



Creating an Acmeology-Based Inclusive Environment for Students from the Temporarily Occupied Territories

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Abstract: *A result of the undeclared Russo-Ukrainian war is the new concept of ‘internally displaced persons’, the majority of whom are young people looking for learning and vocational opportunities and for this a conducive environment is needed. This article illustrates the experience of Mariupol State University (Ukraine) in organising an acmeology-based inclusive environment that aims to reach the students’ highest possible developmental potential and welfare.*

Keywords: *internally displaced person, acmeology, inclusion of university students*

Years of the Russo-Ukrainian war in eastern Ukraine have led to the emergence of a new concept – internally displaced persons (IDPs), or migrants from Crimea and the Donbas, who presently make up a substantial share of the country’s population, i.e. 1,473,650 persons, including 195,884 children and young people under 18 years, and 397,740 persons of working age, as of June 6, 2021, according to the Unified Information Database on IDPs (Ministry of Social Policy, 2021). At present, young people constitute the majority of IDPs pursuing higher education and employment on the territories controlled by the Ukrainian government.

Ukrainian universities face the following challenges in enrolling and supporting student IDPs: facilitating their psychological adjustment and socialisation, overcoming the opposition between their territorial (resistance) and national identity, ensuring quality education, preparing them for employment, and professional self-actualisation and leadership. In order to provide successful inclusion of students with the IDP status into universities’ learning space it is necessary to construct a special learning environment, in particular an acmeology-based one.¹ The latter implies creating acmeological conditions as objective premises, circumstances,

¹ The term “acmeology” comes from the ancient Greek word “acme” (“top”, “blossom”, or “edge”) and is understood as the highest point of development and maturity.



requirements, or provisions which positively affect a person's development and intensify and vary his/her activities, and acmeological factors as subjective driving forces which direct a person toward his/her acme-oriented self-development and self-disclosure and develop the motivation for continuous self-improvement (Dubaseyuk, 2011; Yermak, 2013).

The article describes the experience of Mariupol State University (MSU), Ukraine, in constructing and maintaining an acmeology-based inclusive environment for student IDPs by developing and carrying out a set of measures on the institutional and departmental levels, *inter alia*:

- providing inclusive and flexible admission conditions;
- assigning leadership positions to student IDPs and promoting their empowerment in academic groups;
- encouraging them to participate in cultural and science-related events, international mobility programmes, and specifically-aimed classroom activities.

Firstly, on a University basis there are two educational centres, "Donbas-Ukraine" and "Crimea-Ukraine", as structural units of the Admission Committee which offer a simplified entry procedure for applicants from the temporarily occupied territories. In addition, they: provide counselling and assistance to applicants in submitting their educational declarations (documents on obtaining general secondary education), facilitate annual assessment and final attestation of applicants in the Ukrainian language and

history of Ukraine; issue state documents on basic secondary education or complete general secondary education, as well as identity documents if required; organise entrance examinations for applicant IDPs in MSU, and (in the case of competitive selection) provide recommendations for their admission to the University, etc. (MSU, 2021b). In 2020 MSU was among the top five universities in Ukraine with the largest number of entrants from the temporarily occupied territories. Presently, 3200 students are studying at the University, and among them there are 450 with IDP status.

Secondly, the acmeology-based inclusive environment is aimed at cultivating the leadership potential of student IDPs and forming their interpersonal relationships. Therefore they are assigned formal leadership positions in their academic groups, *i.e.* those of a group mentor, a students' trade union representative, a leader responsible for culture and sport activities, etc. Such empowerment enables the development of a sense of belonging to the group, awareness of group solidarity, and increased responsibility for group effectiveness. For instance, during distance learning because of the coronavirus lockdown the mentors of academic groups effectively organised communication between instructors and students, took records of online classes, coordinated asynchronous studies, etc.

Thirdly, the participation of student IDPs in culture and science-related events and international mobility programmes (within Erasmus+ projects)



supports the fostering of national identity and deeper understanding of the mother country alongside developing an international outlook. In choosing mobility programmes for student IDPs special attention is paid to identifying their academic and professional values, maintaining a regional, national, and global perspective, and promoting interdisciplinarity. Thus, Italian Philology majors with IDP status have the opportunity to take up courses in Italian language and culture in accordance with Italian higher education institutions, e.g. the University for Foreigners of Perugia. The Azov and Black Sea region of Ukraine is known as a crossing of cultures, in particular the Ukrainian and Hellenic ones, with the highest concentration of ethnic Greeks in Ukraine residing in the city of Mariupol and its surroundings. Therefore, MSU maintains active cooperation with universities in Greece. Student IDPs who are majoring in the Humanities and Social Studies can participate in youth exchange programmes, e.g. on the basis of the Department of Languages, Literature, and Culture of the Black Sea Countries, Democritus University of Thrace, Hellenic Republic. Within the framework of the interdisciplinary project “Sharing Different History, Shaping a Common Future” the MSU students visited Cyprus, interacted with their peers from Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, Turkey, Moldova, Bulgaria, and Belarus, and familiarised other participants with Ukrainian customs and traditions, significant historic events, and the current situation (MSU, 2020).

Besides, faculties and departments of the University are implementing numerous initiatives for IDPs’ comprehensive inclusion and adaptation to student life, e.g. conducting free preparatory courses in Ukrainian Language and Literature, English, History of Ukraine, and Mathematics before the start of the admission campaign. In addition to such courses, psychological training sessions, sports competitions, and workshops in drama and choreography are organised for young people with IDP status. The IDP trainees receive an in-course scholarship and live in a hall of residence provided by the University. After completing the courses and passing the final examinations, the entrants receive certificates that will facilitate their successful admission to the higher education institutions of Ukraine (MSU, 2021a).

It is worth noting that during the academic year the instructors of the Foreign Languages Faculty design instructional and learning materials to practise the topics of active citizenship, community work, publicising community events, etc. in foreign language classes and engage student IDPs in lively discussions (see Fig. 1). Later, students apply the acquired knowledge and skills in their daily life by participating in collective clean-ups or practising tourism volunteering in order to make the city of Mariupol attractive for visitors and ensure its safety, since it is situated close to the “contact” line with the temporarily occupied territories.

The results of the annual student evaluation at MSU show the high level

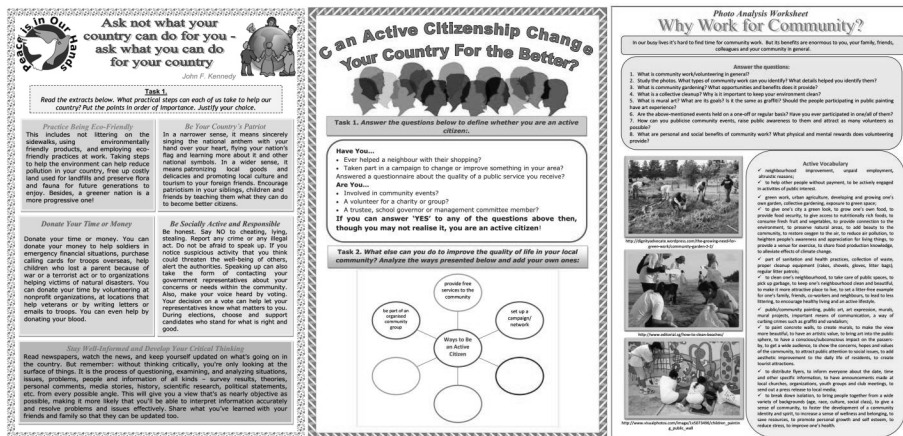


Fig. 1. Samples of English worksheets: active citizenship series

of academic performance of student IDPs, as well as of their achievements in social extra-curricular activities. The MSU psychological assistance centre regularly provides questionnaires to measure their satisfaction with their studies and determine their future foci. According to the results obtained,

the majority of student IDPs identify themselves as citizens of Ukraine and plan their career and further life in the government-controlled areas until the complete cessation of hostilities and restoration of peace, de-occupation, and reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

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MARAKHOVSKA, N. Vytvoření inkluzivního prostředí založeného na akmeologii pro studenty z dočasně okupovaných území

Výsledkem rusko-ukrajinského konfliktu na východě Ukrajiny je nový koncept tzv. vnitřně vysídlených osob, z nichž většinu tvoří mladí lidé, kteří hledají bezpečné útočiště pro svůj další život, vzdělávání a pracovní příležitosti. Tento článek ilustruje zkušenosti Mariupolské státní univerzity (Ukrajina) s organizací inkluzivního prostředí vycházejícího z principů akmeologie; s cílem dosáhnout nejvyššího možného rozvojového potenciálu a blahobytu studentů.

Klíčová slova: vnitřně vysídlená osoba, akmeologie, inkluze vysokoškolských studentů