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Civil Society, Ukraine and Human Recovery

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Civil Society, Ukraine and Human Recovery

Is it too early for the recovery of Ukraine? While the weapons are not arriving completely and timely, which prolongs the Russian war against Ukraine – yes, probably. While both resistance and civil society are very vivid, and while there are plenty of urgent issues to solve – from housing for internally displaced people to the protection of cultural heritage – no, not really. It seems like civil society in Ukraine is dealing with simultaneity, which needs new non-linear approaches to recovery.

Despite the ongoing attack on Ukrainian territories and the growing number of losses, the first initiatives focusing on reconstruction and recovery have already emerged. It is essential that the voice and the role of Ukrainian civil society in recovery processes are heard and seen. It is a voice that ensures and facilitates a dialogue between local communities and authorities and advocates for the necessary solutions.

With 50% of the state budget allocated to military expenditures, international financial support is vital. International philanthropy should also be part of this support, complementing efforts by international organizations, states, and businesses. Ukraine's civil society operates on the ground and understands the needs; therefore, a shoulder-to-shoulder approach and mutual trust are required.

Moreover, creating spaces for rest, breathing, and developing new approaches are also essential forms of support. It is crucial to create safety and stability for people experiencing war.

This journal touches upon questions connected to Ukraine's recovery that we find important to raise. We do so through interviewing Valerii Pekar – an expert working on reforms in Ukraine who comments on the role of civil society in the recovery process. We also talk with Oksana Potapova – a feminist activist and researcher who focuses on the intersectional gendered impacts of the war, highlighting the importance of transformations in relationships between donor institutions and civil society actors. We invite you to read reflections, notes and key messages from fellows of Vidnova Lab, a fellowship program concentrated on ecosystem mapping and prototyping solutions dedicated to recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. Depending on their research fields and activists' work, fellows share their thoughts on green recovery, commemoration practices, language, cultural infrastructure or work with vulnerable groups. Some published their ideas for prototypes and potential solutions in this newspaper, like the one questioning horticultural therapy and climate change policy in Lviv by Inna Datsiuk and Diana

Popfalushi. Lastly, we shine a light on good practices that contribute to civil society actors' recovery - working with veterans, offering grant schemes for supporting the mental health of cultural workers, or ensuring the continuity of work of Ukrainian civil society actors in connection to diverse European organizations.

Two years into the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we already know that we have a long run ahead and that the Ukrainian civil society, in its pivotal role, needs international resources, attention, and support more than ever. However, we also know that international institutions depend on the expertise, knowledge, and experiences of Ukrainians to sustain a secure future for Europe. Both parties can not work alone. But why is it so?

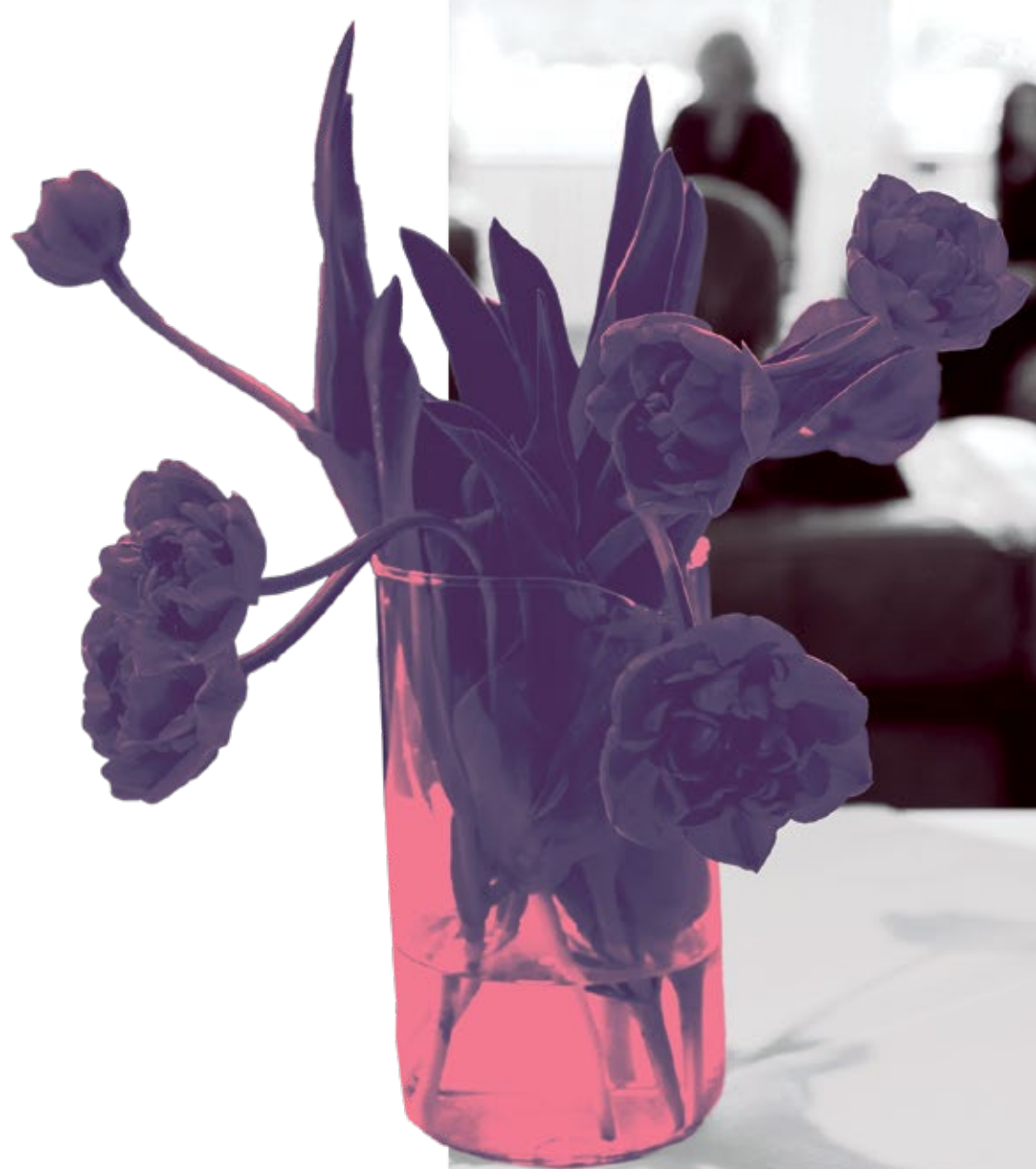
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Annegret Wulff (CEO) and Malwina Fendrych (Communications and Projects Lead)

are part of Commit by MitOst gGmbH, an international NGO based in Berlin that is working with civil society actors across Europe and its neighboring regions. Commit designs and implements educational programs, hosts learning gatherings and develops methodologies contributing to social cohesion.

Alona Karavai

is the First Chairwoman of the Board of MitOst e.V. and a co-founder of several initiatives, such as the Ukrainian NGO Insha Osvita, the art gallery Asortimentna Kimnata, and the residency house Khata Maysternya.



**We wish you
a good and
insightful read.**

Four questions to Valerii Pekar on the civil society role in Ukraine’s recovery

OK: What are the roles of civil society in the recovery process of Ukraine?

VP: Centuries of statelessness formed two features of the Ukrainian nation. On the one hand, Ukrainians hardly trust the state because, in our historical memory, the state was always alien and oppressive. We first gained trust in the state at the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022. On the other hand, Ukrainians have always relied on horizontal networks of the civil society sector. You can find nothing similar in atomized Russian society, always centered around a tyrannic state, or in European societies with well-developed democratic state institutions. Ukraine’s resilience, which surprised the world, is a joint resilience of the state, the armed forces, the civil society and businesses. It’s impossible to imagine such resilience without any of these four.

As one of the key contributors to Ukrainian resilience, civil society plays many roles and has many faces. The usual Western concept of civil society as a watchdog is virtually inapplicable in Ukraine. Indeed, this role is essential, especially when setting red lines for governmental policy and fighting corruption, but not the major one.

The major role of civil society in Ukraine is that of a sled dog: a leading actor who provides the capacity to do things. This role was important in defense: in supplying warriors with numerous personal protection items, electronic devices, food, and shoes when the army had to emerge immediately to resist the invasion. Now, civil society is busy producing devices and inventions that provide warriors with superiority on the battlefield. This role is important in reforms and in developing and implementing necessary laws and government decisions. Even the most successful Ukrainian reforms, like the award-winning public procurement platform ProZorro were initially developed by civil activists.

Here, we notice the third role of civil society: innovations born in networks of activists, intellectuals, and professionals. Civil society is the most vivid environment, and then changes diverge like circles on water.

Finally, in many cases, civil society plays its fourth role as a customer of state policy. Ideas and propositions are developed in open discussions on numerous platforms and then transformed into policies. It is not relevant to think that civil society refers purely to traditional-style NGOs. It is a multitude of varying and overlapping networks that go far beyond well-established NGOs.

OK: Working in a complex and chaotic environment requires planning scenarios. Can Ukrainian civil society contribute to synchronization between different sectors? Or is it too ambitious?

VP: Synchronization is a product of the joint efforts of all parties. The analytical and strategic capacity of independent think tanks and NGOs is indeed higher than that of state institutions. While civil society’s contribution is crucial, only multilateral cooperation could lead us to victory.

OK: One of our colleagues shared that they have consciously decided to stay in Kharkiv so that it doesn’t evolve into a military city but remains a city. Taking this story and many others into account, what features of civil society in Ukraine are difficult to grasp and understand from an outside perspective?

VP: The idea of the Russian attack on Kharkiv, a 1.5 million city full of students, scholars and artists, is to push people away. Being unable to capture the city



● “The major role of civil society in Ukraine is that of a sled dog: a leading actor who provides the capacity to do things.”

because of a lack of resources, Russian forces began destroying it systematically, leaving the warriors without daily support and supplies. An empty city is a dead city, making it impossible and unreasonable to defend. It is terrible that the Western governments don't allow the Ukrainian army to target Russian forces. For instance, Kharkiv is so close to the border that Russians shell the city from their territory, but Ukrainians aren't allowed to respond.

It might seem strange that civilians stay in the city during shelling or even come back to support its defenders, but if you look deeper, there is nothing odd about it. Civilians didn't leave London or Berlin during WWII in spite of shelling. It is normal for Europe to show courage and resilience, but Europeans have been poisoned with almost 80 years of peace and security.

The objective of Russian leaders is to transform the Ukrainian nation into a crowd of shadows full of fear and despair and, therefore, eliminate Ukrainian identity. That is why Ukrainian society tries to maintain the full swing of a social city life, including art festivals, book fairs, or marathons. This is a war against our identity, a genocide war not only in terms of mass murder but also about erasing the culture

and history. Russians know their strategy very well – they deliberately shell museums and memorial places or bomb printing houses full of new books in production, like recently in Kharkiv.

OK: What are the main challenges of the recovery process while being intensively shelled by Russia? What are the changes towards recovery approaches within the past two years and why is it so?

VP: Recovery is sometimes mistakenly associated with post-war times. But many recovery projects are urgent, like bridges, roads, or power plants, because these objects are necessary for defense. With destroyed infrastructure, not only defense but also everyday life in Ukraine is impossible. Ukraine needs more air defense systems to protect its main cities and infrastructure.

The significant shift since 2022 is that people understand that the Russian invasion will last long and that Russia chose the war of attrition. Having more resources, Russian leaders also bet on the fatigue of Western leaders and societies, which could lead to a low supply of Ukraine and then to its defeat and further escalation of the war

to the West. The only way to victory and sustainable peace is asymmetric war, a David strategy against Goliath. David overcame the challenge not by strength in the sword and shield fight but by strategic wisdom in targeting the giant's weak spot. Here is the role of the democratic world leaders: to stop trade with the aggressor, to impose sanctions and to close all detours of sanctions designed to supply Russian military production. Russian missiles that erase Kharkiv right now contain a multitude of components recently sold by the West.

Coming back to the recovery issue, the best formula was described in the Lugano principles adopted two years ago. The major principle, in my humble opinion, is decentralization. By empowering local communities, we shall reach maximum efficiency and relevance while eliminating risks such as corruption.

Valerii Pekar

is a co-founder of 'The New Country' Civic Platform, which unites experts working on reforms in Ukraine. He was a member of the National Reforms Council (2014-2016) and an advisor to two ministers of economic development and trade. Valerii Pekar was a member of the Directors' Board of the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, but the war forced him to suspend these duties. After graduating from Kyiv Mohyla Business School in 2007, he joined the Faculty and started to lead courses on Managing Future, Evolution of Thinking, Leadership and Management. He is also a lecturer at the Business School of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv and the author of four books.

Olha Kotska

is working at Commit by MitOst gGmbH on Ukraine Programs development. Olha draws from over 15 years of experience in facilitation, cultural management and civil society work.

Four questions to Oksana Potapova on transformative relationships between donor institutions and civil society actors of Ukraine and its importance for the recovery



MF: What is the current situation with Ukraine’s state budget? What are the implications for recovery?

OP: If we want to understand the status-quo of Ukraine’s wartime resilience and its recovery efforts, we must look at the numbers – they will tell us about Ukraine’s current priorities, gaps and needs. The state budget of Ukraine for 2024 foresees UAH 1.78 trillion (\$43.7 billion) in revenues, and UAH 3.35 trillion (\$82.3 billion) in expenditures – resulting in a gap of \$38.6 billion to be covered from external resources. About 50% (roughly \$40 billion) of the foreseen expenses will go to the military, and the rest will cover the state apparatus – from social security transfers to the healthcare system. This tells us that the majority of expenses for social infrastructure and civilian life in Ukraine will come from

outside – as most of Ukraine’s budget goes towards the military – with one day of fighting [amounting](#) to \$136 million. Ukraine is [expected](#) to heavily depend on external resources for the next 3 years. Importantly, a significant amount of external funding includes remittances from abroad. According to the [World Bank](#), in 2022 this amount constituted \$17.1 billion. However, the majority of the funds will come from the international financial institutions, development banks and foreign governments in the form of loans and grants. These numbers show us that the role of international donors, financial institutions and banks is extremely important and political, as they cover 50% of Ukraine’s budget, including most of the non-military expenses. The majority of civil society work in Ukraine is being funded by international donors – this will continue to be the case

increased mobilization of civil society in Ukraine since the full-scale invasion, as well as the diversification of roles that civil society plays during wartime. Civil society organizations in Ukraine have historically performed several diverse functions, such as: public monitoring and control (the watchdog role), advocacy of rights of certain social groups or broader policy advice for the government and provision of direct services, information or advice to particular social groups or the wider society. The full-scale war has led to a transformation and expansion of the roles of civil society. [Research](#)⁶ shows that around 75% of NGOs, driven by war-related challenges, have changed or expanded their scope of work. The new roles include humanitarian assistance to war-affected populations, assistance to veterans and advocacy of their rights, integration of the internally displaced people, broader activ-

ities related to immediate recovery of de-occupied territories or longer-term recovery needs of communities. In the context of decreasing state funding for social provision, many civil society organizations complement the functions of state bodies – especially in the domain of service provision and assistance to vulnerable groups. Funding for civil society work has also increased, as international donors continue to see civil society organizations and grassroots groups as important actors in wartime resilience and post-war recovery efforts. However, conditions of the available funding create barriers for effective operations and leave much room for improvement. Studies of the donor landscape in various sectors, for example [media](#), [feminist organizations](#) and [humanitarian](#) assistance show common trends that reflect broad tendencies in donor-civil society relations, which include:

MF: How are funding mechanisms of international donors influencing the capacities of Ukrainian civil society? What is helpful and what is challenging?

OP: Various [reports](#) and [studies](#) have documented

- Slow and inflexible procedures of application, selection, and grant award, that do not match fast changing local realities
- Overly bureaucratic reporting procedures
- Disconnection from local needs and context
- Focus on short-term, project-based funding, rather than long-term institutional support
- Top-down approach to collaboration with local CSOs, rather than a partnership-based model of cooperation

These conditions have a direct impact on the work of civil society actors – both on how they work, and what they can focus on. Lack of flexibility and long processes of grant awarding may mean that by the time the project starts, it requires updating or redesign. In some areas, especially in humanitarian support, rapid response is crucial for basic safety and survival. A simple example from a colleague of mine to illustrate this. In the fall 2023,

● “Local civil society organizations, grassroots and community groups need to be seen as capable expert partners in sustaining wartime resilience and future recovery”

their organization wrote a request for funding to buy blankets to keep people warm in the winter. By the time the project was approved, it was already the end of February and temperatures started to change.

Excessive donor requirements for reporting mean that the workload of CSOs teams tends to orient towards filling out reports, grant proposals or monitoring reviews more than towards designing and implementing change. From places of direct action, advocacy agenda setting and sources of innovation, organizations tend to turn into well-managed implementers of international donor projects – which are often designed, conceptualized, and planned elsewhere, with little consultation from local partners.

The previous point is connected to the challenges of a “top-down” approach which many civil society actors in Ukraine see as one of the main barriers to effective collaboration. According to this logic, international partners imagine themselves – implicitly or explicitly – as those with more expertise and capacity, and thus more qualified to design and manage projects. At the same time, local civil society activists see themselves as capable and knowledgeable actors, who are best connected to the needs of local communities, and who are able to drive change. In this sense, they already have the “capacity” which is required to do the work. However, when donors talk about “capacity” of CSOs, what is often implied is not the team’s ability to innovate, adapt and deliver change, but it rather refers to organization’s ability to fill out the multiple and complicated reports, and to do it in a timely manner. Both aspects of work are important, certainly, but the former seems to be overlooked too often in favor of the latter. Under the guise of “capacity-building programs” donors conduct trainings on reporting or project planning that do not match the needs of local partners.

Finally, the nature of donor funding remains predominantly short-term (up to 6-12 months), and project-oriented, which leaves most teams in extremely precarious situations. To keep an organization running, the manager needs to apply for funds every 3-6 months and do that in parallel with ongoing project implementation. To ensure a decent salary for their teams, CSOs implement several projects at once, which also means an overburdening of staff with excessive workload. All of this happens in the conditions of complete precarity of CSO staff. The most common model of employment for CSOs is a self-employed “consultant” contract. Other-

wise, signing a labor contract implies paying up to 20% of additional taxes for the officially hired staff. Finding a donor who would be willing to approve a project budget, which includes extra costs for official hiring of staff is not impossible, but quite difficult, as most donors do not see themselves as “employers” or long-term supporters of civil society. This means that civil society mostly comprises self-employed individuals, who operate based on 6-12 months working contracts, even if they work in the same organization for decades. This means that they are not entitled to paid sick leave or annual leave, medical insurance or any other benefits that come with official employment. This has long-term impacts on well-being, holistic security and living standards of activists and civil society workers, which are obscured and not addressed by the system.

MF: Why do you think the funding mechanisms need to be changed? What would make Ukraine’s recovery process more effective and sustainable in this regard?

OP: My points above could paint a grim picture that contradicts the already established and celebrated narrative of resilience of Ukraine’s civil society. Indeed, civil society’s response and mobilization during the full-scale invasion has been one of the main sources of Ukraine’s resistance and strength. However, looking at resilience only through the lens of strength of local actors gives an unfair and asymmetric impression. Yulia Yurchuk and Kateryna Zarembo also talk about this in their recent [piece](#) on Ukraine’s resilient society and the implications of the one-sided perspective:

“The phenomenon of (Ukrainian) resilience often is treated uncritically – as some kind of ‘secret weapon’ – which is just there and comes at no price. Resilience is turned into a myth in which humans are presented as superhumans that can cope with any hardships and beat their enemies with bare hands. This oversimplified understanding of resilience can lead to counter-effects when we start to rely too much on the ‘superhumans’ without acknowledging their humanity and all the restrictions and limitations implied in the condition of being human. These are normal people under abnormal conditions who are paying a high price for surviving every single day of this war. We indeed need to acknowledge that resilience comes with a price.”

Echoing Yulia and Kateryna, I think that it is fairer and more sustainable to look at the ‘dark side’ of the resilience discourse – an implication of unlimited individual strength and capacity – without consideration of the resources that are needed (timely, financial, emotional) to continue working under ongoing stress. That is why understanding how donor-funded mechanisms shape the working conditions, the everyday realities and the long-term capacities of civil society, is crucial to ensure sustainable change. A good example is an [open letter](#) to international donors and NGOs, published in 2022. The letter stresses that the time of crisis is a perfect moment to initiate change and shift the power in the allocation, distribution and management of international aid – not only in Ukraine, but globally. It is an invitation towards experimentation and innovation, rather than old-time rigidity, and a call towards genuine solidarity, rather than goodwill charity or bureaucratic hierarchy.

MF: What are your recommendations for transforming relationships in the funding field between donor institutions, private businesses, and civil society actors?

OP: The recommendations for change come from the civil society organizations that I have interviewed during my research as Vidnova Fellow. They include demands to:

- Decrease the bureaucratic burden of grant application, monitoring and reporting between donors and civil society – this will allow organizations to focus more of their time and efforts in implementing projects, rather than managing relationships with the donors
- Recognize the expertise of local partners as those who have knowledge and understanding of the context. This requires transformations in the forms of planning, priority setting and analysis of local needs – rather than being designed by international experts. Programs and projects need to be co-designed in partnership with local actors
- Invest in trust-based, long-term institutional support of organizations, rather than only in short-term project funding. Build in flexibility along the course of the project implementation allows organizations to plan more sustainably, to better design cycles of work as well as to monitor and to adapt to change over time.

These changes require a transformation in thinking and discourse. Local civil society organizations, grassroots and community groups need to be seen as capable expert partners in sustaining wartime resilience and future recovery, not as merely implementing agents.

Such an approach also has implications for mechanisms of participation of civil society in the recovery efforts and decisions around it at all levels. As equal partners, civil society organizations need to be meaningfully included in strategic decisions, priority setting and implementation of the recovery process – at the national, international, and local level. Only effective cooperation of civil society organizations, the state and the private sector will ensure that Ukraine’s recovery is sustainable and locally owned.

Oksana Potapova

is a Ukrainian feminist activist and researcher based in London. Currently, her research focuses on the intersectional gendered impacts of the war in Ukraine, collective care, activists’ solidarity, and innovative forms of civil society support.

Prototypes and potential solutions



The following prototypes have been developed within the scope of Vidnova Lab, a fellowship program on ecosystem mapping and prototyping solutions dedicated to Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. This program is created by Commit by MitOst gGmbH with kind financial support of EVZ Foundation and Robert Bosch Stiftung.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine severely damaged or destroyed large parts of the country, harmed critical infrastructure and disrupted millions of lives. Due to the severity of losses, Ukraine's recovery is predicted to span over the next few decades. It will require a concentrated effort and engagement of many parties, from small local communities and municipalities

to big international partners and donors. It will entail not only the physical reconstruction of architectural objects but a socio-economical recovery as well.

Vidnova Lab aims to strengthen the voice and role of Ukrainian civil society in the reconstruction and recovery process. It ensures that civil society actors have the capacity to facilitate dialogue between communities and authorities and advocate for necessary solutions. At the same time, Vidnova Lab seeks to enable sustainable collaborations between civil society actors based in Ukraine and those in other European countries.

Green recovery. Conservation and preservation as tools for environmental recovery in wartime Ukraine

by Olesia Moroz and Daryna Pyrogova,
Vidnova Lab fellows

Olesia Moroz and Daryna Pyrogova are conducting research to examine how natural and agricultural areas damaged, contaminated, and mined in the result of the full-scale Russian invasion can be preserved and protected. Their goal is to understand conservation and preservation practices in regions impacted by war in other countries, as well as existing approaches to nature recovery in Ukraine.

While the field of research remains mutual, Olesia and Daryna work on individual prototypes tackling different aspects of the conservation of chemically contaminated land.

by Olesia Moroz

Olesia's prototype involves a comprehensive study of the legal aspects of the chemically contaminated land conservation based on existing research and in cooperation with experts in this field. Prototyping will serve to further explore the land conservation algorithm by studying practical aspects

and consulting with stakeholders involved in this procedure to find possible ways of improvement. Olesia aims to provide valuable research results to organizations actively working on this topic but lacking the resources to conduct their own research. Also, in the future, these results can be used for land conservation advocacy.

by Daryna Pyrogorova

Daryna aims to create a test edition of a digital and printed magazine reflecting content from a series of online seminars on the conservation and preservation of contaminated land. Daryna wants to share the work results with a wider audience and aims to use the magazine format as

a way to collect and present project outcomes. She is inspired by zines and art projects, which are new to her, as Daryna's work mainly involves analytical reports and briefs. She wants to invent a synthetic form of publication "on the edge" of the two approaches.

Olesia Moroz

has a master's degree in agriculture and a MBA in Regional Management. She is particularly interested in ecology, nature conservation, and creating community development strategies. During the war, her focus shifted to the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in Berlin.

Daryna Pyrogorova

is an independent sociologist and consultant in strategic urban development and public engagement. Currently, she focuses on forced migration and war's environmental impact.



Questioning horticultural therapy and climate change policy in Lviv

by Inna Datsiuk and Diana Popfalushi, Vidnova Lab fellows

Diana Popfalushi and Inna Datsiuk have combined their passion for climate activism and mental health and found an interconnection between the two topics in building resilience through green spaces. They do both, help with climate change mitigation and adaptation, which is the field of Diana's re-

search, and provide therapeutic assistance to restore and maintain mental health, so Inna's research topic.

Inna and Diana implement the prototypes independently. However, they constantly support each other through feedback and networking.

by Inna Datsiuk

The vision behind this prototype is deeply rooted in the desire to harness the therapeutic potentials of horticulture and make these benefits widely accessible and effectively integrated into therapeutic settings. Inna Datsiuk is developing a preliminary version of a "Horticultural Therapy Toolkit", to make therapeutic gardening accessible and engaging for various institutions. This process involves the following phases: selection of contents, packaging design, educational material creation, feedback, and iteration. Inna aspires to contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities while promoting sustainable, accessible therapeutic practices. The implementation was planned in late spring, leveraging the season's natural association with growth and renewal.

by Diana Popfalushi

Diana's prototype is about developing a comprehensive canvas for mapping local climate policy that aligns with community priorities, fosters collaboration, and guides effective action to address climate change locally. The aim is to build pillars for developing a proper tool called Climate Index to help NGOs and communities quickly assess and examine their current stage of climate policy implementation. The roadmap of activities includes stakeholder mapping and interviewing, assessment of current policies of the local government, and canvas design.

A climate policy canvas can be implemented in several stages and locations. The implementation will be one of the following scenarios:

- incorporating the canvas into already existing projects of the NGO Plato
- inviting activists from different cities to use the canvas to map their community's climate policy both online and offline
- sharing the canvas with members of the Ukrainian climate network

Education and community-based learning

by Iryna Minkovska and Nadiia Synytsia, Vidnova Lab fellows

Education is an important base and a starting point for Vidnova (from Ukrainian recovery). It should be different and various, inclusive and accessible to everyone. Education can be used as an instrument to engage communities, for example, through community-based learning.

Iryna and Nadiia value the importance of education and a variety of local, engaging, and accessible educational opportunities. Therefore, they tested the idea of community learning as an integral part of Ukraine's recovery. The duo envisioned building regional public educational centers that support the country's recovery in human capacity development, attraction of financial resources, and psychological support. Another integral part of the prototype was to research how these centers can enhance the accessibility to lifelong learning opportunities, foster community engagement, and cultivate a culture that prioritizes education as a fundamental societal asset.

Annotation:

Iryna and Nadiia already implemented this prototype in Irpin at the end of April 2024, involving actors from different communities. The prototype introduced the concept in practice and sparked the implementation of an educational community-building center.

Diana Popfalushi

is an ecoactivist and project manager from Lviv. She's part of NGO Plato and works on local, national, and international climate policy. She is also involved in a community gardening project in Lviv named Rozsadnyk and co-hosts the environmental podcast "Poyasnyzaeco".

Inna Datsiuk

also comes from Lviv, where she blends the healing essence of nature with psychotherapy to enhance people's well-being.

Nadiia Synytsia

lives between Kyiv and Berlin. She is the head of Education and CSR at IT Ukraine Association and the Program Manager at enpact. She is an experienced project manager and digital expert in diverse NGOs in Ukraine and Germany.

Iryna Minkovska

from Kharkiv is the CEO of the educational center for teachers, parents and children "ME AND MY SCHOOL", and co-author of the New Ukrainian School reform concept. She has been developing a nationwide teachers' training program in Ukraine.



AI Genius Loci

by Anna Karnaukh - a fellow of Vidnova Lab,
and the team of Lanka.pro collective

In her prototype solution, Anna Karnaukh focuses on the current state and recovery of cultural infrastructure. Her research is particularly interested in the factors that influence its local ecosystem – key players, policy-making process, human factor, local cultural identity, local communities, their capacity and understanding of the cultural potential.

Anna’s findings indicate that for communities of different scales to consider their cultural infrastruc-

tures strategically, they must shift their sources of inspiration from fear-based or not-knowing to authentic and dignity-based. Anna’s organization, Lanka.pro collective, supports the idea that communities with good self-esteem and connection to their authentic cultural assets will have more tools to shape a better tomorrow for their members.

The prototype includes exploring, developing and testing self-assessment tools for communities,

organizations and cities to evaluate their cultural assets and identity. It is divided into two stages:

The prototype includes exploring, developing and testing self-assessment tools for communities, organizations and cities to evaluate their cultural assets and identity. It is divided into two stages:

- creation of a board game for communities to discuss their local cultural assets
- development of an online tool with the use of Artificial Intelligence to have an integral analysis of communities’ local cultural assets and identity

Lanka.pro aims to develop a simple and engaging tool that will allow community members to start discussing how they perceive their

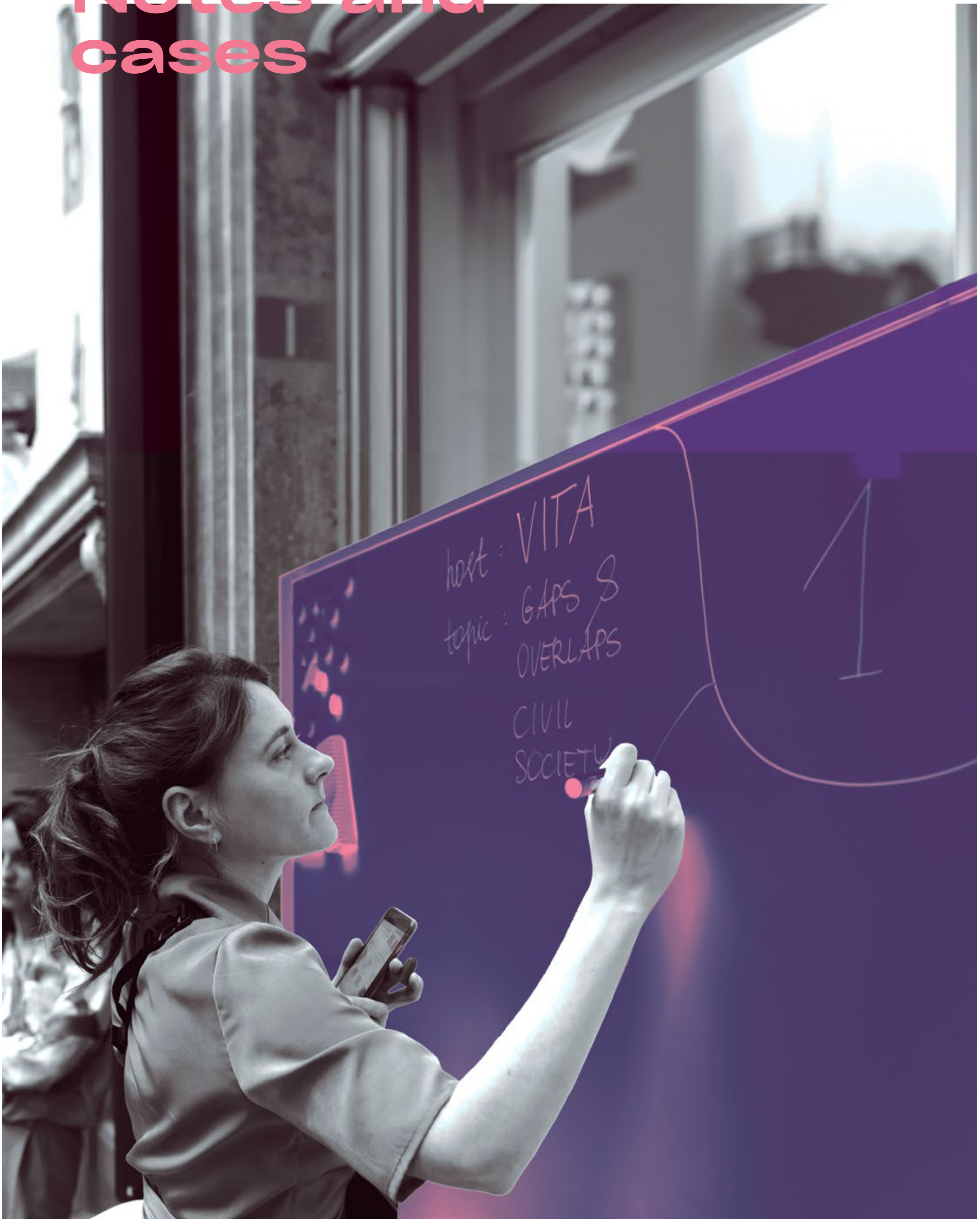
place, what makes it special and unique, and what the assets of the place are. The board game, to some extent, plays the role of the facilitator and prepares the group for the second stage of the project – engaging with AI solutions to analyze the local cultural identity based on the results of discussions of the community.

The long-term vision is to offer an online simulator where communities can quickly test and adjust their visions of themselves and their future and use them for self-empowerment, recovery, and growth.

Anna Karnaukh

specializes in designing and managing programs to develop the cultural and creative sector. She is the co-founder and director of Lanka.pro collective.

Notes and cases



On the impact of language

As an expert in strategic communications, I strongly believe that language is the world's most powerful programming tool. That's why IT's programming languages are called precisely that – languages. We use words to convey and share values and meanings, define goals and synchronize actions.

When words turn into actions, they reprogram our world and physically transform it just as the descriptions of international partners' recovery programs turn into grants, into project applications, into executions that physically influence the communities damaged by war.

As with any tool, language must be suitable and precise for the job at hand. A poorly chosen tool does a poor job at best and at worst – damages the material. In this analogy, the material – my country – that is suffering enough already.

The situation worsens with the fact that language is a very intricate

tool. The meanings and perceptions of words change in 3 dimensions: time, space and context. When we saw how quickly de-occupied communities rebuilt their roads and destroyed buildings, the word "recovery" or "vidnovlennia" in Ukrainian had been a source of hope and inspiration for Ukrainians and the whole world in the first months of the full-scale russian invasion. But the word got over-used, misused, and misunderstood so fast that it became a matter of huge irritation among communities, NGOs, and media engaged in the very process this word was meant to define. And so, in this word, we lost a strong ally. This is the change of a word with time.

Words also change in space. The closer to the frontline, the more "recovery" means something vitally crucial for survival, tactical, immediate and necessary: rebuilding a road for military logistics, re-connecting people to healthcare, restoring electricity or cell signals.

by Anastasiia Pustova, co-founder and communications strategy director, NGO Superwise

facebook.com/superwisebureau/

The further West you go, the more "recovery" gets abstract, strategic, maybe even untimely / "ne na chasi" perhaps even post-war.

The word "inclusion" can be a voluminous term and all-transcending principle when written in a grant program description and transformed into a plain wooden ramp for wheelchairs in the local administration building with the execution of this program in a particular community. So the words can also mean different things in different contexts.

Usage of words is a fine art, a science even. One has to master how to make language accessible and inclusive, how not to lose allies in words, how to explain them and provide necessary adjectives to define things more precisely, how to generalize efficiently, and how not to overuse powerful means for unimportant causes. This expertise right now is desperately missed in the recovery processes on the

sides of the state, partners, donors, NGOs, and local communities alike. That's why, as people engaged in the "vidnova" of my country, I call for everyone to include this expertise of diligent and responsible translation of meanings, experiences, goals, and actionable plans into each and every program we plan.

On green recovery

17% of Ukrainian territory is currently occupied, and 30% is mined or contaminated. This puts other parts of the land at risk of being overused. Of course, humanitarian demining of populated areas is necessary; it is a matter of security and restoration of de-occupied territories. However, demining all natural areas is simply impossible. Rough estimates suggest that it could take 750 years and cost \$37 billion. Paradoxically, restoration of nature is possible even without complete demining.

For me, Ukraine's green recovery is primarily about the recovery of nature. This includes recovering from the significant damage caused by the Russian war on Ukraine's territory and addressing the exploitative and colonial treatment of the land long before the war.

It's unfortunate that nature is often overlooked in conversations, discussions, and conferences about recovery in favor of more pressing

infrastructural and financial topics. I believe that it's crucial to include nature in recovery discussions. Nature is a critical infrastructure that shapes our living environment, provides essential ecosystem services, and has a healing effect. It complements and balances the built environment in our cities. Just as the humanities and arts have embraced an inclusive approach that considers non-human agents, recovery discussions should also adopt this perspective.

One of the issues we face is the heavy toll on Ukrainian nature caused by the extraction of resources for reconstruction in a limited area. A significant portion of our territory is either mined, contaminated by chemicals from weapons, or inaccessible due to occupation. We require sand, water, forest, clay, and crushed stone for recovery, but we must also protect Ukrainian nature from excessive resource extraction. This is a challenging task that requires

the development of a state environmental policy to address these issues.

I strongly believe that EU regulations, and especially the Biodiversity Strategy 2030, will help shape a better future for Ukraine's nature. It aims to protect 30% of the natural territories (including forests, steppes, and water) for biodiversity conservation. Immediate and full demining may not be necessary—we can conserve our contaminated and mined territories to reach the 30% target. Currently, only 6.8% of Ukraine's territory has a protected nature status, where agriculture and other human activities are restricted.

Negotiating a well-balanced recovery that considers not only economic interests but also the interests of nature isn't easy, especially when parts of the occupied territories are agricultural lands. Nevertheless, I see it as a good start to search for a consensus between

the interests of different stakeholders — the state, farmers, scientists, and ecologists.

Contaminated and preserved nature can serve as a potential laboratory for observing how nature can self-recover with limited human influence. We should make an effort to support nature's recovery while we rebuild our homes and houses of culture. The recovery of nature should be a widely discussed topic on local, national, and international levels, as nature, fortunately or not, knows no borders.

by Daryna Pyrogova, sociologist and consultant, Integrated Urban Development in Ukraine by GIZ

2023.ukrainianpavilion.org/program/30

On cultural infrastructure

by Olena Syrbu, senior analyst and project coordinator, Cedos think tank
cedos.org.ua

Last September, I started collaborating with the Velyka Pysarivka hromada in the Sumy region as a part of the “Community reBuilding” project initiated by the Cedos think tank and Western NIS Enterprise Fund. Situated on the border with Russia, this hromada faced occupation during the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion. I worked with a team comprising representatives of civil society organizations and the local municipality, all of whom had experienced displacement twice before — in 2014 and 2022.

I was mentoring them in an effort to create a community cultural center focused on the youth. They envisioned transforming an old Soviet house of culture into a safe, inclusive, and accessible place for people who were experiencing social isolation living at the border with Russia, where education is remote, mass events are prohibited, and shelling is constant.

They created a multifunctional space with a roller rink and co-working areas. They also renovated a bomb shelter in the building. The space was supposed to open in March 2024, but Russia started a nightmare in that region. In one night, they wiped out the center with guided aerial bombs. They had to flee for the third time in their life.

In April 2024, the “Community reBuilding” project received the New European Bauhaus prize. At the same time, people from Velyka Pysarivka hromada were presenting their work and plans at the final conference in Kyiv in between air raid alerts, sitting in a bomb shelter and talking about returning and renewing their activities.

The war impacts the social fabric of Ukrainian hromadas. It disintegrates communities and ruptures social ties, leading to social isolation, especially in de-occupied regions and those closer to the border with Russia and the front line.

I believe that culture is a way to foster **social inclusion, cohesion, and integration**. Civil society organizations and local cultural operators can bring people together and initiate dialogue. They can promote active social relationships and inclusion of people from vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced people, LGBTQ+ or Roma communities, the elderly, and people from low-income households.

What are the needs of the cultural sector?

Long-term institutional and individual financing.

People working in the cultural sector are exhausted and burned out. Working in civil society often means working in precarious conditions from one project to another. At the same time, there are organizations performing some of the functions of the state and municipal authorities. Cultural organizations often solely rely on donor support, as culture is a sector where it is harder to diversify the sources of income. I also believe that culture should not be perceived through economic lenses as the sector where the main aim is to generate profit.

Precariousness and social insecurity lead to people leaving the local civil society sector to work in international organizations, businesses, or state institutions. Long-term sustainable financing will strengthen the capacity of the sector as a whole and, consequently, people as the main drivers of change.

Horizontal networks and communities.

There is a need to unite and form networks and associations. At the beginning of the full-scale war, non-formal networks played a crucial role in mobilizing and redistributing resources. People in such networks often made decisions that should have been made by the

state and municipal authorities. We also have cultural unions that were formed in the Soviet era and are now often exclusive and conservative.

I believe it is important to encourage and support the creation and transformation of professional associations that improve labor conditions in the field and provide support and resources for the precarious. Such organizations can only be born out of existing strong networks. At the same time, strengthening networking opportunities will contribute to developing and enhancing ties within the Ukrainian cultural field.

Cooperation with municipal cultural workers.

Cooperation between civil society and municipal cultural operators can be crucial in transforming the local cultural infrastructure. Municipal cultural operators provide non-commercial cultural activities for their communities. However, they often lack the resources and capacities to reflect on and adapt their work.

The collaboration between municipal and civil society cultural organizations can encourage the transition to more inclusive and participatory spaces. It can question the existing narratives about local identities and heritage and bring more resources to the municipal cultural sector, where workers are mostly women who are underpaid and often have to work overtime.

Cultural decentralization.

The decentralization policy was one of the critical factors that influenced the formation of connections and networks within the Ukrainian cultural field before the start of the full-scale war. It strengthened the agency and proactivity of regional cultural workers, influencing later on the decisions about relocation after February 24, 2022.

It is essential to encourage the recovery and further development of the decentralization reform in the cultural sector at the state level. It is also crucial to provide resources to cultural actors and communities located in remote areas. Focusing on people living in de-occupied hromadas, closer to the front line or on the border with Russia is essential. They need this support the most.

On commemoration

In March 2022, my team launched the Memorial Platform (victims.memorial) to preserve human stories from the war. We created a simple website and started publishing stories about deceased Ukrainian civilians and the military. So far, we have published 7,000 stories, and we still have years of painful and important work ahead.

In the first weeks of the war, we were shocked by what was happening and terrified by the number of casualties. In those moments, we decided that we must tell the world about the story of each person who passed away during the Russian war against Ukraine.

We strive to transform every death statistic into a name and story. We voice each story equally and loudly: the Hero of Ukraine, combat commander Dmytro Kotsiubailo (Da Vinci); the couple Valeriy and Anastasia Saksagansky from Kherson region, who were kidnapped from their home in front of their

child and killed in the forest; and volunteer hero Roman Ratushny and the girl Liza from Vinnytsia, killed during a missile strike.

Every day, people write to us: "Tell the story of my son", "Write the story of my brother, his birthday would have been on February 10", "Show our Hero on your page", "How to add a story to the Memorial?". We have realized that every published story is a step towards accepting loss and becomes an act of solidarity, recognition and healing.

Our data has been featured in statements and reports by human rights organizations and in the book for Ukrainian educators on the war. We trust they will be a source for researchers, historians, artists, filmmakers and educators in Ukraine and worldwide.

Defense and army, infrastructure, humanitarian aid, and support for people near the frontlines or for those internally displaced are key

by Lera Lauda, co-founder of the Memorial Platform
victims.memorial

issues for Ukrainian society. It's the priority. However, commemorative practice is a niche field that does not receive enough attention. I believe that commemoration, along with other niches such as green recovery or cultural infrastructure, build a foundation for societal resilience and contribute to the recovery of Ukraine. We need to devote time and resources to honor each personal story and contribute to preserving collective memory. It's about voicing personal and collective traumas. About healing. About dignity. About the future.

On vulnerable groups

I am from Mariupol, a city that Russia blockaded and occupied in the spring of 2022. In 2014, I left Donetsk and still can't go back.

Most of our team from the DII-Ukraine NGO are from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. For the past ten years, we have been bringing people back from the occupied territories. We understand the importance of working with people who remain in the depths of occupation.

Now, in 2024, Ukrainians live in different conditions, and this contributes to a certain cleavage of society. Everyone strives for unification, but circumstances and experiences lead to division. There are people living in occupied territories under the sound of shelling, shakedowns, and explosions, people who moved abroad, internally displaced people, and those who lived and stayed in the Western part of Ukraine. Local communities are making efforts to integrate these vulnerable groups and en-

sure possibilities of active participation. Despite this, social tensions are feasible.

In 2022, a new concept emerged in Ukraine. Not work-life-balance, but war-life-balance. We are all trying to do what we can while in constant danger. We work from shelters, hide in corridors behind two walls, and still attend professional calls while hearing the air raid warnings in the background. We have something to hold on to. These are square kilometers of our home that we are fighting for. These are people who remain on the edge of the fire and, under the occupation, isolated from information and people who were deported to Russia and are searching for ways to return home.

Chasiv Yar is a small town in the Donetsk region that the Russians are trying to capture. Two months ago, our journalist was there making a reportage. He met civilians who had been living in basements

by Liubov Rakovitsia, chairperson of the DII-Ukraine
linkedin.com/company/dii-ukraine

for a year because they stayed in their hometown. When asked why, they said, "This is our land, this is our home, why should we leave?"

News about a 90-year-old pensioner appeared online. Russia is conducting forced passportization in the occupied territories and his documents were taken away from him and would be replaced with Russian ones. But he did an incredible thing—he left his home village and walked all night to the territory controlled by Ukraine. He encountered volunteers, received help and is doing well. This story is about the strength of spirit and the desire to live in a free and democratic country.

Local media in the de-occupied regions face extremely challenging circumstances – lack of infrastructure, constant shelling, lack of human resources and funds. But they continue to heroically deliver information to the local people. For example, in the Sumy region,

in border communities, journalists deliver their newspapers to neighboring communities on bicycles and mopeds. In the Kherson region, after the Russians blew up the Kakhovka dam and the water flooded Ukrainian cities, local journalists delivered their newspapers to residents by boat.

Listen to these stories and stand with Ukraine. International support is essential for our freedom and strengthens us to keep going.

On wording and manipulation

by Julia Ovcharenko, president of NGO Cultural Hub
culturalhub.org

Informational war is a great dimension of russian aggression. It has no borders, and it affects every mind that "rusски mir" succeeds in capturing. Propaganda finds sneaky ways to enter any message—to convince its receivers of sincere intentions, to legitimize an armed attack, and to create more chaos where doubts, fears, contradictions, and opinion differences seem to shake social integrity. Such lies aren't less dangerous than a missile targeting a city mall.

Manipulation starts the erosion of democracy when it attacks its natural environment: idea, knowledge, word – logos. When a word is misused, there is less trust in its meaning. When logic is broken, there is less confidence in our cognitive capacities. Once the basics

of social order are damaged, you need double efforts to reorganize it. And as soon as lies take root, the whole ecosystem is at risk of infection.

Language is being weaponized. Meaning becomes a target of war. Literature turns into torture when Ukrainians in russian captivity are forced to read aloud texts of lev tolstoy and sing russian songs while standing days and nights in a coffin-size room.

Communications during wartime are very fast, sensitive and sharp. We have less room for mistakes in our messages because the aggressor will immediately take advantage of them. We must stay extremely careful with precise wording and clear definitions.

Never call a federation what is essentially an empire; never say elections if they are held under dictatorships; never call propagandists a journalist; never allow fascist parties to hide under an alternative; never call corruption an economic partnership.

Language becomes a tool for defending ourselves, our values, and the ideas that our democratic civilization is based on. Clarity in mind and word, truth, and critical thinking are crucial for the survival of our societies.

On importance of culture during the war and recovery

by Anna Karnaukh, co-founder of Lanka.pro collective
lanka.pro

While I write this text, many of my friends and their friends post pictures of books they just bought to support Vivat – Ukraine's third-largest printing house. On May 23, 2024, Russian missiles hit the printing house Faktor-Druk, killing seven people and destroying at least 50,000 books. A major disruption that will impact the whole publishing sector.

According to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, from February 24, 2022, 1,946 cultural infrastructure objects were damaged, 317 of which were totally destroyed. This number does not include cultural heritage—as of March 2024, over a thousand objects suffered from the attacks. These numbers keep on growing every day.

Currently, culture is not expected to be a funding priority and is rarely highlighted in recovery panels. One might say there are other priorities – the economy, roads, and houses. However, looking at russia's attacks and information campaigns, Ukrainian culture is clearly among the priority targets.

Here are some arguments for putting Culture high on the agenda of any recovery conversation:

1. Culture is the source of inspiration, self-discovery and sense-making for people in Ukraine. It is also a powerful mean to explain Ukraine to the world;
 2. Cultural and creative industries not only provide senses and ideas but make a tangible contribution to Ukraine's economy (3,9 of GVA in 2019, a multiplier ranging from 1.9-2.2, which is comparable to the multipliers of the construction, finance and insurance sector – data from latest report on the state of the CCI by Kyiv School of Economics);
 3. Deterioration of mental health is a growing challenge for Ukrainians. Cultural experiences and artistic self-expression can help people to cope with stress;
 4. Cultural organizations in communities can become central spaces for social cooperation, integration and overcoming social divides triggered by the war;
 5. Local cultural assets are a solid source of inspiration for communities in their development;
 6. Cultural infrastructure, alongside safety, housing, and education, can be one of the important pillars for people to choose whether they decide to live in Ukraine.

With the inevitable state funding cuts on culture, support from international partners is key to helping the sector survive and deal with the recovery. In addition to funding, including representatives of culture and creative industries in any cross-sectoral recovery dialogues is essential.

Good practices



Highlighting the
essence of the work
with veterans

by Alona Karavai and Victoriia Bokova

Supporting mental
health in cultural
sector

by Adina Constantin and Nataliia Martynenko

Ensuring continuity
of the work of civil
society

by Malwina Fendrych

Highlighting the essence of the work with veterans

sharing based on the creation of Vidnova Veterans, a support program implemented by NGO Insha Osvita

Veterans of the Russian war against Ukraine — or demobilized military — are those who are ending their service after attaining (critical) injuries. Currently, there is almost no other way to complete military service and return to one's previous and normal life in society — let us assume that this "previous" and "normal" exists. Veterans of the full-scale invasion had completely different jobs and dreams before joining the army in 2022 — baristas, artists, teachers, bus drivers, farmers.

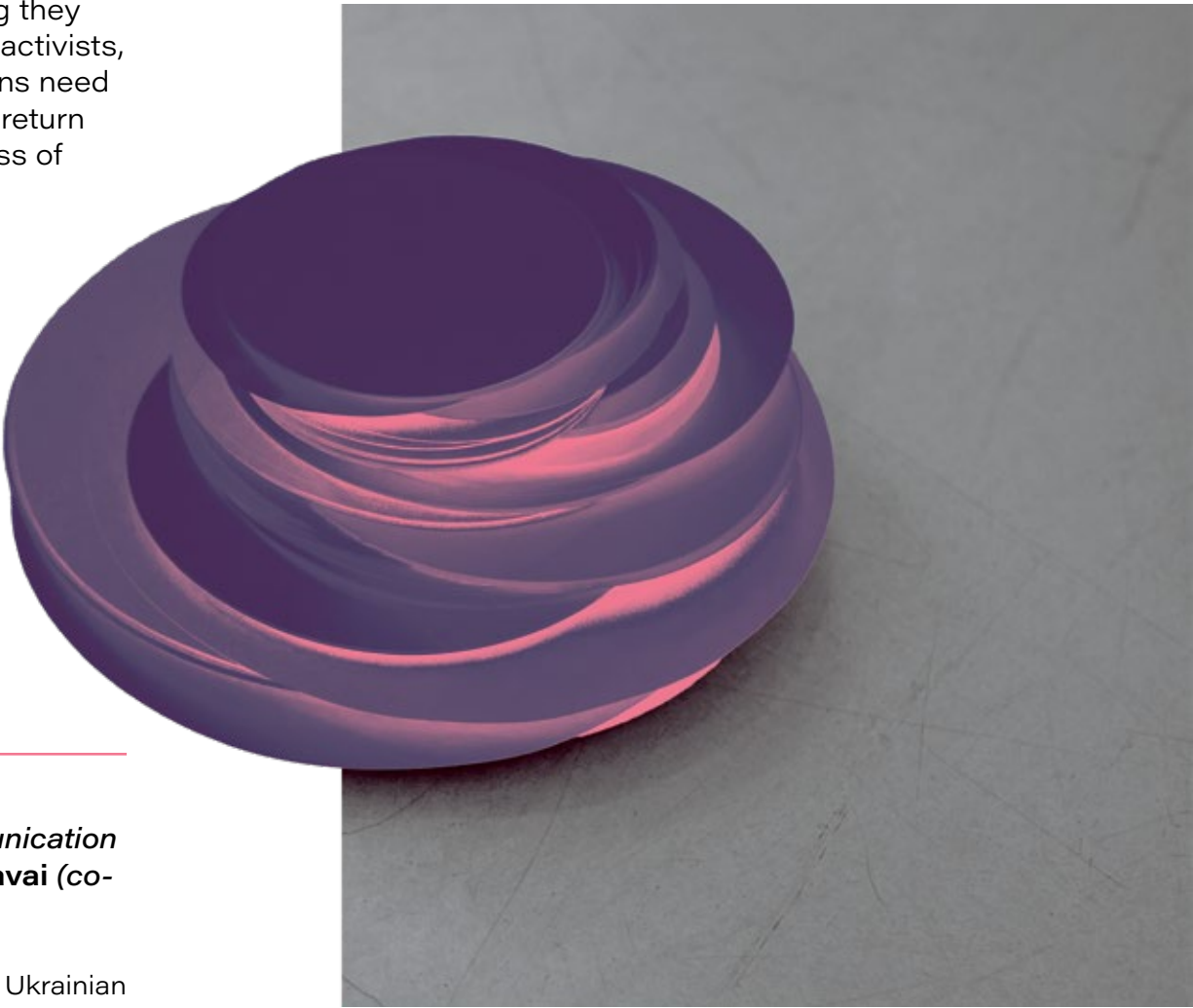
Can their life be "normal" after the return, and what kind of social and professional reintegration is needed to support them? This question requires a comprehensive answer, including state policies, research, and needs analysis. For now, we can start with small (but important) steps that can provide great support and the possibility for the

veterans to restart their (professional) lives. Among other things, it requires psychological rehabilitation, networking and access to a community of people with similar experiences. Last but not least, they need gradual professional reintegration, which includes residencies, qualifications, and networking as necessary conditions for returning to the profession or choosing a new one.

Insha Osvita is introducing the Vidnova Veterans program in order to support colleagues returning from the front in their professional, psychological and social recovery. In the first rounds, we concentrate on veterans who were engaged in artistic or educational practices before the war, meaning they worked as artists, cultural activists, or teachers. Yes, all veterans need support in integration and return to their activities, regardless of

profession. Nonetheless, we are starting with small steps and the communities we know best.

Bohdan Bunchak, an artist and a demobilized soldier (after being wounded), joined Insha Osvita to work on the development of the program. Until the end of June 2024, Bohdan will conduct a needs assessment of his peers through deep interviews. The first round of Vidnova Veterans will be launched in autumn 2024 with the support of the Robert Bosch Stiftung.



insha-osvita.org

Victoriia Bokova (*Communication Manager*) and **Alona Karavai** (*co-founder*)

are a part of Insha Osvita, an Ukrainian NGO with 16 years of experience in the field of civil society, culture and learning spaces creation. In addition, Alona is the First Chairwoman of the Board of MitOst e.V. and a co-founder of other initiatives, such as the art gallery Asortimentna Kimnata, and the residency house Khata Maysternya.

Supporting mental health in cultural sector

sharing based on experiences from AiR zusa residency for cultural professionals and Culture Helps / Культура допомагає – support program created by zusa gGmbH

In the face of the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, our programs aim to support displaced cultural professionals who have been forced to flee the war but are determined to continue their work. We recognize the urgent need for self-care and support for the well-being of these professionals, as many are experiencing burnout, mental health issues, and other challenges.

AiR zusa

Launched in 2022, AiR zusa offered short-term and long-term residencies to 25 Ukrainian cultural professionals. In this residency, the focus was on the process and reflection rather than product-oriented outcomes. The aim is to support mental health and well-being under pressure by offering individual and group therapy sessions with external therapists. Ultimately, human connection is what really matters, and that is the primary goal.

Learning to rest: Finding Peace at AiR zusa

The AiR zusa and its team now hold a special place in my heart. I can imagine that this is not something you can always say about the project or residency, but I was lucky to experience a thoughtful, caring, and even tender approach during my stay in Berlin. For me, AiR zusa was a space to calm down, gaze at the autumn view from the window, record the sound of snow falling and night birds singing and remind myself how important it is. I want to highlight the program's focus on mental health support, which was crucial in shaping the project's scope and flow. I sincerely hope the team keeps this valuable component and shares their methodologies with colleagues.

- Nataliia Revko, AiR zusa resident, researcher, curator, and emerging artist from Odesa, Ukraine.

Culture Helps

At Culture Helps / Культура допомагає, our goal is to assist Ukrainian cultural professionals in reconnecting with their cultural activities and integrating into host communities through artistic work while prioritizing their mental health. Our project provides a multi-level grant system, which includes small grants for individual mental health support. We collaborate with communities affected by war, equipping them with self-care tools and techniques to promote well-being.

Rediscovering balance: a journey restored through mental health grant support

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I found myself on vacation with friends by the sea. With flights to Ukraine canceled, I didn't know what to do. However, at that moment, the director of Ogala-la, Kreuzberg, invited me to stay in Berlin. Like many Ukrainians, I initially thought I would stay in Berlin just for a few weeks before returning home. However, the occupation of Mariupol by the Russian military started from the very first day of the invasion and eventually, I didn't have a home to return to anymore.

After a brief stay in Berlin, I relocated to Hanover. In June 2022, I founded a theater studio there for Ukrainian refugees aimed at helping youth overcome emotional challenges and address war traumas. During our performances, we raised funds to support children from

Mariupol who had lost their parents. However, constant uncertainty about the future, coupled with a lack of stability and immersion in a completely unfamiliar environment, left me emotionally unstable and unmotivated.

Upon discovering Culture Helps' individual support program, I found some hope and successfully received the grant, enabling me to address my mental health needs. During that time, I missed the seaside, which was reminiscent of my home in Mariupol by the Black Sea, so I followed my tradition and traveled to Egypt. Being there, I could find peacefulness and a much-needed healing experience for my mind and soul. With the support of Culture Helps, I received a vital boost, allowing me to recharge and gain new motivation for my artistic work. Upon returning, I premiered performances titled "Goodbye to Arms" and "Wings" with renewed enthusiasm.

In March 2024, I opened Kultur-Haus in Hanover, which became a community space of Ukrainian and German cultures. It quickly grew into a space for community engagement, fostering collaboration among diverse artistic and cultural endeavors. There are also more exciting adventures on the horizon, thanks to my stronger mental resilience and Culture Helps.

- Anton Telbizov, Participant in the Individual Grants Programme of Culture Helps, Theatre director, Mariupol, Ukraine.

zusaculture.org

Discover our latest projects and events

Adina Constantin (Program & communications officer AiR zusa) and Nataliia Martynenko (Project coordinator Culture Helps)

are part of zusa gGmbH, an international NGO based in Berlin working for and with cultural and civil society actors that strive for change in their social and cultural contexts.

Culture Helps / Культура допомагає

is a project co-funded by the European Union under a dedicated call for proposals to support Ukrainian displaced people and the Ukrainian Cultural and Creative Sectors. The project is a cooperation between Insha Osvita (UA) and zusa (DE).

Ensuring continuity of the work of civil society

sharing based on experiences from Vidnova Fellowship, a support program created by Commit gGmbH

Vidnova Fellowship program was created by Commit and EVZ Foundation with the kind financial support of EVZ Foundation, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Gerda Henkel Stiftung, and Stiftung Mercator. Vidnova Fellowship Ukraine is implemented in partnership with Ukrainian NGO Insha Osvita.

In February 2022, many civil society actors in Ukraine were displaced due to the Russian invasion. They have lost their local contexts and connection to their beneficiaries. The Vidnova Fellowship is based on the belief that people who fled the war would require security and structure to continue their activities outside their usual context. It aimed to ensure the continuity of the work of internally displaced and exiled civil society actors in Ukraine. Activists and professionals from various sectors, such as human rights, support for vulnerable groups, media literacy, environmental protection, and others, were invited to apply for fellowships, which allowed them to continue their activities in new places of residence in cooperation with local partners.

From the beginning, the Vidnova Fellowship was a very special program in the Commit ecosystem due to its urgency and the Commit's long-standing connections to Ukraine. Flexibility, high speed, and the constant need for orientation have been in the program's DNA - they allowed us to be efficient and resourceful when the world was volatile and fast-changing.

Participants saw Vidnova as a unique and supportive program that went beyond mere opportunities, emphasizing the importance of its empathetic approach. It gave them a sense of belonging in new countries, enabling them to pursue more meaningful endeavors beyond survival. Key to the program's success was its tailored support, which provided stability, time for reflection, psychological resilience, and opportunity to maintain their professional identities and adapt to new environments.

The fellows recommended extending similar support initiatives to civil society activists beyond instances of compelled migration and addressing the broader issue of social protection for activists in Ukraine.

As a coordination team, we have learned that in order to remain flexible, we need structures and routines. We have realized that fast-paced work requires breathing spaces to be sustainable. Therefore, we have started to slow down and focus on quality management and relationship building. Additionally, we have found that this program is still highly relevant, especially two years into the war.

...I read about Vidnova and applied. I thought that it would be an excellent chance for me to do what I plan to do with some support, not only financial, but also the support that you give us during our meetings and coaching, and all this to feel you belong, that you are not sepa-

rated from everybody. After reading the description, I understood that the program fits my situation.

- Daria Podolian, Vidnova Europe fellow

I was trying to figure out how to live with the uncertainty. Will I go back to Ukraine soon? Should I look for a job in Germany right now? Am I ready for long-term work commitments when I am already busy with a German course, 4 hours per day, taking care of my elderly mom and our publishing company, and making helpful YouTube videos explaining German bureaucracy for Ukrainians? It seemed like quite a lot of work already. So, I was happy to enroll in the Fellowship to be able to continue the activities I had in my pre-war life.

- Iryna Lisova, Vidnova Europe fellow

I needed to start from scratch. Vidnova was a big step for me in that moment: it helped me regain at least a part of my identity. I knew right away that Vidnova was something I needed. I got the information about the Fellowship from my former boss and decided to use this opportunity to continue my work on LGBTQ+ education and human rights. The program is a perfect match for social activists. (...) I want to thank Vidnova for the opportunity. I'm not new to projects, but this project is mainly about humanity, love, and care — which is very important to participants now.

- Daryna Dmytriievskya, Vidnova Europe fellow

Malwina Fendrych

is the Communications and Projects Lead at Commit by MitOst gGmbH, an international NGO based in Berlin that is working with civil society actors across Europe and its neighboring regions. Malwina is one of the Vidnova Program co-creators.

Read about Vidnova Fellowship in-depth

vidnova.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Vidnova-Storyline-2022-2024.pdf

Robert Bosch Stiftung: We support Ukrainian civil society in contributing sustainably to the reconstruction of their country

The morning of February 24, 2022, is undoubtedly etched in the memory of many of us. This also applies to the Robert Bosch Stiftung as an institution. As a German and European foundation, we feel a special responsibility for Ukraine. Since we have been active in and with Ukraine for almost 30 years, we have close ties with many partners in the region. But our sense of responsibility also goes back to our founder, Robert Bosch. His compassion for people experiencing suffering and hardship due to war and his commitment to peace and reconciliation shaped his philanthropic actions during the First World War and the interwar period. In December 1912, he told a friend discussing the Balkan crisis, "I'd rather pay ten million German marks if it means I can avoid a war."

This conviction found its way into his legacy, which guides our work. In response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we decided to make additional funds of 4.5 million euros available within weeks to support the country and its people. It was only natural to work with Commit by MitOst, an organization founded by alumni of our programs in Central and Eastern Europe with experience working with civil society actors of Ukraine and other European countries for over 25 years.

In collaboration with EVZ Foundation, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Gerda Henkel Stiftung, Stiftung Mercator,

and NGO Insha Osvita, Commit developed the Vidnova Fellowship program, with its longstanding expertise in the region, their knowledge of civil society engagement and their trustful local partnerships.

Vidnova in Ukrainian means recovery. To many of us, it may sound counterintuitive to talk about recovery now when winning the war is the key priority. But the signals from our partners and friends in Ukraine were clear: we cannot wait until the war ends to tackle the challenges that Ukraine faces. The war has inflicted significant wounds on society. Many people are traumatized, millions have left Ukraine, and millions are displaced in their own country. There are many layers of reconstruction from the war. Therefore, we need a broad understanding of recovery.

Ukrainian civil society is crucial in sustaining resilience and shaping the future. While the destruction of the war continues, pioneers are developing their visions for the future of Ukraine. They make it clear that a real renewal of the country can only happen with the participation of its citizens – in co-



operation with state, international and supranational actors. Because strong, well-connected civil society organizations on the ground have the necessary capacity and expertise to play a crucial role in the country's recovery. The International Ukraine Recovery Conference, taking place in Berlin on June 8, 2024, is an opportunity to give them the visibility they deserve.

However, Ukraine will not be able to cope with this enormous task without the huge support of the international community. For this

purpose, over the next five years, the Robert Bosch Stiftung will make 20 million euros available. We will consolidate our engagement with Ukraine, focusing on the long-term strengthening of Ukrainian civil society and its role in the country's reconstruction.

We stand with Ukraine.

bosch-stiftung.de

Markus Lux

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● Videos on recovery with Vidnova Lab Fellows collected by Commit youtube.com/@wecommit-to/playlists

PARTICIPATORY URBAN DEVELOPMENT



Revival is already going wrong – for example, mistakes are made when municipalities plant trees without consulting the public. It happens that additional money is poured in without ensuring a better quality. There is a challenge to creating conditions to overcome the siloed perception of community reconstruction and consider the interplay in context, or recovery simply will be ineffective.

- Insight based on preliminary research and ecosystem mapping summarized by Lera Lauda, Liubov Rakovytsia and Iryna Solovey

WORK WITH VULNERABLE GROUPS

The war has deepened existing inequalities and has created new ones. Therefore, collective effort is needed to meet the needs of vulnerable population groups. In this regard, providing a long-term, secure, and affordable housing infrastructure, whether by enabling the defense of renters rights or establishing a functional social housing fund, is of crucial importance for the just recovery of Ukraine.

- Vita Shnaider



CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE



Cultural infrastructure can help provide a human dimension to the recovery of Ukraine, celebrate local assets and identities of hromadas, and promote inclusion and (re)integration. Culture is one of the drivers of local development and a means to strengthen human capital and innovation mindset in communities.

- Anna Karnaukh

● Sharings from participants of Community Dialogues collected by Lanka.pro, MC6 and 3MIN Foundation



COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

youtube.com/watch?v=X-wXrOhcPcV0&t=1s

Community Dialogues is a project aimed at clarifying the notion of communities and their role in the development of Ukraine. The collaboration of leaders from different sectors and regions opened up new opportunities for co-creation and understanding of the global impact of small communities on the resilience of Ukraine and its interaction with the world. Through a method of systemic change guided by shared awareness and the attunement tools of open mind, open heart, and open will, Lanka.pro prototyped a shared future and synchronized actions of 14 leaders of the prominent communities in Ukraine from culture, social sector, business and media.



GREEN RECOVERY

We must take into account the context of climate change adaptation and mitigation in the process of Ukraine’s development and reconstruction processes.

- Diana Popfalushi

MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE



In a country scarred by war, therapeutic horticulture plants seeds of recovery, nurturing both the land and our spirits, proving that even in devastation, we can grow resilience and find healing by connecting with nature.

- Inna Datsiuk



EDUCATION

Education is an important base and a starting point for recovery. It shall be different and various, engaging and accessible to everyone. At the same time, education can be used as an instrument to engage communities, for example, through community-based learning.

- Iryna Minkovska

● Sharings from Vita Shnaider, New housing policy

SECURITY FOR RENT

youtube.com/watch?v=cOI0aGTKY38

