

Art as Peace Building

**Annex 4
Case Studies Ukraine**

Disclaimer

This report was commissioned by the British Council.

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Suggested Citation for the Full Report

edgeandstory, & Lanka.pro Collective (2026). *Art as Peace Building: An exploration of practices and impact scenarios of how arts and culture address fragility and conflict*. British Council. <https://doi.org/10.57884/30WN-CQ12>

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Country Context and Case Studies

Ukraine

Country Overview

Political and Conflict Context

Ukraine has been resisting Russian aggression for 14 years now, since its first military interventions in 2014 in the East of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, and the full-scale invasion in 2022. Since then, the conflict has gone more and more global, with Russia directly engaging Iran and North Korea in military actions, forming anti-Western alliances through economic and diplomatic means, and constantly destabilising the EU through covert operations, acts of sabotage, and informational warfare.

The Russian war is characterised by systematic and widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian laws, committed by Russian military forces and their proxies in Ukraine. PACE qualified these actions as war crimes or crimes against humanity, identifying some elements of Russia's actions as genocidal (Council of the European Union, 2024; International Criminal Court, 2023). These violations include:

indiscriminate attacks against civilians and humanitarian and medical personnel, premeditated destruction of critical civilian infrastructure such as medical facilities, schools, electric power plants, and cultural and religious heritage; the illegal abduction, detention, enforced disappearance, torture, ill-treatment and extrajudicial killings of Ukrainian citizens; the torture, ill-treatment and summary executions of Ukrainian prisoners of war; the unlawful transfer or deportation of Ukrainian children; all forms of conflict-related sexual violence; the use of chemical weapons and cluster bombs; attacks causing widespread, long-term and severe damage to the environment; looting; and the forced "passportisation" and conscription of Ukrainian citizens.

The war in Ukraine has accelerated the development and widespread use of drones, robotics, AI, and electronic warfare systems. These technological developments have redefined the fundamental principles of global security (Zaluzhnyi V., 2025), which Russia's hybrid warfare has already been targeting for decades. Led by the

“weaponisation of everything” (Mark Galeotti, 2022) principle, the Russian hybrid strategy has a particular focus on culture and cultural heritage (Mark Dunkley et al., 2023).

The systematic Russian attacks on Ukrainian culture, through physical destruction and looting or through hostile rhetoric aiming to deny or erase Ukrainian identity, reignited discussions of the role of culture in conflicts. On the one hand, Russia constantly weaponises culture, manipulating historical narratives and controlling information resources, utilising agents of influence and significant financial investments across the globe. Russia has actively employed its cultural diplomacy for disseminating narratives and perceptions favourable to the Kremlin among foreign audiences (Ukrainian Institute, 2022). This instrumentalisation of culture serves as a tool to mitigate the international community’s response, complicating the global understanding of the conflict and its implications. As the war continues, the interplay of direct violence, cyber tactics, and propaganda underscores the multifaceted nature of modern warfare and the profound impact it has on both individuals and nations.

On the other hand, Russian aggression in Ukraine highlighted the importance of culture and identity as integral elements of national sovereignty. Despite the hardships of war, surveys show that the Ukrainian people maintain a strong sense of united yet diverse national

identity (SHARP Wave 3, 2024), which has been a key factor in the nation’s resistance and resilience. For Ukrainians, culture, being the foundation of the nation’s identity, has acted as a powerful source of solidarity and collective strength during times of crisis.

Cultural Ecosystem and Infrastructure

The ongoing war has inflicted severe damage on cultural infrastructure and heritage sites through destruction¹ and looting.² In October 2022, a new Russian law appropriated museum collections from the occupied Ukrainian territories. Russia’s violations of the heritage conventions highlight the urgent need for protection and problematise the efficiency of preservation efforts in times of conflict (Campfens E., et al., 2023). The need for evacuation of teams and collections remains a constant challenge for cultural institutions on the frontlines.

The full-scale invasion in the aftermath of the years of COVID lockdown made an existing difficult situation in the sector into a perfect storm. For many years, culture in Ukraine has been an overlooked and underfunded sector governed by ineffective post-Soviet policies, with outdated infrastructure and one of the lowest-paid and poorly educated workforces. People working in cultural sphere are suffering double burden of professional responsibilities

1 1,333 cultural heritage sites and 2,415 cultural infrastructure facilities were damaged as a result of Russian aggression as of September 2025 (Ministry of Culture of Ukraine).

2 According to the assessment of ICOM Ukraine, approximately 1.7 million objects from Ukrainian museums are in Russia’s control. Source: Russia’s War on Ukraine’s Cultural Heritage: Museums in Crosshairs <https://ukraineworld.org/en/articles/analysis/russias-war-ukraines-museums>

and caregiving in the situation of existential threat and constant emotional trauma; teams are weakened by brain drain as a result of forced replacement, military service, overwork, burnout, and low self-esteem (the latter in particular stemming from a lack of recognition of their efforts and the importance of their work). Air raids, blackouts, lack of shelters in the cultural venues, safety of audiences and artefacts and other security challenges disrupt everyday work, demand constant double-planning and additional managerial efforts, and undermine long-term planning (Karnaukh A., Kravchuk K., 2024). The deaths of dozens of creatives inflict irreversible loss to Ukrainian culture.³

In these circumstances, cultural actors have demonstrated impressive leadership for their audiences and communities, expanding their roles to serve their communities' needs and keeping them together. The responses varied from emergency humanitarian interventions, when cultural actors have become fundraisers to cover the most urgent needs, and cultural venues have become shelters; to documenting war crimes, providing mental health support and developing memorialisation practices - cultural actors become true social innovators in times of crisis. Most significantly, cultural actors contribute to the society's work of reimagining itself, its past, present and future.

Peacebuilding and Fragility Discourse

An essential aspect of the study is the concept of building peace in the country and understanding how the cultural and artistic sectors help to make it. The notion of peace has become quite charged in Ukraine, and there is an ongoing debate on what "peace" means for Ukraine and globally. The accepted consensus is that the old architecture of peace and security is not relevant anymore; Galtung's theory of "negative" and "positive" peace ("absence of violence, absence of war") does not work in the context of armed conflict, especially international aggression: absence of hostilities may be a form of occupation, and occupation is another form of war (Oleksandra Matviichuk, 2022).

Calls for peace, such as building a dialogue or for reconciliation, cooperation, and efforts to humanise the aggressor country, are unacceptable in the context of war. The concept of peace has lost its original meaning through excessive use and instrumentalisation to obtain political dividends and the apparent position of a peacemaker for world domination.

Asymmetry of experience of Ukrainians under the Russian aggression compared to other conflicts since WWII complicates forming the basis for the conceptualisation of the peace doctrines with consideration of the

³ One of the tragic examples is the story of author and civic activist Viktoria Amelina, who investigated the death of the children's author Volodymyr Vakulenko in the Russian-occupied village in Kharkiv region and who was eventually killed herself by a Russian missile during one of her missions. For more stories, see the project [People of Culture Taken Away By The War](#) by PEN Ukraine and The Ukrainians Media.

Ukrainian experience of resistance, cultural sources of resilience and local experience of peacebuilding practices. Some of the aspects of these practices are:⁴

1. **Need to find the language which not yet exist** to conceptualise the experience Ukrainians are going through: the war in Ukraine does not fit into the old theories of post-conflict settlement; it is not intercommunal hostility, not a symmetrical uprising, not a civil conflict but a full-scale colonial war with a nuclear state that attacks the integrity, memory, culture and physicality of the people. Offering Ukrainian artists a “paintbrush instead of a weapon” or theatrical acts of reconciliation with Russian soldiers means not just a misunderstanding — it is a manifestation of methodological violence.
2. During an ongoing attack, the social cohesion effect of culture is natural. It helps to preserve society and prevent it from collapsing from within, to consolidate, not reconcile; it aims to create safe dialogue spaces in order to survive and persevere, not to lose dignity or meaning. **The innovation which is happening in Ukraine is that, with culture being built on the values of human dignity, the very nature of this war has become a battle between a space of democracy and courage, and a space of totalitarian fear.** Hence a strong sense of vitality and intense sense-making processes in the wartime cultural practices in Ukraine. Culture may be a source of dignity and freedom leading to the “world of roads”, or it may feed fear and the “world of borders” (Institute of Post-Information Society, 2023). Studying Ukrainian cases through joint academic research and integrating the findings from Ukraine into global academic discourse will help to develop this new language of war and peace and new peacebuilding practices.
3. Ukraine is in a state of **ongoing catastrophe, not post-conflict.** Therefore, any peace initiatives aimed at “hearing both sides” in Ukraine are perceived as “**dialogue between victims and perpetrators**”. Such attempts will be inefficient and, moreover, insensitive or even traumatic for the Ukrainian participants. However, this approach was used too often in the programming of international cultural and academic events and grant programmes, not only after 2014, but even after 2022.
4. The Ukrainian **cultural sector is the infrastructure of peace:** it does not simply “reflect the war”, it holds the country together, “preserving normalcy in resistance” (*the relevant approaches are listed in the next chapter*) and creating spaces that nurture the highest potential of the future.
5. Peacebuilding efforts should not only work towards military balance, but also towards **protecting cultural identity, the information sphere, and global values,** to allow the creation of a new security architecture that will be effective in countering hybrid threats.

⁴ The following five hypotheses are based on Focus Group Discussions with the Ukrainian peacebuilding community.

In the context of peace talks unfolding around Ukraine since 2014, the notion that peace can be achieved through dialogue and compromise fails to account for the existential threat posed by an aggressor that seeks not just territorial gains but the subjugation of a nation's identity and sovereignty. In this context, it becomes clear that peace cannot be equated with compromise. The idea that peace is the result of concessions made by one party to another is fundamentally flawed when one side is engaged in an act of aggression. For Ukraine, true peace is defined as the cessation of the enemy's ability to attack, a state in which the nation can exist without the constant threat of violence and oppression. This condition was described by a group of Ukrainian opinion leaders as **"just and sustainable peace"**, which implies punishment and reparations as well as peace guarantees for Ukraine and transformation of Russia (demilitarisation, denuclearisation, decolonisation, among other needed changes) (Sustainable Peace Manifesto, 2022).

This understanding necessitates a re-evaluation of what it means to achieve peace in a world where power dynamics are heavily skewed and where the aggressor often seeks to undermine the very foundations of peace. The war in Ukraine challenges the conventional understanding of peace and calls for a reimagining of its meaning in the context of modern warfare and imperial aggression. **By embracing new concepts of peace that prioritise protection, agency, inclusivity, and cultural expression, Ukraine can forge a path towards a more resilient and sustainable peace.** This redefined

vision of peace not only addresses the immediate needs of the nation but also contributes to a broader discourse on conflict resolution and peace-making in an increasingly complex world.

Mapping Summary

The mapping below is based on the desk study, field study and in-depth interviews (including site visits) held in Ukraine in June-August 2025 and offers a number of approaches that highlight the similarities within (most often) ad-hoc response of culture and arts practitioners to the full-scale war. Among dozens of great cases, the research team has selected practices most vividly based on competence, dignity, careful intervention and sustainable impact in the fragile context, considering also geographical and sectoral balance within the Ukrainian cultural field. **Peacebuilding efforts in Ukraine before 2014 have not been included in this mapping since the majority of it was based on the wrong assumption (infiltrated by the Russian propaganda) (Stop Fake, 2025) that Ukraine is divided/polarised due to the regional differences (which was one of the justification for Russia's military intervention in Ukraine and one of many examples of how the notion of peacebuilding can be misused).**

Approach 1: Social cohesion and resilience through artistic practices, shared rituals, culture and heritage

After the full-scale invasion, centres for providing humanitarian assistance to civilians and bases for maintaining necessary equipment, medicines, and food at the front began to form in most large and smaller cities. People from different centres who were proactive in their position joined them.

Representatives of cultural and artistic circles began to form and offer various activities (emergency response as a way to support their community, professional solidarity and support through professional and peer-to-peer networks). Growing demand for cultural services: identity search and processing experiences of war; providing a sense of normalcy. As it turned out, the demand for music, theatre, reading, stories, and drawing became relevant for a wider range of people than before. In many cases, cultural and artistic projects became an important tool in creating safe space, in the feeling of being near other people, and through a sense of unity, maintaining ties in the situation of massive migrations, both internal (IDPs) and external (emigration).

Thus, strengthening horizontal connections and creating new communities provide a sense of care, support, and contact. In the first months and days, such connections gave people the strength to continue overcoming difficult and unusual trials.

Cases

1. [Urban Camp Lviv](#) - street culture hub, community centre and temporary housing for displaced people organised by IDPs
2. [Scattered Communities](#) - a project of Asortymentna Kimnata that creates a space for dialogue between artists who left Ukraine and who stayed in Ukraine during the war
3. [Mystetskyi Arsenal](#) - the exhibition about our feelings and other work during the offensive in Kyiv echoed from the first days of the invasion and gathered people around it
4. [DCCC Dnipro Center for Contemporary Culture](#) - multiple case of combining emergency response, impact on city development and cultural practices, eg. Community Kitchen
5. [Izolyatiya](#) - one of the few ongoing systemic practices carried since 2014 that combines arts, culture and community work within the war context and first-hand experience of Russian terror and violence
6. [Yermilov Center](#) / residency-bombshelter-performance, live experience of artists witnessing the first days of the Russian invasion in the frontline Kharkiv
7. [Room for Heritage](#) - a multistakeholder project that combines cultural heritage protection, strengthening the resilience and social cohesion in the frontline areas

Approach 2: Cultural initiatives to strengthen security through crowdfunding

Since the beginning of the invasion, some visible and influential artists, musicians, actors, cultural activists, and producers have taken on a new role—through their talent they raise funds to strengthen the country's defense, demining, medical training and treatment, social support, and rehabilitation, which are essential for the survival of the country as a whole.

Cases

1. [Comeback Alive](#) launches multiple fundraising campaigns in collaboration with cultural and artistic projects
2. [Fusion Jams](#) – permanent auctions and collections during concerts
3. [Tsyferblat](#) band, Gaysanova brand and Prytula Foundation collaboration – demining campaign during Eurovision
4. [Pen Ukraine](#) - literary volunteering trips to the frontline areas
5. [Badstreet boys](#) and other stand-up comedy projects, as well as NAFO and other meme-based movements using humour as a fundraising and storytelling tool
6. [United 24](#) engages globally renowned artists and celebrities into the fundraising campaigns for Ukraine
7. [Pictoric](#) - community of illustrators that fundraise and advocate through the language of posters.

Approach 3: Documentation of war and storytelling through artistic projects

Documentation has become one of the most common practices among artists, creators who are used to using various artistic tools – writing, recording, drawing. However, with the beginning of the full-scale invasion, it has become one of the most common practices among artists and people from non-artistic fields. It has become a way to record reality, which is being displaced by consciousness due to fear, danger, and an incredible concentration of traumatic events. Ukrainians have become both subjects and creators of their own history in the midst of war

Cases

1. [INDEX](#) - institution emerged during the war in order to document and create exchanges for research, writing texts from the inside through the lens of international actors about Ukraine
2. [The Wartime Art Archive](#) - database by NGO Museum of Contemporary Art
3. [Our years, our words, our losses, our searches, our us](#) - first exhibition in a newly launched Jam Factory Art Centre
4. The work of photographers documenting the war for the media, including M.Palinchak, O.Maslov, Ye. Maloletka, [O.Gliadelov](#). The work of writers - occupation diaries, [V. Vakulenko's diaries](#), and diaries from the front. Diaries of people from the village of Yagidne about being in basements under occupation.

5. The work of modern theatre during the war manifests reality in a way that language cannot reach. e.g. Theater [NAFTA](#)
6. Oscar winning film by Mstyslav Chernov and Yevhen Maloletka, [20 Days in Mariupol](#), and A Road to Avdiyivka
7. [Post:Bellum Ukraine](#) - documenting oral stories of war and occupation
8. [Coloropera](#) - a synesthetic installation that transforms wartime testimonies into an opera of sound, color, and light.
4. [Artists of Agreement](#) train psychologists, teachers and social workers to guide the dialogue and conflict resolution through artistic practice
5. [Veterans Theatre, Contemporary dance practices](#) - art therapy and storytelling of Ukraine's struggle through the eyes of the defenders
6. [Culture Helps](#) - EU-funded programme aimed at strengthening the mental health of artists and communities in and outside Ukraine
7. [Lviv Municipal Arts Centre: Homefront Affairs](#) - capacity building and art-residency to equip artists with the art-therapy tools for the work with veterans

Approach 4: Work with trauma and healing

Ukrainian society has faced the ongoing challenge of the growing traumatisation (both mental and physical). Therefore, a variety of initiatives started to provide psychological support, physical therapy, and rehabilitation. There is a growing understanding that trauma-sensitive approaches should be applied not only in specialised institutions where rehabilitation is carried out, but also at different levels of social projects, programs, institutions, and personal relationships.

Cases

1. [Superhumans](#) and [Unbroken Art](#) are new rehabilitation centres that apply a holistic approach
2. [MC6](#) launched crowd-funded art therapy community residences and works with veterans and their families
3. [Art Therapy Force](#) aims at professionalising the field of art therapy

Approach 5: Memory, identity and public spaces

The issues of commemoration and decolonisation have become an urgent and significant matter. Multiple initiatives related to education and awareness raising on Ukrainian identity and cultural heritage emerged. Grassroot initiatives that raise funds and invest them in the creation of murals, memorial plaques, monuments, decoration of places of study, residence, and public places are growing. At the same time, the process of critical revision of the historical narrative imposed on the public spaces by the former Russian empire and USSR as well as an "uncomfortable" heritage has started. Therefore, the trend of reimagining public spaces creates the room for the necessary dialogue on memory, grief, death, loss, complexity and revival.

Cases

1. [Past/Future/Art](#) – Memorialisation Lab for artists and local communities
2. [Vrodylo](#) – podcast by Ukrainian that explores Ukrainian political identity held by Ukrainians of different ethnic origins
3. [Conversation of birds](#) – performance by Word and Voice theater that aims to showcase the essence of Ukrainian “high culture” from different regions
4. [Know your Ukraine](#) – online course on traditional culture by Ivan Honchar Museum
5. [Vytoky](#) – private initiative for integrating traditional practices into the corporate culture in Ukraine
6. [Museum of terror](#) – municipal museum that works with sensitive topics such as occupation, captivity, violence, discrimination as well as “uncomfortable” heritage
7. [Museum decolonisation guide on Ukraine](#) by British Council, ICOM and Ukrainian Institute

Approach 6: International relations and agency of Ukrainian culture

One of the most important challenges today in building a global dialogue around Ukrainian history is to introduce the Ukrainian experience into the global agenda, and vice versa. Considering the enormous efforts of Russian cultural diplomacy institutions to create the

misinformed perception of Ukrainian culture and history worldwide⁵, Ukraine is not capable of offering a response of a similar scale. That is why asymmetric actions as well as ongoing support from the international community (esp. media and academia) is crucial.

Cases

1. Representing Ukraine at the top global venues eg. at [Carnegie Hall](#), the Venice Biennale in [2022](#) and at the Architecture Biennale with the Dakh project in [2025](#), various book, design, fashion, music fairs etc.
2. British Council: [Eurovision](#) in Liverpool 2023 was held on behalf of Ukraine who was a winner in 2022
3. [UK/Ukraine Season of Culture](#) by British Council and Ukrainian Institute was planned before 2022 and got transformed into emergency response
4. Exhibition of the Ukrainian avant-garde [In the Eyes of Storm](#) or VR-[showcasing](#) of soviet mosaic
5. Photo exhibition [Beyond the Silence](#) – a dialogue in Ukraine between artists from Myanmar, Cambodia, Mexico, Kazakhstan, Kenya and others
6. [Cancel Russia](#) campaign – partially successful approach (the invested resources did not pay off, generalizations rather not effective)
7. [Burning Man](#) Ukraine community - grass root initiative working in annual representation of Ukraine

⁵ According to the assessment of ICOM Ukraine, approximately 1.7 million objects from Ukrainian museums are in Russia's control. Source: Russia's War on Ukraine's Cultural Heritage: Museums in Crosshairs <https://ukraineworld.org/en/articles/analysis/russias-war-ukraines-museums>

8. Ukrainian arts at key political conferences and events since 2022 (e.g. [Munich Security Conference](#), [Davos Economic forum](#))

Approach 7: Art, heritage and resistance

There is a thin line between propaganda, instrumentalisation of culture and cultural agency. Here we collected a number of cases where culture and cultural heritage is a part of physical resistance (grass-root or under the governance of military units) as well as state narrative (included in the political strategies).

Cases

1. [Yellow Ribbon](#) and [Zla Mavka](#) - non-violent anonymous (mainly female-led) resistance movements on the occupied territories
2. [Radio Khartia](#) - media unit under the brigade Khartia led by a poet Serhii Zhadan
3. [Cultural forces](#) - a platform under the Armed Forces of Ukraine, uniting artists, activists, business and international partners to address current challenges through culture
4. [Heritage protection military unit](#) - established in the armed forces in December 2024
5. [Rafael Lemkin Society](#) - brings together lawyers, researchers, cultural leaders, and human rights advocates to work toward preventing and punishing the crime of genocide.

6. [HEMO lab](#) - museums, researchers and security services documenting and communicating cultural heritage destructions.

7. [Navigating the war as artists in Ukraine](#): practical guide by NGO Museum of Contemporary Art.

Approach 8: Sensemaking and imagining the future

There is a set of practices that aims to create spaces for sensemaking and future visioning while considering the Russian-Ukrainian war as a consequence of the failed global democracy and security system. These practices stem from innovation, brave thinking and dialogue with intellectuals and artists worldwide.

Cases

1. [Literature Museum](#) - source of sensemaking and reimagining the identity of frontline Kharkiv
2. [UkraineWorld podcast](#) - initiative by philosopher Volodymyr Yermolenko and literature researcher Tetyana Oharkova
3. [City senses](#) - educational initiative inspired by philosopher Oleksandr Filonenko
4. [Community Dialogues](#) - cross-sector dialogue about the future between the leaders of grass-root communities
5. [What is next?](#) Podcast about Ukraine of the future

6. [“Culture for recovery”](#) school for local communities that aims at exploring local cultural assets and using it as a source of inspiration for future strategic development.
7. [Emerge Ukraine](#): pilgrimage for foreigners to explore what is emerging at the edge of history.

Case Studies

Among the above-mentioned cases, there are some that combine multiple approaches and hardly fit in a single practice since they are multilayered, multistakeholder, breakthrough and aim at a complex impact.

The first case study, Room for Heritage programme, is an innovative initiative designed to empower frontline communities to recognise and rethink their local cultural resources in the face of existential challenges. This programme focuses on various heritage elements, such as museum collections, memorial sites, local figures, and potential tourist attractions, encouraging communities to engage with their heritage in meaningful ways. By providing methodological tools for creating cultural products, the initiative not only aids in the interpretation of heritage but also addresses the unique challenges caused by the ongoing war. A notable aspect of this programme is its commitment to accessibility; the educational resources developed are now available to the public through an online course on the [Prometheus](#) online

platform, fostering broader engagement and understanding of cultural heritage.

The second case study, PEN Ukraine, represents a vital cultural and human rights organisation that unites a diverse group of individuals, including journalists, writers, scholars, and cultural managers. PEN Ukraine emphasises the belief that literature should remain a unifying force, especially in times of political turmoil and war. PEN Ukraine works both for domestic audiences and abroad, bringing in foreign journalists for study trips to get a first-hand experience of the lives of the communities during wartime.

Together, these case studies illustrate the critical role of cultural initiatives in supporting community resilience, building trust and support, and finding new ways to rethink cultural heritage in the face of adversity. They underscore the power of heritage and literature as tools for healing, understanding, and creating visions for the future.

Room for Heritage

Room for Heritage programme aimed to help communities identify and/or rethink existing local cultural resources and also learn from the most experienced players in the field.

The **key hypothesis** in designing the *Room for Heritage* programme was that the development of a decentralised cultural infrastructure and building local cultural actors' capacity are crucial for increasing social cohesion, and that heritage is one of the cornerstones for strengthening of the identity and sense of dignity, crucial for resilience. Thus, the programme was built around peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, developing networks of solidarity and mentorship support from more capable/stronger institutions.

The programme was implemented from January to September 2024, during the third year of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, by a consortium of four organisations: Art Arsenal (Mystetskyi Arsenal), IZOLYATSIA Platform of Cultural Initiatives, Kharkiv Literary Museum, and Odessa National Art Museum, with the support of the Partnership Fund for Resilient Ukraine (PFRU).

Participants of the Room for Heritage programme were 30 organisations from Odesa, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions, including organisations relocated from these regions. 14 organisations out of 30 received subgrants of up to 9 thousands GBP from the Fund for the implementation of their projects, which they implemented with mentoring support from consortium members. Both learning and practical

(pilot projects' implementation) programmes were focused on the topic of local identity, culture for social cohesion (reflecting on the experiences of war, working with dynamic audiences) and culture for local development.

Key outcomes of the programme:

- **Training programme development.** PFRU and consortium partners jointly developed a programme to enhance the capacity of local cultural actors to work on strengthening social cohesion in their communities.
- **Learning Lab:** The consortium worked with 30 cultural organisations to strengthen their organisational capacity and develop/improve project ideas, which were defined in response to the challenges of war and the expanding role of cultural actors in their communities (from documenting war crimes to providing mental health support).
- **Pilot projects:** Out of the 30 participants, the consortium selected 14 to support the implementation of their project ideas.
- **Networking:** The consortium held a series of meetings (online and offline) for participating organisations (both in the training and pilot phases) to allow them to build relationships, learn best practices, and share experiences.
- **Scaling up learning tools:** Based on the project's findings, **an online course** was developed, accessible to a wide audience, that highlights issues of culture and social cohesion during war.

Challenges and Failures

All programme participants faced challenges in managing and administering projects, regardless of their previous experience or management skills. The main reason for these difficulties was the staffing crisis: institutions from the frontline and de-occupied territories suffer from a shortage of employees much more than other regions of Ukraine. A significant part of the employees were forced to go abroad or work remotely due to evacuation from dangerous zones. The situation was further complicated by the fact that some programme participants overestimated their own resources and capabilities in these conditions, submitting project proposals with an excessive number of tasks and activities. The programme implementation period was limited, and most of the activities fell on the period from June to September 2024, when hourly power outages were in effect in Ukraine due to shelling of energy infrastructure. In addition, a significant number of industries were relocated from frontline areas, and those that remained also suffered from labour shortages and power outages. As a result, programme participants faced additional difficulties in finding contractors to purchase equipment and provide the necessary services.

Some programme participants noted that they felt a significant lack of financial and legal competencies in their teams. This is especially true for non-governmental organisations, which often do not have full-time accountants at all or involve specialists on a part-time basis; practically none of the teams have a lawyer on their staff. In state

institutions, the situation is somewhat better, since an accountant is usually on the staff, but such specialists are often overloaded with basic responsibilities and do not have experience working with extrabudgetary and grant funding. This caused both errors in budget estimates at the planning stage and additional burden on teams during project implementation.

Most Significant Change – The Story Is the Programme

The traditional partnership network of cultural actors and heritage operators (based on the examples of participants in the Room for Heritage programme) includes other cultural institutions, public organisations, libraries; for the majority, one of the most important partners is schools. According to the study conducted during the project, education (especially primary and secondary for children) plays an important role in the processes of rethinking and discovering the new, therefore it is important that cultural practices contain educational and educational elements and are included in curricula. The programme participants also emphasised their important role in extracurricular education. With the beginning of the full-scale invasion, it was the horizontal networks of support and solidarity between cultural institutions that proved to be the most effective. The transfer of experience from one actor to another in the format of specific cases is one of the most sought-after aspects of professional training today, and the opportunity to communicate directly with practitioners working in the same field and solving the same problems was

often mentioned by participants as one of the most valuable achievements of the programme. It is obvious that horizontal interaction is more effective than vertical one, due to common challenges, mutual trust, and openness of institutions to cooperation; therefore when expert support or crisis solutions were needed, such help often came

from colleagues who acted more flexibly and promptly than the authorities. The consortium continues to operate in 2025-2026 proving the viability of the model with the second and third edition launch and adding a new partner – Dnipro Center for Contemporary Culture.

PEN Ukraine

PEN Ukraine is a cultural and human rights organisation that unites Ukrainian journalists, writers, scholars, playwrights, publishers, translators, human rights activists, cultural managers, photographers, and illustrators. It is one of 146 national centres of PEN International. PEN confirms that “Literature knows no frontiers and must remain a common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals. In all circumstances, and particularly in times of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.”

PEN’s projects are based on the principle of supporting human rights and cultural freedom; among them are projects of local and international significance implemented by PEN’s active members. The project are Propysy (“Practice Writing”) workshop festival, Literary readings in Ukrainian towns, People of Culture Taken Away By The War, PEN Ukraine’s literary volunteering trips, Unbreakable Ukrainian libraries, In Solidarity with

Ukraine, Free Voices of Crimea, 100 Notable Books in Ukrainian, From Kulish to the Present-day: 100 Iconic Novels and Short Stories in Ukrainian, Solidarity Words, Journalism of Independent Ukraine: History in the First Person, Dialogues on War, Here-And-Now: Stories of Journalists at the War, Requiem, The War Is Not Over Yet, Words and Bullets, Regional Meeting of PEN Centres, Archive of projects

Actors involved - members of PEN Ukraine. Each project has a different constellation of partners, depending on the type of activity. Among the visible partners are listed the International Renaissance Foundation, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy, Duh i Litera Publishing House, The Ukrainian Media, Vivat, the Human Rights Centre ZMINA, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Book Aid International, English PEN, PEN International, Komubook Publishing House, Book Arsenal International Festival, Pabulum Publishing House, Ukraïner, Crimean House, National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy.

Most Significant Change – The Story Is the Programme

After the full-scale invasion, PEN recognised the urgent need for practical assistance and decided to focus its efforts on evacuating people from conflict zones. This initiative stemmed from a deep sense of necessity, compelling them to be on the ground where help was most needed. As their work evolved, they expanded their mission to include the delivery of humanitarian aid. One of their current projects involves working in territories close to the frontline, where they bring books to libraries and organise reading sessions. This initiative not only fosters engagement with the local community but also provides a vital connection to shared experiences for those who remain in these areas. Although consistent work in such challenging conditions is difficult, it is crucial for supporting and uplifting the community.

On an international scale, PEN continues to advocate for these projects, ensuring that they remain visible in global discussions. They actively participate in important international meetings and collaborate with world-renowned intellectuals to promote narratives that emphasise the need for peace. Their efforts are focused on calling for an end to the conflict, highlighting the importance of supporting Ukraine to defend itself.

Artistic Methods

PEN Ukraine implements various artistic and cultural methods to support and promote inclusivity and amplify voices within the Ukrainian communities and for various international audiences. One of the core principles guiding their initiatives is the concept of “Inclusivity: Nothing for Us Without Us.” This principle emphasises the importance of including the voices of those directly connected with the topics being discussed, ensuring that the narratives. By prioritising the voices of those who have lived through these experiences, PEN Ukraine creates a platform for authentic storytelling that resonates with audiences both locally and globally.

In addition to literary events, PEN Ukraine organises public exhibitions that showcase texts and materials related to their projects. These exhibitions often take place in outdoor settings, making art accessible to a broader audience and encouraging community engagement. By bringing literature into public spaces, PEN Ukraine invites dialogue and reflection on pressing social issues, further reinforcing its commitment to inclusivity.

One of the most innovative formats employed by PEN Ukraine is the PEN Bus, a travelling initiative that features prominent authors and poets travelling to the places located in the proximity to the frontline. This mobile platform allows writers to connect with communities across the abandoned towns and villages, facilitating readings, discussions, and workshops in various locations. The PEN Bus not only serves as a means of promoting literature but

also as a vehicle for cultural exchange, bringing together diverse voices and fostering a sense of solidarity among writers and audiences alike

Challenges and Failures

The ongoing war in Ukraine has created a complex landscape, presenting both significant challenges and unique opportunities. On one hand, the war has led to devastating losses, both in terms of human life and cultural heritage. Yet, it has also catalysed a newfound visibility and support for Ukrainian voices on the international stage. For the first time, Ukrainian PEN has garnered unprecedented support from the global community.

This duality of the war as both a limiting and enhancing factor is evident in the way PEN has navigated its mission. The organisation has managed to address difficult topics with a level of understanding that resonates with

audiences worldwide. However, PEN's institutional stance remains neutral, which can complicate its engagement with contentious issues. The decision to distance itself from Russian projects and writers has sparked debate within the literary community. Many public figures, accustomed to openly sharing their thoughts and experiences, have struggled to comprehend this request.

Despite these challenges, Ukrainian PEN has successfully launched several impactful initiatives. The Georgy Gongadze Prize, a recognised award in journalism, stands out as a testament to the organisation's commitment to honouring journalistic integrity and courage. Similarly, the Vasyl Stus Prize and the PEN Library have emerged as successful projects that not only celebrate the achievements of journalists and writers, but also serve as vital resources for preserving and promoting Ukrainian literature.

Access the full report here:

<https://doi.org/10.57884/30WN-CQ12>

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