

URBAN
GOVERNANCE



Citizenship: Urban Futures in Ukraine



Citizenship: Urban Futures in Ukraine

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alliance of Ukrainian Universities

Report authors

- Anatolii Melnychuk
- Kostyantyn Mezentsev
- Liudmyla Pilipaka
- Olha Shevchuk
- Dominika Verešová

External review

- Mariia Gryshchenko
- Valentyna Poltavets

UN-Habitat

Project management and coordination

- Gwendoline Mennetrier
- Mariana Lessa Voita
- Elena Archipovaite

Editor

- Suzanne Maguire

Design and layout

- Dennis Koech

Citation format

Alliance of Ukrainian Universities. 2026. *Citizenship: Urban Futures in Ukraine*. Thematic Paper Series Informing Urban Recovery Approaches in Ukraine. Kyiv: UN-Habitat Ukraine.

Disclaimer

This publication has been produced under the project *Towards inclusive and resilient urban recovery in Ukraine*, implemented by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). UN-Habitat's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and UN-Habitat cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

Copyright © 2026 UN-Habitat. All rights reserved.

Cover photo: Privoz market Odesa vendors portrait © Jason Perry / <https://www.jasonperryphotography.com/>

Information and inquiries

For further information on Alliance of Ukrainian Universities, see <https://auu.com.ua/en/>

For further information on UN-Habitat, see www.unhabitat.org

For comments, corrections or suggestions, email unhabitat-ukraine@un.org

ABOUT THIS PAPER

Thematic paper series

This paper is one of nine drafted in 2025 by national entities in Ukraine as part of a UN-Habitat-commissioned collection entitled *Thematic Paper Series Informing Urban Recovery Approaches in Ukraine*, comprising:



Urban Governance

- Citizenship: Urban futures in Ukraine
- Municipal Governance Issues in Ukraine
- Decentralization and Recovery: Local Recovery Planning in Ukraine



Urban Land

- Land and Property Issues in Housing and Urban Development in Ukraine



Urban Planning

- Spatial Planning in Ukraine



Urban Housing

- Housing Provision and Outcomes in Ukraine
- Tracing the Path of Social Housing Policy in Ukraine



Urban Skills

- Built Environment Professionals: Education and Practice in Ukraine
- Built Environment Professionals: University Education in Ukraine

Executive summary

This document examines the evolution, current dynamics, and future role of urban citizenship in Ukraine, positioning it as a critical lens for inclusive and democratic urban recovery. Urban citizenship is understood as a set of rights, practices, and forms of participation through which residents engage in shaping urban life, extending beyond formal legal status to encompass lived experience, access, and agency.

The analysis highlights that Ukraine's urban citizenship landscape has been shaped by a complex interplay of historical legacies, institutional reforms, and recent crises. Soviet-era governance structures left a legacy of limited civic participation and strong expectations of state responsibility. Since gaining independence in 1991, and especially in the wake of the 2004 Orange Revolution, the 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity, and the full-scale invasion in 2022, civil society has undergone profound transformation. Civic engagement has shifted from relative passivity to increasingly active, self-organized, and networked forms of participation, often driven by crisis response and volunteerism.

Decentralization reforms since 2014 have further enabled local governance and expanded opportunities for citizen engagement. New planning frameworks and participatory instruments, such as participatory budgeting and public consultations, have been introduced, although their effectiveness varies across cities. Urban citizenship practices differ significantly depending on local governance models, stakeholder dynamics, and levels of institutional capacity. In many cases, participation remains uneven, sometimes formalistic, and constrained by limited trust between authorities, citizens, and other stakeholders.

The report identifies the growing importance of informal civic initiatives and volunteer networks, which have proven highly adaptive and effective, particularly in responding to displacement, humanitarian needs, and service gaps. These networks increasingly

complement or substitute formal governance structures, highlighting both opportunities and challenges for institutional integration. At the same time, the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has reshaped urban communities, raising critical questions about inclusion, access to services, and the definition of urban citizenship.

The urban information ecosystem also plays a central role in shaping participation. While official communication channels exist, access to information remains uneven, with reliance on digital and informal platforms creating both opportunities for engagement and risks related to misinformation and exclusion.

Overall, the report underscores that urban citizenship in Ukraine is transitioning from reactive, protest-driven engagement toward more proactive, collaborative, and institutionalized forms. However, this transition remains incomplete. Strengthening urban recovery will require reinforcing participatory governance, improving access to information, building institutional capacity, and fostering trust among stakeholders. Embedding urban citizenship as a core principle of recovery planning offers a pathway toward more inclusive, resilient, and people-centred urban development in Ukraine.

The document ends by identifying further research needs to strengthen the evidence base for urban recovery in Ukraine. Key priorities that appear to emerge for discussion include improving disaggregated, city-level data on participation and service access; assessing the concrete impact of participatory mechanisms on policy outcomes; and better understanding the urban information ecosystem, including digital access and informal communication channels. Additional investigation may also be useful into the long-term sustainability of civic and volunteer networks – particularly those that emerged during crisis moments – and on how decentralization reforms shape urban citizenship, participation, and governance effectiveness across different local contexts.



Vendor selling pickled goods at a covered market © UN-Habitat Ukraine, 2025

CONTENTS

Executive summary	VI
General introduction to the thematic paper series	X
Introduction.....	1
Methodology.....	4
Evolution of civil society and participatory urban planning: heritage, dynamics, and challenges	6
Urban citizenship: legal, social, and cultural aspects.....	11
Urban information ecosystem	21
Forming a shared vision of the city and the role of media	23
Concluding points.....	25
References	27
Annexes	31

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The multidimensional and multilayered nature of urban citizenship. Adapted from Shamai, 1991.....	2
Figure 2: Degrees of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969)	2
Figure 3: Respondents' distribution by city and stakeholder group.....	4
Figure 4: Key events and processes that define the evolution of urban citizenship and public participation in Ukraine.....	6
Figure 5: Civic activity spring	15
Figure 6: Cumulative number of civil society organizations by activity focus by year in the cities Rivne, Kryvyi Rih, and Vinnytsia. Source: Author search of official registries for civil society organizations ('NACE Section 94') using open source data from Opendatabot https://opendatabot.ua	16

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUU – Alliance of Ukrainian Universities
BMZ – German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development
ENGAGE – Enhance Non-Governmental Actors and Grassroots Engagement
UEFA – Union of European Football Associations
GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
GIS – Geographic Information Systems
IDP – Internally Displaced Person
ISAR – Institute for Sustainable and Active Regions
KIIS – Kyiv International Institute of Sociology
LSGB – Local Self-Government Body
NACE – Nomenclature of Economic Activities
NGO / NGOs – Non-Governmental Organization(s)
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
U-LEAD – Ukraine – Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme
USAID – United States Agency for International Development
USAID/ENGAGE – United States Agency for International Development / Enhance Non-Governmental Actors and Grassroots Engagement
USAID/DOBRE – United States Agency for International Development / Decentralization Offering Better Results and Efficiency

General introduction to the thematic paper series

Four years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine of February 2022 – and close to 12 years since the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and City of Sevastopol in 2014 – war continues to inflict untold suffering on the Ukrainian people.¹ Hostilities since 2022² have caused widespread damage and destruction to Ukraine's built environment – from housing, utilities, and transport networks, to social infrastructure and cultural assets. In this compound crisis of urban systems, many cities have shifted focus from long-term development to continuous emergency repair and risk management. Most recent estimates put the cost of reconstruction and recovery at 587.7 billion USD – a figure that has grown year on year since 2022. The sector incurring highest damage in dollar terms is housing: 14 per cent of the national housing stock, affecting some 3 million households, has been damaged or destroyed, requiring 61.1 billion USD for reconstruction and recovery needs.³ As at January 2026, around 3.7 million people have been displaced within Ukraine since 2022, with a further 5.8 million now refugees outside the country. This comes in the context of an earlier wave of conflict-related disruption and displacement from 2014.⁴

In a country that is 70 per cent urban by population,⁵ Ukraine's cities are central to both crisis and recovery. Total recovery and reconstruction needs are spatially concentrated in frontline areas and major urban oblasts.⁶ Urban centres are 'facing both supply constraints and high demand from displaced populations'.⁷ There is an urgent and pressing imperative to respond to impacts on the built environment and critical infrastructure amidst

large-scale humanitarian need. Even as hostilities continue and despite funding constraints, the Ukrainian Government has a strong ambition to 'build back better' – including a desire to revitalize existing towns and neighbourhoods through area-based approaches that support local-level investment and contribute to recovery,⁸ as flagged by the most recent Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment 5.⁹ The Assessment also highlighted that effective recovery planning requires reforms that enhance the institutional and technical capacity of the country's public sector to prepare, implement and monitor investment projects.¹⁰ Strengthened data collection and research is identified as one of the main priorities for a durable recovery.¹¹

Addressing the challenges now facing Ukraine demands a long-term analytical perspective stretching back even earlier than 2014 – to factor in Soviet and post-Soviet structural legacies that continue to fundamentally shape the conditions, constraints, and opportunities facing contemporary urban recovery planning. In particular, Ukraine's post-1991 transition produced privatized housing systems with fragmented ownership and maintenance backlogs, aging and underinvested infrastructure, deindustrialized urban economies and shrinking city dynamics, evolving decentralization reforms, and an increasingly mobilized civil society with expectations for democratic governance.

In this historical context, national, sub-national and sectoral recovery strategies need to be developed and implemented in ways that also embed measures to build capacity within the built environment professions.

-
- 1 In terms of mortalities, hostilities since 2022 have also left over 15,000 civilians dead, and injured over 41,000 others. (OHCHR, 2026).
 - 2 World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations (2026)
 - 3 The most recent Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment 5 indicates that 74 per cent of total damage since 2022 occurred in 4 sectors: housing (requiring 61.1 billion USD for reconstruction and recovery needs over the 10-year period 2026–2035; transport (40.3 billion USD); energy (24.8 billion USD); commerce and industry (19.2 billion USD). (Government of Ukraine, World Bank Group, European Commission & United Nations, 2026 p24). As the report notes, 'The total needs include expenses related to rebuilding with improved standards (...) and account for inflationary pressures' (World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations, 2026 p30).
 - 4 Ukraine already had the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Europe as at July 2021, with over 1.4 million people fleeing (Mikheieva & Kuznetsova, 2023 [for IOM]).
 - 5 World Bank Group (n.d.) (2023 figures)
 - 6 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026 p27)
 - 7 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026 p24)
 - 8 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026 p54)
 - 9 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026)
 - 10 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026, p11)
 - 11 World Bank Group, Government of Ukraine, European Commission, United Nations (2026, p42)

The war has affected the availability of Ukrainian expertise within urban development, which was already scarce pre-war. This presents a real risk to the Government's widely supported aim to build back better. While several organizations have emerged to support capacity development in Ukraine on urban and territorial development and management, access to contextually relevant knowledge and best practices on these issues is still limited.

In response to urban recovery needs, UN-Habitat collaborates with the Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, providing strategy and policy advice. In line with its mandate to promote socially and environmentally sustainable and resilient towns and cities, UN-Habitat supported a variety of not-for-profit and public Ukrainian entities to produce thematic documents on nine inter-related aspects of Ukraine's built environment. Each document considers the historical context and key issues of each topic in relation to urban recovery, presenting authors' valuable understandings of the respective topic.

Under the theme **Urban Governance**, the current document *'Citizenship: Urban futures in Ukraine'* examines how civic participation and citizenship may interplay with inclusive and democratic urban recovery processes. The document *'Municipal Governance Issues in Ukraine'* identifies institutional and administrative features as well as opportunities and constraints affecting municipalities' capacity to engage with recovery. The document *'Decentralization and Recovery: Local Recovery Planning in Ukraine'* assesses how historic decentralization reform has shaped the role of local self-government bodies in planning and implementing recovery. Under the theme of **Urban Land**, the document *'Land and Property Issues in Housing and Urban Development in Ukraine'* covers the evolution of land ownership and property rights issues including in terms of their criticality to reconstruction and housing redevelopment. Under the theme of **Urban Planning**, the document *'Spatial Planning in Ukraine'* sets out the planning environment and associated frameworks guiding coordinated spatial reconstruction across national, regional, and local levels. Under the theme of **Urban Housing**, the document *'Housing Provision and Outcomes in Ukraine'* examines

mechanisms through which housing is financed, delivered, and regulated, and is complemented by the document *'Tracing the Path of Social Housing in Ukraine'* which explores the evolution of social housing and implications for expanding affordable housing provision. Under the final theme, **Urban Skills**, the document *'Built Environment Professionals: Education and Practice in Ukraine'* assesses the professional capacity available to plan, design, and implement urban reconstruction, while the document *'Built Environment Professionals: University Education in Ukraine'* evaluates higher education systems preparing future built environment professionals for reconstruction and urban development.

While many documents on recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine start from accounts of damage from 2014 and 2022, this series takes a longer perspective, actively exploring the selected themes across the Soviet and post-Soviet transition and reform periods.

Collectively, the series conveys the voices of academics, practitioners and civil society activists from diverse disciplines and backgrounds, representing local expert knowledge and experience rooted in the Ukrainian context. They offer a multi-dimensional diagnostic foundation and common language to inform evolving and multi-level discussions on the country's urban challenges and opportunities, as well as options for the future and how Ukraine might achieve them. In particular, the series aims to contribute to the continuing processes of decentralization and democratization. If decisions about towns and cities are to be driven locally and with context sensitivity, a wider literacy and shared understanding regarding the built environment, including its planning and management, is needed. The thematic documents respond to this need, increasing the availability and accessibility of knowledge on urban topics, and providing extensive references for further reading. UN-Habitat hopes the series will serve as a knowledge resource for policymakers, local officials, practitioners, development partners, researchers engaged in Ukraine's urban recovery, as well as general readers; and will contribute to recovery discourse, processes and outcomes that are context-appropriate, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

Introduction

Urban citizenship denotes the set of rights, entitlements, and practices of participation through which individuals and groups claim membership and exercise agency in the governance and social life of the city, often extending beyond or challenging¹² the boundaries of state-based citizenship. In urban crisis-affected settings like Ukraine, it offers a normative and practical lens¹³ for urban recovery planning that highlights place-based belonging, equity, and inclusion, and recognizes formal and informal forms of citizenship, civic responsibility, engagement, participatory governance, and accountability at city level. It thus emerges not only from individuals' legal status but also from enacted patterns of access and participation in specific locations. This strong context-dependence means that practices vary not only between countries, but between cities. In contrast to national citizenship which is defined primarily by legal status and state membership, urban citizenship is better characterized by its practice rather than solely by what is legally granted.¹⁴

This paper examines urban citizenship primarily in contexts of social transformation and urban renewal in Ukraine. In a broad sense, city residents are viewed as participants in urban life who are entitled to access rights, services and opportunities at urban level regardless of formal citizenship or registration status. The multidimensional and multilayered concept of urban citizenship is shown in Figure 1.

- One dimension concerns the degree of citizens' involvement in urban life, city operation, and city management. Various 'layers' may be conceived of (right side of Figure 1), from urban infrastructure (basic and social services) and information about the city to the communal use of urban public spaces and participation in the city's activities, urban policy-making, and urban planning.

- The other dimension pertains to the sense of place. In this case, the 'layers' are formed by belonging, attachment, and commitment to the city (left side of Figure 1).
- Belonging to the city manifests as a feeling of community, emotional connection with the city, and respect for its rules and symbols.
- Attachment means a deep emotional connection, wherein the city is an important part of one's personal identity as well as a living space.
- Commitment to the city means active participation in its life and readiness to invest personal resources (time, abilities, or funds) and even sacrifice something important for public benefit (Shamai, 1991).
- As depicted by the triangle in Figure 1, these dimensions pertain to fewer urban residents according to the order in which they are presented.

Public participation can empower community members with a voice in local development, enhancing civic engagement, strengthening social ties, and fostering cohesion—ultimately making the community stronger and more resilient (Pasyuta et al., 2023). The authors' previous research as well as interviews conducted for the current document corroborate that multi-stakeholder urban development projects are perceived to be of key importance to communities' consolidation, involvement level, and urban citizenship consciousness. While generating ideas and implementing projects, residents self-organize, become aware of their right to the city and their ability to influence urban development. Combined, these shape citizens' political stance, decision-making on electoral process participation, and propensity to elect and be elected – with implications particularly for local elections.

12 An important entry point of urban citizenship inquiry are the 'grey spaces' of urban informality, particularly as regards persons of illegal or marginalized status and how this intersects with residence and employment – linked to the related concept of 'defensive urban citizenship' where groups assert, protect, or defend their right to the city (Yiftachel, 2009; Yiftachel, 2015).

13 The lens references diverse concerns: Yiftachel notes that urban citizenship literature spans a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary research themes including political inclusion/exclusion, rights, scaling, collective mobilization, and the shaping of communities, identities, and policies resulting from city-making (Yiftachel, 2015).

14 In this sense, urban citizenship can be understood as a context-driven, community-specific, and grassroots-related phenomenon showing a fragmented nature within a given country (Blokland et al., 2015).

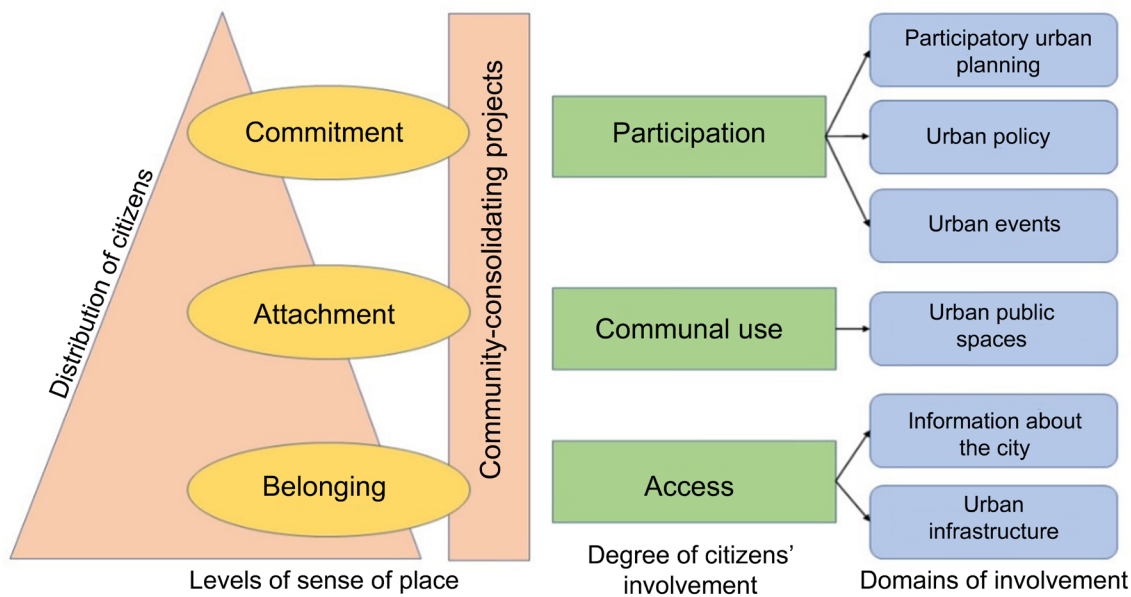


Figure 1: The multidimensional and multilayered nature of urban citizenship. Adapted from Shamai, 1991.

UKRAINE CONTEXT

The Ukrainian context is often presented in an overly simplistic manner, with urban citizenship labelled as 'typically post-socialist', referencing the country's new independent status and the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) from 1991. Herein, the nature of participatory planning is characterized as falling on the lower, less meaningful steps of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation¹⁵ (Arnstein, 1969, Figure 2), i.e. a mix of practices combining Soviet heritage with a layer of neoliberal capitalistic city development on top, positioned between the 'Therapy' and 'Informing' rungs of the ladder.

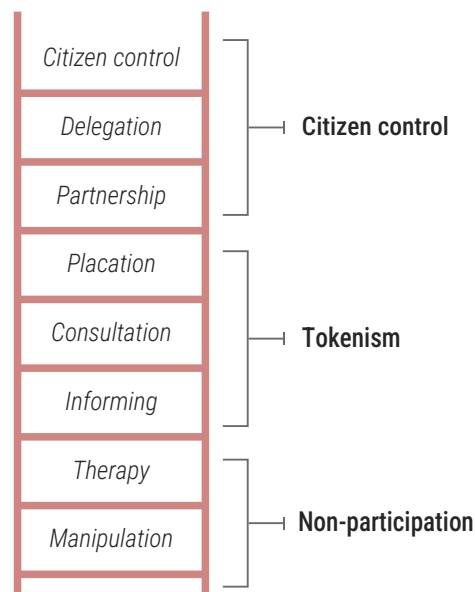


Figure 2: Degrees of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969)

¹⁵ Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (Figure 2) is a conceptual framework that describes different levels of citizen participation in decision-making, ranging from non-participation to full citizen control. It is often used to assess the quality of participation, ranging from being consulted performatively to having effective decision-making power. Rungs are: Non-participation (manipulation, therapy); Tokenism (informing, consultation, placation); Citizen control (partnership, delegated power, citizen control).

The persistent influence of Soviet past is intertwined with rather rigid and pragmatic business interests. The Soviet past is felt everywhere: from social housing distribution practices – with unequal effects across different social groups; and community subbotniks - voluntary community clean-up and maintenance days organized in residential block grounds; to the lack of desire or ideas to rethink the planning of most regional and local centres' main squares; nostalgia for popular Soviet-era locations (the 'best' cinemas, or parks full of standard sculptural compositions where generations of urban residents take family photos) (Mezentsev et al., 2024); and the expectation that city authorities will paternalistically take responsibility for resolving communities' local problems. This all intersects with the chaotic development of brownfield and greenfield spaces, compaction of residential areas, commercialization of public spaces, and informal alliances between city authorities and local businesses.

However, there are examples of more meaningful involvement that - in Arnstein's terms - could be classed as 'Consultation' (Figure 2), even if these are only sometimes formal in nature. In this regard, it is generally the political will of local authorities to foster active citizen involvement in decision-making. Even before Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, some cities had introduced impactful participation instruments such as participatory budgeting, suggesting that Ukraine's position on Arnstein's ladder likely varies from city to city.

While international models of participation have often been adapted for application in Ukraine, there have also been valuable examples of collaboration in which European planners worked alongside Ukrainian specialists to introduce new planning instruments in context-sensitive and locally responsive ways.



People browsing a flea market in an old building in Podil, Kyiv © UN-Habitat Ukraine, 2025

Methodology

SUMMARY OF APPROACH

The key research question is how urban citizenship and participatory planning have evolved in and been shaped by Ukrainian cities. While an exhaustive answer is not claimed, it is endeavoured to go beyond the stereotypical view outlined above to demonstrate the diversity of urban citizenships and associated participatory practices in Ukraine across different local contexts.

The methodology incorporates primary and secondary data-gathering comprising three complementary components: expert interviews, a media screening, and a review of academic and other literature.

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

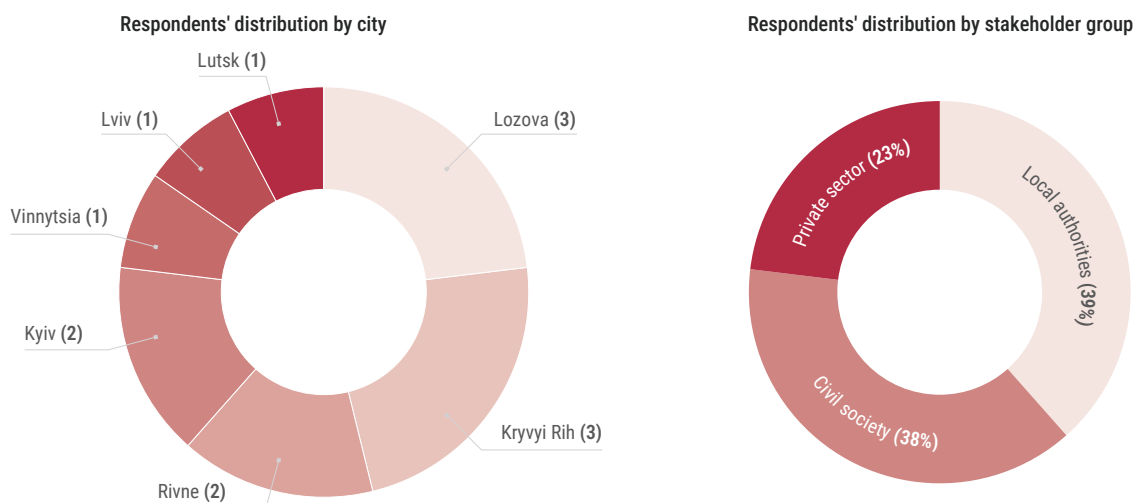


Figure 3: Respondents' distribution by city and stakeholder group

Thirteen interviews (Annex 1) were conducted in March 2025, each lasting around 45 minutes. Interviewees comprised representatives of local authorities (including municipal governance bodies, and urban development institutions), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and urban planners engaged in projects aimed at fostering community consolidation, with respondents drawn from seven cities (Figure 3).

The semi-structured interview format (Annex 2) included questions on participation policy, on the participation process, and invited illustration of responses with case examples. Interviewees consented to publication of their names and responses. Responses are distributed across the main document, with further detailed perspectives provided in Annex 3.

MEDIA SCREENING

A media screening of local web resources dating back five years was conducted to identify projects and events that helped bolster urban citizenship by appealing to residents' sense of place. This horizon was chosen with reference to the completion of administrative-territorial reforms¹⁶ in 2020, which expanded authority, responsibilities, and budgetary resources for local authorities. The media screening focused on five cities: Kyiv, Rivne, Vinnytsia, Kryvyi Rih, and Lozova (Kharkiv Oblast). Cities were selected to include those with a range of administrative statuses and population sizes, as well as for their prior familiarity to the research team undertaking data-gathering in a limited time period.

¹⁶ In 2020 Ukraine adopted legislation for major administrative-territorial reforms as part of a long-running decentralization and local government restructuring process.

Selected media outlets (online news portals, thematic platforms, television and Telegram channels etc.) were screened to identify relevant civic initiatives using keywords including 'community', 'social project', 'civic influence', 'activism', 'cohesion', 'volunteering', 'civic stance', 'public', 'local democracy', 'participation tools', and 'urban citizenship'. Media outlets were primarily in Ukrainian.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A desk review was conducted of academic and grey literature on the theme of urban citizenship and participation focused in particular on Ukraine.

WORKSHOP TO REVIEW PRELIMINARY RESULTS

As for other documents in the current series, a workshop entitled *Urban Citizenship and Participatory Planning*¹⁷ was run to present the document in outline, review preliminary results and gain feedback.¹⁸ Convening on 21 March 2025, the workshop was attended by a multi-stakeholder Ukrainian audience including AUU representatives.



Pedestrians passing market fronts on the historic street Andriyivsky Uzviv, Kyiv © UN-Habitat Ukraine, 2025

17 An article about the workshop appears on the AUU website: [Альянс українських університетів провів два тематичних воркшопи | The Alliance of Ukrainian Universities](#)

18 The workshop focused on the interconnections between citizenship and urban life, the socio-cultural context of urban citizenship in Ukraine, drivers of urban community formation, and the development of the city's information ecosystem including the circulation of information within and about cities, channels for informing citizens about urban issues, and access to open data. Participant consensus informed the research, particularly on how urban activism is driving transformation and fostering new institutions for citizen engagement and information dissemination, such as communication strategies, participatory budgeting, stakeholder consultations, and independent communication platforms.

Evolution of civil society and participatory urban planning: heritage, dynamics, and challenges

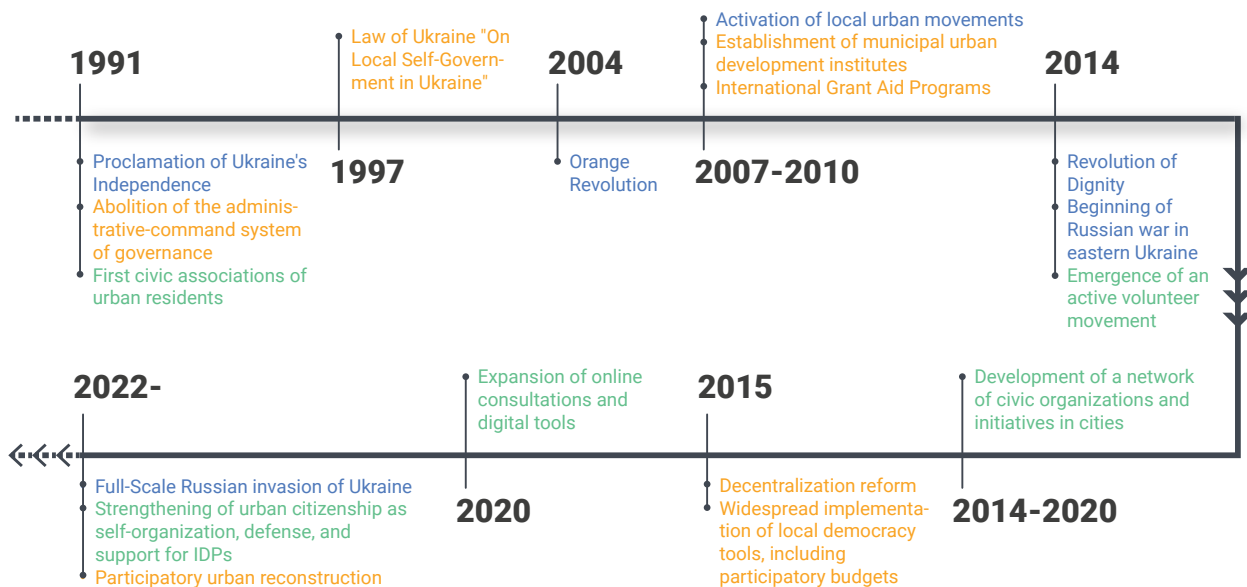


Figure 4: Key events and processes that define the evolution of urban citizenship and public participation in Ukraine

Efforts to address socio-spatial inequalities inherited from Soviet urban development gained momentum after the post-1991 dismantling of centralized administrative governance, although many institutional practices and spatial patterns proved persistent. Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991 created the institutional conditions for subsequent democratization, including the gradual emergence of local self-government (Figure 3). Cities acquired new roles in developing local governance. The increasing delegation of power to the local tier created a functional demand for territorial and administrative structure redesign.

Reforms opened access to resources, including financing, for territorial communities - particularly urban ones - which started assembling management teams. A new planning document architecture and public participation instruments were also established. A policy framework called a *Territorial Community Development Strategy* was legislatively instated as a mandatory medium-term planning document at the local level, and comprehensive planning of spatial development was introduced. Integrated and participatory approaches to planning have become an increasingly prominent principle of local governance in Ukraine, solidifying governmental methods and

recommendations in regard to local-level development planning (Lytvynchuk et al., 2022; Anisimov et al., 2024).

ENDURING INFLUENCE OF SOVIET (SOCIALIST) HERITAGE

Civil society mobilization was constrained in former socialist countries because of the administrative command system. Ideological, administrative, and economic barriers to civic initiatives resulted in weak civic activity - with private members of civic organizations pursuing their interests by means of self-organization in spite of Communist Party control (Buchowski, 1996; Bitušíková, 2015) - and a degree of indifference to urban development and planning. That indifference became a consequential heritage in post-Soviet societies, and Ukraine is no exception, as corroborated by interviewees for the current paper.

The Soviet administrative system was geared toward suppressing initiative; citizen opinion was subject to economic and ideological expedience, and when it came to planning, professional expertise trumped the views of urban space users. Strategic planning was non-existent on the local level. Against this backdrop, interviewees for the current paper highlighted that people today participate in planning with some distrust,

often perceiving involvement in urban planning-related community consultation as a mere formality.

The lack of trust in city authorities and even in civic associations meant that civil society in Ukraine remained weak and insufficiently institutionalized for a protracted period up until the early 2000s (Stepanenko, 2006). Thereafter, the situation radically changed with the progressive loss of Soviet legacy influence. The comparison of national public opinion polls conducted by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) in 2012 and 2015 reveals a substantial increase of trust in civic organizations. While in 2012 only 27.1 per cent trusted them and 29.4 per cent did not (a negative trust balance of -2.3 per cent), by 2015 trust levels rose to 34.5 per cent while non-trust dropped to 21 per cent (a positive trust balance of +13.5 per cent).¹⁹ A more recent poll (Razumkov Centre, 2025) benchmarked the level of trust in public organizations generally at 60 per cent, with trust in the residents' city mayor reaching 51 per cent.

In the 1990s, the weakness of Ukrainian civil society was evident in the fragmented and 'moderate' nature of civil activity in the urban space; dispersed and divergent interests within local communities; the 'celebration of individualism'; as well as scepticism about the effectiveness of urban public activism (Mezentsev et al., 2017). Urban residents mostly preferred to observe rather than participate in urban development and planning. At the same time and in contrast, cities in Soviet times became places where relatively powerful dissident and anti-Soviet movements emerged, striving to protect interests and assert civil rights (e.g. Ukrainian Helsinki Group²⁰). Therefore, Soviet heritage can be viewed in two ways: in terms of the weakness and passivity of local communities on one hand, and on the other, in terms of the charismatic civic leaders and activists who assumed risks to self-organize despite central control.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the active part of Ukrainian society - which mobilized numerous protests, rallies, hunger strikes, and the defence of Ukrainian identity symbols - was unprepared for the post-revolution development and proper institutionalization of civic movements. Ultimately, these actors came

close to losing the struggle for political power to the former Soviet *nomenklatura*,²¹ who managed to ride the wave of societal demands for pro-Ukrainian rhetoric while consolidating an oligarchic (capitalistic) system of state and local governance that restricted opportunities for broad public participation. The 1990s thus became rather a period of civil lull under the influence of obscure privatization, economic crisis, income-based stratification of society, criminalization, 'oligarchization', and more.

At urban level, the Soviet socialist practice of company towns transformed into the post-Soviet capitalist model. Company towns are those in which one or multiple industrial enterprises dominate the local economy, providing a significant share of its employment, supporting the social sector and, importantly, exert decisive influence over elections (Matsuzato, 2018). Under socialism, it was the responsibility of key industrial plants and factories to build and manage housing and service sector facilities, maintain basic infrastructure, provide social services, provide landscaping and public amenities, and even organize urban residents' leisure in their cities. Following the transition to capitalism, these enterprises and their managers (termed 'red directors') continued fulfilling a large share of these civil obligations, which gave them leverage to win elections easily. In this city context, communities came to rely heavily on the decisions of municipal authorities (which entirely depended on local oligarchs or red directors) and expected them to satisfy their needs in exchange for political support and civil passivity. This may be considered an informal social contract between urban residents and authorities. Only the crisis of industrial production, deindustrialization, and, eventually, the Russo-Ukrainian War disrupted that status quo. In the face of these challenges, such cities - despite initial passivity - managed to radically change the trajectory of urban citizenship and public participation.

TRANSFER OF THE WESTERN MODEL OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND 'NGOIZATION'

Another process influencing the early post-Soviet development of Ukrainian cities in the 1990s is related to the desire of Western countries to export their civil

19 KIIS (2012, 2015)

20 [Ukrainian Helsinki Group \(2006\)](#)

21 In the USSR, key jobs in government, industry, education, media, and the military could be filled only with approval from the Communist Party. The official lists of these positions, and the approved candidates, were called the *nomenklatura*.

society model without due regard to the influence of the Soviet legacy and the Ukrainian context (e.g. Stewart, 2009). As a result, the process of 'NGOization' gathered pace, referencing the rise in the number of NGOs funded by foreign donors to support democracy, establish dialogue between civil society and the state, and make civil society an effective partner in solving urban issues.

In some cases, however, NGOs became a means of securing lasting financial support rather than a genuine instrument for improving urban planning and management. Such NGOs used desirable terms like transparency and empowerment, establishing dialogue between the authorities and communities, involving vulnerable populations and so on, yet often merely evoked the Western flavour of civil society instead of actually implementing it. While their tangible influence was initially very limited, the phase did pave the way for the eventual rollout of real civic initiatives, supporting the formation of effective urban communities.

FROM INEFFICIENT INSTITUTIONALIZATION TO EFFECTIVE INFORMAL CIVIC MOVEMENTS AND INITIATIVES

Informal civic movements and local initiatives (i.e. those without official registration) often proved more effective than formal ones in achieving their goals. Throughout the 2000s, social media boosted urban civil activity. Informal communication through social media enabled urban residents to self-organize in order to defend their interests in the face of rapid changes in their cities. Some researchers interpreted these processes as the formation of a 'post-civil society', a term suggesting that urban residents' participation modes will be less focused on formal institutions and more on informal social connections (e.g. Marody, 2004).

In a sense, the Orange Revolution of 2004²² became a turning point, showing that Ukrainian civil society can reach internal compromises and agreement to jointly defend its key interests (e.g. Stepanenko & Stewart, 2025). Primarily, the turning point rests

on scaling – that is, when activists' experiences of self-organizing during the Orange Revolution began transferring to the urban level, laying the foundation for numerous civic movements and initiatives in multiple cities. Urban activism centred on guarding residents' interests in the face of challenges such as illegal development projects, destruction of park areas, or commercialization of public spaces. Thus, the Orange Revolution was a crucial catalyst for moving beyond Soviet governance traditions toward more participatory approaches to urban development. It reshaped communities' perceptions of their own agency, reinforcing the idea that citizens who pursue change can influence decisions and achieve visible outcomes. In later years, this dynamic manifested in the regulatory context through the emergence of several civic organizations whose initiatives set examples to follow. For example, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine Decree '*On Ensuring Public Participation in Formation and Implementation of the State Policy*' (2010) and '*On Approval of the Procedure for Public Hearings on Accommodating Public Interests during the Development of Urban Planning Documentation Projects at the Local Level*' (2011); Decree of the President of Ukraine '*On the Strategy of State Policy for the Promotion of the Development of Civil Society in Ukraine and Priority Measures for Its Implementation*' (2012); and the Law of Ukraine '*On Public Associations*' (2013) were passed. The first effective civic initiatives and movements appeared, including 'Save Old Kyiv' (2007) and 'Hostynna Respublika' (2012) in Kyiv; 'Give Oxygen!' in Mariupol (2012); 'Give Way' (2013) and 'Pidzamche Revitalization' (2013) in Lviv; and others.

GROWTH OF VOLUNTEER MOVEMENTS

The 2013 to 2014 Revolution of Dignity²³ and Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 have been the primary catalysts in the development of the volunteer movement in Ukraine. However, growth started even before that. In 2011, the law of Ukraine '*On Volunteer Activity*' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011) was passed. While the rise in volunteer activity in 2011 to 2012 was due to Ukraine hosting part of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Championship matches, after 2014 it became a civil society

22 The Orange Revolution was a wave of mass protests in Ukraine in late 2004 triggered by allegations of large-scale fraud in the presidential election.

23 The Revolution of Dignity was a mass protest movement in 2013 to 2014 that overthrew the president and redirected Ukraine toward European integration, democratic accountability, and expanded civic activism. The initial phase of the protests in late 2013 have been referred to as Euromaidan, named after their location of Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kyiv.

institution (Holovko, 2023). During pre-Championship preparations, 5,500 volunteers were selected from almost 24,000 applications, who then underwent various kinds of training. This new capacity became an important foundation for volunteer self-organization during the later social upheavals.

During the Revolution of Dignity and later the Russian full-scale invasion, Ukrainian civil society demonstrated its ability to consolidate and mobilize efforts, with state bodies in contrast somewhat unprepared to react effectively to the challenges of social disturbances. Within a short time frame, a network of civil initiatives and associations emerged to tackle urgent issues the country and its cities had never faced before. These groups took on a considerable share of the effort to assist internally displaced persons, supporting the military and providing aid to the wounded (Horielov & Korniiievskiy, 2015).

The rise in activity of volunteer movements was due to a number of key factors: (a) a domestic political crisis causing imbalance in the public administration system, lack of effective administrative decisions, and inadequate resource capabilities and (b) external aggression exacerbating the mismatch between the government's ability to function and the necessity of ensuring citizens' basic needs (Horielov & Korniiievskiy, 2015). A further conducive factor was (c) the sufficient institutionalization of civil society and its capabilities.

The scale of participation in volunteer movements increased dramatically. Whereas earlier only a small number of urban residents volunteered and their efforts remained fragmented and time-limited, they now began to coordinate their activities and work toward shared goals (Rainchuk, 2022). While in 2021 only five per cent of the adult population partook in volunteering (Zagoriy Foundation, 2021), in early 2023 as much as 61 per cent participated as volunteers to help the Armed Forces of Ukraine or their compatriots (Barsukova, 2023). During the war, many local volunteer initiatives grew into sprawling networks. For example, the NGO Building Ukraine Together initially established in 2014 to support restoration of damaged houses developed by 2024 into a network of cells in 16 cities across Ukraine uniting around 6,300 volunteers (Building Ukraine Together, 2024).

Interviewee Olena Denysenko, an expert, researcher, and Dean at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, noted that volunteerism at local level has enabled mobilization for national level issues post-2022 – even

as that shift since 2022 may have undermined local level citizen engagement:

Volunteer movement became a basis for organization of many processes at the national and local levels. The events of 2022 changed the potential of local activism: with a large part of activists transitioning to the national level, the local level started sinking. The active community started weakening at the local level.

– Olena Denysenko,
Dean at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

Similarly, volunteers mobilized in support of the military have been observed to engage as volunteers in other thematic issues. As interviewee Olha Lyashchuk, a Project Coordinator at the Ecoclub NGO emphasizes, Ukraine's volunteer movement has yielded

... activists who expand their scope of activity beyond volunteer help to the military. Now they have other areas of interest, including ecology or environmental impact.

– Olha Lyashchuk,
Project Coordinator at the Ecoclub NGO, Specialist in
Community Adaptation to Climate Change

Summarily, volunteering in Ukraine appears to develop feelings of responsibility and encourages participation in multiple themes and geographic scales of involvement.

After the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022, internally displaced persons (IDPs) became a significant factor in the transformation of Ukrainian cities. Their access to civil rights, data, and services became a test of local authorities' inclusivity and formal bodies' crisis response capacity. Despite legislative guarantees, in practice, NGOs working to support IDPs report that they encounter bureaucratic barriers, information shortage, as well as unequal access to housing, healthcare, and social services. Against this backdrop, volunteer, activist, and professional communities and associated informal networks started emerging in cities in support of the displaced from 2022, rapidly addressing the gap in official aid. Such grassroots initiatives often show more effectiveness than formal institutions in their impact,

benefiting from their flexibility, horizontal organization, and local proximity to community needs. Pragmatic coordination mechanisms were established between government bodies and informal networks in some cities, including the joint administering of humanitarian aid, shelter management, and the establishment of employment or education platforms. On the demand side, IDPs are asserting their claims as rights-bearing citizens. As interviewee Tetiana Voloshyna, the Deputy Director for Strategic Development and Innovation at Vinnytsia's City Council's Institute of Urban Development notes, some displaced persons are insisting on being referred to not as IDPs but as the new Vinnytsia residents.

By taking into consideration IDPs' voices, cities are addressing pressing displacement-related issues while also building capacity to progress on sustainable development and institutional renewal. Socialization and support for IDPs' adaptation in urban centres fosters unity and community consolidation; this is important not least as the influx of IDPs has in instances produced tensions in host urban communities, particularly where access to housing, jobs, and social services is perceived to be limited.

In this context, the very logic of public participation is transformed, with NGOs moving beyond auxiliary roles to act as autonomous participants in shaping urban development. They launch new initiatives, join development strategies, and shape the vision of the city.

THE IMPACTS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM ON LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

Decentralization laid the foundation for the system of local government bodies' independent and effective operation.²⁴ The active phase of decentralization processes started in Ukraine in 2014, considered one of the key moments for what was termed the Reanimation Reform Package - a coalition of Ukrainian civil society organizations and experts created in 2014 right after the Revolution of Dignity. It aimed

to establish efficient local governance, create and maintain a proper living environment, provide high quality and accessible public services, support the formation of direct democracy institutes, and align the state's interests with those of territorial communities. It provided local authorities with resources and instruments to influence the development of its communities. A procedure for voluntary amalgamation of communities was employed to avoid imposing decentralization-related changes in Ukraine's administrative and territorial structure in a top down way, and to alleviate local level opposition to reforms. Although hard to implement in practice, the decision was forward-looking and aimed to catalyze the development of the newly formed communities. This development was further encouraged by the release of public initiatives at local level.

An average of 200 communities per year were voluntarily created over five years as a result. The local self-government bodies (LSGBs) thus formed took on a substantial share of delegated power and actively conducted project efforts. In 2020, the administrative and territorial reform was completed by an administrative decision. On one hand, it was an achievement on the part of the Ukrainian government to have managed to ensure equal conditions for development at local level. On the other hand, however, over 120 voluntarily established communities were later terminated, and trust between the levels of state government suffered (Melnychuk & Hanichenko, 2020). Still, the administrative-territorial reforms of 2015 to 2020, as much as the rise of civil society and European integration, became a potent driver of civil engagement in planning and decision-making at the local level. Progressive, mostly urban, communities started actively implementing new participation instruments to divide development responsibilities between the LSGBs and communities (Melnychuk et al., 2021). According to a national civil engagement poll run by a USAID/ENGAGE programme in late 2020, every third Ukrainian took part in the life of their community regularly, whereas only 17 per cent were engaged in NGOs (USAID/ENGAGE, 2020).

24 Decentralization (n.d.) Website. <https://decentralization.ua/>

Urban citizenship: legal, social, and cultural aspects

LEGAL FOUNDATIONS OF URBAN CITIZENSHIP

The legal foundations of urban citizenship in Ukraine are formed at the confluence of general civil status, local government powers, and the participatory instruments available to urban residents. Although the concept of urban citizenship is not explicitly enshrined in legislation, its substance is revealed through a range of normative legal acts.

The first legislative foundations were laid in the 1990s. First and foremost, urban citizenship is defined by the Constitution of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1996) that guarantees citizens' participation in state and local governance. The Law of Ukraine 'On Local Self-Government in Ukraine' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1997) specifies forms of direct participation of citizens in local self-government. The Law of Ukraine 'On Citizens' Appeals' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1996) regulates the submission of appeals, petitions, and complaints to public authorities.

Over time, a system of urban citizenship legal frameworks has developed, chiefly through the Law of Ukraine 'On Bodies of Self-Organization of the Population' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2001), which regulates the activities of house, street, and other community committees, and the Law of Ukraine 'On Access to Public Information' (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011), which ensures the transparency of local government activities.

In recent years, the legal foundations of urban citizenship in Ukraine have undergone significant changes, particularly in the realms of public participation, urban planning, and freedom of expression (Lytvynchuk et al., 2022; Anisimov et al., 2024).

Local normative legal acts—such as community charters, e-governance and participatory budgeting frameworks, or tactical urbanism provisions—that specify the corresponding instruments of participation constitute another essential component, with their availability, content, and tools varying by city.

SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF URBAN CITIZENSHIP

Urban citizenship is concerned with the rights, duties, and opportunities that arise in the context of city life. The current research shows that the socio-cultural context of urban citizenship in Ukraine is undergoing significant transformation due to post-socialist changes and evolving identities.

Academic studies and popular publications note a shift from passive citizenship to active urban resident engagement in city life. Key indicators of this include urban activism (largely protest- and volunteer-based) and community participation in city governance. Interviewees for the current document emphasized a change in perceptions of urban identity: residents increasingly value local heritage and people-oriented urban spaces rather than ideological Soviet symbols.

The formation of urban citizenship, its intensity and expression in Ukraine are usually considered through the prism of multiple inter-related concepts.

- The first relates to the *right to the city*. Urban citizenship is viewed from the standpoint of residents' ability to influence decision-making in ways that shape the urban environment, with potential to address spatial segregation and socio-spatial injustice. The intensity of urban citizenship is determined by the proportion of citizens engaged in decision-making; this may be manifest in urban residents' involvement in fora like working groups, strategic sessions, and other ongoing discussions. There are substantial differences in these parameters between cities: in some, citizens have more successfully claimed their right to the city, while in others activism is weaker and/or centralized power is stronger.
- The second concept is related to *inclusion in decision-making*. Urban citizenship is viewed from the standpoint of its completeness, i.e. who may be considered an urban citizen and what criteria determine access and inclusion in decision-making on urban development. This concept is

useful for considering inclusion of vulnerable population categories—migrants, IDPs, veterans, persons with disabilities, lower-income groups, and other marginalized urban communities. It is important to understand the degree of agency held by these groups, and how they are perceived by local authorities and by other city residents. For instance, in certain Western Ukrainian cities, various factors enable IDPs to influence the creation of new public spaces in their host cities (Garcia-Ferrari et al., 2024). This, in turn, allows them to maintain ties to their home communities despite their displacement. In some cases, these incentives take the form of social assistance centres organized specifically for IDPs coming from particular cities (e.g. the “I am Mariupol” centres²⁵). Over time, centres like these extend their influence into adjacent spaces (streets, lanes), where elements of street art appear, depicting occupied or destroyed cities. Another avenue is business relocation, primarily within the service sector. When relocated restaurants, cafés, beauty salons, or shops cluster together and help transform the surrounding public spaces, visual signifiers of the cities from which these businesses originated emerge (Garcia-Ferrari et al., 2024). Another dimension of this matter is the range of services and opportunities to which urban residents have access. For example, several cities have introduced resident cards that entitle holders to specific services or discounts on public transport and in certain establishments. These cards were issued only to permanent residents. On one hand, this stimulates the formation of place-based communities; on the other, it creates a sense of exclusivity that by definition discriminates against other groups: In interviews conducted under a project entitled UKRGEOPOL²⁶

that ran from 2018 to early 2022, IDPs expressed the desire to receive resident cards to become full members of the local community.

- The third concept pertains to *local democracy*. The intensity of urban citizenship is measured by the scale of protests and civic initiatives, their use of various local democratic instruments—participatory budgets, petitions, appeals, and others—and by turnout in local elections. The realization of specific projects, transformations of urban spaces, and shifts in city policies become markers of urban citizenship’s expressiveness. According to interviewees for the current paper, this is especially the case when residents identify positively with the urban space changes implemented, take pride in them, and publicize them. Depending on the maturity of local democratic instruments and practices in cities across Ukraine, different forms of citizen participation prevail—formal (local elections, public hearings or consultations on urban planning, complaints and petitions) and informal (civic initiatives, street protests, community associations, and self-organization). Digital participation—both formal (through e-petition platforms, participatory budgeting portals, and online consultations) and informal (local community chats, online campaigns, and flash mobs) is a further medium to support the exercise of citizenship.

Meaningful urban citizenship is achieved when residents wield real power, not merely a symbolic ability to express opinions; and when participation goes beyond ‘decorative democracy’ where authorities consult citizens only superficially without heeding their interests (Purcell, 2008).

25 “I am Mariupol” centres are a nationwide network of support hubs created to help residents of Mariupol who were forced to leave the city after Russia’s destruction and occupation of it in 2022.

26 UKRGEOPOL is a Ukrainian academic research project that explores urban policy issues in what it terms Ukraine’s ‘geopolitical fault-line cities’, focusing on policy areas that are most exposed to the country’s geopolitical and foreign policy choices. <https://geokyiv.org/ukrgeopol>

INITIATIVES TOWARD EMPOWERING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Initiatives focused on empowering local communities became much more active in Ukraine after 2014, and even more so after 2022, with educational programmes becoming the key instrument for supporting civic activity. Ukrainian organizations like CANactions,²⁷ Cedos,²⁸ ReStart Ukraine,²⁹ Institute Respublica,³⁰ ISAR Ednannia,³¹ and Ro3kvit³² conduct numerous training sessions, workshops, hackathons, and schools for activists, youth, architects, and local officials, addressing topics including public spaces, public participation instruments, spatial planning, and local leadership. Meanwhile, international projects and initiatives supported by such donors as U-LEAD with Europe, GIZ, USAID/DOBRE, UNDP, Council of Europe, and Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility also remain active, implementing community empowerment, urban recovery, digital governance, and inclusive participation programmes.

Universities are also joining in. For example, AUU used the research of territorial communities' needs to develop and implement a range of training programmes (Project Management, Fundraising, Energy Efficiency, Local Economic Development, Spatial Planning, and others) for their representatives under its project 'Enhancing Community Capacity for Reconstruction through Piloting Their Interaction with Universities' (Sherenhovskiy et al., 2024). The format of these programmes varies from basic, beginner-level courses to specialized programmes for public consultation facilitators and participative budgeting moderators. These initiatives foster the formation of local leadership, creation of horizontal networks, and boosting communities' capacities to initiate, discuss, and independently implement changes in their urban environments.

CHANGES IN THE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PARADIGM IN UKRAINE

Despite the overall progress toward more inclusive and participatory urban planning, specific transition trajectories in Ukraine vary substantially across national and local contexts. The diversity of national and local political regimes and institutions must be appreciated to understand the plurality of existing urban planning paradigms (Mezentsev & Gnatiuk, 2021). In Ukraine, three stages of change in the approach to public engagement in urban planning can be identified, all of which reflect the current state of planning culture and influence the institutionalization of urban citizenship. Ukrainian cities are currently at different stages when it comes to their ability to engage urban residents in planning and decision-making processes at the local level.

- The first stage is *formal engagement in urban planning*. It involves the introduction of compulsory public hearings and discussions with the involvement of urban residents in working groups. This stage exhibits relatively low civic activity, with urban residents engaged at the point of pre-developed urban planning solutions. Participants are mainly informed about the formulated strategic development principles, measures to be taken, and projects, without any upstream public discussions. Although the engagement of urban residents in urban planning was deemed compulsory in the legal and procedural respects, its formal nature late in the process curtails the opportunity to increase the effectiveness of planning through public engagement.
- The second stage—*activist-driven informal engagement in urban planning*—was prompted by changes in urban planning related to

27 CANactions School for Urban Studies is a Ukrainian non-profit organization focused on urban development, architecture, education, and participatory city-making.

28 Centre for Society Research, a Ukrainian independent think tank focused on urban development, housing policy, education, and social equality.

29 ReStart Ukraine is a Ukrainian urban initiative focused on post-war recovery, sustainable reconstruction, and training a new generation of urban professionals.

30 Institute Respublica is a Ukrainian civil society organization and think tank that promotes democracy, political accountability, and citizen participation in governance.

31 Ukrainian civil society support organization that strengthens non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community initiatives, and democratic participation.

32 Ro3kvit is the Urban Coalition for Ukraine, an international network of Ukrainian and foreign urban professionals working on post-war recovery, spatial planning, and sustainable reconstruction of Ukrainian cities.

administrative-territorial reforms of 2015 to 2020, which adapted planning and participation instruments at the legislative level. Compulsory strategic and budgetary planning was introduced at local level, and the customary settlement Master Plan was replaced with a Comprehensive Spatial Development Plan, Integrated Development Concepts, and other documents supporting the implementation of integrated and participatory planning approaches. Engagement of urban residents became a common practice, even though its scale remains modest (Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2020). The legislation addressed the assembly of a planning documentation development working group as well as public participation forms and measures. Meanwhile, the branching of instruments and the formation of urban planning culture at the local level took place (Lytvynchuk et al., 2022).

- The third stage is *institutionalization of the urban planning process*, in which the cities are continuously engaged in ongoing planning, and the system of mandatory and non-mandatory planning documentation and participatory documents is expanded and diversified. Local authorities are incentivized to draw on civic input and share responsibility for the community's development. Diverse local democracy instruments are introduced, entailing a need for a legal framework to regulate the public participation processes at the local level (regulations on working groups, public hearings, communication strategies, and more) and the formation of institutions to provide organization support for planning processes and establish platforms to engage urban residents, e.g. urban development institutes/agencies or other communication platforms for local government, businesses, and civic activists.

The effectiveness of public participation interplays with the nature of media coverage and society's prevalent values, with the latter shaping behavioural models and the array of approaches and instruments available to the organized civil society to achieve its goals.

A spatial dimension to stakeholder engagement has been discerned for Ukraine, in terms of the intensity and expression of urban citizenship between cities.

- In large cities (Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv), there is a professionalization of activism, growth of

analytical centres, urban platforms, and a culture of critique and participation.

- In medium regional centres (Vinnytsia, Rivne), civic initiatives actively interact with local authorities, though resource limitations and donor dependence are evident.
- In industrial cities (Kryvyi Rih, Zaporizhzhia), civic activity is awakened by environmental challenges, wartime experiences, and social issues.
- In small towns and communities (Lozova), decentralization has spurred the creation of new initiatives, youth councils, and local projects, albeit with limited human resources.
- In front-line cities, volunteer movements and mutual aid prevail, even while communities face instability and psychological burnout.

Overall, civil society is transitioning from reactive protest toward the creation of, and co-participation in shaping, the city's future.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SPRING

Broadly speaking, civic engagement can be categorized into two types: reactive and proactive.

- Reactive initiatives aim to preserve the urban environment by opposing undesirable changes, such as protecting cultural heritage and monuments from demolition or redevelopment.
- In contrast, proactive movements develop their own vision for urban development by proposing new solutions. These include initiatives related to transportation (e.g. creating pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly spaces), social services, and residential areas (vitalization of green zones and aesthetic enhancement of residential buildings, their grounds, and central public spaces).

However, most urban social movements in Ukraine have traditionally focused on addressing the consequences of undesirable changes rather than actively preventing them in the first place.

Based on the analysis of changes in civic engagement in Ukrainian cities, a 'civic engagement spring' metaphor is suggested (Figure 5). In Ukraine, the triggers for urban projects and urban resident engagement have gradually shifted from predominantly reactive motivations (conflict, threat, crisis) to proactive ones (interest, vision, development).

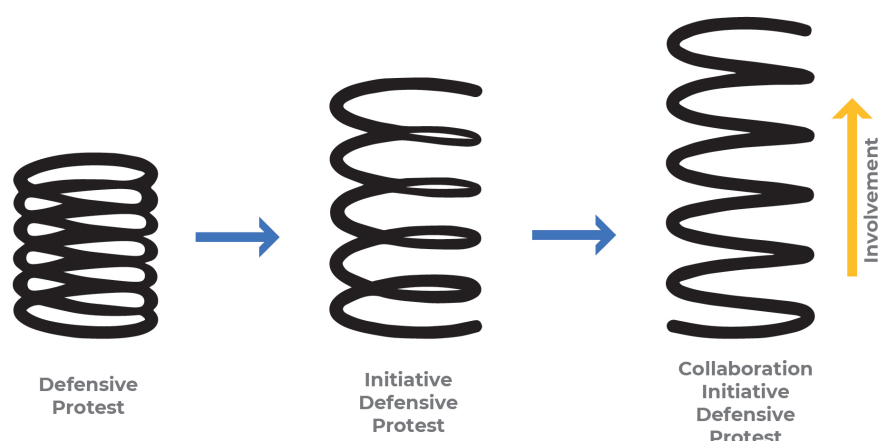


Figure 5: Civic activity spring

During the 1990s, the spring was compressed: passive civic engagement was prompted by 'recent memory' of urban communities. Community engagement in planning was extremely limited if existent at all. Reactive activities emerged sporadically in certain cities in reaction to perceived spatial development injustices and the wish to defend spaces. Following the Orange Revolution, and especially between 2007 and 2010, local urban movements became significantly more active. The spring loosened. Alongside protests and defensive reactions, proactive local initiatives began to emerge. The decentralization reform and subsequent democratization of society released the spring of civic engagement, with citizens in some cities becoming co-creators in city-making, instead of just observers or initiators of individual events and projects.

This evolution suggests how urban participation and collective thinking about the city are transforming. Previously, so-called alarm triggers predominated - threats such as illegal tree felling in parks, the installation of prefabricated trade pavilions on sidewalks, illegal construction, or the closure of a marketplace, library, or hospital. The primary motivation was to defend one's own grounds, street, or history, and resistance became the primary mode of action. This manifested through petitions, protests, public scandals, and media campaigns. The outcome was more often emotional mobilization and short-lived coalitions than sustainable solutions. Now, an increasing number of positive triggers inspire transformation, as interviewees for the current paper emphasize, e.g. the desire to create a new pocket park, open a youth centre, or improve street safety. In such cases, the motivation shifts to environment-building, the forging of new communal meanings, and achieving self-fulfilment through the city. All that happens through cooperation with architects and various workshops, as well as through engagement in participatory

budgeting and other urban initiatives, which fosters mutual trust, strengthens sustainable partnerships, and professionalizes civic influence, as confirmed by interviewees for this paper.

SELF-ORGANIZATION AND COLLECTIVE AGENCY: SOCIAL INITIATIVES, ARTISTIC, CULTURAL, AND OTHER ASSOCIATIONS, AND CIVIC NETWORKS

After Ukraine gained independence, numerous grassroots civic initiatives emerged: artistic, cultural, sporting, and other associations that operated horizontally, engaging the public in active participation and novel interaction models. This is evident in the growing number of civil society organizations registered in the cities of Rivne, Kryvyi Rih, and Vinnytsia from 2000 to 2024 (Figure 6).

Ukrainian civil society is grounded mostly in informal self-organized networks as opposed to only in official institutions. A conspicuous example of self-organized participation is the Orange Revolution of 2004, when spontaneous citizen self-organization created horizontal networks of participation and solidarity. From the Revolution of Dignity (2013 to 2014) to the post-2014 volunteer movement, Ukrainian urban residents have demonstrated growing collective agency through horizontal, community-based activism leveraging digital technologies. Social media has boosted civic activism in cities over the past decade (Mezentsev et al., 2017) and facilitated citizens' self-organization in defending community interests amid urban change. However, urban activism outside formal structures like participatory budgeting often manifests episodically rather than as part of a strategic spatial development plan for the community (Malchykova, 2021; Mezentsev et al., 2020).

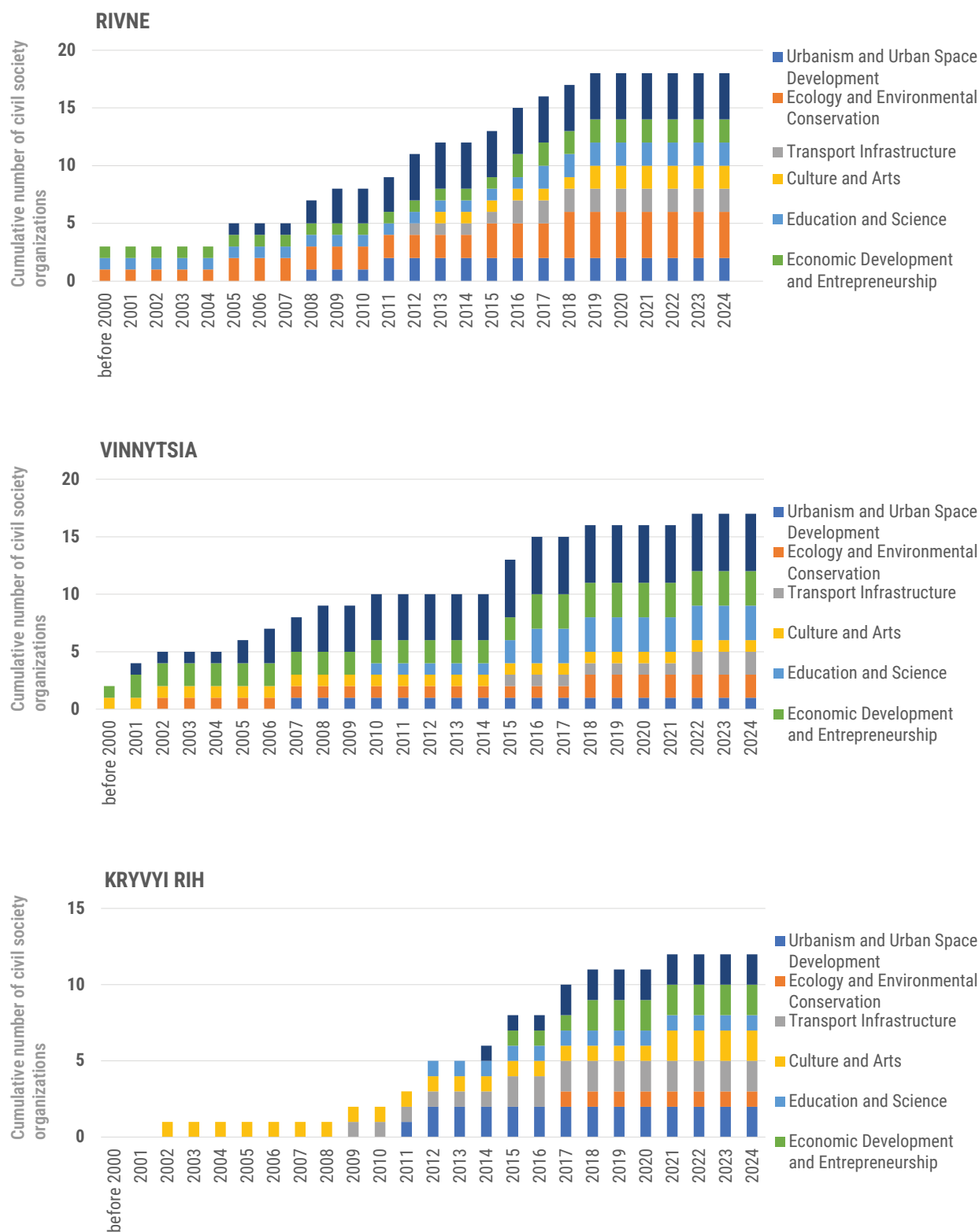


Figure 6: Cumulative number of civil society organizations by activity focus by year in the cities Rivne, Kryvyi Rih, and Vinnytsia. Source: Author search of official registries for civil society organizations ('NACE Section 94') using open source data from Opendatabot <https://opendatabot.ua>

Stakeholders in urban governance

STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION

The advancement of the integrated community development planning paradigm urgently raises the issue of dialogue with stakeholders in relation to overall planning process and solutions. Stakeholder identification focuses on organized entities with legitimacy and authority to represent the interests of a group or agenda in the planning process. These typically include representatives of local self-government bodies, municipal utilities, business associations, entrepreneur councils, local associations, and civil society organizations.

The primary criterion for identifying a stakeholder is their interest in the planning system or individual planning solutions. Stakeholder identification relies on the criteria of interest and influence. The analysis of stakeholders in Ukrainian cities is key to assembling working groups for the development of planning documentation. Typically, urban planning stakeholders include representatives appointed from various municipal departments, local deputies, educational and healthcare networks, cultural institutions, local businesses, key public utilities, veteran and youth organizations, and more. Local media outlets are also considered traditional stakeholders in the urban planning process.

"I see a positive shift in that such notions as 'stakeholder analysis' and 'engaged parties' are no longer unfamiliar to most people working in local self-government; they are now widely understood. Such analyses are conducted while developing strategic documents as well. Depending on the document type or the object of intervention, relevant groups whose interests (...) may be affected must be involved. Our work is focused on identifying these groups and ensuring they are indeed engaged in decision-making."

— Olha Liashchuk,
Project Coordinator at the Ecoclub NGO, Specialist in
Community Adaptation to Climate Change

While interviewed, the representatives of LSGBs and NGOs with experience in citizen engagement emphasized the importance of stakeholder identification processes and confirmed their familiarity

with established methods. The mechanism is generally standardized: once the objectives of the engagement process are clarified, a list of potentially affected parties is compiled. It is essential to understand who stands to gain or lose, who controls resources for change, and who will contribute to implementation. Based on that, primary, secondary, and key stakeholders are determined. LSGB representatives interviewed for the current paper shared insights on compiling a database of community organizations and other stakeholders who could contribute to municipal consultations.

A core element of any participatory process is the identification of all stakeholder categories to communicate with. Effective stakeholder engagement requires the understanding of each group's needs, their level of interest, and their roles, whether as partners, potential opponents, or beneficiaries. Stakeholder engagement occurs throughout all project phases, but the format may vary depending on the stakeholder's role and the stage of the process from active participation to informational engagement.

— Tetiana Voloshyna,
Deputy Director for Strategic Development and Innovation,
Vinnytsia City Council's Urban Development Institute

However, universal stakeholder consultation dilemmas such as favouring some entities over others, finding the optimum communication channel for diverse stakeholders, or achieving meaningful as opposed to tokenistic consultation outcomes remain.

Interviewees for the current paper highlighted the role of local leaders acting as secondary communicators at community level, capable and ready to aid in gathering data from a range of stakeholders. In contrast, the role of *starostas* in consultation processes remains underdetermined in territorial communities. While intended to represent the interests of residents in one or more settlements, a *starosta* is a municipal officer appointed by a local government council on the mayor's recommendation. Dependence on the mayor often compromises the perceived independence and accountability of the role.

MODELS OF URBAN GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING

An analysis of the Ukrainian urban context, informed by the authors' experience and a review of relevant literature, reveals three main models of urban governance and decision-making, depending on which stakeholders exert the greatest influence: the Charismatic Leader Model, the Dominant Business Model, and the Active and Organized Civic Influence Model. The three categories are analytical models and may overlap in practice.

- The *Charismatic Leader* model often centres around the city's mayor. Many chairs of city councils hold strong electoral mandates, which allow them to actively shape and implement urban development programmes. Such communities rely heavily on the accountability and managerial capacity of their leader and associated team. Among this model's features are the leader's multiple consecutive mayoral terms and high media visibility, as well as the popular attribution of city successes and failures directly to the leader. This remains the dominant model of urban governance and decision-making across most Ukrainian cities.
- In the *Dominant Business* model, large employers and major local taxpayers exert disproportionate influence on community's life and development. In some cases, this influence is inherited from the Soviet era and aligns with the 'company town' concept mentioned above. The local executive team tends to prioritize the interests of stakeholders who are important to the city's economy. In effect, the business community influences or even controls the local government's actions to prioritize its interests. This model is common in smaller cities or those with a high concentration of developer activity.
- The *Active and Organized Civic Influence* model is seen in a minority of Ukrainian cities. Here, the community is active, organized, and influential. Decisions by local governments must either pass through a civic filter or face public resistance. When trust between the local council, executive authorities, and the public is low, civic activity may block or delay planning processes and development projects. When trust is established, a more balanced and harmonious urban development is enabled.

These governance models in Ukraine reflect an overall low level of local political culture, where active projects and programmes are replaced with political ones, and instead of stakeholder dialogue and consensus-building, one group tends to dominate the development agenda, whether LSGB, business, or the public.

During planning, we always start with stakeholder analysis and [assess] their potential influence on the project. The public undoubtedly plays one of the most decisive roles because the feedback we receive at the initial stage often determines whether the project moves forward at all. If the community takes a proactive stance, its influence is considerable. Without public participation, any planning process is 100 per cent bound to fail.

— Mariia Burnis,

Deputy Director for Project Management and International Cooperation at the Kryvyi Rih Urban Development Institute

Despite the predominance of the abovementioned Charismatic Leader model, surveys on how residents perceive stakeholders in urban development show that respondents rate community organizations, urban activists, and volunteers as those with the highest capacity to influence decision-making, while LSGBs received the lowest ratings (Provotar & Ohiichuk, 2024).

COMMUNICATION PRACTICES AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

The primary formal instruments for interaction between government bodies and civil society institutions are public consultations, participation in joint bodies and working groups, requests for information, appeals to elected officials and state authorities, participation in public hearings, citizen-led reviews, social project competitions, and participatory budgeting, and others. Tools such as requests for information, citizen appeals, petitions, or participation in public hearings oblige authorities to respond. Responses to information requests enable public access to official data, allow the public to monitor LSGBs actions, and to systematically influence decision-making, rather than relying solely on informal pressure. The systematic use of tools like petitions and requests for information contributes to building a culture of participation.

Collective petitions, requests for information, all instruments of participation are still more effective tools of influence. People need to be taught how to use them, because they are key for constructive engagement. If there is a critical comment or suggestion, it is better to send it officially rather than just vent on social media.

— Oksana Maiboroda,
Deputy of the Rivne City Council, co-founder of the Garden of Stories NGO

When civic activation is triggered by a pressing public issue, social media is often used for quick and effective communication. Pages, channels, or chats are set up to actively discuss current developments. When such communication channels are created independently, they often become springboards for further initiatives, forming communities of motivated individuals ready to get involved.

(...) communication is never enough. It's a long-term process. You need to get people talking. Enter their trust zone. And probably the hardest part is building mutual trust. I think trust is foundational in participation—without it, nothing will come of it; the result will just be formal. In fact, the task is not to ask what you want to know—but what they want to share. You have to build those connections, that step-by-step collaboration with the community, so they begin to believe they truly can make a difference.

— Oleksandr Stolovyi,
Architect

A weak stakeholder dialogue culture is a barrier to urban development in Ukraine. In its absence, significant time and resources are often wasted on discrediting those with opposing perspectives. At times, businesses may become involved with smear campaigns against local authorities when their demands are perceived to be unmet. Some LSGB officials interviewed for the current paper study expressed frustration with residents who, in their view, 'fail to appreciate the effectiveness' of their work, while citizens, in turn, sometimes demonize local authorities in ways that do not take account of the local authorities' actual mandates or available resources.

Large-scale urban development projects remain limited in Ukrainian cities, primarily due to the complex regulatory frameworks that prevent developers from operating fully within the legal system. LSGBs are either unable or insufficiently motivated to create an enabling environment for businesses to function effectively. Breaking this vicious cycle of mistrust requires dialogue between local authorities, the private sector, and organized civil society.

Activists contribute to local self-government their experience, familiarity with local issues, and values often centred around transparency, justice, and community engagement. However, their mode of action shifts from informal advocacy and public pressure to formal participation within legally regulated rules and procedures. It is also important to note the fluidity of stakeholder roles. Interviewee Tetiana Voloshyna observed that many of the staff at the Urban Development Institute are

...former activists—highly motivated people who are ready to go the extra mile and think beyond conventional approaches. This kind of integration of the civic sector is already happening within city council structures, and we want to see the civic sector grow even stronger—to build real collaboration between the government and the community.

As may be expected, interviewees for the current document reported that public participation varies in intensity in line with the perceived urgency or importance of the matter at hand.

"The intensity of community participation is often directly influenced by the perceived urgency or severity of the issues at hand (...) when urban challenges are not immediately apparent or pressing, residents may see little incentive to engage actively in tackling it. Non-contentious processes witness lower levels of public participation more often than not."

— Tetiana Voloshyna,
Deputy Director for Strategic Development and Innovation,
Vinnytsia City Council's Urban Development Institute

ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING: WHO PARTICIPATES, WHOM TO ENGAGE, AND WHOM TO AVOID?

The most common practice in Ukrainian cities is to engage local elites and active, civic-minded residents, whose actual influence on decision-making and urban planning, however, remains limited. Institutions and communication platforms established or supported by local authorities often function as pressure-release valves for popular discontent. Sometimes, public consultations can undermine the credibility of public participation itself, while the use of digital participation tools is sometimes either performative or non-existent.

The tension between decision-making speed and consultation meaningfulness is a well-known trade-off in urban planning and public policy generally in Ukraine and elsewhere. For the current paper, interviewees from community organizations note that formal, institutionalized modes of engagement between the authorities, businesses, and civic groups are sometimes substituted with informal arrangements and *ad hoc* communications that do not challenge the *status quo*, with the rationale that fast, efficient decision-making is needed in the interests of urban development. This may come at the expense of a lawful, inclusive participatory process, which is sometimes presented as slow and bureaucratic.

Experts point to the development of a culture of dialogue among stakeholders as a way forward. Stakeholders—whether representing organized

business structures, community organizations, professional associations, or local authorities—should publicly represent their interests and positions. This dialogue must be transparent and supported by the involvement of local media.

Since I work in a community organization, I believe that the public should be involved in everything that happens. The key issue is ensuring that this involvement is constructive. However, the responsibility also lies with the public, because it can negatively impact the decision-making process if it decides to. For instance, it's possible to paralyse a local self-government body by sending an overwhelming number of requests for information, which they are legally obligated to respond to, thereby preventing them from performing other duties.

— Olha Liashchuk,
Project Coordinator at the Ecoclub NGO, Specialist in
Community Adaptation to Climate Change

Interviewed experts noted it may be inappropriate to seek input from a broad geographic area for projects with impacts limited to a specific location. Conversely, engagement on geographically defined built interventions or strategies should prioritize local residents.

Urban information ecosystem

CIRCULATION OF INFORMATION WITHIN AND ABOUT CITIES

Print and specialized media are scarce at the local level in most Ukrainian cities. Information about urban life is typically accessed through official municipal websites or messaging platforms, which offer coverage of events in the city. Official Facebook pages serve primarily for formal communication, while Telegram is used primarily for informal updates. This narrow range of channels limits access to information for certain segments of the population. For instance, as at 2023, 18 per cent of Ukrainians do not use the internet (World Bank Group, viewed 2026).

At the national level, various aspects of city life are regularly covered by major nation-wide media outlets, primarily in the format of news stories. Some national platforms have established themselves as credible sources of analytical and informational content for urban audiences and experts seeking insight into the urban development trends and analytics.

CHANNELS INFORMING THE PUBLIC ABOUT URBAN ISSUES

During interviews, almost all stakeholders identified the same two channels for informing the public: official city websites and local authorities' social media accounts. In some communities, greater emphasis is placed on local television, e.g. some respondents cited the city of Lozova, where local TV plays a central role in disseminating city-related information. These channels are used to inform the public about community development planning initiatives and project activities, especially those seeking urban residents' participation.

Community organization representatives interviewed also emphasized that much of the information they receive on urban policies comes from the materials of city council sessions, deputy committee meetings, and executive committee briefings. Therefore, they stress the importance of ensuring transparency, including access to public livestreams. However, the transition of public hearings to online-only formats (due to the war) may risk reaching fewer people, whether due to online fatigue or lack of digital access.

Information channels about urban challenges in Ukraine vary in format, reach, and credibility, and may be classified into four main types: official channels, independent media, civic initiatives, and informal and digital platforms.

- *Local authorities' official channels*, including city council websites (news, draft decisions, city council meetings, deputy commission sessions, interactive maps), official social media accounts and channels (Facebook, Telegram, YouTube), websites of municipal utility companies, local e-petition platforms, consultation tools, surveys, and various digital portals (e.g. Open City or Transparent Budget). These channels have the advantage of official status and the disadvantage of perceived formality, delayed dissemination of information, and somewhat limited reach, as not all urban residents are interested in accessing updates via such platforms.
- *Independent local media* encompasses a variety of online publications, investigative journalism offices, and analytics platforms covering matters related to urban planning, transportation, and budgeting. They have the advantage of depth and critical analysis, but often have limited reach and are grant-dependent.
- *Civic initiatives and urban platforms* include think tanks (e.g. Cedos,³³ ReStart Ukraine³⁴) that support the development of housing, mobility, spatial planning, and recovery policies as well as training local professionals to acquire certain knowledge and skills; urban media (e.g. Khmarochos³⁵) and online portals (e.g. Gurt³⁶) that disseminate varied information about urban life and various competitions, grants, and events; and participation platforms (e.g. Facebook communities, Zoom forums, and workshops). The Decentralization national platform³⁷ also plays an informational role, providing expert analysis, legal updates, and discussions on community decisions and participation tools. These initiatives foster a multi-level participation environment. They have the advantage of openness and accessibility, albeit varying public interest, digital literacy, and available time present a challenge.

33 <https://cedos.org.ua>

34 <https://www.restartfuture.org>

35 <https://hmarochos.kiev.ua>

36 <https://gurt.org.ua>

37 <https://decentralization.ua>

- *Digital and informal channels* encompass various messengers (e.g. Viber and neighbourhood/housing cooperative Telegram chats), Facebook groups for individual cities, TikTok and Instagram pages about urban environments. These channels have the advantage of speed and grass-roots nature, while suffering from chaotic flow, rampant misinformation, and emotional polarization.

Interviewees emphasized that personal engagement (interest) of local officials plays a crucial role in effective dissemination of information:

“...I have streamlined personal communication through messengers—especially Facebook. People reach out to me even at 3 a.m.”

— Vasyl Starovoyt,
Head of Saksahanskyi District Council in Kryvyi Rih

THE RIGHT TO ACCURATE INFORMATION AND ACCESS TO OPEN DATA

In Ukraine, the right to accurate information and access to open data is one of the key elements of democratic governance, transparency, and civil participation in decision-making. This right is enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine and further detailed in a range of laws, notably the Laws of Ukraine ‘On Information’ (1992), ‘On Access to Public Information’ (2011), ‘On Access to Open Data’ (as part of the Law of Ukraine ‘On Access to Public Information’). According to these acts:

- Any natural person or legal entity—regardless of nationality, age, or the purpose of the request—has the right to access information;
- Submitting a request for information requires no justification;
- Information is provided free of charge, except in cases involving significant volumes of document copying

Under current Ukrainian legislation, open data at the city level must include: (a) budgets, tenders, public assets, and government structure; (b) urban planning documentation (e.g. zoning plans, detailed territorial plans); (c) infrastructure and service data (e.g.

roadworks, transport routes); (d) environmental data, local statistics, and community profiles.

For 2017 to 2022, Transparency International Ukraine’s indicators-based transparency ranking of the 100 largest cities in Ukraine from 2017 to 2022 showed that, on average, transparency was rising strongly over this period (Transparency International Ukraine, 2024). Cities that were relatively transparent prior to the imposition of martial law in 2022 continued to publish more actively in 2022. However, access to open data has been considerably limited under martial law. A study entitled *Open Data of Cities in War Conditions* (Transparency International Ukraine, 2023) analyzed 18 oblast centres as at December 2022 to determine what share of mandatory datasets for managers of LSGBs had actually been published. Among the cities collectively, only 258 (25.1 per cent) of 1,028 mandatory datasets had been released. Most frequently, the published data included information on local council members, including contact details and office hours (15 cities), e-petitions with signatory information and results (12 cities), and roll-call voting records from local council plenary sessions (12 cities).

High quality public engagement in urban decision-making requires access to information early in the process. This was confirmed in interviews with both community organization representatives and local government officials experienced in participatory processes. The requirement to disclose urban planning documents, including draft plans and local construction regulations, was originally set out in the now-defunct *Law on Urban Planning and Development of Territories* (2000). When it ceased to be in force, the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers *On Approval of the Procedure for Conducting Public Hearings on Draft Urban Planning Documentation at the Local Level* (2011) was adopted, stipulating that the public hearing information be published simultaneously with the draft plan at the local level (as part of the same information statement), and that an additional notification must appear on the official website of the document’s commissioning authority at least five working days before the scheduled hearing. In 2024, the Law of Ukraine ‘On Public Consultations’ was adopted, an important step from the standpoint of fostering a culture of meaningful stakeholder dialogue at the local level.

Forming a shared vision of the city and the role of media

The full-scale Russian invasion since 2022 marked a turning point. In Ukraine, the collective understanding of the city has evolved from the Soviet, industrial idea of a city-as-function to a more human-centred view: city-as-home, city-as-community, and city-as-opportunity. In the early post-Soviet years, cities were often seen primarily as places of survival. Since the 2010s - especially after the 2013 to 2014 Revolution of Dignity - the emphasis has shifted toward association, participation, local identity, and self-governance.

The formation of a shared vision of the city in Ukraine is – as elsewhere – influenced by local media outlets, which act as intermediaries between citizens, authorities, and expert communities. As previously mentioned, local media include both traditional outlets (e.g. TV channels, newspapers, LSGBs' websites and Facebook pages, community organizations' digests) and relatively new social media (e.g. Telegram channels, Instagram, TikTok).

Local media play a key role in shaping this shared vision. They mediate between residents, authorities, and experts through both traditional outlets (TV, newspapers, municipal websites, community bulletins) and social media (Telegram, Instagram, TikTok). Through these channels, people learn about urban problems, initiatives, and opportunities to participate. Media can strengthen local identity and promote values of openness and dialogue.

Interviewees for the current paper note that the importance of local media has grown amid decentralization and war. Beyond informing, the media helps mobilize communities and create a symbolic urban space for collective meaning-making. At the same time, media framing can narrow understanding. Research on coverage of IDPs in Dnipro from 2016 to 2020 found that outlets tended to portray displaced people as vulnerable and passive, focusing on housing, employment, and state aid while rarely amplifying their own voices. Charity narratives dominated, possibly reflecting the influence of political elites (Mezentsev & Kuznetsova, 2022).

Broader problems in communication persist. Authorities frequently explain decisions too formally or too late, which fuels distrust. Some media outlets may provide incomplete or one-sided accounts, making

meaningful participation difficult. Sensationalist or clickbait reporting about urban issues like construction, transport, or public space can amplify conflict, undermine trust in both officials and activists, and crowd out discussion of solutions.

Lack of context is another issue. Complex processes, such as zoning or investment, are simplified, sometimes risking creating impressions of conspiracy. Reliance on a narrow circle of 'convenient' experts further distorts public understanding, making meaningful resident participation difficult.

Highlighting the importance of responsible information dissemination for stakeholder engagement around city visioning, one interviewee observed that:

Availability of information prevents conflicts. The better the planning sphere, decision-making systems, participation, and actions of key stakeholders are covered, the less room there is for misunderstanding and confrontation. (...) It is necessary to create conditions for its evolution from policy replacement participation through protest participation to participation in decision-making.

— Olena Denysenko,
Expert and researcher, associate professor at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

As interviewees noted, debate often migrates to Facebook groups, messengers, or informal networks rather than inclusive, institutional platforms. Instead of supporting collaborative planning, media dynamics can escalate conflict, erode trust, and weaken the legitimacy of decisions.

Responsible journalism is therefore crucial: reporting that explains, provides data, includes diverse perspectives, and cultivates discussion rather than scandal. Transparent communication, independent media, and stable online and offline channels for dialogue are essential foundations for accountable urban governance and sustainable stakeholder engagement.

E-GOVERNANCE AND E-PARTICIPATION IN UKRAINIAN CITIES

E-governance has been actively developing in Ukrainian cities since the 2010s, becoming especially relevant following the decentralization reform as well as the full-scale invasion of February 2022. It encompasses tools of e-democracy (petitions, participatory budgeting, online consultations), e-services (business registration, document management), and open data (urban geoportals). Vinnytsia, Drohobych, Lviv, and Kyiv and other major cities have become leaders in implementing smart city approaches (e.g. Razumkov Centre, 2021). Specialized platforms have been created for citizen participation: e-dem. ua,³⁸ including Open City³⁹ and the Smart City portals. E-governance promotes transparency, accountability, and engagement of urban residents in city governance. However, challenges remain, including the digital divide, service fragmentation, and tokenistic participation. In the future, e-governance can become the foundation of a new culture of participation if the technology is combined with inclusivity, data openness, and genuine citizen influence on decision-making.

Digital participation practices have become widespread in Ukraine. On the one hand, they expand opportunities

for engaging a larger number of participants, particularly the population groups that prefer communicating through digital tools. On the other hand, they are not inclusive for those segments of the population who do not use digital communication channels.

Digital tools are rapidly evolving and improving; in the near future, chatbots, GIS tools, secure blockchain-based participation platforms, and extensive use of artificial intelligence capabilities are expected to become more prevalent.

Challenges unite the community. It takes time for the people's voice not only to be heard but also to be formed. There is a need for positive practices. Engagement processes are increasingly (...) digitalized. Decentralized platforms are expected to gain wider usage, as blockchain helps avoid manipulations during voting and the use of other contemporary digital tools.

— Nataliia Provotar,
Urbanist, Associate Professor at Taras Shevchenko
National University of Kyiv



Mural opened by UNHCR in Kyiv in 2019 to draw attention to citizenship issues in Ukraine © UN-Habitat Ukraine, 2025

38 <https://e-dem.ua>

39 <https://opencity.e-dem.ua>

Concluding points

Urban citizenship is the process through which the city becomes not just a place to live, but a space of responsibility, solidarity, dignity, and creativity. Its meanings are continually reinterpreted in response to challenges such as war, migration, trust crises, and urban transformations.

In Ukraine, urban citizenship is forming as a combination of rights, responsibilities, and practices animating resident participation in city life. Since 2014, particularly in the context of decentralization and war, the role of local initiatives, self-organization, and participatory planning has grown. Residents increasingly influence urban policy through mechanisms including e-democracy tools, participatory budgets, petitions, and public hearings. However, access to these processes remains unequal; active, engaged communities coexist with passive or excluded groups.

A city's community is shaped not only by shared residence but, above all, by a sense of belonging, mutual responsibility, and the ability to act together. Thus, an urban community is not merely a sum of residents but a network of trust, interaction, and a shared vision of the city.

Several issues bearing on urban recovery preparedness and planning emerge from the foregoing primary and secondary data analysis.

- Urban citizenship is a core socio-spatial urban recovery capacity. In crisis and post-crisis recovery, rebuilding legitimacy, trust, and everyday access to rights/services is arguably as important as physical reconstruction. Urban citizenship provides a lens – if fraught in nature – to assess whether recovery is inclusive, accountable, and resilient.
- Promisingly, Ukraine's urban citizenship appears to have moved from passivity toward agency, albeit unevenly. Soviet legacies of paternalism, distrust, and expert-led planning may still shape expectations, yet the post-2004 and especially post-2014 trajectory shows a clear expansion of civic self-organization, local identity, and participation – even while these parameters vary strongly by city.
- Legal and procedural reforms have afforded what may be termed permission structures for participation, though practice will of course determine impact. National acts and local instruments (hearings, access to information, e-petitions, participatory budgeting, comprehensive plans) can yield impact only when paired with political will, early disclosure of information, and patiently administered mechanisms anchored through local governance structures that translate input into decisions. The universal tension between urban decision-making speed and participation bureaucracy is in counterpoint in Ukraine as a place of active conflict where taking action is often urgent.
- Interviewees have suggested that informal networks often deliver where formal institutions lag, with some stakeholders preferring that both options be available. Across the 2000s to 2020s, Ukrainian urban participation frequently becomes effective through grassroots movements, volunteerism, and digitally-enabled self-organization, especially during shocks, while formal consultation has tended towards being late-stage or even performative at times.
- War has accelerated inclusion pressures and redefined membership in cities. The scale of internal displacement since the 2022 Russian aggression has certainly tested cities' ability to treat residents as rights-bearing urban citizens regardless of status/registration. Where IDPs have the possibility of engaging as 'new residents' (not merely transient beneficiaries), recovery planning may become more socially cohesive and forward-looking.
- Post-Soviet decentralization has gradually strengthened municipalities and expanded the arena for city-level democracy. The 2015 to 2020 reforms increased local responsibilities and resources, helping some cities shift from reactive protest participation toward more proactive co-creation. Trust setbacks and capacity gaps persist.
- Stakeholder governance remains a bottleneck: trust, speed, and inclusion are in tension. Charismatic leader and business-dominant models still shape many cities, while the 'active civic influence' model is less common. Breaking cycles of mistrust requires transparent stakeholder selection, clear rules of engagement, and credible institutions that share responsibility.

- Information ecosystems shape participation quality. Local media and digital channels are now central intermediaries in forming a shared city vision, mobilizing action, and enabling meaning-making. But framing biases, sensationalism, late or overly formal official communication, and the provision of limited context may risk eroding trust and reduce participation. Digital tools expand reach but can deepen exclusion if unaccompanied by offline options. E-participation (petitions, consultations) can strengthen transparency and engagement, yet the digital divide, fragmentation, and tokenism risk reproducing inequality. This may be especially relevant under wartime constraints on open data.
- The desk review and interviewee responses have together suggested that the direction of travel is clear: from 'defensive' to 'developmental' citizenship. The proposed 'civic engagement spring' outlined above captures this shift from reacting to threats toward proactive city-making. The prospect of institutionalizing this energy into routine planning cycles, beyond crisis response, stands to be addressed as conceptual and functional approaches to urban recovery are designed.
- Implications for urban recovery planning that have surfaced include prioritizing early information disclosure; co-designing participation; agreeing on inclusive definitions of who counts as a resident in a context of protracted displacement; capacity-building and stakeholder engagement sensitisation for both state officials and civic actors; and finding creative ways to encourage constructive media environments that nurture trust and informed public dialogue.
- Further research needs: The findings of this report highlight several priority areas where further research is needed to support evidence-based, inclusive, and scalable urban recovery in Ukraine.
 - First, there is a need for more granular, city-level and neighbourhood-level data on urban citizenship practices, particularly in relation to disparities in access to services, participation opportunities, and information. While this document identifies uneven patterns of engagement and inclusion, further quantitative and longitudinal research is required to systematically map these differences across cities and population groups, including IDPs, veterans, and other vulnerable communities.
 - Second, additional research is needed on the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms in influencing actual decision-making outcomes. While instruments such as participatory budgeting, public consultations, and digital engagement platforms are increasingly present, their real impact on policy and planning remains uneven and under-evaluated. Comparative studies across Ukrainian cities could help identify which models of participation lead to meaningful influence rather than symbolic engagement.
 - Third, the evolving urban information ecosystem requires deeper investigation, particularly regarding the accessibility, reliability, and use of information across different demographic groups. Given the reliance on digital platforms and the constraints introduced by wartime conditions, further research may be appropriate on digital divides, misinformation risks, and the role of informal communication channels in shaping urban governance and civic engagement.
 - Fourth, there is a need to explore the long-term institutionalization of civic engagement and volunteer networks, especially those that emerged during periods of crisis. While these networks may have demonstrated high levels of adaptability and effectiveness, their sustainability, integration into formal governance structures, and potential role in post-war recovery planning remain insufficiently understood.
 - Finally, further research should examine the interplay between decentralization reforms and urban citizenship outcomes, including how variations in local governance capacity, leadership models, and stakeholder dynamics influence participation, trust, and accountability. This includes assessing how different governance models affect the inclusiveness and effectiveness of recovery processes across diverse urban contexts

References

- Alliance of Ukrainian Universities (2025) Альянс українських університетів провів два тематичних воркшопи. 21 March. <https://auu.org.ua> [Accessed 28 March 2026]
- Anisimov, O., Smirnova, M., & Dulko, I. (2024). *Establishment of a New Planning System in Ukraine: Institutional Change Between Europeanization and Post-Socialist Path Dependence*. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 25(4), pp. 482–501. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2024.2414973>
- Arnstein, R. (1969). *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 35(4), pp. 216–224.
- AUU (2025) Альянс українських університетів провів два тематичних воркшопи. Webpage news article. <https://auu.com.ua/activities/alyans-ukrayinskyh-universytetiv-proviv-dva-tematychnyh-vorkshopy/>. [Accessed 14 February 2026.]
- Barsukova, O. (2023). *The Majority of Ukrainians Volunteer During the War, 18% Do Not Plan To*. Survey. *Ukrainska Pravda*. [Барсукова, О. (2023). Більшість українців волонтерять під час війни, 18% – не планують. Опитування. Українська правда.] <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2023/02/24/253036>
- Bitušíková, A. (2015). *Urban Activism in Central and Eastern Europe: A Theoretical Framework*. *Slovenský národopis (Slovak Ethnology)*, 63(4), pp.326–338. https://www.sav.sk/journals/uploads/011112453.%20A_Bitusikova_Urban%20Activism%20in%20Central%20and%20Eastern%20Europe.pdf
- Blokland, T., Hentschel, Ch., Holm, A., Lebuhn, H., & Margalit, T. (2015). *Urban Citizenship and Right to the City: The Fragmentation of Claims*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 39(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12259>
- Buchowski, M. (1996). *The shifting meanings of civil and civil society in Poland. The shifting meanings of civil and civil society in Poland*. In: C. Hann, C., E. Dunn (Eds.), *Civil Society. Challenging Western Models* (pp. 79–96). London–New York: Routledge.
- Building Ukraine Together. (2024). Website. [Будуємо Україну Разом (2024). Веб-сайт.] <https://www.bur.org.ua/>
- Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. (2010). Resolution No. 996 *On Ensuring Public Participation in the Formation and Implementation of the State Policy*. Database Legislation of Ukraine. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/996-2010-%D0%BF>
- Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. (2011). Resolution No. 555, *On Approval of the Procedure for Public Hearings on Accommodating Public Interests during the Development of Urban Planning Documentation Projects at the Local Level*. Database Legislation of Ukraine. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/555-2011-%D0%BF>
- Center for Civil Liberties & East Europe Foundation. (2024). *Безплатний онлайн-курс «Історія українського громадянського суспільства»* [Online course]. Освітня онлайн-платформа Зрозуміло!; in partnership with Ukrainian Institute; funded by European Union. <https://courses.zrozumilo.in.ua/courses/course-v1%3Aaef%2BEEF-044%2BJan2024/about>
- Decentralization (n.d.) Webpage. <https://decentralization.ua/> [Accessed 14 February 2026]
- Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2020) *Ukrainians Are Involved in Civic Social Activities, but Avoid Active Participation*. Survey. (2020). [Українці залучені до громадської діяльності, але уникають активної участі. Опитування (2020).] <https://dif.org.ua/article/ukraintsi-zalucheni-do-gromadskoi-diyalnosti-ale-unikayut-aktivnoi-uchasti>
- East Europe Foundation & Ukrainian Institute. (2024). *History of Ukrainian Civil Society* [Free online course]. Available on Zrozumilo! and Coursera.
- Garcia Ferrari, M. S., Mezentsev, K., Provotar, N., Iliadi, M., & Kartalou, N.-S. (2024). *Displaced public spaces in Ukrainian cities: Increasing diversity and inclusion in urban reconstruction through temporary occupation*. *ZARCH*, 22, pp. 76–89. https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_zarch/zarch.2024229877
- Holovko, O.V. (2023). *Volunteering in Ukraine: Historical and Legal Aspects*. *Law and Safety*, 89(2), 9–18 Volunteering in Ukraine: historical and legal aspects. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372999442_Volunteering_in_Ukraine_historical_and_legal_aspects
- Horielov, D.M., Korniiievskiyi, O.A. (2015). *The Volunteer Movement: Global Experience and Ukrainian Civic Practices. Analytical Report*. Kyiv: National Institute for Strategic Studies. 36 p. [Горелов, Д. М., Корнієвський, О. А. (2015). Волонтерський рух: світовий досвід та українські громадянські практики: аналітична доповідь. Київ: НІСД. 36 с.]
- KIIS (2012) *Ukrainians' trust in social institutions*. Press release. 18 April. <https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=81>

KIIS (2015) *Trust in social institutions and groups*.

Press release. 15 January. <https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=579>

Lytvynchuk, M. Y., Denysenko, O. O., & Melnychuk, A. L. (2022). *Local planning instruments in Ukraine: experiences and changes from a long-term perspective*. Ukrainian Geographical Journal, 3, 45–54.

Malchykova, D. (2021). *Participatory budgeting practices and civic activism for urban space renovation: the case of Kherson*. Ekonomichna ta Sotsialna Geografiya, 85, pp. 38–48. <https://doi.org/10.17721/2413-7154/2021.85.38-48>

Marody, M. (2004). *Post-Civil Society?* Polish Sociological Review, Vol.148/4, pp. 403–411. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/412749011>

Matsuzato, K. (2018). *The Donbas War and politics in cities on the front: Mariupol and Kramatorsk*. Nationalities Papers. 2018;46(6):1008-1027.

Melnichuk, A., Denysenko, O., & Ostapenko, P. (2021). *New tools for new urban spaces? Analyses of planning and participation tools and their performance in (post) transitional perspective*. Ekonomichna ta Sotsialna Geografiya, 85, pp. 11–22.

Melnichuk, A., Hanichenko, K. (2020). *A Five-Years Term, Forming of the Territorial Communities in Ukraine: Efficiency and Effects of Administrative Completion of the Stage of Reform on Example of Kyiv Region*. Scientific Bulletin of Kherson State University. Series Geographical Sciences, 12, pp. 17–24.

Mezentsev, K., & Kuznetsova, E. (2022). *What Shapes the Narratives on Internally Displaced People in Dnipro Media?* In: T. Kuzio, S.I. Zhuk, & P. D'Anieri (E, eds), *Ukraine's Outpost: Dnipropetrovsk and the Russian-Ukrainian War*. Bristol: E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/2022/02/02/what-shapes-the-narratives-on-internally-displaced-people-in-dnipro-media/>

Mezentsev, K., & Gnatiuk, O. (2021). *Introduction. Urban planning paradigms: shift or persistence?* Ekonomichna ta Sotsialna Geografiya 6-10. 10.17721/2413-7154/2021.85.6-10. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351999227_INTRODUCTION_URBAN_PLANNING_PARADIGMS_SHIFT_OR_PERSISTENCE

Mezentsev, K., Neugebauer, C., & Mezentseva, N. (2017). *Civil Society*. In: Brade, I., Neugebauer, C.S. (eds.). *Urban Eurasia. Cities in Transformation*. Berlin: DOM publishers, pp. 275–282. <https://publications.rwth-aachen.de/record/691120>

Mezentsev, K., Provotar, N., & Gnatiuk, O. (2024). *Courtyards, parks and squares of power in Ukrainian cities: Planning and reality of everyday life under socialism*. Pp. 153–175. In: J. Mariotti, K. Leetmaa (Eds.) *Urban Planning During Socialism: Views from the Periphery*. London: Routledge., <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003327592-13>

Mezentsev, K.V., Provotar, N.I., Palchuk, M.V. (2020). *Public Spaces Through the Lens of Participatory Urban Planning – The Case of Kyiv*. Ukrainian Geographical Journal, 2, pp. 30–37. [Мезенцев, К.В., Провотар, Н.І., Пальчук, М.В. (2020). Публічні простори через призму партисипативного міського планування – приклад Києва. Український географічний журнал, No. №2. С. 30–37.] DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15407/ugz2020.02.030>

Mikheieva, O. and I. Kuznetsova. (2023). *Internally displaced and immobile people in Ukraine between 2014 and 2022: Older age and disabilities as factors of vulnerability*. Migration Research Series, N° 77. International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva. <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/pub2023-031-r-mrs77-internally-displaced.pdf>

Мельничук, А., Ганіченко, К. (2020). П'ять років формування об'єднаних територіальних громад в Україні: ефективність та ефекти адміністративного завершення етапу реформи на прикладі Київської області. *Науковий вісник Херсонського державного університету. Серія Географічні науки*. Вип. 12. С. 17–24.] <https://doi.org/10.32999/ksu2413-7391/2020-12-2>

OHCHR (2026) *Four years since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine: Key facts and findings*. February. https://ukraine.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/2026-02-16%20HRMMU_Four%20Years%20On_fact%20sheet_1.pdf

Opendatabot. (n.d.). *Opendatabot: Business and public data search platform*. <https://opendatabot.ua> [Accessed February 14, 2026.]

Pasyuta, D., Ludviková, D., Treffers, F., Korniyenko, G., Van Epp, T., & Zhang, J. (2023). *The public participation handbook of urban planning for Ukraine*. (Ro3kvit Urban Coalition for Ukraine & Ukraine Rebuilding Action Group). DOM publisher. <https://doi.org/10.36196/0726.2023>

President of Ukraine. (2012) Decree No. 212/2012. *On the Strategy of State Policy for the Promotion of the Development of Civil Society in Ukraine and Priority Measures for Its Implementation*. <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/2122012-14200>

- Provotar, N., Ohiichuk, N. (2024). *Urban Activism and Tactical Urbanism: The Case of Zhytomyr in the Context of Integrated City Development*. *Ekonomichna ta Sotsialna Geografiya*, 92, pp. 14–25. [Провотар, Н., Огійчук, Н. (2024). Міський активізм і тактичний урбанізм: кейс Житомира в контексті інтегрованого розвитку міста. *Економічна та соціальна географія*. 2024. Вип. 92. С. 14– 25.]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17721/2413-7154/2024.92.14-25>
- Purcell, M. (2008). *Recapturing democracy: Neoliberalization and the struggle for alternative urban futures*. Routledge, 224 p. DOI: [10.4324/9780203932940](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203932940)
- Rainchuk, L. (2022). "At First, People Were Donating Cowboy Boots and Summer Dresses": How Ukrainian Charity Changed During the War. [Райчук, Л. (2022). "Спочатку люди передавали ковбойські чоботи і літні сукні": як змінилась українська благодійність під час війни.] <https://mc.today/uk/blogs/spochatku-lyudi-peredavali-kovbojski-choboti-i-litni-sukni-yak-zminilas-ukrayinska-blagodijnist-pid-chas-vijni/ukrayinska-blagodijnist-pid-chas-vijni/>
- Razumkov Centre (2025) Assessment of the Situation in the Country, Trust in Social Institutions, Politicians, Officials, and Public Figures, Attitudes Toward Elections During the War, and Belief in Victory (February–March 2025). Razumkov Centre. [Оцінка ситуації в країні, довіра до соціальних інститутів, політиків, посадовців та громадських діячів, ставлення до виборів під час війни, віра в перемогу (лютий–березень 2025р.). Центр Разумкова.]. <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-sytuatsii-v-kraini-dovira-do-sotsialnykh-institutiv-politykiv-posadovtsiv-ta-gromadskykh-diiachiv-stavlennia-do-vyboriv-pid-chas-viiny-vira-v-peremogu-liutyiberezen-2025r>
- Shamai, S. (1991). *Sense of place: an empirical measurement*. *Geoforum*, 22(3), pp. 347–358. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185\(91\)90017-K](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185(91)90017-K)
- Razumkov Centre. (2021). *Smart Infrastructure in Sustainable Urban Development: Global Experience and Prospects for Ukraine (2021)*. Analytical Report. Razumkov Centre. Zapovit Publishing House. [Smart-інфраструктура у сталому розвитку міст: світовий досвід та перспективи України. Аналітична доповідь. Центр Разумкова. Видавництво "Заповіт", 2021.] <https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/other/2021-SMART-%D0%A1YTI-SITE.pdf>
- Sherenhovskiy, D., Mezentsev, K., Shuvarska, K. (Eds.) (2024). *Guidebook: How Universities and Communities Can Collaborate*. Lviv. 43 p. [Шеренговський, Д., Мезенцев, К., Шуварська, К., ред. (2024). Порадник: Як співпрацювати університетам і громадам. Львів. 43 с.] https://auu.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/poradnyk_web.pdf
- Stepanenko, V. & Stewart, S. (2025). 'Who, if not us?': civic activism and defence in wartime Ukraine. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 38(1), pp. 152–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2025.2467214>
- Stepanenko, V. (2006). *Civil Society in Post-Soviet Ukraine: Civic Ethos in the Framework of Corrupted Sociality?* *East European Politics and Societies*, 20(4), pp. 571–597. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325406293292>
- Stewart, S. (2009). *NGO Development in Ukraine since the Orange Revolution*. In: Juliane Besters-Dilger (ed.) *Ukraine on its Way to Europe: Interim Results of the Orange Revolution*. Peter Lang Verlag, pp. 177–194.
- Transparency International Ukraine. (2023). *Open Data of Ukrainian Cities in War Conditions: Current State, Challenges, Prospects*. Transparent Cities Ukraine program publication. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YE8qtiIpZ5Zy4r93uzv3eNGK5XzAWbfE/view>
- Transparency International Ukraine. (2024). *Transparency Ranking 2024: 100 Ukrainian Cities*. <https://ti-ukraine.org/en/research/transparency-ranking-2024-how-cities-responded-to-new-challenges/>
- UKRGEOPOL (n.d.) *Ukrainian geopolitical fault-line cities*. Webpage. <https://geokyiv.org/ukrgeopol> [Accessed 14 February 2026]
- Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (2011) *Law of Ukraine "On Volunteer Activity"*, No. 3236-VI, 19 April. Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3236-17>
- Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (2012) *Law of Ukraine No. 4572-VI 'On Public Associations'*, 22 March 2012 (entered into force 1 January 2013). *Database Legislation of Ukraine*. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/4572-17>
- Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. (2024) *Law of Ukraine 'On Public Consultations'*, No. 3841-IX *On Public Consultations*, adopted 20 June 2024. *Ukraine. Database Legislation of Ukraine*. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/3841-20>
- World Bank Group (n.d.) *Individuals using the Internet (% of population) – Ukraine (2023)*. Website. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=UA>
- World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations (2025). *Ukraine: Fourth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA4)*, February 2022–December 2024. World Bank. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099022025114040022?>

World Bank Group; Government of Ukraine; European Commission; United Nations (2026). *Ukraine: Fifth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment* (RDNA5), February 2022–December 2025. World Bank. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-02/ukraine-fifth_rapid_damage_and_needs_assessment.pdf

Yiftachel, O. (2009). *Theorizing 'gray space': the coming of urban apartheid?* *Planning Theory*, 8(1), pp. 88–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095208099300>

Yiftachel, O. (2015). *Epilogue—from 'Gray Space' to Equal 'Metrozenship'? Reflections On Urban Citizenship*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 39(4), pp. 726–737. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.122633>

Zagoriy Foundation and Ukrainian Centre for Public Opinion Research (2021) *Charity Through the Eyes of Ukrainians 2021*. Kyiv: Zagoriy Foundation. Available at: <https://zagoriy.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/blagodijnist-ochyma-ukrayincziv-u-2021-1.pdf>

Zagoriy Foundation and Ukrainian Centre for Public Opinion Research 'Socioinform' (2021) *Blahodiinist ochyma ukrainsiv 2021* [Charity Through the Eyes of Ukrainians 2021]. Kyiv: Zagoriy Foundation. Available at: <https://zagoriy.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/blagodijnist-ochyma-ukrayincziv-u-2021-1.pdf>

Annexes

ANNEX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

No.	Name	City	Sector	Affiliation / Position	Date of interview (dd.mm.yy)
1	Inna Koshliak	Lozova	Local authorities (municipal executive body)	Lozova City Council – Head of the Department of Urban Planning, Architecture and Land Relations	09.03.25
2	Viktoriia Klymchuk	Lozova	Civil society (youth/ community hub) Local authorities (consultative body)	Youth Hub “Pixel” – Director; Lozova City Council – Head of the Youth Council under the	10.03.25
3	Pavlo Syrvatka	Lviv	Local authorities (municipal executive body)	Lviv City Council – Head of the Street Infrastructure Development Unit	10.03.25
4	Eduard Dibrivnyi	Kyiv	Civil society (urban development NGO)	NGO “Urban Reforms” – Urban Expert	12.03.25
5	Denys Hanzha	Lozova	Private sector (consulting/ communications firm) Civil society (NGO)	CFC Big Ideas – Co-CEO; NGO “Lozova Development Agency” – Head	12.03.25
6	Olha Liashchuk	Rivne	Civil society (urban development/ environmental NGO)	NGO “EcoClub” – Project Coordinator, Community Climate Adaptation Specialist	12.03.25
7	Oksana Maiboroda	Rivne	Civil society (environmental/ urban development NGO)	NGO “Green Alternative” – Chair of the Board; Coordinator of the “Garden of Stories in Rivne” urban greening initiative	13.03.25
8	Tetiana Voloshyna	Vinnytsia	Local authorities (municipal enterprise)	Institute for Urban Development (Vinnytsia City Council) – Deputy Director for Strategic Development and Innovation	13.03.25
9	Anna Atamanchuk	Kyryvi Rih	Civil society (cycling advocacy NGO)	NGO “VeloKryvbas”; Association of Responsible Citizens	13.03.25
10	Vasyl Starovoi	Kyryvi Rih	Local authorities (elected local official)	Saksahanskyi District Council (Kyryvi Rih) – Head	14.03.25
11	Taras Pakholiuk	Lutsk	Private sector (architecture/ urban planning firm)	Parallel Studio Architects – Co-founder & Architect at; misto.reboot – Head and Urban Planner	14.03.25
12	Mariia Burnis	Kyryvi Rih	Local authorities (municipal enterprise)	Kyryvi Rih Institute for Urban Development (Kyryvi Rih City Council) – Deputy Director for Project Management and International Cooperation	17.03.25
13	Oleksandr Stolovy	Kyiv	Private sector (architecture/ urban planning firm)	“Archimatika” – Lead Architect	19.03.25

ANNEX 2: LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Thematic Block 1. About yourself

- What is your current position?
- When did you take up this position?
- What are your main responsibilities?
- Which of your projects have been the most significant, either completed or ongoing?

Thematic Block 2. Participation policy

- In your view, what does an ideal participatory planning process look like?
- Which issues or objectives should be addressed through effective urban development, and why?
- Who should be involved in this process, and who should not?
- Are there broader contexts or circumstances in which participatory and/or effective urban planning might not be appropriate? Conversely, in which situations are these approaches particularly important or necessary?
- Who provides information about the city, and how? Who interprets urban development, and how? What are the main channels for keeping citizens informed about the city and urban issues?
- What is the current situation regarding open data?

Thematic Block 3. Participation process

- What formal and informal mechanisms exist for influencing urban development (e.g., councils, consultations, etc.)?
- How would you evaluate the effectiveness of these formal and informal participation mechanisms?
- What are the main barriers or challenges, and what are the main drivers of citizen engagement in urban development?
- Has citizen involvement in the planning system in your city changed since it was established? If so, what changes have occurred, and what triggered them?

Thematic Block 4. Specific city case

- Please briefly describe how citizens are involved in developing spatial planning documents in your city.
- How would you assess the success or failure in fostering urban citizenship? (Lessons learned)
- In your opinion, how do civic awareness and citizen engagement influence city planning and development?
- What, in your view, makes a community truly a “community”?

Commentary on negotiating participation: Expectations of authorities and communities



- Interviews with active representatives of community organizations and the public at large confirm that they attach importance to involving communities in urban decision-making processes. Figure 6 indicates terms used to describe this imperative, with the words engagement, community, trust, development, dialogue, choice and respect recurring frequently.
- Responses conveyed a particular emphasis on early involvement of citizens. Interviewees from city authorities or development institutes engaged in strategic planning, coordination, and implementation of urban projects felt that the engagement process should occur throughout all stages of project implementation in various forms. During project implementation, engagement may involve informing communities about progress and convening interim discussions. Engagement does not cease upon project completion; feedback should be solicited with openness to revisiting enacted decisions after project completion.
- Interviewed local government planning officials are oriented towards fast decision-making. They see the implementation of participatory tools in planning processes as mandatory but sometimes unconstructive. Such perceptions often arise, it was suggested, due to a lack of structure, communication, or shared vision. At times, community consultees were observed to focus not on planning decision-making during formal discussion events, but instead on using dedicated fora (e.g. public hearings) to express

- Observing the introduction of new planning approaches, its reform at the local level including new urban development planning documentation, and the active interest of various international technical assistance programmes, some interviewees have detected a gradual shift in attitude towards participation - from a negative perception of participation as a formal necessity to a positive view that appreciates its value.

— Inna Koshlyak,

- Following Ukraine's decentralization and administrative-territorial reforms, proactive municipal teams have received strong backing to organize and expand citizen engagement in planning and decision-making. Participatory practices have gradually become more structured and understandable, helping distribute responsibility for urban development among key stakeholders and supporting officials in their work. At the same time, interviewed representatives of business and civil society often view participation as slow and sometimes at odds with timely, effective decisions. While they want to be involved in community planning, they prefer targeted ways to deliver input and secure support from local self-government bodies rather than engaging in lengthy consultation procedures that require extended deliberation or listening to others' views.

I am all in favour of an informal approach to problem-solving, as in someone comes and says, "Help me," and their problem gets sorted out. I don't like bureaucracy, but doing away with it is not the solution. I support a mixed approach [combining formal and informal approaches in engaging the public in the decision-making system].

— Victoria Klymchuk,
Chair of the Lozova City Council's Youth Council

- An NGO interviewee emphasized the importance of interaction between civic initiatives and local self-government bodies:

Many of our community organizations emerged in response to the need to strengthen the capacity of local self-government, at its request. I had a conversation with the community leadership before establishing my own organization. I inquired about points of contact and their vision of our usefulness for the city's development.

— Denys Ganzha,
Head of the Lozova Development Agency NGO,

- Another NGO interviewee noted that much depends on the personal perception of those in power. Many communities increasingly see civic groups as partners and added capacity, though in some places tensions remain; overall, cooperation has become more constructive in recent years:

There are communities that have clearly understood that civic organizations or initiatives are their allies, additional working minds they can engage and utilize for the benefit of the community. Unfortunately, there are certain communities where this is not as actively happening, and there can be some form of confrontation on certain issues. However, speaking broadly and taken in Ukraine in general, I would rather say that there has been more constructiveness than negativity in recent years.

— Olha Liashchuk,
Project Coordinator at the Ecoclub NGO

- An urban planning official emphasized that public surveys generate diverse - even contradictory or unrealistic - demands, but they are still valuable for surfacing ideas and testing assumptions. Full consensus is impossible because people's needs differ.

If you survey two thousand residents on the street and attempt to analyze the results, there will undoubtedly be mutually exclusive (agendas), including some that are physically impossible to implement. However, such a survey can prompt new ideas or confirm the validity of certain hypotheses. It's important to understand that we cannot satisfy one hundred per cent of everyone's needs (as) those needs vary among individuals.

— Pavlo Syrvatka,
Head of the Department of Urban Mobility and Street Infrastructure at Lviv City Council

- Interviews suggest that authorities and civil society activists often have different perspectives on the ideal participatory planning process in Ukraine, even though they pursue a common goal of equitable and effective urban governance.
 - For local authorities, the ideal process is typically a predictable, regulated form of public participation causing minimal delays in decision-making. Their focus is on legitimizing projects, maintaining control, and avoiding conflicts, frequently interpreting participation as a consultative form, conducted through controlled media, public hearings, electronic petitions, or discussions.
 - In contrast, civic activists emphasize genuine, rather than tokenistic, participation. They envision the ideal process as joint decision-making from the early stages through collaboration, open access to data, horizontal communication models, and consideration of the voices of vulnerable groups. For them, it is crucial that residents not only have the opportunity to express themselves but also exert real influence on final decisions.

- It is uncontroversial to suggest that a successful outlook lies in reciprocal movement: authorities opening up to flexible forms of dialogue and trust and the community assuming responsibility and approaching participation not as confrontation but as partnership.

Commentary on initiative-taking and disengagement in urban communities

Contrasting local initiatives and passivity in urban communities reveals deep-rooted socio- cultural and structural contradictions within Ukraine's urban environment. On one hand, there is a growing number of active initiatives: volunteer centres, various youth movements, urban forums, homeowners' associations, cultural and environmental campaigns. These demonstrate residents' ability to self-organize, protect public spaces, and influence governmental decisions. Often, such initiatives arise in response to crises, lack of services, or threat of overdevelopment. On the other hand, as noted by interviewees for the current paper, even in the same cities, there may be widespread inertia, a lack of trust, feelings of powerlessness, and reluctance to engage in matters perceived as 'not one's own'. Some residents do not believe in the effectiveness of participation or lack the time and resources to get involved.

The key challenge is thus making initiative the norm rather than an exception. This may be achieved by increasing the visibility of successful practices, building infrastructure that supports participation (training, funding, and spaces for interaction), and, most importantly, shifting the culture of coexistence from 'what happens in my city is not my concern' to 'I am part of my city'.

Commentary on media and participation in urban green space renewal

A common trend across most case study cities is the implementation of projects aimed at reconstructing and creating green spaces, e.g. the Urban Park in Kyiv, the Hrabnyk park in Rivne, Khimik Park in Vinnytsia, and Fedir Merzhavtsev Park in Kryvyi Rih.

- The creation of the Urban Park in Kyiv demonstrated exemplary use of various participatory tools; however, in the years after its opening, media mentions of the park significantly decreased.

- In Rivne, information about construction plans in Hrabnyk Park acted as a catalyst for public activism. The park's concept was developed in several stages with the involvement of local residents and other stakeholders. Organizing communal work events and information campaigns helped maintain interest in the project.
- The Vinnytsia case illustrates a prolonged transformation process from a neglected green area to a modern public space using participatory methods. Initially, there were disputes regarding the area's future, including a proposal to build a church, which sparked resident protests. Only after the area was officially designated as a park did the city council commission the Institute for Urban Development to develop a renewal concept. This process included public discussions and community needs assessments.
- Kryvyi Rih's park serves as a successful example of a civic initiative to revitalize urban space. In the 2000s, the charitable foundation Kryvbas Residents' Civic Initiative was established and took the park under its care.



Community-consolidating projects: Urban Park, Kyiv © AUU



Community-consolidating projects: Hrabnyk Park. Rivne © AUU



Community-consolidating projects: Khimik Park, Vinnytsia © AUU



Community-consolidating projects: Fedir Mershavtsev Park, Kryvyi Rih © AUU

In Lozova, the co-creation of an integrated development concept became a community-unifying project. This initiative emphasized the inclusion of smaller population groups and prioritized broad, informal community engagement in planning processes over speed. The experience fostered resident responsibility for territorial development and is expected to bolster support for future initiatives.

Based on this analysis and the media screening undertaken for the current paper, several points can be made:

- Topics related to civic initiatives receive limited attention in national media;
- Local media tend to use simpler terminology than that selected for the study (notably, the term 'urban citizenship' is rarely used);
- To effectively screen media for relevant information, it was necessary to additionally focus on allusion to civic organizations;
- The most prevalent type of civic initiatives aimed at community cohesion are projects related to leisure activities, recreation, communication, and rehabilitation.



THEMATIC PAPER

Citizenship: Urban Futures in Ukraine



Funded by:



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development