

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVISM IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR: COMMUNITY ADAPTATION TO SOCIAL CHANGES

Olga Kuzmuk

Ph.D., Assistant Professor,

Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, Ukraine

e-mail: kuzmuk-olga@ukr.net, orcid.org/0000-0002-9729-1785

Summary

The article investigates the phenomenon of public participation and activism as a key mechanism for the adaptation of Ukrainian society to social changes caused by the full-scale war. It analyzes the transformation of forms of civic mobilization in extreme conditions, particularly the shift from traditional practices to new models of interaction. The main manifestations of public activity are discussed, such as the volunteer movement, the creation of humanitarian initiatives, support for internally displaced persons, and assistance to the armed forces, which have become tools for addressing crisis challenges and strengthening social cohesion.

Particular attention is given to the role of digital technologies and social networks as effective platforms for rapid organization, coordination of actions, and dissemination of information. The research explores how the war impacts the structure of communities, their value orientations, and the level of social capital. The author argues that active public participation not only helps to overcome urgent challenges related to the conflict but also lays the groundwork for post-war reconstruction, contributing to the development of a resilient and democratic civil society. It highlights how new social ties and practices of solidarity that emerged in conditions of instability establish the foundations for long-term social development.

Key words: public participation, civic activism, social changes, war, civic initiatives, collective identities.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/7123>

1. Introduction

Civic participation and activity are subjects of fundamental research in the social sciences, as they serve as key indicators of citizens' ability to influence socio-political processes. In the context of extreme challenges, such as a full-scale war, these phenomena undergo profound transformation. War as a crisis context not only alters political and economic structures but fundamentally reconfigures social practices. It mobilizes and engages broad segments of the population that may have previously remained passive, acting as a catalyst for the formation of new forms of collective action.

These transformations are most vividly manifested in the emergence of powerful volunteer movements, new civic initiatives, and innovative practices of solidarity. Civic activity during wartime becomes not only a mechanism for providing humanitarian and material support but also a powerful factor in strengthening social cohesion and national identity. Participation in volunteering and civic organizations transforms into a means of expressing patriotic positions, where every citizen has the opportunity to make a personal contribution to the defense and future recovery of the country. Such collective efforts create resilient social ties and enhance trust within society.

The adaptation of communities to social changes caused by war requires a rethinking of traditional models of participation. An important aspect of this process is the digitalization of civic activity, where social media and digital platforms have become leading tools for mobilizing resources, coordinating actions in real-time, and disseminating information. This process not only responds to the crisis but also opens opportunities for the development of new, more flexible, and inclusive social practices. Analyzing the motivational factors and barriers to participation of various social groups in these new conditions is crucial for understanding the dynamics of contemporary civil society. Ultimately, the collective overcoming of wartime challenges promotes the establishment of new value orientations, where the priority of the common good becomes dominant, laying the foundations for a new social consciousness based on shared experiences and common goals.

The relevance of this research topic is determined by the necessity of a deep sociological understanding of these transformational processes. Understanding new forms and mechanisms of civic participation allows for the documentation of unique social phenomena during wartime and the development of effective strategies to support civil society and its engagement in post-war recovery in Ukraine.

The aim of this article is to analyze the transformations in the forms and content of civic activity in wartime conditions and to identify key factors influencing the adaptation of communities to social changes. To achieve this goal, the following tasks must be addressed: to analyze theoretical approaches to studying civic activity, to determine the specifics of its transformation in a state of war, to explore the role of the volunteer movement as a key form of social adaptation, and to assess the impact of digital technologies on citizen mobilization.

The object of the study is civic participation and activity as a social phenomenon, while the subject is the transformational processes and adaptive mechanisms of this activity in wartime conditions.

2. Theoretical Aspects of Civic Activism and Social Cohesion

Research on civic participation and activity in wartime relies on a broad spectrum of theoretical developments in sociology. An analysis of scientific sources allows us to identify several key conceptual blocks that form the basis for understanding the transformation of civic activity in crisis conditions: theories of civil society, concepts of social capital and social cohesion, as well as studies of contemporary forms of civic participation.

The fundamental foundation for analysis is the concept of civil society. Modern Ukrainian researchers, particularly V. Stepanenko, define it through the lens of «discourses and practices», emphasizing that civic activity increasingly extends beyond formal organizations and is characterized by spontaneity and mobilizational involvement in addressing specific problems (*Stepanenko, 2015*). This idea is complemented by O. Tit, who views civic activism as a key factor in building civil society in Ukraine, aimed at consciously transforming social conditions (*Tit, 2019*). A significant contribution to understanding the nature of civil society was made by E. Gellner, who introduced the concept of the «modular man» – an individual capable of combining personal interests with voluntary participation in associations that foster cooperation and mutual aid (*Gellner, 1994*). This balance between the individual and the collective gains particular significance in wartime when the realization of citizens' needs becomes inseparable from supporting society.

The concept of social capital is central to understanding the mechanisms of civic participation. P. Bourdieu viewed social capital as a resource arising from stable social networks

(Bourdieu, 1986), while J. Coleman described it as an element of social structure that facilitates individual actions within it (Coleman, 1990). R. Putnam empirically demonstrated that dense networks of civic engagement are a guarantee of effective democratic institutions, as they cultivate skills of cooperation and mutual trust (Putnam, 1993). F. Fukuyama directly linked social capital with trust, calling it a «social virtue» and the foundation of prosperity (Fukuyama, 1995). In wartime, the social capital accumulated within society becomes the basis for rapid self-organization, volunteering, and mutual aid.

The concept of social capital is closely related to the concept of social cohesion. Contemporary researchers, including J. Chan and H. Fonseca, define social cohesion as a multidimensional process that includes a sense of belonging, voluntary social participation, tolerance for diverse values, and the provision of equal opportunities (Chan et al., 2006; Fonseca et al., 2019). In this model, social participation serves as a key dynamic component of civil society. When analyzing civic participation in wartime, it is important to consider both horizontal (voluntariness, donations) and vertical (political participation) dimensions of cohesion. Empirical measurement of these components, as noted by J. Chan, is often conducted through the analysis of membership in various groups – from political parties to professional and religious communities (Chan et al., 2006: 296).

Finally, research highlights the diversity of forms of civic activity. N. Rosenblum argues that for a healthy society, the ideological orientation of associations is less important than their organizational diversity and openness (Rosenblum, 2001). This creates a pluralistic environment where citizens can realize their interests. An analysis of attitudes toward civic activity in Ukraine, conducted by S. Dembitsky, demonstrates the heterogeneity of society and the dynamics of change related to socio-demographic factors and political expectations (Dembitsky, 2019), emphasizing the importance of a contextual approach.

Thus, theoretical analysis shows that civic activity is a complex phenomenon shaped at the intersection of individual interests and collective actions. In wartime, it becomes a key mechanism for society's adaptation, relying on social capital, networks of trust, and various forms of citizen self-organization. This theoretical framework allows for an analysis of specific manifestations of civic activity in contemporary Ukrainian society.

3. Contemporary Forms and Expressions of Civic Activism

Civic activity, as a conscious effort aimed at transforming social conditions, manifests in various forms – from participation in protests and petitions to grassroots initiatives. In the modern era, these traditional practices are supplemented and transformed by digital technologies. As noted by V. Stepanenko, today's civic activity increasingly extends beyond formal organizations, characterized by spontaneity and network mobilization to address specific social issues (Stepanenko, 2015).

In wartime, these trends gain particular importance. The adaptation of communities to social changes occurs through the activation of both traditional and new, flexible forms of participation, allowing for effective responses to crisis situations. Associations and voluntary organizations play a key role in this process, becoming hubs for accumulating social capital. P. Bourdieu indicated that participation in such groups creates a «club effect», providing access to unique resources and support (Bourdieu, 1986).

Importantly, during wartime, these organizations operate in a wide range of areas – from cultural and ecological to informational. R. Putnam emphasized that even apolitical associations, such as choral societies, cultivate cooperation and mutual trust skills, which are

foundational for a strong civil society (*Putnam et al., 2001: 113*). This idea is further developed by N. Rosenblum, who argues that for society, the ideology of associations is less important than their organizational diversity, openness, and the free movement of members among them (*Rosenblum, 2001*). Such a pluralistic structure enables citizens to effectively unite efforts to address pressing issues.

The social capital generated within these networks has the ability to accumulate and spread. Dense social ties and active participation create an environment of trust and solidarity, which is critically important for societal resilience during crises (*Putnam, 1993*).

At the same time, an analysis of attitudes toward civic activity in Ukraine shows that society is heterogeneous. Research by S. Dembitsky demonstrates that the willingness to participate varies among different socio-demographic groups and depends on the socio-political context and citizens' expectations (*Dembitsky, 2019*). This underscores the necessity of considering the specific needs and characteristics of different communities for effective mobilization and support of civic activity during wartime.

Civic activity is a complex, multi-level phenomenon that can be examined through several key components. Firstly, it involves a high level of civic awareness and culture, manifested in active participation in public life. Secondly, social responsibility to both the state and the community is crucial. Thirdly, civic activity includes the realization of personal interests directed at expanding access to material and cultural goods.

Civic activity serves as a way of life, characterized by a conscious orientation of actions towards transforming social conditions in line with urgent needs, interests, goals, and ideals. It manifests across various spheres: social-communicative, political, cultural, civic, and informational. Forms of civic activity can include participation in demonstrations, protests, writing letters and petitions, membership in associations, discussing socially significant programs, proposing local initiatives, and participating in community meetings and public hearings.

In the context of war, traditional forms of civic participation remain relevant; however, new opportunities for activism arise through the development of information and digital technologies. V. Stepanenko notes that modern civic activity increasingly is not tied to formal criteria of belonging to NGOs or political parties but is defined by spontaneous participation and mobilizational engagement focused on addressing specific social problems (*Stepanenko, 2015*).

Thus, civic activity today is characterized as a «situational practice» realized within a specific territorial and social space, taking into account its political, social, cultural, and historical characteristics. Participation can be carried out by individuals through advocating for their rights, publicly expressing opinions, engaging in social media, and through collective actions where citizens unite in associations and groups to achieve a common outcome (*Bukrieieva, 2019*). In wartime, these aspects of civic activity gain particular significance, as they allow communities to adapt to social changes and effectively respond to the challenges facing society.

4. Civil Society as the Institutional Foundation of Activism

Civil society is an important institutional foundation for the development of civic activity, especially during wartime (*Stepanenko, 2015*). It creates conditions for active citizen participation in social processes, providing platforms for expressing opinions and implementing initiatives. It comprises civic organizations, professional associations, religious communities, and educational institutions that shape public consciousness and self-governance skills (*Gellner, 1994; Rozenblum, 2001*). These organizations conduct educational programs

and training, raising citizens' awareness of their rights and opportunities for participation in public life. In the context of armed conflicts, civil society becomes a platform for mobilizing resources and supporting those affected, fostering cohesion and solidarity among the population (Putnam, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995; Chan et al., 2006; Fonseca et al., 2019).

In wartime, civic activity takes on new forms as organizations and initiatives mobilize to respond to the needs of the population (Tit, 2019). This includes humanitarian campaigns, monitoring government actions, advocating for human rights, and other activities that strengthen democratic institutions and ensure social justice. Thus, civil society becomes an important factor in adapting to the challenging conditions of war and supporting democratic development.

Research on civic activity in the context of war is crucial for understanding the functioning of modern societies in crisis conditions (Bukrieieva, 2019). War transforms traditional forms of participation, mobilizing citizens for volunteering, social initiatives, and political campaigns (Coleman, 1990). This process is influenced by several factors: social cohesion, which stimulates collective action (Bourdieu, 1986); access to information, which is critical for awareness of urgent issues; and state policy, which can either encourage or restrict civic participation.

Thus, analyzing civic activity during wartime allows for assessing its role in supporting democratic values and social stability. It demonstrates the ability of civil society to adapt to extreme challenges, recover, and strengthen after crises, reflecting its resilience and maturity.

5. Challenges and Factors Influencing Civic Activity

In wartime, a significant portion of the population faces psychological barriers such as feelings of helplessness, apathy, and learned helplessness, which substantially reduce the level of civic activity. The belief in the inability to influence the situation becomes a serious obstacle to engagement in social processes. In these circumstances, mechanisms of psychological and social support play a critically important role. Specialized assistance (individual counseling, group sessions) and social work aimed at building supportive communities help individuals cope with stress, restore faith in the possibility of change, and strengthen self-efficacy. Involvement in collective actions, where citizens see tangible results from their efforts, is a powerful factor in enhancing social cohesion and creating a favorable environment for further activity (Chan et al., 2006; Fonseca et al., 2019; Fukuyama, 1995).

Socio-economic factors also have a dual impact on civic activity. On one hand, economic instability, rising unemployment, and deteriorating living standards can catalyze protest activity and demands for social justice. On the other hand, focusing on basic needs and survival strategies often leads to a narrowing of interests, social apathy, and decreased engagement in public life (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990). Feelings of helplessness, compounded by economic hardship, can become an additional barrier to participation, redirecting citizens' attention from collective actions to individual coping strategies.

Social inequality is another significant factor that shapes civic activity. In wartime, existing disparities may become exacerbated, increasing social tension. Marginalized groups – specifically internally displaced persons, ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities – often face limited access to resources and discrimination. The sense of social injustice arising from this can spur their increased participation in public life, sometimes in more radical forms (Tit, 2019). For example, communities of internally displaced persons may actively organize initiatives and protests to draw attention to their specific issues (Dembitskyi, 2019; Bukrieieva, 2019). Thus, social inequality not only creates barriers but also acts as a factor that stimulates certain forms of adaptation and mobilization. Addressing issues of social inequality

and supporting vulnerable groups is key to reducing social tension and promoting stability in society, highlighting the necessity of an inclusive approach in crisis conditions.

6. Key Areas and Forms of Activity in Wartime

Modern social networks play a key role in mobilizing communities, organizing assistance, and ensuring rapid information exchange. Citizens' active participation in volunteer initiatives, often coordinated through digital platforms, is a vivid expression of social cohesion and patriotism (Dembitskyi, 2019; Bukrieieva, 2019; Chan et al., 2006). Engagement in volunteer projects fosters a sense of shared purpose and mutual support, which is critically important for societal stability during times of crisis. Thus, civic activity provides not only material but also significant emotional support, creating a sense of community and laying the foundations for sustainable societal development.

In addition to volunteering, public activity in the political sphere is a crucial factor shaping social processes, especially during wartime. It becomes a means of expressing citizens' will and a mechanism for supporting state resilience and national unity (Patnam et al., 2001; Tit, 2019). Traditional forms of political participation, such as voting, participating in rallies, and engaging in public discussions, allow citizens to influence political decisions and take direct part in shaping the country's future (Stepanenko, 2015). In challenging times, such an active civic stance is critically necessary for strengthening democratic values, fostering a responsible society, and creating an atmosphere of trust and cooperation.

7. Conclusions

Civic participation and activity during wartime play a crucial role in shaping and adapting society to social changes. In times of crisis, when a country faces numerous challenges, citizens' activity becomes not only an important tool for addressing urgent problems but also a foundation for strengthening democratic values and national unity. War presents society with new tasks that require rapid responses, and it is community initiatives – often mobilized through digital platforms – that effectively fill gaps that state institutions may not always be able to address.

Political activity, volunteering, and participation in civic organizations become vital components of supporting social stability. These forms of engagement not only provide necessary assistance but also contribute to the formation of a cohesive society capable of adapting to new conditions. An active civic stance during wartime fosters the development of collective identity. By uniting around common initiatives, people strengthen social ties, helping to create a sense of community and mutual understanding. Thus, civic activity in wartime is essential not only for solving specific problems but also for laying the groundwork for the stable development of society in the long term, transforming citizens into agents of change.

Researching civic participation and activity in wartime opens numerous avenues for further study. One key direction involves examining the role of social media in organizing volunteer initiatives and political actions. The psychological aspects of civic participation also require attention; it is important to explore the motivations that drive citizens to engage and the impact of such activities on their psychological well-being. Another significant area is the analysis of collective identity formation, which helps understand how civic activity during wartime contributes to national unity. Comparative analysis of civic participation in different countries and regions can reveal successful practices and models that can be adapted to other contexts.

Furthermore, the interaction between the state and civil society, particularly the mechanisms of their cooperation in times of crisis, deserves attention. Finally, studying the role of civic activity in post-war recovery processes, especially in the context of social integration and economic revitalization, is essential.

References

1. Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The forms of capital*. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood Press.
2. Chan, J., To, H. P., & Chan, E. (2006). *Reconsidering social cohesion: Developing a definition and analytical framework for empirical research*. *Social Indicators Research*, 75(2), 273-302.
3. Coleman, J. S. (1990). *Foundations of social theory*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap of Harvard University Press.
4. Fonseca, X., Lukosch, S., & Brazier, F. (2019). *Social cohesion revisited: A new definition and how to characterize it*. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 32(2), 231-253.
5. Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust: The social virtues and the creation of prosperity*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
6. Gellner, E. (1994). *Conditions of liberty: Civil society and its rivals*. London: Penguin Books.
7. Putnam, R. D. (1993). *The prosperous community: Social capital and public life*. *The American Prospect*, 13, 35-42.
8. Bukrieieva, I. (2019). *Rol hromadianskoi aktyvnosti u formuvanni sotsialnoho kapitalu mista [The role of civic activity in the formation of the city's social capital]*. *Ukrainoznavchyi almanakh*, 25, 24-28. [in Ukrainian]. <https://doi.org/10.17721/2520-2626/2019.25.4>
9. Dembitskyi, S. S. (2019). *Ustanovky na hromadsku aktyvnist v Ukraini: analiz pokaznykiv osnovnykh sotsialno-demografichnykh hrup (2016 ta 2018 roky) [Attitudes to civic activity in Ukraine: analysis of indicators of the main socio-demographic groups (2016 and 2018)]*. *Visnyk NTUU «KPI». Politolohiia. Sotsiolohiia. Pravo*, 1(41), 32-41. [in Ukrainian].
10. Patnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. Y. (2001). *Tvorennia demokratii: tradytsii hromadianskoi aktyvnosti v suchasni Italii [Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy]*. Kyiv: Osnovy. [in Ukrainian].
11. Rozenblium, N. L. (2001). *Hromadski suspilstva: liberalizm i moralni vplyvy pliuralizmu [Civil societies: liberalism and the moral effects of pluralism]*. «І», 3, 6-29. [in Ukrainian].
12. Stepanenko, V. P. (2015). *Hromadianske suspilstvo: dyskursy i praktyky [Civil society: discourses and practices]*. Kyiv: In-t sotsiolohii NAN Ukrainy. [in Ukrainian].
13. Tit, O. H. (2019). *Hromadianskyi aktyvizm yak chynnnyk rozbudovy hromadianskoho suspilstva v suchasni Ukraini [Civic activism as a factor in the development of civil society in modern Ukraine]*. *Hileia: naukovyi visnyk*, 145(3), 100-103. [in Ukrainian].