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REGULATING LAND RELATIONS IN UKRAINE: TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES, KEY CHALLENGES, AND MODERN DEVELOPMENT DIRECTIONS

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Abstract. *In this study, we outline the key aspects of land reform in Ukraine, a process ongoing since the transition to a market economy, yet one where land relations still haven't found a definitive resolution. We analyze the main stages of these transformations, which have included denationalization, free privatization of agricultural lands, parcelling of collective property, and the formation of a land market. Particular attention is paid to the impact of the decentralization reform, which transferred significant powers in land management to local self-government bodies.*

The research reveals that despite radical changes, such as the introduction of private ownership and market circulation, issues of effective and sustainable regulation remain open. Current challenges, including the state of martial law and external aggression, necessitate an urgent correction of the land reform. We substantiate the need for improving both the theoretical foundations and practical mechanisms of land resource management, proposing solutions aimed at ensuring sustainability, adaptability, and security in this critical sector.

Key words: *regulation of land relations, land reform, land market, land transformations.*

Introduction.

In Ukraine, the transition to a market economy required the effective use of land resources, guided by market relations and competitive principles. At various stages of development, land transformations were shaped by diverse reforms.

Land relations in the country evolved under the influence of state land policy and a series of reforms, including land reform. However, these relations have yet to be fully resolved. This situation objectively necessitates the refinement of theoretical and methodological foundations for land relations regulation, which would help address a number of significant social, economic, and environmental issues [2].

Within the framework of land reform and the development of a land market, land (i.e., individual land parcels) becomes the principal commodity in the system of societal reproduction, alongside agricultural products generated through its use.

We consider the following to be among the fundamental components of land

relations shaped by the reforms: land de-statization, free privatization of agricultural land, allocation of collective land shares, and the formation of a land market.

It is important to note that in the initial stages of land reform, land relations primarily developed through land privatization, the introduction of market turnover, and changes in traditional forms of land ownership and land use [1].

The overarching goal of the reform was to bring land closer to the owner-operator, to unite ownership with use, and to ensure the alignment of property and labor in rural areas. The latter goal, however, was only partially achieved, particularly within the agricultural enterprise sector.

The future development of land relations must be informed by a thorough analysis of their historical emergence and evolution throughout various reform stages. This includes assessing the continuity and coherence of land policy decisions-past, present, and future (through forecasting)-as well as identifying both positive and negative outcomes in the implementation of land ownership, use, and disposal rights by all stakeholders. Such clarification of the theoretical principles underlying previous and current land reform concepts will help develop adapted methodological approaches and rules for the theoretical substantiation of land relations.

Throughout the reform process, land relations developed in accordance with the evolving demands for institutional mechanisms, transformations in regulatory and fiscal policy, the creation of a viable market environment, and the establishment of relevant infrastructure [4].

Each stage of land reform played a critical role in shaping land relations. It would be a mistake to consider only the first or third-fourth stages as the most important, as each period brought essential changes. The early phases of land transformation were marked by the need to establish legal and scientific support, laying the foundation for a multi-structure economy through the restructuring of existing farming systems into new entities oriented toward the market. This process combined the advantages of private land ownership with collective forms of labor organization.

The progress of land reform enabled a profound transformation in land

ownership relations, altered the structure of landholding and land use, expanded land lease relations and land rent mechanisms, and made it possible to buy, sell, gift, and exchange land with improved legal forms.

Land relations also included the transfer of land from state to private ownership free of charge, thereby shaping private landowners as potential participants in the land market. From the early stages of land reform in independent Ukraine, private land ownership became the dominant foundation of agrarian transformation. However, the dismantling of the state's monopoly on land did not instantly resolve all regulatory issues. For a long time, up until spring 2020, there was an outright ban on the sale of agricultural land, which represented a constitutional violation of landowners' rights. The introduction of a legal market for agricultural land coincided with the decentralization reform.

Accordingly, land relations gained particular significance following another major government initiative-this time not a land reform, but a decentralization reform-which redistributed powers to local self-government bodies and adapted land resource management to the local level and its specific conditions. At the local level, authority over land allocation expanded significantly. It is noteworthy that all land outside settlement boundaries, previously under state ownership and managed by executive authorities, was transferred to the jurisdiction of local councils. This necessitated the transfer of such land to the communal ownership of newly formed administrative units-territorial communities [3].

According to our research, by the time the decentralization reform was nearing completion, Ukraine had around 60 million hectares of land, more than 70% of which (42 million hectares) fell under the category of agricultural land located outside populated areas. As of the end of 2020, over 10 million hectares remained under state ownership, though a substantial portion was already administered by territorial communities, while management authority still resided with central government agencies. During this period, the State Service of Ukraine for Geodesy, Cartography, and Cadastre transferred more than 2 million hectares of agricultural land from state to communal ownership across 1,251 newly formed communities [3].

The State Service of Ukraine for Geodesy, Cartography, and Cadastre, along with local executive authorities, was tasked with supporting the creation of community geoportals as standardized cartographic platforms. These portals were to serve as unified bases for the development of land management and urban planning documentation and to promote harmonious and intensive land relations development in all territorial communities.

It is also important to note that the decentralization reform simplified administrative procedures in the field of land relations, notably the processes for obtaining construction permits and registering land rights. A more detailed exploration of this aspect of land relations digitalization will be presented in subsequent sections of this work.

At every stage of land transformation, state land policy aimed to ensure the efficient use of the country's resource potential. However, even the introduction of market mechanisms in land relations did not guarantee the sustainability of land use. Thus, there is an urgent need to revise land reform strategies and justify innovative approaches to the transformation of land relations in line with global trends and in consideration of Ukraine's current context, particularly the ongoing Russian armed aggression and the imposition of martial law.

Summary and conclusions.

Land transformations in Ukraine since the onset of market reforms have been significantly influenced by state policy and have progressed through several stages, each playing an important role in shaping modern land relations. Despite substantial changes-such as privatization, decentralization, and the introduction of a land market-the issue of effective and sustainable regulation remains unresolved. Current challenges, particularly martial law and external aggression, necessitate a reassessment of land reform approaches with a focus on security, sustainability, and adaptability. The need to improve theoretical foundations, institutional support, and digital tools is a key prerequisite for developing an efficient system of land resource management.

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