

DECENTRALIZATION: HOW PUBLIC OPINION CHANGES

Results of focus-group research

1. October-November 2014

2. April-May 2015

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Research objectives

- Define the understanding of decentralization concept and attitude towards the reform
- Define the understanding of "community" concept
- Clarify the vision of key problems of reform implementation (as they are seen by representatives of different target groups)
- Define the expectations from decentralization consequences
- Determine the factors, which influence the trustworthiness of information on authority decentralization
- Define the attitude towards different forms of information presentation
- See, how above-mentioned indicators change dynamically (from late 2014 to mid-2015)

Methodology and criteria

- Stage 1 – October-November 2014
- Stage 2 – April-May 2015
- Number of people in each focus-group – 9-12 people
- Interview duration – 1.5 hours
- Selection criteria – each group must include both men and women in proportion 1:1, aged between 18 and 75
- No more than 1 person from a single family can participate in a group
- Each participant is a permanent resident of the settlement
- Each non-specific focus-group includes people from different social strata

Research base 1 (October-November 2014)

Criteria		
Target group	Geography	Age
Journalists	Regions of Ukraine	1:1 m/f, 20-55
LSB – Mayors of small cities	Regions of Ukraine	1:1 m/f, 25-65, * 30-45
Social segment	East (Donetsk, Lugansk oblasts – migrants)	1:1 m/f, 25-65, * 30-45
Social segment	South (Odessa)	1:1 m/f, 25-65, * 30-45
Social segment	Centre (Vinnytsia)	1:1 m/f, 25-65, * 30-45
Social segment	West (Ivano-Frankivsk)	1:1 m/f, 25-65, * 30-45

Research base 2 (April-May 2015)

Criteria		
Target group	Geography	Gender/Age
Journalists, bloggers	Regions of Ukraine	1:1 m/f, 20-55
LSB – village council heads	Regions of Ukraine	1:1 m/f, 25-65, * 30-45
LSB – rayon council heads	Regions of Ukraine	1:1 m/f, 25-65, * 30-45
LSB – mayors of small cities	Regions of Ukraine	1:1 m/f, 25-65, * 30-45
Social segment	East (Donetsk, Lugansk oblast – refugees/migrants)	1:1 m/f, 25-65, * 30-45
Social segment	South (Odessa)	1:1 m/f, 25-70, * 30-45
Social segment	Centre (Cherkassy)	1:1 m/f, 25-70, * 30-45
Social segment	West (Lviv)	1:1 m/f, 25-70, * 30-45

Main lead motive. Dynamics

2014	2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding of decentralization concept among participants bears ambiguous, even contrasting character. Positive comments come from those who have understood the difference between centralized and decentralized authority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All focus-group participants admitted (in some form) that decentralization was the delegation of authority and finances to the basic level, closer to the public People understand that this is a link in the whole chain of reforms, without which Ukraine will be unable to become a full-fledged European state and move on People feel, that every provision of the reform concerns each and every one of them personally

2014: Two principal opinion groups

Positivists	Confused, aggressive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify decentralization with delegation of greater competencies and resources to the local authority. Also mention: Public participation Democracy Responsibility Self-governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desintegration of an entity Lack of something Remoteness from the centre Separatism Independence of separate regions Disarray Experience of chaos of the 90-s

2015: Two principal opinion groups

Democrats	Economists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underline the social and public significance of the reform. Decentralization is a step towards development of a democratic society, democratic principles of relations between the citizen and the authority, enhancement of the principles of democratic government and public participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underline socio-economic relevance and significance of the reforms. Decentralization (for them) is, first of all, an effective form of economic activity.

Key changes witnessed during the six months: not WHAT, but HOW

2014	2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main question of the discussion was WHAT decentralization means 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with different levels of understanding tried to express their thoughts on HOW decentralization would work

2015 "Democrats"

Perhaps, these are the drawbacks of today's society. Society will change. But not in a moment. The process takes years, even decades.

Innovations, image of Ukraine are a decisive push towards the image of a renewed Ukrainian.

I have a hope... We will manage to do only a little. We are only making the first steps. Our children, born in a free society, will continue what we start. They are more free. They have no fear. They long for something new, and they will be able to complete what we started.

Decentralization is development.

We will have a normal country.

We often hear and often say it ourselves: "They are the bastards, and I am such a good guy, we are such good guys". But what are we doing to prevent the bastards from getting on top of us?

Young politicians want to switch from blah-blah-blah to real actions. We already have examples of successful communities, modern managers. The problem is the passiveness of the citizens, but it will get under way. The more of us there are, the less corruption there will be; we will witness development.

- Who** – young active people – public activists, students, officials, who came to power after Maidan, partly –journalists and bloggers. These people were present in all the regions where the discussion took place.
- Accent** on the change of an individual, of mentality, of social and public activity habits.
- Global vision of opportunities:** education, language, national policy, overcoming of corruption, managerial staff, business development, development of the country from bottom to top, starting from villages and cities
- Criticisms of the reform** – stress the lack of full-scale, global vision, clear plan, roadmap; disruptiveness of reformation chain, non-understandable new rules of the game
- Vision of personal prospects** – implementation of one's skills, capabilities and energy in the country's development, no matter where they are going to be implemented (in local authorities, business, social work, policy). They are not afraid of change and are ready to face the risk.

2015 "Economists"

Getting the services closer to people at the local level. To put it simple for people: there will be no need to ride 30 km of broken roads to the oblast' centre and change the bus along the way; you can just visit us in the village council and we will resolve all the issues.

If the community decides that we need a music school, and it is ready to pay several teachers, then it is quite plausible. Presently, the Budget code clearly provides, what you can finance, and what you can not.

- **Who** – experienced representatives of local self-government bodies, representatives of small business, older people having the experience of unsuccessful reforms, and those who had cautious attitudes towards Maidan.
- **Accents** – rational usage of resources and opportunities at the local level, delegation of authority, making services closer to people, simplification and efficiency of solutions for urgent issues, increasing of local budgets.
- **Vision of opportunities** – solution of specific typical problems of communities: financing, replenishment of local budgets, communal problems (roads, housing repairs, water pipelines, refuse dumps), culture and leisure, quality of healthcare, security, and attraction of investments.
- **Criticisms of the reform** – economists criticize specific actions of VR and the Government – procrastination of adoption of the necessary laws, lack of clarification of authority delegation mechanism, poor dialogue between central and local authorities
- **Personal prospects** – uncertainty, expectations, search for opportunities for avoiding unexpected difficulties

Decentralization is an ability of the community to solve its problems using its own efforts, its own resources, its own people.

It will be easier to hold the local guys liable. They are a long way from the tsar. You cannot go to Kiev to check everything. However, [under decentralization] our local "chiefs" will be unable to complain that "there are no funds, because we haven't been allocated any". The funds for healthcare, for education...

It's like a family. I have a budget, I distribute it and use it myself. In older times you needed a hundred documents and a hundred trips to Kiev to spend every hryvnia. Plus, the treasury was reluctant to allocate even the funds which were already approved at all levels.

2015 Community

Decentralization for the sake of improving people's lives, or improvement of management of territories?

What does democracy tell us? Not a person for the state, but the state for the person. That is, we can say, that the principle of democracy is defied. Right?

- In the process of discussion it became clear that the realization of the essence of decentralization comes through understanding of "community" concept.
- Some contradictions were witnessed while defining what was the primary category: people or territories.
- For "democrats" it is critical to put the individual in the first place.
- People, who were convinced that a community was not so much a territory as citizens, were present in each group.
- Approximately half of the participants chose the definition from the local self-government reform Concept: "A community is an administrative and territorial unit, created as provided by the law, including one or several settlements (village, urban-type settlement, city), as well as adjacent territories". However, they also thought that the formulation had to be revised and improved.

Community comes from Cossacks. Communities were Cossack settlements, unions of people. The Cossacks protected, first and foremost, their families, and then – territories.

Who will be interested in community development? Only those people, who identify themselves with this community.

Problems of implementation of authority decentralization

2014	2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of political culture • Central management will hamper the whole process • There is no political will for reforms • External enemies • Immaturity of the society • The reform is out of step with the present times • Lustration is needed • Communities are not ready 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low level of trust to authorities, disillusionment • No results to be seen so far • Lack of professionals in self-government and state management sectors • Non-transparency. Authors of the reform cannot establish effective contact with the lower level (according to ordinary citizens) • Remark for the theorists – they do not consider the specificity of Ukraine, while implementing the foreign countries' experience • Problems, regarding the future elections of local authorities

2015 Informational strategy of reforms. Ways of improvement

- Interest in the topic of the reform and, particularly, decentralization, grew significantly during the six months
- The majority of respondents displays sharp need for information, not so much on the essence of the reform, as on specific steps of its implementation, and on expected results
- In every group there are people, who purposefully search for the necessary information and analyze it
- All discussion participants stressed the lack of clear information, answers to specific questions. This leads to fear of and opposition to the reform. Also the weak points of informational policy on decentralization include contradictions in interpretation of certain provisions, populist promises.
- People are upset by the fact that those who should know and understand the meaning of reforms, confine themselves to general phrases.
- Financing, authority, and control – these are the three questions, people want to get the answers to.

Conclusions

- It turns out, that in 2015 the attitude towards decentralization does not depend on participants' region of residence
- During the six months significant changes took place in the mentality of the citizens. They realized the urgency and irreversibility of the reform
- People clearly understand the difficulties and problems, related to its implementation, and the responsibility of the community for its result, including their personal responsibility
- While in late 2014 people could be conditionally divided into proponents and opponents of decentralization, now the criterion for partition can be formulated as "democrats versus economists", depending on the people's vision of the reform's final outcome.
- It's not about WHAT exactly decentralization means, but rather about HOW to make the reform more successful and less painful.
- People do not respond general statements and populism of the authorities, they wait for specific steps and precise answers to the questions in the context of their everyday interests.

2015. Information sources

- Official sources – journalists, representatives of LSB, civil activists
- According to participants, there is a need to adapt the contents of official documents for an average user, in the context of his/her everyday interests
- The key information source for youth is the Internet
- For older people, particularly, retirees, the main information source is the TV
- LSB representatives underline the importance of web-sites of the Association of Ukrainian cities, oblast and local councils
- The most active participants note positive changes in terms of getting information from the officials. First and foremost, these changes result from availability of personal pages of these officials in social networks
- Such web-sites as decentralization.gov.ua, despro.org.ua, and DESPRO platform of communities of practice, were also positively estimated
- All participants value live communication with people they trust or respect.

2015 Village council heads on community unification

- Participants noted the impossibility of observance of free will principle in the process of unification
- Previous negative experience of reforms considerably lowers the motivation to do anything now, creates negative mood
- Participants understand that after the election many of them will stay "overboard"
- Participants stressed the important role of the All-Ukrainian Association of Village and Settlement Councils and local self-government bodies in transmitting their opinion to the upper levels of authority
- In spite of popular stereotypes and simplified view of the problem, village heads will not necessarily oppose the reform. Mostly, they understand their personal responsibility for its result



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OF POWER**

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