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The Phenomenon of Inclusiveness of United Territorial Communities and Districts of Ukraine As Rural-Urban Agglomerations

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Abstract

The reform of the decentralization of public power and management launched in Ukraine in 2015 led to the formation of united territorial communities (UTCs) and new districts, which are identified as rural-urban agglomerations, on a set of their essential features. Thus, the transfer of financial and economic resources and powers from the center to localities created prerequisites for solving a number of important social problems, namely, the elimination of spatial disparities in the development of rural and urban areas, socio-economic inequality, overcoming of poverty and social injustice on the basis of inclusiveness. Rural-urban agglomerations are positioned in our study as a socio-spatial continuum of harmonious coexistence of human communities that are involved in creating inclusion within spatial boundaries UTCs and districts, which are the appropriate units of the administrative-territorial system of Ukraine.

Keywords: sectoral and socio-spatial orientation of inclusive development, decentralization of public power and management, inclusive capacity, united territorial community (UTC), district, rural-urban agglomeration, Ukraine, inclusiveness phenomenon

Le phénomène de l'inclusivité de collectivités territoriales et districts unis de l'Ukraine comme agglomérations rurales-urbaines

Resumé

La réforme de décentralisation du pouvoir public et de la gestion lancée en Ukraine en 2015 a conduit à la formation de communautés territoriales unies (CTU) et de nouveaux districts qui, selon un ensemble de leurs caractéristiques essentielles, sont identifiés comme des agglomérations rurales-urbaines. Ainsi,

le transfert de ressources et de pouvoirs financiers et économiques du centre vers les localités a créé les conditions préalables à la résolution d'un certain nombre de problèmes sociaux importants, à savoir l'élimination des disparités spatiales dans le développement des zones rurales et urbaines, les inégalités socio-économiques, vaincre la pauvreté et l'injustice sociale sur la base de l'inclusion. Les agglomérations rurales-urbaines sont positionnées dans notre étude comme un continuum socio-spatial de coexistence harmonieuse de communautés humaines impliquées dans la création de l'inclusion dans les limites spatiales CTU et les districts, qui sont les unités appropriées du système administratif territorial de l'Ukraine.

Mots-clés: orientation sectorielle et socio-spatiale du développement inclusif, décentralisation du pouvoir public et de la gestion, capacité inclusive, communauté territoriale unie (CTU), district, agglomération rurale-urbaine, Ukraine, phénomène d'inclusivité

1.0 Introduction

All the most important changes in public life in Ukraine are connected in one way or another with the reform of decentralization of public power and management, the essence of which is the transfer of financial and economic resources and powers from the center to the localities. One of the biggest and most important powers that Ukrainian citizens received during the years of reform is the right to voluntarily and independently unite in order to improve their living space. With the formation in July 2020, instead of 490 old districts, 136 new ones, the administrative centers of which are all twenty-four oblast centers and other large towns of oblast importance, their role in making important decisions and providing various services to the population of the districts and UTC has significantly increased. There have been not only quantitative but also qualitative changes in the structure, functionality, and social purpose of UTCs and districts as viable units of the administrative-territorial system of Ukraine. Within their continuum, due to the 'mixed' composition of the population, the diversity of resources and the diversification of functions, rural-urban agglomeration formations, different from classic (urban) agglomerations, arose. In this connection, the question of determining the essence of these new formations, which still remains insufficiently scientifically substantiated, acquires theoretical relevance and practical significance.

In view of the above, the purpose of the study is to reveal the essence of the phenomenon of inclusiveness of UTCs and districts of Ukraine as rural-urban agglomerations. For the implementation, actual research tasks are solved. First, the role of the decentralization process in the transformation of communities and districts into rural-urban agglomerations is clarified. Further, these agglomeration formations are positioned as a space for the formation of social inclusiveness. At the same time, the tendencies of the manifestation of this process, which are formed under the influence of urbanization and ruralization, are monitored. The sectoral and socio-spatial orientation of the development of rural-urban agglomerations is analyzed using the waves of convergence and divergence, which directly affect the inclusive capacity of these formations. This type of capacity of rural-urban agglomerations is based on their financial and economic capacity but is not identical to it. In addition, important factors of the inclusive capacity include the location of the UTCs and districts, their demographic characteristics, administrative and organizational levers, and the psychological readiness of everyone and everyone to create welfare inclusion. In conclusion, the obstacles that stand in the way of the formation of an inclusive

rural-urban environment are defined and taking them into account and overcoming them is extremely important in the conditions of wartime and the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine.

The main scientific ideas, conclusions and recommendations are based on the fundamental provisions of economic, sociological, geographical sciences, modern works of Ukrainian and foreign scientists, taking into account the experience of other countries in the formation of socio-spatial inclusiveness.

The generalizations and practical suggestions based on the research results are primarily of fateful importance for Ukraine's restoration of communities and districts affected by Russian military aggression.

2.0 Literature Review

The prerequisite for the inclusiveness of local government and districts is the process of decentralization, the implementation of which helps to overcome spatial disparities and extreme poverty (Shantir, 2022) because the economic returns from decentralization are always higher with effective local governance, especially in places that are surrounded by regions with a high level of self-government (Rodriguez-Pose & Muštra, 2022). However, the functioning of self-governing institutions in Indonesian villages suggests that local decentralization can create exclusivity in multi-ethnic areas to strengthen the position of local authoritarian leaders and corruption at the indicated level (Annahar et al., 2023).

The formation of consolidated communities and districts had the synergistic effect of creating rural-urban agglomerations within their continuous space. The emergence of this socio-spatial phenomenon requires its comparison with urban agglomerations based on their essential characteristics. Common to both types of agglomerations is their characteristic as a spatial form of localization of settlements, the core of the local settlement system and a driver of economic growth (Stepanenko & Omelchenko, 2019), which, on the one hand, contributes to the intensification of relationships between settlements, and on the other hand, it restrains the development of small towns in urban agglomerations (Kravchenko et al., 2020). In rural-urban agglomerations, towns of oblast importance perform a dual function – an administrative center and a core town of an agglomeration formation, which creates a risk of insufficient representation of the interests of small communities (Kalashnikova, 2020). The development experience of Indian states shows that the spatial pattern of settlements with densely agglomerated plots of land eliminates the difference between urban and rural areas (Sunny & Thomas, 2021). Rural and urban formations are not only largely interdependent but actually coexist and often merge into a common space (Hofmann et al., 2023), and the increase in land use in rural areas has led to a transition from a landscape in which the dichotomy between urban and rural areas is clearly traced to a continuum in which the dense urban fabric expands and merges with the surrounding rural areas, forming large and extended suburban strips (Cimini et al., 2023). Such spatial formations of a continuous type demonstrate a change in the land use system due to its multifunctionality, which blurs the line between urban and rural functions (Vlieta et al., 2020). Against the background of systemic overloading of large towns, the role of small and medium-sized towns is growing, which accumulate excess resources, change the processes of production, distribution and consumption (Mercandalli et al., 2023), thereby creating an effect (“ $1 + 1 > 2$ ”) – “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts”, given the high carrying capacity of the agglomeration's land resources (Shen et al., 2022).

At the same time, the growth in such socio-spatial formations of demand for land resources carries with it the threat of loss of agricultural land, causing concern about the provision of food for poor citizens and means of subsistence for suburban farmers. This phenomenon is observed in Europe, North and South America, and Australia. For example, 60% of the increase in urban and rural areas in Canada from 1988 to 2010 happened due to agricultural lands (Coulibaly & Li, 2020). Nicol & Nicol (2015) analyzed the nature of the conflict of interests of the residents of the city of Calgary, Alberta, where 85% of the population of the Canadian province lives, and populations of four surrounding rural municipalities – the main managers of agricultural land in the province – proved that rural communities broke partnership relations with the city, due to the inconsistency policies of its administration to the interests of the rural communities, among which the most important are those related to land use. In this sense, Berdegue et al. (2014) put forward a valid proposal to change the analytical lens from a separate consideration of villages and towns to their interconnected perception, with the definition of rural-urban functional intermediate zones that reflect elements of both types of settlements, but differ from them. Therefore, these so-called intermediate zones are nothing more than rural-urban agglomeration formations, which, in our opinion, are characterized by the following specific features:

- insignificant population size and the predominance in its composition of the population of villages and township
- absence, with some exceptions, of core towns and large secondary town
- low population density
- non-diversified population employment
- mainly agrarian-industrial and rural-urban orientation of development

Rural-urban agglomerations should be seen as a platform for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 (European Commission, 2021), which emphasizes the desire to promote an inclusive and sustainable future for all places. Inclusive development in the broadest sense consists of strengthening the involvement of all strata of the population and social groups, without exception, in solving political, socio-economic, ecological, and spiritual problems of the development of countries (regions) (Lisovskyi et al., 2019). Although inclusive development has primarily an economic basis, it is implemented through the formation of sustainable systems that are based on respect for people's rights and providing them with the necessary tools to help overcome such a socio-economic problem as poverty (Podesta, 2013). The inclusive socio-spatial environment should be understood as such, in which the conditions for effective socio-economic development of the local community are created on the basis of economic, political, social inclusion and local cohesion (Snigova, 2020).

3.0 Methodologies

3.1 Research Area, Scale and Period

UTCs and districts are components of the administrative-territorial system of Ukraine; therefore, the object is studied on a national scale, taking into account its peculiarities in the section of twenty-four oblasts and five macroregions – Northern, Eastern, Southern, Western and Central. The period of scientific observation covers the years 2015–2023 – from the beginning of the reform of decentralization of public power and management to the current functioning of

newly created rural-urban agglomerations. At the same time, it is taken into account that eleven oblasts were or are in the military zone.

Taking into account that rural-urban agglomerations are the product of organizational and administrative measures and management decisions of public authorities, their research was carried out taking into account the institutional factor. Therefore, first of all, regulatory legal acts dated 2014 and subsequent years, which are directly related to the process of formation of UTCs and new districts, were analyzed. In the future, the formation process of UTCs was monitored, which was initially carried out on voluntary principles, and at the final stage of the reform – on a planned basis with the active participation of the Ministry of Community Development, Territories and Infrastructure of Ukraine, of local executive authorities.

3.2 Data Collection and Summary

In order to obtain the necessary data on the object of the study, a significant array of statistical data posted on official websites was processed regarding the quantitative composition of all 1.438 UTCs and 119 districts of Ukraine without exception, and their characteristics were tracked by oblast.

Thanks to this, an idea was formed about the conditions, organizational and legal basis of the process of creating UTCs and districts, on the basis of which the classification of UTCs and districts was carried out according to certain characteristics. Thus, conditions were prepared for the implementation of content analysis of Ukrainian and foreign literary sources, which were selected in accordance with the purpose and objectives of the research.

3.3 Scientific Approaches and Methods of Research

Using a synergistic approach made it possible to follow the manifestation of the inclusiveness of rural-urban agglomerations as a consequence of the synergistic effect of including rural and urban settlements into a single social space. The systematic approach contributed to the formation of an idea about the types of UTCs and districts belonging to the unified system of the country's administrative and territorial organization.

The institutional approach helped to reveal the influence of economic, social and political institutions on the redistribution of the authority of UTCs and districts and the sectoral and socio-spatial orientation of the inclusive development of rural-urban agglomerations.

The use of the statistical method made it possible to reveal quantitative characteristics, the composition of rural-urban agglomerations and their connection with the manifestation of ruralization and urbanization trends of these socio-spatial formations, their convergence and divergence; of comparison – to determine the common and distinctive features of different types of UTCs and districts, their manifestation in the development of these formations on the basis of inclusiveness in different oblasts of Ukraine; of SWOT analysis – to assess the advantages and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses of the inclusive development of rural-urban agglomerations in terms of different types of UTCs and districts; of analysis and synthesis – to understand the contradictory nature of the relationship of such paired dichotomies as alienation and inclusion, exclusivity and inclusiveness, segregation and integration; of induction and deduction, to find out the impact of agricultural land, types of economic activity on the level and degree of social integration of rural and urban settlements included in the UTCs and districts, the sectoral and socio-spatial orientation of their development.

Modeling, analogy, abstraction, generalization, and idealization were used to determine the inclusive capacity of rural-urban agglomerations.

In order to establish the degree of the inclusive capacity of these socio-spatial formations, their typology was carried out according to the following characteristics: the centrality of agglomerations, the size of their area, the number of districts, UTCs, settlements, population, a demographic load on one district, UTCs, functionality, industry and social spatial direction of development. The calculation of the generalized index of the inclusive capacity of agglomerations consists of fourteen separate indices, which were calculated for each community on a 4-point scale.

The distribution of UTC and districts by oblasts is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Distribution of UTCs and Districts by Oblasts of Ukraine*

Oblast	Number of districts	Number of UTCs	Number of settlements	Area km²	Number of population
Vinnitsya	6	63	1,503	26,484	1,545,416
Volyn	4	54	1,087	20,121	1,031,421
Dnipropetrovsk	7	86	1,501	31,878	3,176,978
Donetsk	5	46	856	18,018	1,843,578
Zhytomyr	4	66	1,668	29,621	1,208,212
Zakarpattia	6	64	605	12,749	1,253,791
Zaporizhzhya	5	67	953	27,209	1,682,534
Ivano-Frankivsk	6	62	804	13,871	1,368,097
Kyiv	7	69	1,180	25,522	1,781,044
Kirovograd	4	49	1,029	24,566	933,209
Luhansk	4	26	544	18,242	661,028
Lviv	7	73	1,928	21,800	251,2084
Mykolayiv	4	52	911	24,319	1,119,862
Odesa	7	91	1,173	32,103	2,363,126
Poltava	4	60	1,841	28,724	1,386,079
Rivne	4	64	1,026	20,021	1,152,961
Sumy	5	51	1,490	23,810	1,068,247
Ternopil	3	55	1,058	13,796	1,036,590
Kharkiv	7	56	1,746	31,386	2,654,375
Kherson	5	49	698	27,337	1,027,913
Khmelnyskiy	3	60	1,451	20,615	1,254,702
Cherkasy	4	66	854	20,867	1,192,137
Chernivtsi	3	52	417	8,071	901,632
Chernihiv	5	57	1,510	31,841	991,294
Ukraine	119	1,438	27,833	553,818	3,5146,310

Source: Compiled by the authors based on official statistics of Ukraine.

4.0 Results

4.1 The Role of Decentralization of Public Power and Management in the Transformation of Communities and Districts Into Rural-Urban Agglomerations

Decentralization of public power and management has taken place in many European countries in recent decades, with a federal form of government – earlier, and in more centralized, unitary countries such as France, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, and, somewhat later, Poland. In Ukraine, despite the objective need for decentralization reform and the authorities’ awareness of this need, as evidenced by repeated attempts to implement it, the real reform process began more than two decades after gaining independence. For this reason, a whole complex of problems related to the imperfection of the territorial organization of society and the ineffective functioning of the existing system of public power and management has accumulated. They achieved the greatest social acuity in rural areas.

In 2014, on the eve of the decentralization reform, the number of the rural population decreased by 2.5 million people (17%) compared to 1991, and the number of rural settlements decreased by 348 units (1.2%). At the same time, the number of village councils increased by 1,067 units (13.3%). The population of 40% of territorial communities did not exceed 1,000 people. Subsidies of 5,419 local self-government budgets (almost 50% of their total number) were more than 70%, and 483 communities were kept by 90% from the state budget (Legislation of Ukraine No. 333, 2014). Of the 490 administrative (rural) districts, 112 (22.8%) had a population of up to 30,000 people. Particularly, the costs of maintaining the management apparatus of a significant number of administrative-territorial units of the specified level were not economically justified.

In the course of the reform, instead of 11,250 communities, as a result of their consolidation, 1,470 UTCs were created, and the number of districts decreased from 490 to 136, of which 1,438 UTCs and 119 districts are currently functioning. The types of territories requiring special attention from the state and using special mechanisms and tools to stimulate their development include agglomerations, cities, and rural areas in unfavorable conditions (Legislation of Ukraine No 695, 2020).

In particular, the Legislation of Ukraine No 695 (2020) defines agglomerations for the first time as,

“territorial clusters of settlements (primarily towns) that form integral socio-territorial formations with a population of more than 500,000 people. Agglomerations are territories of concentration of population, capital and business and have intensive economic, labor, cultural and household ties with the surrounding territories, are characterized by a high level of development of infrastructure, economy, and provision of services to the population” (Common part, para. 12).

In this regard, the issue of identifying socio-spatial formations that fall under the given definition of agglomeration has gained theoretical relevance and practical significance. In the pre-reform period, about two dozen classic (urban) agglomerations were actually formed in Ukraine, mainly in its eastern part and

around towns with a population of more than 500,000 people. Their status did not have an appropriate regulatory and legal consolidation, which became the basis for the definition of agglomeration formations, any set of socio-spatial formations concentrated in one place, regardless of their functions or quantitative and qualitative characteristics of their population.

Researchers distinguish national, regional urban and even regional rural agglomerations in the country's territory. An example of a rural agglomeration is the Kolinkovetso-Nedoboivskaya agglomeration, with a population of 32,743 people, which was formed in the Chernivtsi oblast between the towns of Chernivtsi and Khotyn (Tkachuk et al, 2019). This is a purely geographical formation, which can only conditionally be attributed to agglomerations.

The Drohobych agglomeration of the Lviv region, which was formed long before the decentralization reform, has a completely different characteristic. The territory of this agglomeration is 1365 km², a population - of 237,800 people, including 169,800 people (71.4%) are city dwellers. (Tkachuk et al, 2019). The agglomeration consists of four functional parts. The first is the urbanized core of agglomeration formation, which consists of towns that form the infrastructural component of the agglomeration, with its available most pronounced and grouped resources—natural raw resources of an industrial nature (potassium salts, oil, natural gas) and medical and health-improving direction—mineral springs, some of which are unique in their medicinal properties. The resource of historical and cultural significance is also concentrated to a greater extent within the urbanized core. The second part is the borderland of the flat and mountainous landscape, within which oil and potash deposits and sources of mineral water are located. The third is the southwestern, mountainous part, which is not connected to the urban core. The fourth part is the northeastern, agrarian zone, which contains deposits of natural gas and prospective deposits of potash salts. However, the Drohobych agglomeration, which was based on the mining industry, currently lacks the motivation, resources and functioning models that were a condition at the time of its formation. Instead, other factors, such as available sources of mineral water, mountain landscapes and historical and cultural heritage form the basis of the development of the tourist industry (Bardyn & Sosnova, 2023).

The example of the Drohobych agglomeration provides grounds for consideration of the UTCs and districts formed as a result of the decentralization reform as specific rural-urban agglomeration formations. In accordance with the requirements of the Law of Ukraine *On the Voluntary Association of Territorial Communities* (Legislation of Ukraine No. 157-VIII, 2015), the subjects of the voluntary association of territorial communities became not only neighboring territorial communities of villages and townships, but also towns, which contributed to the formation of UTCs, which are 'mixed' in population composition and heterogeneous in functions and lifestyle.

Of the total number of functioning territorial communities, 626, or 43.5%, are rural. These communities are characterized by a homogeneous composition of the population and uniformity of resources and functions, so they cannot be considered rural-urban agglomeration formations. Rural-urban agglomerations include 432 (30.1%) township communities, 380 (26.4%) urban communities and all 119 districts. This means that in the formation of rural-urban agglomerations at the district level, rural communities that are part of individual districts also participate.

At the level of UTCs, rural-urban agglomerations include urban and rural communities, among which twenty of them, whose population exceeds 100,000

people, are the most prominent. The largest among them are ten UTCs, the administrative centers of which are the centers of oblasts and districts – Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lutsk, Sumy, Ternopil and four more large towns of oblast importance.

Among the districts, the classical type of agglomerations in quantitative terms correspond to sixteen, the population of which ranges from 502,000 to 1,7 million people. The five largest of them in terms of population exceed seven of the twenty-four existing oblasts. However, the administrative centers of the vast majority of districts are small and medium-sized towns with a population of up to 100,000. Since the majority of the district's resource potential—human, natural, industrial, financial, administrative-organizational, social-cultural – is concentrated in these towns, they act as poles of economic growth and development of newly formed rural-urban agglomerations and play the role of a connecting link between villages, township and big towns.

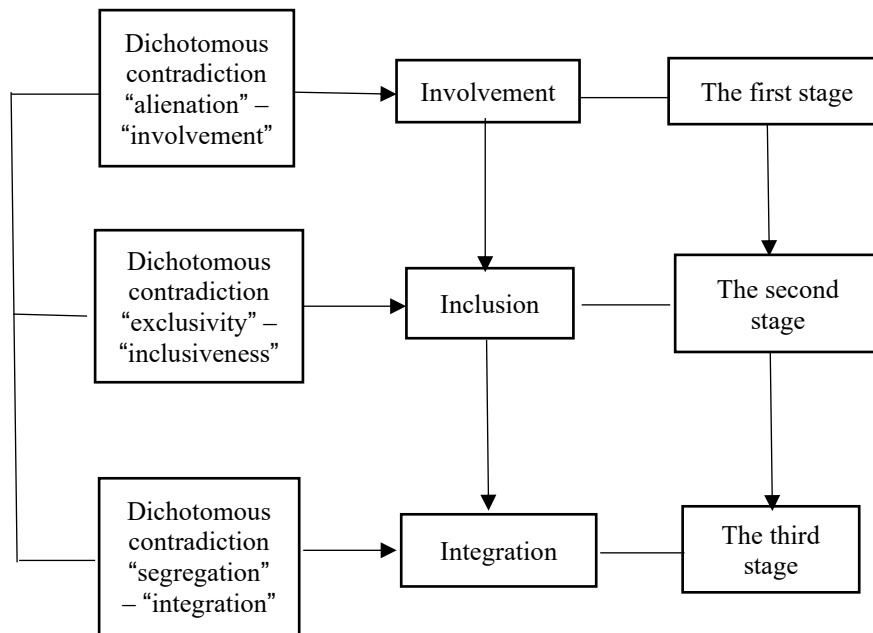
4.2 Rural-Urban Agglomerations as a Space for the Formation of Social Inclusiveness

The identification of UTCs and districts as rural-urban agglomerations is the key to understanding the essence of socio-spatial inclusiveness, which can be defined as the current state and degree of inclusion of human communities living within communities and districts in the system of property relations, their involvement in political, economic, social, spiritual changes in order to satisfy the interests and needs of all residents of these agglomeration formations without exception. Taking into account the above, rural-urban agglomerations of the basic and district levels of the administrative-territorial system of Ukraine are objects of socio-spatial inclusiveness. The inclusiveness of these socio-spatial formations is primarily achieved thanks to the synergistic effect of cohesion within the continuous space of villages, townships, towns, and rural and urban populations, which was initiated by the decentralization reform.

The process of rural-urban agglomerations acquiring a state of inclusiveness occurs gradually, with overcoming certain contradictions at each of its stages.

The unfolding of inclusion, which is reflected in Figure 1, occurs step by step by overcoming antagonism within the indicated paired dichotomies. For the first stage of the deployment of inclusion – involvement, the presence of a common living environment of members of territorial communities and districts who are residents of urban and rural settlements with agglomeration attributes is characteristic. The second stage of inclusion is the participation of all layers of the population of agglomerations in the process of social reproduction in the system of power relations and the everyday life of communities and districts. The third stage is integration, which is characterized by the implementation of social transformations on the basis of inclusivity with the active participation of all population groups without restrictions of age, gender, social, political, religious, ethnic, or physical characteristics (Pavlova, 2022).

Figure 1. The sequence of deployment of inclusiveness of the rural-urban agglomerations.



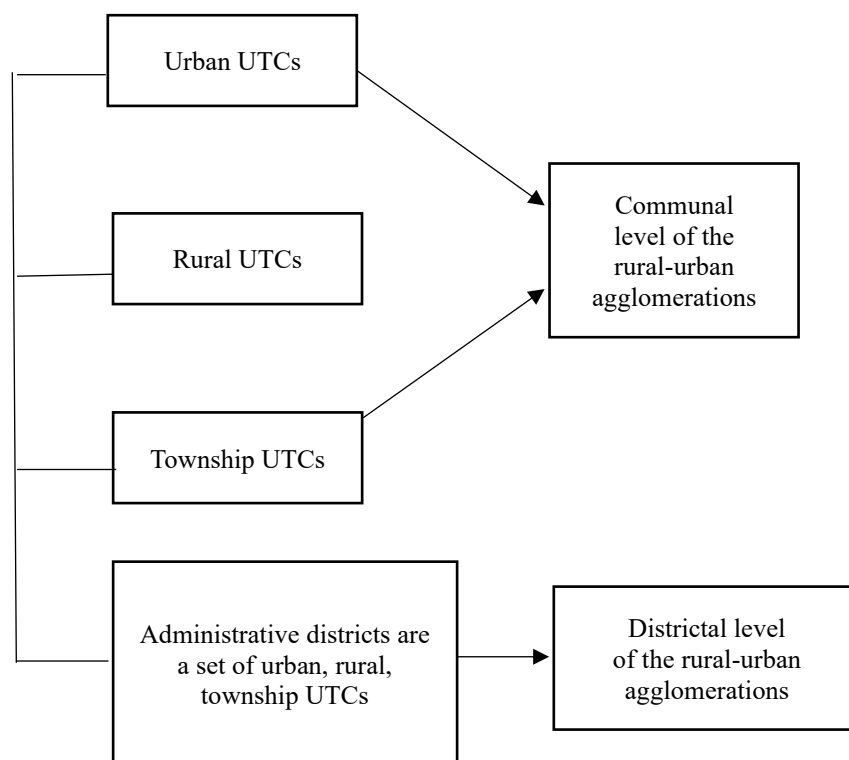
Source: Authors.

The result of the inclusive development of rural-urban agglomerations is the achievement of a certain state and level of the community, which forms an environment of social harmony and inclusion of well-being, in which there is no social discrimination on any grounds and social injustice. However, the significant difference in the population and the area that exists between different UTCs puts them in unequal conditions. In particular, six oblast centers acquired the status of UTC centers. More than 100,000 people live in the twenty largest urban UTCs, and less than 10,000 people live in the ten smallest urban UTCs. The same differentiation exists between rural UTCs, ten of which have more than 20,000 people, while the population of each of the twenty-two smallest communities does not exceed 3,000 people. There is also significant differentiation between districts, each with eight of the largest having over 500,000 people, while each of the nine smallest districts has a population of less than 100,000.

Tracking the deployment of the process of inclusive development of the UTCs and districts made it possible to determine its three socio-spatial models. One of them – communal township-urban – reflects certain properties of urban and township UTCs, which are derived from the population of the administrative center, the resource potential of communities, the state of their infrastructure, and production specialization. The second – the district model – consists of a set of communities. The inclusiveness depends not only on the financial and economic capacity of communities but also on the stability of connections and relations formed as a result of the interaction of rural, township and urban UTCs among themselves and with the district center and from the potential of the center of the district. In this sense, the status of the district centers (town-centers of oblasts, towns of oblast significance, towns of district significance) is also important. There is also a third – the communal rural mode – is characteristic of the relevant UTCs, with a dominant agrarian branchial and rural socio-spatial

orientation of inclusive development. This, taking into account its structural and essential characteristics, does not reflect the features of rural-urban agglomeration formations. In order to create and maintain an inclusive environment, it is important that all members of communities and different strata of the population of the districts are psychologically ready and socio-economically motivated to participate in public, social, economic and political activities. That is, the onset of inclusion is possible only with active participation in this process of the subjects of its creation.

Figure 2. Two-level structure of the rural-urban agglomerations.



Source: Authors.

Despite the specificity of the manifestation of inclusiveness within the spatial boundaries of Ukraine's rural-urban agglomerations, it is necessary to emphasize its certain determinism. This process takes place in the conditions of the modern stage of globalization and under the influence of urbanization and ruralization, which manifest themselves differently in certain countries.

For example, China's economic success is largely based on a provincial model of urbanization that stimulated sustainable and inclusive rural development (Huang & Zheng, 2022). In Indonesia, on the contrary, in the development of rural areas, considerable attention is paid to the benefits of ruralization, which contributes to the revival of agriculture and fishing, and farmers are the main generators of this process (Sulistyorini, 2020). In India, the rural way of life has emerged from the subjugation of the ghost of urbanization thanks to the spread of "agrarian urbanism," which takes into account certain advantages of the urban way of life (Gillen et al., 2022, p. 6). In African countries, rural development, which is influenced by ruralization, and urban development, which evolves on

the basis of urbanization, do not fully reflect their mutual interdependence and, therefore need to be revised and reformatted (Sakketa, 2022).

The dynamics of inclusiveness of rural-urban agglomerations depends on which tendency – convergent or divergent – is dominant in the space. Ukraine manifests a club version of the convergence of rural-urban agglomerations, the essence of which is the contradictory convergence of these socio-spatial formations since they are characterized by a similar structure and didn't have a significant difference in the development at the time of the implementation of the decentralization reform.

An important role in assessing convergent and divergent trends in the inclusive development of UTCs and districts is played by the location in relation to oblast centers, the degree of functionality, and sectoral and socio-spatial orientation. The distribution of UTCs across the country, according to this feature, is uniform, although with a certain predominance of the share of semi-peripheral and peripheral communities. The largest percentage of central UTCs is in the western macroregion (40.1%), of peripheral—eastern (49.3%) and southern (48.9%)—macroregions. Among the districts, 41.2% of their total number have the status of central, 37.0% are semi-peripheral, and 21.8% are peripheral. The largest share of central districts is in the central (56.2%) and eastern (47.7%), of peripheral – in the southern (35.3%) macroregions. The majority of agglomerations are polyfunctional or bifunctional (86 out of their total number, which is 72.2%). The largest number of multifunctional agglomerations belongs to the central (11) and eastern (10) macroregions with the smallest being northern (3). Monofunctional agglomerations are concentrated in the western macroregion (48.4%). The agglomerations of the central, southern, and western macroregions are predominantly agrarian, respectively, the agglomerations of the eastern and northern macroregions are predominantly industrial. The largest share of agglomerations mainly focused on service development is in the western and southern macroregions, which is due to the presence of mountainous terrain and the seaside coast. The distribution of agglomerations according to the socio-spatial direction of development is derived from their industry specialization. The distribution of agglomerations with balanced urban-rural or rural-urban development is more or less uniform. Agglomerations of the central macroregion have some deviation in this regard.

Indexes of inclusive capacity indicate a relatively even distribution between macroregions of agglomerations with moderate inclusive capacity. Minor fluctuations in individual indicators reflect the uneven provision of agglomerations with land area, as well as the specifics of the settlement system in terms of oblasts and macroregions, the level of their urbanization and ruralization, and the historical division of labor. Table 2 presents the definition of the inclusive capacity of macroregions.

Table 2. Inclusive Capacity of Rural-Urban Agglomerations of Ukraine by Macroregions

Criterion and level of inclusive capacity	Northern macroregion	Eastern macroregion	Southern macroregion	Western macroregion	Central macroregion
The level of inclusive capacity districts: number; percentage:					
•sufficiental inclusive capacity (more than 20 points on average per district)		*432 points: **21 = ***20.57 points (first place among macroregions)			
• moderatel inclusive capacity (from 15 to 20 points on average per district)	270.5 points: 17 = 15.89 points (fifth place among macroregions)		277 points: 16 = 17.31 points (third place among macroregions)	576.5 points: 33 = 17.46 points (second place among macroregions)	517.5 points: 32 = 16.16 points (fourth place among macroregions)
•insufficiental inclusive capacity (less than 15 points on average per district)					

Source: Compiled by the authors based on official statistics of Ukraine.

* Total number of points by one macroregion.

** The total number of districts of the macroregion.

*** Average number of points per district.

4.3 Obstacles to the Formation of an Inclusive Rural-Urban Environment

Rural-urban agglomerations arose against the background of Ukraine's deindustrialization process, which has been ongoing for the past two decades. As a result, it intensified the process of ruralization, which had its own basis—the developed agrarian sector and the tendency to agrarianization of many spheres of social life. These changes in the social development of the country coincided with the initiated reform of decentralization of public power and management, in which the main emphasis was placed on strengthening the powers of administrative-territorial units at the basic and district levels. The first step on this path was the formation of UTC and consolidation of districts. According to the intention of the initiators of the reform, the administrative centers of communities and districts became large villages, small and medium-sized cities.

During the last 15 years, with a significant reduction in the population of Ukraine (more than 8 million), the territory of settlements and the area of construction have grown rapidly. According to the World Bank, Ukraine is among the five countries with the largest number of built-up areas. Today, 33,340 km² of territory are under construction, this is more than in Brazil with 33,160 km². There is no territory left in the towns for placing objects of critical urban infrastructure: solid household waste landfills, town cemeteries, sewage treatment plants, and water intake sites for water supply. This leads to the search for territory outside the town limits and, therefore, to inevitable negotiations with rural communities, which do not always give successful results (Tkachuk et al., 2019).

A side effect of the reform is the aggravation of old and the appearance of new problems, namely:

- concentration and redistribution of power
- decrease in the number of self-governing units authorized to make decisions independently
- preserving the division of communities and districts into central, semi-peripheral and peripheral
- strengthening of the conflict between rural, township and urban communities on land use issues
- the inability of a significant number of administrative centers of communities and districts to perform the functions of centers and poles of economic development
- a significant share of the poor and unemployed
- strengthening of spatial polarization; lack of qualified managers

Despite the success of the decentralization reform, local self-government has still not received adequate financial independence due to the existing structure of community budgets, which are filled only by a quarter thanks to local taxes.

The presence of a large share of small towns in Ukraine (more than 50%), the population of which does not exceed 50,000 people, limits the process of inclusion deployment within the spatial boundaries of rural-urban agglomerations. This, in a certain way, affects the functional, sectoral and socio-spatial orientation of their inclusive development.

The reluctance of a significant part of the population to take a direct part in this process has a negative impact on the inclusive development of these socio-spatial entities. So, according to the results of sociological research, only 32% of the surveyed citizens expressed a desire to participate in solving the problems of their communities in the case of expanding the rights of local self-government bodies. It is likely that in the post-war period, their number will not increase for objective reasons, although the percentage of those ready to do so will be higher.

With the formation of UTCs and the creation of new districts, the prerequisites for creating an inclusive environment within these rural-urban agglomeration formations arose. However, such social transformations in terms of cohesion with the subsequent integration of Ukrainian society into a single European community were interrupted by the Russian war against Ukraine.

A large part of the territory of communities and districts was destroyed as a result of Russian military aggression. Only in the Kyiv oblast during the month of occupation (from February 24 to April 1, 2022), destruction was recorded in 46 out of 69 territorial communities. Thus, in the town of Bucha, 27% of the

population (more than 16,000 citizens) were left homeless and housing of 60,600 people was damaged. In Irpen, 119 multi-story buildings and almost 1,500 private houses were destroyed, and in Gostomel, 40% of the total number of buildings were damaged. Other settlements of the oblast also experienced noticeable destruction and significant population outflow (Pidgrushnyi et al., 2023).

The most urgent problems of war and post-war reconstruction of UTCs and districts that need urgent solutions should include: provision of the population with places of residence, work and education; provision of adequate living conditions for persons whose houses and apartments were damaged as a result of enemy bombings; reconstruction and restoration of industrial, transport and social infrastructure facilities; providing jobs primarily to the active working population; restoration of pre-war economic potential; search and implementation of investments in new types of economic activity, taking into account the availability of local resources; and providing assistance to the war disabled and other socially vulnerable sections of the population.

Within the framework of the project *Government Reforms Support in Ukraine* (SURGe), which is financed by the Government of Canada, expert support will be provided to relevant ministries on the formation and implementation of state policy in the areas of recovery, regional development and decentralization. It is about starting work in the five oblasts most affected by Russian aggression. Experts of the SURGe project will provide support in the implementation of Reform Support Offices in communities. In particular, they will work directly with local self-government bodies to improve the efficiency of their work. In addition, expert support will be provided in the following areas: project management and strategic planning, investment management and monitoring of their use, digitization and prevention of corruption (The Ministry of restoration and the SURGe project are starting pilot projects to support communities in 5 regions, 2023).

In August 2023, an online presentation of the new initiative of the SURGe project *Inclusive Recovery Under Community Leadership* took place, the main task of which is expert support of communities in sustainable, inclusive, social and economic recovery. The implementation of the initiative involves the creation of teams at the community level with the involvement of local experts to build capacity and preserve experience and knowledge on the ground (“Inclusive recovery with leadership of community”: Invite to participate in the initiative, 2023).

In the state budget of Ukraine (Fund for liquidation of the consequences of aggression), there is UAH 61.7 billion (1.55 billion US dollars) for liquidation of the consequences of armed aggression, of which UAH 25.8 billion was forcibly seized from the aggressor. The funds of the fund will be used to provide financial assistance for the repair of damaged housing, the restoration of critical infrastructure, for pilot reconstruction projects in five oblasts, as well as for a large number of objects throughout the country that were destroyed (61.7 billion hryvnias were collected for the Fund for Liquidation of the Consequences of Aggression, 2023).

It is impossible not to agree with the opinion of one of the leaders of the Ukrainian government that in many spheres, there has been decentralization of financial resources and decentralization of powers, but there has also been decentralization of corruption. However, the central bodies of executive power are not free from corruption either: on January 22, 2023, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine announced the disclosure of the Deputy Minister

of Community Development, Territories and Infrastructure of Ukraine V. Lozytsky for a bribe of 400,000 dollars (Kudimov, 2023).

Therefore, the elimination of these and other obstacles that stand in the way of the formation within the UTCs and districts of an inclusive environment is a priority task of both the central and local authorities.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

According to the results of the study, the phenomenon of inclusiveness of UTCs and districts of Ukraine is largely related to the specifics of the process of decentralization of public power and management in Ukraine, despite efforts to design a domestic model of decentralization based on the Polish model (Kolosov et al., 2020). First, the main task of the decentralization reform was to preserve the unitary nature of the Ukrainian state and prevent its federalization. Secondly, the reform scenario itself turned out to be derived from the course of events of the ‘Revolution of Dignity’ and related social processes in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Under such conditions, the authorities did not have enough time to make decisions regarding the step-by-step sequence of implementing the reform. The events of 2014 left no other choice but to reform the administrative and territorial system of Ukraine, first at the basic and later at the district levels. However, the principle of voluntariness, according to which decentralization was carried out at its initial stage, did not bring the expected results in terms of the rapid pace of reform implementation. The problem was not only that the reform was delayed (Kolosov et al., 2020): by the end of 2019, only 40% of the existing councils of territorial communities had merged. The key point was that most of the newly created communities demonstrated their financial and economic incapacity: the funds they earned per inhabitant amounted to less than UAH 3,000 (75 US dollars) per year.

In order to facilitate the joining of towns of oblast significance, normative legal acts were adopted, introducing the plan principle of the formation of UTCs. As a result, UTCs covered the entire country, with the exception of the temporarily occupied territories. Thus, a common rural-urban continuum was formed within the administrative-territorial units of the basic (community) and district levels, and UTCs and districts thereby turned into corresponding agglomeration formations. Based on the analysis of the demographic, natural-resource, socio-economic potential of rural-urban agglomerations, their two levels and corresponding models of development on an inclusive basis were identified – communal township-urban and district. The deployment of three stages of inclusiveness in the spatial boundaries of rural-urban agglomerations is outlined – involvement, inclusion and integration.

Taking into account that the centers of the vast majority of UTCs and districts are villages, townships, and small and medium-sized towns that have signs of agrarianism and rurality, in the phrase ‘rural-urban agglomerations,’ the semantic emphasis is placed on its first part. The sectoral and socio-spatial orientation, the inclusive capacity of rural-urban agglomerations, in addition to the endogenous factors of inclusiveness (location, available potential, psychological readiness for change for the better), largely depend on exogenous factors – of influence on the formation of an inclusive environment of urbanization and ruralization, of convergent and divergent trends.

As a result of the formation of UTCs and of new districts, various settlements emerged within their borders. These settlements were chosen by communities and the decision of central state authorities, ranging from small villages to cities with millions of inhabitants. They are tasked with creating an inclusive living

environment, despite facing various obstacles such as existing social inequality, alienation of a significant number of the population from work, its results, and public goods.

Changes in the administrative-territorial system at the level of UTCs and districts led to significant changes in the territorial organization of society. The key feature is the growing role in social processes of the self-governing component of public administration in the conditions of the formation of continuous-convergent formations of the agglomeration type with an inclusive perspective. This is connected with the possibility of inclusion of rural, township and urban communities located in the common rural-urban space to the process of overcoming their socio-economic inequality, convergence of living standards of rural and urban population, and the achievement of welfare inclusion.

The reform of the decentralization of public power and management created opportunities for democratization of the system of public management of inclusive development through the direct implementation of self-governing principles at the local government level and self-governing and representative interests of communities at the district level. However, such potential opportunities in the form of a self-governing component of public management of the inclusive development of these socio-spatial entities can turn into reality, first of all, under the condition of recognizing the individual as the primary self-governing link.

The inclusive development of rural-urban agglomerations takes place thanks to a certain generation of separate rural development and urban development into an integrated combined inclusive rural-urban development, which occurs under the mutual influence of urbanization and ruralization.

Decentralization of public power, like any matter, has historical, political-legal, economic foundations and is manifested through an objective contradiction between people's power and the system of the state bureaucratic apparatus. In Ukraine, this contradiction is exacerbated by the very nature of unitarism, as a result of which there is a false slide towards the 'overcentralization' of state power, which leads to a gradual increase in socio-economic disparities and a disruption of systemic ties between the central, regional and local levels of the state-territorial organization of society (Hamburg, 2014).

As a result of the decentralization reform, the number of administrative-territorial units, primarily at the basic level, significantly decreased, under which there were significantly more communities than before. That is, there was a real concentration of the population, settlements, authorities and relevant powers at the local level. In this way, a conflict field of conflicting interests of representatives of central and peripheral communities, the administration of the district center, and the heads of the UTC are formed.

Some authors see a danger in the development of decentralization processes in Ukraine in the adaptation of the oligarchic model to the conditions of decentralization (Maksymchuk & Klyoba, 2019). The key role in preventing this process belongs to the state, which, as evidenced by successful world practice, should turn into a "developmental state" that will reflect with its policy not only the narrow corporate interests of business but primarily the interests of the entire population of the country (Kindzerskyi, 2020, p.115).

It has been found that the vast majority of rural-urban agglomerations are characterized by an agrarian sectoral and rural socio-spatial orientation of inclusiveness, the capacity of which is moderate. An inclusive rural-urban environment is imagined as one within which the rights and freedoms of citizens

are respected, their participation in political, economic, social and cultural life is ensured; there are no spatial disparities and socio-economic imbalance; and extreme poverty and social injustice, discrimination on any grounds, including ethnic ones, have been overcome.

The formation of inclusiveness is a directed process, which is determined by its proper governance based on self-government with a gradual approach to inclusive governance. Of course, in this case, it is important to maintain a balance between state administration and local self-government. First of all, it requires a new philosophy of the functioning of public power, which should be based on the paradigm of civil society with its institutions and mechanisms of people's rule and self-government, the base of which should be the sovereign individual. Endowed with freedom from birth, an individual has the right to form a certain community and voluntarily and at their discretion, in accordance with the procedural principle of subsidiarity, to form public organizations, and to delegate the exercise of some of their powers to the state. Social harmony will not come until every single individual turns into a citizen capable of realizing his natural rights as the primary subject of self-government and the only source of power in Ukraine (Pavlov & Pavlova, 2020).

On the one hand, the decentralization of power and management in Ukraine corresponds to the global trend of democratization of public management due to the growth of power and management functions in the public life of self-governing units. On the other hand, as a result of the socio-spatial unification of rural, township and urban communities in the process of formation of UTCs, the latter actually took over the functions of state authorities and local self-government bodies. This tendency contains undesirable consequences for the institution of self-government. Here, it is difficult to disagree with the fact that the model of decentralization and deconcentration of public power in Ukraine is characterized by the actual implantation of local self-government into the matter of state administration, a total dependence on the state (Batanov, 2014).

Tracking the process of the deployment of inclusiveness within the spatial boundaries of rural-urban agglomerations is significantly complicated by Ukraine's state of war. UTCs and districts of almost half of the oblasts were and continue to be in the military zone, which requires priority restoration of the destroyed part of the territory of Ukraine with the participation of international partners.

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