

VIRTUAL CULTURAL SPACES PROJECTS OF TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES

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The article examines the state and activities of cultural institutions of territorial communities, in particular in front-line territories. The issues of reformatting the work of cultural institutions, the search for new online and offline formats that would meet the cultural needs of communities, minimal costs and martial law conditions are highlighted. It is determined that to ensure high-quality and full-fledged work of cultural institutions in the martial law conditions, it is advisable to use the potential of the virtual environment. During the war, it is worth creating virtual cultural spaces that could comprehensively satisfy cultural needs, improve the mental health of different age groups, and hold events in online and offline formats. The authors proposed a concept for a project to create a virtual cultural space in cultural institutions of territorial communities and the stages of its implementation, using available technologies (PostgreSQL and MySQL databases; server programming languages: PHP, Ruby, Java, JavaScript (Node.js), 3D technologies). The concept is based on the analysis of the results of the sociological study "Cultural Practices and Needs for Population Restoration in Deoccupied and Frontline Communities" which was carried out with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This project will be able to meet the cultural needs of communities in a short time and with minimal costs and will allow the use of modern technologies to provide online services, improve the information support of the activities of cultural institutions of territorial communities. In addition, in order to preserve and improve mental health, art therapy and media art therapy can be used within the framework of the project, which will positively affect the mental health of the Ukrainians. The project may be implemented in an online format, both for frontline territories and in a mixed format, for other regions of Ukraine which is relevant in the conditions of the martial law.

Keywords: information support, information technologies, cultural institution, territorial communities, virtual environment, project, cultural service, art therapy, 3D technologies.

Introduction and problem statement

The full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022 stopped the activities of cultural institutions in Ukraine. In 2023-2024, the most part of them returned to their functioning in full or in part. In the frontline regions, the cultural institutions operate in an online format, while in other regions they operate in a mixed one. However, the areas of the work have changed significantly. Their main functions of the providing the cultural goods and meeting the cultural needs were facilitated by the community members assistance, work with the internally displaced persons, volunteer activities, preserving cultural heritage, and implementing cultural diplomacy projects. At the same time, we should note a number of problems among them – the low level of material and technical support and the loss of human capital.

Thus, the issue of reformatting the work of cultural institutions in accordance with the needs of wartime. The search for new online and offline formats, which would meet the communities cultural needs, minimal capital costs belong to the key problems.

Analysis of recent research and publications

We can see that many Ukrainian new researches, devoted to the analysis of the war impact of on the cultural sphere. For example, the development of the cultural sphere under martial law was studied by I. Bitiuk and O. Berdychevska (2023). The issues of cultural and leisure practices in the conditions of war conflict were considered by T. Shevchenko (2022). O. Kopiiivska, V. Dobrovolska, N. Holovach, T. Filina, T. Reva (2023) studied the innovative projects of the united territorial communities cultural institutions, N. Holovach (2023) focused on the cultural institutions transformation in the united territorial communities.

The sphere of cultural services in the regions of Ukraine under the martial law were analysed by S. Shults and O. Voitenko (2023). The issues of project implementation are considered by the following specialists in information area N. Kunanets, L. Sokur, V. Dobrovolska, S. Lytvyn (2021); V. Pasichnyk, D. Tabachyshyn, N. Kunanets, A. Rzheuskyi (2020); O. Duda, V. Kochan, N. Kunanets, A. Sachenko, T. Pytlenko (2019). The scientists actively research the innovative activities of libraries, the modern library projects, considering them as the most effective tools.

Formulation of the article objectives

The purpose of the article is to formulate the project of the virtual cultural spaces, designed to meet the cultural needs of the communities population under the martial law regime, which is based on the analysis of the sociological research results. The article highlights the conceptual foundations of creating virtual cultural spaces in territorial communities and reveals the stages of their implementation. The scientific novelty is the formation of virtual cultural spaces requirements for territorial communities to provide cultural services by cultural institutions under the martial law regime. It is noted that we should implement the innovative projects, using the opportunities working in the virtual environment, to gain the high-quality and full-fledged work of cultural institutions in wartime.

Presentation of the main material

Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine has changed the physical landscape of Ukrainian regions as well as the socio-cultural structure and socio-psychological reflections of people in cities and communities.

That is why, today it is important to develop requirements for cultural hubs (virtual cultural spaces in territorial communities) that would help meet the cultural needs of the community population and provide cultural services by cultural institutions under the war.

Let's see the project main stages of the creating a virtual cultural space in territorial communities in details. At the first stage, it is necessary to conduct a sociological research and study the cultural space of Ukrainian communities under martial law. The second stage involves analysing the quality of cultural services and identifying the cultural needs of the population in de-occupied and frontline communities to determine the requirements for virtual cultural spaces. The third one is the project implementation of the virtual cultural spaces in territorial communities.

According to the research “Cultural and creative sectors in Ukraine: resilience, recovery, and integration with the EU” (Karnaukh & Kravchuk, 2024), organised by the Cultural Relations Platform in January-April 2024, in spring 2024 the existing problems of the Ukrainian cultural spaces were compounded by the following ones:

- A brain drain is becoming more visible in all sectors of the economy, having a crosscutting impact on efficiency and productivity.
- The ongoing war is exhausting the resources, mental and emotional capacities of Ukrainians and is creating Ukraine fatigue in Europe and beyond.
- There is a deepening distinction in the quality of life and operational context in the frontline areas and the rest of Ukraine, which requires different policy instruments for different regions.
- There is evidence of incredible practices of resilience and adaptability demonstrated at many levels, but there is a lack of deep learning infrastructures to reflect on those experiences and integrate it on the systemic level.
- There is a growing understanding of survival and recovery processes occurring simultaneously, with this ambiguity creating confusion in the strategic planning of the local communities and institutions.

Lately, the network of cultural institutions has shrunk significantly. For example, the network of Kyiv region clubs has been reduced till 779 units whereas in 2022 they were 817. 183 objects of the region’s culture were damaged or destroyed, including 149 cultural institutions. In addition, 34 cultural heritage sites also were damaged or destroyed. 94 are undergoing repairs among them 35 have already been restored (General information, 2025).

The cultural service centres network reforms in territorial communities have been halted due to lack of funds (targeted subventions), which is the result of Covid-19, and the Russian war aggression (National identity, 2024). The first pilot projects of cultural service centres in communities were implemented and their experience spread to other regions. Those projects emerged as a response to the reduction of urban and rural clubs and cultural centres in communities that found it difficult to maintain them due to low attendance and ineffective management.

The research, entitled “Cultural practices and needs for population recovery in deoccupied and frontline communities”, which was conducted from 17 November to 4 December 2023 and implemented with the support of the USAID Ukraine Confidence Building Initiative (UCBI), showed that all respondents, including cultural service providers, considered the state of the communities cultural institutions to be unsatisfactory. More than 70 % of the respondents did not support the idea of closing cultural institutions (clubs, libraries) in sparsely populated places if they did not cope with their functions, while 22 % of them supported such an initiative (Cultural practices and, 2024).

At the same time, the territorial communities tries to create new-generation interactive public spaces by transforming old village clubs with libraries into modern multimedia service centres. They develop projects to receive grants for their implementation, which positively impact on the provision of quality cultural services and meeting the community population cultural needs. For example, the vast majority of young people believe that the state of culture in their communities is unsatisfactory and outdated. In addition, there is a lack of interesting leisure ideas and modern equipment for their implementation at the communities.

For the alternative financing of the cultural institutions development, the experts recommend actively to implement project activities and develop partnerships at the local, national and international levels in the conditions of budget deficits of both the state and communities during the war period. In these cases, the international organisations assistance through grants and targeted funding, the sister-cities and intermunicipal partnership by the search for partner institutions, etc. may become relevant (Holovach, 2023).

The cultural projects can take part in the partial grants, which are aimed at the civil society organisations, dealt with culture, local culture management, artists and representatives of the cultural domain. The main goal of such projects, is the activation of cultural life, the community socioeconomic and civic development.

Many communities actively make attempts to get the possibilities of the culture grant support and apply for grants. Some of them are success in winning and using grants. However, there is a problem of the innovative technologies improper using in community cultural institutions. The rapid development of information technologies leads to active using computer systems and networks in innovative activities e.g. artificial intelligence systems, databases, emotional intelligence etc. (Kopievska et al., 2023).

Today, there are no any necessary conditions for interactive cooperation with the UTCs and their involvement in the community cultural strategies development. This issue deals with a lack of funding and appropriate technical equipment. First of all, such situation negatively influences the inclusion of young people in the cultural life of UTCs. It is important because the young people are more mobile, active Internet users and can consume cultural products as well as to put in practice cultural projects (Kopievska et al., 2023).

The war and its consequences has caused significant social isolation and people separation in communities. In addition, the cultural services in regions, which are mostly provided online in small settlements on the frontline territories, negatively influence the socialization. These tendencies are evidenced by the data of “Cultural practices and needs for population recovery in deoccupied and frontline communities”.

The research was conducted among the population (aged 18 and older) of Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya, Odesa, Mykolaiv, and Kherson regions (Cultural practices and, 2024). The assessment of the degree of population satisfaction with the existing state, variety and quality of cultural services and infrastructure in communities belong to the basic issues, which are the subjects of the analysis.

The research results showed that 50 % of the respondents noted that there were proper number cultural institutions in their locality, including libraries, clubs, museums, and art studios. On the other hand, 33 % of the respondents stated that there was an insufficient number, particularly Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia and Chernihiv regions. In the Kherson region, only 25 % said that there were many cultural institutions, while more than 70% noted that there were a lack of them. For example, more than 75 % of respondents indicated that there were libraries in their localities in Chernihiv, Sumy, and Mykolaiv regions, 48 % in Kharkiv, and 21 % in Kherson it was found out the following data (Fig. 1).

The best situation, concerned the clubs activities is in Chernihiv and Sumy regions, where more than 75 % of respondents noted that those cultural institutions were working. The worst situation is in Kharkiv – 41 % and Kherson – 12 %. In other regions, about 60 % of the respondents said that the clubs were working. Regarding the community club-type cultural institutions visiting we can see the following data (Fig. 2).

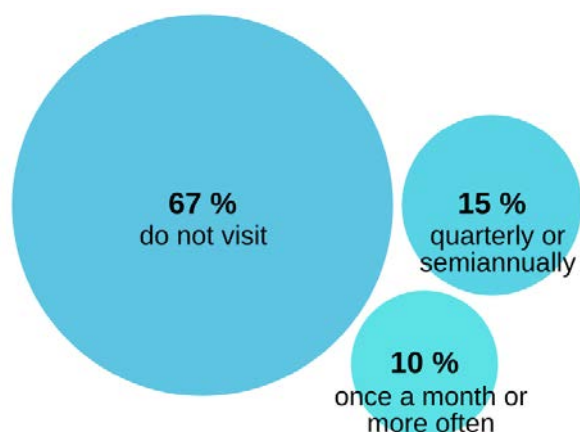


Fig. 1. The state of the community libraries visiting

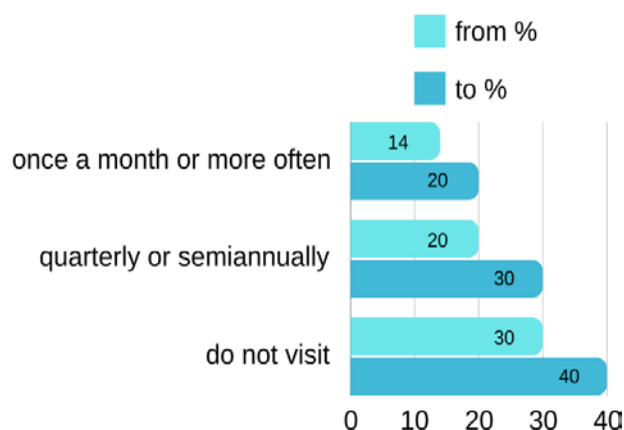


Fig. 2. The state of the community club visiting

These indicators are explained by the rather narrow list of cultural institutions services in the studied communities. The main kinds of the services are group classes, publishing books, holding concerts and performances, mostly online. For example, offline events in the studied communities are held quite infrequently. They are held in the warm seasons and outside for safety reasons. There are restrictions on to mass companies in the separate districts (Kherson region, communities of Sumy region).

The typical offline events include fairs and charity concerts, children's parties, and remembrance days of patriotic character. These events are useful to raise funds for the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which motivates people to join the events. In the respondents' opinion, volunteering and the support of the Armed Forces has been partially replaced the leisure activity in the cultural institutions.

Analysing the cultural needs of the communities' target audiences, it has been found out that children and teenagers can attend online or offline clubs, music schools, seasonal and national holidays in almost every community. These events are organised in shelters or in the open air. The parental respondents would like to see more such activities as well as psychological and skills training for children and adolescents, educational activities, and sports clubs. There is a lack of the sports facilities and stadiums in working order in the studied communities. So, we can see a great interest in them. Parent are ready to pay for the children high-quality leisure according to their means.

Young people, aged 16-24, mostly do not have opportunities for quality cultural leisure. In certain communities, this group of respondents try to solve this problem by "meetings" and "little parties", events, organised by local cultural institutions in the collaboration with the councils of youth. Due to the busyness of the adult respondents, aged 25-40, their cultural needs are usually determined by the needs of their children. There were quite few cultural services for this group in communities even before the war time. They are ready to pay money for cultural services. People, at the age of 41+ and 60+, are offered to participate in women's clubs, based on their interests or choirs. This age group is the most active libraries visitors. They often consider the entertainment content to be out of date today (Cultural practices and, 2024).

The Table 1 shows the lack of the live communications in the communities. The respondents are eager to visit offline events.

Table 1

The distribution of community cultural needs

Age	Cultural needs
Children	online, offline clubs; music schools; seasonal and public holidays; sports sections
Youth 16–24 ages	festivals; concerts; comedy shows, stand-ups; meetings with famous people; sports sections; educational trainings, master-classes, psychological trainings; theatre
Adults 25–40 ages	fairs; Days of towns or villages; meetings with interesting people; useful workshops; psychological trainings; theatre, cinema, concerts of Ukrainian pop stars
Adults 41–60+	concerts; festivals; performances of Ukrainian cultural figures and collectives

The results of sociological research shows the increasing of psychological problems in the communities, which affects all spheres of life and the ability to resist new challenges (Fig. 3).

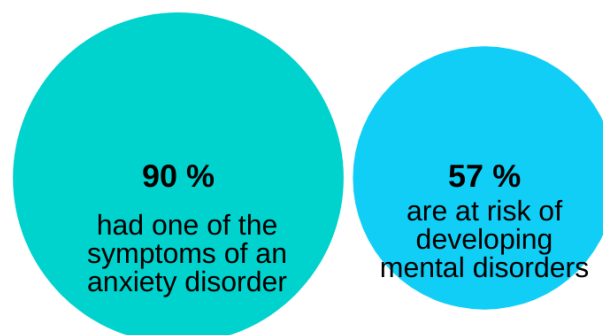


Fig. 3. Psychological conditions of the communities

The research demonstrates the demand for psychological training to preserve and improve mental health. The ability to adapt, function and even develop during the war, the prospects for the post-war recovery of Ukraine largely depend on the level of emotional solidarity of citizens and the culture of mental health (The All-Ukrainian mental, 2025).

The important stages of the projects implementation in cultural institutions are the determination of evaluation methods and the development of project scenarios options to put them in practice.

The virtual cultural spaces creating project consists of the site, which includes the following steps: to define the project topic and main goal; to develop the technical tasks; to prototype, modelling and design, layout and programming; to fill with content, testing; to present the final project (Kopievska et al., 2023).

Thus, in our opinion, at the period of wartime, it would be appropriate to create virtual cultural spaces that could comprehensively satisfy cultural needs, create conditions for improving the various age groups emotional health, and conduct events in online and offline formats. To preserve mental health, the art therapy (music therapy, humor therapy, bibliotherapy, etc.) can be used within the project, as well as media art therapy. The latter means the applying the modern media in the creative process. It can be put in practice in two ways: receptive (passive) – the perception of media art works, film art, photos, etc. and creative (active) – creation of media products.

Today, the Internet is one of the most important tools for creating a virtual cultural space. It ensures a effective communication process among all participants. So, the web portal development will allow us to use the modern technologies for the information support improvement of the cultural institutions activities.

Nowadays, the implementation of the virtual cultural spaces creating project includes the solution of the following tasks:

- to determine the valid arguments of the relevance and main purpose of the web portal;
- to define the methodology of creation and further development of this resource;
- to ensure the formation of web portal management;
- to implement the proposed content architectonics and create a system of consolidated content of the web portal.

Working at the virtual cultural space server component, we can use the following technologies: PostgreSQL and MySQL databases; server programming languages PHP, Ruby, Java, JavaScript (Node.js). The 3D technologies allow us to create an illusion of presence, which will contribute to the diversification of cultural services and positively affect the satisfaction of the territorial communities population cultural needs.

To quantitatively assess the effectiveness of the implemented virtual cultural space, we propose a set of composite indices that capture accessibility, community needs, and technological readiness. These indices enable comparative analysis across different communities and allow tracking changes over time.

Cultural accessibility index reflects the average level of satisfaction with cultural services, weighted by the significance or population size of each community:

$$C AI = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (S_i \times W_i)}{\sum_{i=1}^n W_i},$$

where S_i – satisfaction score in the i -th community, W_i – weight of the community (e.g., based on population or strategic priority).

Cultural Needs Index represents the weighted sum of cultural service requests from different demographic groups:

$$CNI = \alpha T_c + \beta T_y + \gamma T_a + \delta T_s,$$

where T_c, T_y, T_a, T_s — number of requests from children, youth, adults, and seniors respectively, $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta$ – weighting coefficients indicating the strategic importance of each group, determined either through expert analysis or by the Analytic Hierarchy Process.

Technological readiness index measures the readiness of a community to participate in the virtual cultural space, based on infrastructure and digital skills:

$$TRI = \frac{ICT_{\text{equip}} + ICT_{\text{skills}}}{2}$$

where ICT_{equip} – percentage of equipment availability, ICT_{skills} – average level of digital skills among staff.

Project Effectiveness Index the overall effectiveness of the project is determined as a weighted sum of the above indices:

$$PEI = \lambda_1 CAI + \lambda_2 CNI + \lambda_3 TRI$$

where $\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \lambda_3$ — priority coefficients reflecting the strategic objectives of the project (e.g., λ_1 may be higher when improving accessibility is the primary goal).

These mathematical models enable both quantitative monitoring and comparative evaluation of cultural services, providing a basis for evidence-based decision-making in the development of virtual cultural environments.

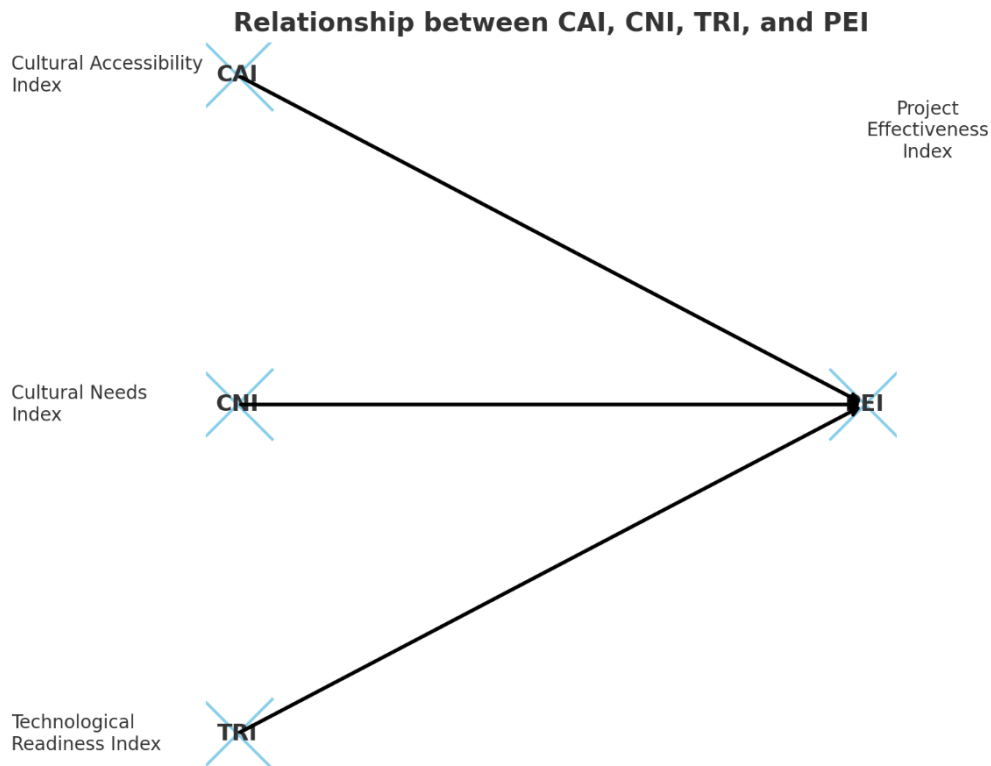


Fig. 4. Relationship between CAI, CNI, TRI, and PEI

The proposed system of indices can be applied to assess the effectiveness of a project aimed at creating virtual cultural spaces. Suppose surveys on satisfaction with cultural services were conducted in three communities: community A (population 20,000) average satisfaction score - 0.7, community B (population 10,000) average score - 0.6, community C (population 5,000) average score - 0.5, community D (population 4,000) average score - 0.67, community E (population 3,000) average score - 0.74. In this case, the weighted average (CAI) makes it possible to observe the integral level of accessibility to cultural services while taking into account the relative weight of each community.

Within a community, data were collected on the number of requests from different age groups: children – 40 requests, youth – 80, adults – 60, elderly – 20. If the weighting coefficients ($\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta$) are defined as 0.25, 0.35, 0.25, and 0.15 respectively, the calculated CNI index will help evaluate the strategic importance of implementing precisely those cultural services that are most requested by the population groups.

If in a given community the level of equipment availability is 70%, while the average level of digital skills among personnel is 60%, then $TRI = 0.65$. This provides a quantitative measure of readiness for the introduction of virtual cultural spaces. The integrated indicator is calculated as a weighted sum of the three previous indices. For example, if priority is given to accessibility ($\lambda_1 = 0.5$), community needs ($\lambda_2 = 0.3$), and technological readiness ($\lambda_3 = 0.2$), then PEI can be obtained, which allows for comparing different communities and identifying where the implementation of the project will be most effective.

Thus, the application of this system of indices enables quantitative tracking of changes over time, conducting comparisons across communities, and forming well-grounded managerial decisions regarding the development of virtual cultural spaces.

Tabl.2

Example of Index Calculation (CAI, CNI, TRI, PEI)

Community	Population	Requests (0-18)	Requests (19-60)	Requests (60+)	CAI (Child Access Index)	CNI (Community Need Index)	TRI (Total Request Index)	PEI (Priority Efficiency Index)
Community A	12.000	150	300	200	0.45	0.60	0.55	0.53
Community B	9.000	80	250	220	0.35	0.72	0.63	0.58
Community C	15.000	200	400	300	0.50	0.65	0.70	0.62
Community D	4.000	–	–	–	0.67	–	–	–
Community E	3.000	–	–	–	0.74	–	–	–

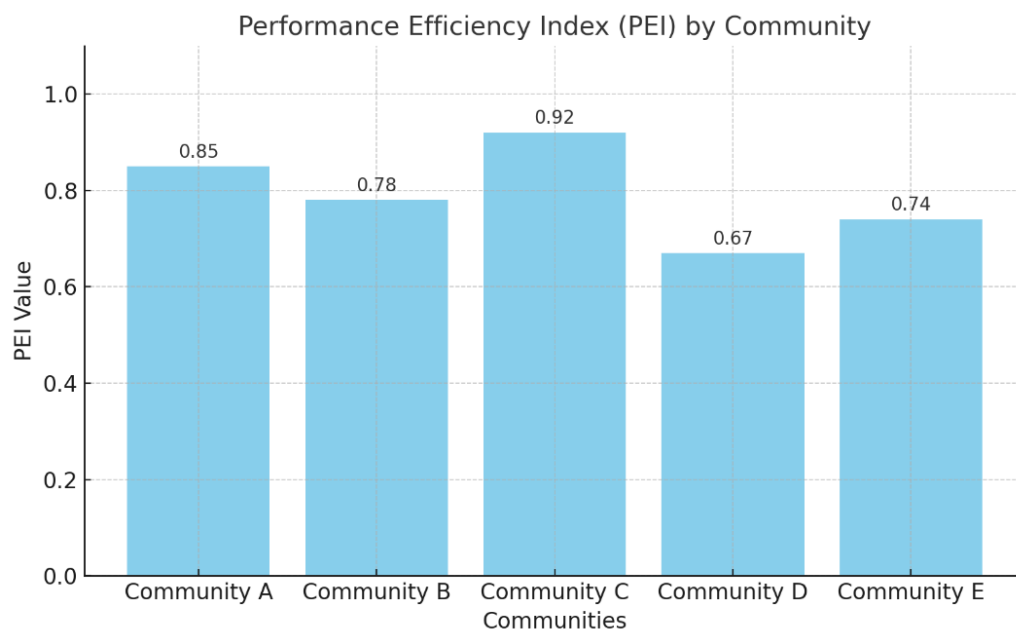


Fig. 5. Performance Efficiency Index (PEI) by Community

Conclusions

Thus, the Russian armed aggression has changed cultural priorities, which have become more nationally oriented. In the frontline regions, the cultural institutions are forced to give preference to online work whereas in other parts of Ukraine we can see a mixed format. So, it is worth to implement innovative

projects that would respond to cultural requests and satisfy the communities cultural needs in a short time period with minimal costs. The virtual cultural spaces are such projects. Their work can be organised in an online format, for the front-line territories of Ukraine, and in a mixed one in other regions. The cultural spaces web portals will help to coordinate communication among cultural institutions and the communities. In addition, the elements of art therapy and art practices will positively effect the emotional and psychological health of the Ukrainians.

The study demonstrates that the proposed system of indices (CAI, CNI, TRI, PEI) provides a robust methodological framework for assessing the effectiveness of projects related to virtual cultural spaces. By integrating measures of accessibility, community needs, and technological readiness, the indices enable quantitative monitoring of changes over time and facilitate comparative analysis across communities. The aggregated PEI indicator, in particular, supports evidence-based decision-making by identifying where project implementation will be most effective. This approach ensures that cultural initiatives are not only context-sensitive but also strategically aligned with community priorities and technological capacity.

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ПРОЄКТИ ВІРТУАЛЬНИХ КУЛЬТУРНИХ ПРОСТОРІВ ТЕРИТОРІАЛЬНИХ ГРОМАД

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У статті розглянуто стан та діяльність закладів культури територіальних громад, зокрема на прифронтових територіях. Висвітлено питання переформатування роботи закладів культури, пошук нових онлайн та офлайн форматів, які б відповідали культурним потребам громад, мінімальним витратам і умовам воєнного стану. Визначено, що для забезпечення якісної та повноцінної роботи закладів культури в умовах воєнного стану доцільно використовувати потенціал віртуального середовища. У період війни варто створювати віртуальні культурні простори, які могли б комплексно задовольняти культурні потреби, покращувати ментальне здоров'я різних вікових груп, проводити заходи в онлайн та офлайн форматах. Авторами запропоновано концепцію проєкту створення віртуального культурного простору у закладах культури територіальних громад та етапи його впровадження, з використанням доступних технологій (бази даних PostgreSQL та MySQL; серверні мови програмування PHP, Ruby, Java, JavaScript (Node.js), 3D-технології). Концепція базується на аналізі результатів соціологічного дослідження «Культурні практики та потреби для відновлення населення у деокупованих та прифронтових громадах», яке було здійснено за підтримки Агентства США з міжнародного розвитку USAID. Даний проєкт зможе задовольнити культурні потреби громад у короткі терміни і з мінімальними витратами та дозволить використовувати сучасні технології для надання онлайн-послуг, покращити інформаційне забезпечення діяльності закладів культури територіальних громад. Крім того, для збереження та покращення ментального здоров'я, в рамках проєкту, може використовуватися арт-терапія і медіа-арт-терапія, які позитивно вплинуть на ментальне здоров'я українців. Проєкт може бути реалізований в онлайн-форматі, як для прифронтових територій, так і в змішаному, для інших регіонів України, що є актуальним в умовах воєнного стану.

Ключові слова: інформаційне забезпечення, інформаційні технології, заклад культури, територіальні громади, віртуальне середовище, проєкт, культурна послуга, арт-терапія, 3D-технології.