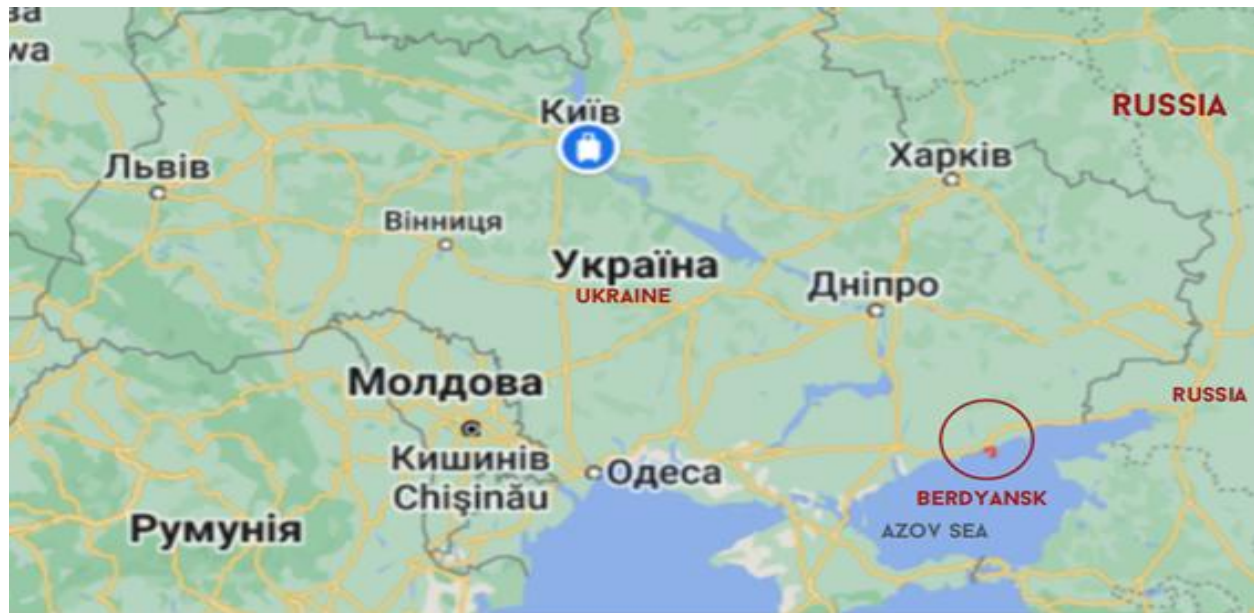


UCD 341.324(477.64):355.01

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Everyday life of Berdyansk residents under the conditions of russian occupation

My name is Yeseniya Hnatenko, I am a first-year student at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University. I study Law. I will share with you the story of my life during the occupation in my native Berdyansk.



https://cultureversus.org/wiki/Бердянськ_у_Лютій_війні#/media/File:Бердянськ_на_мапі_України.jpg (Revised: 10.07.2024)

Berdyansk was founded in 1836 on the site of Cossack and fishing settlements that appeared here in the middle of the 16th century. The first settlers were the Zaporizhia Cossacks, who founded an outpost and settlement of Zaporizhzhia Sich on the site of the future city and engaged in agriculture, fishing, animal husbandry, and beekeeping.

Berdyansk was developed on a seaport in the Bay of Berdyanska Kosa. The surrounding estuaries contain unique healing mud.

Berdyansk is a famous sea, climate, and mud resort. Its population was nearly 106,000 inhabitants in 2022.



Berdyansk is the heart of Azov. The photo was created on July 25, 2013. Author: Insaitman.

https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Бердянськ#/media/Файл:Berdyansk_The_Heart_Of_Azov.jpg (Revised: 10.07.2024)



Berdyansk, April 2022. Author: Andrey Borodulin (AFP). <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/novyny-pryazovya-berdyansk-okupatsiya-zsu/32267842.html> (Revised: 10.07.2024)



Berdyansk railway station. The photo was created on June 9, 2019. Author: Voky89.
https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Файл:Вокзал01_0684.jpg (Revised: 10.07.2024)



Berdyansk State Pedagogical University. The photo was created on August 17, 2014. Photo: Nataliya Shestakova.
[https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Бердянськ#/media/Файл:Berdyans'k_Shmida_4_Budynok_Cholovichoyi_Gimnaziyi03_\(YDS_8515\).JPG](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Бердянськ#/media/Файл:Berdyans'k_Shmida_4_Budynok_Cholovichoyi_Gimnaziyi03_(YDS_8515).JPG)
(Revised: 10.07.2024)



Berdyansk city center, Azov Avenue. The photo was created on August 15, 2014. Author: Nataliya Shestakova.

[https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Проспект_Азовський#/media/Файл:Berdyans'k_Lenina_prospekt...vulytsya_01_\(YDS_8167\).JPG](https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Проспект_Азовський#/media/Файл:Berdyans'k_Lenina_prospekt...vulytsya_01_(YDS_8167).JPG)

(Revised: 10.07.2024)

Since 27 February 2022, Berdiansk has been under russian military occupation.

My life in the occupation was a lack of food, light, water, gas, communication, and Ukrainian news. It was the time when you no longer lived, but only survived.

On February 27, 2022, my native Berdyansk was taken without a fight. Since then, my life has turned upside down. I well remember how a column of military equipment of the russian occupier passed by my window. The letter “Z” was written everywhere on this military equipment.

After that, the number of russian invaders in my native Berdyansk increased every day. The russian military occupiers have settled where the Ukrainian military base used to be. It was near my house, so when I went outside, I saw russian soldiers all the time with machine guns, as well as their cars and tanks.

The occupiers received information about everyone. Persecution of people began. They were especially diligent in looking for military personnel. My dad is in the military, so we had to bury his ID and uniform in the ground because it was not safe to keep them at home.

The occupiers came to the apartments and broke down the doors if they were not allowed in, rummaged through personal belongings, stole equipment and jewelry, and tortured people. They did not care if you were a woman or a man, a child or an elderly person. I was afraid to go out alone for a long time because there were repeated cases of girls being raped.

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However, sometimes I forgot about the fear. My family and I took part in rallies several times. Because we still hoped for the best. I felt it. I was so proud of the Ukrainian people, who together with us stood unarmed in front of soldiers with machine guns.



Action for the unity of Ukraine in Berdyansk. February 28, 2022. Photo: RadioSvoboda.org (RFE/RL).

<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/novyny-pryzovyya-berdyansk-okupatsiya-rosiyski-viyskovi/31732103.html> (Revised: 10.07.2024)



Berdyansk, pro-Ukrainian rally on March 6, 2022. <https://war.telegraf.com.ua/ukr/ukraina/2022-03-11/5699055-v-berdyanske-gvardeytsy-putina-vyglyadyat-kak-bosyaki-boyatsya-pravogo-sektora-i-mitingov> (Revised: 10.07.2024)



Peaceful rally in Berdyansk, March 13, 2022. Photo from the Facebook page: Berdyansk 24. <https://suspilne.media/zaporizhzhia/217074-mitingi-za-ukrainu-zalakovanna-okupantami-ta-pitanna-evakuacii-aka-situacia-u-berdanku/> (Revised: 10.07.2024)



Berdyansk, pro-Ukrainian rally on March 14, 2022. <https://hvylya.net/news/248977-v-berdyanske-okkupanty-pytavutsya-zapugivat-protestuyushchih-mestnyh-zhiteley-foto> (Revised: 10.07.2024)



Residents of Berdyansk carried a large Ukrainian flag through the city on March 16, 2022. Photo: irish_petrish/Instagram. <https://gordonua.com/ukr/news/war/meshkantsi-berdjanska-znovu-vijshli-na-proukrajinskij-miting-zelenskij-nazvav-jih-horobrimi-ljudmi-1600294.html> (Revised: 10.07.2024)

The rallies stopped when russian riot police – special forces arrived in the city, because people were beaten right in the center of the city, and first activists were kidnapped and tortured.

I want to pay tribute to our teenage heroes: Tigran Hovhannesyanyan and Mykyta Khandanov. They were involved in partisanship in occupied Berdyansk. Twenty russian soldiers broke into Tigran's apartment at the end of 2022. They conducted an illegal search, beat his grandmother, and took the boy out of the city, where Tigran was tortured with electric shock for 5 days. Mykyta and his family were detained on October 14, 2022. Since then, the boys have been regularly interrogated. On June 24, 2023, these heroes shot a russian serviceman and a police collaborator. After a shootout, 16-year-old boys were killed. Mykyta and Tigran's last words were “Glory to Ukraine!”

There was a panic among the people in the city, they bought everything. There was a terrible lack of food. In stores, only a few shelves were filled with products, and the rest of the shelves were empty. Many shops were closing. People stood in line for bread for hours, getting one loaf in their hands.

When gas completely disappeared in the city, life became even more difficult. We heated water in a kettle. Periodically, the water also disappeared from the taps. However, the hardest thing was when the connection completely disappeared. You seem to have stepped into the past. You cannot call your relatives to find out about them. You cannot read the news. It is as if you are in a bubble.

Once, near one of the houses, I saw a crowd of people with phones. It turned out that Wi-Fi was still catching at someone's apartment. Then I was able to go online. However, soon the repression started even more and Wi-Fi was almost impossible to find. We went all over the city to find a connection.

Everywhere on big boards, all over the city there were inscriptions “with russia forever” and other propagandistic campaigns of the occupiers. It put a lot of pressure on my mental state.

It was very difficult for me to see people I knew who decided to side with the enemy and cooperate with them. While some teachers refused to work, other teachers went to tell children russian history and sang the national anthem of the russian federation on the first of September.

I was at home and drew, embroidered, and watched old discs with movies, to distract myself from the gray, depressing reality. Every evening we gathered with neighbors and played cards by candlelight. It saved me from endless obsessive thoughts.

I was under occupation for two months at my home in Berdyansk. The decision to leave Berdyansk could cost one's life. The city of Zaporizhzhia was the nearest unoccupied city. Nevertheless, in order to leave Berdyansk for Zaporizhzhia, it was necessary to pass 14 russian checkpoints. Before the war, we could get to Zaporizhzhia in 3-4 hours. However, in wartime, it took at least 8 hours. Usually, people had to spend the night in the field for several days.

Russian soldiers fired at cars with the inscription “Children”, and whole families were killed. The occupiers also took equipment and clothes. The military invaders were watching the chats and photo gallery on the phone. It was extremely dangerous to have patriotic photos or messages.

The road from Berdyansk to Zaporizhzhia was in terrible condition, torn by mines, and burnt tanks stood on the roadsides. If you looked around, all you could see were shelled houses, broken fences, looted shops, and black smoke from rocket fire. Loud explosions accompanied us all the way.

I have not been in my room at home for two years. I do not know when I will go to my native house again, or whether there will be anywhere to go at all.

I so love my hometown Berdyansk. I believe in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which are heading in the direction of Berdyansk. I know how difficult it all is and how many lives are sacrificed for it. I am ready to wait.

I will never allow my Ukrainian Berdyansk to remain in the hands of a terrorist country, an aggressor country, an occupier country of russia.

Glory to Ukraine!