Applied Dramaturgy as an Instrument of Public Governance: Values, Understanding, and Scenarios

UDC 35.07:159.955:316.46
JEL Classification H83, D83, D91, O30
DOI: https://doi.org/10.15421/152551

Ivanova Svitlana
Ph. D., Assoc. Prof., https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9065-8687, isaivanova2014@gmail.com
Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University (Dnipro, Ukraine)

Abstract.
Introduction. The article examines applied dramaturgy as an interdisciplinary tool for the analysis and design of governance decision-making in the context of increasing social complexity. It is demonstrated that text-centered practices dominant in public governance are methodologically insufficient for addressing processes of becoming, uncertainty, and value conflicts that characterize contemporary governance systems.
Methodology. The study is conceptual and theoretical-methodological in nature and is based on theoretical synthesis and interdisciplinary analysis. The literature review is constructed primarily according to a conceptual logic rather than empirical comparison, which reflects the positioning of the article as a theoretical and methodological contribution rather than an empirical study.
Main Content. The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in C. Graves' value meme model and the concept of the spiral movement of understanding. The role of image-centered and scenario-based forms of thinking is substantiated as a key condition for the holistic comprehension of governance situations. Applied dramaturgy is interpreted as a model of change that enables the analysis of transitions from situation to event and further to the transformation of governed processes, as well as a means of shifting from the management of descriptions to the management of processes and meanings.
Results and Discussion. It is shown that the dominance of text-centered governance models is structurally associated with specific value regimes and leads to typical governance limitations, including normative overload, process fragmentation, and the illusion of control. In the discussion, the results are correlated with contemporary research in narrative policy, scenario thinking, strategic foresight, and design thinking in public governance, which makes it possible to identify methodological intersections and avenues for extending the dramaturgical approach.
Conclusions. The study concludes that applied dramaturgy can be regarded as an independent methodological instrument of public governance, oriented toward working with the dynamics of change, values, and scenarios of possible futures. It is substantiated that the rejection of image-centered and scenario-based forms of thinking under conditions of increasing complexity generates systemic governance vulnerability, whereas the integration of applied dramaturgy expands the capacity for meaningful and reflective governance decision-making.
Keywords: applied dramaturgy, public governance, scenario-based decision-making, narrative policy analysis, visual and image-based thinking, value regimes, anticipatory governance

Прикладна драматургія як інструмент публічного управління: цінності, розуміння, сценарії

Іванова Світлана
Дніпровський національний університет імені Олеся Гончара (Дніпро, Україна)

Анотація.
Вступ. У статті розглядається прикладна драматургія як міждисциплінарний інструмент аналізу та проєктування управлінських рішень в умовах ускладнення соціальної реальності. Показано, що домінантні у публічному управлінні текстоцентричні практики є методологічно недостатніми для роботи з процесами становлення, невизначеності та ціннісних конфліктів, характерних для сучасних управлінських систем.
Методологія. Дослідження має концептуальний і теоретико-методологічний характер та ґрунтується на теоретичному синтезі й міждисциплінарному аналізі. Огляд літератури побудовано переважно в концептуальній логіці, а не у форматі емпіричного зіставлення, що відображає позиціонування статті як теоретико-методологічного дослідження, а не емпіричної роботи.
Основний матеріал. Теоретичною основою дослідження є модель ціннісних мемів К. Грейвза та концепція спірального руху розуміння. Обґрунтовано роль образоцентричних і сценарних форм мислення як ключових умов цілісного осмислення управлінських ситуацій. Прикладна драматургія інтерпретується як модель змін, що дає змогу аналізувати переходи від ситуації до події, а далі – до трансформації керованих процесів, а також як засіб переходу від управління описами до управління процесами й смислами.
Результати та обговорення. Показано, що домінування текстоцентричних управлінських моделей структурно пов'язане з певними ціннісними режимами та призводить до типових управлінських обмежень, зокрема нормативної перевантаженості, фрагментації процесів і ілюзії контролю. У дискусії результати співвідносяться із сучасними дослідженнями у сфері наративної політики, сценарного мислення, стратегічного форсайту та дизайн-мислення в публічному управлінні, що дає змогу виявити методологічні зони перетину й розширення драматургічного підходу.
Висновки. Зроблено висновок, що прикладна драматургія може розглядатися як самостійний методологічний інструмент публічного управління, орієнтований на роботу з динамікою змін, цінностями та сценаріями можливого майбутнього. Обґрунтовано, що відмова від образоцентричних і сценарних форм мислення в умовах зростаючої складності формує системну управлінську вразливість, тоді як інтеграція прикладної драматургії розширює можливості осмисленого ухвалення управлінських рішень.
Ключові слова: прикладна драматургія, публічне управління, сценарно-орієнтоване ухвалення рішень, наративний аналіз публічної політики, візуальне та образоцентричне мислення, ціннісні режими, антиципаторне управління

Стаття надійшла / Article arrived: 02.01.26 // Схвалено до друку / Accepted: 09.02.26 // Підписано до друку / Approved for printing: 12.02.26

Introduction.

Contemporary public governance operates under conditions of high dynamism, multiplicity of actors, nonlinear effects, and value heterogeneity. Under these circumstances, a paradoxical situation emerges: despite the continuous growth in data volumes, regulations, and analytical reports, the quality of managerial decision-making does not improve and often deteriorates. This is reflected in systematic delays in decision-making, fragmentation of governed processes, erosion of trust, and semantic disorientation among stakeholders.

This crisis is not primarily organizational or technological in nature, but methodological. It is associated with the dominance of text-centered modes of thinking oriented toward the fixation of already stabilized realities, while the object of governance increasingly exists in a state of becoming. In this context, instruments capable of engaging not only with facts and indicators, but also with processes, meanings, and developmental scenarios become particularly relevant. One of such instruments is applied dramaturgy.

Mini-Glossary:

Applied dramaturgy – a methodological approach to the analysis and design of governance processes that understands management as the unfolding of change over time. It focuses on distinguishing between situation, event, and transformation, and on identifying actors, conflicts, points of choice, and possible future trajectories. Unlike text-centered models of fixation, it is oriented toward processes of becoming and the production of meaning.

vMEME (value meme) – a value-cognitive regime for perceiving and organizing reality that determines what is considered significant, legitimate, and rational in governance. The concept originates from Clare W. Graves' spiral dynamics model and is used to describe shifts in the "languages" of governance: from force and order toward adaptability, systemic thinking, and reflexive transformation.

Scenario – a structured configuration of possible action that includes actors' roles, their motivations, conflicts, branching points, and the potential consequences of decisions. In dramaturgical logic, a scenario is a tool for understanding and orientation under conditions of uncertainty rather than a linear forecast.

Scenario thinking – a cognitive capacity to perceive governance as a field of alternative futures, to hold multiple trajectories simultaneously, and to work with transitions between them. It implies sensitivity to the moments when a situation turns into an event and is oriented toward conscious choice rather than mechanical adherence to regulations.

Managerial decision – a fixed selection of a trajectory of action that emerges as the result of passing through the dramaturgical stage of situational understanding. From this perspective, a decision is not the starting point of governance but a moment of temporary stabilization within a broader scenario process.

Analysis of Recent Publications. Contemporary research relevant to the theme of applied dramaturgy in public governance is concentrated in several intersecting directions: (1) dramaturgical and performative approaches to public practices and political communication; (2) narrative methods of policy analysis; (3) scenario thinking, strategic foresight, and anticipatory governance; and (4) design thinking and visual methods as instruments of public-sector innovation. Taken together, these directions form a methodological foundation that makes it possible to conceptualize applied dramaturgy as a tool for working with values, understanding, and scenarios in public governance.

Dramaturgical Approach and Public Practices. The classical foundation of dramaturgical analysis remains the work of E. Goffman, in which the concept of the "presentation of oneself" and the distinction between front stage and back stage spaces were introduced, providing an analytical language for describing public roles, managed impressions, and regimes of legitimacy (Goffman, 1959). Subsequent studies have applied this approach to the analysis of public communication, political marketing, and the "staged" aspects of politics, primarily within qualitative and case-study research designs (Alexander, 2011; Hajer, 2009).

It is crucial that dramaturgical nature of these works is understood not as an artistic metaphor, but as a structure of social action that includes roles, scenes, audiences, and effects. In contemporary studies of public practices, the dramaturgical approach demonstrates high analytical productivity in describing roles, stages, and mechanisms of legitimation within the public sphere. At the same time, its application remains largely limited to the analysis of communication and representation, while the potential of dramaturgy as an instrument for designing and governing change in public systems remains insufficiently developed. This limitation opens space for further methodological expansion.

Narrative Approaches in Policy Analysis. A distinct methodological line is represented by narrative analysis in politics and public governance. In his foundational work, E. Roe demonstrated that under conditions of high complexity and conflict, data and formal models often prove insufficient for decision-making; in such cases, policy is stabilized

through competing narratives that perform a governing function (Roe, 1994).

In contemporary literature, the most institutionalized direction within this field is the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), which analyzes how narratives structure problem perceptions, form actor coalitions, and influence the dynamics of policy change (Jones & McBeth, 2010). In 2024, a comprehensive systematic review of NPF research was published, outlining future research directions for the framework (Kuenzler et al., 2024). In the same year, studies that further specify the relationship between the NPF, institutional contexts, and models of choice also emerged, including integrations with prospect theory to explain differences between the maintenance of the status quo and policy change (Kuenzler, 2024).

For the this study, this collection of works is significant in that applied dramaturgy can be interpreted as an operationalization of narrative governance, enabling a transition from descriptive analysis to the ***scenario-based organization of meaning.***

Discursive Politics and the Interpretive Turn. Within the interpretive turn in public policy research, it is emphasized that governance decisions cannot be reduced to technocratic choice alone, but depend on modes of problem framing, argumentation, and public interpretation (Fischer, 2003). In this context, politics is conceptualized as a space of competing interpretations rather than merely a domain of rational calculation. This line of inquiry is conceptually aligned with the understanding of dramaturgy as a model of change, encompassing transitions from situation to event and subsequently to the transformation of the governed system.

Scenario Thinking, Strategic Foresight, and Anticipatory Governance. Scenario thinking and strategic foresight provide a methodological framework for considering scenarios as governance instruments under conditions of uncertainty (Kvitka, 2016; Kvitka, 2019). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has consistently developed the concept of strategic foresight as a means of enhancing the resilience and adaptability of public policy (OECD, 2021). Of particular practical relevance are recent applied guidelines, notably the Strategic Foresight Toolkit for Resilient Public Policy (OECD, 2025), in which foresight is conceptualized as a set of procedures and tools for anticipatory governance.

The advancement of strategic foresight and anticipatory governance consolidates scenario thinking as a normatively recognized instrument of public governance in uncertain environments. At the same time, existing foresight approaches tend to focus primarily on forecasting procedures and tools, while the dramaturgical logic of scenarios – conflict, actors, branching points, and transformations – remains methodologically underdeveloped.

Design Thinking and Visual Methods as Instruments of Public Innovation. A methodologically related line of research concerns design thinking and visual practices in the public sector. A number of contemporary studies demonstrate that design approaches (prototyping, co-design, and abductive thinking) transform the processes of public policy and service development, making them more sensitive to user experience and the context of complexity (Bason, 2017; Routzouni et al., 2021).

Systematic reviews have also emerged that assess both the potential and limitations of design thinking in public administration, including a comprehensive review published in 2025 (Basegio et al., 2025). Within the Ukrainian scientific context, a growing collection of publications where design thinking is viewed as an instrument for transforming leadership and governance under conditions of crisis and social recovery (Lopushnyak et al., 2024; Ivanova & Anpilohov, 2025; Ivanova, 2025).

For this study, this line of research is significant as it supports the argument that visual and creative technologies in public governance perform a cognitive and methodological, rather than merely decorative, function by enabling the maintenance of systemic integrity, processual dynamics, and meaning.

Value Regimes and the Spiral Logic of Scenario Change. Finally, a distinct line of research is represented by value-evolutionary models, most notably the theory of C. Graves and the concept of spiral dynamics. In applied governance literature, these models are used to analyze shifts in value regimes and managerial "languages," ranging from control and efficiency to consensus and systemic integration (Graves, 1974; Beck & Cowan, 1996). As a local theoretical foundation, the article uses the author's development of the logic of vMEMEs and future scenarios, based on a spiral interpretation of value transformations (Ivanova et al., 2021).

Thus, an analysis of contemporary publications demonstrates that applied dramaturgy in public governance is not yet articulated as an autonomous, institutionally consolidated research field. Nevertheless, it is implicitly present across a number of adjacent domains. The convergence of dramaturgical, narrative, scenario-based, and visual-design approaches forms an interdisciplinary methodological foundation that enables the conceptualization of applied dramaturgy as an instrument for working with values, understanding, and scenarios of governance change.

Overall, the review of recent publications indicates the existence of a fragmented yet methodologically consonant body of research that supports the positioning of applied dramaturgy as a promising instrument of public governance. The absence of a coherent conceptual framework for this approach within existing scholarship defines the scientific novelty of the present study and delineates directions for the further development of dramaturgical analysis in governance processes.

Methodological Positioning and Data Novelty. This study is theoretical and conceptual in nature and does not involve empirical data analysis in the classical sense. The research is based on interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis, conceptual modeling, and comparative interpretation of existing scholarly frameworks in public governance, narrative policy analysis, dramaturgical sociology, and value-based models of social change.

The novelty of the study lies not in the generation of new empirical datasets, but in the development of an integrative conceptual framework that interprets applied dramaturgy as a methodological instrument for understanding, navigating, and designing governance scenarios under conditions of complexity and uncertainty.

This article is positioned as a theoretical and methodological paper and therefore does not include empirical data analysis.

Main Material.

Traditionally, dramaturgy is understood as a field of artistic knowledge associated with the construction of plot, conflict, and the main character transformation. However, in a broader methodological sense, dramaturgy represents a model of change that enables the analysis of transitions from one state to another, the identification of points of tension, and an understanding of the logic through which events unfold over time.

Applied dramaturgy transfers these principles into the analysis of real-world processes – social, organizational, and governance-related. Unlike narrative, which records what has already occurred, and plot, which structures a sequence of events, dramaturgy focuses on the very mechanism of change:

–what the situation is,

– what transforms it into an event,

– and what kind of transformation occurs, and for whom.

In the context of public governance, this implies a shift from describing static states to understanding the logic through which governance scenarios unfold.

Image and Text in the Spiral of Governance Understanding. An analysis of cognitive strategies in governance demonstrates that image-centered and text-centered modes of thinking are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they form a spiral movement of mastering reality. When a governance situation becomes excessively complex, uncertain, or new, it cannot be immediately described through text. At this point, thinking turns to the image – a holistic, intuitive, pre-conceptual mode of grasping what is happening. The image enables orientation within the situation, the identification of key tensions, and the anticipation of possible directions of development.

As the situation stabilizes, it becomes possible to fix it through text: concepts, rules, regulations, and indicators are formulated. However, further increases in systemic complexity once again push governance beyond the limits of text-centered models, initiating a new cycle of image-based and scenario-oriented thinking.

Within the proposed spiral model, the distinction between image and text can be interpreted as a distinction between phases of navigation and fixation in the process of mastering reality. The image functions as a means of orientation within an unmastered, emerging reality, whereas text provides fixation, normalization, and reproducibility of already understood structures. Contemporary artificial intelligence models demonstrate maximal effectiveness precisely within this second phase – the phase of fixation.

Artificial intelligence operates optimally in tasks involving structuring, normalization, and large-scale reproduction of meanings, reinforcing existing text-centered practices and bringing them to a technological limit. However, this effectiveness does not extend to processes associated with holistic situational experience, the retention of in vivo dynamics, or passing through the dramaturgical path of transformation, which involves transitions, internal tensions, and a change in the subject's position.

In this sense, artificial intelligence should be regarded not as an instrument of understanding in a strict epistemological sense, but as the culmination of the stabilization phase – a highly developed mechanism for fixing an already established reality. Its functionality is fundamentally limited in areas of emergence, where image-based thinking, scenario sensitivity, and the ability to dramaturgically distinguish between events and changes are required.

Thus, text preserves and transmits acquired knowledge, whereas image enables the understanding of processes in their emergence phase. Applied dramaturgy operates precisely within this transitional zone.

Value Regimes of Governance and vMEMEs. Within the framework of this article, the concept of *values refers to people's conceptions of what constitutes the good for themselves, both at the level of ideals (absolute values) and at the level of ideologemes (applied values)*. It should be noted that the value model proposed by C. Graves (Graves, 1974; Beck & Cowan, 1996) operates within the domain of potentially plausible ideologemes of the historical past, present, and future, which contextually shape individuals' understandings of their own well-being. At the same time, it is important to recognize that any ideologemes within society are realized both in positive and in negative forms. Notably, a substantial share of social manipulation occurs precisely through those ideologemes that are dominant within a given society at a particular historical moment. Governance, in the broadest sense of the term, is also grounded in ideologemes.

So, if we carefully analyze the system of values of levels 1 and 2 proposed by C. Graves, we can clearly see a certain cyclicality, repeating patterns of movement along a historical spiral.

And if we continue the table of Level 2 vMEMEs by analogy with Level 1 vMEMEs, moving upward along an expanding spiral, we can obtain a rather interesting picture of the potential development of values, and with them, a futuristic picture of future scenarios. In this article, we will proceed step by step. Specifically, we will start from what C. Graves left as his legacy and move on to what can be synthesized further from his concepts.

As a reminder, the first level of vMEMEs can be summarized as follows (Table 1).

Table 1.

Level 1 of vMEMEs according to C. Graves

Color	Core Relation	Key Values / Orientation	Mode
Green	Interpersonal relationships	Consensus, well-being	**Collective**
Orange	Competition	Opportunity seeking, rivalry, improvement of one's position	**Individual**
Blue	Power of law	Belief in the single correct path, obedience to authority	**Collective**
Red	Power of force	Imposition of power, conquest, expansion of external boundaries	**Individual**
Purple	Tribal bonds	Blood ties, mysticism, understanding the world through magic	**Collective**
Beige	Survival	Ability to stay alive	**Individual**

Source: developed by the author (based on Beck & Cowan, 1996)

Thus, the level 1 of vMEMEs shapes the human being as a conqueror of the material world, forming both the environment of existence and the context of activity. All level 1 ideologemes are present in the contemporary world and, unfortunately, are often in a very negative context. Negative manifestations of vMEMEs are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Negative Scenarios of Societal Development of Level 1 vMEMEs

Color	Negative Scenarios / Manifestations
Green	Formation of a "collective digital cell"; displacement of the new through rating systems and promotion of paid content; social surveillance
Orange	Creation of illusions of novelty; manipulation of fears; governance based on the interests of one side at the expense of another
Blue	Institutionalized double standards; imbalance in agreements; anarchy of interactions; inability to negotiate in accordance with the rule of law
Red	Redistribution of existing territories; wars and deaths under the slogan of building a new "wonderful" world
Purple	Retreat into superstition and mysticism; withdrawal from understanding the real world; creation of objects of "false connectedness"
Beige	Creation of conditions that make survival impossible; the concept of the "golden billion"

It is evident that degenerative scenarios in society are more than familiar, and their manifestations are frequently encountered in everyday social life.

C. Graves and his followers (Beck & Cowan, 1996) also described the initial vMEMEs of the second level. So, the level 2 of vMEMEs according to C. Graves can be presented in the following table (Table 3).

Table 3.

Level 2 of vMEMEs by C. Graves

Color	Core Meaning / Mode of Understanding	Orientation
3.Coral	(Designation of the next individual-oriented level in the expanded spiral)	**Individual**
2.Turquoise	Understanding the world through dynamic change; action at the macro level	**Collective**
1.Yellow	Flexible adaptation; connectedness; scalable understanding of causes	**Individual**

Source: developed by the author (based on Beck & Cowan, 1996)

The second level of value dynamics in the classification proposed by C. Graves (Beck & Cowan, 1996) can be interpreted as a transition to a qualitatively different mode of life activity, associated with the subject's inclusion in a continuous flow of existence (in vivo), experienced as a holistic and singular process. Within this level, the human being is viewed not as an autonomous, closed unit, but as a functional element of a more complex system – a kind of "living network" in which individual subjects relate to the whole through principles of mutual inclusion and coordination, analogous to the interaction of neurons within the structure of the brain.

Results and Discussion

An analysis of the substantive characteristics of first- and second-level vMEMEs makes it possible to identify a principle of continuity realized within the logic of spiral development. Thus, a comparison between the Beige and Yellow vMEMEs demonstrates a transition from basic biological survival to adaptive survival within an increasingly complex reality, requiring flexibility, systemic understanding of causal relationships, and conscious participation in transformative processes. In a similar manner, a comparison between the Purple and Turquoise vMEMEs reveals a transition from a mytho-religious mode of apprehending the world to a holistic understanding of reality at the level of integrating dynamic change and macrosystemic processes.

These correspondences, documented in the works of C. Graves, provide methodological grounds for reconstructing and refining the structure of second-level vMEMEs presented in this study (see Tables 4 and 5). At the same time, the second level should be understood not as a break with earlier stages, but as their spiral expansion, in which fundamental mechanisms are preserved while being reinterpreted and rendered more complex within a new value-cognitive context. It is not about repetition, but about the transformation of previous forms in conditions of greater complexity and intensity of life experience.

It should be emphasized that the format of the article does not allow for a full presentation of all levels of generalization and analytical procedures undertaken in the course of the study; the text therefore records only the final conceptual results. Color designations of vMEMEs are used, as in C. Graves's original model, in an associative sense and do not imply any direct correlation with color theory or symbolic systems of color coding.

Table 4.

The "Extended" Graves' Model: Level 2 vMEMEs

Color	Core Meaning / Description
White	Formation of a society of consensus and development; a globally cooperative community of like-minded individuals
Peach	Unfolding of human potentials through creative activity aimed at shaping a new mode of human existence
Lilac	Understanding and articulation of cosmic laws and regularities within the real world of life
Coral	Development of the Human within oneself; discovery of new possibilities; opening new territories of knowledge; exploration of human qualities; comprehension of the essence of phenomena
Turquoise	Understanding the world through dynamic change; action at the macro level; commitment and sacrifice; informational selectivity; capacity for unification
Yellow	Flexible adaptation; connectedness; scalable understanding of causes; expansion of human potential; awareness of one's role in the transformation of the world

Table 5.
Core Concepts of Level 2 vMEMEs for Ease of Memorization

Color	Core Quality
White	All-encompassing world
Peach	Fruitfulness of activity
Lilac	Sobriety and spirituality
Coral	Depth of understanding
Turquoise	Boundlessness of possibilities
Yellow	Creative energy

Source: developed by the author (based on Beck & Cowan, 1996)

It may be argued that ideologemes continue to function as stable mechanisms of value-based and meaning-oriented structuring of social reality, operating at the scale of global governance processes. Their effectiveness lies not only in legitimizing governance decisions, but also in shaping scenarios of permissible futures, within which subjects are offered specific roles, modes of action, and horizons of possibility. In this context, the analysis of second-level values, particularly the Coral vMEME, acquires special significance for the development of applied dramaturgy as an instrument of public governance.

Unlike earlier levels of value dynamics, which are oriented toward external expansion, normative control, or competitive optimization, the Coral vMEME establishes a logic of internal transformation of the subject and the expansion of cognitive frameworks of understanding. This value regime can be interpreted as a form of internal conquest directed not toward the redistribution of resources, but toward the mastering new scenarios of thinking, action, and self-determination – toward the creation of one's own platform for understanding the essence of things, situations, and actions. It is precisely within this domain that applied dramaturgy emerges as a timely methodological instrument, enabling engagement with processes of becoming rather than solely with fixed systemic states.

Within the framework of applied dramaturgy, governance is understood as the unfolding of scenarios in which initial situations, events as points of change, and transformations of the system or subject are analytically distinguished. This logic fundamentally differs from text-centered governance models oriented toward regulation and fixation (Ivanova, 2025). It allows governance processes to be analyzed as dramaturgically organized sequences that include conflicts, branching points, alternatives, and the consequences of decisions.

The contemporary sociocultural and media environment – characterized by fragmented attention and saturation with manipulative stimuli – complicates the formation of reflective subjectivity necessary for scenario-based thinking. As a result, governance increasingly relies on reactive and short-term scenarios that reproduce degenerative trajectories and intensify the gap between declared goals and actual outcomes. In this context, applied dramaturgy functions as an instrument for restoring the capacity for holistic understanding of governance situations and for the conscious design of alternative developmental scenarios.

An analysis of second-level values demonstrates that they cannot be institutionally implemented through normative acts or procedural regulations alone (Ivanova, 2025). Their appropriation requires the formation of a specific type of subjectivity capable of reflection, of holding contradictions, and of working with uncertainty. Scenario governance grounded in the principles of applied dramaturgy provides the necessary toolkit for such formation, as it is oriented not toward predicting the future, but toward the conscious choice among possible scenarios.

At the same time, scenario governance cannot be reduced to techniques of forecasting or foresight. Within dramaturgical logic, a scenario is understood as a structure of possible action that includes actor roles, configurations of interests, points of tension, and potentially viable transformations of the system. This perspective makes it possible to conceptualize public governance as a process of continuous scenarization, in which the governance actor functions not only as an administrator, but also as an architect of meaning- and value-based transitions.

Based on the findings of this study, the Coral vMEME can be interpreted as a value foundation for applied dramaturgy and scenario governance, enabling a transition from the governance of external processes to the governance of the logic of understanding and the formation (design) of future system states. Its development is associated with the emergence of collectives capable of jointly scenarizing alternative developmental trajectories and of moving beyond the reproduction of obsolete governance scenarios.

The Blue-Orange vMEMEs that dominate contemporary public governance are oriented toward order, control, efficiency, and measurability. Their primary cognitive form is text: the regulatory act, the report, the instruction, and the indicator.

However, under conditions of increasing complexity, these forms reveal structural limitations, generating typical governance failures such as delayed decision-making, system fragmentation, subs-

titution of goals by form, and the illusion of control (Ivanova, 2025). The transition to the Yellow vMEME is accompanied by a shift in the cognitive regime: image, diagram, map, and scenario become primary instruments of understanding, while text assumes a secondary function of fixation.

In this context, applied dramaturgy functions as a Yellow-level practice that enables systemic vision and engagement with multiple possible futures, while also providing the potential for a transition toward Coral vMEMEs. In summarized form, the material is presented in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6.

Summary Table: vMEME / Color – Core Meaning – Type of World (Image ↔ Text), Level 1

vMEMEs (Color)	Core Meaning of Value Regime	Type of World: Image-Centered ↔ Text--Centered
Beige	Survival, physical immediacy, "here-and--now" reaction, absence of abstraction	**Image-centered (pre-semiotic) – sensations, physical signals, environment as a flow of stimuli**
Purple	Mysticism, kinship ties, magical thinking, sacred imagery	**Image-centered** – symbols, totems, ritual visual forms
Red	Will, power, expansion, impulse to act	**Image-centered** – gesture, sign of power, visual dominance
Blue	Order, law, hierarchy, "one true way"	**Text-centered** – norms, rules, canons, written prescriptions
Orange	Achievement, rationality, efficiency, competition	**Text-centered (instrumental)** – data, reports, models, instructions
Green	Consensus, dialogical values, empathy, equality	**Transitional – text + image** (narratives, visual metaphors, storytelling)

Table 7.

Summary Table: vMEME / Color – Core Meaning – Type of World (Image ↔ Text), Level 2

vMEME (Color)	Core Meaning of Value Regime	Type of World (Image ↔ Text)
Yellow	Flexible adaptation; interconnectedness; scalable understanding of reasons; awareness of one's own role in transforming the world	**Image–text–centered** (image → text): the image is used for navigation within complexity, while text serves fixation and transmission of decisions; diagrams, maps, models, infographics
Turquoise	Comprehension of the world through dynamic change; action at the macro level; self-sacrifice; capacity for integration	**Image–systemic world:** holistic dynamic models, prioritization of processes over descriptions
Coral	Development of the Human within oneself; discovery of new possibilities; exploration of new territories of knowledge and meaning; grasping the essence of phenomena	**Image–reflective world:** the image as an instrument of deep understanding and inner transformation
Lilac	Comprehension and formulation of cosmic laws and regularities within lived reality	**Image–symbolic world:** the image as a carrier of law; transition from belief to reflective symbolic knowledge
Peach	Unfolding of human potentials through creative activity; formation of a new mode of human existence	**Image–projective world:** the image as a project of the future, preceding linguistic and institutional fixation
White	Formation of a society of agreement and development; a globally cooperative community of like-minded actors	**Meta-image world:** supra-linguistic holistic understanding; the image as a universal form of meaning integration

Source: developed by the author

The tables clearly demonstrate that text-centeredness as a dominant cognitive regime is characteristic of phases of normalization, institutional control, and optimization of governance processes, corresponding, as noted above, to the Blue-Orange value range. Under these conditions, text functions as the main tool for transmitting, regulating, and recording already established structures, ensuring their reproducibility and the controllability of social reality. Image-centeredness, by contrast, becomes dominant in those cognitive domains where understanding is achieved through wholeness, symbolic apprehension, and engagement with dynamic processes. Such regimes are characteristic both of archaic forms of value perception (the Purple vMEME) and of second-order levels (Yellow and Turquoise) oriented toward working with complexity and nonlinearity.

Accordingly, the process of understanding may be conceptualized as a progressive movement from the unknown toward a satisfactory (stable) fixation of the result of comprehension.

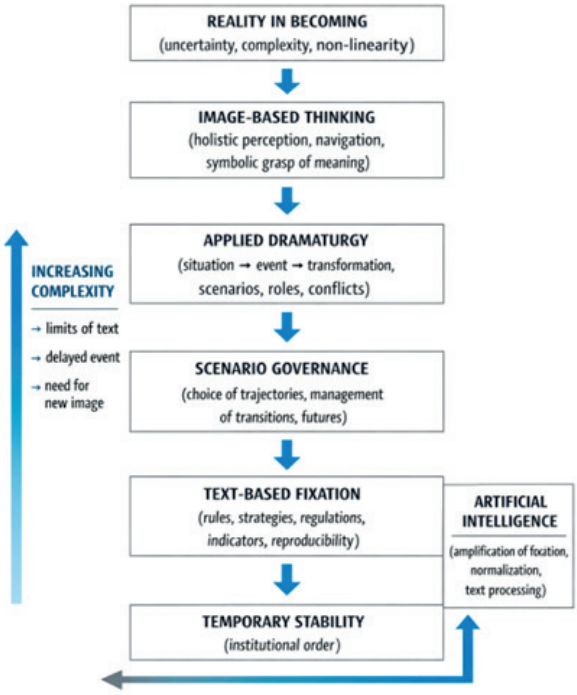

Figure 1. Applied dramaturgy as an integrative framework for navigating complexity in public governance.

Source: developed by the author

If translated into a more philosophical register, the image may be understood as a form of primary apprehension of being, whereas text functions as a form of secondary retention of being. The spiral, in this sense, does not represent linear progress "forward," but rather an alternation of cognitive regimes in response to the increasing complexity of the world. In practice, when reality becomes too unknown to ensure survival, thinking turns toward the image. When reality becomes at least partially intelligible and stable, text emerges as a means of fixing understanding. Further complication of reality once again pushes thinking beyond the limits of text, and the spiral repeats.

Within this context, artificial intelligence may be interpreted as a mechanism of temporary mitigation of the crisis associated with the existential necessity of generating a new image of understanding complexity. By scaling operations of analysis, ordering, and processing of textual arrays, artificial intelligence effectively assumes the function of clearing accumulated "blockages" of text-centeredness – excessive regulations, repetitive descriptions, and fragmented meanings characteristic of the late stage of textual thinking.

In doing so, artificial intelligence reduces the cognitive load placed on human, allowing to remain longer within obsolete forms of understanding without transitioning to a radical revision of the foundations of thought itself. In this sense, artificial intelligence does not initiate a shift toward a new image-based mode of mastering reality; on the contrary, it postpones such a transition by compensating for the structural insufficiency of text through computational power and scalability.

However, this mitigation is fundamentally temporary in nature. Artificial intelligence is capable of effectively processing only that which has already been fixed in textual form, whereas the existential necessity for a new image of understanding arises precisely where reality has not yet been described and cannot be formalized. In these zones, artificial intelligence does not resolve the crisis, but merely renders it less acute, leaving unresolved the inevitable question of transition to new cognitive and scenario-based forms of thinking.

Thus, artificial intelligence should be regarded not as a substitute for image-based and dramaturgical understanding of complexity, but as a liminal technology of late text-centeredness – one that temporarily stabilizes the system while simultaneously revealing the limits of textual epistemology and thereby intensifying the objective necessity for the emergence of a new image of understanding.

It is important to emphasize that higher vMEMEs do not imply a return to primitive, pre-conceptual forms of image-based thinking. On the contrary, they overcome the rigid dichotomy of "text versus image," treating both modes as complementary instruments of cognition and governance. In this context, the image functions as a kind of "guiding star" leading toward holistic understanding, while

text serves as a means of clarification, fixation, and transmission of already clearly articulated structures. This logic directly corresponds to the research focus of the present study, within which applied dramaturgy is interpreted not as an auxiliary technique, but as an autonomous form of cognition (Table 7) endowed with methodological significance.

Table 7.

vMEME – Type of Governance – Type of Dramaturgy

vMEME	Type of Governance	Type of Applied Dramaturgy
Yellow	**Adaptive-situational governance: f**lexible navigation within complexity; work with causes, contexts, and constraints	**Dramaturgy of choice:** identification of branching points, alternative courses of action, "if-then" scenarios; governance through conscious transitions
Turquoise	**Systemic-process governance:** macro-level coordination; management of dynamics and flows; integration of actors	**Dramaturgy of processes:** unfolding of long-term change; nonlinear plots; emphasis on rhythms and cycles
Coral	**Reflective-transformational governance: governance of subjectivity development, potentials, and meanings**	**Dramaturgy of inner transformation:** the hero as a carrier of change; the plot as a path of insight and expansion of possibilities
Lilac	**Normative-meaning-oriented governance:** alignment of action with universal laws and principles	**Dramaturgy of law and revelation:** identification of deep regularities; transition from intuitive experience to reflective understanding
Peach	**Creative-projective governance:** formation of new modes of being and anthropological and social configurations	**Dramaturgy of creation:** design of future forms of life; scenarios of emergence prior to institutionalization
White	**Integrative (consensus-based) governance:** alignment of interests; global capacity for agreement; co-development	**Meta-dramaturgy of agreement:** suspension of conflict as a driving force; dramaturgy of co-tuning and co-being

Source: developed by the author

The relevance of the issues addressed is determined by the specific character of the current stage of sociocultural and governance development. Contemporary reality has reached a level of complexity at which it can no longer be adequately sustained by exclusively text-centered forms of description and regulation, while at the same time it has not yet been mastered through new, context-appropriate image-based and visual-modeling means of understanding. In this regard, contemporary artificial intelligence models may be interpreted as the apex of the text-centered stage in the development of cognitive technologies. They radically enhance the capacity for fixation, recombination, and reproduction of already existing meanings, yet they do not overcome the fundamental limitation of text as a form of cognition that is incapable of independently mastering reality in its phase of emerging.

As a result, an intermediate condition emerges, characterized by the simultaneous growth of normative overload, inflation of textual documentation, and the proliferation of visual forms that predominantly perform decorative or illustrative functions rather than being integrated into processes of thinking and decision-making. It is precisely this disproportion between the level of complexity of reality and the cognitive instruments employed that renders the turn toward applied dramaturgy and visual thinking as autonomous forms of cognition both methodologically and practically significant under current conditions.

Scenarios as a Form of Governance Thinking. Unlike plans and strategies, scenarios do not presuppose rigid predictability. They enable engagement with alternatives, uncertainties, and points of choice. A dramaturgical approach to scenarios focuses not on enumerating steps, but on identifying:

– key actors and their motivations;

– conflicts and value contradictions;

– possible branching points and the consequences of decisions;

– transformations of the system and governance subjects.

In this way, a scenario becomes not a forecast, but an instrument of understanding that allows governance actors to act consciously under conditions of uncertainty.

Within the logic of applied dramaturgy, the current role of artificial intelligence may be described through the phenomenon of the "deayed event." In this context, an event is understood not as a technological breakthrough, but as an existentially and cognitively significant transition – the emergence of a new image of understanding complexity, neces-

sary for the adequate appropriation of a changing reality. By reinforcing text-centered practices of analysis and fixation, artificial intelligence enables the temporary stabilization of the system, reducing the intensity of the crisis of understanding and postponing the moment at which such a transition becomes inevitable.

An analysis of governance practices oriented toward working with complex systems makes it evident that the functional potential of artificial intelligence is clearly delimited. Its strengths manifest in domains associated with the systematization of formalized data sets, the maintenance of procedural coherence, and the reproduction of already established configurations of meaning. At the same time, when it comes to tasks involving the interpretation of development processes, the recognition of qualitative shifts, and working with value ambiguity, the capabilities of artificial intelligence are structurally limited.

In situations where governance requires not so much the processing of information as the discernment of event-based transitions and the maintenance of the holistic dynamics of processes in vivo, automated models lose their heuristic productivity. This is due to the fact that artificial intelligence does not participate in the dramaturgical logic of transformation and is incapable of generating new frameworks of understanding, functioning predominantly in a mode of processing and recombining already given structures.

In light of the above, several possible scenarios of further development can be identified, differing in their relationship to the delayed event.

The first scenario presupposes a soft transition, in which artificial intelligence is used as an auxiliary tool for clearing the legacy of text-centeredness, thereby freeing resources for the formation of new images of understanding and the development of scenario thinking. In this case, technology becomes a mediator of the transition rather than its substitute, allowing for the gradual construction of more adequate modes of working with complexity. Such a scenario is fully plausible under conditions in which, for example, Coral vMEMEs are realized within society.

The second scenario may be characterized as the "boiled frog" effect. Under conditions of continuous technological compensation for the crisis of text-centeredness, individuals may fail to notice the moment at which the opportunity to create a new image of understanding is lost, despite its existential necessity. A gradual increase in complexity, combined with the outward appearance of manageability, leads to a situation in which the need for transition is recognized too late, when degenerative scenarios have already become embedded in everyday practices of thinking and governance.

The third scenario is associated with the further deepening of text-centered approaches without transition to a higher level of understanding of the complexity of being. In this case, artificial intelligence is employed for even greater formalization, regulation, and optimization, reinforcing the illusion of control while simultaneously distancing governance from living processes of formation. Such a trajectory leads to a growing gap between technical efficiency and the existential meaningfulness of the decisions being made. Thus, within the context of applied dramaturgy, artificial intelligence functions not as the initiator of an event, but as a factor determining the form and duration of its postponement. Whether this postponement is used for the formation of new images of understanding or results in the further inertia of text-centered thinking will shape the character of governance and anthropological scenarios in the near future.

In this context, it is critically important to emphasize that scenario thinking grounded in applied dramaturgy entails a redistribution of responsibility between human actors and technological systems. Artificial intelligence can be effectively integrated into governance processes at the stages of analysis, structuring, and stabilization; however, the formation of scenarios as meaningful trajectories of development remains a domain of human competence. It is the governance actor who functions as the subject capable of discerning the moment at which a situation becomes an event and of recognizing the necessity of shifting the image of understanding, rather than merely adjusting existing regulations.

Accordingly, applied dramaturgy introduces a fundamentally different perspective on governance thinking: governance is understood not as the optimization of the system's current state, but as engagement with its possible future configurations. Within this logic, the scenario performs the function of a cognitive "interface" between the complexity of reality and decision-making practice, enabling the retention of processual integrity, value dimensions, and the dramaturgy of change. Artificial intelligence, in turn, becomes an element within this dramaturgy – not a hero and not an author, but a tool that amplifies individual acts without determining the plot as a whole.

Consequently, the effectiveness of governance under conditions of increasing complexity is determined not by the degree of automation or the depth of algorithmization, but by the capacity to timely recognize the need for a scenario shift and to initiate a transition toward new images of understanding. It

is precisely at this point that applied dramaturgy reveals itself as a methodological instrument capable of integrating values, understanding, and governance decisions into a single, continuously unfolding logic of development.

Conclusions.

The conducted study makes it possible to conceptualize applied dramaturgy in public governance as an autonomous methodological approach that goes beyond both artistic metaphor and narrowly applied storytelling techniques. The analysis demonstrates that dramaturgy functions as a model of change, enabling governance processes to be understood not in terms of static states, but through the dynamics of transitions, events, and transformations. In doing so, it compensates for a key methodological deficit of text-centered governance practices, which are primarily oriented toward the fixation of already stabilized reality.

A significant outcome of the study is the substantiation of the spiral logic of the relationship between image-centered and text-centered modes of thinking. Image and text are shown not as competing forms, but as sequentially activated cognitive modes, each appropriate to a specific phase of mastering reality. Under conditions of growing complexity and uncertainty, the image assumes a primary role as a means of holistic orientation and navigation, while text performs a secondary function of fixation and reproducibility. Ignoring this logic leads to typical governance failures associated with normative overload, process fragmentation, and the illusion of control.

The integration of C. Graves' value vMEME model with applied dramaturgy has made it possible to reveal a deep connection between value modes and types of governance thinking. The study demonstrates that the Blue-Orange value configurations dominating contemporary public governance structurally reproduce a text-centered approach, whereas the transition to second-level values is accompanied by a shift toward image-centered, scenario-based, and reflective modes of understanding. In this context, the Coral vMEME is substantiated as a value foundation for governance oriented toward the internal transformation of subjects and the meaningful design of future system states – an orientation that is critically necessary at the current stage of societal development.

A separate contribution of the study concerns the analysis of the role of artificial intelligence in contemporary governance realities. The findings indicate that artificial intelligence should be interpreted as the culmination of the phase of fixation and stabilization rather than as an instrument for generating new understanding. By scaling text-centered operations, artificial intelligence temporarily mitigates the crisis of complexity while simultaneously highlighting the ultimate limitations of textual epistemology. In terms of applied dramaturgy, artificial intelligence functions as a factor of the "delayed event," influencing not the transition to a new image of understanding itself, but the form and duration of its postponement.

Taken together, the results of the study allow us to assert that the rejection of image-centered and scenario-based modes of thinking under conditions of increasing complexity does not constitute rationality; on the contrary, it generates systemic governance vulnerability. Public governance deprived of a dramaturgical dimension loses the capacity to recognize its own scenarios and begins to reproduce governance failures as a recurring plot rather than as a meaningful process of change.

Prospects for Further Research. Future research prospects are primarily associated with the transition from the theoretical conceptualization of applied dramaturgy to the development of operationalizable instruments for its application in public governance. In particular, the creation of methodologies for the dramaturgical analysis of governance situations – capable of identifying key events, scenario branching points, and potential system transformations – appears especially promising.

Further attention should be given to the integration of visual and scenario-based thinking into systems of training and professional development for governance practitioners. Empirical studies in this area could focus on analyzing how the mastery of image-centered tools affects the quality of governance decisions, the ability to work with uncertainty, and the prevention of degenerative scenario reproduction.

Another important direction involves the continued examination of human-artificial intelligence interaction in the governance of complexity. Particularly promising is the analysis of hybrid governance models in which artificial intelligence is used to clear the legacy of text-centeredness, while the formation of images, scenarios, and value orientations remains within the domain of human responsibility and professional competence.

Finally, future research may be directed toward the empirical verification of the proposed spiral model of the relationship between image and text across different sectors of public governance, as well as toward comparative analyses of governance system development scenarios depending on dominant value regimes. This would not only deepen the theoretical foundations of applied dramaturgy, but also expand its practical potential as an instrument for the meaningful governance of the future.

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