

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR ON THE STATE OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN ETHNIC GROUPS IN MULTINATIONAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The article presents the results of a number of sociological studies aimed at examining the impact of the war on social cohesion, civic activism, and the consolidation of efforts in multinational communities in Ukraine. The research covered important issues of interethnic interaction and consolidation of the multicultural Melitopol community, and the expansion of effective channels of mutual assistance for members of ethnic communities in the context of the Russian aggression and temporary occupation, as well as an assessment of factors that may affect conflicts in communities during the war. As part of the study 'Ethnic Communities and Commonality: The Key to Civic Engagement and Trust', three focus group discussions were held, with a total of 72 participants; and a questionnaire survey was conducted with 1,500 respondents, representatives of ethnic communities in Melitopol, who found themselves in difficult living conditions caused by the war and at the time of the survey either remained in the occupied territories, moved to the government-controlled territory, or went abroad. The following respondent groups provided answers to the question about factors of the influence of the war and territorial community cohesion: members of ethnic communities of the Melitopol region who remained in the occupied territory; those who moved to the territory controlled by Ukraine (IDPs); those who moved abroad (forced migrants) named the main problems of interethnic understanding, as the study emphasises the importance of interethnic understanding and demonstrates the urgency of addressing issues related to the living conditions of Ukrainian citizens in multinational communities during the war and the postwar future. The findings require close attention and responses from both the government and civil society, in order to ensure positive community development, and to preserve social harmony in the postwar period.

KEY WORDS: Ukrainian community, multicultural community, intercultural city, ethnic groups, impact of war.

Anotacija

Straipsnyje pateikiami sociologinio tyrimo, kurio tikslas buvo ištirti karo poveikį santykiams ir požiūriui į skirtingas etnines grupes daugiatautėse Ukrainos bendruomenėse, rezultatai. Sudėtingomis sąlygomis atliktame tyrime dalyvavo daugiau kaip 1500 respondentų. Atskleisti veiksniai, galintys veikti bendruomenės konfliktų karo metu vertinimus. Emocinė gyventojų būseną: tarp ukrainiečių vyrauja pykčio jausmas agresoriams ir ryžtas ginti valstybės laisvę, nepriklausomybę. Daugiau kaip 85 % respondentų išreiškė didelį susirūpinimą dėl asmeninio ir šeimos saugumo. Konflikto veiksniai bendruomenėje: vieni pagrindinių – nepasitikėjimas vietos valdžia, piliečių dalyvavimo problema, mažėjantis tikėjimas moralinėmis vertybėmis. Bendradarbiavimo ir vienybės veiksniai: nedidelė dalis respondentų įžvelgia konfliktų galimybę bendruomenėse. Tokie veiksniai, kaip žemas infor-

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macijos lygis ir piliečių įsitraukimas, laikomi mažiau svarbiais. Atskleidžiama, kad vienas esminių ukrainiečiams kylančių klausimų yra jų pokario valstybės ateities vizija bendros ateities kūrimo kontekste. Tyrime pristatomi karo poveikio Ukrainos teritorinėse daugianacionalinėse bendruomenėse rezultatai visuomeniniam gyvenimui, siekiant darnos, reikalauja valdžios ir pilietinės visuomenės vertinimo, siekiant užtikrinti tolygų bendruomenės vystymąsi ir socialinę darną pokario laikotarpiu. PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: karas, projektai, tarpkultūrinis miestas, etninės bendruomenės, tautinės mažumos.

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Introduction

The war has made the issue of the formation of the civic and cultural identity of members of the Ukrainian community particularly acute, which until recently was caused mainly by the political consequences of globalisation, the intensification of regional integration, the crisis of nation-states, and difficulties in the functioning of democratic institutions in the post-Soviet space (Stepanenko, 2002).

A number of sociological studies conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 2022 and 2023 monitored closely the impact of the war on the value priorities of the Ukrainian community (Zhulenova, 2022), the specifics of the civic 'Ukrainian' identity and the transformation of identities during the war (Kostenko, 2022), a comparative analysis of the civic identity of Ukrainians before and during the war (Liubava, 2022), and the transformation of liberal values during the war (Otreshko, 2022).

However, due to many circumstances, important aspects of the interaction of ethnic communities of multinational Ukrainian communities in different situations during the war remain poorly understood. At the same time, under the current conditions of the Russian military aggression and the temporary occupation of Melitopol, the local authorities have stepped up their efforts to ensure proper conditions, support and livelihoods for all city residents, refugees, IDPs and members of various ethnic and religious communities, which in turn requires proper sociological support. Therefore, despite the temporary occupation of the region and the difficult conditions for obtaining sociological information, we consider it expedient to continue the systematic study of the factors of the war's impact on the socio-cultural aspects of multinational Ukrainian communities, which are an integral part of the existence of any human community, and a marker of its national, political and cultural subjectivity.

The subject of our study is multinational communities in Ukrainian intercultural cities.

The purpose of the study is to examine the factors of the war's impact on the mutual understanding of ethnic groups in multinational communities of Ukrainian intercultural cities.

1. Literature review

Today, the Russian occupying authorities deny Ukraine's European choice, and the very existence of an independent Ukrainian state as a nation, and the occupiers view the modern multicultural Ukrainian nation as an 'anti-Russian construct' that has no content of its own. Therefore, the denazification of Ukraine, which they proclaimed, is actually its de-Ukrainianisation and de-Europeanisation. For more than two years, a number of regions of Ukraine have been living under the occupation of Putin's horde, under pressure from the racist administration, and bearing the terrible yoke of temporary occupation. The racist ideology is carrying out a coordinated plan of action against the people of Melitopol, with signs of genocide and discrimination: from the destruction of the political and social systems to the destruction of culture and language, the violation of rights and freedoms, and ultimately the security, dignity and life of the people. The racist invaders are imposing the so-called 'Russian world' on Melitopol residents, which denies the European choice of the Ukrainian nation, and the occupiers consider the multicultural Ukrainian people an anti-Russian construct, while the independent Ukrainian state is an 'artificial entity', and promotes the example of 'Soviet friendship of peoples'.

Currently temporarily occupied, in 2008 Melitopol became the only Ukrainian city selected on a competitive basis to represent Ukraine in the pilot project of the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme (there are currently six such cities in Ukraine, and 147 in the world). In this context, the study of the problems of implementing the European model of intercultural interaction as an innovative factor in the development of multicultural Melitopol is one of the priority social, educational, cultural, scientific and practical areas of activity of Bohdan Khmelnytsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University.

Interculturality in the modern scientific discourse is interpreted as a promising trend in the development of multicultural communities, based on the growth of respect, trust, mutual understanding and community consolidation, with the participation of all city residents, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, age, gender or education.

Traditionally, interculturalism is based on socio-cultural phenomena such as multiculturalism and multiculturalism. In the context of our study, we rely on the definition of the term multiculturalism, in the sense not only of the moment of fixing and recognising the existence of cultural differences in a society/state, but also a conceptual position in the field of political philosophy and ethics, which is reflected in legal norms, social institutions, and in everyday life. The development of the European Union is a vivid example of focusing on multiculturalism rather than on building a common cultural identity, where neither member states nor

individual regions demonstrate a clear readiness for a single identity, for a complete loss of identity (Educational Reforms: Mission, Reality, Reflection, 74). By multiculturalism, we understand, first of all, the phenomenon of social life, which consists of the coexistence of many cultures within one society. From the point of view of multiculturalism, an extreme and deviation from the norm is an attempt to establish one single 'generally accepted' culture in public life, which often happens in totalitarian societies (Slyushchynsky, 2005). In other words, multiculturalism is a fundamental feature of interculturalism, interacting with different ethnic groups in developed urban communities, which characterises the coexistence of many cultures and the practice of coexistence in a heterogeneous society, in which no one culture is dominant (Kovalynska, 2016). For now, let us focus on the definition according to which an intercultural city is a community in which cultural diversity is considered a valuable quality, and in which the principles of mutual understanding, mutual respect and equality prevail. The social structure and daily interaction of such a community, members of different ethno-cultural groups and indigenous peoples, are determined by reciprocity, justice, respect, acceptance, understanding, freedom, diversity, and the desire to cooperate and coexist peacefully. An intercultural city adheres to an inclusive policy, focusing on intercultural connections, relationships, mutual knowledge of different cultures, and the principles of interaction and respect for each other. Intercultural cities develop strategies and policies that encourage people from different cultures to meet, 'intersect' and mix. In the context of European integration trends, intercultural integration is a comprehensive approach driven by committed leaders that transcends political divisions and administrative barriers. An intercultural integration policy involves strategic engagement in institutional capacity building that ensures equal rights and opportunities for all, promotes positive intercultural mixing, interaction, participation and power sharing. This model helps governments achieve inclusiveness, equality and well-being, by unlocking the potential of diverse communities, while minimising the risks associated with human mobility and cultural diversity (Intercultural Cities).

It should be noted that the specifics of the approach of the Ukrainian network of intercultural cities in the prewar period were determined by the documents and standards of the Council of Europe in the field of ethno-cultural diversity and protection of minority cultures, intercultural competence, multilingualism, intercultural education, combating racism and xenophobia, the prevention of hatred, the role of the media in developing a culture of tolerance, interaction between migrants and host societies, and the intercultural competence of social services. The intercultural model of development of Ukrainian cities, tested and developed within the framework of the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme, allows

us today to introduce new methods of management, public participation, intersectoral cooperation, project approaches, etc, for successful future development. Cooperation with existing national networks and associations of intercultural cities in Europe opens up opportunities for successful partnerships, and the exchange of experience and ideas of intercultural dialogue (Afanasyeva, Rubikondo-Khovanova, 2016).

It should be noted that not every multicultural city can boast the title of ‘intercultural’. In 2008, Melitopol became the only Ukrainian city selected on a competitive basis to represent Ukraine in the pilot project of the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities Programme (there are currently six such cities in Ukraine, and 147 in the world). Since 2008, researchers from Bohdan Khmelnytsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University, in cooperation with the Melitopol City Council, have been regular partners in the development and implementation of integration policy for multicultural Melitopol as a strategic priority for the development of a multicultural community.

Since 2008, scientists from Bohdan Khmelnytsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University, in cooperation with the Melitopol City Council, have been conducting constant monitoring to quickly study public and expert opinion, in order to identify current ethno-cultural problems in the city in the context of the general political situation in Ukraine, and to develop optimal methods and directions for implementing the strategy of an intercultural city based on intercultural mapping, the most important of which are reflected in the collective work of Melitopol scientists (Sociological markers of intercultural mapping of Melitopol, 2020).

2. Materials and methods

Scientists are currently providing scientific support for the implementation of the ‘Comprehensive Programme of Intercultural Interaction of the City of Melitopol for 2021–2023’, which aims to implement the European model of intercultural interaction as an innovative factor in the development of multicultural Melitopol, by increasing the level of respect, trust, mutual understanding and community consolidation, with the participation of all city residents, regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, age, gender or education. It should be noted that from 2015 to 2022, Khmelnytsky Melitopol State Pedagogical University worked on the implementation of the fourth integration theme ‘Policy of Welcoming Newcomers’ of the Melitopol Intercultural Integration Plan, to consolidate the city’s intercultural community with newcomers (in this case, internally displaced persons from Donetsk and Luhansk regions and annexed Crimea).

At the city level, such a strategic approach is ensured by proper scientific support, the mobilisation of all administrative units and professional specialisations, and the involvement of broad sections of civil society.

At the city level, such a strategic approach is ensured by proper scientific support, the mobilisation of all administrative units and professional specialisations, and the involvement of broad sections of civil society.

The sociological support in 2022 and 2023 mainly concerned the main problems and difficulties faced by members of ethnic communities in Melitopol who remained in the occupied territory, or were forced to leave their homes and moved to territory controlled by Ukraine or abroad. As part of the study 'Ethnic Communities and Commonality: The Key to Civic Engagement and Trust', three focus group discussions were held, with a total of 72 participants (Ethnic Communities and Commonality: Report, 2022). Participants were recruited according to the following indicators: members of ethnic communities of Melitopol, who found themselves in difficult living conditions caused by the war, and at the time of the study either remained in the occupied territories, moved to government-controlled territory, or went abroad. According to the terms of the study, the participants were not related to journalism and the mass media, psychology, sociology, or public opinion research.

Based on an analysis of the factors influencing the mutual understanding of ethnic groups in multinational communities, the main problems of recognition faced by members of ethnic communities in Melitopol who remained in the occupied territory, or who were forced to leave their homes and move to territory controlled by Ukraine (IDPs), or left abroad (forced migrants), were identified.

Members of the ethnic communities of Melitopol region who remained in the occupied territory named the following as their main problems: anxiety and fears for their health, their own lives and the lives of their relatives; denunciation and distrust of people; insomnia and neuroses; searches and document checks; abductions and repression; a significant percentage of collaborators; a lack of communication with relatives, like-minded people and friends; uncertainty about the liberation of the occupied city and a sense of powerlessness; the falsification of facts about the history and culture of Ukraine; the destruction of historical and cultural monuments of the Zaporizhzhia region; no alternative to obtaining information (exclusively Russian media); pro-Russian agitation and propaganda; the destruction of the Ukrainian library fund; the confiscation of private housing; the theft of private and state-owned enterprises; the inability to meet the basic needs of vulnerable groups of the population; the danger of leaving the occupied city; the forced transition of all educational institutions to Russian standards of education;

psychological pressure and the intimidation of parents and children who refuse 'Russian education'; the fear of speaking their native language.

Members of ethnic communities of the Melitopol region who moved to government-controlled territory (IDPs) identified the following as the main problems: suspicion, a distrust of people who remained in occupied Melitopol; the fear of air raids and explosions; a sense of social vacuum and helplessness; difficulties in adapting to the new conditions after the occupation; the low level of stress resistance; the fear of losing housing and property left in the occupied city; a sense of inferiority compared to the local population; the lack of communication with relatives, like-minded people and friends; the lack of language courses and electives; the limited circle of communication in their native language.

Members of ethnic communities of the Melitopol region who went abroad (forced migrants) named the following as the main problems of interethnic understanding: a long-term stay abroad causes a loss of hospitality on the part of the host country; the need for psychological support for children; depression, nostalgia for the homeland; the closed environment; the lack of communication with relatives, like-minded people and friends; the lack of understanding of the military and political situation in Ukraine by elderly local people; the difficult adaptation and integration to new conditions living together in camps and dormitories; a sense of inequality compared to local residents; spreading disinformation about Ukraine through social media, rumours; cultural divisions into 'friends' and 'foes'; prejudice against Ukrainian citizens as outsiders; limited opportunities to study under Ukrainian programmes; the incompatibility of Ukrainian educational standards with European ones; language barriers and misunderstandings with local residents; the dismissive attitude of some volunteers towards Ukrainian migrants.

Another component of this support is the results of the latest research 'Ethnic Groups and Community: The Key to Civic Engagement and Trust' (July-September 2022). The study was conducted by online survey using a questionnaire in Google Form. The sample includes 1,500 respondents from among members of ethnic communities of Melitopol, who found themselves in difficult living conditions caused by the war, and at the time of the survey either remained in the occupied territories, moved to government-controlled territory, or went abroad.

3. Results

First of all, it should be noted that the majority of respondents express strong negative emotions, especially anger towards the aggressor and a strong intention to defend the freedom and independence of Ukraine. At the same time, some respondents note the constant tension and anxiety about the future of the state. The

survey emphasises the importance of security issues and respondents' concerns about personal safety and the safety of their families. This indicates the urgency of addressing issues relating to the living conditions and security of citizens. The most conflictogenic factors, according to respondents, are a distrust of the local authorities, problems relating to the participation of citizens in cooperation, and relations between residents of the occupied territory and those who left.

It is noteworthy that the war has hardly affected everyday personal communication, and most respondents define their relationships with relatives and friends as trusting, and with community members, people who live in their town or village, as neutral. The war and forced displacement have had a significant impact on the activity of community members in common affairs: 16.5% of respondents feel that they are active members of the community; while 37.7% do not. About a third of community members are far from being active in community affairs. Answers to the question about factors that can positively affect community cohesion mostly reflect respondents' perception of the causes of the growing conflicts/misunderstandings. Most respondents include a common vision of the city's development prospects (64.7%); the development of urban space as a useful and comfortable place to live (53.1%); common interests in the socio-economic sphere (51.1%); pride in their city (45.9%); and the organisation of the city community's life on the basis of democratic values and civil society (42.1%). The respondents also consider important the need to strengthen the Ukrainian national and civic identity (38.3%), to ensure equal rights for all ethnic communities and their cultural interaction (34.2%), to observe language legislation at all levels (25.8%), and to have an emotional attachment to the city (32.7%). Half the respondents look to the future with hope and optimism, 23.3% calmly but without much hope and illusions, one fifth of respondents feel anxious and uncertain about the future, and only one in 30 (about 3%) feel fear and despair.

As for community relations, the survey shows moderately trusting personal relationships and neutral attitudes toward community members. It is also worth noting that active participation in community affairs is not important to most respondents. The main factors that can have a positive impact on community cohesion are a common vision of the city's development prospects, a comfortable urban space, and the development of civil society.

Conclusions

Sociological studies of the impact of the war on interethnic understanding in multinational communities of the temporarily occupied territories, government-

controlled areas, and foreign communities, provide important insights into the experiences and attitudes of citizens.

Members of the ethnic communities of the Melitopol region who remained in the occupied territory named the following as the main problems in intercultural understanding: the falsification of facts about Ukrainian history and culture; the destruction of the historical and cultural monuments of the Zaporizhzhia region; no alternative to obtaining information (exclusively Russian media); pro-Russian agitation and propaganda; the destruction of the Ukrainian library fund; the forced transition of all educational institutions to Russian standards of education; psychological pressure and intimidation of parents and children

Members of ethnic communities of the Melitopol region who moved to territory controlled by Ukraine (IDPs) named the following as the main factors of the war's impact on intercultural understanding in Ukrainian communities: a sense of inferiority compared to the local population; a lack of communication with relatives, like-minded people and friends; a lack of language courses and electives; the limited circle of communication in their native language; the suspicion and distrust of people who remained in occupied Melitopol.

Members of ethnic communities of the Melitopol region who went abroad (forced migrants) named the following as the main problems of interethnic understanding: cultural divisions into 'friends' and 'foes'; prejudice against Ukrainian citizens as outsiders; the limited opportunities to study under Ukrainian programmes; the incompatibility of Ukrainian educational standards with European ones; the language barriers and misunderstandings with local residents; the dismissive attitude of some volunteers towards Ukrainian migrants.

Regarding factors of community cohesion, we can note the diversity of feelings and moods among the population, but the general trend demonstrates the great inner strength and optimism of citizens who are ready to actively interact and build a future in the face of the challenges of the postwar period. In everyday communication, it was found that the war had almost no impact on relationships with relatives and friends, with most respondents describing them as trusting. At the same time, despite the fairly tolerant attitude towards Russian-speaking Ukrainians, respondents are not ready to 'be friends as before' with Russians and Belarusians. There is an increase in the friendliness of Ukrainians towards citizens of allied countries. At the same time, it is noted that only a limited number of respondents consider themselves active members of the Melitopol community, which may indicate a certain level of remoteness from active participation in public affairs among the population.

This indicates the expediency of directing the efforts of both the authorities and civil society into supporting and stimulating positive trends that will help strengt-

hen social harmony in every multinational community and constructive relations between Ukrainian communities. In general, despite the difficult conditions, Ukrainian citizens are optimistic, and believe in victory. Since it will be important to maintain and strengthen this positive attitude in the future through targeted measures by the authorities and the active participation of civil society, the information obtained in this study can serve as a basis for developing effective strategies for managing and maintaining social harmony in the future.

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