BALTIC WORLDS
Theme: Recovery and resilience in Kharkiv

Guest editor: **Ilona Kostikova**

Introduction.

From underground learning to national recovery

THE TRANSFORMATION OF UKRAINIAN UNIVERSITIES IN WARTIME

The war in Ukraine is still ongoing.[1] It affects all aspects of life: from safety,[2] to education,[3] to health.[4] This special section provides a comprehensive socio-pedagogical map of Ukraine's wartime reality, illustrating a society that is touched by the war on every structural level. It reflects a nation forced into a "hybrid" existence, where education is literally driven underground to preserve intellectual sovereignty, and where youth development pipelines are severed by infrastructure destruction. The section captures the intersection of physical danger and psychological endurance, documenting how faculty maintain a sense of professional mission despite profound emotional exhaustion.[5] Collectively, the section portrays the Ukrainian experience not just as a humanitarian crisis but as a deliberate act of institutional resistance, where the maintenance of education, sport, and mental health becomes a vital front in the struggle for national continuity.

These three essays and the reports are unified by their rigorous examination



H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University after Russian attack (authors' own photo, July 2022).

of institutional and human resilience within Ukraine's educational, social, and psychological infrastructure during the full-scale Russian invasion. Overall, the papers analyze how systemic military aggression necessitates a radical shift in pedagogical, sporting, and ethical paradigms. From "underground" teaching and learning at universities to the survival of youth athletic pipelines and the emotional endurance of faculty, these works highlight the intersection of emergency adaptation and national identity. For journal readers, this collection offers a rare empirical window into sectoral survival under existential threat, providing a blueprint for maintaining educational, intellectual, and physical sovereignty amidst the war in Ukraine. The interview reflects Ukraine's wartime reality by documenting the strategic adaptations required to sustain teachers' training at a university under constant threat, providing a vital narrative of institutional problem-solving amidst systemic disruption. For readers, it offers a rare first-hand case study in maintaining pedagogical standards and organizational resilience during the war using the case of Kharkiv city, located near the Russian border.

THE ESSAY "Education as resistance: Wartime university practices and decolonization in Ukraine" shows the reality of teaching and learning at the university in Kharkiv city. The contemporary global landscape, while still navigating the residual complexities of the post-pandemic

era, has been profoundly destabilized by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. This act of military aggression transcends mere territorial conquest; it represents a deliberate attempt to dismantle the cultural and intellectual foundations of a sovereign nation. For the higher education sector, particularly in frontline cities like Kharkiv, this war has shaped a cascade of socio-legal and existential emergencies that threaten the very continuity of knowledge production. This article, "Education as resistance", addresses the urgent necessity of reframing wartime university adaptations, not merely as emergency logistics but as vital acts of decolonization and epistemic resistance.

THE AIM OF the research is underscored by the systemic destruction of educational infrastructure. Kharkiv, once a vibrant "student capital", has seen its universities transformed into frequent targets of hostilities. When the physical sanctity of the classroom is violated, the constitutional right to education – a cornerstone of Ukraine's socio-legal fabric – is placed in immediate danger. This study posits that the survival of the university under such conditions is a prerequisite for the survival of the nation's intellectual sovereignty. By examining the experiences of Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, the authors illuminate how the institution has successfully synthesized student safety with high-quality instructional delivery through the pioneering use of "underground classrooms".

The necessity of this work lies in its critical examination of the "decolonial stance" adopted by the Ukrainian higher education system. The ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war is interpreted here through the lens of long-standing colonial pressures, where the aggressor seeks to reassert influence over the content and orientation of knowledge dissemination. Consequently, the preservation of a Ukrainian-centric curriculum and the maintenance of institutional autonomy become dominant concerns. The essay explores how the conversion of deep bomb shelters into fully equipped learning environments, the "underground university", serves as a symbolic and practical manifestation of resilience against Russian aggression.

"KHARKIV, ONCE A VIBRANT 'STUDENT CAPITAL', HAS SEEN ITS UNIVERSITIES TRANSFORMED INTO FREQUENT TARGETS OF HOSTILITIES."

Furthermore, the essay provides a nuanced analysis of the psycho-emotional and logistical frameworks required to sustain education in a high-risk setting. It investigates the shift from traditional physical classrooms to subterranean and blended learning formats, ensuring that the development of Ukraine's youth is not permanently derailed by the trauma of war. By documenting these unprecedented transformations, the essay offers a compendium of instructive insights for the global academic community, serving as a proposal for institutional resilience in conditions of armed conflict. Ultimately, this research asserts that the Ukrainian university's wartime evolution is a profound act of self-determination, safeguarding the nation's right to produce its own knowledge and protect its cultural identity.

THE ESSAY "Transformation of youth sport education in Ukraine under war: Perspectives on recovery" reveals the changes in youth sport education in Ukraine during wartime. The full-scale military invasion of Ukraine has triggered a systemic disintegration of the public sector, with the sphere of physical training and youth sport education facing particularly acute, cumulative challenges. Traditionally viewed through the system of the Long-Term Athlete Development framework, youth sport serves as an essential pipeline for athletic reserves and as a critical mechanism for social integration. However, the current macrosystemic shock of the Russian-Ukrainian war has radically disrupted these developmental trajectories, necessitating an urgent and systematized investigation into the sector's structural transformation and recovery.

The work's primary objective is to provide a systemic assessment of structural transformations, and to formulate a theoretical framework for the recovery. It argues that recovery must move beyond emergency crisis management toward a resilient educational model that integrates trauma-informed rehabilitation into athletic training. Through qualitative policy analysis and data triangulation from international bodies such as the UNDP and UNICEF, the study identifies patterns of institutional loss and resilience.

THE INTEREST OF this essay stems from the deformation of learning environments. The war acts as a decisive exogenous shock that deforms students' micro- and mesosystems – families, sports schools, and instructional training processes – leading to a "talent pipeline" collapse. With physical activity among children near frontlines declining by 40% to 60%, the risk of somatic and anxiety disorders has increased, making the restoration of youth sport education a matter of Ukrainian national health and psychosocial stability.

This essay is necessary to address the multilayered "hybrid threats" targeting the sports sector. In territories temporarily occupied by Russian troops, the authors document the instrumentalization of sport for the militarization and indoctrination of youth, a clear violation of Olympic principles. Concurrently, the study highlights the insidious impact of "sportswashing", where international competitions are used to manufacture political legitimacy for the Russian aggressor, creating profound ethical dissonance for the global sports movement. By analyzing these factors, the essay substantiates the need for ethical governance and robust sanctioning mechanisms to protect the integrity of Ukrainian national systems.

The significance of this work extends to global sports sociology and pedagogy. By conceptualizing the fragility of pedagogical pipelines in state-centralized sys-



The university lecturers have classes in Genetics at Kharkiv Lyceums in the basement of security reasons. PHOTO: KHARKIV LYCEUM

tems during the war, the authors offer a replicable theoretical model for assessing sectoral resilience. The essay concludes that sustaining the sector requires internationally coordinated financial mechanisms and a shift toward specialized infrastructure funds, ensuring that the integrity of the international sports movement is preserved even among the most severe geopolitical crises.

THE ESSAY "University staff's mental health in wartime: Personal experiences, emotional well-being, and support mechanisms" underlines the importance of mental health in wartime. In the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian university lecturers have been thrust into working conditions without global precedent. Navigating air-raid alerts, displacement, and the existential threat of daily life, these educators continue to fulfill their professional responsibilities while managing intense personal trauma. This essay addresses a critical gap in contemporary research by providing systematic quantitative evidence on how specific wartime stressors influence occupational burnout and functional impairment among academic staff at universities.

The urgency of this study is rooted in the dramatic rise of emotional exhaustion (EE) among faculty members, particularly in heavily affected regions such as Kharkiv, Sumy, and Dnipro. While burnout is a recognized challenge in global higher education, the "demands-resources" equation undergoes a radical shift in wartime. Demands multiply in intensity and unpredictability, while material and organizational resources break apart. This research is essential for informing university policies that are able to support staff who are working under conditions that would typically paralyze institutional functioning.

A central finding of this study, and a key reason for its importance, is the discovery of a non-linear progression in burnout. While emotional exhaustion is prevalent in nearly 80% of Ukrainian respondents at the universities, negative affective reactions and cynicism remain strikingly low. The authors suggest that non-material resources, such as civic duty, professional identity, and a sense of mission, serve as powerful protective mechanisms. This challenges traditional linear models of burnout, such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and invites a reconsideration of how resilience operates under extreme conditions.

The essential nature of the essay is emphasized by its empirical focus on the correlation between personal wartime exposure and professional functioning. The study reveals that direct personal connections to the war, such as having relatives in the Armed Forces, significantly amplify stress and exhaustion. Moreover, it demonstrates that functional impairment is more closely associated with internal emotional exhaustion than with external infrastructural damage. This insight is vital for institutional leadership, demonstrating that support strategies must move beyond organizational logistics to address individual trauma loads.

By utilizing Spearman's rank correlation and adaptive self-report instruments, the research provides a rigorous quantita-

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tive analysis into the dynamics of burnout in conflict-affected contexts. The paper concludes by recommending targeted psychological support and the reinforcement of "mission and purpose" as key strategies for sustaining professionalism and reducing long-term professional attrition. Ultimately, this work serves as a unique resource for international scholars and policymakers, offering profound insights into the psychological endurance of the academic community during armed conflicts.

THE INTERVIEW OFFERS A powerful and rare glimpse into the extraordinary measures taken to maintain educational standards during the Russian-Ukrainian war is is given by the Rector and Vice-Rector of H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University in their two reports. They speak about educational resilience, describing how professors and students continue their work not only online but also in bomb shelters and at underground "MetroSchools" in Kharkiv, in order to ensure learning never stops. It is shown how the university has adapted to the war by creating different educational structures such as the Educational and Scientific Laboratory of Special and Inclusive Education. It highlights a vital, often overlooked consequence of war: the increasing number of children with special educational needs (SEN) due to physical and psychological trauma. The collaboration with UNICEF to build the specialized laboratory shows how international support is being transferred into immediate, local action. The work of Skovoroda Hub – a free digital environment – and the STEM Centre at the University, both of which provide practical science and technology training to help overcome "educational losses" caused by years of online learning, is described in detail.

Ilona Kostikova is a Doctor of Science in Education, PhD in Philology, PhD in Education, Full Professor, Head of Professor Mykhailo Hetmanets Department of Theory and Practice of the English Language and Foreign Literature, H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University, Kharkiv, Ukraine.

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University staff's mental health

"Professional maturity acts as a buffer against cynicism.

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