Self-organization of Kherson region population in conditions of lack of governance during occupation and liberation (2022-2025)

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Introduction

The Kherson region, which was under occupation for nine months before liberation, is a bottomless source for various studies, especially the relations of the local population with the occupiers, which varied from city to village, from district to street, from alleyways to Soviet-era guesthouses.

There were many different reasons for this, and in order to understand them, the best option during a full-scale war is oral testimonies. Until recently, oral history as an academic method was something exotic within the corpus of conventional approaches, but today it clearly demonstrates new spaces are opening up for understanding the depth of historical events.

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In short, oral histories bring us one step closer to finding the mysterious truth.[1] Documenting oral testimonies is important because it enables us to better understand events for future purposes. Oral history (with careful analysis), although considered very subjective, can at the same time convey invaluable experience and information gleaned from individuals who, in the case of Kherson, encountered and interacted closely with the authorities and occupiers.

Such knowledge cannot be overlooked, as many occurrences cannot be registered at the official level, because it would harm the system and its information flow. The features and nuances of such sources of information, of course, will be considered and taken into account in my study, since every time historians deal with a greater variety of human activity than their predecessors, they must consult a wider range of evidence. Some of these testimonies are oral; others are visual. Can we trust every one of these testimonies without question? Of course not. We need to delve into the topic and carefully consider each testimony, as some may have been distorted as a result of the normal working of the mind, and changes in personal memory.[2] I note that this approach applies not only to recorded oral histories, where everything can be changed with one click on the recorder, but also to official documents. Oral sources correct other perspectives and vice versa.

Let's note that oral history today is known not least because of discussions about sincerity. It is quite possible that there have already been shifts on this topic in Western academic circles, but I think it is worth focusing on my context. Until recently, when oral history was still considered unconventional history, sincerity (by definition) was contrasted with truth, and subjectivism with objectivity in research.

Of course, now, when oral history has been able to find its special place in history, along with microhistory, some issues have been resolved, and it has become clear that one does not interfere with the other. Oral history does not shy away from the search for truth, but tries to find it from a different perspective, regardless of the rather large contradictions in the scale and methodology of research, where, again, the concept of sincerity enters. It seems arrogant to us when

a researcher tries to minimize the consideration of such an aspect, since opportunities are lost to make contact and attempt to understand a person more fully. Understanding is an integral part of this discipline. The occupation, one might say, contributed to the further rooting of this topic, because not everyone can trust not so much a part of their life as a part of what was hidden during the occupation, especially if it goes against the prevailing views of society. In this study, this is of particular importance, since we are touching on the topic of occupation, where, of course, everything was not divided into black and white.

A debatable issue is also the possibility of questioning with the aim of finding out some "bad" events, given a person could have received psychological trauma and may not wish to relive those experiences again.

Many people who have experienced painful events during the occupation, such as murders, abuse in "basements", fear that at any moment they may be visited by people with machine guns. Of course, they may refuse to give evidence, because for them this is really a painful topic, but on the other hand, there are many people who want to share these events, and relate their pain, which they still remember and did not disappear in the whirlpool of time. Traumatic events are an integral part of both academic history and oral history. How to relate to this is everyone's choice. At the same time, we believe that with the consent of those involved, they should be documented, because this opens up a large space for research and understanding of individual historical events from different perspectives.[3] People may be afraid, but they are also able to fight - which is why many have returned to the Kherson region despite shelling, to their families, their homes.

The main goal of this research is to trace how the views of the local population changed during the full-scale war and subsequent occupation. It explores why many residents remained in the city throughout the occupation and why, after de-occupation, they began to return—even in the face of continued shelling. The study also examines the differences in relationships between civilians and occupying forces across the city and the wider region; the degree of success in

implementing a new economic system in the Kherson region,[4] the documentation challenges faced within the combat zone; and the efforts made by Ukrainian authorities to address the social and domestic needs of civilians under occupation. [5]

Furthermore, it investigates how widespread collaboration was, why many collaborators ultimately proved impossible to arrest, and how justified certain actions—such as the issuance of Russian passports and the transfer of businesses to Russian standards—were during the occupation.[6] The research also considers how both the information war and the experience of occupation have shaped the way many Ukrainians view residents from occupied territories.

Oral history plays a central role in this research, offering a means to give voices to those who previously lacked one—namely, ordinary civilians. This discipline allows us to uncover events lost in the turbulence of time, often omitted for various reasons, especially due to the communication policies and strategies adopted by authorities during the full-scale war. These aspects will be considered in depth throughout the research.

The study's primary subjects are the residents who remained in Kherson throughout the occupation or left and later returned; members of the resistance movement; individuals who were acquainted with or worked alongside collaborators prior to or during the occupation; local volunteers; and representatives of international organizations. It also analyzes the economic system in Kherson under occupation, the diversity of experiences and perspectives in interactions with occupying forces and collaborators, the scale of looting during and after the occupation, and the socio-historical anachronisms that emerged during the war.

These themes are addressed through oral testimonies collected in Kherson, Nova Kakhovka, the Dar'yivska rural community, and the village of Oleshky, covering the period from the onset of the full-scale invasion (February 24, 2022), through the liberation (November 11, 2022), and up to the present day (March 17, 2025).

The research methodology is grounded in oral history—that is, documenting the narratives of local residents and analyzing their collective experiences—alongside microhistory, which allows for the comparison and contextualization of testimonies from different settlements. Social anthropology also informs the analysis, supported by general philosophical methods such as synthesis, analysis, and induction, as well as historical-comparative approaches and participant observation.

Additionally, the study incorporates the concept of "landscape resistance," introduced into academic discourse by James C. Scott. This category enables a more precise interpretation of the decisions made by the command of the Russian Armed Forces during the occupation, particularly in terms of their communication with the local population.

The primary sources for this research are the oral testimonies of local residents, officials, volunteers, and members of the resistance. Methodological inspiration is drawn from the works and essays of scholars including Eva Domanska,[7] Peter Burke, Jim Sharpe, Giovanni Levi, Gwyn Prins, Robert Darnton, and Richard Tuck.[8]

The division of the research into four sections is justified by the chronological unfolding of events during the full-scale war and by the sequential nature of decisions made by the local population during each critical phase.

Chapter 1. Kherson region in the first months of the full-scale invasion

"Anthropology is a discipline whose distinctive feature lies in paralleling the anthropologist's view with the view of the subjects of his research, in order to obtain an instrument of knowledge."[9]

On the night of February 24, 2022, a full-scale war began—an event that irreversibly changed the lives of tens of millions. Concepts such as war, occupation, and values underwent radical redefinition. In the Kherson region, Russian forces had already arrived by morning,

moving through various villages with little resistance due to widespread confusion and disorder. Most residents only began learning about the invasion through contacts in the security services—some of whom were spotted in local bars—as well as through relatives, acquaintances in the military, and informal networks. That same morning, people in the Kherson region,[10] still in shock from the news, found themselves face-to-face with the occupiers.

One of the most traumatic early episodes took place at the Antonovsky Bridge and Buzkovyi Park on March 1, where only a few Territorial Defense fighters survived an uneven confrontation. The local police department along with some special service units,[11] had already fled the area, abandoning shelters stocked with weapons. Yet these resources proved largely ineffective due to their selective distribution. In the months that followed, the region witnessed drastic changes in its economic system and in the interpersonal dynamics among locals.

1.1. First encounters between civilians and occupiers in the city and region

In the city of Kherson, the first encounters with the occupiers unfolded in public spaces such as parks, where large-scale protests emerged and temporarily overtook the city. As the Russian National Guard and other forces began dispersing civilians by force, the nature of these events quickly escalated. This early stage of the occupation also saw a powerful surge of Ukrainian patriotism, which, in our view, sustained hope among residents for six to eight months.[12]

In contrast, rural areas experienced a different kind of occupation. Russian forces entered quietly, almost unobtrusively. Violence was more muted compared to the city, partly because the contingent included personnel from the so-called "DNR," who spoke the same language as locals and did not initially engage in looting or murder. This allowed commanders[13] to manipulate local perception, presenting the newcomers as somewhat familiar. Meanwhile, ethnic Russian soldiers—perceived as outsiders—were stationed in the steppe and restricted in their interactions with civilians. They were allowed only

to visit local shops and were barred from speaking with residents, likely in an effort to avoid conflict.[14] This strategy may have reflected the occupiers' expectation of a long-term, perhaps permanent, presence—and a corresponding attempt to establish functional relationships with the local population.

In the countryside, contact was limited by logistics and space. In the city, by contrast, the sheer density made such restrictions unfeasible; one could not simply enter every house.

1.2. Grounded reasons: why civilians stayed or left the city during the occupation

Civilians remained in their homes for many practical and deeply personal reasons: caring for immobile relatives, the presence of pets that couldn't be evacuated, fear of looting, hope that the war would end soon,[15] and anxiety about being displaced in a new region or foreign country.[16] Rumors of executions spread quickly,[17] and financial concerns also played a critical role. Carriers raised prices for evacuation to unaffordable levels, making escape impossible for many. Some even attempted to return to the left bank to retrieve relatives, but this often ended in tragedy. On the very first day, for example, those who tried to cross the Antonovsky Bridge were met with death—gunned down amidst the wreckage of cars and Ukrainian Territorial Defense tanks.[18, 19]

In the early weeks of the war, civilians throughout the city and region weighed all available options. The decisions they made during that time, in our view, became almost irreversible. Many chose to stay, buoyed by a wave of patriotism, belief in a quick Ukrainian victory, and the tone of national media. Once they made this decision, they often adhered to it—for better or worse—for the next six to seven months.

Eventually, conditions worsened, and despair began to spread.[20] Until that point, most people showed no intention of changing course—or were no longer able to.[21] By summer 2022, the only remaining route out of the region—the road to Vasylivka—was guarded by 50 to 60 checkpoints.[22] Escaping via this path required money, courage, and

considerable luck.[23, 24] An alternative route through other occupied territories, via Belarus or Belgorod, carried even greater risks, despite being marginally more affordable. This option also involved the potential loss of support and solidarity from other Ukrainians, deepening the moral and emotional cost of escape.[25, 26]

Chapter 2. The economic system under the occupation regime

The question of how the occupying forces implemented their economic system during the first year of the full-scale invasion is a compelling one. Compared to other currently occupied territories, the Kherson region experienced this process relatively mildly. Psychological pressure was undeniable and affected nearly everyone to some extent, but economically, Kherson did not fully fall under the occupiers' economic framework throughout the occupation period (February 25, 2022–November 11, 2022). The reasons behind this, we argue, can be understood through a specific periodization that we will explore in this chapter.

By employing the methodologies of oral history and microhistory, it becomes feasible to investigate why and how the Russian Federation's economic system failed to function effectively in Kherson. We propose a periodization that focuses on three practical spheres: pharmacies, supermarkets, and markets.[27] This approach, in our view, offers a vivid illustration of the slow and fragmented process by which the occupiers attempted to integrate Kherson into their economic structure.

In the first months of the occupation (March to May 2022), Ukrainian pharmacies quickly sold out their remaining stock. In some places, local volunteer organizations organized distribution points where Ukrainian medicine was offered free of charge.[28, 29] During this period, "mobile pharmacies" began to appear—often run by both Ukrainian and Russian sellers, and largely supplied via Crimea (**Fig. 1**).[30] The goods they sold were of questionable quality,[31] though some medications were cheaper than their Ukrainian counterparts. The efficacy of these medications, however, remained doubtful.[32]

Figure 1. Queue for a "mobile pharmacy" in May 2022 in Kherson. Personal archive of a local resident, Kherson.

Meanwhile, "spontaneous markets" began to form across the city—in alleyways, vacant lots, and other informal spaces (**Fig. 2**).[33] These markets, where virtually anything could be bought or bartered, persisted until the end of the occupation. The reason for their emergence was rooted in pre-invasion logistics: fields had already been sown, and significant deliveries—including planned exports—were in motion. When the invasion caused a partial exodus and isolated the local market, prices for agricultural and perishable goods plummeted. Producers were forced to sell at extremely low prices simply to avoid spoilage. Ironically, this helped both regional businesses and civilians to survive during the early occupation.[34]

Figure 2. One of the "stalls" at a spontaneous market selling alcohol in May 2022, Kherson.

However, this situation did not last. As the occupation dragged on, prices for Russian-imported goods began to rise steadily, unchecked by any regulatory mechanisms. With time, inflation and scarcity began to affect all sectors of the local economy.

As for supermarkets, the picture was more complex. Initially, looting affected nearly all major retail chains.[35] Stores such as "Vezunchik," "Kefir," "Green Market," and "ATB" began selling Russian goods, accepting both hryvnias and rubles. Some even had hidden card terminals that occupiers generally ignored, and transactions were often conducted by transferring money directly to personal bank cards. However, some supermarkets underwent complete rebranding. "Silpo," for instance, was converted into "Sytniy" and began to operate entirely in rubles. [36] A similar transformation happened with "ATB," which was rebranded as "ABC". These transformations are discussed more fully in the next chapter, where we analyze the circulation of currency. For now, we may suggest that "Sytniy" functioned as a kind of economic experiment in implementing full ruble-based trade, though whether this was truly systematic remains open to debate.[37]

Regarding industrial enterprises, testimonies are scarce. Most civilians recall only vague rumors about factories that produced foodstuffs helping the population. Nevertheless, some accounts credit the Kherson dairy plant (which reportedly continued distributing milk), the city's bread factory, [38] and locally produced Melitopol sausages with maintaining affordable prices during the occupation and offering critical support to the population.[39]

By the end of August 2022, the flow of pharmaceuticals had become largely limited to the same mobile pharmacies parked near open-air markets. Their quality remained questionable. Russian state-provided humanitarian aid fared no better—it was often of poor quality, and its distribution sporadic. In contrast, some foreign and Ukrainian medications were still distributed by volunteer organizations, including Russian ones, operating in the region. In rare cases, medicines like insulin could be acquired for free at local hospitals, but they were widely regarded as ineffective.[40]

The situation with markets and supermarkets did not undergo any major changes during this period (**Fig. 3**).[41] However, starting in September 2022, new dynamics began to emerge. In place of Ukrainian pharmacies that had closed in the spring, full-fledged Russian establishments began to operate—for example, "Romashka" and "Omega."[42] The quality of the medications they provided had improved compared to earlier months.[43]

Figure 3. Egg imported from the territory of the Russian Federation to the city of Kherson. Personal archive of a local resident, Kherson.

At the same time, in markets, supermarkets, and private institutions, the occupiers began to actively resist transactions in hryvnias. This marked a significant shift in the Kherson occupation context. New inspections were introduced to reinforce the mandatory use of the ruble, and card terminals in supermarkets were increasingly confiscated. This was part of a broader effort to enforce Russian monetary control.[44]

Interestingly, SIM cards issued by the occupiers reportedly did not work in Russia. This detail was especially frustrating for traders and entrepreneurs who attempted to travel or communicate across borders, further highlighting Kherson's distinct experience compared to other occupied territories.

Based on the periodization developed here and when compared to other available data, one could argue that the Kherson region was, in some respects, fortunate. Many of the occupiers' attempts to implement systemic change were unsuccessful or met with local resistance and infrastructural complications.[45] However, this relative "leniency" should not be romanticized or extrapolated to other currently occupied cities. Kherson had the peculiar advantage of retaining hryvnia usage throughout most of the occupation—even the occupying forces made use of it. Terminals, though hidden,[46] continued to operate, and some businesses were not threatened or pressured to transition to Russian standards.[47]

It is essential to emphasize that these economic observations do not negate the brutal realities of life under occupation—including torture basements, psychological pressure, mass unemployment, and food insecurity. Rather, they serve to highlight how much more severe the conditions have become in other regions that remain under occupation today. The occupiers, after all, are capable of learning from their mistakes—and Kherson was not immune to this process.

Much also depended on how the occupation authorities envisioned the future of the territory. Since direct contact with these authorities was not possible, all that remains is to speculate on their intentions and the factors that might have influenced the pace and scope of system implementation.

Returning to the topic: autumn marked a turning point in the occupation of the Kherson region. The civilian population began to receive larger financial transfers—not only pensions, but also various forms of family assistance. In some areas, money withdrawals became more advantageous or accessible.

In the following section, we will explore currency circulation in greater depth.

2.1. Functioning of the new currency system

As previously stated, despite the occupiers' efforts over nine months, the economy of the Kherson region was never fully integrated into that of the Russian Federation. Turning now to currency specifically, we observe that in markets, supermarkets,[48] and other establishments—including bars and cafes—prices were listed in both hryvnias and rubles. However, the hryvnia remained the preferred currency. Sellers often quoted prices in hryvnias and prioritized it in transactions.[49, 50]

Even though a large number of people lost their jobs, some portions of the population continued receiving Ukrainian pensions and salaries deposited directly onto their bank cards. For instance, employees of the Philharmonic,[51] schoolteachers (who continued teaching remotely),[52] and university staff often retained access to Ukrainian payments.[53] This was not the case for all workers, however—employees of public utilities like the water service, for example, no longer received Ukrainian wages.[54] Instead, they were re-registered under Russian administrative control.[55, 56]

How did people withdraw money from their cards? While some Russian banks and cards were available, the options were limited. One Russian bank that operated in Kherson for most of the occupation was a branch of Sberbank, located on Sovetska Street. This branch was in place before the invasion.[57, 58] A broader distribution of "MIR" bank cards occurred only later, primarily on the left bank of the Kherson region at the beginning of 2023.[59]

Cash withdrawals were possible at certain ATMS, although these issued only small sums and were often overwhelmed. People queued for hours, sometimes days, based on "lists" that were flexible at best and prone to being lost or rewritten—often several times. A more accessible and discreet option was through card terminals hidden in stores.[60] A more accessible and discreet option was through card terminals hidden in stores. Store employees risked much by concealing them from Russian military and security forces. Other options included a few Russian banks (though they issued only rubles), or simply withdrawing money through traders at informal markets.[61, 62]

An important detail worth noting is the question of currency usage by the occupiers. While the ruble was officially encouraged, the occupiers frequently used hryvnias as well. Due to the continued dominance of the Ukrainian currency throughout the nine months of occupation, full-scale rubleization was never achieved.[63] In fact, it wasn't until January 1, 2023—well after the de-occupation of Kherson—that the transition to rubles and the implementation of "MIR" bank cards was formally announced in Oleshky. In some places, even the sole operating store had to close due to issues with a terminal not being compliant.[64]

According to local residents and business owners, occupiers held hryvnias not just in bundles, but in literal kilograms—a striking image that underscores how casually they used Ukrainian currency for everyday expenses. After all, if it allowed them to purchase goods or enjoy comforts, why wouldn't they use it?[65]

Meanwhile, the belief that Russian soldiers or collaborators earned only modest wages is incorrect. In reality, salaries for Russian military personnel, security operatives, and collaborators during the occupation were extremely high—even by Moscow standards.[66] Moreover, the wealth of the Russian military command extended far beyond salaries. Senior officers and their families were often assigned entire apartments in Kherson.[67, 68] Alternatively, they simply seized private property, taking over homes and garages abandoned by residents—a form of looting that became another very real income stream.[69]

2.2. Inevitability: Russian passports and the transition of businesses to Russian standards

From the early days of the occupation in 2022, the occupying forces aggressively promoted the use of rubles, encouraged the adoption of Russian passports, and pushed for the alignment of local businesses with Russian administrative standards. But how long could the local population resist such pressure?

As mentioned earlier, the use of rubles was not strictly enforced for the first seven to eight months. Only in autumn—with the establishment of Russian pharmacies and a deeper entrenchment of the administrative system—did the ruble begin to gain ground. The situation with passports and administrative requirements was quite similar. Again, much depended on the specific location and the attitude of the occupying authorities stationed there.

For example, consider a bar located opposite the administrative building of the Dniprovskiy district and a small cafeteria near the Territorial Recruitment Center. These two establishments were well known to both locals and various ranks of the occupying forces. The bar in particular was frequently visited by occupiers, including members of the FSB (**Fig.4**).

In the early months of the occupation, the bar's staff were faced with a harsh ultimatum: "Either you work with us, or the bar will continue operating—without you." The occupiers used intimidation to pressure them into complying with Russian rules and switching to their standards.

The owners made the difficult decision to keep the bar running. They urgently needed income. They stayed in operation to earn money not only for themselves but also to help friends financially so they could escape the city.[70] They ultimately decided to keep working until they were forced to shut down—but they were fortunate, as that moment never came during the occupation.[71, 72]

Regarding the cafeteria, it was frequented by numerous occupiers, including the FSB, but they never once demanded a transition to Russian standards during the entire occupation. Moreover, the establishment, like many others, continued using hryvnias without encountering resistance from the occupiers.[73]

Based on these examples, we find that during the occupation of Kherson, the local population and businesses (especially smaller ones) had good chances of avoiding compliance. Those who immediately switched to Russian standards and obtained passports were mostly either genuine collaborators or individuals who simply could not psychologically withstand the circumstances of that time.[74]

Figure 4. The Pivovar bar opposite the Korabelna District Council, which operated throughout the occupation. March 2023, Kherson. Author's personal archive.

Therefore, to summarize: there was no critical need for a complete transition to rubles, obtaining a Russian passport, or switching to Russian standards during the first eight months for the local population. However, had the occupation continued until January 2023, the situation might have looked entirely different, as evidenced by events on the left bank, where a more active transition to rubles with thorough searches for terminals began on January 1. Later, elderly people were denied medical care if they lacked Russian passports,[75] and thus the old dilemma resurfaced with renewed urgency: the critical need to leave.

Chapter 3. Relations between local residents and occupiers

At the onset of the full-scale war, the rise of Ukrainian patriotic sentiment played a crucial role. However, over time, the emerging "cult of resilience" raises certain concerns, as it may distort the broader historical picture in the long run. In particular, this narrative often overlooks complex or ambiguous episodes involving the interaction between civilians and occupying forces.

It is important to emphasize that this is not about justifying the aggressor, but rather about the need to gain a deeper understanding of why the attitude of the occupation authorities toward local populations varied significantly across different regions. This is essential because public perception tends to reject accounts in which civilians are portrayed not only as victims, but also as active participants in complex and often controversial situations.[76]

Taking Kherson as a starting point, it has become common place in social networks and real life to stigmatize local residents of both Kherson region and other currently occupied territories. Many people who remained in the city during the occupation, or who did not leave at the onset of hostilities after the de-occupation, are labeled collaborators, separatists, traitors, and ultimately people without a shred of reason.[77] We suppress memory (this point will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 4).

Here we must at least acknowledge that occupiers, in the vast majority of cases, treated children well, and from this starting point, we should move toward a deeper understanding of the occupation and the occupiers' motives. While we may not be able to comprehend the mindset of those people fully, we can certainly attempt to understand their motives based on various data. Therefore, for a deeper understanding of this problem, which has spread after the de-occupation, let us examine the relations between occupiers and locals during the occupation.

3.1. Coercion and intimidation of the local population

At the beginning of the occupation, the local population could respond to occupiers relatively freely until occupation services arrived and eventually suppressed protest movements. Intimidation in the city occurred directly through psychological pressure, as well as in detention facilities where particularly active citizens (known for supporting Ukraine since 2014) were taken away, as the occupiers had lists of such individuals.[78, 79] Regarding the rest of the civilian population, they generally had opportunities to avoid direct interaction with the occupiers, as there was usually no need for such contact.[80] In fact, this appears to have often been the case.

Nevertheless, as with business relations, the situation varied from district to district, especially in apartment buildings rather than private sectors, where collaborators were repeatedly found heading homeowners' associations (HOAs); consequently, much depended on their decisions. For instance, there were cases when residents had to appeal to collaborating HOA heads to use their connections to free neighbors from detention who had been unfortunate enough to be captured. In other cases, when the HOA head was absolutely unwilling to compromise, the local population had to find various ways to manage the situation. One such method was minimizing contact with neighbors and ensuring they were always aware of their neighbor's status, pieces of paper were placed in designated areas in the entrance hall, with each neighbor responsible for their own. When someone left the building, they would turn their paper over to indicate their absence, and do the same upon returning. This

practice proved very effective and represents a vivid example of self-organization among locals under occupation conditions, though not everything ended so positively.[81]

While residents of apartment buildings could quickly self-organize to protect each other (especially men, due to fears of forced mobilization into the Russian army), the same cannot be said for businesses and various cultural institutions. State institutions, such as schools, also fall into this category, but as mentioned previously, the vast majority of teachers remained untouched until mid-autumn (when the occupation intensified). More specifically, this applied to everyone who did not teach Russian.[82, 83]

Returning to cultural institutions, one can mention the Kherson Regional Philharmonic. In the first months of occupation, occupiers approached this institution, attempting to force a well-known conductor to hold cultural events, but instead received a refusal.[84] Ultimately, this ended with the conductor's murder, which the occupiers described as follows: "at night, in a state of an alcoholic intoxication, he went out into the street with a metal rod and attacked Russian military personnel who were patrolling the area. In self-defense, the attacker was shot."[85] In reality, the situation ultimately resulted in the institution only working with individuals who sided with the occupiers. It is important to note that this occurred before the conductor's murder, so this specific aspect is excluded.[86]

Therefore, the relationship between occupiers and the local population remained quite tense even under the conditions in which Kherson region found itself. Despite the fact that they did not interfere with many ordinary civilians, occasionally offering jobs with high salaries[87,88] this did not eliminate all potential danger. If in Kherson region, before or during the occupation, you were associated with Ukrainian cultural organizations, were part of nationalist organizations, owned a business, or even taught Russian language (or related disciplines), and refused to do it further—depending on the occupying leadership's perspective on the situation in a particular area—you might be visited with harsher intentions, potentially resulting in torture or death.[89]

3.2. Ambiguity: assistance to the local population from Ukrainians and Russians

Returning to the "cult of invincibility," it would be appropriate to recall volunteer (and other) movements; in other words, people who helped and continue to help during the war and occupation.

At the beginning of the occupation of the Kherson region, as already mentioned, many people could not leave due to high carrier prices, practical reasons, or very frightening (yet often true) rumors. In the following months, this trend persisted. Moreover, after the de-occupation, it gained new momentum on the left bank (and beyond), raising the question of where civilian population sympathies would lie.

How did Ukrainian and Russian volunteers help the civilian population? To illustrate, we will again examine the situation with medicine in the region. In the first months of occupation, the population was informed about volunteers entering occupied Kherson and supplying medicines to certain pharmacies, but later access became more difficult, especially when these pharmacies were closed.[90] There were Ukrainian volunteer headquarters distributing medicine, and some residents managed to obtain supplies, but this remained a temporary phenomenon (volunteer headquarters of an open format; **Fig. 5**).[91] If

Figure 5. The volunteer headquarters from Nova Kakhovka described above; worked for only a few weeks. March 2022, Nova Kakhovka. Archive of artist Maksym Kilderov.

ordinary civilians often could not find needed medicine, people with special needs (those with disabilities or other health problems such as diabetes, autism, or epilepsy) faced even greater challenges.

Regarding the occupiers, the situation was relatively similar—the civilian population was aware of assistance, but practically no one received it.[92] For example, in villages near Novovorontsovka,[93] locals only received medicines during the first months of occupation.[94] Based on accounts from this village and substantial data from other occupied territories, where large pensions and comparable salaries were issued only in the presence of occupation authorities, one might logically assume such conditions existed everywhere under strict regulation by central authorities, but this would be a mistaken view.[95] In Kherson itself, there were repeated instances when occupiers, throughout the entire occupation, provided critically important medicine to the local population free of charge,[96] while these same residents received none from Ukrainians. In our opinion, this data warrants considering the occupation from a broader perspective, where circumstances were not limited to either extreme. Everything depended on the local resident›s place of residence, the leadership of occupation authorities in their area, the accessibility of the location for Ukrainian volunteers, the individual's willingness to venture outside, and finally, which areas the Russian volunteers themselves selected.[97]

Therefore, it is normal and expected that the local population had a rather different perception of the occupation than the widespread opinions suggest. In their eyes, both Russian and Ukrainian volunteers could appear somewhat mythical. There would be nothing wrong with this perspective (considering that people with chronic illnesses truly needed to survive), if only those who were not in the occupation or who found the strength to leave between 2014–2023 treated this understanding with more compassion.

Of course, we are unlikely to determine precisely what goals Russian volunteers pursued, so we must acknowledge this limitation, but the same can be said about Ukrainian volunteers, who, both before the occupation of the Kherson region and after the de-occupation (and

throughout Ukraine generally), cannot claim exclusive honesty and altruism. As commonly stated—it all depends on the individuals themselves, and regardless of the organization, established perspectives remain difficult to change completely.

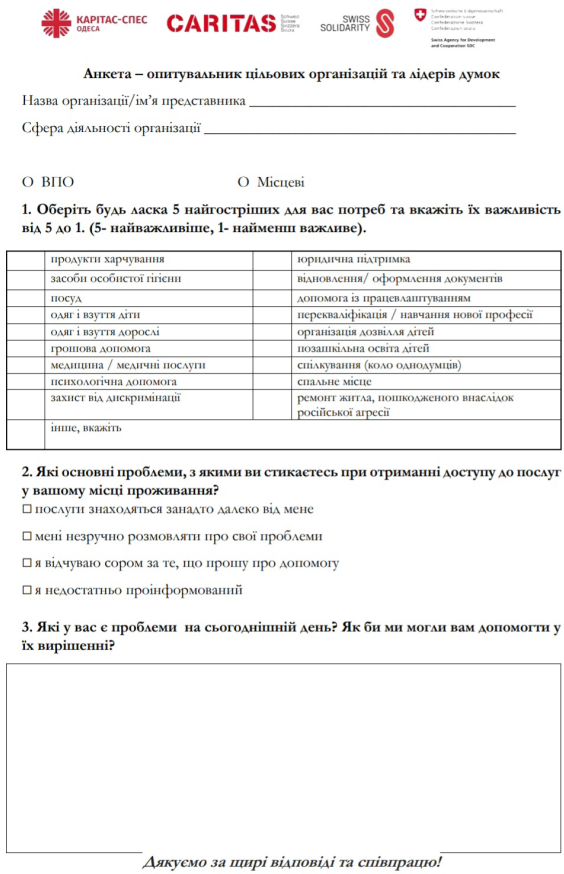
Chapter 4. Documenting the testimonies of local residents after de-occupation

When de-occupation occurred and the first humanitarian aid trucks entered Kherson region, new historical questions emerged: how to document the testimonies of local residents? How to interpret and process their testimonies? What challenges might potential researchers encounter? In other words, the scientific community discovered a new realm for reflection, which remains simultaneously comprehensible and extraordinarily complex. Concurrently, how do international organizations working in this area perceive these opportunities and research prospects? Can ordinary volunteers without specialized education undertake this work? We will attempt to address these and many other questions in this chapter.

4.1. Difficulties of documentation in the combat zone

On July 28, 2023, the Ministry for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine approved an order stipulating that numerous settlements in the Kherson region were included in the combat zone. This affected the Kherson, Beryslav, and Kakhovka districts. A few weeks after de-occupation (11.11.2022), at the end of November 2022, the first intense shelling began,[98] which continues to intensify to this day. Regarding research efforts, we note that various stakeholders —from volunteers with journalists to representatives of authorities(including during the occupation regime)—have demonstrated interest in such projects, but we could not establish direct contact with them. One could reference the work of large international organizations, but their purpose and the type and amount of information they collect differ significantly.

As an example, among large international organizations (and their departments), we can mention RO "RM "CARITAS-SPES-ODESA,"[99] which, while based in the rear in their offices, occasionally conduct interviews with people affected by hostilities. They also sometimes interview individuals as part of financial assistance programs, but these are quite limited in content and entirely focused on recovery-related issues. Here, it is important to consider a significant point: for whom this work is conducted. The answer is as follows: reporting for donors,[100] needs assessment,[101] and case management (**Fig. 6–8**).[102]



КАРІТАС-СПЕС ОДЕСА CARITAS SWISS SOLIDARITY

Анкета – опитувальник цільових організацій та лідерів думок

Назва організації/ім'я представника _____

Сфера діяльності організації _____

О ВПО О Місцеві

1. Оберіть будь ласка 5 найгостріших для вас потреб та вкажіть їх важливість від 5 до 1. (5- найважливіше, 1- найменш важливе).

	продукти харчування		юридична підтримка
	засоби особистої гігієни		відновлення/ оформлення документів
	посуд		допомога із працевлаштуванням
	одяг і взуття діти		перекваліфікація / навчання нової професії
	одяг і взуття дорослі		організація дозвілля дітей
	грошова допомога		позашкільна освіта дітей
	медицина / медичні послуги		спілкування (коло однодумців)
	психологічна допомога		спальне місце
	захист від дискримінації		ремонт житла, пошкодженого внаслідок російської агресії
	інше, вкажіть		

2. Які основні проблеми, з якими ви стикаєтесь при отриманні доступу до послуг у вашому місці проживання?

☐ послуги знаходяться занадто далеко від мене

☐ мені незручно розмовляти про свої проблеми

☐ я відчуваю сором за те, що прошу про допомогу

☐ я недостатньо проінформований

3. Які у вас є проблеми на сьогоднішній день? Як би ми могли вам допомогти у їх вирішенні?

Дякуємо за щирі відповіді та співпрацю!

Figure 6. Example of a questionnaire in RO "RM "CARITAS-SPES-ODESA" for target organizations and opinion leaders. A form aimed at the prospect of project formation; falls under the definition of "needs assessment."

КАРІТАС-СПЕС
ОДЕСА

Анкета для визначення потреб у фокус-групах

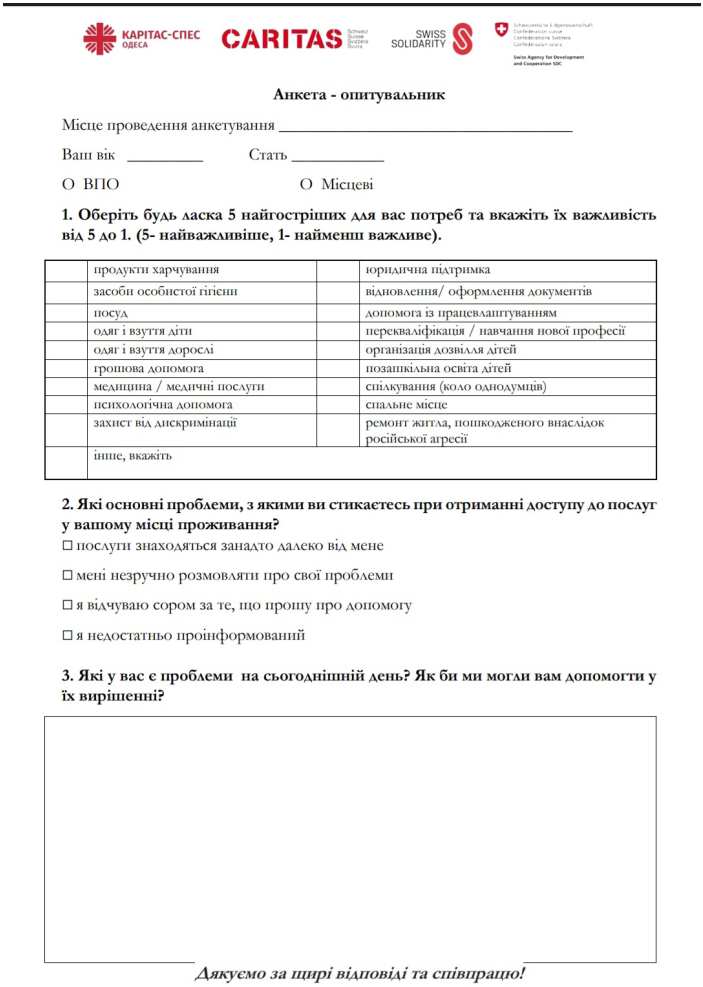
Місце проведення опитування		Дата		ПІБ фасилітатора	

Представником якої групи є опитуваний_____
Місцевість, з якої походить опитуваний_____
Стать опитуваного_____
Вік опитуваного_____
Статус опитуваного: ВПО/місцеві/повернулися у власну оселю_____

1. **PROTECTION**. Які основні труднощі та потреби виникають у вас, у вирішенні яких ви потребуєте допомоги?
2. **SHELTER.** Які основні труднощі та потреби виникають у вас, пов'язані з житловою ситуацією (відсутність житла, ремонт пошкодженого житла, оренда, тимчасове проживання у колективних центрах, проживання у родичів/знайомих, брак коштів на оплату комунальних послуг, інше)?
3. **MHPSS.** Які основні труднощі та потреби, пов'язані з психосоціальним благополуччям, виникають у вас (депресія, стрес, тривожні стани, емоційна нестабільність, панічні атаки, самотність, соціальна ізольованість, брак спілкування, інше)?
4. Чи пов'язані ці проблеми з війною, чи вони існували до війни? (Якщо проблеми існували до війни, чи змінилися вони внаслідок війни? Якщо так, то чому і як?)
5. **PROTECTION.** З якими основними перепонами ви зіштовхуєтеся, намагаючись задовольнити основні потреби, які труднощі відчуваєте в отриманні необхідних послуг (брак коштів, не підпадаєте під критерії допомоги гуманітарних організацій,

Figure 7. Example of a questionnaire in RO "RM "CARITAS-SPES-ODESA" in various “focus groups” among ordinary civilians. A form aimed at the prospect of project formation; falls under the definition of “needs assessment.”

In other words, their interviews are very limited in content and do not aim to professionally research any particular “academic” field. They are designed only to showcase a portion of “tragic events” to obtain grants and continue volunteer activities (which is not inherently problematic).



КАРІТАС-СПЕС ОДЕСА CARITAS SWISS SOLIDARITY

Анкета - опитувальник

Місце проведення анкетування _____

Ваш вік _____ Стать _____

О ВПО О Місцеві

1. Оберіть будь ласка 5 найгостріших для вас потреб та вкажіть їх важливість від 5 до 1. (5- найважливіше, 1- найменш важливе).

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	засоби особистої гігієни		відновлення/ оформлення документів
	посуд		допомога із працевлаштуванням
	одяг і взуття діти		перекваліфікація / навчання нової професії
	одяг і взуття дорослі		організація дозвілля дітей
	грошова допомога		позашкільна освіта дітей
	медицина / медичні послуги		спілкування (коло однодумців)
	психологічна допомога		спальне місце
	захист від дискримінації		ремонт житла, пошкодженого внаслідок російської агресії
	інше, вкажіть		

2. Які основні проблеми, з якими ви стикаєтесь при отриманні доступу до послуг у вашому місці проживання?

☐ послуги знаходяться занадто далеко від мене

☐ мені незручно розмовляти про свої проблеми

☐ я відчуваю сором за те, що прошу про допомогу

☐ я недостатньо проінформований

3. Які у вас є проблеми на сьогоднішній день? Як би ми могли вам допомогти у їх вирішенні?

Дякуємо за щирі відповіді та співпрацю!

Figure 8. Example of a questionnaire in RO "RM "CARITAS-SPES-ODESA" for the local population. The form of an already involved and existing project that is under implementation; falls under the definition of "case management."

The same situation applies, at best, to other international organizations. The issue of documentation does not end here. International organizations, due to restrictions imposed by their statutes, cannot remain for extended periods in any particular area of the combat zone, where "on the hot trails" documentation is precisely needed. As another example of why this work needs to be done now, we can provide the following statistics: the population of Kherson and

surrounding villages, despite increasing shelling, is noticeably growing. In spring 2023, Kherson's population was approximately 60,000 (down from about 300,000 before the full-scale war),[103] and it has now surpassed 80,000.[104, 105] What are the reasons for these changes? Why do people return despite growing danger? This also represents a task for researchers.

Based on the above, other documentation problems in combat zones emerge:

1. Most interested parties (including large organizations) cannot remain in the combat zone for extended periods due to funding limitations and danger (**Fig. 9**).

Figure 9. Evacuation of low-mobility segments of the population by volunteers from the shelling zone in the city of Kherson. End of December 2022, Mykolaiv. Author's personal archive.

2. Individuals who are present and attempting to document independently, without "local coordinators," may inadvertently record deliberately biased testimonies, which will directly harm research objectivity. The reason is as follows: people who led the occupying authorities remain at large and, when possible, continue promoting their interests. For similar reasons, researchers unfamiliar with the area may encounter individuals who have lost their sanity as a result of hostilities.

3. Visiting historians today have the opportunity to document primarily in the Kherson area, as they will not be permitted access to other locations without authorization from authorities. Even with permission, upon arrival, they will place themselves and surrounding people[106] at greater risk, so until the zone's status changes, comprehensive information gathering for the average researcher appears impossible, regardless of the researcher's or locals' desires.

Therefore, field research remains far from a simple task, and oral history is its direct component, without which we cannot more deeply understand the essence of occupation or how the local population perceived it in relation to the occupiers.

4.2. Issues with providing socio-domestic needs

As mentioned earlier, during the occupation, civilian population receipt of humanitarian aid (from Ukrainian and Russian volunteers) varied, although with predominance on the Ukrainian side, both in quantity/quality and (presumably) in the "purity" of intentions. It is worth adding that some residents certainly had stockpiles of hygiene products and other necessities, but these were insufficient for an extended period. Nevertheless, considering that the occupation was not prolonged, the local population had reasonable opportunities to provide themselves with necessary items.[107, 108] Let us now consider this more systematically, dividing humanitarian aid during occupation into central authorities of Ukrainian and Russian sides, as well as volunteer aid from individual centers on both sides (their size should also be considered); then we will examine Ukrainian aid from volunteer organizations after de-occupation.

Regarding central authorities, local residents in the first months of occupation could receive various humanitarian aid with Ukrainian products from the Administration of Korabelny district, which remained in warehouses.[109] This continued until June 2022, when the Ukrainian flag was removed from the administrative building. However, neither the occupiers' administration nor anyone else established themselves there. The nearest location where occupiers

resided (specifically, Russian Federation military) was the Civil Registry Office.[110] As mentioned in previous sections, during occupation, local population experiences with contacting both Ukrainian and Russian volunteers differed greatly.[111] While some never encountered Ukrainians and interacted exclusively with Russians, for others the situation could be completely different.[112] We emphasize that distinctions should be made between volunteer aid from central authorities (**Fig. 10**),[113] and ordinary scattered volunteers from both sides. While central authorities addressed issues of providing pensions, salaries (utility services being an example), or social benefits, scattered volunteer organizations engaged in local population evacuation,[114] as well as delivery of food, hygiene products, and medical aid of Ukrainian/Russian origin.[115]

Figure 10. Humanitarian convoys of the central authorities of the Russian Federation on the main square of Kherson, where protests were held at the beginning of the occupation. July 21, 2022, Kherson. Archive of a local volunteer.

Special attention should also be paid to large Ukrainian volunteer movements based in Mykolaiv and later in Zaporizhzhia. At the beginning of occupation, Mykolaiv functioned somewhat as a hub. Here, with coordination from certain individuals and warehouse allocation by various companies and organizations (for example, the agricultural firm "Vladan" and the scouts "Nova Ukraine"), various humanitarian aid was organized and delivered through Davydiv Brid and Vasylivka to Kherson. This consisted predominantly of food packages, water, and medical supplies. Mykolaiv was selected precisely because it was the closest non-occupied settlement, and consequently, foreign donors sent their aid there. In June 2022, the volunteer center of the NGO "Regional Center for Sustainable Development" (which accumulated humanitarian aid from international organizations, coordinated local volunteer organizations, and collaborated with pro-Ukrainian representatives of local authorities and population) had to relocate to Zaporizhzhia due to military actions blocking movement toward Mykolaiv. Russian military allowed passage only in the direction of Zaporizhzhia-Kherson.[116] Therefore, at that time, all available humanitarian aid intended for occupied Kherson region was accumulated in Zaporizhzhia. Also, it was in the Zaporizhzhia direction (specifically from March 25) that systematic transportation of humanitarian aid began from both Ukrainian and Russian sides. A reporting system for transported humanitarian aid was introduced. This last factor was crucial as it resolved several transportation issues.

Unlike the previous period, when everything remained chaotic until October 2022 (in September, humanitarian aid was no longer permitted through, and in October, the checkpoint was closed), with only one checkpoint remaining—toward Zaporizhzhia through Vasylivka—the process became more systematic.[117]

Military personnel on both sides required presentation of accompanying documents specifying the type of humanitarian aid, quantity, sender, and recipient. Transporting humanitarian aid without the presence of a legal entity became problematic. Volunteers began searching for public organizations and funds that would take the transported humanitarian aid under their "wing" and sign the

accompanying document. With this documentation, drivers transported humanitarian cargo through checkpoints. At that time, approximately 30 checkpoints from the Russian army existed toward Kherson.[118] The occupiers maintained their own lists and, following military command recommendations, did not permit more than 200 vehicles per day.[119] In addition to cargo from known donors, volunteers of the NGO "Regional Center for Sustainable Development" organized transportation of humanitarian aid from many other donors and organizations present in Zaporizhzhia at that time, using carriers who were evacuating Kherson region residents. From June to September 2022, 75 involved volunteer drivers made 116 trips and transported approximately 164 tons of humanitarian cargo.[120]

After de-occupation, when volunteer organizations (mainly from southern Ukraine) began arriving to the region, the local population experienced a degree of relief, but when shelling of the region from the left bank began, new challenges emerged. Due to shelling, only a small portion of volunteers remain in the city for residence and work, yet this did not prevent the formation of "humanitarian chaos." [121] The reason was that in Kherson, with authorities' assistance, a unified system for collecting data and requests was rejected, thus making humanitarian aid control impossible; consequently, many civilians could not receive humanitarian aid, while others could appropriate it for themselves (including for sale purposes) if they were sufficiently active and traveled around the city. People refer to them as "hamsters,"[122] but it is worth noting that these are not necessarily collaborators or separatists, but potentially ordinary individuals whose nervous systems eventually collapsed.[123] Simultaneously, it is important to remember that some population segments, for example, those whose relatives fought and died in Kherson region, still cannot receive payments from state bodies.[124] The attitude toward people and bureaucracy within the army and state bodies clearly requires changes.[125]

During the hydroelectric power station explosion period (**Fig. 11**), there was a new surge in humanitarian organizations and humanitarian aid flow and, naturally, again due to inability to control this flow and lack of understanding regarding needs, much aid went to inappropriate recipients or was used for self-serving and populist purposes.[126]

Figure 11. One of the houses in a small village in the Kherson region after the flood; in the photo you can still see a visible line, which clearly shows where the water reached. July 28, 2023, Yasna Polyana village, Kherson region. Author's personal archive.

Ukrainian volunteers have genuinely accomplished much for the local population, but for various reasons, they often placed people at significant risk; for example, through mass gatherings intended to demonstrate high attendance for humanitarian aid distribution. Simultaneously, tribute and respect must be paid to all volunteers who work, have been injured, or have died not only in Kherson region during occupation but also afterward, especially during the hydroelectric power station explosion period, evacuating locals despite all challenges.

4.3. Subduing Memory: A gap in understanding people who were under occupation

It seems quite possible that the prevailing societal opinion holds that those who remained or remain under occupation consist of 90% collaborators, separatists, and ultimately simply "the waiting," regardless of the region in question. Moreover, such thoughts are observed not only among those who were never under occupation or in combat zones (fortunately for them), but also among people who managed to leave such areas. Certainly, such thoughts have foundation, but due to their pervasiveness, they ultimately overshadow other aspects of occupation, making it practically impossible to understand entire regions and populations.

From this emerges the fundamental question: how does one identify a collaborator? Answer: definitely not through television. This represents an attempt to find and capture a phantom while shooting oneself in the foot. Years later, this could become a fatal shot to the head. Connected to this, people often have related questions: why do many collaborators avoid accountability? And ultimately, why do people refuse to leave their homes and the occupation? Kherson region, being a unique place, can provide answers to these and many other questions. It can maximally (as far as possible) lift the veil on relations between locals and the Russian military, and give us an approximate understanding of what awaits in the future. For example, it vividly demonstrates what evacuation difficulties existed in the first months of occupation, as well as current challenges in other occupied Ukrainian regions, which we discussed in previous sections.

After de-occupation, when travel to other Ukrainian territories became possible, many naturally took advantage of this opportunity, but alongside the joys came the beginning of a marginal discourse, which will be discussed in more detail in this section. With Kherson, the situation appeared quite clear — the occupation ended, many left immediately (for an indefinite period), and a few weeks after shelling began, departures had to continue — but is this accurate? In fact, official data varies greatly, and evidently, the civilian population began returning to the city six months after de-occupation (especial-

ly toward autumn 2023). Based on oral testimonies from the local population, reasons for returns included lack of financial assistance in another region/country (people could not adapt to new societies in other countries), grief,and concern about personal homes, sick relatives on the left bank, etc.

Here is a processed excerpt from an interview with a man who lived for 1.5 years under occupation in Oleshky: after approximately 8 months, the man began experiencing apathy (like many locals) due to uncertainty about what awaited him in the future.[127] When the right bank of Kherson region was de-occupied, he, along with many locals, received new stimulus and motivation, a desire for life and expectation of prompt liberation. After another half year passed, moral decline returned, and the man decided primarily to reach Kherson, where one of his apartments is located.

Commercial carriers agreed for approximately $600 to take the man to Belarus via the Crimean bridge/Russian Federation, but without guarantees regarding departure from Belarus itself. It should be noted immediately that carriers' inability to provide clear departure guarantees represents one reason why people remain in occupied territories. This is especially significant considering that after the first months of the full-scale war, departure without a Russian passport only became more difficult. Simultaneously, one must also carry a Ukrainian passport,[128] otherwise, it is quite likely that Baltic countries will deny entry to Europe.

The man quoted in the interview was fortunate to travel from Belarus to the Latvian border with a Ukrainian passport (without obtaining a Russian one); specifically, he witnessed a woman from occupied territory attempting to enter Europe without a Ukrainian passport, having only a Russian one—she was refused entry. We must consider these moments in people's lives, expanding our understanding of why they stayed or could not leave.

From the same interview, we learn how a person was denied medical assistance in the hospital during a stroke (resulting in rapid death), and how an individual with cataracts had to obtain a Russian passport for an urgent operation in Simferopol. We emphasize that all these events unfolded in Oleshky. This clearly exemplifies how far regional occupation can progress.[129]

Practical reasons push us against a wall of misunderstanding, or rather, a lack of attempts to understand. Many argue that people who were under occupation, and afterward (when shelling began), were obligated to leave, as they risked death, while a new house could eventually be built. We (volunteers from different parts of Ukraine) shared this perspective until we lived alongside these residents for more than a year. Ironically, those who once imagined war with occupation (like Donbas) thought similarly; confronted with reality, they were overwhelmed by experiences and emotions that seem nearly impossible to articulate. In my opinion, similar situations are occurring today in other occupied territories, though it is worth noting that, unlike Kherson, conditions elsewhere are significantly worse and tend toward extremes.

Simultaneously, when identifying collaborators, we must remember that information does not materialize from nothing, and informational miracles do not occur. If collaborators received advice on how to eliminate evidence, they will indeed be difficult to identify, and it is important to understand that local testimonies do not always claim to be truthful: personal motives, desire for revenge, stress, shelling, subsequent psychological traumas, memory atrophy, and numerous other factors impede this process. One fundamental aspect we must remember is that, just as in world wars (essentially, in any war), propaganda operates and emanates from both sides; if some people claim they lived better under enemy occupation, they may simply be victims of that very propaganda. As one local resident mentioned, some people from the South, when deciding to relocate to Russia for a better life (due to high pensions and social benefits during occupation), discovered upon arrival a completely different reality.[130] Here, the question of perspective emerges.

The modern war in Ukraine enables us to observe how occupation deepened and how enemy propaganda functions, creating the illusion of a good life (predictably, some succumb to this bait). Therefore, when we hear from people who were under occupation that conditions in some places were better than in Ukraine, we must understand and consider such factors. Propaganda is paramount, and here it is clearly manifested. We, in turn, recognize that dialogue is possible and can occur. It is worthwhile and necessary to discuss with these and many other individuals what the occupation truly entailed, as it attempts to conceal its ugly nature.

Conclusion

In the contemporary context of Ukraine's full-scale war with the Russian Federation, which will undoubtedly be deeply studied and researched by various individuals worldwide in the future, the question of "truth" will be particularly acute. This will especially concern not just "conversations and ideas" within the government, military structure, or economic system, but also "microhistory"—in this case, the history of occupation, influence, and relations with the local population.

How does Ukraine differ in this respect? Whether considering colonial processes in Oceania or religious confrontations in the Middle East, Ukrainians in rural areas under occupation (Kherson region) related to occupiers, if not "positively," then at least "neutrally." The consequence of this was the hybrid war in Donbas, where numerous Ukrainians became separatists and were subsequently mobilized.

In this work, based on unconventional reflection on the past, we have examined how people first encountered occupiers during the full-scale war, why people remained in the city during and after occupation, why they returned to their homes even under heavy shelling, how Kherson region economically fell into Russian Federation control, how Ukrainian and Russian volunteers assisted the local population, how centralized power operated in the city, how many factors and opportunities during occupation depended

on local authorities themselves, what difficulties future researchers of oral history and microhistory in occupied regions will encounter, why life under occupation could appear "better" than before it, and ultimately, why Ukrainians themselves need to reconsider their view of occupation.

All testimonies converge like pieces of a large puzzle, revealing the everyday lives of people under occupation in Kherson region: whether an ordinary civilian trying to minimize contact with the outside world to avoid encountering occupiers; a business person attempting to avoid switching to Russian standards while somehow surviving on handouts and rubles, especially if requiring travel or orders from Crimea; a person with a background as an activist, volunteer, or military fearing daily that they might appear on lists and that the next broken door might be theirs; or the volunteers themselves, traveling from other regions along "roads of death," uncertain what kind of individual they will encounter at the next checkpoint.

People are often saved not only by supermarkets with mixed assortments but also by markets where prices decreased due to harvest surplus; Russian and Ukrainian volunteers with quality medicine (depending on whom they encounter); or, primarily, self-organized local residents with their supplies, information, and hope for improvement. Meanwhile, the region suffered economically, evident in the emergence of spontaneous markets and various mobile pharmacies; the fear of the unknown and the impossibility of leaving for various reasons; or the inability to withdraw Ukrainian funds from bank cards, instead receiving calls from the post office regarding Russian card issuance.

All of this brings us to the period of de-occupation, where the final puzzle pieces—the hydroelectric power station explosion, "humanitarian chaos," and the populism of various individuals—lead to misunderstandings throughout the country. Changes, *qualitative* changes in attitudes toward people—this is what Kherson needs and what will be needed in the future for all other de-occupied territories.

The study revealed only a small portion of oral history and microhistory's potential. Many aspects remain unexplored, such as occupiers' attitudes toward religion (relations with various churches, etc.), how civilian population views changed on specific issues from the beginning of occupation, how they envision the country's future and other occupied territories, their children, and so forth. Simultaneously, we gained understanding of the occupation's heterogeneity and how much more remains to be learned, particularly in other territories where the economic system and vision of life under occupation currently differ significantly from the de-occupied Kherson region.

Notes

1 Domańska, Ewa. History and Contemporary Humanities. Kyiv: Nika-Center, 2012. p. 264.

2 New Approaches to Historiography, ed. Jim Sharpe et al. Kyiv, 2010. p. 368.

3 For example, during the Falklands War in 1982, documents related to earlier disputes, particularly the position of the Foreign Office in the 1930s, which cast doubt on the legitimacy of British claims to sovereignty over the islands, were suddenly withdrawn from public access. However, attentive and, as it turned out, justifiably suspicious historians had managed to make copies, which, as is known, made their way into the press, despite the great displeasure of Mrs. Thatcher.

4 Including comparison with other occupied territories in different regions of Ukraine today.

5 This issue also includes various international humanitarian missions and individual independent volunteers from Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

6 Compared to other still occupied territories.

7 Domańska, Ewa. History and Contemporary Humanities. Kyiv: Nika-Center, 2012. p. 264.

8 New Approaches to Historiography, ed. Jim Sharpe et al. Kyiv, 2010. p. 368.

9 Cannibal metaphysics. The Frontiers of Poststructural Anthropology. Viveiros de Castro. Univocal Publishing. 2014. p. 229.

10 The occupiers entered Kherson itself only on March 1.

11 The exception is those police officers who remained in the city to monitor events and provide shelter for the local population.

12 According to statistics and oral testimonies of people who were under occupation, apathy and moral decline began around this time; if not earlier, the transition to "survival mode" began, when people no longer even thought about liberating the settlement for one reason or another. In the study, we will repeatedly touch on this point.

13 If that was a strategy at all.

14 Materials of field research in the village of Inhulets, Kherson region, 2024. Author's archive.
Materials of field research in the Dariv settlement territorial community, Kherson region, 2023–2024. Author's archive.
Materials of field research in the village of Poniativka, Kherson region, 2023. Author's archive.

15 Which were also very actively disseminated by various high-ranking officials and "experts" in the beginning of the full-scale war.

16 It is worth adding that over the months, these beliefs only grew and became widespread. This was directly related to those who returned to the region after staying in other cities of Ukraine and abroad.
17 These rumors had a very real basis, and on the very first day of the occupation of the region, based on interviews with locals who were on the left bank, the lion's share of the population was well aware of the prospective danger. Choosing between two evils, many decided to stay in their homes, as there was a great chance of being shot at point-blank range on the Antonovsky Bridge or on the way from Kherson to the Mykolaiv or Zaporizhzhia region.
18 In fact, these are some of the most vivid examples of the reality of rumors about executions in the first days of full-scale occupation; the information is taken from personal interviews with the population on both sides of the Dnieper.
19 Woman, teacher of mathematics and computer science, born in 1989. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
20 We mean the deepening of the occupation itself. Although, as already mentioned, Kherson did not manage to economically transition to the Russian Federation in 9 months, the psychological pressure remained unchanged. As an example of the deepening of the occupation and the introduction of an economic system, we can cite the medical sphere, which we will consider below.
21 This is particularly due to the fact that, unlike the first two months of the occupation of the South, when it was possible to leave with a Ukrainian passport without any problems, in the following year the Russian passport began to play an increasingly important role. (Woman, self-employed person and volunteer, born in 1990. Date of recording: 03/18/2024, Odesa.)
22 These were not necessarily full-fledged checkpoints, but possible concentrations of occupiers even in the bushes, who nevertheless had the right to stop passing cars.
23 One of the "proven" options for leaving for Vasylivka was via commercial buses, whose drivers, having repeatedly met with the occupiers, got to know them and knew who to bribe. However, this did not eliminate the danger of being shot when exiting to another part of the road (which also happened). All others who tried to leave in their cars with personal belongings along this route were irretrievably cut off for weeks at various checkpoints. No one ever knew who they would encounter and what attitude the occupiers had towards civilians. (Man, volunteer, born in 2002. Date of recording: 01/21/2024, Kherson.)
24 Man, volunteer, born in 1986. Date of recording: 02/12/2024, Kherson.
25 This issue is discussed in more depth in section 4.3.

26 Man, paramilitary guard rifleman, born in 1951. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
27 As for the stores, their contents remained mostly the same after the occupation began. When all the goods were sold off the shelves (or the occupiers appropriated them), they acquired a mixed character, which is confirmed by the testimony of a person who worked in "Kefir" during the occupation: before their director disappeared, he told them to do whatever they wanted, and in the following months they bought some of the goods in the same markets; thus, on the shelves there were goods of both Ukrainian and Russian origin or from some Middle Eastern country (the vast majority of which were also of extremely low quality, compared to Ukrainian products). (Woman, junior specialist in district life activities, born in 1988. Date of recording: 05.04.2024, Kherson city.)
28 This phenomenon was not long and active only in the first month or so of the occupation; it did not necessarily end as deplorably as it could have. As an example, we can cite the volunteer headquarters in Nova Kakhovka, which in the first weeks after the start of the occupation distributed medicine from Ukrainian and foreign pharmacological companies. The distribution point began to close when, on the 13th day, local authorities first came and took away medications without any explanation, bringing with them local journalists with the occupiers, who offered to star in the story as if everything was fine. After some time the headquarters was closed.
29 Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive. Testimony of the artist Maksym Kilderov from the city of Nova Kakhovka. Date of recording: April 2024.
30 Woman, member of the Philharmonic Orchestra, born in 1979. Date of recording: 01/20/2024, Kherson.
31 Their "quality" is measured in our country by how the local population described their effectiveness depending on the place of purchase. According to the sellers of "mobile pharmacies" set up near the markets, the active ingredients of the drugs, according to them, were strikingly different from Ukrainian counterparts, and even conventional paracetamols or antibiotics did not work. However, in the fall, when full-fledged, official pharmacies opened, according to the local population, similar drugs were no longer of such poor quality and were much more effective in comparison. We think it is worth noting that Russian drugs are, for the Ukrainian population, a 'dark forest' in themselves, so all the above comparisons are relative (which does not exclude their value). In particular, it is worth paying attention to the fact that drugs could lose their properties in the summer heat due to spoilage and improper storage. Thus, it can be assumed that the drugs that appeared in Russian pharmacies later in the fall were not degraded in this

manner, being stored in refrigerators.
32 Oleh Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Council of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson.
33 Woman, member of the Philharmonic Orchestra, born in 1979. Date of recording: 01/20/2024, Kherson.
34 Oleh Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Council of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson.
35 This was due to a fairly wide range of reasons, since it was engaged in not only by people pursuing useful interests (which could also be due to a psychological shift with unknown prospects in the future), but also by partisans. They collected food for themselves in order to evade the occupiers for as long as possible, and also to help others, be they neighbors or less mobile people who had been abandoned to their fate. The current authorities from the entourage of the former mayor Kolykhayev couldn`t stop the looting. For example, patrols of the Municipal Guard under Karamalikov Ilya Mikhailovich, which was supposed to prevent looting, engaged in looting. They transported stolen food (for example, from Silpo on Ushakova Street) to his chain of stores—"Gourman"—in the Korabel district of the island for the purpose of resale. (Man, military man, born in 1989. Date of recording: 11/30/2024, Kherson.)
36 During the first months of the occupation, it was possible to buy using hryvnias in "Sytny", but then there was a gradual switch to Russian goods and Russian currency. (Woman, junior specialist in district life activities, born in 1988. Date of recording: 05.04.2024, Kherson city.)
37 Man, head of the farm, born in 1966. Recording date: 06/04/2024, Kherson.
Oleh Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Council of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson.
38 Which, unfortunately, as of December 7, 2024, went bankrupt, which is why the liquidation procedure of the enterprise has been initiated.
39 Vladyslav Nedostup, volunteer, military man born in 1994. Date of recording: 01/12/2024, Kherson.
40 Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2024. Author's archive.
41 If we talk about specific instances of scarce goods, apparently, eggs and lamb were among them. In the first case, a poultry farm in the village of Skhidne, Muzykivska territorial hromada, was liquidated (sometimes people could get their hands on lean poultry carcasses in Chornobayvka for

free, and these ended up in the hands of volunteers) (Oleh Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Council of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson.) "Eggs were then transported from the Russian Federation, covering distances of 1000–2000 km (**Fig. 3**). According to oral testimonies, their quality was lower than that of Ukrainian eggs (Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2024. Author's archive.). In the second case, most (if not all) of the sheep in the region were slaughtered; the problem with lamb in the market and supermarkets persists to this day, even after de-occupation, so it is not uncommon for there to be a need to order lamb from the Mykolaiv region, due to the lack of large-scale production in the Kherson region (Woman, member of the Philharmonic Orchestra, born in 1979. Recording date: 01/20/2024, Kherson. Oleh Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Council of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson.). It is worth noting that despite the liquidation of the poultry farm, some volunteers managed to remove some of the emaciated chicken carcasses and distribute them to local people at the market (Man, head of the farm, born in 1966. Date of recording: 06/04/2024, Kherson).

42 Woman, junior specialist in district life activities, born in 1988. Date of recording: 05/04/2024, Kherson city; Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2024. Author's archive.

43 In all likelihood, this can be attributed to better storage conditions.

44 Man, paramilitary guard rifleman, born in 1951. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.

45 Or perhaps conflicts of interest within the government itself.

46 Oleh Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Council of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson.

47 Man, head of the STC, born in 1986. Date of recording: 02/12/2024, Kherson.

48 As mentioned earlier, "Sytny" is an exception. While all other stores offered local products in two currencies and could issue Ukrainian money through terminals, offered transfers to cards from under the floor, etc., "Sytny" traded exclusively in rubles and was mainly visited by pensioners. This was due to the fact that it was an ideal place to use Russian rubles. Pensions, I recall, were around 10,000 rubles, so for a similar amount you could buy a good deal on various Russian-made goods (albeit of dubious quality). At the same time, again, locals paid more attention to local markets with Ukrainian products, which local businesses were so zealously trying to sell (Oleh Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Coun-

cil of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson).

49 Of course, they also could not refuse to accept rubles or Russian goods, otherwise they would have been closed (as was the case with some shops in the village of Komyshany; they refused to accept Russian goods), (Man, mechanic, born in 1993. Date of recording: 06/04/2024, Kherson.) but judging by oral testimonies, the occupiers often paid in hryvnias. Whether this was due to the large number of rubles in their hands or goodwill is a question (Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of recording: 03/29/2024, Kherson).

50 Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of recording: 03/29/2024, Kherson.

Man, head of the STC, born in 1986. Date of recording: 02/12/2024, Kherson.

51 Woman, member of the Philharmonic Orchestra, born in 1979. Recording date: 01/20/2024, Kherson.

52 Woman, archivist at the Ukrainian State Archives and Records Administration, born in 1995. Date of recording: 02/16/2024, Kherson.

53 Man, head of the STC, born in 1986. Date of recording: 02/12/2024, Kherson.

54 Perhaps this was due, among other things, to the fact that their director turned out to be a collaborator, and later gave the go-ahead for the export of a large amount of municipal equipment to the left bank (not long before the de-occupation, including); (Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2023–2024. Author's archive. Testimony of a water utility employee in the city of Kherson. Date of recording: April 2024).

55 The salary was approximately at the Ukrainian level, but much depended on the exchange rate (Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive. Testimony of a water utility employee in the city of Kherson. Date of recording: April 2024.)

56 Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive. Testimony of a water utility employee in the city of Kherson. Date of recording: April 2024.

57 The work was carried out approximately as follows: information was distributed throughout the city to the same elderly people that post offices were issuing Russian bank cards, to which their pension would be credited. The bank, in turn, offered a convenient way, for example, to withdraw rubles. Another operating Russian institution is mentioned on Ushakova Street, where Raiffeisen Bank used to stand (and still does). (Woman, junior specialist in district vital activities, born in 1988. Date of recording: 05/04/2024, Kherson).

58 Woman, junior specialist in district life activities, born in 1988. Record-

ing date: 05/04/2024, Kherson city.
59 Man, paramilitary guard rifleman, born in 1951. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
60 Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of recording: 03/29/2024, Kherson; Man, head of the STC, born in 1986. Date of recording: 02/12/2024, Kherson.
61 But at the same time, we should note that they charged exorbitantly high interest rates (10%+). Often this happened in the "card-to-card" format, where the end client was simply given cash. Law firms are included in this list, since some of them still kept terminals and could do the same as people from the supermarket. However, according to the testimony of locals from the Korabel district, there was an opportunity to withdraw money at a much lower interest rate (2-3%). In particular, it should be understood that many businesses that had a lot of cash on hand at the beginning of the occupation, realizing the great risk of transporting it, decided to engage in exchange as well. This way they preserved their resources and even made money. According to the locals, at the end of the occupation, by exchanging large amounts (tens of thousands of hryvnias), they could even make a profit themselves, as businesses were paying extra to get rid of hryvnias during a very turbulent period. Perhaps they wanted to keep only rubles (to clean up the evidence of certain activities?) in order to go to the left bank later. On the contrary, the locals themselves tried to get rid of rubles and dumped them wherever possible. Examples include kilometer-long lines at the Epicenter near the Factory and in the Shumensky district. Currency manipulation under the occupation, along with the lack of price controls, was reaching unheard-of proportions (Man, head of the farm, born in 1966. Date of recording: 06.04.2024, Kherson).
62 Woman, junior specialist in district life activities, born in 1988. Recording date: 05.04.2024, Kherson city.
63 Of course, this is not some final and main reason for the "postponement" of the transition. There are many reasons for this, one of which is that the local population actively used hryvnia everywhere (markets and various establishments of private entrepreneurs) (as did the occupiers, since it was profitable; the exceptions were large (already requalified for Russian products) supermarkets, such as the former "Kefir", "Vezunchik" and "Green Market". It is worth noting that much in the occupation depends on the leadership of a particular unit or district; since we cannot find out what their views were at the time, we can only discuss it. (Oleh Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Council of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson.)
64 Man, paramilitary guard rifleman, born in 1951. Date of recording:

02/24/2024, Kherson.

65 A very interesting point was made by one of the large wholesalers (and market traders in general) who said that many rubles that were in circulation in the Kherson region were "written off" and were not quoted in Crimea. Perhaps this was another reason why the occupiers actively used hryvnias. (Oleh Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Council of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson.)

66 Man, entrepreneur, born in 1989. Date of recording: 11/11/2023, Kherson; Materials of field research in Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive. Testimony of a local seller in Kherson. Date of recording: March 2024.

67 These were mostly apartments of those people who died or left the city. As for the property of those who went to the basement, the question is open.

68 Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of recording: 03/29/2024, Kherson; Woman, chief specialist of the State Service for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a lawyer, born in 1966. Date of recording: 11/20/2023, Kherson.

69 There is repeated evidence that if the occupiers moved into the apartment, the owner had the opportunity to file a complaint with the occupation administration to get it back. The same was true for cars. The results were such that people did get their property back, but the whole process was more like a performance to show that they were the occupiers, a real source of power that was capable of doing something.

70 It is worth adding that fear of the unknown also played a role here, since in the first days various rumors (quite true) spread about how people were shot when leaving through the Antonivskyi Bridge, on the way from Kherson to Vasylivka, etc. (Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of recording: 03/29/2024, Kherson; Man, entrepreneur, born in 1989. Date of recording: 11/11/2023, Kherson).

71 During conversations with the workers, a thesis emerged that perhaps they were lucky because they were all women. (Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of recording: 03/29/2024) Therefore, they say, despite their sometimes rudeness, the occupiers still kept themselves in check. It seems, based on other interviews, that the occupiers had a more gentle attitude towards both children and women, but still a lot depended on the person themselves. In one place, say, a coffee shop (which is given later in the text), the local military near the administration might not touch a woman at all, while in another place, such as one of the checkpoints to Vasylivka, based on real history, they might break their collarbones with buttstocks (Oleh

Volodymyrovych Akymcenkov, deputy of the Kherson City Council of the VIII convocation, born in 1966. Date of recording: 12/11/2024, Kherson).
72 Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of recording: 03/29/2024, Kherson; Man, entrepreneur, born in 1989. Date of recording: 11/11/2023, Kherson.
73 Since the exchange rate was not set in favor of the ruble, the occupiers could often even exchange them for hryvnias in order to save for their own purposes (Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of entry: 03/29/2024, Kherson; Man, entrepreneur, born in 1989. Date of recording: 11/11/2023, Kherson; Man, volunteer, born in 1986. Date of recording: 02/12/2024, Kherson).
74 It is now practically impossible to establish who was who, since the occupiers advised the real collaborators on how to avoid suspicion and create a lack of evidence for their future lives.
75 Man, paramilitary guard rifleman, born in 1951. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
76 Woman, financier, born in 1984. Date of recording: 05/02/2024, Kherson.
77 Based on the author's personal experience of communicating with local residents of the Kherson region.
78 According to the information of the people who were in the basement, they consisted mainly of those who had participated in protest movements since 2014, or were members of nationalist organizations (National Corps, various Ultras, etc.).
79 Man, volunteer, born in 2002. Date of recording: 01/21/2024, Kherson.
80 Woman, teacher of mathematics and computer science, born in 1989. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
81 Shchohol Gennady Borisovic, salesman, born on March 21, 1968. Date of recording: January 16, 2024, Kherson.
82 It is worth clarifying that this is not only about coercive measures. As in many places, there will always be a person who voluntarily went to the collaborators, and schools are no exception. Returning to the topic, we can recall a mathematics teacher who taught online throughout the occupation and only stopped in mid-autumn 2022. The reason was the decision of the school management, because according to them, this is done for her own safety.
83 Woman, teacher of mathematics and computer science, born in 1989. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
84 There was no mention of salaries, since all employees were paid by the Ukrainian side during the occupation.
85 Everything described below is based on the words of his colleagues at

the Philharmonic (Woman, member of the Philharmonic Orchestra, born in 1979. Date of recording: 01/20/2024, Kherson.).
86 Woman, member of the Philharmonic Orchestra, born in 1979. Date of recording: 01/20/2024, Kherson.
87 For example, one woman with a higher education (she was studying to be a lawyer) was offered a job as a judge for 300,000 rubles a month. But there were other, more common cases where they were offered to simply dig trenches for some n-sum.
88 Woman, chief specialist of the State Service for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a lawyer, born in 1966. Date of recording: 11/20/2023, Kherson.
89 Woman, teacher of mathematics and computer science, born in 1989. Recording date: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
90 Man, paramilitary guard rifleman, born in 1951. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
91 Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive. Testimony of the artist Maksym Kilderov from the city of Nova Kakhovka. Date of recording: April 2024; Materials of field research in the city of Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region, 2024. Author's archive.
92 If we talk about a certain ratio of the medicines provided between Ukrainian and Russian volunteers, then the Ukrainians will most likely be in a more advantageous position.
93 This specific settlement was not under occupation.
94 Shchohol Gennady Borisovic, salesman, born on March 21, 1968. Date of recording: January 16, 2024, Kherson.
95 This means that people who, after receiving a lot of help from the Russian authorities (or in parallel Russian volunteers), voluntarily decided to move to the Russian Federation, according to real examples from locals, found themselves at a broken trough. If during the occupation they were given a pension of, say, 10,000 rubles, then in the Russian Federation itself (not talking about Moscow) it was in the region of 1,500-2,500 rubles.
96 Woman, teacher of mathematics and computer science, born in 1989. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
Materials of field research in Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive. Testimony of a local seller in Kherson. Date of recording: March 2024.
97 Based on this comparison, it is clear that it was much easier for Russian volunteers, if they were present in the area, to meet the local population and offer help. On the other side of the barricades are Ukrainian volunteers, who often had to travel not from the Mykolaiv region, but from the Zapor-

izhia region.

98 It is worth noting that if we take into account the entire region, the shelling, of course, began in the first days after the de-occupation. This can be clearly seen thanks to the news columns, the columns of which are still published on the Internet. The countdown from the 2nd week after the de-occupation (end of November) is given because it is the local population of the Kherson region that most often remembers it. Perhaps the date they mention is also due to the fact that only a few weeks later they began to distinguish between the arrivals from the left bank and the departures of our artillery from the right.

99 The author of the study has been working at RO "RM"CARITAS-SPES-ODESA" for 3 years as a local coordinator in Kherson.

100 "Emotional" parts of interviews from other programs are added to donor letters to emphasize the importance of their work and funding of various projects.

101 A form of collecting information on the existing needs of residents (in our case) of the Kherson region by volunteers, various local volunteer organizations, as well as directly at meetings of men and women in communities. For example, volunteer A tells management B that it would be worth financing a project to allocate fire extinguishers according to lists of condominium associations and quarter residents.

102 This is a form where the project (in the most common cases) is already involved and exists. An example would be a project with assistance for the restoration of a household. In this case, the head of the "household" is "interviewed"; in the interview passport-sheet, he writes down what was irretrievably lost, what he needs in the future for restoration, sowing in the new season, etc.

103 According to the press officer of the Kherson Defense Commandant's Office, Dmytro Pletenchuk, as of January 2, 2023.

104 According to oral testimony of the head of the Korabel district council of the city of Kherson of the VIII convocation – Chornenko Natalia Yevgenivna, as of 10/24/2023. It is worth noting that the data, although reflecting the real state of affairs, are at the same time approximate. A full-fledged collection of data on the local population during the occupation, and especially after it, is not considered possible; the reason is that, for example, all documentation regarding the local population shortly before the de-occupation was taken by the occupiers to the left bank, leaving the current administration with practically nothing. A similar situation exists with officially registered volunteer organizations in the region (this applies to both local and international ones); it is not uncommon for an international organization to operate in the region without full permits (the reason

for this is again the charter and the ban on long stays in the combat zone). According to the local population, as of the beginning of 2025, there were 50,000 people in Kherson, and according to the official data of Kherson Regional State Administration, as of November 2024, 158,481 people live in the affected communities, 10056 people with disabilities, 12,457 children, 66,011 elderly people, 31,746 IDPs and 73,504 people in Kherson. Based on these data, it is possible to trace the average number between the testimonies of local and government officials, which was interestingly included in the official statistics of KRSA.

105 Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2023–2024. Author's archive. Testimony of the head of the ship district council in the city of Kherson of the VIII convocation – Chornenko Natalia Yevhenivna in the city of Kherson. Date of recording: March 2024.

106 I will add that from the point of view of the "Code of Ethics of a Scientist of Ukraine" [1.9]: "A scientist is responsible for the emergence of danger to an individual, society...", that is, such actions are unacceptable.

107 If we compare, it was easiest to provide ourselves with hygiene, and the most difficult with medicine.

108 Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of recording: 03/29/2024, Kherson; Man, volunteer, born in 1986. Date of recording: 02/12/2024, Kherson; Man, economist and entrepreneur, born in 1989. Date of recording: 12/11/2023, Kherson.

109 Materials of field research in the city of Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive. Testimony of the head of the ship district council in the city of Kherson of the VIII convocation - Chornenko Natalia Yevhenivna in the city of Kherson. Date of recording: March 2024.

110 Woman, bartender, born in 1969. Date of recording: 03/29/2024, Kherson.
Materials of field research in Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive. Testimony of a local seller in Kherson. Date of recording: March 2024.

111 As an example, we can add that while among the volunteers who traveled to Kherson, entire checkpoints received terrible names as a result of their history ("the road of death" in the region before the village of Oleksandrivka), the locals have never heard of them, and probably never will. Although, it is still worth saying that, most likely, the majority of the cars shot were those that did not follow the instructions of the occupiers when driving.

112 Woman, teacher of mathematics and computer science, born in 1989. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson; Materials of field research in Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive; Testimony of a local

seller in Kherson. Date of recording: March 2024.
113 Man, volunteer, born in 2002. Date of recording: 01/21/2024, Kherson.
114 Here, too, it is worth distinguishing between commercial organizations that took people to the Mykolaiv/Zaporizhzhia region for money, as well as volunteer organizations that often took people to Zaporizhzhia.
115 Woman, private entrepreneur and volunteer, born in 1988. Date of recording: 08/02/2024, Kherson.
116 To be more precise, when the road through Davydiv Brid (from where you could get to Kryvyi Rih) was closed, the last remaining routes were through Vasylivka, Melitopol, and Zaporizhia.
117 This did not change the fact that in Zaporizhia itself, in the markets and in other places (for various reasons), people could spend months waiting for their turn to travel on the lists.
118 This was obviously also related to the movement of equipment. To be more precise, this generally concerns the topic of why the occupiers allowed access only at certain hours or days; everything was done in order to minimize the danger from the local population and Ukrainian military intelligence, which was actively working in nearby cities.
119 Of course, as mentioned earlier, a lot depended on the occupiers who later came across them on the way; there were both adequate ones who could return everything to the owner after a while, even if the property was confiscated, and those who had to irrevocably give bribes when traveling to their destination. On the Ukrainian side, they could also take bribes, but mostly only for speeding.
120 Materials of field research in Kherson, Kherson region, 2023-2024. Author's archive. Testimony of the head of the NGO "Regional Center for Sustainable Development" in Kherson. Date of recording: April 2024.
121 At the same time, it should not be assumed that volunteers did not try to counteract this at the very beginning: the Odesa Regional Humanitarian Headquarters tried to organize a project that would unite and centralize the flows of humanitarian aid from abroad and from local volunteers, but in the end it failed. There was another voluntary attempt by local volunteers and IT specialists who were willing to create a website on a volunteer basis where all the volunteers of the country would coordinate with each other; so that everyone would understand what and where to take, as well as where there is enough humanitarian aid. The project and the same idea also failed at the very beginning. If we recall international volunteer organizations, then, in addition to the fact that they cannot be in a combat zone for a long time, one of the problems is their lack of understanding of the surrounding situation. Due to "humanitarian chaos", they can often duplicate their programs in the same place, not fully understanding the needs of

others. As a result, this may result in the closure of both projects. Or they may stop providing assistance due to conflicts with local authorities.
122 Based on the author's communication with the local population of the city of Kherson.
123 In other words, these are people who have developed pronounced problems with their psychological state; critical distrust of others, panic attacks, etc.
124 Although it might be more correct to say that much depends on the bureaucracy within the army itself, the authorities and others simply don't even try to change anything, as a result of which people don't receive help.
125 Man, carpenter, born in 1935. Date of recording: 01/18/2024, Kherson.
126 These factors are always present, but at a critical moment, accordingly, they began to manifest themselves even more vividly.
127 Man, paramilitary guard rifleman, born in 1951. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
128 The question of whether a Ukrainian passport is taken away when a Russian one is issued is quite understandable, but here again much depended on the authorities themselves. If during the occupation of Kherson it could be taken away without registration and if a Ukrainian passport was kept, then, say, in Melitopol, according to oral testimonies, Ukrainian passports are definitely taken away; after the deoccupation of the right bank of the Kherson region in Oleshki, passports were issued only with registration; if your house was washed away during the period of the hydroelectric power station explotion, you could not get it and found yourself in a stalemate. (Man, paramilitary guard rifleman, born in 1951. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson; Materials of field research in the village of Oleshky, Kherson region, 2024. Author's archive).
129 Man, paramilitary guard rifleman, born in 1951. Date of recording: 02/24/2024, Kherson.
130 Shchohol Gennady Borisovic, salesman, born on March 21, 1968. Date of recording: January 16, 2024, Kherson.