



Optimizing Inter-Community Cooperation through Network Governance and Smart Specialization to Prevent Social Conflicts

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Abstract: We can suggest that in the dense information society and diminished credibility of hierarchical organizations characteristic for post-industrial societies, Ukraine requires a transition to reflexive, polycentric governance. The aim of the article is to provide evidence that network governance and smart specialization may serve as instruments to minimize latent social tensions, enhance internal cohesion between communities, but also maintain regional competitiveness. The methodology employed in the article is based on an inductive synthesis, comparative institutional analysis, analytical deduction, synergistic modeling and qualitative systematization on a pluralist interpretivist approach. The paper clarifies key priorities for network governance, which include an integrated performance assessment system, a distant citizens' and inter-institutional initiatives register, territorially-embedded partnership ecosystems, ours-styled organization-based projects. In the case of smart specialization, the paper stresses real-time data infrastructures, multisectorial coordination between stakeholders, cross-policy integration across domains and context-sensitive communication as these measures can help reduce friction and restore public confidence.

Keywords: smart specialisation, public administration, multi-level governance, intercommunal cooperation, decentralisation, territorial development strategy, social conflict mitigation, participatory governance

Introduction

Against the background of heterogeneous social-political relations in a Ukraine's society (complicated by external threats and institutional entropy), there is need to reconsider certain substantial aspects for basic principles of local self-government functioning. Decentralisation as a reformative and transformative praxis has led to qualitative transformations of the murky terrains of territorial organisation which have produced conditions for reanimating subregional initiative and unleashing endogenous developmental resources. Notwithstanding the ambitious normative and declarative rhetoric of establishing modernisation reform, especially that of decentralisation as a way of have drive sustainable socio-economic growth at the local level", there is still glaring lack of systemic linkage between governance renewal on one hand and demonstrable improvements in peoples' quality life. Moreover, developmental asymmetries at regional and intra-regional levels endure and are exacerbated as a result, not so much of economic disintegration but politico-cognitive barriers to integration. These disproportions, which are exacerbated

by the effects of military violence, lead to a rise in conflictogenic potential at the local level, where growing social disbalances turn into triggers for instability and collapse.

This survey is particularly useful for the purposes of analysis in the context of two valuable results of a poll, conducted by the National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service [1] before the invasion started. Results: The results also show that the majority, 76.5% of respondents who are civil servants, perceived a lack of skills in tools for analysing and transforming conflict situations as a major obstacle to peace and stability among communities. For the time being, while 23.5% of the respondents were aware, they, however, did not have the necessary skills to effectively solve it due to limited access to evolving administrative tools.

In this respect, network governance mechanisms become particularly important. These mechanisms act as quasi-regulatory institutions for a type of synergistic nexus of interaction between the main order-forming stakeholders – governments, private sector, civil society and academia, according to principles of poly-centricity and adaptive governance. At the same time, smart specialisation approach-as a strategic device for discovering and exploiting distinctive territorial competitive advantages-serves not only an instrument of economic rationality, but also as passion play designed to pre-empt social conflict through embedding collective identities of shared goals or values, together with good practices in inclusive development.

Therefore, there is an urgent demand for an integrated model of intercommunal cooperation that (1) acknowledges the institutional complexity of present governance settings and (2) reflects established international practices in terms of network governance and smart specialization – suitably adjusted to local conditions. This argument entails identifying not only promising vectors for institutionalising the approaches mentioned, but also reflecting critically on the gaps and challenges that are specific to countries with highly disparate regional operating contexts. In this context, the current study seeks to test the efficacious methods in improving governance practices so that social confrontations can be avoided and society as a whole will have more sustainable development.

Literature review

In terms of territorial management seen through a postmodern lens, this network governance becomes one of the major discourses and points of departure for present-day administration science. Decentralization here, of course, signifies a polycentric world. Realizing several nodes could, therefore, mean it is a mechanism to fasten change of socio-spatial interaction. In this current moment of tense allocation of the political and economic powers of territorial entities, we are forced to build better theoretical models that not only preserve resilient organisations but also allow ever more fruitful, collaborative and interactive work by leveraging and integrating human capital, technological infrastructure and regulatory harmonization.

Based on the corpus of analyses represented by Kvitka and Mazur [2], the most heuristic-fundamental strategy of preventive neutralisation of social confrontation processes should be the introduction of digital network technologies into the public administration, which is now still exists in the regime of deconcentration of power. This integration allows one to model the social mutations which will be induced in the broader context of a general systems (near) future evolution projection for political and territorial entities. According to the transitology rationale, network governance represents the intersubjective institutional module that the visibility of interactions and the interest complementarity between state authorities, business actors and civil society take by means of deployment of new informational and communicational tools.

Provan et al. [3] argue, the cross-organisational quasi-market networks between public and non-profit parties are an institutional device to address the multi-level structure of social problems. Such a capacity to adapt classical bureaucratic forms is normatively-functional lacking, one of the contributions made by Sørensen and Torfing [4], and its increasing implementation in market logic within the scope of post-industrialist public services. Hu et al. [5] highlight the intersector desynchronisation and vertical disarticulation as problematic factors that, in combination, contribute to undermining the leverage of efficiency by the network. From the point of view of critical administrative anthropology, Shenkoya [6] emphasises the lack of transparency and accountability associated with network structures that resulted in public trust collapsing due to entropic degeneration. Under the framework of conflictological functionalism, Fang et al. [7] theorise network interaction as an underlying generator of cross-actor tensions caused by institutional misfit between involved parties.

Following the rationality of regionalist thought, the idea of smart specialization, following Shevchenko [8], can be read as the ability of the state to generate connective synergy between the triad of research institutions (including both traditional and public research), economic agents and civil institutions, accumulating efficiency in the key areas of regional development. This is described as an endogenous systemic strategy that builds on the cognitive co-

participation and innovation-catalysing cooperation between the leading actorial domains [9]. The core of smart specialisation is the systematic encouragement of cross-sectoral cooperation, realised within the strategically defined regional development priorities.

However, this implementation is actually constrained by several barriers. Of these, Papamichail et al [10] underscore universities' structural inertia in terms of stimulating engagement with entrepreneurial structures. On the other hand, others highlight the lack of complementary interregional communication channels [9, 11, 12] and the inadequacy of innovation as a well-defined element that can initiate structural-economic transformation remains an important issue [8]. Kavun and Zamula [13] rightly point out that the lack of empirical evidence creates epistemological gaps, which represent a basic barrier for managerial reckoning in ambiguous socio-economic environment. Thus, the systemic optimization of the communitarian cooperation demand not only the introduction of the principles of participatory transparency in network governance [2], but hence the organic embedding of smart specialisation in the national economic policy on the basis of the effective regional configuration of both the research and development and the innovation networks.

The different definitions of social conflict make research challenging because they result in scientists using different methods to study this phenomenon. Etzioni-Halevy [14] describes conflict as a social power which drives positive and negative social changes that speed up social progress. The research by Blikhar et al. [15] explain how these events create disruptive effects on systems which result in social instability and economic decline and the breakdown of institutional authority. The reduction of conflict-producing elements which stem from economic social and ethnic and political and religious factors [16] framework requires public policymakers to develop flexible policies which merge network governance with smart specialisation for achieving three vital goals which consist of uniting different groups' interests and decreasing social conflicts and achieving consensus between multiple stakeholders [17].

Materials and Methods

3.1. Research logic and conceptual positioning

The methodology of the work is structured as a multi-level analytical construct that combines theoretical reconstruction, normative-institutional analysis, and elements of comparative case studies. We proceed from the assumption that intermunicipal cooperation is not just an administrative procedure. It functions as a network mechanism for coordinating resources, interests, and conflicting expectations. That is why the research design is focused not on identifying individual cooperation projects, but on identifying the structural conditions under which network governance can minimize social tensions. The conceptual framework combines network governance approaches, polycentricity theory, and smart specialization tools. This combination allows us to view territorial communities as open systems that interact in a mode of cooperative competition. In short, cooperation is interpreted as a mechanism for preventing conflicts through the redistribution of functions and coordination of strategic priorities.

3.2. Formation of the empirical base and selection criteria

The empirical basis of the study is formed from three types of sources. First, regulatory and legal acts governing intermunicipal interaction and regional development. Second, strategies for the development of territorial communities and regions, in particular documents related to smart specialisation. Third, international analytical reports and case studies of countries where network governance is used as a coordination tool [18]. The materials were selected based on the following criteria: the presence of clearly defined cooperation mechanisms, a description of institutional coordination models, references to conflict prevention tools, and empirical verification of results. The general corpus includes 28 strategic documents, 12 normative acts, and 18 analytical reports from international organizations. The case study sample covers examples from Belgium, Greece, and Latvia as states with different models of decentralization. The Ukrainian context is used as the basic analytical space.

3.3. Methods of analytical processing and interpretation

The methodological toolkit consists of systematic analysis, comparative methods, institutional analysis, and elements of content analysis of strategic documents. The systematic approach helped to view intermunicipal cooperation as a set of interrelated elements. Comparative analysis was used to compare coordination models in different countries. Content analysis of strategic documents was carried out to identify recurring categories: resource coordination, distribution of powers, participation mechanisms, and conflict prevention tools. The categories were refined through sequential coding of text fragments. Institutional analysis made it possible to assess the degree of formalization of network mechanisms. Particular attention was paid to the issues of transparency of procedures, participation of business and universities, and the role of regional administrations (Table 1).

Table 1: Methodological matrix for the study of intermunicipal cooperation

Stage	Object of analysis	Method	Analytical focus	Result
Formation of the body of	Strategies and regulatory acts	Documentary analysis	Availability of coordination mechanisms	Source base
Primary coding	Strategy texts	Content analysis	Repeated categories	Categorical matrix
Case comparisons	Models of Belgium, Greece, Latvia	Comparative method	Type of management model	Typology of approaches
Institutional assessment	Interaction mechanisms	Institutional analysis	Degree of formalization	Effectiveness assessment
System integration	Generalized data	System analysis	Interconnection of levels	Conceptual diagram
Assessment of conflict factors	Development strategies	Analytical grouping	Potential sources of tension	Risk map
Modeling	Aggregate results	Analytical reconstruction	Consistency of elements	Prevention model

Source: developed by the authors

3.4. Classification of network governance models

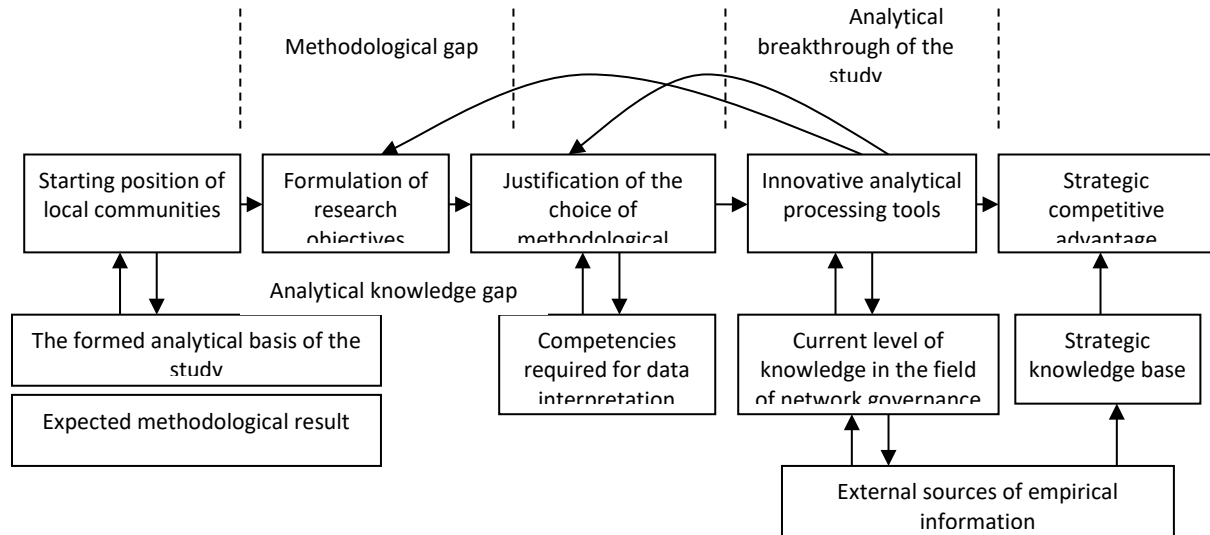
The criterion of institutional coordination was used to typologize the approaches. Three models were identified: centralized-coordinated, decentralized partnership, and polycentric network. The first model is characterized by the dominance of regional administration. The second involves horizontal agreements between communities. The third is based on multi-level interaction with an active role for universities and business. Analysis of the strategies showed that the polycentric model demonstrates greater potential for preventing social conflicts. The reason is simple. The distribution of responsibility reduces the concentration of tension. However, such a model requires a high level of trust and institutional culture.

Smart specialisation was considered as a tool for coordinating economic priorities. It creates a basis for rationalising resources and forming common interests. Where priorities are clearly defined, conflict is reduced. It does not disappear, but is transformed into a manageable format.

3.5. Integration modeling and validation

The final stage of the study involved synthesising the results into a comprehensive analytical model. The model is built around three interrelated blocks: institutional coordination, economic specialisation, and participation mechanisms. Each block influences the level of social stability (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptual diagram of the use of the research methodology



Source: developed by the authors

The results were validated by comparing the conclusions with actual cases of strategy implementation. In cases where inter-municipal cooperation was accompanied by clear coordination procedures and transparent resource allocation, a lower level of conflict was recorded. The methodological framework is not static. It allows for expansion through the inclusion of quantitative indicators of effectiveness and social cohesion. However, even at this stage, it allows us to trace the structural patterns of interaction between network governance and the prevention of social conflicts.

Results

During this epoch of hypertrophic technological development fueled by the paradigms of networked interconnectedness and ceaseless information exchange, not only is there a radical transformation in the architectural substratum upon which society rests, but also in that on which economic processes are based. This metamorphosis is driving the birth of a new model of governance. Network formations are progressively emerging as the major integrational shapers of economic relationships active within a dynamic, pluralistic context coloured by a tapestry of interdependent agents constantly open to formation and reformation. Against this background, the question of the synergistic coexistence and interaction between state institutions, corporate sector and scientific-educational world is becoming very acute. One of the conceptually important tools to enhance effective integration is network governance as an instrument, which is based on the values of transparency, accessibility and multistakeholder collaboration [19].

Network governance is understood as a sui generis type of communicative action between public administrations, institutions of civil society and economic actors made possible by the fusion of advanced information technologies with communication. It is an essentially reformed model of public-private collaboration, where horizontal linkages predominate, participative management and decentralised decision making prevail—all conditions necessary to create groups that are able to self-regulate based on shared responsibility.

The successfulness of that as a governance structure relies on agile production, transmission and sharing of information through polyvalent channels—the mail, web portals, Facebook, Twitter or SMS—that produce the ubiquitous near availability to administrative services at the lowest transactional cost [18, 20]. If there is something characteristic of the governance forms described, it is that they are anthropocentric: their centre is not to be found in institutional pressures, but in consumerist demands made by the last beneficiaries (citizens). In this framework of understanding, the role of public administrator cast adrift is redefined: it is not limited to being a disinterested servant carrying out regulatory orders; but instead becomes responsible for facilitating socio-economic development, managing resources

and designing institutional feedback processes. This redefined role requires an all-round professional education in a trans-processual field involving state, private, municipal and non-profit sectors.

A number of vital factors need to be considered in the development of a networked governance model for Ukraine: in order to successfully introduce an ideological construct such as that pertaining the network- governance at the Ukrainian level. First, the development of a unified methodological framework for assessing the effectiveness of regional programs must be realized with a long-term registry of initiatives as an instrument of systematization and institutional control. Second, implementation of networked governance envisages simultaneous institutional strengthening of amalgamated territorial communities which should become real subjects to local self-government. In its essence, the decentralization reform requires testing innovative management instruments to boost the capacity of regional—level players – including through the institutionalization of partnership mechanisms and co-financing project based management. The second, defined as a "project" organisational approach (which must be adapted to the country's administrative environment), is worked through indicators of project maturity in public bodies, which makes it possible to judge whether or not they are mature enough to implement programmes on a long-term basis.

From this set of ideas, heightened maturity of implementation is an enabling factor to public administration through a networked method of conduct that leads to the characteristic qualitative decision, the rationality reserve potential resource sustainable development territorial communities and trajectory performance long-horizon. Hence, in the face of multi-dimensional challenges of provenance, global and local alike, network governance is to appear not as optional choice but as a paradigmatic necessity -- one that should be holistic and complemented by other conceptual tools. One of these is the concept of smart specialization, a methodological framework anchored in an approach that seeks to identify regional competitive advantages where innovation-driven transformation of priority sectors is given a high policy focus. Within the logic of smart specialisation, localities are given scope to harness internal resources and skill for common purpose addressing systemic issues collectively, mobilising their activity through recourse to networked governance with its risk on moderation in terms of social (dis)integration. In the EU, this approach has been found as the most effective tool for mobilizing national economic potentialities in a post-crisis recovery stage not only conform to national strategic interests but also with the general politico-economic system of the EU.

Especially in view of Belgium's S3.0 experience building, that builds on the creation of a IL Convergence Program bottom up from an investment priorities supporting four strategic research centers Flanders and seven Spearhead cluster initiatives. Those work as enablers of the "triple helix" model in co-investment activities on (see Glossary) relevant S3 domains [21].

The Flemish clusters range from sustainable chemistry, smart manufacturing, and life sciences to ecosystem innovations, bioeconomy, and photonics – evidencing the potential for cross-regional synergetic effects and the co-creation of value-added chains. At the same time, the Greek national smart specialization strategy for 2021–2027, which was approved in June 2022 (Ministerial Decision 66021/30-6-2022), gives priority to knowledge exploitation as a means of fostering production of high-value-added products in global value chains [22]. Accordingly, the network governance idea, in association with ways of smart specialization, gives a complete framework both for superimposing the efficiency of public administration and for starting a new form of economic cooperation based on innovation, participation, and sustainable development.

Therefore, the framework of the smart specialisation policy, in its manifest aspect, has a permanent focus solely on the entrepreneurial discovery phenomenon, while within the institutional transition, this value is perceived as an imperative tool for regional autonomy. As regards the context of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECS), which areiscurrently under the process of gradual decentralisation of its administrative-territorial organisation, this implementation is a syndromic, multi-level process that demands joint research development policy and innovation strategy initiation – based on fundamental principles related to smart specialisation – at both national and sub-national level through an active cooperation between them.

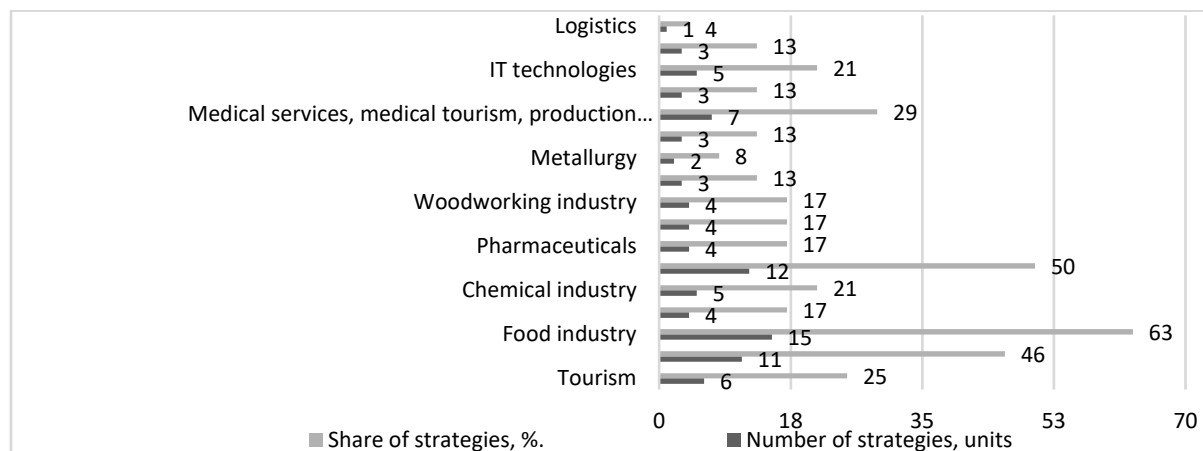
In this sense, the Latvian Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3) is a teleological commitment to structuring transformation in the direction of acceleration in higher added value intensity of productivity and more rationalised utilisation/resource potential. Thus, the delivery of RIS3 rests on 3 crucial paths: reviewing production structures and export-oriented lines within traditional branches of economy; identifying and strengthening progressive sectors provided with potential or embryonic capacities for high added value goods and services; enhancing sectors with a high coefficient in horizontal impact – able to generate a multiplier effect upon macroeconomic revolution [23].

In the face of a situation marked by armed conflict and simultaneous economic storm, Ukraine stands out with a high dynamism in the field of smart specialisation in comparison to other countries that are or have become recently

involved on track to European integration. Specifically, a formal declaration of intention should not be available to the public as a result and barely trading off to compose its overt character is not in play here; we are talking about a deeply syncretic vision of socio-spatial and economic cooperation, which brings together social-, economic- and administrative planes [24]. This paper institutionalises a three-fold strategic frame: deepening of social territorial cohesion, anchoring the regions' comparative advantages in competition space; and multi-level governance under a predominantly anthropocentric vector. This regional policy as the methodological basis of the strategy of the composite territorial development of Ukraine is focused on mechanisms of state support for economic backwardness regions, their infrastructural substrates formation and launching complex endogenously-linked growth programmes. A careful analysis of these [programs] which is conducted within functional regions demanding additional financial input along with the associated body of territorial planning documentation.

Against the canvas of current strategic matrices for regional development – those various configurings within which smart specialisation becomes a central element of programmatic-targeted policy – the teleology rests in operationalising innovation potential along economic priority trajectories. The overall direction in smart specialisation can be summarised by utilising focal points based on a review of 24 regional development strategies (as of 2027), as presented in Figure 2. The predominance of the country's industrial and interrelated economy serves as a consolidating factor of the great economic expediency of applying smart specialization principles, while the smart specialization appears to be an actual, directed, context-based instrument for realizing the industrial policy of Ukraine.

Figure 2: Thematic Axes of Smart Specialisation as Articulated in Regional Development Strategies of Ukraine (Horizon 2027)



Source: [8]

Taking into consideration a relative historical evolution of the dynamics of changes in the Ukrainian regions' economic structure, one cannot but admit that it is obvious that there exists an exaggerated mismatch in spatial and sectoral dispositions of the productive forces (shortage on its backdrop) that results into a hypertrophied reliance on traditionally industrialized sectors characterized by low value-added rates and crucially over-the-top energy intensity within production. This technological dinosaur being pursued in the indignant technopark overwhelms by its degree of infantilism and manifests total poverty of business environment connected with those units that dispose capital or launch startups [25].

On the other hand, a pathological indifference displayed by private capital for institutionalised forms of co-operation with the academic world strengthens even more the weak degree of intellectualisation that characterises regional production systems and ensures that structural inertia becomes endemic at subnational levels. In this sense, it must be stressed that the establishment process of the smart specialization model takes on a fragmentary and occasional character, considering also how empirical data identify an overload of strategic efforts concentrated in traditional sectors as those related to agro-industrial sector, food industry or basic forms in mechanical engineering and chemical production.

It does have to be underscored that the current paradigm of regional strategizing suffers not only from a lack of ontological transparency, but also an overarching conceptual eclecticism which in practice means that the key protagonists in the innovation ecosystem fail to coagulate into a coherent systemically synergistic form. The

administrative approximation of development objectives and the limited analytical strength of governance apparatus serve only to accentuate these entropic tendencies.

Thus, the need for overhaul of the paradigmatic foundations on which state regional policy support is based does not present itself as an optional issue but a strategic exigency whose oversight may doom any effort at modernisation of regional economies to a future scenario marked by stagnation-recurrence dominance – delivered underpinned raw material dependence and permanent technological peripherality (Table 2).

Table 2: Strategic Vectors for Enhancing the Contemporary Framework of Regional Smart Specialisation in Ukraine

Aims	Tasks
Formation of ontologically substantiated mechanisms for integrating priority domains of smart specialisation into the paradigm of strategic governance	Given the multi-vectorial arrangement of globalization-induced turbulences triggered by pandemically-climactic rearrangements and the geopolitical dis-integration, one needs to formalize new types of regulatory-institutional tools identical with the imperatives followed in European integration trajectory (especially those provided for by the European Green Deal) under jurisdictional conditions constituted by martial law and socio-economic tempest generated during military-type times.
Integration of the conceptual postulates of smart specialisation into the macroeconomic toolkit of state policy	One central challenge is issued by the need to ensure that such innovative-centered, investment-led and export-biased strategems are made cumulatively trans-territorially accessible by integrating techno-scientific clusters as prospective growth poles in national green transformation paradigm of the economy, where cognitive synergy with other sectoral policies must be institutionally embedded.
Deployment of an axiology-based risk assessment system and crisis-responsive modelling within the smart specialisation domain	The establishment of an open and epistemologically validated control system, comprising both the supervision of deviancy in managers' business trajectories as well as providing for a context-sensitive corrective model, ushers in the need for a ubiquitous application of multilevel preventive governance mechanisms and corruption-proofing instruments.
Institutionalisation of a national policy aimed at the formation of value-oriented economic cooperation chains	It is required that the European interregional approach to smart specialisation should be adjusted by appointing specialised platforms serving as systemic institutional synchronisers among subnational actors and enabling stable emergence of horizontal and vertical value chains on the horizon of innovation-industrial development functional space.
Reflexive analysis of regional priorities and systemic dilemmas in the implementation of smart specialisation	An in-depth situational analysis, including an epistemological extrapolation of existing regional priorities, forestalls any belittling of the problem with a call for the conceptual reconfiguration of regional strategems within an interlocking webbed texture that ties ongoing armed struggle with the urgency to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) globally.
Formulation of a unified national canon for smart specialisation policy	The polycentric strategic imperatives of territorial communities must be summarized and transformed into national institutional space, which in turn would require the development of financial and organizational support mechanisms based on central resources mobilization, as well as procedural formalization of cross-sectoral coordination.

Introduction of state-supported protectionist policies for industrial-scientific conglomerates aligned with smart specialisation priorities	Institutionalisation of the instruments for support of public industrial and science parks functioning under conditions of priority areas of smart specialisation are to be realised based on planning, investment stimulating measures, transfer technology models and innovation acceleration paths.
Genesis of regional platforms for cooperation within smart specialisation processes	An essential first step is the launching of inter-institutional infrastructures in the shape of regional hubs, which should stimulate horizontal cooperation trajectories, and pool investment inflows by, after potential scaling-up, a unified national platform of interregional cooperation.
Initiation of regional energy-saving and resource-optimisation initiatives as vectors of smart specialisation	The use of preferential financial mechanisms (as instruments, showing Ukraine's commitment to international climate accords, above all the Paris agreement) are justified regarding: energy efficiency and resource-saving technologies in regional development strategies.
Strategic incorporation of smart specialisation domains into national-level planning and innovation documents	Legislative commitment to the integration of regional innovation priorities into the macro-strategic development path of the country within the Law of Ukraine "On Priority Areas for Innovation Activity" demands deconstruction addressing to outdated paradigms and architectural (re)building up new ones structuring developmental paths in the post-pandemic, war-time torn structures.

Source: developed by the authors

Given the transversality of the social change vectors and the globalised regimes of digitalisation of societies, this circumstantially creates the demand for an exploratory and adaptive framework for the understanding of conflictogenic nanostructures that can individually exacerbate the conflictogenic multiplicity through social practices heterogenisation, collective identity fragmentation and the deliquescence of traditional forms of social contract at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Social conflict should not be understood as a clash of interests, in its basic ontology, but as the complex dialectical clash of opposing dispositions arising from the disharmonic articulation of egocentrically conditioned preferences between social agents in the context of post-structural dissolution of normative boundaries of public and private.

Till recently, the facade of homogeneity of value orientations had served as a paradigm of social order, cementing and homogenizing social identities, that in the digital world is increasingly being replaced by a spectral plurality of discourses causing not only cognitive confusion, but also potential conflictuality within the horizontal communicative structures. Thus, explanations of socio-conflictual dynamics cannot be simplified to the narrow analysis of internally acting factors but ground a holographic vision of the social whole, by which every local destabilisation reverberates with global reconfigurations of power and normativities.

From the perspective of axiological constructivism, however, conflict cannot be seen as a departure from the normative solid state of society, but rather an immanent part of the autopoietic system of society, because through the successful actualisation of latent potentials it can also serve as a heuristic device of social rejuvenation, in the case that calibrated managerial schema and institutional frames are in place to support this development [26]. With this in mind, the idea of smart specialisation takes a new level of importance and positioning as an intricate cognitive-infrastructural practice based on a fusion of digital technologies, multi-actor involvement and heuristic forecasting capabilities that permits the articulation of network-based cooperation protocols aim at trans-territorial synergies.

Yet, we must not fall to the mechanistic trap of propelling such strategic frameworks into marketable action plans without a careful understanding of the sociocultural and mental archetypes of communities, for suchisation can lead to performative destabilization [27], and institutional dissolution ultimately complemented, and compounded, with a foe more viral than a pathogen, that of radical fractional civic legitiacy. The understanding in analytical terms of struggles and social contradictions requires not just an inter or multi-disciplinary approach, but also an epistemological sensitivity to the local context that would allow for the deconstruction of the tendencies to dehumanise and destroy, but also equally, the unlocking of conflict as a mechanism of social transgression.

Finally, Table 3 reveals key strategies to better design synergies rooted in network management and smart specialisation to prevent the emergence and escalation of any social conflict and better enhance community cooperation.

Table 3: Functional Dimensions of Social Conflicts within a Dichotomous Framework

Category	Function / Consequence
Positive Functions	
Socio-diagnostic	A sophisticated, widely applied data collection and analytical capability enabling the early detection of social dysfunctions and transparency in the information exchange between different parts of society that may have latent tensions between one another.
Regulatory	Creation of advanced mechanisms of coordination among social interaction constituents through smart specialization principles on conditional parity of interests and the joint decision-making process in the framework of inclusionary community settings.
Integrative	Initiatives such as these create preconditions for the social consolidation through the gradual construction of a common identity from the awareness that conflictogenic modes of operation result in processes of disintegration of social fabric in the absence of dialogue.
Innovative	New technological paradigms and organizational solutions that are developed and integrated into existing governance frameworks to break stagnation and create intellectual dynamism through new ideas.
Communicative	Development of communications approaches that ensure accountability, transparency and two-way flow of information among all actors within the governance process so as to reduce the underlying potential for conflict escalation.
Socio-psychological	Fit for improving social reflexivity and emotional neutrality to conflictogenic stimuli of individuals via collective deliberation and reinterpretation of socially relevant phenomena.
Negative Functions	
Destabilising	Facilitation of crisis in institutional operations and destabilization of social hierarchies leading to loss of citizen faith and dismissal of rulers.
Disorganising	Dismantling of coordinated resource connection between components of the social organism, and hence reduced efficiency of governance decisions and a reinforcement of the entropic processes within the society system.
Excessive and Costly	Create significant material, time, and energy costs involved in conflict resolution processes that hinder resource mobilization for other avenues of socio-economic development.

Source: developed by the authors

In the context of modern socio-humanitarian reflection, problematics of conflictology acquire not only an epistemological significance, but also a gnoseological and praxeological one too, for social conflict as a phenomenon of antagonistic interaction among unequally potent actors turns out to appear at once as an immanent part of the dynamic autopoietic system of the social through. Its ontological position moves beyond one-sided explanations as exclusively a deviant reality to become polysemic, including reference to diagnostic, integrative, innovative and psychosocial function. Highly articulated social formations, especially in times of tacit structural entropic proclivity

and a buoyant cognitive disequilibrium among the subjects of hegemonic discourses, call for the use of precise socio-analytical instrumentations. In these cases social struggles are symptoms of institutional perversion and anomic variation. The implementation of digitised systems for big data processing – in combination with the conception and development of smart specialisation algorithms – goes beyond just a utilitarian function but has also a hermeneutic role in order to allow for a paradigm shift concerning how interest-based relations between actors are negotiated across polyarchic arenas.

In this light, the deleterious effects of social conflict, blazoned as they are in phenomena that effect systemic disarray, organizational fracturing and resource-exacting escalation, may be composed through embracing communicative manoeuvres based on transcultural dialogue; discursive reciprocity; and hierarchical re-entrenchment as regards power schemes. The emergence of multi-disciplinary models to deal with conflictogenic structures (based on the inter-operationality between technological networks and ontology hybridised forms of social order) will be a *sine qua non* condition for maintaining social coherence in the face of permanent systemic turmoil.

Just as critical is the problem of normative legitimation of how one represents those on the margins in conflictual systems. Hence, one must institutionalise transparent models of social articulation that eliminate potential for treated aggression and secure the representativity of polyvariant dialogue within a plural democratic order. In this respect, social conflict is not only a phenomenologic necessity but also an existential mechanism of occasional renewal for the social tissue.

Discussion

In the order of the latest evolutionary phase in dispositive models of public action, indeed a clear *kairos* has to be captured – from a monolithic hierarchy-drawn project towards another perspective focused on pluralistic (intersubjective) architectures, where governance is not centralized regulation itself but synergy slumbering horizontally in the veins of interconnected configuration decision-making. In this emerging paradigm, it is the functional vertical authority of power that now takes second place to the polycentric cooperation of communities for aggregating resources, optimisation of procedural governance and enhancing autoregulatory capacity in social systems. The integration of digitalized devices through the avant-garde technologies of governance does as appropriately noted by Kvitka and Mazur [2] enable to govern not only predictable cyclically regulated deviations from the average (also, for example socioconflictual mutations), but also to configure their temporally-linear sequences and recognize nascent systemic regularities in development of the society.

Relatedly, Provan et al. [3] point out that after embarking on the path of network governance, local community capacity can be significantly strengthened to meet essential needs in sectors such as health care, social welfare, solutions for dysfunctional societies and developmental economics — all of which prove to the multifunctional nature of governance model. The results of our own research however, stand in contrast to these findings that clearly show: a deep institutional change is critical for an effective introduction of the network governance model in Ukraine. This includes the development of a single system for monitoring managerial results; setting up a permanent register of projects; increasing the institutional capacity in amalgamated territorial communities through pilot testing of modern mechanisms for community capacity-building; activating partnership-based communication and combined financing modalities; enshrining an integrated approach to project-making as a basic structural unit; introducing project maturity as an assessment criteria regarding management efficiency, etc.

That a framework which is as comprehensive would be intended to address with sufficient granularity the plethora of nodal pathologies characteristic of network-based governance has been argued elsewhere in terms of recidivous command-hierarchical logic and muted oversight amidst political instability [4], lack of coordination between subnational and national tiers of governance [5], not enough transparency and continuously weak accountability by network structures [6], and detrimental crosspatterns among the interests of the actors at this levels [7]. Compared to these malignant tendencies, the theoretical foundations developed by Yermachenko et al. [28] emphasize the need to develop a smart governance framework as a tool to adapt conventional modes of governance to sociospatial idiosyncrasies and concomitant social realities. This is important not only for mitigating the adverse effects of digital inequality but also for preventing unnecessary increases in state expenses.

Consistent with this, Soroka [29] treats smart specialisation as a crucible for promoting tri-sectoral synergy – the triangle business-university-government - intended to revitalize regions' key fields of region-themed expertise. We concur wholeheartedly with these conclusions, seeing in the operationalisation of smart specialisation – and not only as a means to optimise horizontal cooperation between regions but also as a prophylactic against social conflict precipitated by resource disequilibrium and managerial disunity.

Concurrently, Dudnik et al. [30] highlight the need to rethink management praxis, and at the digital transformation that is underway, implying a rethinking of further levels of the normative paradigm. Therefore, our study draws a map of priority vectors for the development of smart specialisation in Ukraine: realization targets for innovation and their incorporation into macroeconomic policy; risk assessment system establishment and creation of an integrated national value chains; regional strategy analysis focusing on priorities determination; industrial clusters support and innovation parks implementation as well as interregional development platforms organization or energy-efficient project realisation; using smart specialisation concept in state spatial planning strategies. As suggested by researcher Likarchuk et al. [31]: The need for strong public governance in the era of digital revolution cannot be met without communities' institutional maturity, i.e. strategy meshing of radical technology and human decision-making.

Moreover, we have solved the problems identified by Shevchenko [8], that is, vagueness of the innovation component pursued by us, urgency of development of sustainable innovations and insufficient attention to the potential for interregional cooperation in our work by proposing a set of instruments designed for optimization of intercommunal cooperation. These include development of data collection systems, alignment/bundling of stakeholders with regionally defined smart specialisation priorities; implementation of digital technology into management process and development of multi-faceted communication strategies.

Conclusion

In this vein, consideration of the importance of creating an endogenously derived methodological doctrine is also related to understanding the significance of synthesizing empirical and conceptually strong approaches defining how effective are regional development strategies. This means the integration of procedural framework in which a long-range record of initiatives does not so much serve as an instrument of systematization as a metastructure for the retrospective review of managerial fast tracking.

The implementing substratum of this networked governance mode has to be condensed under a certain institutional understanding of the consolidation of a territorial community network operative capacity (that, on functioning well, should turn into strengthened actors in subnational policy with increased dispositive autonomy). Decentralisation does not unfold in a line. From the standpoint of economicgeographic stratification, it is also important to intensify the search for and promote the latent comparative advantages of specific territorial clusters and then to extrapolate them to the field of regional smart specialisation where innovation does not represent an element that somehow contributes to additive processes, but serves as a system-generating factor. This, in turn, implies the accumulation of resources by means of horizontal intermunicipal networks approaching structurally to polycentric governance models with elements of glocalisation.

To generalize the above it is however important to emphasize that a synthesis of analytic monitoring systems, anticipation modeling, institutional correlation and normative transparency are an essential architectural frame for reactionary response's to disruptive impulsion in n-complexly rising entropic social-economic dynamics. At the same time, ensuring the development of deliberative strategies for communication among all stakeholders appears to be an indispensable factor of reduction in conflictogenic hazards and continuing sustainable development.

In this sense, the envisaged conceptual vectors and technocratic levers do not just aim to counterbalance an asymmetry of managerial decisions, but are a priori directed towards the establishment of a "flexible governance matrix" capable to function under conditions of exogenous turbulence and within the manifold challenges characterising the post-industrial age.

Implications and Projections

The results obtained should not be perceived as a complete model. Rather, they are an indicator of direction. Intermunicipal cooperation in the context of network governance demonstrates the potential for reducing social tensions, but the effect does not occur automatically. It is formed where there is institutional trust and a clearly structured division of responsibilities. Without this, cooperation becomes a mere declaration. The implications have several dimensions. At the management level, there is a need to create permanent coordination platforms capable of accumulating the interests of communities, businesses, and educational institutions. At the economic level, smart specialization must transform from a formal strategy into a mechanism for concentrating resources. What is important here is not the number of projects, but their coordination.

The prognostic aspect is ambiguous. Strengthening network structures can simultaneously reduce local conflicts and generate new points of tension through competition for investment. Paradoxically, cooperation sometimes raises expectations. Further research should integrate quantitative indicators of social cohesion and mechanisms for

monitoring horizontal links. It is there, in the subtle links between communities, that the question of long-term stability is decided.

Declarations

8.1. Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

8.2. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

8.3. Funding

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