

ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS AND IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL DIRECTIONS FOR THE APPLICATION OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN COMMUNITY RECOVERY

Anna Verbytska¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7805-1412>

¹*Department of Social Work, Chernihiv Polytechnic National University, Chernihiv, Ukraine*

Corresponding author: annaverbytska.che@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36059/978-966-397-609-9-8>

Keywords: service-learning; community recovery; stakeholders.

In the framework of the research project “Service Learning Model for Ensuring Resilience and Post-Conflict Recovery of Border Communities of Ukraine”, an empirical study was conducted aimed at identifying current threats and challenges in the development of border regions under martial law in Ukraine. The study employed qualitative methods, including in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The interviews enabled the collection of individual perspectives, experiences, and assessments of stakeholders’ challenges, while the focus groups, comprising a mixed composition of participants (local self-government bodies (LSGs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business, and education sectors), facilitated the identification of shared problems, comparison of approaches, and formulation of consensus-based solutions within communities.

The purpose of the survey was to obtain empirical data for identifying the needs, expectations, and constraints of key stakeholders in the context of post-conflict recovery of border communities, as well as to substantiate the feasibility and potential of integrating the service learning approach into higher education institutions’ activities.

The study involved 120 respondents from five communities of the Chernihiv region (Koriukivka, Nizhyn, Pryluky, Horodnia, and Chernihiv community). The subsequent analysis summarizes the results regarding the potential directions of service learning identified by the respondents.

Respondents representing local self-government bodies noted that service-learning is viewed as a tool for practical support of

community development and simultaneous formation of human resource capacity for the public sector. In particular, they emphasize the feasibility of involving students and lecturers in strategic planning processes, development of community strategies and project (grant) proposals, as well as in conducting analytical research necessary to substantiate managerial decisions and monitor recovery programs. A particular focus is placed on organizing internships and placements within local self-government bodies (in the fields of public administration, law, and social work), which would contribute to preparing specialists for the needs of local governance, healthcare, and education. Respondents also identify the digitalization of administrative processes and the introduction of electronic services as an important direction, particularly through the involvement of IT students in the development and maintenance of relevant solutions. In addition, representatives of local self-government bodies highlight the potential of service-learning in implementing joint practical courses in project management and grant writing, as well as in providing analytical support for energy management and developing spatial and architectural solutions for community development.

Respondents representing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emphasized the significant potential of service-learning for strengthening their activities, particularly in the areas of psychosocial well-being and work with vulnerable population groups. They highlight the possibility of engaging students in conducting group sessions, including in schools and in work with veterans, incorporating elements of art therapy, especially in the context of a shortage of qualified staff. An important direction identified is the conduct of analytical studies of the needs of target groups (youth, veterans, internally displaced persons). Respondents also underline the effectiveness of a partnership-based approach to grant proposal development, where NGOs provide contextual and practical insights, while students contribute analytical substantiation. Particular attention is given to the development of communication and fundraising strategies, social media management (SMM), and media content creation, as well as the implementation of communication campaigns.

Respondents representing the business sector emphasized that service-learning holds significant potential for supporting the development of small enterprises while simultaneously fostering

students' practical competencies. In particular, they highlight the possibility of involving students in conducting market research and customer base analysis, developing marketing strategies and business analytics, as well as optimizing business processes. An important direction identified is the implementation of digital solutions, including the development and execution of advertising campaigns and the broader digitalization of business processes with the participation of IT students.

Respondents from the education sector noted that service-learning can serve as an effective mechanism for expanding access to educational services and strengthening the practice-oriented component of learning. They emphasize the potential of developing legal and social clinics with outreach to communities or online consulting, as well as implementing environmental monitoring projects, including sampling, laboratory analysis of water and soil quality, and preparation of recommendations for communities. A particular focus is placed on joint grant proposal development, where students provide scientific justification while communities ensure the practical implementation base. An important direction identified is the development of digital services for utility enterprises and community residents. In addition, respondents underline the importance of involving students in social and volunteer projects, educational and youth initiatives, conducting analytical studies. Among other areas, they highlight career guidance activities for school students, training programs for NGO and LSG teams in new tools, organization of speaking clubs and international cultural exchanges, participation in conferences and working groups of local self-government bodies, as well as the development of digital literacy programs and intergenerational initiatives.

The obtained empirical results indicate that service-learning is interpreted by different stakeholder groups primarily as a tool for integrating educational activities with community development practices in an applied dimension. The identified directions include analytical support, strategic and project planning, digitalization of processes, as well as the provision of social, educational, and business services, which allows service-learning to be viewed as a mechanism for strengthening the institutional capacity of communities in the context of recovery.

However, the results also indicate a limited level of conceptual understanding of service-learning among stakeholders: the dominance of an applied perspective suggests an incomplete awareness of its educational and transformative potential. This highlights the need for targeted information dissemination, promotion, and institutionalization of service-learning as an integrated model combining educational, socio-economic, and institutional functions and capable of generating long-term effects in the recovery of border communities.