offices function as an effective and systemic mechanism for enhancing public management. The organisational structures in question have been designed to ensure coordination, planning, monitoring and implementation of projects with three key aims: socio-economic diversification, environmental restoration and the development of alternative sectors of the economy. These entities function as nexuses for communication between local authorities, international donors, businesses, and the community, thereby ensuring transparency and inclusivity in decision-making processes. By providing support for workforce retraining programmes and promoting small and medium-sized enterprises, project offices contribute to the strengthening of the human capital required for a just transition. Furthermore, they

have been demonstrated to facilitate the attraction of investments and the development of green energy projects, thereby creating new economic opportunities for coal-dependent regions.

Project Offices allow to translate transformation strategies from the declarative level to the practical plane thanks to the following functions:

- Centralized project management (offices coordinate all initiatives at the community level, which allows to avoid duplication, optimise resources and ensure the achievement of synergy between different projects).
- Institutionalization of partnerships (project offices become an "entry point" for international donors, business and public organisations, which facilitates the attraction of external technical and financial assistance).
- Increasing transparency and accountability (offices implement mechanisms for regular monitoring, public reporting and public involvement in the assessment of project results).
- Formation of human resources potential (they become a platform for training local specialists in the field of project management, which is critically important for the sustainable development of communities).

It is acknowledged that there is scientific consensus on the viability of investment projects that utilise mine infrastructure for alternative purposes. Significant efforts must be allocated to the development of programmes aimed at job creation and the training, retraining and requalification of workers. Additionally, the design of industrial parks and the implementation of innovative projects must be given due consideration (Vovk et al., 2021). The efficacy of this model is demonstrated by a number of practical examples. For instance, in the city of Chervonohrad, a Transformation Office was established to coordinate the implementation of projects within the framework of just transition with the support of GIZ. In Pavlohrad, a municipal project office has been

Table 3

**Examples of project offices in coal communities of Ukraine and areas of their activity**

Community / City	Name of Project Office	Main Areas of Activity	Partners / Funding Sources
Chervonohrad (Lviv Oblast)	Chervonohrad Community Transformation Office	Coordination of "Just Transition" projects, development of green energy, SME support	GIZ, Just Transition Fund, Government of Germany
Pavlohrad (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast)	Pavlohrad Municipal Project Office	Implementation of regional transformation plan, ecological mine land reclamation, energy modernisation	World Bank, Ministry for Communities and Territories of Ukraine
Myrnohrad (Donetsk Oblast)	Myrnohrad Community Development Office	Preparation of industrial park feasibility study, attracting investors, miners' professional retraining	UNDP, Donetsk Regional Administration, local businesses
Novovolynsk (Volyn Oblast)	Novovolynsk Project Management Center	Projects in sustainable energy, industrial park development, youth programs	EU4Climate, EU Mayors for Economic Growth Programme
Toretsk (Donetsk Oblast)	Toretsk Transformation Support Office	Preparation of "Just Transition" plan, water supply and social infrastructure projects	EU, USAID, Ministry of Energy of Ukraine

Source: compiled by the authors based on local government data and donor programs (GIZ. 2022)

established to oversee initiatives within the framework of the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Transformation Plan, which is financed by the World Bank. In Myrnohrad, a project office has been established with the objective of overseeing the preparation of feasibility studies for an industrial park on the site of closed mines.

Consequently, project offices assume a pivotal role in the emergent institutional architecture of public governance within coal communities in Ukraine. The functioning of these councils is such that it ensures the consistency, transparency, and efficiency of transformation processes. In addition, it strengthens citizens' trust in local authorities and increases the capacity of territorial communities for sustainable development in the post-coal period.

## 5. Conclusions

In the context of the growing global energy transition, environmental risks, socio-economic instability, and post-war recovery, coal communities in Ukraine face the urgent need to transform their governance approaches. The study emphasises that effective public administration in such territories must rely not only on administrative capacity but also on inclusive communication strategies, participatory mechanisms, and institutional innovations.

The analysis confirmed that public management in coal communities requires a shift from hierarchical and reactive governance models toward process-oriented and strategic approaches. The proposed model integrates the cycle of good governance and Project Offices as core mechanisms for building institutional resilience and adaptive capacity at the local level. These tools have been demonstrated to facilitate continuity in decision-making processes, coordination among

relevant stakeholders, and accountability in the utilisation of public resources.

The communication component is of pivotal importance in mobilising social capital, engaging community members in decision-making, and building trust between authorities and residents. Transparent and multi-channel communication strategies must be embedded in governance practices if support for transformation is to be provided and resistance to change reduced.

The scientific novelty of this research lies in the theoretical and practical substantiation of the integration of good governance principles with project-oriented institutional structures (Project Offices) as a systemic approach to managing the structural transformation of coal regions. Moreover, the study contributes to the academic discourse on decentralised public administration under crisis conditions by emphasising the importance of participatory tools, horizontal coordination, and capacity-building initiatives. The utilisation of the cycle of good governance and Project Offices is poised to contribute to the establishment of a novel management culture at the local level, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability on the part of authorities. This is of critical importance during a period characterised by profound changes.

The implementation of the proposed strategies and mechanisms has the potential to engender considerable enhancement of the sustainability and effectiveness of governance in coal communities. Furthermore, it has the capacity to establish the basis for long-term socio-economic development, inclusive transition planning, and the successful reintegration of former coal territories into the broader national development agenda.

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