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Institutional Capacity of Local Self-Government Bodies in the Context of Design Thinking and Managerial Changes

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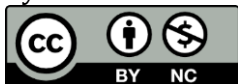
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The study aims to examine and substantiate the specific features of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies in fostering design thinking and implementing managerial transformations under contemporary conditions. In the process of writing the article, the author identified the features of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies during the emergence of design thinking in improving managerial decisions. It was characterized that institutional capacity is understood as regulatory, legal, financial, resource and organizational support, and we also include human resources. No less significant, as highlighted, is the ability of local self-government bodies to adapt managerial decisions to modern crisis changes. The article details assessment methods for analyzing the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies in the process of forming design thinking, as well as analyzes socio-economic indicators for the period 2023–2025. The author tried to convey in the study that even with a shortage of time, human and financial resources, preference is still given to hierarchical and reactive management models. While the components of design thinking, we included empathic analysis of citizens' needs, participatory and preliminary testing of management decisions, motivate proactive decisions of residents. During the study, it was found that the introduction of the principles of design thinking in the activities of local self-government bodies implements the function of compensatory, contributes to transformation in the structure of informed management decision-making.



KEYWORDS

public administration, territorial community, decentralization, institutional capacity, design thinking, management decisions, local self-government, society, martial law, decisions, state.



Інституційна спроможність органів місцевого самоврядування в контексті формування дизайн-мислення та управлінських змін

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СТАТТЯ

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Дослідження має на меті вивчити та обґрунтувати особливості інституційної спроможності органів місцевого самоврядування у сприянні розвитку дизайнерського мислення та впровадженні управлінських трансформацій у сучасних умовах. Авторка у процесі написання статті визначила особливості інституційної спроможності органів місцевого самоврядування під час зародження дизайн-мислення у підвищення управлінських рішень. Було охарактеризовано, що під інституційною спроможністю розуміють нормативно-правове, фінансово-ресурсне та організаційне забезпечення, сюди ж включаємо й кадровий потенціал. Не менш вагомою, як виділено, є здатність органів місцевого самоврядування адаптувати управлінські рішення до сучасних кризових змін. У статті було деталізовано методи оцінки для аналізу інституційної спроможності органів місцевого самоврядування у процесі формування дизайн-мислення, а також проведено аналіз соціально-економічних показників за період 2023–2025 років. Авторка намагалася донести у дослідженні, що навіть при умові дефіциту часових, кадрових та фінансових ресурсів все-таки перевага надається ієрархічним та реактивним моделям управління. У той час, як складові дизайн-мислення, сюди ми віднесли емпатійний аналіз потреб громадян, партисипативність та попереднє тестування управлінських рішень, мотивують проактивні рішення мешканців. Під час проведеного дослідження було виявлено, що запровадження принципів дизайн-мислення в діяльність органів місцевого самоврядування реалізує функцію компенсаторності, сприяє трансформації у структурі прийняття обґрунтованих управлінських рішень.



КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

публічне управління, територіальна громада, децентралізація, інституційна спроможність, дизайн-мислення, управлінські рішення, місцеве самоврядування, суспільство, воєнний стан, рішення, держава.

1. Introduction

In the conditions of hostilities, the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies is interpreted not at all as a simple formality and a set of powers, but as a continuous living matter that is capable of renewal, rethinking and self-reflection. Actualizing the problems of large-scale decentralization and restoration of the state of war in our country, we see an urgent need for the latest management approaches, which in turn will focus on the creation of specific solutions and environments for development, as well as for the implementation of certain procedures. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that design thinking completely goes beyond the instrumental method and is definitely integrated into the management space. And this helps local self-government bodies to thoroughly simulate bottom-up decisions and analyze the very logic of relations with citizens, and directly influence the problems of communities in particular.

At the same time, it should be recognized that the complexity of municipal challenges from life support crises to the management of reconstruction processes makes traditional hierarchical-bureaucratic management models ineffective. Contrary to this, local authorities are increasingly unable to keep up with the dynamics of standard regulations, and at the same time, all possible formal management instructions that can be unconditional guidelines for actions are lost.

During the shift in focus from administrative control to the adoption of specific managerial decisions together with the community, the formation of design thinking takes place in the management practice of local self-government bodies. In the course of this process, there is a deep empathic immersion in the problematic environment of residents, solving urgent problems and mistakes, perceiving all possible changes not as a state for threat, but as a natural development. However, it is advisable to note that in today's Ukrainian realities, design thinking still remains at the level of fragmentation, that is, in the format of trainings, projects, pilot initiatives, while not being embedded in the systemic management culture of local authorities.

In our opinion, this problem is acutely felt precisely through the processes of military and post-war management, namely when local self-government bodies are responsible for interaction with international partners, supporting the social cohesion of communities, and we also include the coordination of humanitarian processes.

Design thinking provides perspective vision with a sensitive range to the local context. This is a kind of practical tool for managerial adaptation, and not just a fashionable concept in the modern dimension.

However, despite the exceptional interest and attention from innovative approaches, discussions in scientific circles still do not stop regarding the saponification of the links between the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies and the formation of design thinking as the main factor of changes in management. It is worth emphasizing the opinion that researchers mostly focus their own attention on the analysis of regulatory and legal aspects of decentralization or the organizational characteristics of local authorities, while they do not pay attention to motivational, cultural and value changes in management. However, such "soft" factors are able to form and integrate promising management decisions, and at the same time the ability of institutions to survive in the face of crisis changes.

Therefore, the relevance of the study of this article is determined by the need to analyze both managerial changes and design thinking. Thanks to this approach, it is undoubtedly possible to go beyond the formal vision of the functions of local government and substantiate its systemic content space within the management search, combining creativity, focus on the needs of citizens and undoubted responsibility.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, scientists have been actively discussing the role of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies in the process of forming design thinking and making reasoned management decisions. The specifics in this regard are revealed by G. Zelenko [14], who noted that institutional capacity is practically a critical form for the effective operation of local self-government bodies, especially in wartime conditions and ensuring the adaptation of residents and the community, in particular, to the crisis situation in the country. The opinion of V. Zinkevych [15] is also prominent,

who emphasized that there is a considerable need to coordinate the powers of local self-government bodies and meaningful justification of the functions of institutions for making effective decisions in management. The scientist also outlined promising ways to improve administrative legislation.

In the study of V. Kysil [2], we see that the scientist considers the transformation of legislation in the field of local self-government (taking into account the hostilities in Ukraine) through the prism of successful implementation of managerial decisions and changes from local self-government bodies to the formation of high adaptability and the ability to implement new management models. On the other hand, according to Ye. Minakova [3], the integration of internally displaced persons into host communities is important for the practical application of institutional capacity in the process of forming design thinking.

It is worth mentioning here the research of H. Nakonechna and V. Zinkevych [5], who unanimously state that during martial law in the country, local self-government quite often faces restrictions (both organizational and resource restrictions should be included here). And this, in turn, necessitates a proactive approach to meaningful management and the application of methods that are mainly focused on the needs of residents. Analyzing the conclusion on the "Concept of Reforming Local Self-Government and Territorial Organization of Power in Ukraine" [1], it should be emphasized that reforms should fully ensure the strengthening of institutional capacity, as well as sufficiently optimize the powers and develop the functional direction of the managerial culture of self-government bodies.

In this case, a significant role is assigned to the integration of managerial innovations and design thinking into the practical activities of local self-government bodies. Researchers such as O. Yarema and N. Lepish [13] point out that local self-government bodies act as a kind of agents of change in communities, because in their activities they use participatory and proactive methods in the process of making important managerial decisions. At the same time, it is advisable to recall the experience of O. Ros [6; 7], who emphasize that the functional aspects of institutional capacity (this includes transparency of procedures, monitoring of the implementation of decisions and a thorough definition of functions and powers) are basic for the implementation of management reforms and new management models, including approaches related to design thinking.

It is also worth mentioning the regulatory framework for ensuring institutional capacity, which is supported by such legislative documents that are directly related to the activities of local self-government bodies, in particular the Law of Ukraine "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine" [10], the Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to the Budget Code" [12], as well as the State Regional Development Strategy for 2021–2027 [11]. In the works of the authors [4; 9], attention is focused on the use of management tools in communities and a clear delineation of the availability of resources, the delimitation of powers and the level of institutional capacity of the authorities themselves are indicated.

Summing up the research of scientists and the analysis of regulatory and legal aspects, we note that the formation of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies in combination with managerial innovations and design thinking principles, in our opinion, is the foundation for increasing efficiency in making logical and meaningful management decisions, the sustainability of management processes during crisis phenomena and the adaptability of communities.

3. Problem Statement

The purpose of the study is to substantiate the peculiarities of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies in the field of design thinking formation and managerial changes at the stage of modern conditions.

4. Methods and Materials

During the study, several reasoned and clear methods were used in the article, among which we highlight the following:

1. Analysis of theoretical material and regulatory support, which made it possible to determine the role of institutional capacity of local self-government bodies in the process of formation of design thinking and managerial changes.

2. Comparative analysis to characterize and substantiate macroeconomic and socio-demographic indicators for 2023–2025, which have a direct impact on the activities of local self-government bodies.

3. Criterion analysis of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies, which included an assessment of resource provision, human resources and functionality.

4. System analysis of management models, which made it possible to determine the assessment of hierarchical, reactive and proactive decisions using the principles of design thinking

Thus, as a result of the analysis, the relationship between financial, personnel and managerial analysis was outlined, which made it possible to form a holistic picture of institutional capacity and assess the potential of territorial communities in the implementation of managerial changes in the crisis environment.

5. Results and Discussion

Taking into account the harsh realities of today in our country, there is a link to the requirements for flexibility and efficiency in making managerial decisions. There is a connection with the processes of both full-scale invasion and decentralization of power. Taking into account the outlined conditions, we observe that local self-government bodies become the leading institutions responsible for the successful implementation of administrative, social, and economic functions at the territorial level, supporting the viability of communities [9].

For the effective operation of local self-government bodies, an important condition is the introduction of design thinking, which is able to adapt management processes to the needs of the community, motivate the proactive behavior of authorities and produce modern management models that will focus on a comprehensive solution of problematic issues. Such integration of the principles of design thinking into management practice allows not only to improve the quality of decision-making, but also stimulates mechanisms for strengthening institutional capacity, which is able to determine the effectiveness of the performance of functions by local self-government bodies in the processes of difficult socio-economic conditions.

Figure 1 clearly shows how design thinking is integrated into the activities of local self-government bodies.

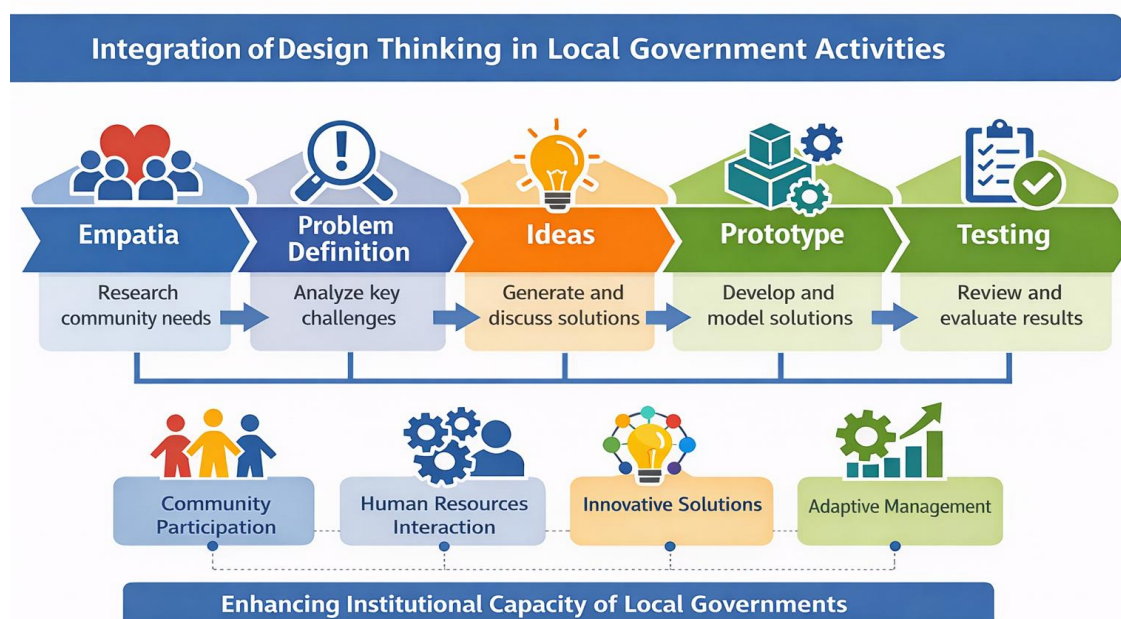


Figure 1. Integration of design thinking into the activities of local self-government bodies

Source: Compiled by the author.

It is advisable to note the statement of H. Shchedrova, who understands institutional capacity as the ability of an institution to perform its functions by ensuring an appropriate level of professional training of personnel, processes, organization and resources of the relevant institution [8, p. 146]. At the same time, it (institutional capacity) is considered as the ability of organizations to perform the functions assigned to them within the regulatory framework determined by the state.

Institutional capacity includes such basic elements as:

1) regulatory and legal support;

- 2) a system of special subjects;
- 3) financial and logistical support [13, pp. 559–560].

Such components can be attributed to the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies.

Thus, the European Charter of Local Self-Government outlined several main postulates that have a direct impact on the way the local self-government body operates: the powers vested in local self-government bodies, as a rule, should be complete and exclusive; general principles for the formation of administrative structures of local self-government bodies; selection of highly qualified personnel, taking into account personal qualities and competence; the number of employees of local self-government bodies [3, p. 247]. The condition for the institutional capacity of a local self-government body is a high-quality and objective personnel policy.

The main component of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies is their functions. According to G. Zelenko, they proceed from the functions of territorial communities as the main ones, since the social role of local self-government is revealed in the functions of their representative bodies [14, pp. 50–51]. At the same time, functions are the basis, the basis from which the powers, forms and methods of activity of village, township, and city councils are derived. These are law-making, representative, managerial, coordination, information, planning function and budget and financial. According to different spheres, there are political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, etc. [14, p. 51]. The functions of local self-government bodies are disclosed and implemented through the powers enshrined in the legislation.

Assessment of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies in the context of decentralization should take into account effective criteria that establish the level of viability of a particular territorial community. Such criteria, in addition to the availability of a regulatory framework, are also financial self-sufficiency and resource provision, human resources, support of the population, etc. It is also important to clarify all the existing contradictions between the expanded powers of local self-government bodies and the controlling functions of state departments and services [6, p. 98]. The assessment of institutional capacity should be carried out separately for each host community, taking into account the specified criteria.

Institutional capacity building includes: professional development (who), improvement of procedures (how) and organizational strengthening (which system). Institutional capacity is increased in such a way that the attraction of resources and their disposal contributes to a more efficient and effective functioning of institutions [7, p. 101]. The reform of decentralization of power is aimed, in particular, at increasing the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies, which, in particular, affected the potential opportunities to meet the needs of IDPs.

In the course of the analysis of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies in 2023–2025 (according to the data given in Annual monitoring of the organization and development of local self-government as of 01.01.2025). A generalization of macroeconomic, budgetary and managerial indicators that determine the real capabilities of territorial communities to implement managerial changes in the conditions of a full-scale war was carried out. Based on the results of the analysis, it was determined that the slowdown in economic growth forms severe structural restrictions for the activities of local self-government bodies, reducing their financial, organizational and managerial capacity.

To systematize the numerical indicators that form the institutional environment of local self-government bodies, the results of the analysis are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Main indicators of impact on the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies (2023–2025)

Indicator	2023	2024	2025	Managerial consequences for local self-government bodies
GDP growth rate, %	5.3	3.5	2.7	Reduction of the financial base for community development
Share of own revenues in financing needs, %	–	–	48.0	Increased dependence on transfers
Number of citizens abroad, million people	–	–	6.9	Loss of labor and tax potential
Number of internally displaced persons, million people	–	–	≈4.0	Increasing social burden

Source: Compiled by the author based on [4].

From the data obtained in Table 1 data, we observe the following: the dynamics of the growth rate of the gross domestic product of Ukraine during 2023–2025. has a pronounced downward trajectory: from 5.3% in 2023 to 3.5% in 2024 and 2.7% in 2025. Such dynamics, according to the results of the study, indicates the gradual exhaustion of the compensatory mechanisms of the economy, which turns into a reduction in the budgets for the development of territorial communities, limitation of capital expenditures and a decrease in investment opportunities for the restoration of infrastructure and human capital. In turn, the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies is increasingly determined not by the number of available resources, but by the quality of management decisions and the ability to adapt management models to the crisis environment.

Further analysis of socio-economic and organizational factors made it possible to assess the nature of management models that dominate the practice of local self-government bodies. It is detailed that in the context of a shortage of financial, human and time resources, reactive and hierarchical management decisions still prevail. Due to this, there is a partial increase in the share of proactive approaches focused on the needs of communities, the involvement of stakeholders and the use of design thinking tools.

This structural transformation of managerial approaches is reflected in Figure 1, which shows the ratio of traditional and design-oriented management models.

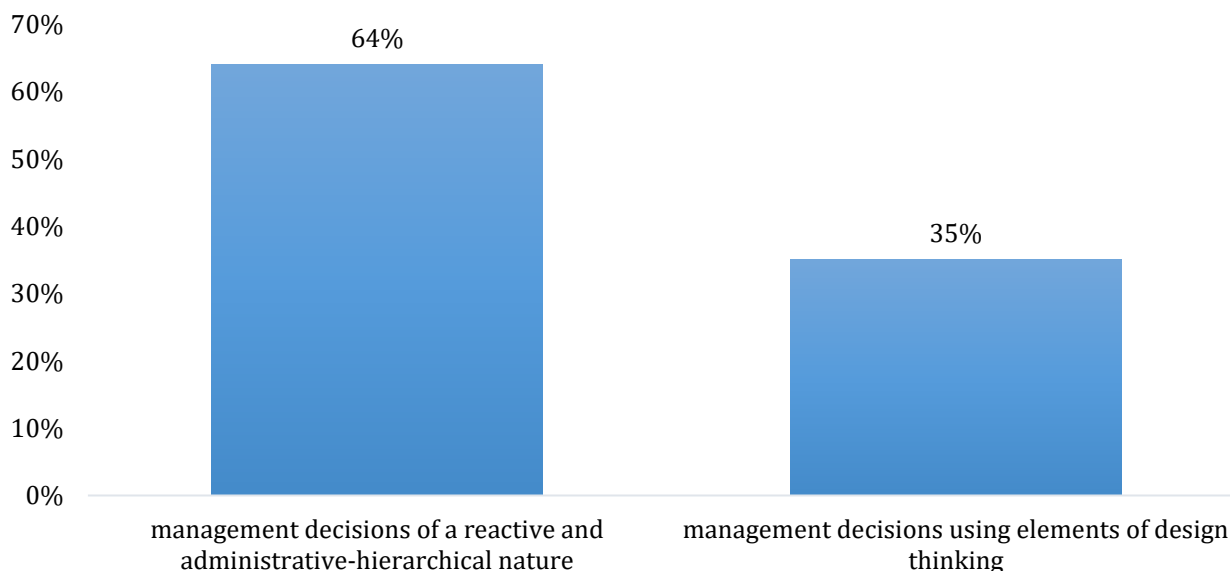


Figure 1. Correlation of traditional and design-oriented management models according to the CEMG/PAD Report for 2024

Source: Compiled by the author based on [1].

Analyzing the data shown in Figure 1, we can see that approximately 65% of managerial decisions retain their own administrative-hierarchical and reactive character. This trend is rather due to the preservation of centralized procedures in decision-making, where the main functions are concentrated in administrative units, and powers and responsibilities are clearly delimited according to the hierarchical principle. According to the results of the study, it became obvious that such an organizational structure makes it possible to control processes and comply with regulatory procedures. However, when responding to the new needs of the community, the adaptability and flexibility of local self-government bodies are limited. Usually, reactive solutions are more aimed at eliminating the consequences of existing problems, rather than preventing crisis phenomena, which in turn leads to the risk of delays in the provision of social and administrative services, reduces the effectiveness of budget planning and, of course, slows down the formation of innovative practices.

At the same time, almost 35% of all managerial decisions are formed due to the use of elements of design thinking, which forms a gradual transformation of management principles in communities. Design thinking involves a participatory approach, where residents and stakeholders are involved in identifying problems and jointly developing solutions; empathic analysis of the needs of the population, which allows a better understanding of social, economic and cultural contexts; as well as preliminary

testing of management decisions through prototyping and modeling of possible consequences. In general, we believe that this practice will contribute to real informed decision-making, which will reduce the risk of errors and increase citizens' confidence in local self-government bodies.

Thus, it is found that in the conditions of war, the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies is in the phase of structural transformation. Analyzing the correlation of traditional and design-oriented management models, it should be noted that the introduction of design thinking does not have a clear declarative character, but performs a compensatory function, allowing local governments to increase the effectiveness of managerial decisions under conditions of limited financial, human and organizational resources. In this case, design thinking appears as one of the key tools for strengthening the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies during the period of war and post-war transformation.

6. Conclusions

Based on the study, it was found that in today's conditions, the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies is a complex phenomenon that combines such elements as: organizational and financial support, regulatory and legal support, as well as the ability to function effectively in the public sector. The level of institutional capacity of local self-government bodies helps to directly determine the effectiveness of the exercise of powers in the process of interaction with territorial communities, as well as some kind of management decision-making. The article highlights the leading functions of local self-government bodies: rule-making, representative, managerial, coordination, informational and budgeting, which serve as the basis for the implementation of powers not only in the political sphere, but also in the social, cultural, environmental and economic.

Carrying out a full-fledged study of the features and effectiveness of the role of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies, it was traced that the main evaluation criteria are resource provision, human resources, support of the population and financial self-sufficiency. At the same time, it was determined that there is no clear and meaningful direct proportional relationship between the growth of material and financial resources and the expansion of the powers of local self-government bodies. In the course of the analysis in 2023–2025, it was detailed that the reduction of budget resources and the slowdown in economic growth indicate the undoubted predominance of hierarchical and reactive management models. In this case, there is a decrease in the adaptability of local self-government bodies to changes in the socio-economic environment. In addition, there was a partial and slow growth in the share of design-oriented solutions, which already means the formation of a transformation of management models.

Thus, summarizing all the data presented in the article, it can be argued that the use of design thinking criteria in the practical activities of local self-government (this includes empathic analysis of citizens' needs, participation, preliminary testing of managerial decisions) contributes to compensating for limited resources, increasing efficiency in making meaningful decisions, as well as directly contributing to the transformation of institutional activities.

And finally, the growth of the institutional capacity of local self-government bodies still requires a systematic flexible approach, which includes improving personnel policy, optimizing procedures, organizational strengthening and active implementation of innovative management methods, including design thinking, which ensures a stable position of local self-government bodies in today's changing environment.

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