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POPULATION PERCEPTION OF DECENTRALIZATION PROCESSES IN UKRAINE. THE CASE OF KELMENETSKA AND LIVYNETSKA COMMUNITIES

The ratification by Ukraine of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1997, and the subsequent creation of the Concept of Reforming Local Self-Government and Territorial Organization of Power in 2014 marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of our state, one of the most important tasks of which was the creation of capable, self-sufficient communities. Therefore, the importance of researching the attitudes of the community population, their perception of the changes that have taken place, ideas and expectations from the reform is unquestionable and necessary at all stages of decentralization and after its implementation.

The paper presents the results of a study of the awareness and perception of residents of Kelmenetska and Livynetska territorial communities regarding certain aspects of decentralization processes. The survey involved 630 respondents, and their answers were analyzed according to their gender, age, level of education and the size of the settlements in which they live.

The paper analyzes people's feelings about the changes due to the reform of local self-government and territorial organization of power, and how exactly their lives changed after such changes. The level of awareness of the changes in the administrative-territorial structure of the region that occurred as a result of the consolidation of districts in Chernivtsi region and the formation of united territorial communities, including Kelmenetska and Livynetska within the former Kelmenetskyi district, whose residents are the respondents themselves, was determined, and their relationship was analyzed in relation to such division. The level of respondents' willingness to take direct part in the development of their territorial community was determined.

As a result of the conducted research, it was discovered, that the residents of Kelmenetska and Livynetska communities have a high level of awareness of the administrative and territorial changes to which the reform has led. A significant number of the population did not feel the effect of bringing the authorities closer to the people and transferring budgets to the localities. On the other hand, residents of the studied communities show a significant level of social awareness and have a high level of readiness to participate in the development of their own community.

Keywords: community, territorial community, decentralization, reform of local self-government and territorial organization of power.

Relevance of research. The reform of local self-government and territorial organization of power created prerequisites for qualitatively new directions of development of territories and society. Expanded powers and opportunities received by the local self-government bodies of the newly formed units of the basic level – territorial communities – are one of the main results of decentralization, which are designed, among other things, to create significant opportunities and improve the quality of life of local residents. In this sense, the internal perception of changes by the population itself is an extremely important factor in the success of the reform, because only full awareness, understanding and readiness for personal direct participation in the development of one's own administrative and territorial units can form the optimal consolidation necessary for the formation of truly self-sufficient territorial communities.

Analysis of the recent research and publications. The study of people's attitudes to the process and results of decentralization is an important element in ensuring the success of this reform because of the feedback from society, which in this case makes it possible to understand whether some form of measures undertaken are successful, and accordingly, to shape further direction of development. In 2015 the Council of Europe, in cooperation with Ukrainian partners, initiated a series of annual sociological studies among the population of Ukraine on the reform of local self-government and decentralization (*Decentralization, 2020*), in which experts in the field of local self-government and the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine participate. The first wave of the all-Ukrainian sociological study "Decentralization and reform of local self-government" commissioned by the Council of Europe Program "Decentralization and reform of public administration in Ukraine" (*Kyiv International Institute of*

Sociology, 2021) was conducted in September-October 2015, the second one – in October-December 2016, the third one – in October-December 2017, the fourth one – in November-December 2018, the fifth one – in August-September 2020 (*Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2021*) and the sixth one – in October-November 2021 (*Decentralization. 63 %..., 2021*).

Over the years, social and political opinions of adult population of Ukraine were studied from these surveys, and at the same time residents of UTC, who went through the process of unification in 2015-2018 (*Decentralization, 2020*), were interviewed on their level of interest in politics, the assessment of certain aspects of local self-government reform and establishment of united territorial communities, the perception of the state of affairs in the community and the war in eastern Ukraine, the Covid-19 pandemic, etc.

A series of surveys on the public opinion on the reform of decentralization and its results was also conducted by Democratic Initiatives Foundation and Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in August 2016, June 2017 and August 2018. And in 2020 the research was carried out in cooperation with the sociological service of the Razumkov Center in all the regions of Ukraine, except Crimea and the occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions (*Democratic initiatives, 2020*). An objective assessment of the implemented reforms is a natural result of a strategic vision of the situation, and monitoring of the dynamics of community development in the context of new, both internal and external challenges in modern conditions becomes more and more important, therefore research and analysis of the population's perception of implementation of decentralization and its impact on quality of life, as well as general changes caused by it, remain relevant today.

The aim of the research. The assessment of personal perception and awareness of particular aspects of decentralization processes and their results by residents of Kelmentsi and Livyntsi territorial communities.

Methods and methodology. This study was conducted among residents of Kelmentsi and Livyntsi territorial communities in the period from January 15 to February 24, 2022. Data was collected by the questionnaire method using Google Forms online software and distribution of printed copies of questionnaires, as well as by face-to-face interviews, during which (besides direct responses to questionnaire), additional opinions and impressions of the subject of this study were obtained. This survey was carried out with 630 respondents. The maximum statistical error with a probability of 0.95 and a design effect of 1.5 does not exceed 3.95 %. The peculiarities of the demographic composition, sex-age structure of communities and their settlement system were taken into account in the survey. All respondents were stratified by following categories:

- sex: male and female;
- age: under 18 years old (including students of 9-11 grades); 18–34 years old; 35–49 years old; 50–59 years old; 60+ years old;
- educational level: complete secondary education; secondary special education, higher education;
- the size of settlements with: less than 1000 people, 1000-2000 people, more than 2000 people; urban-type settlement Kelmentsi (more than 7000 people).

The article provides analysis of views of respondents on particular questions of the sociological research, which reflect public awareness in the process of administrative-territorial reform, people's perception of current changes and social activity, and their willingness to engage in the development of their own community.

Presentation of the material. Approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on April 1, 2014 The concept of reforming local self-government and territorial organization of power in Ukraine is caused by political processes taking place in the state and society on the way to European integration. It provides for decentralization, the creation of appropriate material (property, in particular, land owned by territorial

communities), financial (taxes and fees related to the territory of the relevant administrative-territorial unit) and organizational conditions to ensure the performance by local self-government bodies of their own and delegated powers (*Tkachuk A., 2017*). Therefore, the first questions of the sociological survey relate to the personal feelings of the population of the studied communities regarding the changes caused by the decentralization reform.

Question №1 "The main goal of the reform of local self-government and territorial organization of power is to bring power closer to the people and transfer budgets to local governments (from state bodies to local self-government bodies). Have you experienced such changes?" More than half of the respondents did not experience the effect of bringing power closer to the people and transferring budgets to local governments, while 23.4 % of the surveyed women and 20.9 % of the men experienced such changes. Teenagers under the age of 18 felt the least influence, which is explained by the lack of a formed position regarding the question – the share of respondents of this age group could not answer affirmatively or negatively – 43.3 %. Among the elderly people who passed a sociological survey, the share of those who experienced changes is 13.2 %, while 3/4 of the 60+ age group did not experience such changes, which is the lowest and highest figure according to the proposed answer options, respectively. On the contrary, men and women of the age groups of 18–34 years – 29.7 % and 35–49 years – 27.5 % experienced the changes the most. Among all the respondents, respondents with a higher education experienced the impact of the local self-government reform the most – 26.6 %, while the least – with a complete secondary education – 16.7 %. On the other hand, men and women with secondary special education experienced the least changes – 57.7 %. The largest share of people who answered the question in the affirmative live in the urban-type settlement Kelmentsi (the administrative center of the Kelmenetska community and the Dnistrovskiy district). The residents of this locality make up to 28.6 % of the total number of respondents, while the share of respondents of other localities who answered the question in the affirmative ranges from 15.5 % to 21.8 % (table 1).

Table 1. The main goal of the reform of local self-government and territorial organization of power is to bring power closer to the people and transfer budgets to local governments (from state bodies to local self-government bodies). Have you experienced such changes?

	1. Have you experienced the changes?		
	Yes, I have experienced	No, I did not experience	Difficult to answer
Sex			
Male	20,9	52,3	26,8
Female	23,4	56	20,6
Age			
under 18	24,3	32,4	43,3
18-34	29,7	37,8	32,5
35-49	27,5	48,1	24,4
50-59	18,6	65,1	16,3
60+	11,4	75,4	13,2
Educational level			
Complete secondary education	16,7	50	33,3
Secondary special education	20,6	57,7	21,7
Higher education	26,6	53,1	20,3
Settlement			
less than 1000 people	15,5	57,3	27,2
1000-2000 people	20,2	56,3	23,5
more than 2000 people	21,8	54,3	23,9
urban-type settlement Kelmentsi (more than 7000 people)	28,6	52,1	19,3

Question № 2 "Has your life changed after the formation of new united territorial communities (during the last few years)?" The question about the rapprochement of power and the transfer of budgets to local governments caused certain difficulties for the formulation of their own specific position for a significant part of the respondents, who believe that it is necessary to express a professional opinion about the general foundations of decentralization processes in Ukraine. The question about changing the respondents' lives in recent years, after the formation of new united territorial communities, has become more practical, based on their personal experience, the real reflection of which is an internal assessment of one's own life development and opportunities formed, or, on the contrary, their absence. Only 13.4 % of men and 10.6 % of women could not answer the question, and women of the Kelmenetska and Livynetska territorial communities were more sensitive to changes – 40.6 % of them answered that life has become worse over the past few years, while only 13.9 % felt changes for the better, in contrast to men – 34 % and 16.1 %, respectively. Naturally, the largest share among respondents who felt improvement belongs to the age group under 18 years old – 24.3 % of high school students, on the other hand, the oldest age groups are less satisfied with the changes – only 12.8 % and 6.3 % of respondents aged 50–59 years and over 60 answered that life has become better. Among respondents with a higher education, the largest share of those who chose the option "Yes, life has become better" – 19.3 %, while such a share is lower among respondents with vocational and complete secondary education – 14.4 % and 10.6 % respectively. Residents of Kelmenetsi experienced the most positive changes in their lives in recent years – 18.6 % of respondents living in this settlement, while 40% did not experience any changes. On the other hand, in other settlements of the studied communities with a population of more than 1000 people, about 15 % of all respondents noted that life has become better, while residents of villages with a population of less than 1000 people felt the least positive changes – 10.9 %.

In order to optimize its activities in response to national and global challenges and trends, the state is constantly improving its apparatus, including changing the parameters of the administrative-territorial system. At the same time, a balance is always maintained between the effectiveness of the organization of government and historical, economic, geographical, and demographic features (**Council of Europe, 2019**). By Resolution No. 807-IX of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine dated July 17, 2020, 136 new districts were formed in the process of consolidation from 490 districts that existed before the reform. The next question indicates the level of awareness of the respondents regarding the intra-regional changes formed in the process of decentralization.

Question № 3 "Do you know that as a result of consolidation of districts in the Chernivtsi region, only 3 were formed: Dnistrovskiyi, Chernivetskiy and Vyzhnytskyi?" The population of Kelmenetska and Livynetska territorial communities has a sufficient level of awareness of the processes of reforming the administrative and territorial system in the region. Thus, among the respondents, 49.2 % of men and 51.9 % of women are well aware of the fact that as a result of consolidation in the Chernivtsi region, 3 were formed from 11 districts: Dnistrovskiyi, Chernivetskiy and

Vyzhnytskyi (Fig. 1). Another 35.6 % of male residents and 34 % of female residents of the surveyed territorial communities have some information about the specified administrative and territorial changes. One of the main reasons for a significant share of residents of the studied communities being aware of this issue is to a certain extent the debatable process of determining the center of the Dnistrovskiyi district, which was accompanied by active public discussions, both among specialists of specialized committees, experts, representatives of local self-government bodies of the region, and ordinary residents who shared their thoughts and positions, including at the household level, communicating with relatives, friends and colleagues. The urban-type settlement Kelmenetsi – the district center of the former Kelmenetskiy district became one of the two main "candidates" for becoming a center of the newly formed district, which led to increasing the interest of the population in the issue of administrative and territorial reform at the local level and formed their clear positions and the already mentioned high level awareness. Respondents of the youngest and oldest age groups have the least information about the consolidation of districts – the share of young men and women under the age of 18 who are well aware of administrative and territorial changes in the region is 32.4 %, and among people aged 60 and older – 46.3 %. On the other hand, the share of people who are well aware of administrative and territorial changes in the region among the population aged 35–49 and 50–59 is the highest – 58.1 % and 57 %, respectively. The most aware respondents are residents of the district center (high level of awareness – 55.7 %), residents with a higher education (62.3 % among all respondents), and by their field of activity work in state structures (65.3 % among all respondents), are specialists or private entrepreneurs (58.7 % and 64.2 % among all respondents, respectively). At the same time, the least aware are residents with complete secondary education – 40.2 % and those living in settlements with less than 1000 people – 47.3 %.

In Ukraine, the decentralization process began in 2014 with the adoption of the Concept of Reform of Local Self-Government and Territorial Organization of Power in Ukraine (04/01/2014), the Laws of Ukraine "On Cooperation of Territorial Communities" (06/17/2014), "On Voluntary Association of Territorial Communities" (05/02/2015) and amendments to the Budget and Tax Codes – regarding financial decentralization. This process made it possible to form, in accordance with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, a significant effective and capable institution of local self-government at the basic level – United Territorial Communities (UTC) (**Government portal, 2020**). In total, 1469 united territorial communities were formed in Ukraine, including 2 territorial communities within the former Kelmenetskiy district. The following questions of the study were aimed at tracing how much the residents of the studied communities are aware of the fact that such changes have taken place, what is their opinion about such changes, and regardless of one or another position, to determine their personal readiness to participate in the development of their community.

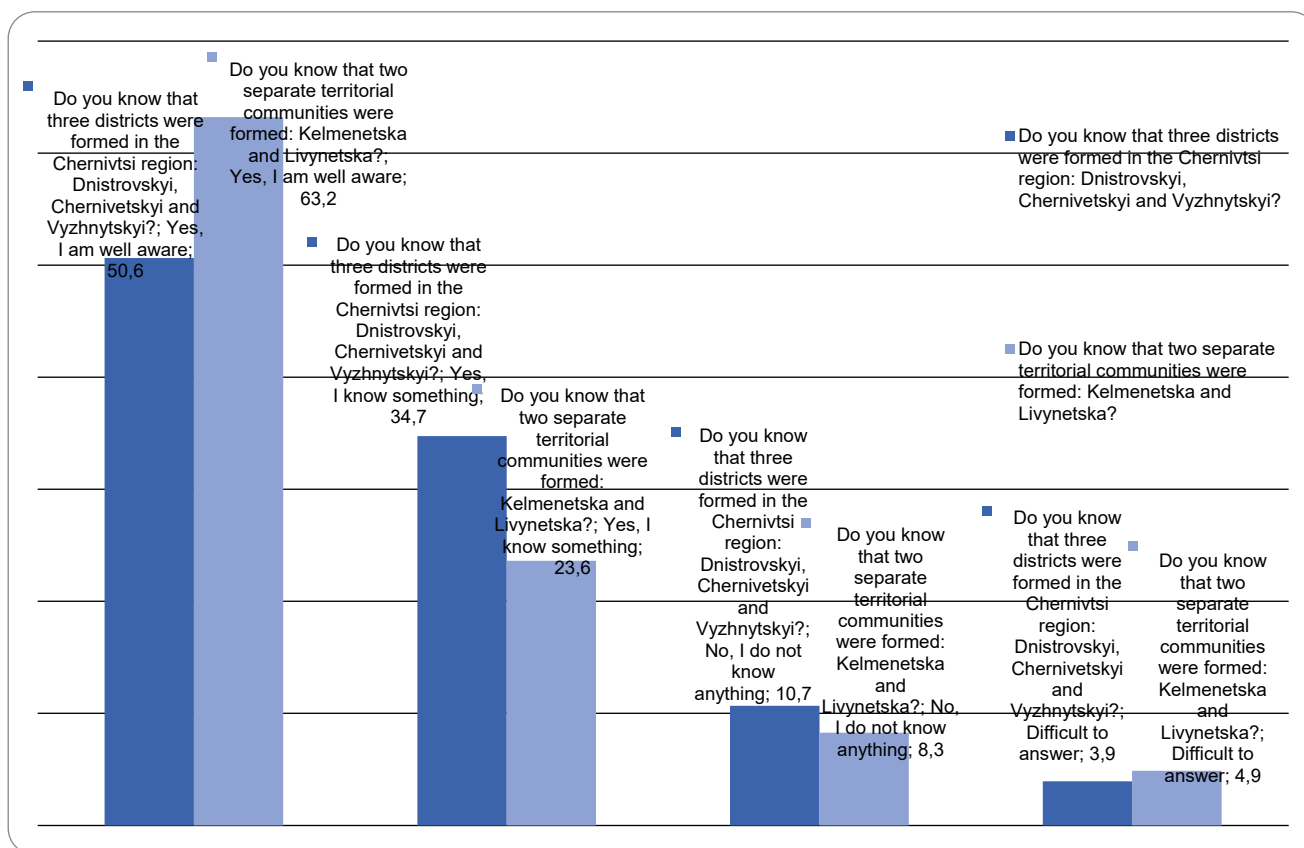


Fig. 1. People's awareness of the consolidation of districts of Chernivtsi region and the formation of united territorial communities

Question № 4 "Do you know that after the reform, two separate territorial communities were formed within the boundaries of the former Kelmenetskiy district: Kelmenetska and Livynetska (in which the villages of Livyntsi, Podvirivka, Zelena, Kozyriany, Mykhailivka and Oselivka, which were previously part of the Kelmenetskiy district, remained)?"

Compared to the previous question, the number of respondents who are well aware of the result of the decentralization process – the formation of two territorial communities within the former Kelmenetskiy district – Kelmenetska and Livynetska – is higher. Thus, 62.1 % of men and 64.2% of women who passed the survey chose the option "yes, I am well aware", and another 23.3 % and 23.9 %, respectively, chose "yes, I know something". In general, 8.3 % of respondents answered that they do not know anything about the formation of new communities, and 4.9 % found it difficult to answer the question.

Among respondents aged 35–49 years and 50–59 years, the share of those aware of the formation of new administrative-territorial units at the basic level is the highest – 70 % and 66.3 %, respectively. On the other hand, the share among representatives of the youngest and oldest age groups is the lowest – 51.4 % of respondents under the age of 18 chose the option "Yes, I am well aware", and among respondents aged 60 and older, this figure is 57.7 %. At the same time 13.5 % and 8.6 %, respectively, among the specified age groups, do not know anything about the newly formed communities.

Among the respondents with a higher education, 70.5 % are well informed and another 19.8 % have heard something about the formation of two different territorial communities.

On the other hand, among the respondents who has special secondary education, such shares are 61.5 % and 24.7 %, respectively, and among respondents with complete secondary education, it is even less – 56.1 % and 27.3 %, respectively. Naturally, the respondents who live in Kelmenetska are the most aware – 76.3 % of them chose the option "Yes, I am well aware" and only 6.3% do not know anything about the new administrative-territorial formations. In settlements with a smaller population, the share of informed residents decreases, and, conversely, those who do not have information on this issue increases:

- settlements with more than 2000 people – "Yes, I am well aware" – 62,7 %; "No, I do not know anything" – 8,9 %;
- settlements with 1000–2000 people – "Yes, I am well aware" – 59 %; "No, I do not know anything" – 8,5 %;
- settlements with less than 1000 people – "Yes, I am well aware" – 54,8 %; "No, I do not know anything" – 9,4 %.

Question № 5 "How do you feel about the fact that two separate territorial communities were formed within the former Kelmenetskiy district: Kelmenetska and Livynetska?"

The conducted survey showed that the population of the communities as a whole is mostly dissatisfied with the division of the former Kelmenetskiy district into 2 territorial communities. The formation of capable communities through their unification, which began in Ukraine in 2015 (*Decentralization. Decentralization..., 2021*) and took place on a voluntary basis, did not find its continuation in the Kelmenetskiy district. If in 2017 in each of the 11 districts of the Chernivtsi region two or more united territorial communities independently united, then in the Kelmenetskiy district – none (**Administrative and territorial system of Ukraine, 2021**). Among the possible reasons: the passivity

of a significant part of the population regarding decentralization processes in Ukraine and the region; the desire to form the Kelmenetska territorial community, the size and composition of which would correspond to the former Kelmenetskyi district; the absence of a single formed position of a critical majority of the population regarding joint cooperation and uniting into communities; lack of stable connections between local government representatives and the population, etc. Only 12.5 % of respondents have a positive or rather positive attitude to the formation of two territorial communities within the former Kelmenetskyi district (11.6 % among men and 13.3 % among women), while 40.7 % have a negative or rather negative attitude (41.8 % among men and 39.8 % among women). More than a third (36.7 %) of respondents are neutral about such changes, and 10.1 % could not answer the question. The share of those who support such a division into communities is the largest among the age groups 18–34 and 35–49 – more than 15 % in each, and the smallest among the population under 18 and over 60. However, if the low level of support among young people is primarily characterized by a general neutral position – 56.8 % or the lack of a formed opinion on this issue – 16.1 %, then for the older generation such a result of decentralization did not meet support at the time of the survey – 50.3 % respondents of this age category have a negative or rather negative attitude towards the formation of two territorial communities.

The position of the population with a higher education is the most formed, among which 13.8 % gave a positive assessment of the newly formed communities, and 45.5 % – a negative one, which are the highest proportions for both answer options in comparison with the population of other levels of education. The most dissatisfied with the changes are the respondents living in Kelmentsi – 52.8 %, while in the rest of the settlements the share of respondents who chose the option "Negatively or rather negatively" ranges from 34.2 % to 39.4 %, and supported the following changes of more than 12 % in each of them.

Question № 6 "Are you ready to take a direct part in the development of your territorial community?" forms an idea about the public position, activity and interest of the residents of the studied communities to be not observers but participants in their development. In general, more than 3/4 of all respondents answered that they are ready to participate directly in the development of their local community to one degree or another – 76.8 % of men and 75.5 % of women answered positively. The largest share of respondents who chose the option "Yes, or rather yes" among age groups up to 49 years old – more than 80 % in each, on the other hand, elderly people showed the least willingness to participate personally in community development activities, only 60 % of them gave a positive answer to this question, while 24.6 % of this age group answered negatively. However, during personal communication, a significant proportion of older people noted not so much a lack of desire to participate in the development of their own community, as limited opportunities, consisting primarily of a lack of the necessary physical strength and resources for socially useful activities and a certain psychological detachment from the affairs of their own community because of their age. Therefore, it is an important task of both local self-government bodies and various representatives of public organizations and activists to convey the importance and necessity of an active social position of each resident of their own community and create opportunities to be heard and realized by all segments of the population. In general, the population of Kelmenetska and

Livynetska communities with higher education takes a more active civic position – 88.4 % of respondents answered the question positively, while the smallest share of respondents with a complete secondary education – 65.9 % – is ready to participate in the development of the community. The largest number among those who have decided on the answer to this question is among the residents of the Kelmentsi district center – 82.2 % of respondents from this settlement are ready to help their community, 10.7 % are not. Among respondents in settlements with more than 2000 people, such shares are 77.2 % versus 15.2 %; settlements with a population from 1000 to 2000 people – 73.2 % versus 14.2 %; settlements with a population less than 1000 people – 70 % and 17.3 %, respectively.

Conclusions. The study of the perception of residents of Kelmenetska and Livynetska territorial communities regarding certain aspects of decentralization processes and their results revealed a number of features that reflect the attitude of the local population to recent changes. In general, there is a certain pessimism regarding the effect of reforms of local self-government and territorial organization of power and their impact on the lives of the population of the studied communities. High awareness of the population in intra-regional changes in the administrative-territorial system at this stage is not accompanied by a significant level of their support, however, despite this, the respondents showed a high level of readiness for personal participation in the development of their own communities. It is worth noting that important factors that had a significant impact on the formation of certain positions of the respondents are, for example, the relative "youth" of the decentralization reform for the studied communities, which were fully formed only in 2020; the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and a number of accompanying bans and restrictions that occurred at the time of the formation of the studied communities; tense situation in the period preceding the beginning of the large-scale war of russia against Ukraine, during which this sociological study was conducted.

The real impact of the decentralization reform on the development of Ukraine will be fully investigated only later, first of all, in the process of our state's struggle with the external aggressor. However, the heroic struggle of Ukrainians, reflected in many narratives precisely in the context of communities, their unexpectedly strong consolidation and organization, indicates that one of the most important tests of the reform has already been successfully passed.

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ПЕРЦЕПЦІЯ НАСЕЛЕННЯ ДЕЦЕНТРАЛІЗАЦІЙНИХ ПРОЦЕСІВ В УКРАЇНІ. КЕЙС КЕЛЬМЕНЕЦЬКОЇ ТА ЛІВИНЕЦЬКОЇ ГРОМАД

Ратифікація Україною у 1997 р. Європейської Хартії місцевого самоврядування, а в подальшому створення Концепції реформування місцевого самоврядування та територіальної організації влади 2014 р. поклали початок нового етапу розвитку нашої держави, одним із найголовніших завдань якого стало створення спроможних, самодостатніх громад. Тому важливість дослідження настроїв населення громад, їхнє сприйняття змін, що відбулись, пропозицій та очікувань від реформи є безсумнівним і необхідним на всіх етапах децентралізації та після її проведення.

Представлено результати дослідження обізнаності й перцепції жителів Кельменецької та Лівинецької територіальних громад щодо окремих аспектів децентралізаційних процесів. Впрацюванні взяли участь 630 респондентів, а їхні відповіді проаналізовано відповідно до їхньої статі, віку, рівня освіти та розміру населених пунктів, в яких проживають.

Проаналізовано відчуття людей стосовно змін унаслідок реформи місцевого самоврядування й територіальної організації влади, та того, як саме змінилось їхнє життя після таких змін; визначено рівень обізнаності щодо змін адміністративно-територіального устрою регіону, які відбулися внаслідок укрупнення районів у Чернівецькій області та формування об'єднаних територіальних громад, у тому числі Кельменецької й Лівинецької в межах колишнього Кельменецького району, жителями яких є самі респонденти; проаналізовано їхнє ставлення стосовно такого поділу; визначено рівень готовності респондентів брати безпосередню участь у розвитку своєї територіальної громади.

У результаті проведеного дослідження було визначено, що жителі Кельменецької та Лівинецької громад мають високий рівень обізнаності стосовно адміністративно-територіальних змін, до яких привела реформа. Значна кількість населення не відчула ефекту наближення влади до людей і передавання бюджетів на місця. Натомість, жителі досліджуваних громад виявляють значний рівень соціальної свідомості й мають високий рівень готовності брати участь у розвитку власної громади.

Ключові слова: громада, територіальна громада, децентралізація, реформа місцевого самоврядування й територіальної організації влади.