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ELITE NETWORKS AND THE SHAPING OF OPEN INNOVATION IN UKRAINE: RETHINKING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN WARTIME

ABSTRACT. *The role of elite networks in shaping the adoption and governance of open innovation (OI) in Ukraine during wartime has been examined. Using qualitative interviews with government, academic, and business elites, this study investigates how global OI models are translated into context-specific practices, mediating institutional change, policy reform, and cross-sector collaboration. Findings highlight the dual role of elites as facilitators and gatekeepers, the persistence of regional inequalities, and the repurposing of Soviet-era structures for innovation purposes. The study demonstrates that elite agency is central to Ukraine's innovation resilience but underscores the need for inclusive and accountable policy to ensure equitable access to innovation benefits.*

KEYWORDS: *open innovation, elite networks, innovation resilience, cross-sectoral collaboration, policy reform.*

INTRODUCTION. This study investigates the transformative role of elite networks in advancing OI in Ukraine, focusing on how power, knowledge, and institutional agency interact during wartime. It examines how elites translate global OI models into context-specific practices, shaping innovation governance amid post-socialist legacies, regional inequalities, and the disruptions caused by Russia's invasion. OI, defined as the purposive inflow and outflow of knowledge to accelerate innovation and expand market reach [1], provides a strategic mechanism for reconfiguring innovation governance under uncertainty and conflict, departing from traditional closed innovation models [2]. Understanding elite-driven OI adoption is crucial for guiding policy, fostering resilience, and enabling innovation-led development in Ukraine.

MATERIALS AND METHODS. The study employs qualitative research methods. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian elites from government institutions, research organisations, business associations, and innovation agencies. A purposive sampling approach ensured coverage across regions and sectors. The data were thematically analysed to identify patterns in elite behaviour, network formation, and translation of OI concepts into practice. The analysis is contextualised within Ukraine's socio-economic and geopolitical environment, highlighting how wartime conditions influence collaboration, risk-taking, and institutional adaptation. Theoretical insights were drawn from elite theory [7], critical political economy [5,6], and innovation studies [1,2].

RESEARCH RESULTS. Elite networks play a central role in the adoption and governance of OI in Ukraine. They act as both facilitators and gatekeepers, mobilising resources, shaping narratives, and linking domestic institutions to global innovation circuits. Key findings include:

- **Institutional Translation:** Elites adapt global OI frameworks to national and regional conditions, aligning them with policy and economic priorities.
- **Networked Coordination:** Elite actors bridge fragmented innovation infrastructures, connecting state, academic, and business sectors.
- **Spatial Inequalities:** Core hubs (Kyiv, Lviv, Dnipro) show higher OI activity, while peripheral and frontline regions are constrained by infrastructure and instability.
- **Path Dependence and Reform:** Soviet-era hierarchical structures persist but are repurposed as scaffolds for new collaborative practices.

Wartime conditions act as both disruptors and catalysts. While fragmentation has increased, the crisis has accelerated policy reform, international partnerships, and cross-sector collaboration. Elites leverage the context to frame innovation policy as part of national resilience and integration strategies.

CONCLUSIONS. The study demonstrates that elites are key agents shaping Ukraine's innovation landscape. Their capacity to navigate uncertainty, mobilise international alliances, and translate global OI frameworks into actionable strategies positions them as drivers of post-war recovery and innovation-led development. However, reliance on elite networks raises concerns about inclusivity, accountability, and reinforcing existing hierarchies. Policy should aim to balance elite-driven coordination with broader participation, ensuring equitable access to innovation benefits. This research advances understanding of how OI functions as both a resilience mechanism and a contested arena of power in contexts of institutional disruption.

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ЕЛІТНІ МЕРЕЖІ ТА ФОРМУВАННЯ ВІДКРИТИХ ІННОВАЦІЙ В УКРАЇНІ: ПЕРЕОСМИСЛЕННЯ ІНСТИТУЦІЙНИХ ЗМІН У ВІЙСЬКОВИЙ ЧАС

АНОТАЦІЯ. Досліджено роль мереж еліт у формуванні впровадження та управління відкритими інноваціями (ВІ) в Україні під час війни. Використовуючи якісні інтерв'ю з урядовою, академічною та бізнес-елітою, це дослідження досліджує, як глобальні моделі перетворюються на контекстуально-специфічні практики, опосередковуючи інституційні зміни, реформу політики та міжсекторальну співпрацю. Результати дослідження підкреслюють подвійну роль еліт як посередників збереження регіональної нерівності та перепрофілювання структур радянської епохи для інноваційних цілей. Дослідження демонструє, що діяльність еліт є центральною для інноваційної стійкості України, але підкреслює необхідність інклюзивної та підзвітної політики для забезпечення рівного доступу до переваг інновацій.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: відкриті інновації, мережі еліт, інноваційна стійкість, міжсекторальна співпраця, реформа політики.