"Youth views on the role of local government and universities in the development of deoccupied territories"

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NUMBER OF REFERENCES	NUMBER OF FIGURES	NUMBER OF TABLES
78	8	3

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YOUTH VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEOCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Abstract

This study examines young people's perspectives on local government bodies' and universities' roles in revitalizing de-occupied territories. A mixed-methods approach was deployed to examine their roles in returning and retaining young people in these areas. An initial quantitative survey was conducted among 1,180 young individuals from Berdyansk and its district (a temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine), focusing on the prospects of their return after de-occupation. A subsequent "Youth of Berdyansk" forum assembled roughly 300 participants, including university and local government representatives, to further explore youth perceptions. Findings revealed that 52.8% of respondents envision their future in the de-occupied region. Local government bodies and universities were seen as crucial for the region's development and restoration by 92% and 86% of respondents, respectively. Moreover, 69% recognized the potential of partnerships between these institutions to enhance the territories' appeal. Most respondents indicated readiness to participate in creating recovery strategies (41% absolute readiness, 38% with certain guarantees), though views on youth-centric strategies were mixed (80% agreement, 13% disagreement). The study concludes that local government bodies and universities are critical in the territories' recovery and development, necessitating explicit engagement and focusing on young people's needs for effective outcomes.

Keywords	reintegration, universities, governance, youth, de-occupation, cooperation, third mission, fourth mission, war, Ukraine
JEL Classification	R23, I25, I28, J24

INTRODUCTION

In the face of war and its inevitable aftermath, the path to restoration and development is often riddled with numerous challenges. This is particularly true for the war instigated by Russia against Ukraine, which resulted in the occupation of significant territories and loss of human lives (Petryna, 2023; Malyarenko & Kormych, 2023). In such a context, the restoration of de-occupied territories stands as a monumental task, requiring concerted efforts from various sectors of society and necessitating not just structural changes but also the return of the youth who play a pivotal role in the dynamics of the socio-economic rejuvenation of the region. Youth, as the engine of innovation and change, have unique potential in the prospective development of these territories. However, their readiness and ability to return and activate in de-occupied territories require a favorable environment to find their place and realize their potential.

First and foremost, it is essential to recognize that the reintegration of de-occupied territories is a multifaceted process that requires partic-

ipation and interaction from various sectors of society. The central government, volunteers, businesses, and international institutions play critical roles in this context, as they shape the foundation for structural changes and support the return of youth to these territories. However, we should not forget about the local level, which has peculiarities and challenges. This is particularly true regarding the role of local government bodies and universities in this process (Petrushenko et al., 2023). Even though the central government has strategic control and available resources, it is the local government bodies that implement specific initiatives on the ground, taking into account the specifics of local conditions and needs, while universities help to retain youth, serving as a magnet.

In this context, universities and local government bodies can form the foundation for a stable, attractive, and inclusive environment. This justifies the need for understanding how they can collaborate and interact to fully realize their potential in stimulating the return of youth. However, the role of these institutions in restoring de-occupied territories is currently insufficiently studied, especially in the context of youth involvement. This leads to a scientific problem: it is unknown how universities and local government bodies can collaborate to create conditions that facilitate youth involvement. In addition, an important aspect that remains unexplored is how youth perceive the role of local government bodies and universities in the context of de-occupied territories. Uncovering their thoughts and expectations can be vital in formulating more effective and youth-oriented policies and strategies.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Since Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, Ukraine has been in constant war (Sviezhentsev & Kisly, 2023; Galeotti, 2016). The full-scale war in Ukraine has been ongoing for over a year and a half (Götz & Staun, 2022; Mälksoo, 2022). During this time, the country's political landscape has significantly changed. At the beginning of the war, parts or all of the Kharkiv, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions fell under occupation. The hotbeds of active military actions were the Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy regions, and other areas of Ukraine. Occupied territories and territories where active combat actions were or are being conducted encountered numerous problems, the aftermath of which will take many years to overcome (Astrov et al., 2022; D. Chumachenko & T. Chumachenko, 2022; Haque et al., 2022; Bin-Nashwan et al., 2022).

Destruction of healthcare facilities, educational institutions, research institutions, the civil sector, energy, and humanitarian crises, significant population outflow from such territories – these are far from a complete list of new challenges (Gostin & Rubenstein, 2022; Grossi & Vakulenko, 2022; Rodrigues et al., 2022). Constant stress, anxiety, panic attacks, and other mental disorders caused by migration, missile attacks, destruction, loss of loved ones, and other life landmarks are the com-

panions of every Ukrainian (Johnson et al., 2021; Surzykiewicz et al., 2022; Shevlin et al., 2022).

In this context, Ukraine faces the critical task of transforming society by forming community resilience and cohesion. In this understanding, community resilience is associated with the application of long-term recovery plans, active involvement of non-governmental organizations or civil society organizations, and adherence to the principles of social justice (Chandra et al., 2011). Some studies focus on socio-demographic factors in the recovery of affected territories and the role of the community in this process (Goroshit & Eshel, 2013; Korostelina, 2020). Researchers highlight factors such as the size and type of community, age, level of education, etc. For instance, researchers found that residents of large cities mainly rely on personal resources, whereas in small communities, resilience is based on connections within the community (Braun-Lewensohn & Sagy, 2014). The same study emphasizes that community resilience is higher in areas with greater trust in local government and more social support.

Voznyak et al. (2023) examine the role of local self-government bodies in adapting internally displaced persons (IDPs) to host communities during the war in Ukraine. The authors also note that most IDPs perceive the host community only as a place of "waiting" and aim to return to their for-

mer residence. This is often associated with the problematic integration of IDPs into new communities (Niemets et al., 2020; Sakhanienko et al., 2021). In addition, the desire to return home is facilitated by the feeling of belonging to the former community and place of residence and nostalgic reflections on pre-conflict life (Balinchenko, 2021).

In this context, Petryshyn (2023) emphasizes that while active hostilities in Ukraine are still ongoing, one needs to look ahead – to forecast, analyze, and prepare the Ukrainian legal, institutional, and financial systems to deal with the issue of constant population loss by base territorial communities.

Therefore, the issue of returning the population to the de-occupied territories is critical. At the same time, researchers stress that regional development programs for the regions of Ukraine affected by the war need to be more developed (Radzihovska et al., 2023). It is also emphasized that to restore post-conflict territories, it is necessary to actively involve the local population and civil society, with the population's participation in governance being a priority (O'Driscoll, 2018).

As early as 2003, Charles (2003) emphasized that universities play an essential role in regional governance due to their close ties with communities, acting as "regional animators" through representation in external bodies. Universities are now clearly part of local governance systems, and their participation depends on the prevailing issues in the local community's social and economic problems (Diegtiar et al., 2004; Ladychenko et al., 2021; Ostapenko et al., 2023). In addition, the role of universities in territorial development has gone beyond technology transfer (Charles & Benneworth, 2001). Glasson (2003) wrote about the alleged role of universities in local and regional development, noting that this "role extends from direct and indirect impacts on employment and expenditures to influencing the local knowledge economy and to a broader contribution to sustainable development". Goldstein and Renault (2004) also wrote about the contribution of universities to regional development, emphasizing that this contribution is realized in several ways: research, human capital creation through education, technology development and transfer, and joint creation of a conducive environment. Scott

(2006) supported this idea, stressing that universities contribute to developing "creativity" in regions. Indeed, universities play a crucial role in the innovative process of regional development, providing resources to the industry in various forms (Charles & Howells, 1992; Smith, 2004; Cohen et al., 2002; Antonelli & Quéré, 2002; Rutten et al., 2003; Huggins et al., 2020; Heaton et al., 2019). First, universities contribute to the geographic concentration of innovators and facilitate the dissemination of new knowledge among companies in the region that coalesce around them (Audretsch & Feldman, 1998; Breschi & Lissoni, 2001; Melo et al., 2018; Liu, 2023). Secondly, universities supply skilled personnel and attract creative people, creating spill-over effects that enhance the overall level of innovation in the region (Dankbar, 2004; Reichert, 2019; Garcia-Alvarez-Coque et al., 2021).

These studies open a new discourse that emphasizes the third mission of universities, namely, playing an active role in regional development as various forms of civic service (Jongbloed et al., 2008; Laredo, 2007; Donati & Wigren-Kristoferson, 2023; Madichie & Agu, 2023). In this process, universities can play a transformative role, helping the state overcome the aftermath of violent war and build peace at various levels (Petrushenko et al., 2023). Applying their managerial structure, they can create coordinated responses to complex reconstruction challenges (Lopatina, 2023; Peregudova, 2023) and become a powerful tool for attracting youth back to the de-occupied territories.

War has necessitated the temporary relocation of universities to new locations, many of which today exists as a "university without walls" (Suchikova et al., 2023b; Suchikova & Tsybuliak, 2023). Some universities have been relocated for the second time (Porkuian et al., 2023; Zakharova & Prodanova, 2023). In this context, universities have invaluable experience surviving during crises and relocation, making them extraordinarily resilient and adaptable to challenges (Falko & Zhukov, 2023; Suchikova, 2023; Suchikova et al., 2023a). Given this, the positive experience of universities' managerial policies should transition to city reconstruction strategies. A significant challenge for de-occupied cities is image creation and "city branding" (Fomenko, 2023; Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2023; Bukrieieva & Afanasieva, 2022).

Despite the recognized importance of these aspects, contemporary literature seems to lack a comprehensive study of the role of local self-government bodies and universities in the recovery of de-occupied territories, especially from the youth's perspective. The views of young people on returning to these territories, how to make these territories attractive to them, and the cooperation strategies between the university and local government in city reconstruction – all these topics remain largely unexplored in the existing academic discourse.

This article aims to explore the role of local self-government bodies and universities in the development of de-occupied territories from the youth's perspective, particularly regarding the desire to return to these territories, as well as potential tripartite cooperation strategies in the process of rebuilding the region. This goal is supported by the following hypotheses:

H1:   *Youth considers the activity of local self-governments and universities essential for the restoration of de-occupied territories.*

H2:   *Partnerships between universities and local governments can attract youth to de-occupied territories.*

H3:   *Young people desire active participation in the restoration and development of their territories.*

H4:   *Understanding the needs of the youth is critical to their engagement and retention in de-occupied territories.*

2. METHODOLOGY

This article focuses on a specific case: the future vision of reconstruction and development of de-occupied territories using the example of Berdyansk, particularly the Berdyansk territorial community and Berdyansk State Pedagogical University. When writing this article, the city of Berdyansk is still under occupation. However, the experience of de-occupied territories and the role of universities in this process (Spivakovsky, 2023) provide a clear understanding that it is al-

ready necessary to build the foundation for the future development of the city and develop specific policies for the return of youth to the de-occupied cities.

2.1. Instruments and procedure

This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveying with qualitative discussions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research issues. The methodology was rooted in a two-tier strategy: first, a quantitative assessment of young people's perceptions through an online survey (Round 1), followed by an in-depth examination of these perceptions through discussions at the "Youth of Berdyansk" forum (Round 2), which was designed as an interactive debate platform. This approach facilitated the gathering of the youth's perspectives on issues identified in the online survey and engaged them in dialogue with university representatives and local self-governing bodies. With approximately 300 participants, the forum served as an invaluable medium for gathering qualitative data.

Round 1 – Online Survey: The aim here was to amass the perspectives of the youth on the prospects of returning to de-occupied territories. A research team devised a questionnaire comprising 13 questions. The queries spanned demographic inquiries (6 closed questions) to more targeted questions centered on the respondents' subjective perspectives regarding the potential to return to Berdyansk and the Berdyansk region post-de-occupation, and their readiness to rebuild their region (7 semi-open questions – with answer options and the possibility to provide their own, 2 of these questions permitted up to 5 answer choices). The respondents comprised youth from Berdyansk and the Berdyansk region, aged between 14 and 35. This demographic was selected as it represents current and future university students and the youth, the primary focus of local self-governance bodies' youth retention strategies. The distribution of a Google form online resulted in responses from 1,180 young individuals, and the substantial sample size enabled the generalization of results to a broader youth population in de-occupied territories. The results of this survey are presented in sections 4.1 and 4.2 of this article.
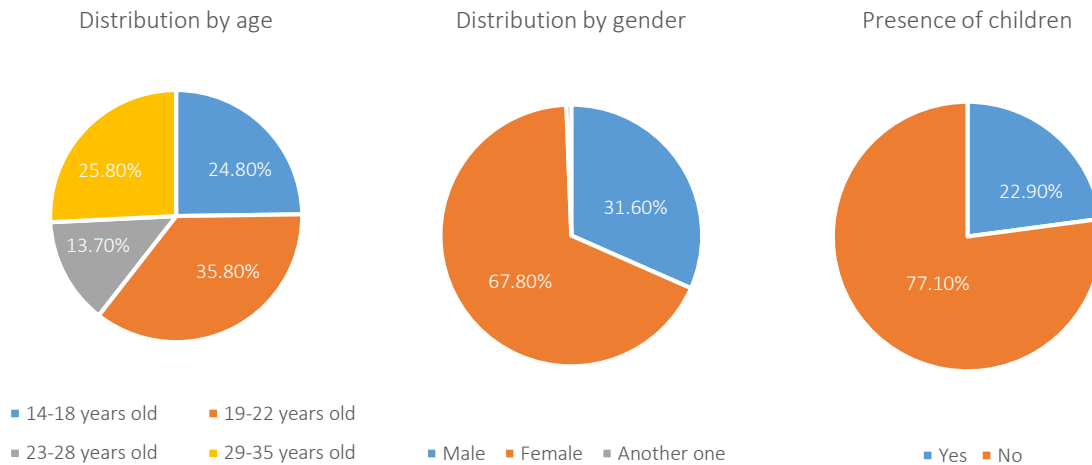
Distribution by age

Distribution by gender

Presence of children

24.80%

35.80%

13.70%

25.80%

■ 14-18 years old   ■ 19-22 years old
■ 23-28 years old   ■ 29-35 years old

31.60%

67.80%

■ Male   ■ Female   ■ Another one

22.90%

77.10%

■ Yes   ■ No

Figure 1. Portrait of respondents

Round 2 – "Youth of Berdyansk" Forum: The objective was to gather the views of the youth of Berdyansk and the Berdyansk region concerning the role of local self-government bodies and universities in the development of de-occupied territories. The forum, organized in a hybrid format (combining online and offline participation), invited representatives from the university leadership and local self-governing bodies. Around 300 participants assembled for the forum. Data collection was facilitated in two ways:

Forum discussions: This approach allowed for open dialogue between participants representing the youth of Berdyansk and the Berdyansk region, university leadership, and local self-governing bodies. Participants could voice their views on the role of local self-governing bodies and universities in developing de-occupied territories. A prepared moderator ensured productive discussions and encouraged all participants to share their viewpoints. All forum discussions were documented, transcribed, and subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Express survey: An express survey was also conducted using the ZOOM platform during the forum. This tool guarantees anonymous responses and rapid feedback collection. The survey focused on discerning participants' attitudes towards issues exceeding the scope of the discussion and incorporated five closed questions associated with the study's hypotheses. The resulting data were compiled and analyzed. The consolidated results of the forum discussions and express survey are presented in section 4.3.

All respondents were informed that participation in the survey and the forum was voluntary. Participants gave consent for data and response processing. All personal data were used only in aggregated form. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Berdyansk State Pedagogical University (protocol No. 06/2023).

2.2. Participants

In the survey (the first stage of the research), 1,180 respondents aged 14 to 35 years participated who lived at the start of the war in Berdyansk and the Berdyansk region or studied in Berdyansk educational institutions. The general portrait of the respondents is presented in Figure 1.

Among those surveyed, 61.7% at the time of the survey were in the territory controlled by Ukraine, 24.2% abroad, and 14.2% in the temporarily occupied territory.

Respondents are representatives of various communities of Berdyansk and the Berdyansk district, with the absolute majority (82.2%) representing the Berdyansk territorial community (Figure 2).

Of the respondents, 60.3% lived permanently in Berdyansk or the Berdyansk district before the full-scale war. Table 1 presents the field of employment of respondents.

During the forum, demographic information about the participants was not collected, as the priority was the safety of all those present. This
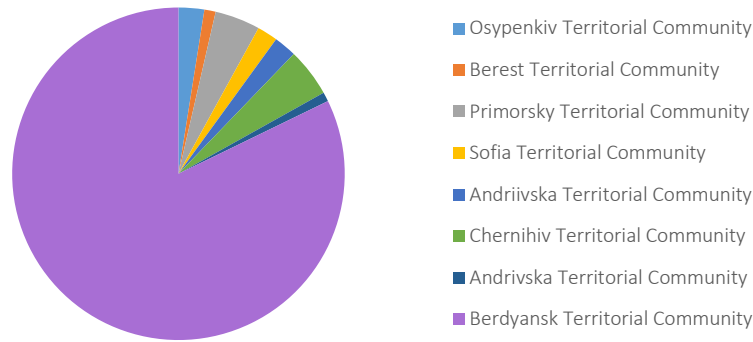
Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by belonging to a territorial community

Table 1. Employment of survey participants

Field of employment	Respondents, %
Studying in an institution of higher education	47.2
Full official employment	18.7
Studying in a general secondary education institution	17.8
Self-employment	6.1
Maternity leave	3.8
Not working or studying	3.3
Studying in a vocational technical institution	2.2
Entrepreneurial activity	1.9

precaution was essential, considering the participants were individuals residing in temporarily occupied territories. In light of the potential risks to their safety, confidentiality was prioritized.

This approach undeniably limited the ability to analyze data in the context of different demographic groups; however, it was seen as a critical compromise to ensure participant safety and trust in the research process. Adherence to principles of ethics and safety was upheld as a primary concern at all stages of information gathering.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Youth perspective on their future

The results of the online survey (Round 1) indicated that among the respondents who are studying in public secondary education institutions, 19.3%

answered that they plan to enter higher and vocational education institutions in Berdyansk, 29.4% – in institutions of other regions, 13.3% – abroad, others have not yet decided or do not want to share their intentions.

In response to the question "Do you see your future in our region after de-occupation?", 52.8% responded positively, 18.8% said they would come but do not plan to live, 4.7% do not associate their future with Berdyansk and Berdyansk district at all, 23.7% have not yet decided on their opinion on this matter (Figure 3).

Table 2 shows the main factors that guide young people when deciding to return or not to return to Berdyansk after de-occupation.

Table 2 shows that the motivations and deterrents for returning to Berdyansk after de-occupation

Table 2. Factors influencing respondents' choices about the prospect of returning to Berdyansk after de-occupation

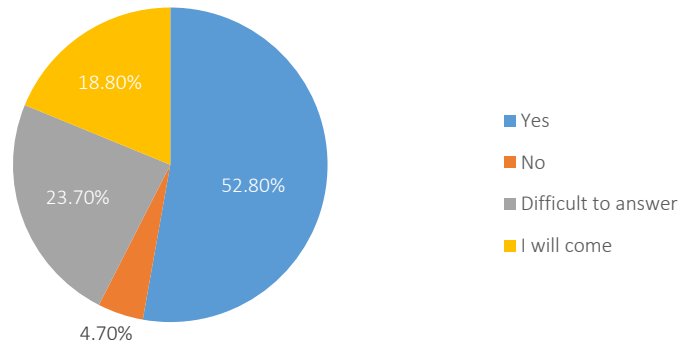| "I want to return home"	"I don't want to return home"
• Desire to live in their hometown; • Desire to develop their hometown; • Self-realization prospects in Berdyansk; • Returning to family and relatives	• Lack of sufficient jobs with decent pay; • Presence of people in the city who supported the occupation authorities; • Fear and sense of danger; • Lack of prospects in Berdyansk

Figure 3. Respondents' answers to the question
"Do you see your future in our region after de-occupation?"

are complex and multifaceted. Individuals who wish to return home often cite emotional ties to the region, family connections, and the desire for self-fulfillment in their hometown. Meanwhile, those who do not wish to return often point to concerns about safety, economic opportunity, and potential societal tensions related to people who supported the occupation authorities.

3.2. Directions for working with youth and post-war construction

The online survey results (Round 1) also provided insight into the youth's vision of necessary efforts for returning and retaining young people in the de-occupied territories. In response to the question "What, in your opinion, are the most important areas of work with youth for the communities of Berdyansk region now?", the majority of respondents (73.9%) said that there should be, first of all, promotion of employment (Figure 4). Furthermore, 70.6% said it is financial and moral support for young people currently in difficult life circumstances. The third most important area was providing housing to youth. That is, the most significant factors in retaining and returning youth

to the de-occupied territories are the financial component and the issue of housing provision.

At the same time, respondents identified significant factors for themselves such as support for talented youth, promotion of a healthy lifestyle, organization of meaningful leisure, and promotion of youth entrepreneurship.

Most of the respondents noted that they consider tourism a priority sector to be developed in Berdyansk (57.3% of the respondents' answers) (Figure 5). Many also highlight such factors necessary for the city's restoration as construction (53%), education (43%), art, sports, and entertainment (42.2%). Youth also paid attention to such essential sectors as entrepreneurship development (37%), ecology (34%), healthcare (30.9%), industry (32%), etc.

For Berdyansk district, respondents identified the following most important sectors for development: agriculture, forestry, and fisheries (43.9%), construction (38.8%), tourism (38.2), education (34.9%), entrepreneurship (32.1%), industry (31.9%), etc. (Figure 6).
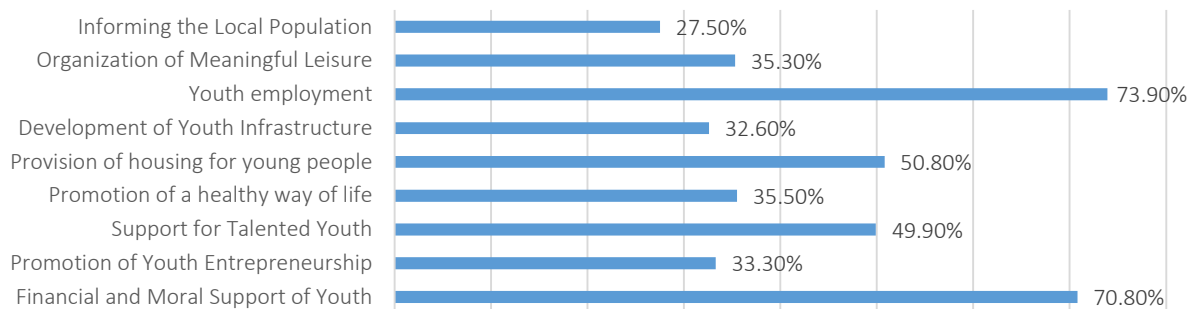

Figure 4. Responses to the question "What, in your opinion, are the most important areas of work with youth for the communities of the Berdyansk region now?"
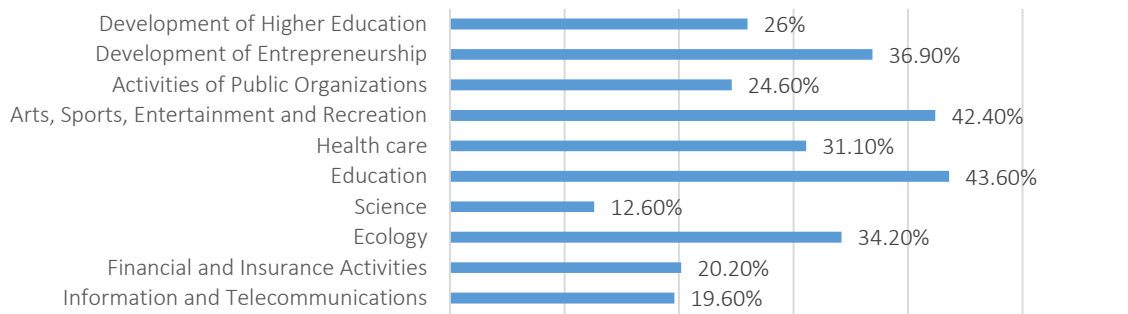
Figure 5. Responses to the question "Given the potential of the city of Berdyansk, which areas of the city, in your opinion, should be developed as a priority after de-occupation?"

From an economic perspective, the youth's focus on sectors such as agriculture, construction, tourism, education, and entrepreneurship resonate with the sectors that can drive economic recovery and growth in the de-occupied territories. For instance, agriculture, forestry, and fisheries can provide jobs, foster food security, and stimulate economic activities. Similarly, construction contributes to infrastructure development, which is vital for economic recovery. Tourism can attract foreign exchange, promote cultural exchange, and also provide jobs. Moreover, education is essential for human capital development, which is the foundation of any long-term economic development strategy.

Meanwhile, the emphasis on entrepreneurship highlights the youth's recognition of its role in stimulating innovation, providing employment, and promoting economic growth. Furthermore, industry is crucial for producing goods for local consumption and export, providing jobs, and contributing to economic growth. The fact that the youth identified these sectors signifies their understanding of their critical roles in economic recovery and development.

The youth's identification of the need for financial support, housing provision, and employment promotion as key areas of focus for local government bodies aligns with the basic principles of economic development, which require the availability of economic resources (financial support), infrastructure (housing), and productive employment.

The survey results and the discussion at the forum also showed that the Berdyansk region and Berdyansk district youth are ready to implement projects aimed at the region's development after the de-occupation. Table 3 shows the main directions of the proposed projects.
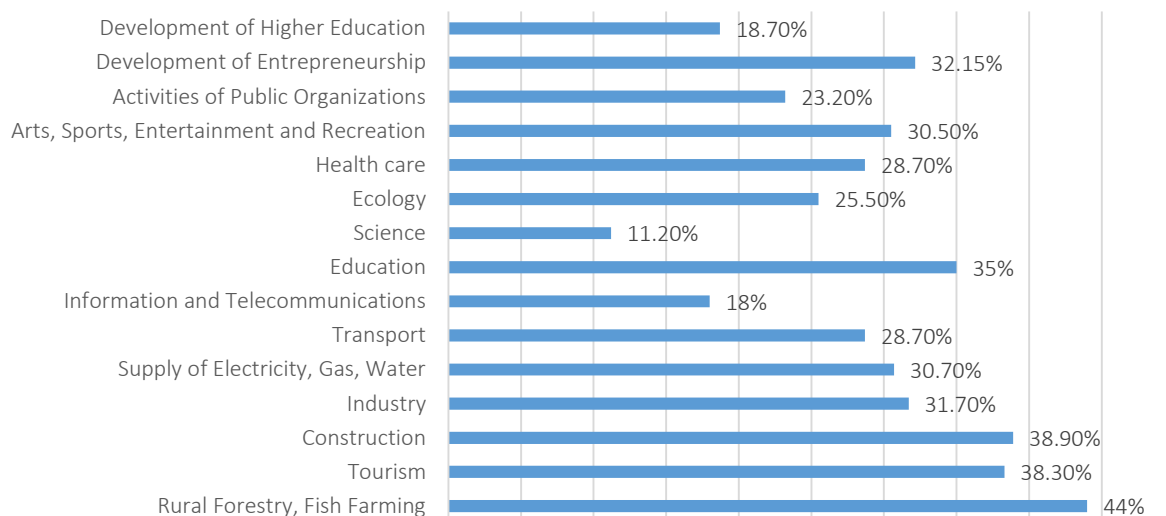

Figure 6. Responses to the question "Considering the potential of Berdyansk district, which sectors, after the de-occupation, in your opinion, need to be developed primarily?"

Table 3. Responses to the question "What project or idea are you ready to implement for the development of Berdyansk region?"

No.	Direction	Sub-directions and specific proposed projects
1	Tourism and Ecology	Hotel business
		Green tourism
		Environmental projects
		Eco parks
		Farms
		Desalination of the Sea of Azov with its subsequent stocking
		Water tourism
2	Education	Advisory support
		Private kindergartens and children's development centers
		Development of military training for youth
3	City for youth	Art clubs
		Arrangement of playgrounds for children and youth
		Renovation of public community locations
		Open platform at the city council every Wednesday
		Free youth space
		Project for reintegration of de-occupied territories
4	City rebranding	Modernization of museums
		Music festivals
		Updated city communication strategy
		Youth locations by interests
		City design code
5	Science and Innovation	IT hub
		Scientific clubs
		"Berdyansk Silicon Valley"
		Repair and restoration of the astronomical observatory
		Youth Science Center
		Business incubators
6	Projects for strengthening national identity, Ukrainization and patriotism	"Easy Ukrainization – healthy nation"
		Gratitude mural
		Volunteer teams and associations
		Youth hub focused on fostering a civic position
		Cultural development and educational activity among the youth of Berdyansk region after the experienced occupation
		Cultural-sporting-patriotic student conventions
		Preservation of historical memory and values
7	Psychological support projects	Psychological rehabilitation for the military and people who stayed in the Joint Forces Operation area
		Public organization for psychological unloading and psycho-emotional support of the population
		"Life Matter" project

3.3. The role of local government bodies and universities in the development of de-occupied territories

It should be noted that during the forum discussion and the rapid survey (Round 2), participants mentioned the utmost need for support from local government bodies and universities to implement development projects (Figure 7). Respondents acknowledged a substantial recognition of the role of local government bodies in the development of de-occupied territories, with 68% considering it "very important", and another 24% considering it "important". Only a tiny minority considered it "unimportant" (1%) or expressed uncertainty (7%). Regarding the role of universities in the same context, 54% of respondents considered it "very important", and 32% "important". Only 3% considered it "unimportant", while 11% were "unsure".

In the opinion of young people, it is precisely the unification of efforts and a shared vision that can ensure synergy in the reconstruction of cities after de-occupation (Figure 8). The potential of a
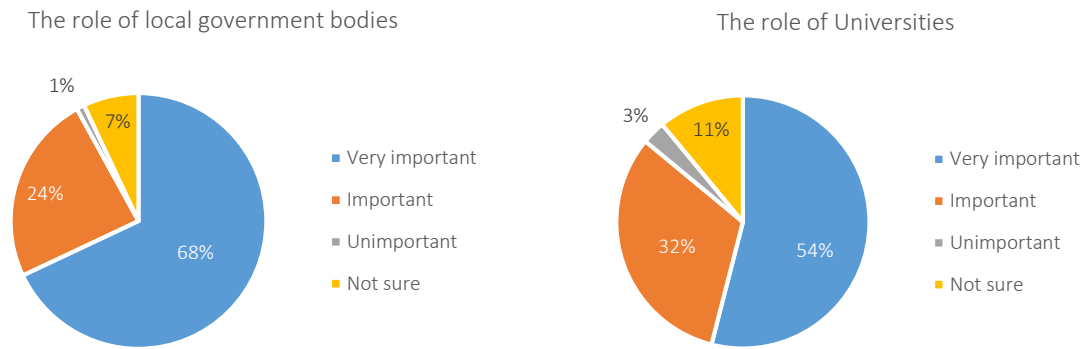
The role of local government bodies

The role of Universities

Figure 7. Respondents' answers to the questions "How do you assess the importance of the role of local government bodies in the development of de-occupied territories?" and "How do you assess the importance of the role of universities in the development of de-occupied territories?"

partnership between universities and local government bodies to enhance the attractiveness of de-occupied territories for young people received broad recognition. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) agreed with this statement, and another 21% partly agreed. However, a considerable minority (19%) disagreed, while 12% expressed uncertainty. Regarding active participation in shaping the recovery strategy of their territories, the majority of respondents (41%) expressed apparent willingness. Another 38% stated they could participate under certain guarantees, but a significant portion (21%) considered it not to concern them. Finally, respondents' opinions were divided as to whether the needs and desires of young people should be critical factors in developing a recovery strategy. While 33% wholly agreed, the majority (47%) partially agreed. A minority disagreed (13%), and 11% were "unsure".

In particular, the forum discussions showed that young people believe in the potential of universities, thanks to their third mission, to significantly contribute to developing de-occupied territories. They highlighted the importance of universities as providers of education and skill training, research and innovation generators, and community engagement facilitators.

In addition, young people expressed hope that local government bodies should play an active role in developing and implementing policies to revive de-occupied territories. They suggested that local authorities focus on improving infrastructure, en-

a)

b)

c)
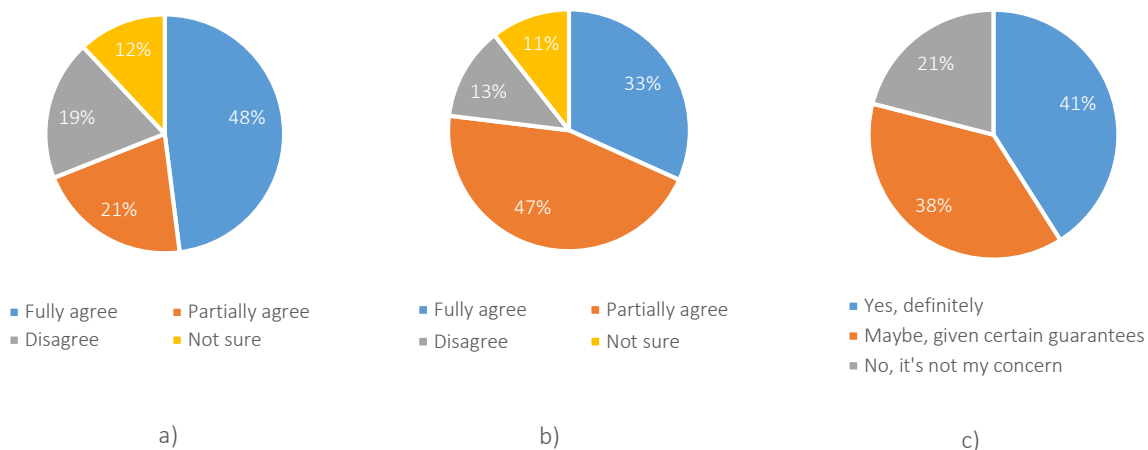
Figure 8. Respondents' answers to the questions during the rapid forum survey: a) "Do you believe that a partnership between universities and local government bodies can make de-occupied territories attractive for young people?"; b) "Do you believe that the needs and desires of young people should be key factors in developing strategies for restoring de-occupied territories?"; c) "Do you wish to actively shape the recovery strategies for your territories?"

suring public safety, providing essential services, and creating employment opportunities.

Similarly, the role of universities was a key point of discussion during the forum. The participants viewed universities as critical institutions for retaining young people in the de-occupied territories. They suggested that universities could contribute to this effort by developing and implementing targeted educational programs, stimulating entrepreneurship, providing employment assistance, and developing business incubators. The youth also emphasized the importance of cooperation between universities, public organizations, and other institutions and stressed universities' need to implement social involvement and support programs. Additionally, the youth suggested that universities should provide sufficient dormitory spaces to accommodate students.

The forum participants also spoke about the role of universities in the reconstruction and development of de-occupied territories. They believed that universities should ensure high-quality education and scientific research, which would contribute to the overall development of these areas. They suggested that universities should support youth employment, implement innovative technologies, and develop infrastructure. The participants also proposed that universities should fulfill their Third Mission, i.e., to serve the community by providing psychological assistance and support programs and engaging and mobilizing the youth community in local initiatives.

Overall, the discussion at the forum provided valuable insights into the youth's views on the role of local government bodies and universities in returning young people to the de-occupied territories and the development of these territories.

The call to youth for a shared vision and collective efforts among universities, local government bodies, and civic associations underscores the importance of social capital for economic recovery and development. Social capital, which includes relationships, networks, and norms that promote collective action, is recognized as a vitally important asset for economic development.

The youth's desire to participate in projects aimed at the post-occupation development of the region, appeals for support to the university, local government, and civic associations, demonstrate readiness to contribute to economic development. Their innovative ideas, combined with knowledge from universities and resources of local government bodies, can create a synergistic effect, leading to efficient economic recovery and development.

The results of the survey and discussions at the forum allow us to draw several important conclusions:

- Berdyansk has significant potential for reconstruction and development;

- the youth are not indifferent but seek attention and respect for themselves;

- the youth are eager to develop a series of projects and thus must be involved in the community life of the territories.

To implement the considerations above, "gradual development" strategies may prove insufficient; instead, a "breakthrough" strategy might be needed. The validity of the hypotheses can be evaluated by considering the conclusions drawn and the results obtained. In light of these results, all four hypotheses find confirmation.

The first hypothesis is supported, which asserts that young people perceive the active involvement of local government bodies and universities as essential for the development and recovery of de-occupied territories. An overwhelming majority of participants (92% for local authorities and 86% for universities) rated these institutions' importance as "Important" or "Very Important", underscoring their recognition of these institutions' crucial role in territorial recovery and development.

The second hypothesis, suggesting an effective partnership between universities and local government bodies could enhance the appeal of de-occupied territories to youth, is also supported. Data shows that 69% of participants either "completely" or "partially agreed" with this proposition, indicating an inclination towards the belief that such collaboration can boost these territories' attractiveness.

The third hypothesis, proposing young people's eagerness to shape their territories' recovery strategies actively, is partially supported. Although 41% of respondents "Definitely" expressed a desire to participate, 38% noted they might participate "given certain guarantees". This indicates that while there's a desire, it may depend on certain conditions or assurances. This hypothesis's nuanced nature suggests that further in-depth qualitative study may be beneficial.

Lastly, the fourth hypothesis, anticipating that understanding the needs and desires of young people is critical in devising effective strategies for their return and retention in de-occupied territories, is predominantly supported. While 80% of participants either "completely agree" or "partially agree" with this statement, 13% disagreed. This discrepancy highlights the potential for further exploration of diverse views on this topic among the youth.

4. DISCUSSION

The intricate post-occupation reconstruction and revitalization of de-occupied territories invite the convergence of diverse societal players and institutions. In particular, universities and local government bodies possess unique capabilities for these areas' socio-economic and infrastructural regeneration. Nevertheless, the critical aspect that demands comprehensive exploration and further research is their role in enticing and retaining youth in these territories.

Universities inherently offer diverse resources and opportunities that could fashion an environment favorable to youth return. Their pivotal roles in knowledge creation, dissemination and their potential to foster innovation and entrepreneurship may create enticing opportunities for the younger demographic. However, this potential is contingent upon a paradigm shift in university governance – surpassing the traditional roles of education and research to embrace the "third mission" of community development and societal engagement (Laredo, 2007; Loi & Di Guardo, 2015).

The "third mission" concept highlights the universities' potential to contribute to the broader community beyond their walls (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020; Trippl et al., 2012). This mission accentuates universities' active role in regional development, social inclusion, and innovation, bringing together resources, expertise, and capacities to foster sustainable development in the broader society (Piirainen et al., 2016; Sánchez-Barrioluengo & Benneworth, 2019).

Expanding upon this, there is an increasing discussion about the "fourth mission" of universities, reflecting an even broader role in tackling complex societal challenges (Boffo & Cocorullo, 2019; Rinaldi et al., 2018). In the context of de-occupied territories, this could translate into universities playing a proactive role in addressing issues such as social cohesion, peacebuilding, and resilience, in addition to their role in economic development.

Therefore, the possibility of universities stepping up to the plate to assume this fourth mission could provide a transformative approach to youth return and retention challenges in de-occupied territories. It might mean a shift in the institutional paradigm and engagement modes, driving universities to become active agents of change, promoting sustainable development, and fostering an environment conducive to youth reintegration and retention.

On the other hand, local government bodies are pivotal in formulating policies and programs aligning with youth's needs and aspirations. Their efforts can include strategies to facilitate quality of life and expand opportunities, such as creating employment, providing affordable housing, and ensuring access to quality education and healthcare. However, the success of these endeavors relies heavily on a profound comprehension of the local context and an ability to involve young people in decision-making processes.

The collaboration between these two institutions could catalyze a more sustainable return of youth to de-occupied territories. Yet, this synergy necessitates an integrated approach to collaboration, which requires a shift from traditional operational modes towards a more cooperative and collective model. This transformation is not without complexities. It raises several intricate questions that warrant further empirical research.

Drawing from literary sources (Kretz & Sá, 2013; Öhrström et al., 2018; Cocorullo, 2017; Akolgo-Azupogo et al., 2018), the significance of the fourth mission in this context becomes even more pronounced. The direct involvement of universities in solving complex societal problems, such as the return and retention of youth in de-occupied territories, represents an essential evolution in their societal role. However, the effective operationalization of this mission is still an area of ongoing research and debate. The unique challenges and opportunities the de-occupied territories present offer a compelling context for further exploring these issues.

Exploring this subject presents an opportunity to contribute to a growing body of literature on the evolving role of universities in society. It has practical implications for policy-making and practice in post-occupation reconstruction and development. As such, future research should aim to develop a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics and propose practical strategies for implementing the fourth mission in de-occupied territories.

In addition, while this discussion has focused on the potential benefits of such collaboration, it is also necessary to consider possible risks. For instance, could such an approach have unforeseen consequences, such as exacerbating inequality or creating dependency? Could this lead to the politicization of universities, undermining their academic freedom and integrity? These are critical considerations that must be considered in any such endeavor.

The results of this study underscore the perceived importance of universities and local government bodies in the recovery of de-occupied territories from a youth perspective. The data suggests that young people see universities, through their third and fourth missions, as potentially powerful agents of change in these regions. Universities can contribute through their traditional role in education and research and their ability to engage with the broader community.

At the same time, young people expect local government to play a decisive role in these efforts. They consider local government bodies responsible for creating an environment to facilitate the return and retention of young people in the de-occupied territories. This includes providing essential services and security and creating opportunities for employment and societal participation.

Interestingly, young people do not perceive universities and local government bodies as separate spheres of activity. Instead, they envision a scenario where these two entities synergize to recover the de-occupied territories. This indicates the need for more coordinated strategies that leverage universities' and local government bodies' unique strengths and capabilities.

However, it is essential to note that these results reflect the views of young people and may not necessarily align with the opinions of other stakeholder groups. Therefore, further research is needed to explore these issues from broader perspectives. Nevertheless, the results of this study provide valuable insights that can inform policy and strategy development in the context of de-occupied territories. Hopefully, this discussion will stimulate further debate and research on this critical topic, contributing to more effective, resilient efforts to recover and develop de-occupied territories.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to uncover the youth's perception of the roles of local self-governance bodies and universities in developing and recovering de-occupied territories.

The findings demonstrate a clear consensus among the youth regarding the critical roles that local authorities and universities play in restoring and developing de-occupied territories. A significant majority attribute high importance to these institutions, highlighting their significance in facilitating regional recovery. Moreover, effective partnerships between universities and local government bodies were pivotal in making de-occupied territories attractive to the youth.

Additionally, the study reveals an emerging desire among young individuals to participate in recovery strategies actively, although the need for certain guarantees tempers this. This finding suggests that while the youth want to be involved in the process, their engagement is contingent upon providing supportive frameworks and assurances.

Lastly, the study underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of the youth's aspirations and requirements. This understanding was crucial in devising effective strategies to encourage young people's return and long-term settlement in de-occupied territories.

The study has underscored the growing role of universities and local governance in post-conflict zones, particularly from a youth perspective. This topic has both practical and academic relevance, potentially contributing to developing effective, youth-inclusive strategies for these regions and furthering discourse on youth participation and the role of education in transitional territories.

It should be noted that this study, while valuable, has several limitations to consider. First, potential sample bias could exist as participants self-selected, resulting in an overrepresentation of strong opinions. Second, focusing on individuals aged 14-35 may have excluded essential perspectives from younger and older demographics. Geographical restrictions also limited the study, as not all youth in the territory could access the survey or participate in the forum. Furthermore, the depth of discussion might have been affected by the public setting of the forum, potentially inhibiting some participants from sharing freely. Future research should aim to overcome these limitations, though this study serves as an essential initial exploration of the topic.

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