






“Positioning of low-urbanized territories based on self-identification: The case of Ukraine”

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POSITIONING OF LOW-URBANIZED TERRITORIES BASED ON SELF-IDENTIFICATION: THE CASE OF UKRAINE

Abstract

In the context of competition for limited resources for the development of territorial communities in Ukraine, the use of marketing tools in managing local development is becoming increasingly important. One of these tools is positioning. In the case of territorial communities, it is a communicative expression of their identity. This study aims to determine the positioning characteristics of small territorial communities in Ukraine (low-urbanized territories – communities with a predominantly rural population) in formulating their positioning criteria. The subject of the analysis was the strategic visions formulated in the long-term planning documents of low-urbanized territories. Descriptive information was evaluated and grouped using expert methods. It was determined that low-urbanized territories in Ukraine use a multi-criteria approach in the positioning process: the number of applied criteria reached 26 (an average of 6 criteria). Each of them is focused on specific target audiences – residents, investors/local businesses, and tourists/visitors (48% for each of the target audiences). At the same time, less than half of the surveyed communities (44%) position themselves as “territories of developed agriculture”. Since little research has been done on the positioning of territorial communities in the Ukrainian context, this study has contributed new knowledge in this field.

Keywords

low-urbanized territory, differentiation, marketing, tourism, investor, comfort of living

JEL Classification

H79, M38

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the start of the active phase of administrative-territorial reform in 2015, the low financial capacity of territorial communities and the narrow competence range of local self-government discouraged all stakeholder groups, including, and above all, local self-government bodies, from taking a proactive position in the issue of economic development of territorial communities. As a result, marketing actions and decisions were minimized, and in the vast majority of cases they were presented within the framework of event marketing, with an emphasis of events on cultural and entertainment components and less on economic and/or promotional ones (Oklander, 2008).

The measures implemented during 2015–2020 as part of the reform led to fundamental changes in the distribution of competencies between different levels of public power, and the consolidation of administrative-territorial units at the subregional and local levels. As a result of the change in borders (de facto consolidation), among other things, 1,469 territorial communities were formed (compared to 11,250 in the period before the reform was implemented), which are basic administrative units that correspond to the upper level of local administrative units of the standard of territorial division of countries for statistical purposes (LAU level 1).

This consolidation has led to several localities differing in their demographic weight and status (urban or rural) within the territorial community as an integral entity. In this case, it is not only the formation of a separate administrative level of local self-government, which “takes over” certain decision-making concerning life support in the territory (provision of public services, maintenance and development of municipal infrastructure, preschool and school education services, etc.). Obviously, these issues also reflect the content of transformation processes, but they should be assessed as technical (though essential). More important in the context of the research goals is the arising need for newly amalgamated territorial communities to form a new local identity and determine their competitive position against the background of other communities. Considering the process mentioned above in the marketing paradigm, positioning a territory should be perceived through the prism of its competitive advantages, making it possible to differentiate this territory in the minds of stakeholder groups.

A special place against this background is occupied by low-urbanized territories, which are defined as administrative-territorial units of the basic level with a predominant (more than 50%) share of the rural population, united by common economic and social interests of development. These territories were chosen as the object of the study for two reasons.

First, in the Ukrainian reality, they de facto gained subjectivity in local government for the first time: until the last period (the beginning of the active phase of administrative-territorial reform in 2015), only large cities could be considered as full-fledged subjects of local government (according to the criteria of existing powers and their resource provision) in Ukraine. In contrast, small towns and villages had minimal competencies in all spheres of life: economic, social, and cultural (Tkachuk, 2016). In such conditions, self-determination in a competitive environment is now taking place at the “zero” reporting point, where the socio-economic profile of a territory is integrated, and which is not the usual sum of the profiles of localities located on it.

Secondly, scientific and analytical materials more often state the situation of “blurring” the traditional economic profile for rural areas, which is clearly related to agriculture (both in terms of the share of added value generated by local economic entities and in terms of the industry structure of employment) (OECD, 2014). In this way, not only the retrospective is recorded, but also the trend forecast is confirmed. In this context, it is interesting to determine whether there is a specific feature of Ukraine that would deny or confirm the stated.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Among the authors involved in analysis and description of the theory of marketing, the history of the marketing practice development, there is a consensus on the dynamism of the development of the discipline, the expansion of the means and practices of marketing realization in further new areas. At the same time, the logic of the mentioned process is usually inserted in certain time frames/periods (Kotler et al., 2020; Kerin et al., 2015; Lamb et al., 2018; Shaw, 2009; Hollander, 1980). Analysis of the essence of changes that serve as the basis for identifying these periods shows that each subsequent stage of development is a refinement of marketing tools aimed at enhancing its effectiveness. Despite

the difference in the time frame and the definition of stages by different authors, this clarification primarily makes its progress from the general idea of “competition for the mass consumer” towards a segmented approach adapted to the needs of individual consumers. Robert Bartles shares the same point of view. In his reference work on the history of marketing, in addition to carrying out an in-depth analysis of the prerequisites for the crystallization of marketing as a separate economic discipline, he substantiates the direction of its development from the “research” and “conceptualization” of the early twentieth century to the “Period of differentiation” of the 1960s (Shaw & Tamilia, 2001).

Thus, the historical analysis proposed by various authors synthesizes the research results of chang-

ing market conditions of existence: increased competition between economic entities within individual goods markets encourages the former to form a product offer that will have clear distinctive characteristics against the general competitive background. What will be in the future in the title of one of the famous joint works of E. Ries and J. Trout (“Differentiate or Die”) (Ries & Trout, 2000) in the late 1950s, is only formalized as a concept of differentiation in the article by Wroe Alderson (Alderson, 1958).

Developing Alderson’s idea of market heterogeneity, many marketing works from the second half of the 20th century are in the thematic field of this theory: it is gaining wide popularity in scientific and academic circles (Shaw, 2009) and practical activities of enterprises. As a development of the concept of differentiation, a notion of positioning explained in J. Trout’s work can be considered. The emphasis on differentiation partially shifts from the definition of a product’s unique technical and/or price characteristics to their perception and understanding by a consumer (Trout, 1969). In the future, the idea of distinction of a brand against a general competitive background with the “consolidation” of this difference in the minds of consumers can be described as dominant in works on this topic (Alpert & Gatty, 1969; Houston & Haneski, 1976; Maggard, 1991).

Understanding the universality of marketing tools has led to an expansion of the scope of their use. In this context, the proposal of W. Gartner and D. Sperling and their other contemporaries regarding positioning looks quite logical. It justifies its use at the meso-level (locality, region, country) (Sperling, 1991; Gartner, 1989). However, the ideas of territorial marketing in mentioned works (both in general and concerning positioning in particular) are predominantly focused on the tourist and leisure directions. A clear illustration of this is Gartner’s definition, who defines the positioning of a territory as a “process of establishing a distinctive place of that destination in the minds of potential visitors” (Gartner, 1989).

Against this background, the approach proposed by N. Saqib is more complex (Saqib, 2019). She draws attention to:

- 1) A large number of stakeholder groups that have influence and, at the same time, are potential or current “consumers” of this product;
- 2) Multivariance of the components that make up the territorial product and their interrelation.

As a result, this significantly complicates the positioning process.

Regarding the author’s first argument, it should be noted that the diversity of consumers/sales markets is an important factor that determines the specified complexity of the territory positioning process. As it is common to distinguish in the literature on territorial marketing, they can be subjects with fundamentally different selection criteria, priorities, and interests. The positions of different authors slightly differ. In particular, some of them justify a detailed approach to defining “territory clients” (Anholt, 2010; Harroussi et al., 2019). The study adopts the approach of those authors who suggest that when defining target audiences in territory marketing, one should focus on the fundamental differences between them as for the characteristics of the territory’s mega-product that are important for them. According to this criterion, most authors classify target audiences in territorial marketing as:

- Tourists/visitors,
- Investors/local businesses,
- Current/potential residents (Kotler et al., 2002; Florek, 2013; Amajid et al., 2016; Hassib & Ibtissem, 2018).

Obviously, when determining the positioning of a territory, one of the starting points should be a list of values/competitive advantages that this territory disposes of for the above-mentioned customer groups. At the same time, as noted by F. Bourkache and A. Tessa, the process of positioning a territory involves choosing such characteristics that, on the one hand, emphasize its strengths, and on the other, are important for its “customers” (Bourkache & Tessa, 2015). Some of the authors go even further in this issue, justifying the feasibility of applying the USP (Unique Sales Proposition) principle for positioning the territory (Ermann &

Hermanik, 2017; Laven et al., 2019), formulated by R. Reeves in relation to consumer goods (Reeves, 2015). According to this approach, when formulating the territory's position against the general background of competing propositions, the choice should be made in favor of a single, most important argument. In contrast to this argument, M. Dumont, L. Devisme, and J. Park pay attention to the risks that excessive simplification of positioning entails (Dumont & Devisme, 2006; Park, 2007).

The second argument mentioned by N. Saqib, while justifying the complexity of positioning at the territorial level, is mainly due to the historical preconditions that formed the territory's economic, social, and cultural images. At the same time, the mentioned preconditions can be both natural and acquired (Harroussi & Chakor, 2019) and have both rational and emotional coloring (Morgan et al., 2011). De facto, this argument points to the importance of place identity, which internal stakeholder groups must formulate. Based on the perception of place identity as a notion formed through a wide range of interdisciplinary discourse (Govers & Go, 2009), the positioning should be taken as an attempt at its communicative expression (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Grey & O'Toole, 2020). A similar method was used by Barbora Gulisova (Gulisova, 2021), while noting that the right of initiative and final consent in determining the key characteristics of territory still belong to the population living in this territory and/or its representatives.

Despite the well-developed theory of territorial marketing, its application in Ukraine has not been studied enough in practice. Existing research primarily focuses on specific tools of stimulating local development: land lease (Liakhovych et al., 2019; Zos-Kior et al., 2021), fiscal tools (Korbutiak et al., 2019; Siryk et al., 2021), stimulating entrepreneurship (Zablodska et al., 2021; Lozhachevska et al., 2020), etc. Marketing practice and positioning of territorial communities are analyzed only in fragments and superficially. Thus, comparative analysis often applies only to large cities (Budnikevich et al., 2021; Ustymenko et al., 2021) or focuses only on methodological/theoretical aspects (Ustymenko et al., 2019). At the same time, when the research concerns small territorial commu-

nities (Zablodska, 2020), the conclusions are too general.

Based on the literature review, the purpose of this study was defined as the identification of key characteristics used by low-urbanized territories for positioning, with two specific objectives, namely:

- determining the level of diversification of positioning of low-urbanized territories;
- studying the extent to which low-urbanized territories in Ukraine, using the marketing positioning tool, identify themselves as areas with agricultural development.

Based on this framework and the research objectives, the following hypotheses were identified:

H1: When implementing their positioning, low-urbanized territories use a multi-criteria approach focused on different target audiences.

H2: When positioning, most low-urbanized territories in Ukraine do not define agriculture as one of the essential points of their differentiation.

This study is aimed at identifying key characteristics that low-urbanized territories use in positioning. Given the peculiarities of applying positioning tools at the level of territorial communities, the definition of the research subject requires justification.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research subject

One of the starting points of the positioning methodology of low-urbanized territories was that the formulation of criteria should not be based solely on the analysis of statistical data in the social, cultural, and economic areas. They allow formulating the strengths of the territory, its potential points of differentiation, in the most rational way. On the contrary, the entire process should focus on the opinion of stakeholder groups that are internal "clients" of the territory, including the general pub-

lic that lives in it. This approach can be relied upon Terry Jordan (Jordan, 1978) and Oleksandr Pavlov (Pavlov, 2014). They justify the weight of the local population as carriers of information about the retrospective, modernity and prospects for the development of the area they live in.

As an informational expression of territory positioning, the authors define a strategic vision expressed in long-term planning documents. This interpretation is justified by the role that this notion plays in the system of goal setting of the community development strategy: it “reflects the uniqueness of the territory that other territories cannot copy” (MCTDU, 2021; Berdanova et al., 2017), it is used in various promotional and informational materials aimed at different target audiences: both external and internal. De facto, the strategic vision helps a territorial community provide a place, clearly separated from other products, against the general background and in the minds of the target audience of influence – to implement its positioning.

An important characteristic that was verified when forming the research sample concerns the methodology used to develop a planning document in a low-urbanized territory. The analysis was carried out for the involvement of a wide range of residents in this process at all its stages. Those communities in which the development strategy was not developed based on a participatory approach were not considered as objects of the study. In this case, none of the elements defined in the development strategy can be considered as such that:

- express the opinion of the entire community;
- they are a manifestation of the identity of a territory, formulated by the overwhelming majority of the population living on it (as it is also in the case of a strategic vision).

In turn, given the research objective, this characteristic is critically important.

Most territorial communities are those with less than 10 thousand residents, while only eight communities have a population of more than 15 thousand residents. Another important characteristic is the type of locality that is the administrative

center of the community. And in the case of this classification feature, the proportion in favor of entirely rural territories is quite predictable, given the characteristics of the research object. However, even in communities where the center is an urban-type locality (town, settlement), the vast majority of their residents live in rural localities and the population structure in the context of “town/village” has remained almost unchanged over the past five years.

2.2. Data analysis

The data analysis process took place in two stages. At the first of them, descriptive information was encoded inductively by two evaluation team members (Thomas, 2006). The group of participants consisted of 21 people with experience in working with local communities to develop strategies for sustainable development of territories and communication strategies.

Their work was conducted independently of each other. To increase the accuracy of the encoding results, the studied material was read through several times (Jain & Ogden, 1999). Thus, a greater correspondence of the specific positioning characteristics of analyzed content material was achieved. At the initial stage, seven randomly selected vision formulations were encoded and compared with each other to form the initial encoding tree (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After all vision formulations were encoded, the results were re-compared to each other. Then they discussed until an agreement on the correctness of the encoding was reached. Thus, a list of key positioning characteristics of low-urbanized territories was developed (Table 2).

Characteristics are ranked in descending order of their level of mention in the strategic visions of individual territorial communities. Also, they are divided using the average absolute deviation indicator.

At the next stage, the formulated positioning criteria were deductively encoded independently by two evaluators based on the position highlighted in the literature review on identifying the target audience of influence in territorial marketing. The reliability of the evaluators was tested using Cohen's kappa. This indicator showed a high lev-

el of reliability between estimates: $0.67 < k < 0.90$ (Carletta, 1996).

When formulating positioning criteria at the first stage, when possible, specialized reference literature that formulates and generalizes certain economic concepts and phenomena was used (Konopitskyi & Filina, 2007; Sandmo, 2017). For example, when coding the notions of “water supply/sewerage”, “administrative/public/household services”, “municipal infrastructure”, and taking into account the context in which these notions were used, the term “services to the population” was proposed as the most appropriate and generalizing.

All the material was available to experts in an anonymous form to objectify the evaluation. However, when publishing the results of the study, the requirement of anonymity was removed due to the fact that the material analyzed is of a public nature and freely available (Appendix A).

3. RESULTS

In general, the use of content analysis, taking into account the goals of the study, allowed identifying key criteria for positioning low-urbanized territories in Ukraine and identifying the content areas in which it is located. For this purpose, the territorial communities were selected by the different times of their foundation, the number of residents living in them, and the composition of the localities included in them. The mentioned characteristics of the research sample are shown in Table 1. In total, the research sample includes 50 newly amalgamated territorial communities with a predominant share of the rural population.

Strategic visions in the case of each of the studied communities were formulated in the process of active resident group discussion on key characteristics that distinguish a territorial community from others and constitute their competitive advantages in the long term. The generally accepted rule in each case was also that the structure of the group that participated in the discussion reflected the age, gender, and geographical structures of the local population as much as possible; it included representatives from all spheres of communi-

ty life: economy, education, culture, social sphere, administration.

Table 1. Characteristics of territorial communities by population and by type of their administrative center

Number of inhabitants		Type of settlement-administrative center	
Up to 10 thousand	32	Village	31
10 to 15 thousand	10	Town, Urban-type settlement	19
Over 15 thousand	8		

In most cases, the formulation was subject to editorial adjustments by local or external experts: either directly at the group discussion stage or after it. In the second case, the strategic vision definition was submitted for re-discussion. However, in each of the mentioned alternatives, at one of the subsequent stages of working out of a local development strategic plan, the public had the opportunity to provide their own proposals on certain aspects related to the formulation. According to the study, this opportunity was successfully implemented in four cases, the proposal became part of the final version of the strategic vision (Appendix A).

3.1. Identification of positioning criteria

The analysis allowed forming 26 criteria used by communities when positioning (Table 2). At the same time, these criteria were not always present literally in the submitted formulation.

For example, “investment attractiveness”, in addition to literal formulations, combines authentic formulations such as “openness for investors”, “attractiveness for investment”, “comfort of doing business”, and “medium business”. “Tourism, recreation”, among other things, integrates “rest and recreation” and “balneological resort”. “Entrepreneurship” serves as a combination for notions such as “small business”, “starting own business”, “freelancing”. Thus, the grouping of individual notions into the criteria presented in Table 2 was carried out considering the context in which they were used and the details they comprised.

These integral criteria were arranged (see Table 2) in descending order of the request numbers to them as positioning points when formulating

Table 2. Application frequency of positioning criteria

No.	Criterion	Number of territorial communities	% of local communities	Group
1	Comfort of living	32	64	H
2	Tourism, recreation	24	48	H
3	Ecology, environment	23	46	H
4	Agriculture, processing, fishing	22	44	H
5	Entrepreneurship	20	40	H
6	Industry	17	34	M
7	Culture	14	28	M
8	Economic development	14	28	M
9	Investment attractiveness	14	28	M
10	Proximity to a big city, good location	14	28	M
11	Public activity	13	26	M
12	Services to the population	12	24	M
13	Infrastructure	12	24	M
14	Leisure	11	22	M
15	Education	10	20	M
16	History, heritage, traditions	9	18	M
17	Security	9	18	M
18	Standard of living	8	16	M
19	Natural resources	6	12	L
20	Children, youth	6	12	L
21	Modern, European	6	12	L
22	Sport	6	12	L
23	Logistics	5	10	L
24	Innovation, high technology	5	10	L
25	New residents	4	8	L
26	Trade	2	4	L

strategic visions. At the same time, the criteria are divided into three groups: high/medium/low frequency of mention. The average absolute deviation indicator was applied for the division (APA, 1998), which in the given entirety was “11.15”. Thus, the group with an average frequency included criteria for which the number of mentions was in the range of “11.15±”, in relation to the average value of “24.46”. All criteria for which the mention rate was beyond the specified limits (13.31-35.61) formed the low and high frequency of mention groups, respectively.

Five notions are identified as the most frequently chosen criteria by low-urbanized territories for positioning; the most commonly used is “comfort of living”. This notion is one of the broadest in content. It reflects the priority of positions that small communities in Ukraine determine for themselves in relation to more infrastructurally developed medium and large towns. Population outflow from villages and small towns is a trend that has been observed for decades, including in Ukraine (Lykheid, 2017). It also actualizes the is-

sue of competition for the population, in particular for young people. Although not sufficient, but a necessary and primary condition for successful competition of low-urbanized territories is the development of a habitat that can be a worthy alternative to living in the city.

It is worth pointing out that the positioning criteria indicated in Table 2 may overlap with each other for certain components of their content, being interdependent and sometimes correlated to each other as a part and a whole. The notion presented in the previous paragraph is such an example. Developed communal “infrastructure”, “cultural” needs satisfaction, broad opportunities for “leisure” activities are somewhat that in a certain part forms the “comfort of living”. Just as the latter notion contributes to the emergence of “new residents”. At the same time, the criteria were formulated in such a way as to play the role of a leitmotif for partial notions that have become their integral components. And as the results of inductive analysis show, the unifying element for partial notions reflected in strategic visions can have different lev-

els of generalization. Therefore, the above-mentioned overlapping of the content of positioning criteria are predictable and acceptable.

A similar overlapping also occurs in the case of “agriculture and processing”, which in terms of content partially overlaps with “economic development” and “innovation, high technologies”. At the same time, the emphasis on the first characteristic shows that a certain territorial community clearly and in the long-term positions itself as a territory whose economic potential is based on agriculture and related economic activities.

3.2. Economic criteria positioning

Attention is drawn to the fact that a clear positioning of a territorial community that is focused on the development of agriculture is present in less than half of the low-urbanized territories. This confirms one of the hypotheses tested in the framework of the research: in Ukraine, although with a certain time lag, there is a blurring of the agricultural-industrial profile of communities with a predominant share of rural localities. Moreover, there is no dependence on whether the community consists exclusively of rural localities or communities amalgamated around small towns or urban-type settlements (Table 3).

Table 3 presents the results of an analysis of positioning criteria that highlight notions that are not related to emphasizing a community as a habitat but are focused on emphasizing its strengths in terms of economic specialization.

The results shown in Table 3 indicate a greater clarity of positioning in the case of low-urbanized territories located within the administrative boundaries of urban territorial communities. The above thesis is supported by the fact that there is no notion of economic content in 13% of the analyzed rural territorial communities, but the frequency of mentioning these notions in the case of urban territorial communities is higher than rural.

3.3. Positioning criteria per target audiences

The study took a marketing approach differentiated depending on the target audience. At the same time, the basic approach was reasoned in the professional literature: the clients in territorial marketing are defined as tourists/visitors, investors/local businesses, current/potential residents.

Thus, the formulated criteria for the positioning of low-urbanized territories can be presented in relation to what priority target audience they are focused on (Table 4).

Checking the consistency of expert opinions in the distribution of criteria by target audiences shows a high level of this indicator in the case of those criteria that are classified as aimed at the audience “Current/potential residents” and “Investors/local business”. Limited conclusions can also be drawn in relation to the positioning criteria assigned to the group “Tourists/visitors”: Cohen’s kappa, in this case, is on the verge of a moderate level of consistency.

Table 3. Frequency of use of economic criteria positioning, %

Criterion	Among all territorial communities	Among territorial communities, where all settlements are villages	Among communities, where the administrative center is town/urban type settlement
None	8	13	0
Economic development	26	23	32
Entrepreneurship, small/medium business	42	35	53
Investment attractiveness	24	23	26
Industry	30 (18) *	16 (10)	53 (37)
Tourism, recreation	48 (22)	39 (23)	63 (21)
Agriculture, fishing	44 (16)	35 (19)	58 (11)
Good location, logistics	20	26	11
Alternative energy	6	0	16
Trade	4	6	0

Note: * – the number in parentheses indicates the frequency of reference to a particular industry, tourism or agriculture.

Table 4. List of positioning criteria per target audiences, %

Target audience	Criterion	Cohen's kappa	Number of territorial communities that mentioned the term in a strategic vision
Current/potential residents	Comfort of living	0.875	32
	Culture		14
	Public activity		13
	Services to the population		12
	Infrastructure		12
	Leisure		11
	Education		10
	Security		9
	Standard of living		8
	Children, youth		6
	Modern, European		6
	Sport		6
	New residents		4
	Investors/local businesses		Agriculture, processing industry, fishing
Entrepreneurship		20	
Industry		17	
Economic development		14	
Investment attractiveness		14	
Good location		14	
Natural resources		6	
Logistics		5	
Innovation, high technology		5	
Trade	2		
Tourists/visitors	Tourism, recreation	0.68	24
	Ecology, environment		23
	History, heritage, traditions		9

The smaller (compared to the previous two cases) size of the Cohen's kappa can be explained by the fact that in this group, there are criteria that are important for all categories of "consumers" of mega-product: in particular, it is environmental friendliness/environmental cleanliness, historical heritage this or that low-urbanized territory. However, the context in which they were used served as a basis for the experts to classify them in the above way.

The number of criteria used by low-urbanized territories for positioning differs depending on the audience it is aimed at. In a situation of emphasizing their own position in relation to other communities in the field of tourism, in most cases the approach of maximum generalization is used, such as "tourist center", "tourist infrastructure" with a likely compaction of this position in the areas of gastrological, cultural, historical, green and other types of tourism. Strengthening the argument in this case also occurs by highlighting the ecological and cultural features of the territory. At the same

time, when it comes to targeting at investors/local businesses and/or current/ potential residents, the positioning of the territory is based on a significantly larger number of criteria of different levels of generalization.

In general, when positioning, the studied communities focused on a multidimensional approach: the number of the criteria they used in their formulations ranged from 2 to 12 on average. That is more than six criteria in each case. Naturally, this is significantly discordant against the background of positioning practices applied in the final consumption goods market, where the USP (Unique Sales Proposition) approach, formulated by Russell Reeves, prevails: the product should offer the target audience a single competitive advantage that is most relevant to its needs (Reeves, 2015). In most cases, the offer of territorial communities in competition for limited development resources is significantly more diversified and complex, which makes it impossible to simplify it to a single dimension. A generalization of this diversification is shown in Figure 1.

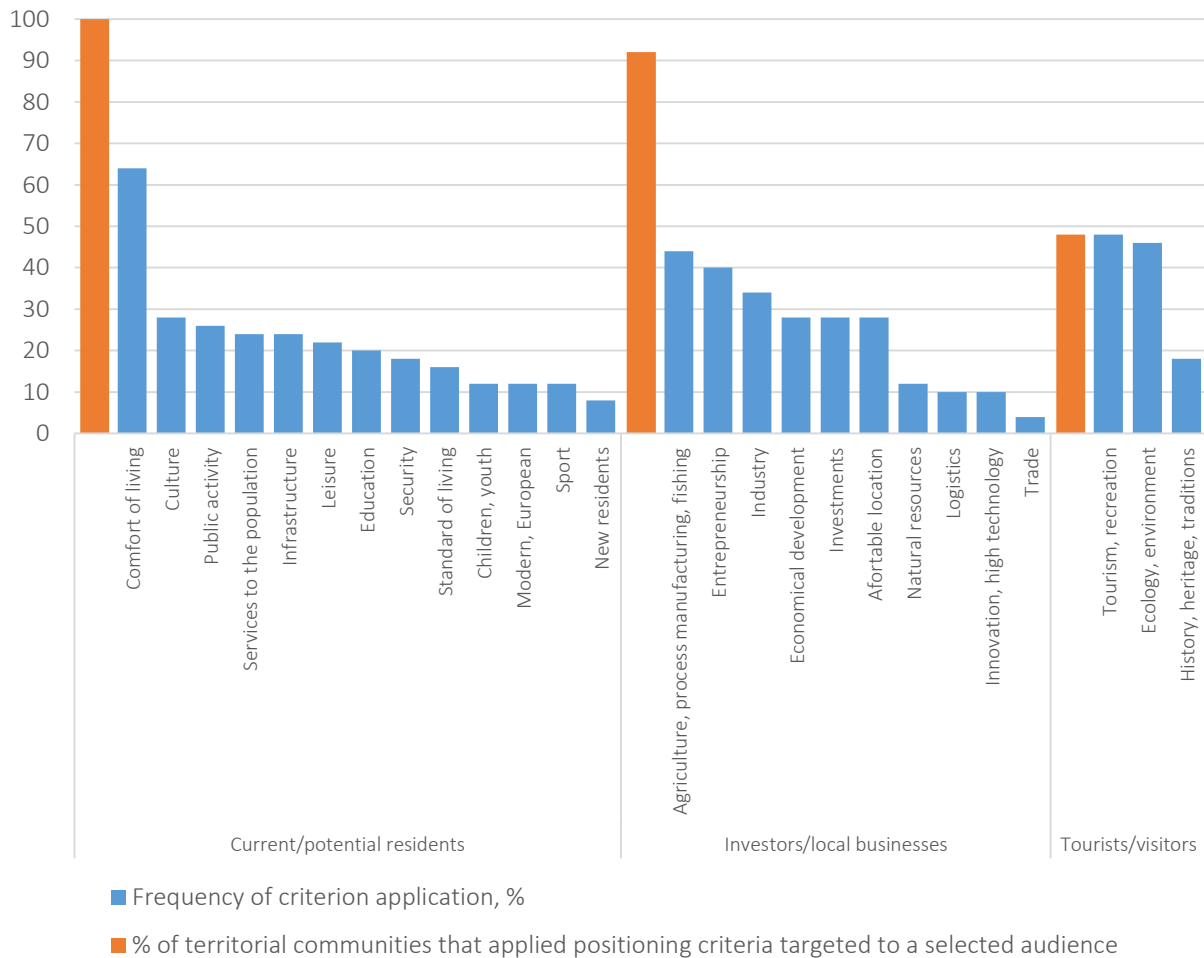


Figure 1. Percentage of communities that applied positioning criteria that targeted a specific audience

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, each of the communities that formed the study sample used several criteria to determine its position in relation to other territories. Thus, the emphasis was placed on the following characteristics:

- The cultural environment (“a community of cultural diversity” – Velykokopanivska TC; “cultural center” – Pechenizhynska TC);
- Among other spheres of life of the community, the priority was given to the tourism sector (“tourist friendly” – Horodnianska TC);
- “Space for cultural tourism, rest and recreation” – Myrivska TC);
- It was emphasized on the development of certain sectors of the local economy (“Southern logistics center for the sales and processing of

agricultural products” – Velykokopanivska TC, “a leader in the production of natural cosmetics” – Chopovytska TC);

- Other positioning criteria were formulated.

If these criteria are summarized according to the target audience for which they are designed, it can be stated that all low-urbanized territories determine their positions with a focus on current/potential residents, the vast majority (92%) on investors/local businesses, and almost half (48%) on tourists/visitors.

4. DISCUSSION

The results presented in the paper are replicated in other studies only partially. These results are presented below in the context of the analyzed hypotheses.

H1: Marta Plumed, Tatiana Berrozpe and Carmen Saso (Plumed et al., 2017) confirm the use of a differentiated approach by territories to determine their position against the general background in the results of the studies. The application of a multidisciplinary approach in rural branding is indicated in the report of the relevant committee of the European Parliament (CARDEP, 2013). Partly (as in the first case) or in full (as in the case of the mentioned report), these sources indicate that the multidisciplinary positioning used by low-urbanized territories in Ukraine is not a unique phenomenon. Rather, this indicates the immanent complexity of offering the territory as a kind of mega-product that was mentioned in the paper. The allegorical nature of the notion of “product” in relation to it in its form can cover up the diversity of content (consumer value) that it contains. Regarding the Ukrainian context, studies of positioning rural territorial communities, communities united around small towns in Ukraine were conducted only in fragments (as discussed above). Moreover, the subject and content of these few studies are different. Therefore, it is impossible to correlate the results obtained from the required angle.

H2: Obviously, the structure of the mega-product of a low-urbanized territory does not remain constant over time. This remark applies to both individual and to this type of territory as a whole. One of the fundamental changes taking place in this structure is the gradual shift from agricultural production as the dominant force that completely forms the economic base of low-urbanized territories. The universality of this trend (regardless of the region) is evidenced by the report presented by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2014). As expected, this must be reflected in the positioning strategies used by these territories (Siemens, 2013). With certain

inertia inherent in open socio-economic systems (as Lynn Siemens points out), these changes occur. The above-mentioned research results are basically the same as the results received in the study framework. The results obtained by S. Moroz and A. Synowiec indicate the sustainability of the agricultural profile of low-urbanized territories in Ukraine (Moroz, 2017; Synowiec, 2021). However, on the one hand, one should be aware of the slowness of its transformation processes and, on the other hand, the desire to change it, which is noted in the research of authors engaged in the study of socio-economic development of low-urbanized territories (Yakymchuk et al., 2021; Belei, 2021).

This study is one of the few that provides a detailed assessment of the positioning process of low-urbanized territories. While research is applied to this undeveloped research topic, the conclusions based on the results of its implementation should be perceived with consideration to the key limitations they contain. The limiting factor of the study is its reliance on expert opinion, which may not be correct when testing competence due to its increased susceptibility to personal bias. Also, the selection criteria applied carry unavoidable limitations regarding the scope and practical implications of conclusions. In particular, this limitation concerns the peculiarities of historical preconditions and the current state of development of the low-urbanized territories in Ukraine. Eliminating or (conversely) confirming these restrictions must be the subject of further research.

The prospect of further research is also in a related area of interest. The added value of knowledge will be the results of the analysis of low-urbanized territories’ development strategies: the extent to which positioning (as a communicative expression of the territory features) correlates with the tasks and projects aimed at confirming it.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to determine the characteristics of positioning used by low-urbanized territories in Ukraine.

It is determined that low-urbanized territories in Ukraine use a multi-criteria approach to identify their positioning characteristics. At the same time, the grouping of these criteria showed that almost half of them determine their positions with a focus on each of the pre-defined target audiences: current/po-

tential residents, investors/local businesses, and tourists/visitors. Given the complexity of the territory's offer, the multi-profile nature and interconnectedness of the "consumers" of its mega-product, applying a multi-criteria approach has practical benefits in positioning.

The study also revealed the extent to which local communities with a predominantly rural population in Ukraine identify themselves as "areas of developed agriculture." Less than half of the local communities define developed agriculture in one form or another as a characteristic that distinguishes the current economic profile of the territory from others or will be its basis in the medium and long term.

Data were collected in Ukraine among small territorial communities with predominantly rural populations. Therefore, the conclusions can be extrapolated to this type of administrative units. Additional research is needed on the positioning strategies used by medium and large cities. Deviations are also predicted in approaches to the positioning of border areas, urban agglomerations, these cases are also of interest for further research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Nazar Hlynskyy.

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Formal analysis: Olha Hirna.

Funding Acquisition: Olha Hirna.

Investigation: Nazar Hlynskyy.

Methodology: Olha Hirna.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Strategic visions of the studied communities

Territorial community	Administrative center type	Strategic vision
Barska	Town	Historical, cultural, industrial, tourist and spiritual center of Podillia. A safe and comfortable territory for living and doing business, playing sports and recreation, which unites the interests of residents of the surrounding villages. An environment of economically and socially active people who plan their own and their children's lives in their own community. It is rich in natural resources and opportunities for the development of tourism and agricultural products processing
Baryshivska	Town	Investment and tourist attractive territory of the capital region. It is focused on high-tech ecological agriculture and processing of agricultural products, safe for life and doing business, has a developed infrastructure. A community that provides high-quality educational and medical services, has a modern sphere of recreation, sports and leisure in Ukrainian national traditions
Bobrovytska	Town	A modern, thriving community with a diversified economy: high-value-added agriculture combined with high-tech industrial production forms a solid foundation for balanced development. Thanks to its favorable location in Southern Polissia, a developed urban service sector and a clean environment, the community constantly attracts new residents and creates a favorable living environment
Boromlianska	Village	Open government, joint development planning, dialogue with business, partner model, promotion, and support for folk crafts. A socially oriented community that creates an environment of social well-being for its residents by means of effective and efficient management of its resources
Buhrynska	Village	A place where happy residents, who use professional public services, live and work in harmony with nature among beautiful landscapes and lakes
Buzivska	Village	The picturesque community of Cherkasy region on the border with Kyiv region, on the banks of the Hirskyi Tikych river, surrounded by ponds. Initiative and hard-working residents, intellectual and athletic young people who are given personal development and self-realization opportunities live here. Favorable conditions are created in the community for starting a business, farming, fishing, and tourism. An ecologically friendly environment, the safety of residents and cultural diversity contribute to achieving European standards of living and economic prosperity
Velykokopanivska	Village	A community of active and entrepreneurial people, where it is easy to start and run a business; a Southern logistics center for the sale and processing of agricultural products, a community of cultural diversity, where it is cozy, safe and comfortable to live, work and relax, and which takes care of people
Halytsynivska	Village	... entirely makes use of its location near Mykolaiv and important transport routes. Developing economic activity zones ..., it provides high standards of living for current residents and attract new ones. Natural and landscape resources are widely used, ... environmental protection is an important responsibility

Table A1 (cont.). Strategic visions of the studied communities

Territorial community	Administrative center type	Strategic vision
Hrabovetska	Village	An energy-efficient, energy-independent, and environmentally friendly community with a developed social infrastructure and household services sphere, where active and cohesive residents live. Transport and logistics hub with a developed agricultural production and processing of agricultural products. A tourist-friendly area where residents and guests of the community have the opportunity to work
Horodnianska	Town	A successful, dynamic, comfortable for residents, and friendly for tourists and visitors community in Chernihiv region with a developed high-tech agriculture, small and medium businesses; a place where the most daring entrepreneurial ideas come to life
Davydivska	Village	Located not far from Lviv, with a population of more than 20 thousand people, is one of the leaders of the amalgamated territorial communities of Ukraine in terms of a high level of quality of life, an active investment-attractive community, a community of active people, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, where it is easy to set up and run a business. A community of sincere and friendly people, cozy and comfortable for living, business and recreation
Dashivska	Town	Economically and tourist attractive territory with developed processing of agricultural products. Eco-friendly and comfortable for living, studying, doing business and leisure activities. Rich in natural resources and opportunities for the efficient use of renewable energy sources
Demydivska	Town	An environmentally friendly community with developed agriculture and agricultural processing, attractive for tourists, open to investors and partners. This is a modern, harmonious, friendly, self-sufficient, creative, European community of active people. A community with a developed infrastructure and a high level of social services
Dzhulynska	Village	Villages with a high level of culture, spiritual development, preserved national traditions, modern institutions of culture, school and early childhood education
Zavodska	Town	A successful, modern, and self-sufficient community, an important cultural and economic center of the Ternopil region, a cozy and comfortable place to live, open to guests and investors
Zolotopotitska	Town	A well-known tourist center on the Dniester river, a region with developed small businesses, environmentally friendly agriculture, developed social infrastructure, preserved historical traditions, active youth and responsible residents who know how to work for themselves and for the benefit of Ukraine
Zatyshanska	Town	An economically self-sufficient community where it is comfortable and safe to live and work. Favorable conditions for small businesses, agricultural processing and the food industry ensure employment for residents and sustainable economic development of the community. Educated and interested young people are our future!
Konoplianska	Village	An agricultural production center, open for investment and a safe community with a high level of employment, comfortable living and recreation conditions
Kopachivska	Village	Comfortable location for living and doing business, open for investment
Krasnosilka	Village	Eco-friendly, well-organized, comfortable living area on the Kuyalnytskyi estuary near Odesa, where the relaxation is convenient and work is profitable
Malodivytka	Town	A self-sufficient, prosperous, comprehensively developed community in Pryluchyna, where hard-working people live, united around a common cause – they are descendants of the Cossack family. Small and medium businesses are developing harmoniously in the community; local agriculture is a significant component of the region's economy
Mateiivetska	Village	A self-sufficient, rich, and comfortable for living community in Prykarpattia region with the developed infrastructure, significant economic potential; a space where nature and man live in complete harmony
Mykulynetska	Town	A picturesque territory on the Ternopil plateau; a well-known balneological resort in the region, a center of urban services for surrounding communities; the territory of intensive diverse production and processing; agricultural products; a community that provides good conditions for life, rest, and recreation
Mykolaivska	Village	A community of high human values, strong in unity, safe, developed, with comfortable living, working, recreation and self-realization background, where everyone will find their place to implement their ideas and wishes with respect for people and nature
Myrivska	Village	The community economy is based on the potential of local agriculture... a center of high-quality public services with a well-developed technical infrastructure, high social capital, clean environment and aesthetic public space ... is an interesting space for cultural tourism, rest and recreation
Myropilska	Village	An initiative, investment-attractive and environmentally friendly community, a popular place for rest and recreation, with a high level of social protection of residents

Table A1 (cont.). Strategic visions of the studied communities

Territorial community	Administrative center type	Strategic vision
Mostyska	Town	The bridge of cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and the European Union, which ensures the development of the community and the well-being of its residents. An area that is attractive for investment and agricultural development. A community of active people who preserve the long-standing traditions of Ukrainian and Polish cultures and know how to work for themselves and for the benefit of Ukraine
Muzykivska	Village	This is a community of successful, active and entrepreneurial people, a self-sufficient economically developed territory near Kherson, a place where cultural life is booming, and children's laughter is heard everywhere
Nabutivska	Village	The community of initiative, educated, hard-working people united by the historical and cultural heritage of the princely era in Cherkasy region, self-sufficient and economically developed, with a high level of infrastructure and social standards, environmentally friendly. A community that is comfortable for living, doing business, tourist recreation, and health-related activities
Nedryhailivska	Town	As safe as possible community for living; focused on self-employment of the population; the center for further amalgamation processes in the district; developed cultural and recreational sphere; transformation of the consciousness of guest workers into the consciousness of proprietors and owners; attractive for investments and comfortable for doing business; effective management of local development
Nyzhnioverbizka	Village	A cozy, comfortable territory in Kolomyia region, a significant economic and tourist center of the region; a place where traditions and modernity are intertwined
Novobasanska	Village	A self-sufficient community near Kyiv with developed modern environmentally friendly agricultural production and processing, logistics opportunities, attractive for investments, friendly to small businesses, safe and comfortable for life and recreation, the embodiment of Ukrainian Cossack self-governing traditions of freedom, a healthy, blessed community
Oskilska	Village	A community with a developed infrastructure; efficient rural and industrial economy; tourism sector; a decent standard of living of the population
Pavlivska	Village	An example of a modern Ukrainian community with its rich historical and cultural heritage, picturesque nature, educated people and economy based on organic production
Pechenizhynska	Town	An economically successful, environmentally friendly and comfortable territory in the picturesque part of the Prykarpattia region, an important tourist and cultural center of the region
Piskivska	Town	The community in Kyiv Polissia of European standard of living, a local resort, a cultural, artistic, and sporting center, with a developed economy and infrastructure, high-quality and meaningful leisure activities
Pishchanska	Village	A close-knit, self-sufficient community where caring for the neighbor and the natural environment is a reality and everyone has opportunities for self-realization, where the infrastructure meets the needs of residents and guests, serves for development, and invites new residents, tourists, and entrepreneurs. Healthy and happy people live here!
Rohanska	Town	Sustainable from the point of view of ecology and industry, a unique place for living, education and recreation of active residents and localization of suburban economic activity. The community works closely with the National Agrarian University named after Dokuchaiev for the development of a modern centre of the agricultural and food industry
Rudkivska	Town	A community with a developed business, where conditions are created for the development of farming, industrial production, alternative energy, green and historical tourism. Safe and environmentally friendly territory with high-quality roads, suitable for comfortable living, getting high-quality educational, medical, social, and communal services, with wide opportunities for leisure and recreation. A place where festivals, numerous cultural and sporting events are held
Rukshynska	Village	"The region of gardens over the Dniester" is a cozy ecologically clean territory on the slopes of the Dniester river with the developed infrastructure, recreational areas, blooming gardens, productive agriculture, active entrepreneurs and well-to-do friendly people
Smyzka	Village	The region with ancient forests and clean reservoirs, with a developed woodworking industry, located on the transit highway from northern to southern Europe. Community ... with comfortable conditions for full personal development and a decent life. A community with an effective management system and wide opportunities for partnership between the authority, business, and the public, where the initiative and activity of everyone are cultivated
Smidynska	Village	A community with a developed infrastructure in which conscious, happy people live. The community is self-sufficient and open to everyone. A community with developed small and medium businesses, sufficient human resources, and decent wages

Table A1 (cont.). Strategic visions of the studied communities

Territorial community	Administrative center type	Strategic vision
Sokyrynetska	Village	A capable community with comfortable living, working and recreation conditions for residents and guests, a powerful educational, cultural, and sporting center, and favorable conditions for innovative economic development
Stanislavska	Village	A space of harmony between modernity and tradition; an environmentally friendly, well-organized, comfortable living area on the right bank of the Dnieper-Bug estuary. The community is a well-known centre of green and sports tourism in Ukraine and abroad; small and medium businesses ensure the dynamic development of the local economy, which is based on high-value-added agriculture, fishing and processing industry
Stashynivska	Village	An economically developed, investment-attractive community with a high standard of living, powerful agricultural innovation production, extensive social infrastructure, high level of educational, medical, and social services, security, law and order, developed green and agricultural tourism. A community of sincere and hospitable people, open to investors, comfortable to live in
Shabivska	Village	A unique corner of the Odesa region between the Black Sea estuaries and the coast. It is a wonderful place to live and relax, a picturesque basket of gastronomic delights for its guests from all over the world. Our highlight is green, wine, and gastronomic tourism, guests coming on vacation and for rehabilitation all year round. Our feature is European openness and accuracy for investors, the best conditions for business. Our inspiration is creative people and free lancers
Shalyhynska	Town	A close-knit, self-sufficient community with a high standard of living, medicine, education, and culture, where small businesses, cooperatives are developing, there are green tourism and highly efficient rural production with processing
Shevchenkivska	Village	Cozy place near Mykolaiv, a pearl on the background of the endless southern steppe of Ukraine. The community is a center of high-tech agriculture, trade, a place convenient for residents, friendly to visitors, open to cooperation
Chopovytska	Town	A land of spirituality, crystal springs, clean air, ancient history and magnificent Polissia landscapes. A community of hard-working, talented, and open to cooperation people. The territory of the community is comfortable for living, recreation and doing business with a favorable geographical location, an attractive investment climate and a developed agricultural sector. A leader of the region in the production of natural cosmetics, which is successfully sold in Ukraine and exported to the EU
Iakushynetska	Village	A comfortable, safe place for residents to live with a developed infrastructure and a high level of providing administrative, municipal, educational, cultural, medical, and social services