

FROM CRISIS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: HIGHER EDUCATION RESILIENCE IN WARTIME THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND SERVICE-LEARNING: SUMY STATE UNIVERSITY CASE

Tetyana Mayboroda¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4547-5822>

Vasyl Karpusha¹ <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2460-2273>

Alla Krasulia¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2048-1879>

Inna Balahurovska^{1,2} <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3642-9506>

¹Sumy State University, Sumy, Ukraine

²Silesian University of Technology, Gliwice, Poland

Corresponding author: a.krasulia@dir.sumdu.edu.ua

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Abstract

The full-scale war in Ukraine has caused profound transformations in the higher education system, jeopardizing its stable functioning, accessibility, and quality of educational services. Higher education institutions have found themselves in the need to quickly adapt to crisis conditions, including security risks, the forced digitalization of the educational process, and changes in the social role of universities. In these conditions, the concept of higher education resilience, as the ability of the system not only to withstand crisis impacts but also to transform while maintaining its social function, becomes of particular importance.

One tool for increasing universities' resilience is international academic cooperation, which provides access to resources, knowledge, and innovative educational practices. At the same time, the importance of service-learning is growing as an approach that integrates the educational process with the real needs of communities, especially in conditions of war and reconstruction.

Despite active development of these approaches, the issue of their synergy in ensuring university resilience in crisis conditions remains insufficiently researched. Particularly relevant is the analysis of specific cases of Ukrainian universities that combine international cooperation and socially oriented learning in their practice.

The study is based on a qualitative case study approach, drawing on elements of descriptive and analytical approaches. The object of the study was Sumy State University, as one of the leading Ukrainian higher education institutions that actively implements international educational initiatives and practices of service-learning in wartime.

The methodological basis is:

- analysis of official university materials and project documentation;
- case study of the results of the implementation of international educational projects (in particular, Erasmus+);
- generalization of practices of university interaction with local communities.

This approach not only allows for describing practical experience but also for identifying mechanisms for transforming educational activities in times of crisis.

The experience of Sumy State University demonstrates that the combination of international cooperation and socially oriented learning can be an effective means of enhancing the sustainability of higher education.

Firstly, the university's participation in international projects, in particular the Erasmus+ program, plays an important role, within which the initiative to develop socially oriented learning is being implemented. Thanks to its cooperation with European partners, the university gains access to modern pedagogical approaches, methodological materials, and opportunities to improve teachers' qualifications. This contributes to the transfer of knowledge and adaptation of best practices to the Ukrainian context.

Secondly, an essential component is integrating service-learning into curricula. At Sumy State University, this is implemented through the development of courses that combine academic learning with the solution of real social problems. For example, students are involved in projects aimed at supporting children's mental health, developing entrepreneurial skills in communities, and increasing the population's digital literacy.

Thirdly, the university actively cooperates with local territorial communities, enabling it to develop educational programs in line with current societal needs. An important stage is conducting

preliminary research, in particular, focus groups and consultations with representatives of communities, authorities, and businesses. This ensures the relevance of educational initiatives and increases their social impact.

The adaptation of the educational process to war conditions deserves special attention. A significant part of the training has been transferred to an online format, ensuring the continuity of the educational process even in the face of threats. In parallel, the university is developing international educational partnerships that allow supporting academic mobility and joint educational initiatives. The case of Sumy State University demonstrates the transition from a traditional educational model to a more flexible, open, and socially oriented system capable of functioning in crisis conditions.

The results indicate that ensuring the sustainability of higher education in war conditions requires a comprehensive approach that combines international cooperation, innovative pedagogical practices, and active community engagement. For educational practice, this means integrating socially oriented learning into educational programs as a systemic element rather than as separate initiatives. It is also important to develop teachers' competencies in community work and interdisciplinary learning. At the level of educational policy, it is advisable to support international partnerships and create conditions for Ukrainian universities to participate in global educational projects. This will contribute to improving the quality of education and integration into the European educational space. Accordingly, in the context of post-war reconstruction, universities can act as agents of community development, providing training of specialists, generating knowledge, and implementing socially significant initiatives.

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