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PROBLEMS OF RURAL AREAS DEVELOPMENT IN UKRAINE IN THE CONTEXT OF CLOSING-DOWN RURAL SCHOOLS: INFORMATION SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

In Ukraine, since 2014, the reform of power decentralization has been underway. Therefore, the basic goal of the decentralization reform was to change the governance model, which would contribute to the formation of the territorial communities capacity. In ensuring the capacity of local communities, one of the priority means is the ability to ensure the appropriate level of public services, in particular in the field of education, independently or through relevant local governments. However, in the field of education in recent years there has been a negative trend – the large-scale liquidation of schools in rural areas of Ukraine.

Large-scale closing-down of schools in rural areas of Ukraine in recent years has been largely accompanied by a distorted understanding of decentralization reform. There is a tangle of problems in the issue of liquidation of rural schools: at the local, national and information security levels.

At the local level, it is easier for local authorities that have emerged as a result of the decentralization reform to close rural schools than to think about where to get funding for them. At the national level, the problem of liquidation of rural schools is due to the fact that the inept formula of the state education subvention that currently exists is one of the reasons for the inability of communities to maintain schools.

At the information security level, the authorities were faced with the task of operatively forming mechanisms to counteract the destructive information manipulative influences that were directed against the decentralization reform. A balanced information policy on the problem of liquidation of schools in rural areas can prevent the spread of panic in society.

The issue of closing schools is painful for rural communities in Ukraine. Therefore, it should be carefully discussed at public hearings. Successful development of the territory is possible if there is a partnership between the government and the community.

Keywords: decentralization, schools, informational security, power, rural areas, Ukraine.

Introduction. In Ukraine, since 2014, the reform of power decentralization has been underway. This reform is aimed primarily at creating conditions for sustainable rural development.

Rural areas have undergone destructive changes because of excessive power centralization inherited by Ukraine's political system from the former Soviet Union. Therefore, the basic goal of the decentralization reform was to change the governance model, which would contribute to the formation of the territorial communities capacity. In ensuring the capacity of local communities, one of the priority means is the ability to ensure the appropriate level of public services, in particular in the field of education, independently or through relevant local governments¹.

¹ *Постанова Про затвердження методики формування спроможних територіальних громад, 2015* (Кабінет Міністрів України) *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України* <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/214-2015-%D0%BF#n10>> (2022, February, 21).

However, in the field of education in recent years there has been a negative trend – the large-scale liquidation of schools in rural areas of Ukraine. Of course, the problem of liquidation of schools in rural areas is also related to the demographic factor, and not only in Ukraine. But in Ukraine, the process of liquidation of schools in rural areas in recent years has often been accompanied by a distorted understanding of the reform of power decentralization, both among residents and among government officials.

Problems with the schools shuttering in rural areas have the potential to lead to political instability, especially in the eastern regions of Ukraine. After all, hostilities caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation have been going on in eastern Ukraine since 2014. All sorts of troubles in the political field of Ukraine are used by Russian propaganda to split society, in particular, in border and frontline areas. Thus, the «National Security Strategy of Ukraine» states that the Russian Federation, continuing the hybrid war, systematically uses political, economic, information and psychological means in Ukraine¹.

Accordingly, in the context of decentralization educational policy should be well-balanced and aimed at ensuring the national interests of Ukraine, especially in the field of information security of the state.

The issue of closing schools is painful for rural communities in Ukraine. Successful development of the territory is possible if there is a partnership between the government and the community. Therefore, the subject and direction of the study was determined by a need for coordinated work of the Ukrainian authorities in the field of educational policy, in particular, in rural areas, in order to avoid social upheaval in society.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study were general scientific methods of cognition as to the problems of rural development, in particular, methods of analysis and synthesis, abstraction and concretization, etc. In addition, research methods based on the principles of systems and structural-functional analysis were used.

The site «Decentralization provides opportunities»² and the regulatory framework for decentralization were analyzed to determine the priorities of decentralization reform in Ukraine and the new administrative-territorial structure³.

The information-analytical collection «Education in Independent Ukraine: Development and Competitiveness», published by the Ministry of Education and Science 2021, was used to find and analyse statistical information on the dynamics of the number of schools in Ukraine by type of area (in rural and urban areas), on the number of students in rural schools⁴.

The principles of formation of the state educational subvention in Ukraine (Budget Code of Ukraine) were considered⁵.

The regulatory framework of Ukraine has become a methodological basis for identifying information and security context in school shuttering in rural areas of Ukraine (in particular, the Law of Ukraine «On National Security of Ukraine»⁶, «National Security Strategy of Ukraine»⁷).

Thus, **the main purpose** of the article is to analyze the problems of development of rural areas of Ukraine in the context of liquidation of rural schools (information security).

The main text. The reform of power decentralization has led to a change in the administrative-territorial structure of Ukraine. Issues of problematic issues coordination still arise at different levels: legislative, institutional, financial, educational, etc. In fact, decentralization reform started in Ukraine after the adoption of the Law of Ukraine «On Voluntary Association of Territorial Communities» in 2015⁸. As of February 2022, 626 rural territorial communities have been formed in Ukraine (Table 1).

¹ *Стратегія національної безпеки України, 2020* (Верховна Рада України). *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України* <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/392/2020#Text>> (2022, February, 21).

² *Децентралізація дає можливість* (2022). *Головна сторінка* <<https://decentralization.gov.ua/>> (2022, February, 21).

³ *Закон України Про добровільне об'єднання територіальних громад, 2015* (Верховна Рада України). *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України* <<http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/157-19>> (2022, February, 21).

⁴ *Інформаційно-аналітичний збірник* (2021). *Освіта в незалежній Україні: розвиток та конкурентоспроможність. Міністерство освіти і науки України.* <<https://mon.gov.ua/storage/app/media/zagalna%20serednya/serpneva-konferencia/2021/19.08/Inform.zbirnyk-Osv.v.nezalezhniy.Ukrayini/Inform.zbirnyk-Osv.v.nezalezhniy.Ukrayini.17.08-1.pdf>> (2022, February, 21).

⁵ *Бюджетний кодекс України, 2018* (Верховна Рада України). *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України* <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2456-17#Text>> (2022, February, 21).

⁶ *Закон України Про національну безпеку України, 2018* (Верховна Рада України). *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України* <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2469-19#Text>> (2022, February, 21).

⁷ *Закон України Про Стратегію національної безпеки України, 2020* (Верховна Рада України). *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України* <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/392/2020#Text>> (2022, February, 21).

⁸ *Закон України Про добровільне об'єднання територіальних громад, 2015* (Верховна Рада України). *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України* <<http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/157-19>> (2022, February, 21).

Table 1

Number of territorial communities in Ukraine as of February 2022

	Number of territorial communities	Population	Number of settlements	Area, km ²
Rural territorial communities	626	4904877	8434	172857.0
Settlement territorial communities	432	6063510	9889	203111.0
Urban territorial communities	381	27154168	9510	177850.0

Source: *Decentralisation*¹

Creating comfortable living conditions for rural residents, forming effective local self-government on the ground are the basic priorities of the decentralization reform in Ukraine. Indeed, there are many examples of successful decentralization practices in Ukraine that have contributed to significant changes in various spheres of socio-economic life in rural areas.

At the same time, the lack of information about the benefits of decentralization reform on the ground sometimes leads to some sabotage by both rural residents and individual officials.

The issue of school liquidation has become a litmus test for identifying problematic points in the implementation of decentralization reform in Ukraine. This problem is also due to the demographic factor, when in recent years the population is declining in both rural and urban areas of Ukraine.

The number of students studying in Ukrainian schools decreased by 40.9% in 2021 compared to 1991, when Ukraine gained independence (Figure 1).

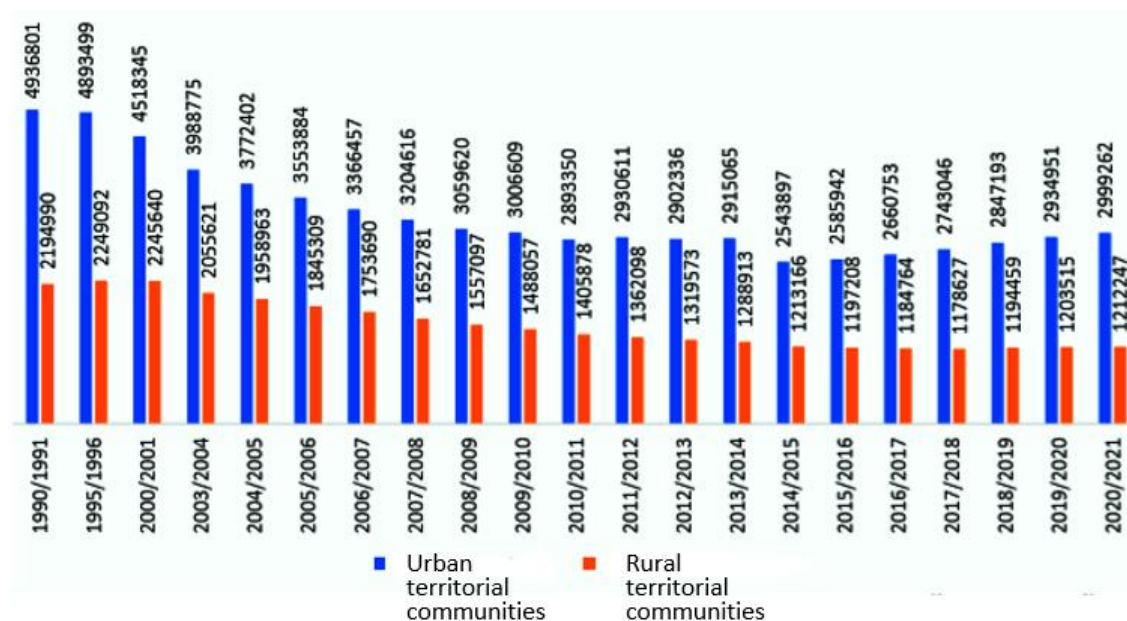


Fig. 1. Dynamics of the number of students in general secondary education institutions by type of area during 1991-2021, persons

Source: *Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine*²

¹ Децентралізація (2022). Головна сторінка <<https://decentralization.gov.ua/>> (2022, February, 21).

² Міністерство освіти і науки України (2021). *Освіта в незалежній Україні: розвиток та конкурентоспроможність. Інформаційно-аналітичний збірник*, 61 <<https://mon.gov.ua/storage/app/media/zagalna%20serednya/serpneva-konferencia/2021/19.08/Inform.zbirnyk-Osv.v.nezalezhniy.Ukrayini/Inform.zbirnyk-Osv.v.nezalezhniy.Ukrayini.17.08-1.pdf>> (2022, February, 21).

In 2020/2021 academic year 4 211 509 students studied in secondary schools in Ukraine. In rural areas, the number of students decreased by 44.8%, and in urban areas – by 39.2%. One of the reasons for such negative dynamics was the demographic situation: declining birth rates.

The problem of school closures is also associated with low opportunities for young people living in rural areas to find work. Thus, the employment level of the population of Ukraine in rural areas, unfortunately, is low – 47.3% as of 2021 (Table 2).

Table 2

**The employment level of the population of Ukraine* in rural areas
in 2021 by age groups**

	Thousands, person	Percent of population in respective age group
Total in rural areas	4931,4	47,3
Of them		
aged 15-70	4889,9	54,2
aged 20-64	4787,0	62,8
working age	4651,7	62,6
by age groups		
aged 15-24	383,8	29,1
aged 25-29	553,0	65,4
aged 30-34	702,9	70,9
aged 35-39	629,4	74,1
aged 40-49	1246,8	73,2
aged 50-59	1135,8	66,2
aged 60-70	238,2	14,9
aged 71 and older	41,5	2,9

**Data exclude the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and a part of temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions.*

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine¹

Moreover, mostly young people cannot find work in the villages. And this situation will only get worse due to the school liquidation: young families with children will leave the rural areas of Ukraine en masse.

However, there is an interesting trend that emerged in 2014-2015: in rural areas there was an increase in number of pupils in secondary education institutions by 27.7% (Figure 2). A similar trend was observed for secondary schools in urban areas: the average number of pupils increased by 20.9%.

In general, such processes of increasing the number of pupils in schools are mainly related to the reduction of the secondary schools network.

During the thirty years of Ukraine's independence, the general school network has decreased (Figure 3) by a total of 31.9 %: in rural areas by 38.5 %, and in urban settlements by 16.7 %.

¹ Державна служба статистики України (2022). *Зайнятість населення за статтю, типом місцевості та віковими групами* <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2017/rp/eans/eans_u/arch_znsmv_u.htm> (2022, February, 21).

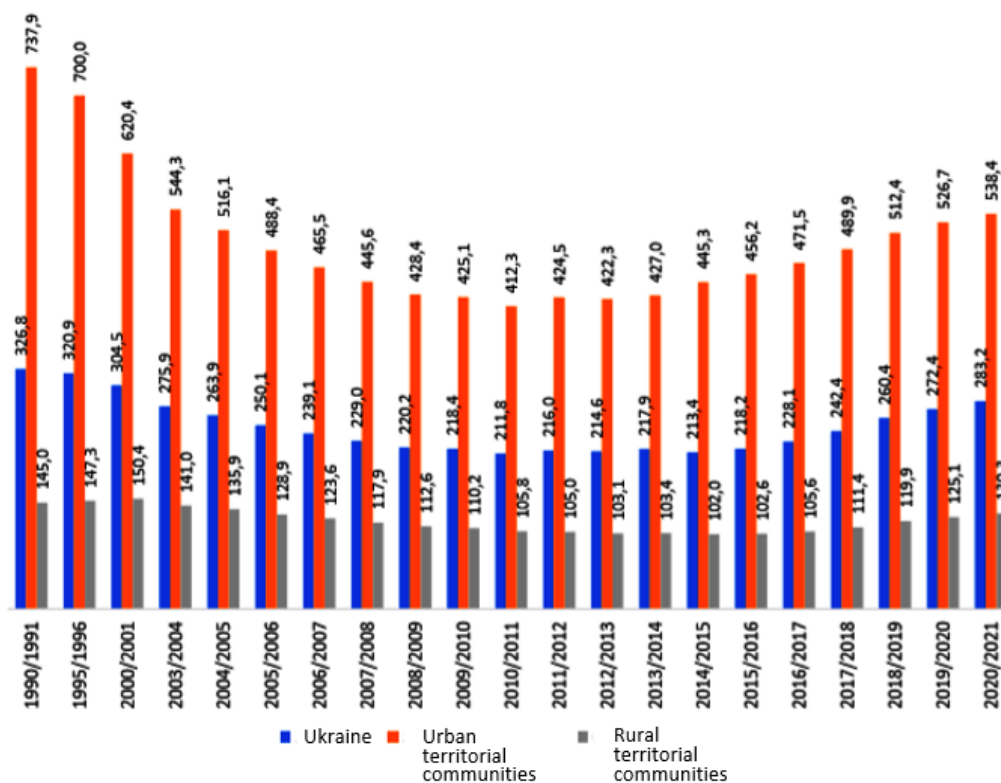


Fig. 2. Dynamics of the average number of pupils in general secondary education institutions in Ukraine by type of area during 1990-2021, persons

Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine¹

It should be noted that such negative dynamics is also related to the disregard of data on schools located in the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories (Crimea, parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions). That is why, starting from 2014, Ukraine has seen a decrease in the number of schools compared to 2013: by 16.3% in urban areas and 4.6% in rural areas.

In addition, decentralization reform is also reducing the number of secondary education institutions, particularly in rural areas.

Moreover, in rural areas the reduction in the number of schools is due to the formation of educational districts and the need to form supporting educational institutions. However, a fairly high percentage of the number of schools that were liquidated in 2021 compared to 2014 in rural areas of Ukraine – 21.8%. During the same period, the number of schools in urban settlements decreased compared to 2014 by only 2.5%².

There is a tangle of problems in the issue of rural schools liquidation: at the local, national and information security levels.

At the local level, it is easier for local authorities that have emerged as a result of the decentralization reform to close rural schools than to think about where to get funding for them. After all, the problem of schools shuttering in rural areas is often associated with a misunderstanding of decentralization reform. People are being told that decentralization is to blame. Decentralization reform has enriched communities. But own funds must be skillfully managed. On the one hand, local government leaders should not become «feudal lords» who manage resources as they please. On the other hand, people must be involved, control the government and constantly demand transparency in common funds spending so that local leaders would not be tempted to become «feudal lords».

¹ Міністерство освіти і науки України (2021). *Освіта в незалежній Україні: розвиток та конкурентоспроможність. Інформаційно-аналітичний збірник*, 62 <<https://mon.gov.ua/storage/app/media/zagalna%20serednya/serpneva-konferencia/2021/19.08/Inform.zbirnyk-Osv.v.nezalezhniy.Ukrayini/Inform.zbirnyk-Osv.v.nezalezhniy.Ukrayini.17.08-1.pdf>> (2022, February, 21).

² Ibid.

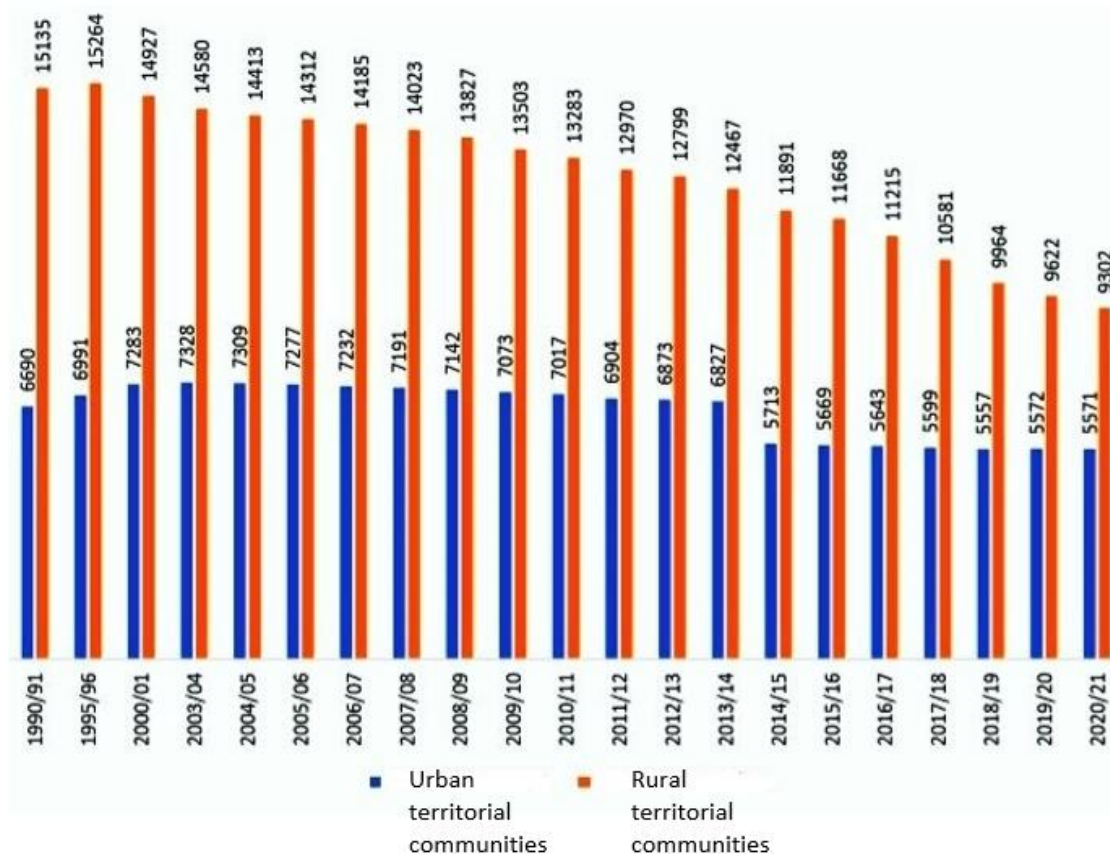


Fig. 3. Dynamics of the number of schools in Ukraine by type of area during 1991-2021, units

Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine¹

The situation in Ukraine is paradoxical: communities have been given money, the budgets of territorial communities have increased. But there are still not enough funds and for some reason they are not enough to maintain schools. Of course, educational institutions are costly, they do not bring profit. But if you include a little bit of strategic thinking and care about the future, it turns out that over time, the village without a school will be depopulated and no one from that village will fill the community budget with taxes. And in the end everyone loses! This is only the financial aspect of the problem. And the fact that the main mission of the school is to form a person, it is impossible to assess from a financial point of view, because knowledge is invaluable.

Successful development of the territory is possible if there is a partnership between the government and the community. Parents can set up parent funds to help with education. But they need to know how much money the local community is allocating for the school. That is, the budget of the rural territorial community should be transparent. Therefore, there is a need of public control over budget expenditures. Because it is worth checking what percentage of the budget goes to the maintenance of administrative staff.

In June 2021, people protested against liquidation of schools in rural areas of Kharkiv region: they blocked the road in Kupyansk district. This road is important, it leads to the fighting zone. When people blocked the road, only military vehicles, rescue vehicles and medical supplies were allowed to pass².

¹ Міністерство освіти і науки України (2021). *Освіта в незалежній Україні: розвиток та конкурентоспроможність. Інформаційно-аналітичний збірник*, 67 <<https://mon.gov.ua/storage/app/media/zagalna%20serednya/serpneva-konferencia/2021/19.08/Inform.zbirnyk-Osv.v.nezalezhniy.Ukrayini/Inform.zbirnyk-Osv.v.nezalezhniy.Ukrayini.17.08-1.pdf>> (2022, February, 21).

² Харківська територіальна організація «Європейська Солідарність» (2021). *Проблема масового закриття шкіл на Харківщині уже спричинила протестні акції на Ізюмщині та Куп'янщині*. <<https://kharkiv.eurosolidarity.org/2021/06/22/problema-masovogo-zakryttya-shkil-na-harkivshhyni-vzhe-sprychynyla-protestni-akcziyi-na-izyumshhyni-ta-kupyanshhyni/>> (2022, February, 21).

Heads of local communities should also understand that measuring children's destiny only by the availability or absence of funding for education is inappropriate. Primary education should be everywhere, in all villages: so that young children can study where they live, because taking a six-year-old to a strange settlement could create a psychological problem for a child.

In this situation, the positions of some heads of rural territorial communities are unpleasantly impressive. They argue that they care primarily about the quality of education, not the lack of finances. That is why, in their opinion, some rural schools should be liquidated. Representatives of the authorities of rural territorial communities also complained that the reason for the liquidation of schools is the lack of teachers who do not want to teach in underpupiled schools.

But it is not the rural authorities that need to worry about the quality of education. This issue should be dealt with by competent people in the field of education. Otherwise, it turns out that then a significant part of schools in Ukraine should be closed due to the low quality of education, if parents still pay out-of-school tutors to prepare their children for future entrance exams to universities. And Ukraine is not a totalitarian country where the government will decide for children where to get education. Children's education is the choice of their parents, not government institutions. Parents decide whether the child is studying in a physics and mathematics lyceum, or in a regular school near their home, or whether he or she is receiving individual education at home. Therefore, in fact, parents decide whether they are satisfied with the quality of education in a particular institution, it is their choice, not the authorities.

In rural areas, according to Article 32 of the Law on Complete General Secondary Education¹, it is the residents of the territorial community who decide on the issue of school liquidation at a public discussion. Moreover, the liquidation of schools in rural areas is allowed only after such a public discussion. But rural residents do not always know this. And there are cases when the authorities simply imitate public discussions: they gather residents and imperatively announce the closure of schools without asking their opinion. There were also situations when local leaders did not even raise the issue of school liquidation during public discussions.

That's why the authorities need to honestly explain to people why schools are being closed, and not to cover up the issues of allegedly low (from the government's point of view) quality of education. Because quite often the question is, indeed, the lack of sufficient funds to maintain schools. But you should decide with your parents what to do in this situation. To do this, we will honestly have to tell where the budget is spent (up to a penny).

And the complaints of the leaders of rural territorial communities about the lack of teachers in schools show a complete misunderstanding of the issue of decentralization. Thanks to decentralization, communities have finally got the money. But we must understand: take the money – take responsibility! That is, communities themselves should start looking for teachers (try to offer them high salaries, favorable conditions, etc.).

In order for community leaders to take responsibility for educational institutions (which do not bring profit, because their function is in another – intangible – plane), it is necessary to think and work actively. But, unfortunately, it turns out that it is much easier to make a decision: «no school – no problem».

Educational institutions are costly everywhere, not only in Ukraine. People should be told what exactly is the most expensive. If it's heating costs (which is what everyone is talking about), then the local government should offer an alternative, and not immediately decide to close the school. We are already living in the XXI century and the alternative is clear: it is worth trying to invest once in the school, insulate it and equip it with solar panels. And the problem will be solved. Yes, it's hard! But it is an investment in the future. Moreover, if primary schools remain in the villages and older children are transported to other schools, the heating problem will still not disappear.

It is clear that educational institutions do not bring profits and the easiest way for the authorities to patch holes in the budget is to close schools. But this is the way to nowhere! And we must always compromise (both the government and the community) and look for opportunities to preserve rural schools. The search for compromise is always a two-way street that involves mutual concessions. Therefore, there should be a partnership at the government-community level to work together to find solutions.

Authorities often find it difficult to convince people on the ground of the decentralization benefits. Without the initiative «from below» (from individual active members of the community), no government will succeed, because the coercive orders imposed «from above» will sooner or later fail. Decentralization is just

¹ Закон Про повну загальну середню освіту, 2021 (Верховна Рада України). Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/463-20#Text>> (2022, February, 21).

a tool: if the community uses it effectively, the level of life comfort of ordinary people is growing rapidly. But at the same time, the level of local authorities responsibility at the level of the territorial community should increase significantly. Unfortunately, not everyone is ready to take responsibility. Moreover, there are cases when village heads and village councils sabotage the decentralization reform in some way, realizing that under the new conditions it will be necessary to work much more efficiently and responsibly.

That is, in the line of «government-community» interaction, there should be two-way movement: the government should explain the benefits of decentralization, and the community should nominate active initiative people who are able to learn new things, able to take responsibility for others.

In general, the benefits of decentralization reform should be explained. It is necessary to explain to everyone: both citizens and community leaders. Unfortunately, this work is not carried out systematically.

At the national level, the problem of liquidation of rural schools is due to the fact that the inept formula of the currently existing state education subvention causes the inability of communities to maintain schools.

The educational subvention is an additional subsidy aimed at the implementation of expenditures transferred from the state budget for the maintenance of educational institutions. Provisions on the direction of the educational subvention are prescribed in Part 1 of Article 103 of the Budget Code of Ukraine¹.

Regarding the problem of liquidation of schools in rural areas, it is necessary for representatives of rural authorities to appeal to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to change the formula of the state educational subvention. Similar appeals have already been made by representatives of Ukrainian Cities Association².

After all, the formula of the educational subvention has been poorly written: due to certain coefficients in this formula, rural areas receive less money than urban ones. And in this context community leadership could be understood, because funding is insufficient. But the way out cannot be the mass closure of schools. It would be worthwhile for the leaders of rural territorial communities to propose to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to update the formula of the state educational subvention in order to try to preserve educational institutions. Because over time, the formula will change, but schools in rural areas will not be able to restore.

At the information security level, the authorities were faced with the task of operatively forming mechanisms to counteract the destructive information and manipulative influences that were directed against the power decentralization reform. The «National Security Strategy of Ukraine» states that “the lack of a holistic information policy of the state, the weakness of the system of strategic communications complicate the neutralization” of destructive propaganda, which aims to incite hostility in society³.

By information security we mean «the state of protection of vital interests of the individual, society and the state, which minimizes damage due to incompleteness, timeliness and inaccuracy of information, negative information impact, negative consequences of information technology and unauthorized dissemination of information»⁴.

The conceptualization of information security should take into account two interrelated contexts in the understanding of this concept. On the one hand, information security involves providing comprehensive and high-quality information to citizens, free public access to various sources of information. On the other hand, information security is subject to strict control functions over the non-dissemination of misinformation. In this context, information security is designed to promote the integrity of society, preserve information sovereignty, counteract negative information and psychological influences and protect the national information space from information wars and manipulation⁵.

In the information sphere, threats to Ukraine’s national security include: restricting citizens’ access to information; distortion or tendentious coverage of information, ignoring important information for society, distortion, omission and blocking of information; unauthorized dissemination of certain information; misinformation; destructive information intrusion into the national information space, etc.⁶.

¹ *Бюджетний кодекс України, 2018* (Верховна Рада України). *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України* <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2456-17#Text>> (2022, February, 21).

² Освіта (2021). *Освітня субвенція потребує перегляду* <<https://auc.org.ua/novyna/osvitnya-subvenciya-potrebuye-pereglyadu-amu-zvernulasya-do-premyer-ministra-ukrayiny>> (2022, February, 21).

³ *Стратегія національної безпеки України, 2020* (Верховна Рада України). *Офіційний сайт Верховної Ради України* <<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/392/2020#Text>> (2022, February, 21).

⁴ Ільницька, У. (2016). Інформаційна безпека України: сучасні виклики, загрози та механізми протидії негативним інформаційно-психологічним впливам. *Гуманітарний вісник*, 2 (1), 28.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 30.

Counteracting the manipulation of public consciousness and the dissemination of distorted information, the formation of a clear coordinated information policy of the authorities are the main priorities of information security of Ukraine.

However, the situation with the liquidation of rural schools shows that these priorities remain largely declarative. After all, people are misled by explanations that liquidation of schools in rural areas has been allegedly caused by decentralization.

In addition to the above, the shortcomings of the regulatory framework of Ukraine also lead to low efficiency of coordination of various government institutions in combating information and security threats to the issue of rural schools liquidation.

Despite the already long process of decentralization reform in Ukraine, there is a lack of understanding on the ground of the benefits that this reform can provide to rural residents. One of the key factors in this situation is the extremely low level of communication between the authorities and citizens, in particular regarding the problem of school liquidation in rural areas of Ukraine.

In general, a well-balanced information policy on school shut-down in rural areas can prevent the spread of panic in society.

Conclusions. The reform of decentralization of power has led to a change in the administrative-territorial structure in Ukraine. Issues of coordination of problematic issues still arise at different levels: legislative, institutional, financial, educational, etc.

Rural areas had undergone destructive changes in the face of excessive centralization of power inherited by Ukraine's political system from the former Soviet Union. Therefore, the basic goal of the decentralization reform was to change the governance model, which would contribute to the formation of the capacity of territorial communities. One of the priority means of ensuring the capacity of rural territorial communities is the ability to provide an appropriate level of service independently, in particular in the field of education.

However, it is in the field of education that negative trends have been observed in recent years: large-scale liquidation of schools in rural areas of Ukraine. Moreover, the process of liquidation of schools in rural areas was mostly accompanied by a distorted understanding of the decentralization reform.

Problems with the schools shut-down in rural areas have the potential to lead to political instability, especially in the eastern regions of Ukraine. After all, hostilities caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation have been going on in eastern Ukraine since 2014.

There is a tangle of problems in the liquidation of rural schools at three levels: local, national and information security.

At the local level, it is easier for local authorities that have emerged as a result of the decentralization reform to close rural schools than to think about where to get funding for them. After all, the problem of schools liquidation in rural areas is often associated with a complete misunderstanding of decentralization reform. People are being told that decentralization is to blame, although decentralization reform has enriched communities. But own funds must be skillfully managed. On the one hand, local government leaders should not become a kind of «feudal lords» who manage resources as they please. On the other hand, the inhabitants of rural areas must be involved, control the government and constantly demand transparency in the spending of common funds, so that community leaders do not have a temptation to become «feudal lords».

At the national level, the problem of rural schools liquidation is due to the fact that the inept formula of currently existing state education subvention causes inability of communities to maintain schools. After all, the formula of the educational subvention is spelled out in such a way that due to certain coefficients in this formula, rural areas receive less money than urban ones. And in this context the leadership of rural communities could be understood, because there is not enough funding to maintain schools. But the way out cannot be the mass school shut-down. It would be worthwhile for the leaders of rural territorial communities to propose to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine to update the formula of the state educational subvention in order to try to preserve educational institutions. Because over time, the formula will change, but schools in rural areas will not be able to restore.

At the information and security level, the authorities were faced with the task of operatively forming mechanisms to counteract the destructive information and manipulative influences that were directed against the reform of power decentralization. A balanced information policy on the problem of liquidation of schools in rural areas can prevent the spread of panic in society. Educational policy in the context of decentralization should be aimed at ensuring the national interests of Ukraine, especially in the field of information security of the state.

The issue of closing schools is painful for rural communities in Ukraine. Therefore, it should be carefully considered at public discussions. Successful development of the territory is possible if there is a partnership between the government and the community. In general, the benefits of decentralization reform should be explained. It is necessary to explain to everyone: both citizens and community leaders. Unfortunately, this work is not carried out systematically.

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