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The role of entrepreneurial initiatives in the architecture of post-war infrastructure recovery in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has destroyed much of the Ukrainian infrastructure. Post war period focuses on the restoration of the infrastructure as a hope to avoid the economic hardship for the public. The government’s dedication to reviving the economy and infrastructure requires the intervention of the public sphere through the neoliberal approach. This approach requires the services of entrepreneurs to achieve the desire goals. The competition factor and the inclusive strategy to take all the key stakeholders on board is the primary concern of the neo-liberal approach. This paper underpins the intricate play between entrepreneurial initiative and the restoration of the infrastructure though the regional cooperation. Despite the opportunities provided by the war for the drastic changes in business, the negative impact of the war is more concerned about the aftershocks of such a crucial destruction. This paper aims to investigate entrepreneurs' role in restoring the infrastructure in the war-ravaged areas of Ukraine. The qualitative method serves the purpose of investigating through the analytical approach. Entrepreneurial initiatives have contributed heavily to restoration through economic uplift, innovative steps, and domestic integration. It presents business as a resilient tool to bear the aftershocks of unwelcomed. Fostering the innovation and the international supports could reduce the burden on the government and promote the competition to achieve the desired results for reconstruction.

Keywords: Sustainable entrepreneurship, Infrastructure reconstruction, Economic recovery, Investments in regional development, Social responsibility of business.

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1. Introduction

War has long been debated within economic scholarship for its pros, cons, and long-term societal effects. For some, war provides favorable conditions for beginners to expand their businesses with new opportunities and strength [1]. In other words, it creates a gap filled with market competition, providing neoliberal vocabulary. Western society believes war positively indicates a strong economy. It comes with opportunities created by the economic conditions as the positive indicators to attract the investment and development process. The claim is highly controversial as it overlooks the destruction caused by the war to a state, especially in the form of infrastructure. The net result of the wars is the destruction of buildings, roads, railways, and other essential connectivity routes, irrespective of their nature [2, 3].

It does not only cost to defend the state during the war period; a considerable amount of investment is required to bring life to normality after such events. The reconstruction of these mega projects requires a competitive environment for the government and the private sector. It does help to grow a state's spending, especially on the military side and the construction of the infrastructure, but the overall impact on the GDP is negative [4]. With the reservation of the perks of war, the scholarship primarily focuses on the infrastructure that causes a massive dent in a state's economy. It underpins the war and the aftermath for the state as the primary concern. War has long been part of human history, and the consequences have always created social, political, and administrative issues with displacement, refugee, infrastructure, and production problems. Loss of human lives is incomparable with material losses, but the nuanced observations offer a different view of the overall impact. The destruction of the infrastructure is a tool to force the warring state to keep down, considering the loss it might face during the war.

The prime target of modern wars is the infrastructure, which creates deeper societal issues. The devastation of the infrastructure halts the wheel of the economy and causes irreparable damages. The conflict has played a significant role in moving out of multinational companies such as Volkswagen from Russia and Sumitomo from Ukraine. It impacted these two companies and the overall production of cars around the globe with the scarcity of raw materials. The damage to residential and non-residential buildings touched $127 billion in 2022 [5]. The security issue and the unstable economic conditions became critical factors for the pullout of such companies.

This paper investigates post-war entrepreneurs' role in reconstruction, especially in Ukraine. The post-war period, with its economic nose dive and the gap with the out of MNCs, provided opportunities for the government to attract international investment and to promote the private sector to take the lead for collective responsibility. It primarily focuses on the events of the Ukraine war. It compares the destruction to a dent in the economy. To do so, the paper opens up the literature on the definition of Infrastructure and its importance for a state. It offers a detailed account of the literature on the entrepreneurial approach in dealing with such problems. The research methodology for the paper follows it.

Later, it tries to provide the dynamic of war to destabilize a state, using it as a prime target to push the other state to kneel with destabilized economic conditions. This paper aims to provide a neoliberal approach to dealing with the situation. The primary concern within the framework is promoting the participation of the private sector in small, medium, and mega projects with competition and resilience. Lastly, it offers a conclusion and recommendations for further research in the related field.

2. Literature review

The economy and war possess inverse relations, especially in the post-war period with the decline of the corporate culture [6]. The factor of the war either destroyed the economy or left it in bad shape. The condition required drastic changes and a revised version of the existing economic practices. The relationship became a case study for government spending and the financial bucket [7]. For some, war is an opportunity for new methods and approaches to the economic sector [1]. According to Kaldor, the war in the modern days is the continuation of the policy with no end goals. It has changed its form from decisive results to a revenue generation tool [8]. She mentioned drug rackets, warlord culture, and money laundering as essential tools to provide a lifeline to such conflicts in the long run. The prominent approach to the conventional war offers a state with two critical paths that make or break the economy.

The increased insecurity and risk situation offers a viable atmosphere for entrepreneurs to jump into the problem of innovation. The local-level conflict developed into an international conflict with the delayed international response, leaving Ukraine to focus on entrepreneurial initiatives for recovery [9]. This liberal approach promises cooperation in extreme conditions but fails to deliver in the face of conflict. The liberal answers to the situation could not dent global politics, presenting neoliberalism as a theory to answer the questions. According to the neoliberal school of thought, entrepreneurial initiatives are a prerequisite to a stable economy and the development of a state. It comes with a change in the practices and the competition between the individuals to achieve the desired goals.

The claim remains controversial, but the most fitting claim to the equation is full of insecurities. According to Abramova et al. [10], Bakhov et al. [11], Boiarynova et al. [12], and Djumadi [13] promoting entrepreneurship requires state-level policy formation to provide a framework. Such massive projects cannot give the desired results without state sponsorship and intervention. It nullifies the liberal aspect of the economy from a non-intervention approach to the protectionist approach to provide a cushion and framework to execute the plan. The literature also offers a detailed account of the importance of entrepreneurship in every sector of state business. The specific role is usually focused on tough times such as economic recession or in the war periods. It remains crucial for the state and the business sector simultaneously [14, 15]. The active role played by entrepreneurs in Japan challenges the rest of the growing economies to follow their footprints. Development is directly linked with entrepreneurship as an important factor in a state’s economy and individuals' economic situations [16]. The work of Iyigun and Rodrick advocates the need for such initiatives for economic growth and reforms across the board [17]. Munshi, Schepen, and Gibbon also subscribe to the idea by applying entrepreneurial initiatives [18, 19].

Neoliberalism tends to provide solutions to all sorts of problems. Despite all of the opposition, the theory is still relevant in central multilateral relations, especially in Europe, to deal with the common threats between the states. The framework remains the heart of significant studies [20], especially the economy. The nuanced observation in the whole equation is its relationship with the private sector promoting such initiatives with resilience. It offers a detailed account of the abovementioned initiatives for the reconstruction process. The Foucauldian approach provides the vocabulary for neoliberalism as an entrepreneurial idea under the subjectivity domain [21, 22]. This approach is viable for the economic goals and develops resilience with the state’s intervention [23-25].

3. Research Methodology

The research adopts case study methods, analyzing the role of entrepreneurs in the post-war reconstruction of the infrastructure in Ukraine. This method focuses on the specific event [26] rather than the holistic projection. The paper adopts the qualitative method; secondary sources, such as journal articles, the thesis, and the report, have been utilized. It utilizes the “why” approach to investigate the reason behind the problem despite offering responses that may carry different biases. Adopting the case study method also provides a real-life perspective to the research. It considers all prerequisites, such as policies and action plans, to give an appropriate direction to the paper. The approach seeks to offer the answer through the analysis. The gathered data serves the purpose of the case study method. Books and journal articles remain significant contributors to the paper, providing the literature and the data on the topic. Newspaper articles and electronic articles complement the analysis. J.stor, Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, Routledge, and Sage Pub are the most important platforms with relevant journals. The platforms have been used through institutional access to gather the literature and relevant information for this research paper. The nature of the research remains desktop research with the consultation of the appropriate material.

The initial part of the research analyses the impact of war on infrastructure, especially in light of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. It offers the conditions and the effect of the war on Ukraine, especially with the destruction of the infrastructure. The conditions provided the grounds for the application of the entrepreneurial initiatives. The 2nd portion follows it to offer analogy and the application of the gathered data. The second portion focuses on entrepreneurial initiatives for recovery. The recovery process focuses on reconstructing the infrastructure and applying entrepreneurial innovation approaches such as developing resilience. To do so, the existing literature provides the grounds for the discussion and literature gap. The gap is utilized to offer the analysis and answer the question for the research paper focusing on entrepreneurial initiatives.

This research paper focuses on Russian aggression toward Ukraine and the losses it later bore in the war. It limits the application of research on similar conflicts based on their nature. The literature can be used for further study in the same domain, but the conditions of the conflicts must be considered before using it. This article does not comply with the interviews to avoid any observation, which requires an in-depth investigation of the single factors.

4. Results and discussion

Schumpeter’s innovation theory includes three main components: invention, innovation, and diffusion. The active role of entrepreneurs in economic recovery through innovation and applying market processes for resilience offers the vocabulary for the action of the three components mentioned above. According to Schumpeter, entrepreneurship is innovative destruction, replacing existing methods and practices with new ones to bring stability and offer a new approach to the economic situation [27]. Infrastructure is considered the backbone of a state's economic development. It is a crucial factor that helps expand the output and services [28]. Considering the importance of the infrastructure for a state, it remains a liability and prime target to achieve the policy goals. The classical approach, especially Clausewitz, promotes achieving policy goals through any means. “War is an act of force to compel others to do our will” subscribes to destroying the infrastructure during the war [29]. The states often collapse into prices considering the economic situation in the post-war condition. Russian aggression turned the financial picture of Ukraine upside down. It cost Ukraine a 29.2 % loss in 2022, displacing 14.5 million people. It also spiked the ratio of the poverty line, touching 7 million figures.

The broader definition of infrastructure considers material, institutional, and personal dynamics for input through equalization of remuneration. It tries to focus on the disbursement of resources to maximise development [30]. This definition offers the vocabulary for the prime duty of infrastructure, which is to provide an individual with the opportunity to optimize production [31]. Every other state tries to devise an infrastructure to deliver maximum to their public [32]. States invest heavily in such projects to meet the requirements for production [33]. It is one of the prime reasons that war is an improbable event for the states with shared interests under the liberalist perspective. Waging war is directly proportional to the destruction of the infrastructure and the dent in the economy [34, 35]. The destruction is often turned into opportunity through entrepreneurship for better and more resilient conditions for a state.

Economic and statistical analysis remains the primary method used in the paper to highlight the statistical data against the state's financial condition. The state has gone through the worst economic crisis, which heavily impacted the restoration of the infrastructure demolished during the war. The destruction also has a direct effect on the state's economy. This bilateral impact of infrastructure and economy underpins the importance of the topic for the investigation. The data analysis depicts the challenges for entrepreneurial initiatives for restoration in the post-war era. The problem is multifaceted, but the main reasons include the Ukraine state policy to hold the statistical data and the halt caused by the war within Ukraine [36]. War in Ukraine has cost the nation with roads, railways, bridges, water systems, and the list goes on. The damages are so immense that it would take ages to recover from the impact of war.

4.1 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is considered to be present everywhere and in every sector of life. According to Perry Anderson, it is one of the famous theories. For some scholars, the ideology has become redundant and is no longer applicable due to its controversial and incoherent nature [37]. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is also called a clash of ideologies, as some scholars assume it to be the end of neoliberalism [38]. The after-shocks of the conflict reached the central European states by terminating the gas supply from Russia using the Ukraine route, especially for the Nord Stream pipeline. Despite the opposition from some schools, it has answered contemporary problems and expresses its presence everywhere [39-44]. The neoliberal framework refers to the adaptation capacity to the changed environment [39].

The change could be collective or imposed through the aggression of a particular group, such as terrorist activities, or through threats from external factors, such as war [23]. The concept of resilience is better understood through a change in the structure of the government operation. In other words, it presents the vocabulary for structural change [45]. Creating resilience through the neo-liberal approach offers a sense of responsibility on the shoulders of an individual. The phenomenon often tends to bounce back from the situation and grow stronger. It helps to deal with the problem and plan for the future aftershocks of a particular situation [23]. It provides a space for the entrepreneur to offer services, bounce back, and adapt to the problem based on the environment [46].

4.2. Entrepreneurial initiatives in Ukraine

There are multiple factors in the unstable economic situation of any state, but for Ukraine, it remained the war imposed by Russia. The war consumed the Ukrainian economy and shook it to focus on the new initiatives to restore it. The war-ravaged areas required enterprises to use the conditions as an opportunity to create a more stable environment for the business. The resilience of small and medium enterprises helped Ukraine recover from the aftershocks of the war. It came with the idea of promoting small and medium enterprises as they count as the basis of the business, especially in developing states [47].

It led to business growth, one of the significant factors in the Ukraine war, with an active participation of 93.4%. Out of this percentage, 70% volunteered directly in the war. The business significantly contributed by selling the production at the production cost and delivering it without charges. The idea of active participation reached another level, with the primary responsibility of its citizens to participate in the business, pay taxes, and create employment to help their Ukraine survive the challenging times [48-52].

The six areas for potential growth include IT, food, machinery, metal processing, raw materials, and renewable energy resources. These underpin entrepreneurship's efforts to support the national cause in Ukraine. Diya reports that entrepreneurs face subsequent challenges, especially finding solvent customers in domestic markets. The percentage is as high as 62%, which creates a gap in navigating the field [48]. The indicators depict Ukraine's 80th position regarding accessibility to open new businesses and invest in the market [47].

The technology sector touched 28 billion euros, double the average for companies with startup initiatives in Eastern Europe. The partnership with Google has provided new ground for entrepreneurship in Ukraine. It is one of the novel initiatives, from constructing the infrastructure to protecting it through drone surveillance of the landmines and organic CO2 collection [51]. Similarly, the initiative for green steel production at the industrial level complies with the standard set by the UN for the reconstruction. Despite the traditional construction process, steel production with the most diminutive carbon footprint is one of the entrepreneurship innovations [52]. The other significant impact of the entrepreneur on the war is the transparency factor and the competition between the continents. The neoliberal approach to dealing with the situation creates competition for enhanced quality commodities and services [53].

It played a vital role in the economic development of the EU states, especially in providing access to opportunities for personal, corporate, social, and national-level projects and entities. The threshold of the impact of such projects may vary based on the requirements and feasibility [54]. The recovery plan under the European Investment Bank has provided Ukraine with groundbreaking achievements in reconstructing its infrastructure through the Ukraine Recovery Program (URP). The projects under the Ukraine Early Recovery Program (UERP) have offered services to the internally displaced population affected by the war. The total number of projects includes 155 and 66 under URP and UERP, respectively [55].

The general trade agreements of Ukraine with the international market increased gradually, but between 2021 and 22, the outflow of goods reached another level. It jumped from 49 million dollars in 2020 to 68 million in 2022 Field [37]. According to the European Commission in Figure 1, the EU contributed 24 billion euros in imports and 28.3 billion in exports in 2021, which jumped to 27.6 billion and 30 billion in 2022. The sharp difference is visible in 2023 when the imports declined due to war, but the exports touched 39.1 billion euros.

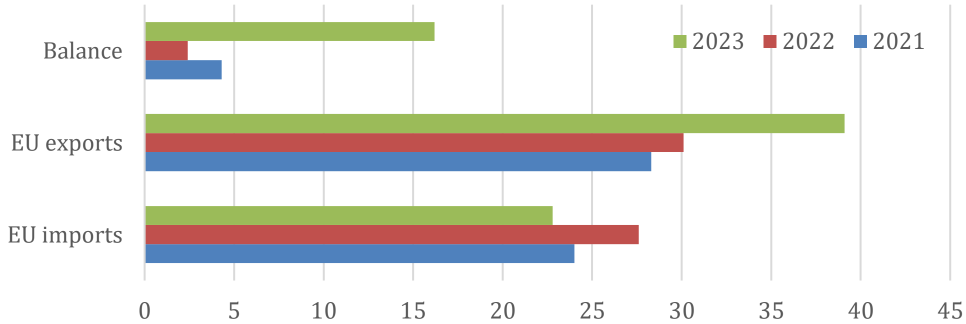

Figure 1. Based on the European Commission stats

Infrastructure remained the primary target for the conflicting parties to put them off the rails of their business directions. Cutting the routes, primarily through destruction, remained a primary obstacle [56]. For a long time, entrepreneurial scholarship has overlooked the long-term effects on overall business conditions. The relationship between entrepreneurs and conflicts remained favorable for significant related research [56]. This conventional approach is still prevalent in contemporary research but has received criticism for its deduced results [57]. The reason behind such positive results is that they nullify the history of the conflicts and focus on the contemporary period, which focuses on either the post-war situation or the recovery time, offering positive results. Entrepreneurs often confront three fears while dealing with the economic environment and conditions—the first concerns the macro and micro impact of the war on individuals and aggregate entrepreneurs. The second option deals with market uncertainty, with high-risk ratios pulling entrepreneurs to make their mark. The third tension subscribes to the second tension based on the changing nature of the economic conditions. The overall impact requires other factors, such as social life and connectivity in general [58, 59].

The European states pledged to promote the reconstruction of Ukraine by showing their interest in the exhibition. More than three hundred companies from twenty-two states signed up to reconstruct the infrastructure in Ukraine. More than seven hundred companies attended the conference for the Ukraine cause. The main focus of these two conferences remained wastewater treatment, transformers, and other necessities [60].

5. Conclusions

The Russian aggression in Ukraine has brought serious consequences for the economy, with the vast destruction of the infrastructure. The existing innovative entrepreneurial practices within the IT sector have played a key role in Ukraine's survival in the war. This elucidates the importance of similar practices for the other sectors, especially the construction sector, for better resilience. Dealing with existing damages for the state itself is hard, but the entrepreneurial initiative to execute the job is mandatory to reduce the burden on the state and the government.

Entrepreneurship's role in reconstructing Ukraine in the post-war period has provided a route to reduce the stress on the government through the neoliberal approach. Schumpeter's theory underpins creative destruction to filter out the redundant practices with the newer ones with intelligent solutions to the problems. It has not only assisted the government in sharing the burden but also offered a new framework for stable economic conditions. The resilience through the neoliberal approach allowed FDI to attract and promote small businesses to think outside the box to enhance society's reliance. The strength of Ukraine's business sector has not only helped revive its place after the war but also worked as a lifeline within the war. The role of entrepreneurs has remained exceptional, especially in the technology sector, which has proven to be one of the critical assets of the Ukraine, helping it to revive in the worst economic conditions.

This paper allows the researcher to further investigate neoliberalism's role as the relevant theory, especially in the post-war and civil war periods, to elevate the economic condition. The direction of the investigation could focus on the developing states.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known financial or non-financial competing interests in any material discussed in this paper.

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