

COMMUNITIES

AT THE HEART OF
URBAN CHANGES

PARTICIPATION
TOOLKIT



3	UKRAINE IS BUILDING AND REBUILDING ITSELF. BY ALL UKRAINIANS
4	THE START
5	A LARGER MOVEMENT
7	10 VALUES FOR SUSTAINABLE PARTICIPATION
9	PRACTICAL CASE STUDIES
10	CHERNIVTSI
17	LUKASHIVKA
28	PIDHAITSI
37	TOOLS USED
40	ANALYZING ACTORS
47	INFORMING AND INVITING
55	ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY
62	CO-CREATING
64	WORKING UNDER STRESS
70	AFTERTHOUGHTS
71	COLOPHON

Ukraine is building and rebuilding itself. By all Ukrainians.

This is the strong believe and vision we have as Ro3kvit, together with all our Ukrainian and Dutch partners in the project 'Communities at the Heart of Urban Changes'.

Ukraine was in the process of decentralization reforms - local self-government and territorial organization of power was interrupted by the war in 2022. But it also continued during the war. And even - or maybe especially - in these very hard times, the Ukrainian society showed its strength by standing up, supporting each other and in creating new ideas and opportunities.

The large amount of municipalities and grassroots organisations that applied to learn from the Dutch experience in participatory design processes showed the interest and willingness to continue the decentralisation process.

During the project the partners from The Netherlands learned a lot as well. The high level Dutch teams learned how life during the war continues, and local initiatives struggle with and overcome challenges. What is the meaning and form of participatory projects under stressful circumstances?

Ro3kvit could function as a bridge between the Dutch and Ukrainian experience, because of the Ukrainian-international network that and because of the experience we have with participation in our other projects.

The output of this project is of much wider importance than in just the three municipalities we worked with. The tools that were used during the project can be very helpful and relevant for other Ukrainian initiatives and we hope they will be widely copied, reused and further adjusted.

By spreading the knowledge, the tools and the experiences, we are building and rebuilding the country. By all.

Fulco Treffers
CEO Ro3kvit

In November 2024, Ro3kvit and its three Dutch partners—INBO, Stipo, and Play the City—launched an Open Call for Ukrainian municipalities and their local partners to submit projects in which citizen involvement was a crucial factor for success. One could argue that a good relationship between a municipality and local communities is always essential for a flourishing society. Top-down policies without any citizen involvement lead in most cases to mutual distrust between authorities and citizens. In communities under stressful situations such as war or other (natural) disasters, a sense of belonging and “ownership” of the new situation—which will never be the same as it was—is even more urgent. But the how is not easily answered: on the one hand, there is interest from citizens to be involved and engaged; on the other hand, they (both citizens and municipalities) have many other urgent issues to handle.

The project Communities at the Heart of Urban Changes aims to provide food for thought, advice, and very practical tips and tricks.

The Open Call led to 91 applications, which was above expectation; moreover, the quality and variety made it difficult to choose which projects to further develop. The choice of whom to work with was determined not least by the expectation of how, and for which cases, the Dutch partners and Ro3kvit could contribute most. The Dutch approaches might work well in certain cases, but how useful they would be in the Ukrainian context remained to be seen. During the summer of 2025, there was intense collaboration and fieldwork activity in the three chosen municipalities: Lukashivka with Repair Together; Pidhaisti with Misto Reboot; and Chernivtsi with NGO AREAC.

From a de-occupied small rural village in need of a basic community and service centre, to a village needing to restore its relationship with its natural surroundings, to a city requiring the collaboration and engagement of local NGOs and active citizens—these three cases include characteristics that are recognisable in many other Ukrainian municipalities. The approaches and tools used are presented here in the toolkit. We reflected on their applicability to specific cases, on how and when international collaboration can be useful—the outsider’s view—and on what it means to work with these participatory tools under stressful circumstances. We hope these insights can be of use to many.

A LARGER MOVEMENT

Across Ukraine, 71 teams — from front-line cities to rural agglomerations — submitted applications describing their challenges, ambitions, and hopes for rebuilding social life and public spaces during wartime. They were seeking practical tools, clear methods, and capacity-building to work in new fields such as participatory planning, inclusive design, and community resilience.

A large number of applications highlighted the need to engage residents more effectively, especially groups that are often overlooked: internally displaced people (IDPs), veterans and their families, people with disabilities and low-mobility groups, as well as young and elderly residents.

Municipalities struggle with distrust, low participation, emotional fatigue, and the pressure of working under stress. Many expressed difficulty in facilitating discussions, motivating residents, or navigating sensitive topics such as memorialisation, trauma, or heritage loss.

These applications show that the challenges faced by Lukashivka, Chernivtsi, and Pidhaitsi are far from unique. The toolkit developed through the programme directly responds to the most common requests expressed across all applications: participation tools, working under stress, capacity-building for professionals, inclusive approaches for diverse groups, and strategies for sustainable development.

Nearly every community is looking for concrete, hands-on support with:

- how to choose the right participation methods
- how to design inclusive and barrier-free spaces
- how to gather and analyse community needs
- how to manage complex projects with limited resources
- how to communicate ideas, build trust, and overcome scepticism
- how to work with traumatised or vulnerable groups
- how to ensure the sustainability of projects beyond a single intervention
- how to activate people to join projects and work together



HERITAGE, CULTURE & HISTORICAL PRESERVATION

(heritage restoration, museums, historic squares, cultural diplomacy, tourism based on heritage)



PUBLIC SPACE, URBAN IMPROVEMENT & SPATIAL PLANNING

(eco-parks, plazas, streetscapes, public gardens, youth spaces, green & blue infrastructure, spatial plans)



PARTICIPATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & GOVERNANCE TOOL

(platforms for participation, youth councils, civic engagement hubs, training residents)



SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE & INCLUSIVE SERVICES

(multifunctional centres, IDP hubs, resilience centres, sports/recreational infrastructure, inclusive design)



VETERANS, REHABILITATION & MENTAL-HEALTH SUPPORT

(veteran hubs, rehab centres, mental health recovery, integration of veterans & war-affected residents)



10 VALUES FOR SUSTAINABLE PARTICIPATION

01

PARTICIPATION IS
A PRACTICE, NOT A
CHECKBOX

Participation is not something you just do, it is a profession. It is not enough anymore to be an architect, an urban planner or a social developer, being able to create processes of participation becomes a part of that profession. If you tried and failed, it doesn't mean that participation does not work, but it gives you an opportunity to learn for the next time how to develop this part of the profession better.

02

WE START WITH TRUST
AND CARE

Participation does not start with a workshop, but often needs healing first. Healing and (re)building trust are especially important in situations of stress, personal traumas, limited resources and attention in war, and situations of conflict. This means that often you cannot plan the time that is needed for participation before you start the process; it requires flexibility and an open attitude during the process.

03

WE THINK IN TERMS
OF LONG-TERM
TRANSFORMATION

Participation is not neutral, but meant to lead to long term transition. So participation is not the same as 'you tell us what you want, and we will do it'; it is meant to lead large networks through long term transitions. The long term transition we aim to achieve is always a compass for our short term actions, without exactly knowing beforehand how – that is what you will discover together with everyone. This also means that participation cannot be a one-off consultation evening, it should be about building long-term relationships to co-create and co-invest together.

04

NOT TOP-DOWN OR
BOTTOM-UP, BUT SHARED
RESPONSIBILITY

Participation is not top-down, nor bottom up, but both. The opposite of top-down is not bottom-up, it's middle-up-down. We don't create good cities through only top-down investments. But we also don't create good cities with only bottom-up initiatives. Sustainable development is created when both worlds work together as equal partners: middle-up-down. The conversation between these two worlds needs to be carefully curated by facilitators who understand both languages. The community therefore consists of everyone needed for the transition, both local residents, NGOs and businesses, as well as municipalities and investors.

05

PARTICIPATION IS
CURIOSITY, NOT
CONVINCING

Participation is not presenting, but listening. Participation is also not about calming resistance, or simply to inform about the project, it is about genuinely finding out the needs of many in order to include these into the shared transition. It starts with listening, observing, and understanding the community's needs from the inside out. Allow room for people to address issues and concerns you haven't thought about yet and make them part of your process. Of course you cannot do everything; the long term transition is your compass of what to do and what not to do.

06

WE GO TO WHERE LIFE HAPPENS

Participation is not inviting people to come to you on a Thursday evening, but going to where people already are, at the time they are already there. Never organise a participation night in a city hall on a specific night, because then mainly negative will come. For instance, stand in front of the entrance of a supermarket, a local school or an existing festival, and ask people their opinion on your proposal.

07

WE ACTIVELY INCLUDE QUIETER AND MARGINALIZED VOICES

Participation is not waiting who shows up, but actively reaching out to the weaker voices. You need to reach out more actively to the softer voices, vulnerable groups like children, elderly, people who came from elsewhere (IDPs, migrants), people with a lower income who are struggling to make ends meet, etcetera. Always in the process imagine an empty chair, and think of who should be sitting there to represent all voices in the community, and what is needed to activate those voices.

08

WE WORK STEP BY STEP, BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Participation is not a quick fix for instant large numbers, it is a process to gradually build up. It is not about having everyone around the table at once, but about starting with the early innovators and early adopters. It is difficult to find 'the community' and works better to find the local heroes with energy first. It is not about 'the municipality' but about the changemakers on the inside of the organisation who have the energy and the position to mobilise their colleagues. This means that participation always starts small, in one on one conversations, creating confidence and depth, reaching an understanding of the internal dynamics of groups, and finding partners in each group, and then slowly bringing them together.

09

WE MOVE FROM TALKING TO DOING, WHERE TIMING MATTERS

Participation is not talking, but doing. There is no participation without implementation. Doing builds trust. This requires the idea of tactical urbanism; selecting those short term actions that contribute to the long term transition. Go from co-creating to co-investing together. It does not start with a workshop, but with preparing for what happens after the workshop. If you have a participation workshop you can start to implement the first quick wins in the first weeks immediately after then people see that their voice really makes a difference, and that participating is valuable. They will then also open up to bigger ideas. This requires organising some budget for implementation, enough time immediately after the workshop, and the right permits needed from the side of the government or the building owner. Sometimes this preparation takes more time than the actual participation, but it is rewarded, because afterwards, you will fly much faster.

10

THE PROCESS IS ITERATIVE AND EMBRACES CONFLICT AS PART OF CHANGE

Participation is not linear. We move through cycles of listening, testing, reflecting, and adjusting. Conflict is not failure - it is a normal part of working with different needs, interests, and experiences. If you work together with many people, the question is not if you will have conflicts or not; the question is how you create the soft relations to be able to solve conflicts together, rather than the conflict becoming hard.

Practical Case Studies





LOCATION	Chernivtsi, Ukraine
INITIATOR	NGO AREAC
DEVELOPER	Play the City
COORDINATOR	Ro3kvit, Urban Coalition for Ukraine
PARTNERS	Chernivtsi City Council, INBO, STIPO

The main outcome of the project was the creation of the interactive platform “PoruCh”, where residents can both receive and offer free services and support. To physically stimulate collaboration and networking within the community, Play the City developed the Civic Action Game – an interactive tool that helps identify needs, resources, and opportunities for cooperation.

MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT



CONTEXT

Chernivtsi is the administrative center of Chernivtsi region in southwestern Ukraine, located 40 km from the Romanian border. Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Chernivtsi community, as one of the rear territories, has hosted and continues to receive a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from frontline areas. As of January 1, 2022, the city's population was about 260,000. By early 2025, according to the Chernivtsi Regional Military Administration, about 42,000 IDPs were officially registered in the city. Unofficially, the number is at least twice as high — reaching up to one-third of the total population. The region regularly receives evacuation trains from combat-affected regions, and most arrivals prefer to stay in Chernivtsi due to the lack of jobs and underdeveloped infrastructure in rural areas.

“

We all live in bubbles. The game helped us see how many strong initiatives exist in our city — and start working together.

representative of
the local NGO

This demographic shift significantly affects the municipality's capacity to provide social support and services, creating high pressure on infrastructure, healthcare, and education. There is a critical shortage of affordable housing. Many IDPs are accommodated in student dormitories or collective centers unsuited for long-term family living. These people often suffer not only from poverty but also from alienation in the new community. Due to wartime socio-economic challenges, state support remains minimal, while donor aid has largely shifted toward frontline regions.

Since 2022, various community spaces — social centers, coworking hubs, and shelters — have been rapidly developing in Chernivtsi. They have become hubs for assistance, communication, learning, and joint initiatives, serving both newcomers and long-term residents. Between 2022 and 2024, international donors actively supported these spaces, funding repairs, equipment, and events with psychologists, trainers, and facilitators. However, by 2024, this support had sharply declined due to the closure of grant programs and the economic crisis.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Community spaces that once thrived with activity are now often underused, serving mainly as evening gathering points in shelters. At the same time, many organizations in the community offer valuable social, cultural, or educational services, yet residents often don't know about them. The absence of a shared database or clear navigation system leads to duplication of initiatives and inefficient use of resources.

Traditional communication tools — social media, posters, and word of mouth — failed to build a coherent system of interaction. A digital, accessible, and user-friendly tool was needed — a living map of collaboration.



For the first time, someone asked about our needs. It helped us realize we can share not only what we lack but what we can offer.

representative of
the local NGO

Residents' expectations were simple: to access up-to-date information about available help and events in one click and to be able to offer their own services — from workshops to volunteer actions. These needs became the foundation for PoruCh.

The NGO Chernivtsi Regional Association for Social Development (AREAC) specializes in developing such community spaces, promoting adaptation and resilience. In 2024, AREAC successfully implemented the region's largest SCLR program, supporting 77 initiatives aimed at IDP adaptation. Many of these were based in shared community spaces, which also became a network of local activists and organizations.

It became crucial to sustain and strengthen these spaces — especially in Chernivtsi, which hosts the largest IDP population — and transition from externally managed models (donor-driven programming) to self-governance. The goal: apply proven participatory approaches to activate community spaces through local residents — especially IDPs and civic activists — transforming them from passive aid recipients into self-sufficient, community-driven centers of influence.

PROJECT AND ACTIVITIES

PREPARATORY PHASE: TOOLS AND SURVEY

AREAC engaged its own staff, a municipal representative, and three community space coordinators across Chernivtsi — based in an educational institution, an IDP shelter, and an inclusive coworking space under the Ombudsman's local office. This collaboration allowed the project to reach a wide audience and implement activities efficiently.

After training sessions with Dutch and Ukrainian partners, the AREAC team selected participatory tools to adapt locally. They chose a game-based engagement method developed by Play the City and an online platform for civic services.

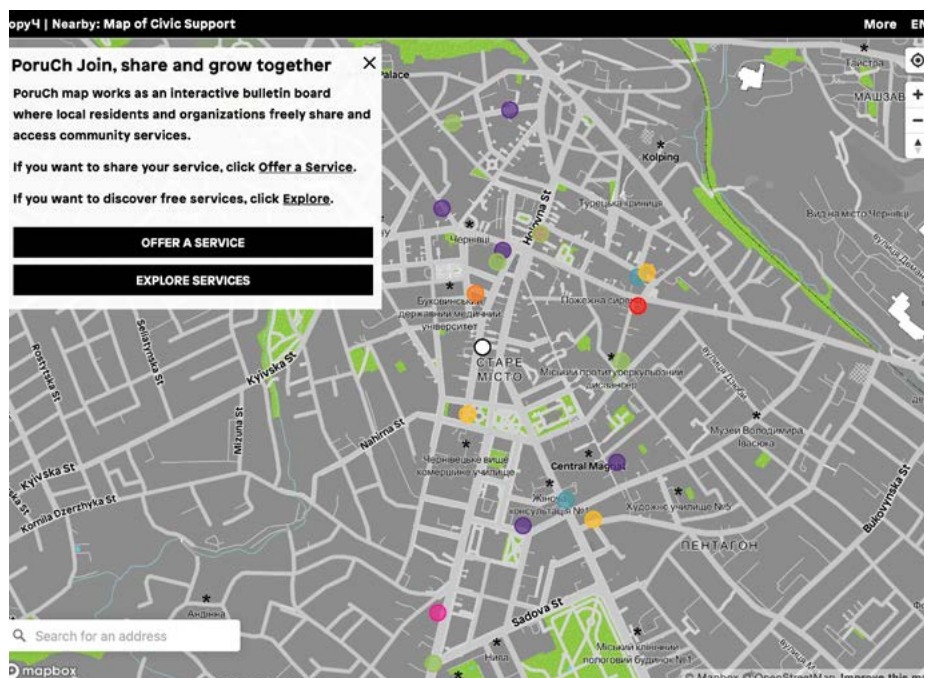
A survey was conducted among potential beneficiaries to identify service needs in community spaces and participants' willingness to share their skills — teaching, running workshops, organizing children's activities, or interest clubs. The survey took place online, during the public launch event (attended by over 400 residents), and through focus groups in community spaces.

Meanwhile, a promotional campaign ran across Chernivtsi — via posters, flyers, social media, the AREAC website (<https://areac.org.ua/novyny/>), local authority channels (<https://surl.li/funqjb>), and local media.

THE PORUCH PLATFORM

The PoruCh platform is an interactive map — the first city-wide tool visualizing free support opportunities. Play the City created a system combining the city map with a database of NGOs, volunteer groups, and other public services. Each colored marker represents a specific offer: psychological aid, workshops, children's courses, humanitarian support, or coworking and leisure spaces.

The platform is open: users can both find and add services. This promotes dialogue and equality—residents are your partners, not just participants—and turns residents into active participants in community recovery. The map is continuously updated and managed by the community itself, functioning as an open ecosystem of collaboration.



poruch.gamesforcities.com

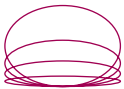
THE CIVIC ACTION GAME: TESTING IN ACTION

To present and test PoruCh, the team used the innovative Community Support Game developed by Play the City. The game helped identify community needs and populate PoruCh with real contacts and content. It took place on July 25, 2025, during the platform's launch event. The event was opened by Nataliia Frunze, Director of the Department of Social Policy of Chernivtsi City Council, who emphasized that tools like PoruCh offer communities new ways of self-organization. Then Nadiia Makushynska (AREAC) presented the platform's functions, while Ekim Tan (Play the City) and Daryna Pasyuta (Ro3kvit) facilitated the gameplay.

The public event brought together over 40 participants – local authorities, business representatives, educators, NGOs, social services, disability support centers, and volunteer hubs. Each participant received an ID card describing their organization's activities and resources.

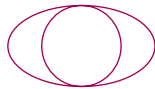


ROUND I



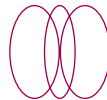
identified key needs
– lack of volunteers,
communication,
premises, funding.

ROUND II "WHAT IF"



envisioned the future
of Chernivtsi –
comfortable, inclusive,
entrepreneurial, and
healthy.

ROUND III



involved resource
exchanges –
knowledge, spaces,
time, contacts – to
plan collaborations.

ROUND IV



reflection and
agreements on
next steps – joint
workshops, inclusive
design courses, etc.

During the game, dozens of new entries were added to the PoruCh map – real content co-created by the community.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

The hardest part was communication – explaining that PoruCh is not just another organization directory but a space for interaction. Some participants initially treated it as an informational resource, missing its social value.



Our eco-initiative partnered with a major IDP shelter to create info stands for kids and insect houses in their yard.

representative of
a local environmental
initiative

Technical challenges included localization, and ensuring accessibility for users with varying digital literacy. To adapt it to the Ukrainian context also issues of registration and trust were considered.

A major challenge remains promoting the platform among as many residents as possible – especially newly arrived IDPs, for whom it is a vital tool for adaptation. Marketing tools should be used so that PoruCh becomes a familiar app not only for activists but for all citizens – fostering continuous interaction and engagement. Coordinating the testing event among numerous partners was also difficult. Yet the game format eased tensions, built trust, and inspired collaboration. Although not all planned tools yielded equal results – limited time prevented deeper discussion on future platform management – all participants agreed that PoruCh has strong potential as a long-term municipal tool.

NEXT STEPS AND SCALING

PoruCh remains open: any organization or resident can contribute. Municipal services will also be added, as they offer numerous free opportunities – from elderly support to business training – often unknown to citizens.

After the project completion, AREAC and partners officially handed over PoruCh to Chernivtsi City Council. The platform will operate under the Department of Social Policy as a tool for communication and coordination of volunteer and social initiatives.

SCALING ROADMAP

STAGE 1. (9-12 MONTHS)

Promote PoruCh across the Chernivtsi community to increase user engagement and expand to nearby towns.

STAGE 2. (2-3 YEARS)

Scale accross Chernivtsi region.

STAGE 3.

Expand to more Ukrainian regions.

STAGE 4.

Apply UA-NL best prectices – e.g., adapting the support ecosystem for elderly care in the Netherlands.

Thus, PoruCh becomes not just a project outcome but a new ecosystem of community collaboration scalable across regions.

The Civic ActionGame remains under AREAC's stewardship and is open for use by other organizations – as a tool for education, strategy-building, and local initiative development. Ideas generated during gameplay will feed into future municipal resilience programs, especially in inclusivity, youth development, and IDP support. The project became a launchpad for systemic networking – turning one-time contacts into an ongoing communication community.



Case study

Lukashivka villarge, Chernihiv region, Ukraine

LOCATION

Lukashivka, Ukraine

INITIATOR

Repair Together

COORDINATOR

Ro3kvit, Urban Coalition for Ukraine

PARTNERS

Stipo with INBO and Play the City

The Lukashivka project has taken steps toward restoring not only a shared physical space but also the community's capacity for collective action and trust, demonstrating that participatory recovery can rebuild both place and social fabric in post-war rural Ukraine.

MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT



CONTEXT

Lukashivka is a small village in the Chernihiv district, located about fifteen kilometers from the regional center. Despite its proximity to the city, it is a typical peripheral settlement with an agricultural economy; the main employer is the large agricultural company Naporivske agribusiness. Before the full-scale war, the village had around four hundred residents. After the occupation, some people returned, while several new families from Chernihiv moved here, seeking a safer and calmer place to live.

In March 2022, Lukashivka became an epicenter of heavy fighting and remained under Russian occupation for more than three weeks. The village suffered extensive destruction: over thirty homes were completely destroyed, and almost every remaining house was damaged. All public buildings - the school, community club, church, and administrative facilities - were ruined or left unusable. As a result, Lukashivka lost all spaces of community life. Residents found themselves back in repaired homes, yet without any place to gather, communicate, celebrate, or act together.

“

The residents of Lukashivka are hardworking, used to doing everything with their own hands, but now they are exhausted by the war and everyday hardships.

Oleksii, local
activist,
serviceman, 25

The lack of basic services deepens this isolation. There is no medical care, pharmacy, administrative office, library, or cultural infrastructure in the village. For any essential service - from obtaining documents to buying medicine - people must travel to neighboring settlements or to Chernihiv. This absence of social infrastructure makes everyday life not only difficult but also socially empty: no leisure, no cultural exchange, no meeting points between generations.

Since 2022, the charity organization Repair Together has been systematically rebuilding private homes in Lukashivka. As this phase approached completion, the team realized that leaving people in restored houses without restoring their access to essential social needs would mean merely returning to survival mode. This insight gave rise to the idea of creating a multifunctional community center - a new social heart for the village.

To find the most meaningful format for such a space, the team organized a two-week interdisciplinary residency in autumn 2024, bringing together architects, sociologists, urbanists, and cultural practitioners. They observed daily life, spoke with residents, and analyzed rhythms, needs, and aspirations of the community. The residency's key conclusion was clear: rebuilding walls is not enough - social ties, trust, and civic engagement must also be rebuilt.

A small-scale field study conducted during the residency revealed that Lukashivka's situation is far from unique. Across Ukraine, there are over 18,000 villages with fewer than 500 residents - almost 4 million people who live without stable access to basic social and cultural infrastructure.

In most of these villages, as in Lukashivka, there are no functioning public spaces at all. Thus, Lukashivka has become a pilot project for hyperlocal participatory recovery - a place where physical transformation, co-creation, and shared learning help to restore not only buildings, but the very fabric of community life.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

After the occupation, Lukashivka was left without basic infrastructure - and without trust. People stopped believing in authorities, in external organizations, and often even in one another. Daily life became centered around survival within the boundaries of one's household: your yard, your world. Collective action disappeared, replaced by quiet caution and self-isolation.

This reflects a broader structural crisis typical of many small Ukrainian villages. Lukashivka is part of the large Ivanivka municipality, created through decentralization reform. The local administration, with limited capacity and resources, struggles to cover distant settlements evenly. Residents feel they live on the periphery of the periphery: officially part of a community, but in reality - left on their own.

At the same time, the demographic collapse continues. Most young people have left for cities or abroad, and many men are serving in the army. The population is aging rapidly. The village's social life now depends largely on women - middle-aged, multitasking between care work, farming, and informal volunteering. Without new participants, any initiative burns out quickly.

And yet Lukashivka remembers what togetherness feels like. The old school - now half-ruined - once served as a meeting place, hosting local gatherings, small exhibitions, even discos for youth. Teenagers used to gather around the only ping-pong table in the village, assembled by a few boys with scrap materials. Once a year, on Village Day, everyone came together at the stadium - with homemade food, songs, laughter, and stories. These modest traditions preserved traces of collective energy that had long lived without a proper space to hold it.

When the team began working in Lukashivka, it became clear that standard participatory tools - community meetings, surveys, public discussions - did not work here. People distrusted abstract talk and plans without visible outcomes. Their message was clear: "Show that you're doing something real - and then we'll join." Thus, participation had to start from physical action, not from words. Cleaning a yard, building a bench, planting flowers, lighting a bonfire - these small gestures became acts of rebuilding trust. Only through shared effort that leaves a visible mark can a community begin to believe in itself again.

“

There used to be a club and a choir. Now there's nothing - people just gather on the street.

Nadiia, 68

The problem of Lukashivka is not only the war's destruction, but a reflection of the wider rural reality: depopulation, blurred responsibility between administrative levels, and the loss of collective life. The project became a response to a national question facing thousands of Ukrainian villages: how to rebuild not only houses, but the capacity of people to act together.

PROJECT AND ACTIVITIES

STAGE 1.

RESEARCH AND LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY

"After everything that happened, we all just scattered. Everyone lives on their own now. We used to gather at the school, and now there's no school, no club."

"It would be good if we could meet sometimes, talk - and if the children had somewhere to go."

These conversations revealed a deeper picture - not only the destruction of buildings, but the breakdown of social ties. The team created a map of human resources: who had tools, transport, skills, or simply the willingness to help.

To keep communication alive, the team launched a community group chat - a space to share updates, coordinate meetings, and invite people to events. Over time, this chat evolved into Lukashivka's first informal coordination platform - a virtual meeting place.



STAGE 2.

WORKSHOP 'OUR SPACE AND WHY WE NEED IT'

The team organized a facilitated workshop where residents collectively explored what a shared space could mean for them after the war. Through drawing, conversation, and storytelling, they voiced simple yet profound wishes:

"We'd like a place where we could just sit and talk."

"The kids could play, and we could chat - like before, near the school."

During the workshop, it became clear that people needed not just a construction project, but an opportunity to reclaim a sense of togetherness. The team decided to begin with small, tangible joint actions - gestures that could rebuild both space and trust.

STAGE 3.



TOLOKAS - ACTION AS A PATH TO TRUST

The first 'toloka' (community cleanup) failed - no one came. People didn't believe that "this time something real would happen." The team changed its approach: switched to personal invitations, spread the word through acquaintances and the chat, and made tasks specific - not 'a toloka', but 'painting benches and planting flowers near the school'.

The second 'toloka' brought the first participants. Together, they cleaned the area, repaired a fence, and planted trees.

Teenagers wanted to act separately from adults, so parallel activities were organized for them: painting and making short videos about the village. These small acts of doing together became seeds of restored trust.

STAGE 4.

COLLABORATION WITH KHARKIV SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE STUDENTS

In the summer of 2025, students from the Kharkiv School of Architecture joined the process. They lived in Lukashivka for three weeks, working side by side with residents. Together they created outdoor furniture, a bonfire area, and basic navigation elements around the old school.

“

I'm ready to help - for any 'hustle.

Inna, 42

The work took place directly on-site - without drawings, through dialogue, observation, and collective decision-making. At the end, everyone gathered for a community evening with music, fire, and homemade food. It was the first time in years that the village felt alive together - informally, just the joy of being together.

Over the following weeks, the space began to live on its own: during the day children came on bicycles; in the evenings, adults sat by the fire, talking and resting. That organic use was the best sign of success - the place had become truly theirs.

Meanwhile, the team held meetings with municipal departments to engage local authorities and demonstrate the project's potential as a replicable model for other villages in the community.

STAGE 5.



The problem isn't the city - it's the lack of attention to the village.

Inna, 54



EXCURSION TO CHERNIHIV

To broaden residents' perspectives, the team organized a trip to Chernihiv, to visit 'Peremoha', a community innovation space developed by Eco Misto, a local organization revitalizing an old cinema building into a community hub. The idea was to inspire Lukashivka residents with a real example of collective action and self-organization. However, none of the local residents could attend - they declined at the last moment due to personal circumstances. Only the KhSA students made the trip. This incident illustrated a common reality of small villages: when a community is so small, even a few coinciding personal events can derail a collective initiative. Participation here is fragile by nature - and recognizing that fragility is part of the learning process.



STAGE 6.

The final event was a cleanup toloka inside the old school building. The goal was to connect the outdoor work completed over the summer with the next phase - future improvements inside - to create a feeling of continuation rather than closure.

FINAL TOLOKA

Only a few people came this time: it was harvest season, school had begun, and many were busy. This reminded us once again that rural seasonality is a key factor in participation - life here follows the rhythm of the land.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

The project in Lukashivka became not only a spatial intervention but also a laboratory for understanding how participatory planning functions in post-war peripheries. Here, architecture could not serve as an end in itself - it became a medium for social recovery. Work with space revealed deep social and methodological limitations characteristic of most small villages in Ukraine.

In a village where all public buildings were destroyed, space lost its public function. People retreated into private yards, and physical public life disappeared. The absence of a schoolyard, community club, or church meant not only the loss of infrastructure but also the erosion of social capital - the networks of communication, exchange, and mutual visibility.

From an urbanistic perspective, this creates a paradox: the community exists, yet lacks a medium through which it can manifest itself. Every aspect of public life must be rebuilt literally from zero - from a shared bench to a gathering point. In this sense, Lukashivka became a case of "rebuilding sociality through materiality": even the smallest shared physical intervention - a bench, a flowerbed, a bonfire - becomes a tool for restoring social relations.

“

Many houses are abandoned; not everyone has returned. Lukashivka seems to 'not exist' - unlike the neighboring villages.

Iryna, 58

In the post-war context, conventional models of participation - strategic sessions, consultations, workshops - proved ineffective. Participation through conversation does not work where experiences of violence, loss, and isolation have eroded the very foundation of collective dialogue. The team discovered that collective action precedes collective vision. Only through concrete, tangible tasks - cleaning, painting, planting - can people gradually regain a sense of belonging. In Lukashivka, the process of rebuilding trust was more physical than discursive.

Another barrier was the demographic fragmentation of the community. Many residents had left; most men were serving in the army, leaving mainly elderly women and teenagers. As a result, each activity depended on just a few individuals, and the loss of even one active participant significantly reduced momentum. This raised the question of a 'critical mass of togetherness' - how many people are needed for participation to become sustainable.

Following Ukraine's decentralization reform, Lukashivka became part of the larger Ivanivka municipality, where most decisions are made centrally. For local authorities, peripheral villages like Lukashivka often fall outside the scope of strategic planning - lacking dedicated budgets, personnel, or attention. The team had to balance between bottom-up and top-down

logics - engaging the community while simultaneously negotiating with local administrations to prove that social activation can be as vital as road reconstruction. A few municipal representatives became interested in the Lukashivka experience, though a stable partnership has yet to form.

This case highlights the need for a new type of communication between local governments and communities, where the architect or urbanist acts not only as a designer but as a moderator - building a shared language between institutions and people.

The lack of digital infrastructure and literacy emerged as an unexpectedly critical barrier. In a village with unstable internet connectivity, informational participation like surveys, chats, coordination - had limited reach. Instead, social chains of trust were more effective like personal conversations, neighbor networks, and direct invitations.

The seasonality of rural life also strongly influenced participation. In spring - fieldwork; in autumn - harvest; in September - the start of the school year. Sustained cycles of intense activity were impossible. To adapt, the team developed a 'pulsating methodology' - alternating between phases of action and rest, synchronized with the community's natural rhythm.

Examples of tools that proved ineffective at this stage:

- Public discussions at an early stage—low turnout, indifference, expectations that “everything has already been decided.”
- Trip to Chernihiv—none of the locals came due to personal circumstances, which showed the limitations of the approach when the initiative comes from “outside.”
- Initiative group—despite attempts to create it, no stable core was formed: people were involved on a situational basis, rather than structurally.

These “failures” became empirical evidence that participation in small communities does not become institutionalized immediately. It has a biological, organic nature as it is formed from the rhythm of actions, emotional connections, and small successes.

Thus, the experience of Lukashivka demonstrates that participatory recovery in small villages is not a project phase but an ongoing socio-spatial process. It requires flexibility, empathy, and the ability to work within uncertainty. Its main outcome is not a finished object but the emergence of local agency - people's renewed belief in their collective capacity to act.

Small physical actions proved more effective than large plans, becoming rituals of restored togetherness.

- Place is a process rather than a product—the “third place” emerges through continuous encounters, not architecture.
- The architect acts as mediator, focusing on relationships, facilitation, and social learning.
- Even remote villages can sustain networks with universities, NGOs, and volunteers.

Thus, Lukashivka demonstrates that participatory recovery is an ongoing socio-spatial process requiring flexibility, empathy, and comfort with uncertainty. Its main outcome is not a finished object but renewed local agency.

NEXT STEPS AND SCALING

Local Level

COMPLETING THE PILOT AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

The Hurt: the Third Place team, together with Repair Together, is finalizing the development of the area around the old school and designing a concept for a multifunctional community center that will become the core of social life in the village. At the same time, cooperation continues with the Ivanivka hromada to integrate this space into the municipality's official development documents.

The key objective is to establish community ownership - a shift from external initiative to internal responsibility. A temporary-use for the building is planned, allowing educational, cultural, and social activities to take place even before full reconstruction is completed.

Regional Level

WORKING WITH SIMILAR VILLAGES AND TESTING THE METHODOLOGY

The next step involves working with several other villages within the Ivanivka hromada that share a similar scale and socio-demographic profile. This will allow the team to test and refine the methodology within one administrative framework, while strengthening the municipality's capacity to work with its own peripheries.

Afterward, the team plans to replicate the model in different regions of Ukraine - from Polissia to Podillia, from the northern borderlands to the southern steppe. The challenges of small villages are not limited to war-affected or occupied territories; they represent a systemic crisis of rural Ukraine - demographic aging, infrastructural decline, and low civic engagement.



National and International Level

SHAPING POLICY AND DISCOURSE

At the national level, the team aims to contribute to strengthen the public discourse around rural activation. A participatory approach to rural development should become not an exception but a standard element of national policy. The focus lies on collaboration with associations of local self-governments, relevant ministries, universities, and professional networks to transform the Lukashivka experience into an argument for a new narrative: that the Ukrainian village is not merely an object of aid but a source of innovation and social potential.

At the international level, the team is oriented toward participation in European initiatives, particularly within the framework of the “Pact of the Rural” - a network designed to unite projects of participatory rural regeneration. To engage in knowledge exchange with European partners, research institutions, will make it possible to scale the developed methodology while preserving its locality and contextual sensitivity.

METHODOLOGICAL CONTINUATION

The Lukashivka model is conceived as an open system that can be adapted to multiple contexts. Its essence lies not in architectural form but in the processes of collectivity - shared action, observation, repetition, and trust. The next step is to develop a scientific and practical toolkit for hyperlocal community work, helping municipalities, educational, and cultural institutions understand participation not as a “phase” but as a continuous process of building collective capacity to act together.





Case study

Pidhatisi, Lutsk region, Ukraine

LOCATION	Pidhaitsi, village in Lutsk Region, Volyn Oblast, Ukraine
INITIATORS	NGO Misto.Reboot, Youth Council at the Pidhaitsy Village Council, Pidhaitsy Village Council
COORDINATOR	Ro3kvit, Urban Coalition for Ukraine
PARTNERS	INBO, with Play the City and STIPO

The main outcome is the development of a participation strategy and awareness campaign about the ecological value of the river valley. At the same time, a spatial framework has been created including a perspective for scaling up. New participation and communication strategies have been developed and tested.

MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT



CONTEXT

It all began in November 2024 with a request from the residents of the Pidhaitsi community, a small village near Lutsk in North-West Ukraine. The Youth Council at the Pidhaitsi Village Council reached out to the civic organization misto.reboot asking for help in creating a new beach in the village of Pidhaitsi. The only existing beach on the riverbank was overcrowded and unorganized: large numbers of visitors from Lutsk were coming there, causing serious overuse of the area.

To understand the community's needs, misto.reboot together with the municipal Youth Council held a participatory session on the bank of the Topillia River.

It soon became clear that the issue went far beyond creating a single beach. The area of analysis was expanded to include a large part of the Styr River valley – a territory within the Emerald Network of the Council of Europe, which has high ecological value.

The study area is located just 600 meters from the main square of the village of Pidhaitsi and about 3 km from the administrative boundary of Lutsk. It is a picturesque wetland area with rich biodiversity. Its natural untouched state, the river, and scenic views attract many visitors – especially during the warmer months.

However, this attractiveness also has a downside: the lack of clear rules for behavior in the area and the underdeveloped infrastructure are leading to gradual environmental degradation. Visitors leave trash, drive cars directly to the river, and damage existing sites.

“

I'm impressed by the observations made during the project: how actively the community participates at the moment of engagement, and at the same time how reluctantly it agrees to participate at first. This only highlights how essential engagement practices are, and yet how forgotten and unusual they are for Ukraine.

Sofiia Bondar,
Ro3kvit, project
coordinator

Most of the territory belongs to the community, but it borders private plots owned by residents and is fragmented into agricultural lands. Formally, the communal land is maintained – grass is mowed, garbage is collected – but these actions do not address the main challenges. As a result, certain social tensions and misunderstandings arise between residents and local authorities.

The analysis showed that the area has great potential for the development of ecotourism, sports, and nature-oriented activities. However, it is also vulnerable due to excessive human impact. Creating yet another beach would only worsen the problem. Therefore, the team of the misto.reboot proposed a different vision – not to multiply the problems, but to unlock the potential of the area by creating an Eco-park in the river valley. The idea aims to preserve the natural value of the territory and unite the community around the concept of sustainable development of a natural ecosystem. An important factor is the proximity to a large city, since there is already a significant number of potential users of the area.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Such an initiative requires broader community involvement — not only from active youth, but also from other local residents: older inhabitants, local entrepreneurs, farmers, and existing community groups. It was important to find out whether they shared the vision of the Eco-park, how they saw their roles and places in its creation, and whether this territory truly had ecological value.

The local community lacked an established practice of open dialogue and involving residents in decisions about territorial development. The topic of ecological and sustainable development is not yet part of the local agenda, even though it is actively discussed among professionals and various communities across Ukraine.

This raised a key question: how can residents be engaged around this initiative? How can the idea of sustainable development be made clear and relevant to the people of Pidhaitsi? What tools could be used or developed to reach the community engagement, which can be divided into three components:

To explore the needs of a broader group of residents in order to understand how they perceive this area and what matters to them.

To raise awareness about the natural value of the territory and the principles of environmentally sustainable development.

To activate the community around the idea of creating an Eco-park that would become a shared space for the community and a source of new opportunities.



PROJECT AND ACTIVITIES

The larger goal of the project was to create a development strategy for the territory of the Styr and Topillia river valleys – a document that would help coordinate all actions and ensure their consistency within a shared vision. At the same time, this strategy was to become a step toward the creation of the Eco-park – a space for recreation, environmental education, and community development. To achieve this, four directions were developed in parallel in four smaller teams:

- 01 Branding and Communication, for which the “misto.reboot” team was responsible
- 02 Management – the development of the management model of the future park and its administrative structure, handled by a representative of the Pidhaitsi Village Council
- 03 Recreation and Education – the organization of events, involvement of residents, and support of civic initiatives (carried out by “misto.reboot” together with the Youth Council)
- 04 Ecology, for which an ecologist from Volyn National University was engaged
- 05 The INBO team took on the role of curator

The first stage was an ecological assessment of the territory. During field research in the Stry River valley, 80 species of plants and more than 60 species of animals were recorded. The results showed that the area has high ecological value. The most valuable zones are those with high humidity, protected from noise and human disturbance.

FOR MORE
DETAILS:
RESEARCH REPORT



In parallel, a communication strategy was developed – defined how and what we would communicate, created visual materials and catchy names for the events, planned a series of activities for local residents.

THE FIRST MEETING: A DATE WITH THE VALLEY (JUNE 21, 2025)

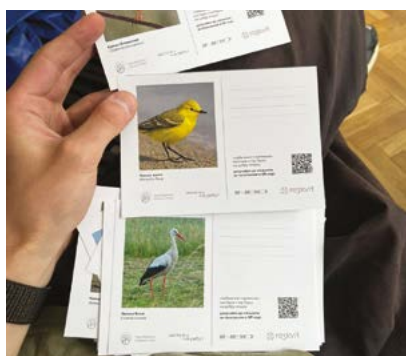
This was the first event within the project, aimed at introducing the community to the idea of creating an eco-park, and at the same time allowing the team to get to know the people and the place itself.

The program combined three formats: a walk with an ecologist, a community cleanup, and a picnic discussion. For the event location, a local landmark was chosen— under the pear tree, a tree at the edge of the village and the valley that residents perceive as a meeting place. To ensure that as many people as possible learned about the event, a poster was spread on notice boards and poles, and the event was announced on social media.

Special attention was given to the postcards, which became part of the icebreaker activity. Each of them depicted one of the animals identified during the ecological assessment — for example, a bird, a frog, or a butterfly.

The postcards also included a map of the area, the project name, a field for the participant's name, and a QR code leading to chats in various messengers. We created these chats so that residents could communicate, share news and ideas, and initiate their own activities within the project.

Despite this being the first event, we managed to engage 12 residents of different ages and professions. This was a success for us: within the program, everyone found something of their own — some came for the guided walk, some for the community cleanup, and others simply for the conversation.



THE TRAVELING EXHIBITION (JULY–AUGUST 2025)

After the first event, the team wanted to broaden the group of participants in the local community. Instead of inviting the community the team went to the places where they gathered. They explored which communities were already active in Pidhaitsi, and planned to visit them with a 'traveling exhibition' about the project. They reached out to the priests - public figures of the village to promote the project in the religious communities which are the biggest in the Pidhaitsi.

“

I extremely liked the comprehensive approach. It is very pleasing that in Lutsk there is someone who can analyze issues from all sides, helps find solutions for different requests and 'pockets'.

Valentyna Petruk,
participant of all
workshops

For this purpose, large posters with visualizations, a project description, and its goals, as well as postcards featuring animals and QR codes, were prepared which by that time had already become a recognizable element of the communication.

Throughout the summer, the project was presented in person three times. In two churches there were discussions after the service about community needs, green areas, and the role of the river. Additionally the posters were displayed in the school, the cultural center, and the village administration building. This made it possible to engage a wider range of residents, including those who do not use social media. The main goal of the series was to raise awareness about the ecological value of the territory, collect feedback, and continue the dialogue about what the future park could be. At the same time, the misto.reboot team presented the project at urban forums to introduce it to the professional community and engage expert specialists. Many connections and exchanges were made that lay the basic foundation for the future work.

WORKSHOP: CARING FOR THE VALLEY: PIDHAITSI (SEPTEMBER 12, 2025)

The final event brought together the previous experience and aimed to collect ideas for the development of the Valley from the community – both short-term and long-term.

The final event brought together the previous experience and aimed to collect ideas for the development of the Valley from the community – both short-term and long-term.

The workshop format was developed together with the participants. First the basic principles of territorial development - what should be preserved, which values are of priority- were defined. The event was planned to take place in the central square of the village under a canopy; we prepared a poster and distributed invitations through messengers and social networks.

However, on the day of the event, the weather deteriorated, and the workshop was moved to the administration building. In addition, it turned out that this was harvest time, and even personal invitations to the event did not convince people to join. Despite the difficulties and the small number of participants, the discussion and collected material for further work were fruitful and a development plan was drafted.



CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

One of the main challenges was the realization that projects aimed at community activation require bigger local involvement, more resources — both time and finance — and, overall, a longer implementation period. In this case, the work on engaging the community could not be limited to only three participatory events, since such processes require more time to build trust and establish lasting connections. There is not yet a fully operating community around the idea of the Eco-park yet; however, within the framework of the project.

The project reached a much wider audience than the team had before: residents are informed about this initiative and interest is sparked.

Another obstacle turned out to be the lack of a habit of participating in such events. For many residents, this is still not a common practice, which has historical roots: the long-standing dominance of the Soviet model of governance with its “top-down” approach did not contribute to the development of a culture of participation and civic initiative.

In addition, during the events we encountered instances of aggressive behavior from certain participants, which created additional stress and required the team to develop new communication skills and emotional resilience.

The lessons learned:

“

From the first time I learned about this project, I saw a group of local professionals who truly believe in this place and project. But even more, they are working on a system change in the field of urban planning and design. Community led and with nature at its core. I've seen the team putting in their energy and overcoming obstacles and barriers. For me, it is these kind of professionals who lead the way to sustainable change.

Randy Bloeme,
INBO, partner from
the Netherlands

01

The 'go to the communities' approach. If an initiative originates from outside, it is more effective not to expect residents to join on their own, but to go to them — into already existing communities, spaces, and formats of interaction.

02

Visual communication. High-quality posters, postcards, and displays proved to be effective. They not only attracted attention but also helped to form the project's visual language, which ensures recognizability and trust.

03

Personal invitations. Direct personal invitations to residents turned out to be much more effective than general announcements — they create a sense of involvement and responsibility.

04

It is important to help shape a space for the community, not to create it on its behalf. The experience showed that messenger chats created “from above” do not become active without the community's internal motivation.

05

Involvement of experts. Cooperation with professional specialists, particularly with an ecologist, had a positive impact on how the project was perceived — expert participation strengthens trust among residents.

NEXT STEPS AND SCALING

On the foundation of networks that is created through this project and with the ecological assessment done, the future of the eco-park is much more hopeful than it was before this project. The next steps that need to be taken are laid out below.

STEP 0.

CONTINUATION OF WORK ON THE ECO-PARK

Activation of communities, joint implementation of tactical interventions, development of a weekend tourist route through the valley and the surrounding villages. Exploration of the potential of paludiculture as a model of sustainable farming on waterlogged lands.

STEP 1.

DEVELOPMENT OF ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY GREEN AREAS INSPIRED BY THE ECO-PARK

Creation of a program that defines the principles for transforming green areas: a balance of the ecological component, community participation, tourist attractiveness, and agricultural production.

STEP 2.

GENERALIZATION OF EXPERIENCE

Formation of a universal approach suitable for other small settlements in Ukraine. It may include working with ponds, streams, small parks, forest glades, or individual landmark trees — any natural points around which a community can unite. To disseminate the experience: development of a guidebook, a set of typical tactical projects, and a training program for local community activists and officials.

STEP 3.

FORMATION OF THE GREEN NETWORK

Connecting separate points into an ecologically valuable network that will support biodiversity, create prerequisites for green mobility between villages, and become the basis for diverse tourist routes.

STEP 4.

LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

Institutionalization of the approach at the national level and the development of partnerships. "Green corners" as a part of the social infrastructure of small villages, important both for communities and for business. Formation of a national green framework of the country and a system for preserving waterlogged areas in river valleys.



Used tools

TOOLS USED

Working at the heart of communities is a shared journey. It begins with understanding the people and networks that shape a place, and it grows through dialogue, trust, and creativity.

This chapter introduces a practical approach built around four steps: a pathway from analysis to co-creation. Each step is supported by tools that make participation tangible and meaningful. Importantly, this process is iterative. It can start again from the beginning, repeat steps, or loop back when new insights emerge. Projects evolve, actors change, and ambitions grow. So revisiting earlier steps is part of building resilient, inclusive urban change.



01

ANALYZING ACTORS

Before any action, we need clarity: Who is involved? Who cares? Who can make a difference? Mapping actors is the foundation for collaboration. It reveals relationships, influence, and hidden champions who can drive change. Tools like an Actor–Network Map help visualize connections, while a Tagged Spread sheet organizes roles and responsibilities. To understand needs and priorities, we used Needs Assessments, Online Surveys, and Indepth Interviews. These tools turn abstract networks into real people with voices and interests.

02

INFORMING AND INVITING

Participation starts with openness. Communities cannot engage if they do not know what is happening. This step focuses on sharing clear, accessible information and creating invitations that spark curiosity. Sometimes it's as simple as spreading Postcards or using Play Cards to explain ideas in a playful way. Other times, it means combining Old Media Tools like local newspapers with New Media Tools such as social platforms. For larger audiences, Travelling Exhibitions, Symposiums, and Focus Group Meetings create spaces where people can learn and connect. The goal is always the same: make the process visible and welcoming.

03

ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY

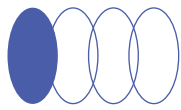
Engagement is more than consultation, it's about listening deeply and building relationships. This step creates opportunities for dialogue and shared experiences. Sometimes engagement looks like a Campfire or a Picnic, where conversations flow naturally. Other times, it happens through a Digital Platform that connects people across distances. Activities like Bursting Your Bubble challenge assumptions and open minds. These tools help uncover stories, concerns, and ideas that shape better solutions.

04

CO-CREATING

Finally, dialogue becomes design. Co-creation means working side by side with the community to turn ideas into action. This can take many forms: a Makers Residency where local crafts meet urban design, City Gaming sessions that explore scenarios playfully, or a Summer School that brings together experts and residents to learn and create. Community-led Events and Placemaking activities transform public spaces into living laboratories. Digital tools continue to support collaboration, ensuring everyone has a voice in shaping outcomes.

These four steps are not rigid rules—they are guides that adapt to context. Together, they form a process that moves from understanding to action, turning urban projects into shared journeys of change. The tools presented here are invitations: to experiment, to connect, and to co-create cities that truly belong to their communities.



ANALYZING ACTORS. ACTOR - NETWORK MAP

TARGET GROUP

A wide range of stakeholders from the village residents to policy makers on the regional government and their interdependencies

A visual mapping tool that identifies key actors, their roles, relationships, influence levels, and connections within the urban recovery ecosystem. It helps reveal alliances, gaps, power dynamics, and potential collaboration routes.

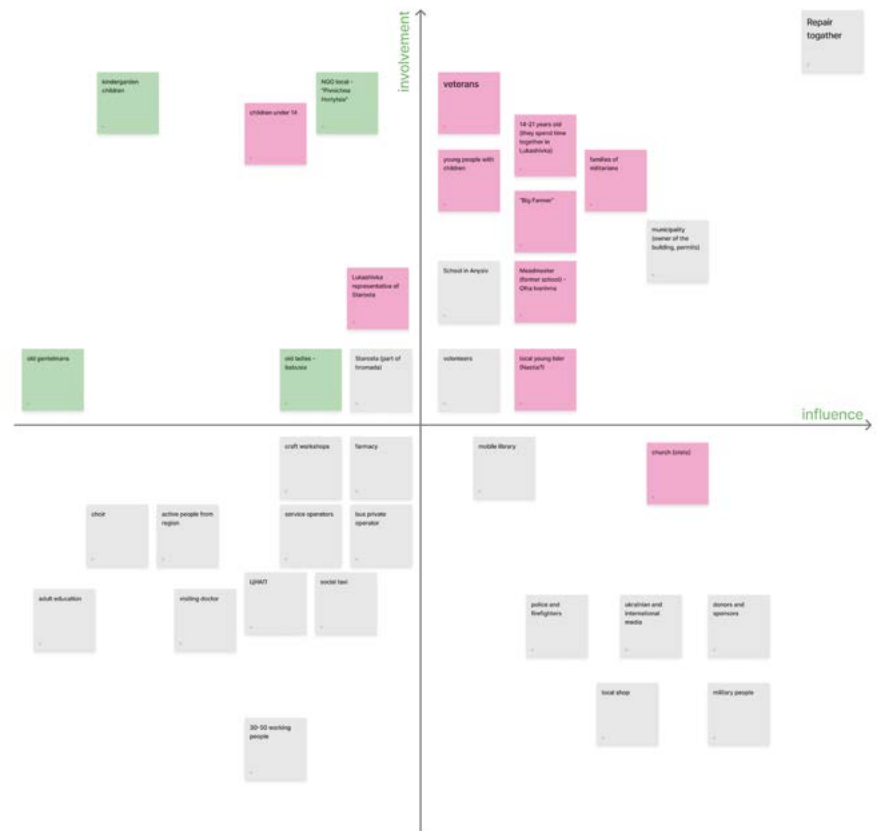
USED IN PIDHAITSI

In the project, this was a supporting tool, especially in the initial stages. Its main purpose was to identify and understand all potential actors who may influence the project or be interested in its results. At the start, we understood that we needed to broaden the circle of those involved, since interaction at that moment was taking place mainly among young people.

We systematized the identified actors by placing them in the 'interest-influence' matrix. This made it possible to determine which groups were already involved and which required additional attention. Thanks to this, we were able to understand with whom we needed to work more actively in order to increase their level.

In the process of project implementation, the map was updated: new actors appeared, and the positions of those already identified shifted.





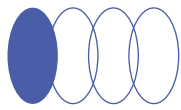
The Actor-Network Map in Lukashivka served as a foundational tool for understanding how a small, war-affected rural community functions when formal institutions are weakened and most decision-making relies on informal relations.

Unlike urban settings with visible institutional structures, in villages like Lukashivka social dynamics depend heavily on trust lines, family ties, neighbor networks, and the everyday flow of mutual help. Mapping these relationships became essential for entering the community respectfully and effectively.

In the project, this was a supporting tool, especially in the initial stages. Its main purpose was to identify and understand all potential actors who may influence the project or be interested in its results. At the start, we understood that we needed to broaden the circle of those involved, since interaction at that moment was taking place mainly among young people.

We systematized the identified actors by placing them in the 'interest-influence' matrix. This made it possible to determine which groups were already involved and which required additional attention. Thanks to this, we were able to understand with whom we needed to work more actively in order to increase their level of interest, and as interest grows, the potential for increasing the influence of certain actors on the course of the project also appears.

In the process of project implementation, the map was updated: new actors appeared, and the positions of those already identified shifted.



ANALYZING ACTORS. TAGGED SPREADSHEET

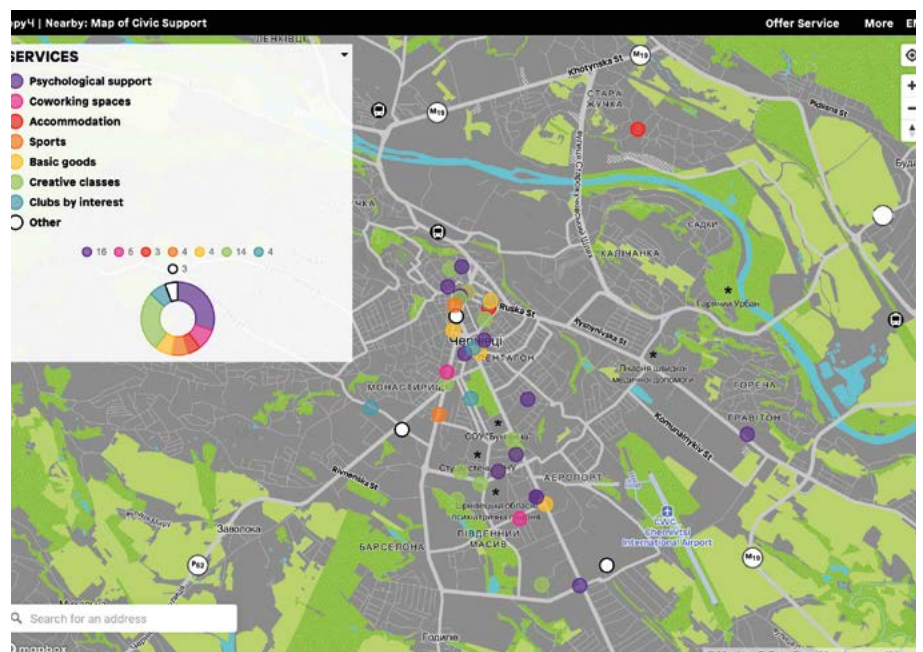
TARGET GROUP

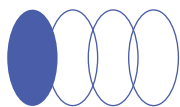
NGOs, philanthropists,
educators and volunteer
initiatives

A sortable and searchable database for organizing stakeholder information. Tags allow filtering by roles, sectors, needs, vulnerabilities, or geographic areas, making it easier to track engagement and plan outreach.

USED IN CHERNIVTSI

In the form of a Tagged Spreadsheet, the AREAC NGO team systematized data about the actors of the Chernivtsi Public Support Map. To do this, the team members communicated with each organization or initiative to enter relevant up-to-date information about them into the table: official name, types of activities, website address and/or pages in social networks, services of the organization, its need for donations (tools, materials, etc.), address, contact person and their phone number, other important data. This allowed in the future to create a user-friendly structure of the map. NGOs on the map are sorted by areas of activity and types of services provided (free psychological support, accommodation, coworking, basic necessities, sports activities, etc.). In addition, while creating this Tagged Spreadsheet, the team disseminated information about the project's activities and collected wishes for desired activities from the surveyed activists.





ANALYZING ACTORS. ONLINE SURVEY


TARGET GROUP

Local residents and NGOs,
philanthropists, educators
and volunteer initiatives

USED IN CHERNIVTSI

A fast, scalable method to gather feedback from dispersed communities. Ideal for collecting quantitative and qualitative insights, especially when participants may be displaced or have limited time for in-person meetings.

ПОРУЧ:
МАПА ГРОМАДСЬКОЇ
ПІДТРИМКИ ЧЕРНІВЦІВ



ПОРУЧ

Ініціатива реалізується ГО AREAC та урбаністичною коаліцією Rozkviт спільно з нідерландськими партнерами INBO, STPRO, Play the city та фінансується Міністерством закордонних справ Нідерландів.

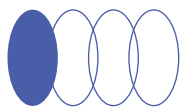
На платформі “ПоруЧ” кожен, хто має змогу, ділиться своїми навичками чи іншою підтримкою. А той, хто має таку потребу, безоплатно користується запропонованими можливостями.

Що на мапі?

- 👥 спільні простори Чернівців;
- 🎨 творчі заняття, семінари, тренінги, курси для дітей і дорослих;
- 🧠 психологічна підтримка; видача продуктів, одягу та інших речей;
- 🏠 безкоштовне проживання;
- 👨‍💻 коворкінги для навчання і віддаленої роботи;
- 🏃‍♂️ заняття спортом, у тому числі для людей з інвалідністю;
- 📖 зустрічі за інтересами: від книжкового клубу до волонтерської діяльності.

Безкоштовно, актуально, без реєстрації!

To determine the opportunities for providing support and the need for support for residents of the Chernivtsi community, the AREAC team developed an online questionnaire that was also distributed in paper format during the project opening event, where there were more than 400 attendees, and in the common spaces of Chernivtsi involved in the project. As a result, they learned what activities and other types of support are most in demand in the common spaces of Chernivtsi. On the other hand, thanks to this questionnaire, information was collected about those active residents and community organizations who offer their services free of charge to anyone who wants them, such as those willing to hold a free master class, lecture, training, sports class, etc. These people were later invited to the appropriate common space and helped to organize their own event.



ANALYZING ACTORS. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

TARGET GROUP

Targeted all residents across age groups, including vulnerable households such as elderly people living alone and women with heavy care responsibilities, as well as youth, teenagers. NGOs, philanthropists, educators and volunteer initiatives

A structured process for identifying community priorities, challenges, and existing capacities. It provides a baseline understanding of what matters most to different groups and informs targeted recovery strategies.

USED IN PIDHAITSI



We applied this tool to understand the needs of the residents of the Pidhaitsi community and to verify the relevance of the idea of creating an Eco-park. At the beginning, we had a clearly formulated request from the local youth – to find a solution to the problem of an overcrowded beach. However, we understood that this problem was only one among other possible needs of the community.

To do this, we visited one of the community's religious groups. We organized a discussion based on the principle “from general to specific”: we started with the general challenges and needs of the community, then narrowed the focus to the development of green areas in the community, and finally asked the most specific question – what role the valley of the Topillia River plays in the life of the community, where the creation of the Eco-park is planned.

This approach allowed us to establish a direct connection between the community's needs and our initiative. We received confirmation that the valley is a valuable natural area that must be preserved, and that the creation of the Eco-park can address part of the community's current needs. This became an important validation of the idea and gave us grounds to move forward.

USED IN LUKASHIVKA

The Needs Assessment in Lukashivka served as a crucial tool for uncovering not only the community's visible challenges but also its latent capacities and aspirations. After months of living under occupation and the subsequent struggle to rebuild, many residents had shifted into a survival mindset, where unspoken social and emotional needs often remained overshadowed by material concerns. This required a sensitive, trust-building approach to understanding what truly matters to people.

The process engaged diverse groups: elderly women who carry much of the community's daily care work, teenagers searching for meaningful social spaces, young families, newly arrived residents, and those who returned after the fighting. Conversations explored not just physical needs, but also social, cultural, and psychological dimensions—access to services, safety, children's opportunities, shared spaces, and the longing for togetherness.

The assessment revealed a layered picture of needs: a communal place to gather, opportunities for intergenerational interaction, small-scale cultural activities, and dependable channels of communication. It also identified key barriers such as rural seasonality, transportation limitations, and widespread distrust of external actors.

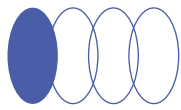
Ultimately, the Needs Assessment became the backbone of the project's strategy. It ensured that the team's interventions grew directly from the lived experiences of residents, grounding the recovery process in authentic local priorities rather than external assumptions.



USED IN CHERNIVTSI

A survey of the needs of the target community was carried out by the AREAC team before the start of the 'Spaces of Growth' project as part of the previous community support program in Chernivtsi region. Also, during the project implementation, this needs study was carried out in several stages. Representatives of three common spaces of Chernivtsi took part in the initial project workshop in Lviv: inclusive coworking, psychological recovery space at the IDP shelter, and common youth space. They spoke about the priorities, challenges, and capacity to take this into account when planning project activities. Later, the project team involved representatives of local authorities, non-governmental organizations, volunteer initiatives, and educators in such a needs assessment. It was important to conduct such an assessment in several stages, since the situation in the region is very volatile.





ANALYZING ACTORS. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

TARGET GROUP

Focused on elderly women who had lived through the occupation, teenagers, local activists, and families who returned to the village after deoccupation.

USED IN LUKASHIVKA

One-on-one conversations that capture deep, personal insights about people's experiences, memories, motivations, and hopes. They uncover nuanced perspectives that may not appear in surveys or group sessions.

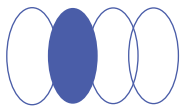
In-depth interviews became one of the most essential tools in Lukashivka, as they revealed the community not through statistics or general observations but through deeply personal stories. After the occupation, residents were reluctant to speak publicly, distrusted external actors, and often interacted even among themselves in short, practical exchanges. Conducting private conversations in calm, familiar settings made it possible to understand what remained unsaid.

The team spoke with residents across generations and life experiences—from elderly women who carry memories of pre-war community life to teenagers whose identities were shaped entirely during wartime. These interviews opened space for topics seldom discussed in group settings: fear, loss, exhaustion, but also hope, resilience, and the longing for everyday social connection.



Beyond identifying challenges, the interviews helped uncover community capacities: who has tools, who has skills, who is willing to help but needs encouragement or structure. Importantly, residents did not speak in abstract terms about “the project”; they shared what community means to them, what they miss, and what they dream of rebuilding.

In-depth interviews provided a human-scale foundation for all subsequent actions. They ensured that the recovery strategy would not rely on assumptions but grow directly from lived experiences, emotions, and aspirations expressed by the people of Lukashivka.



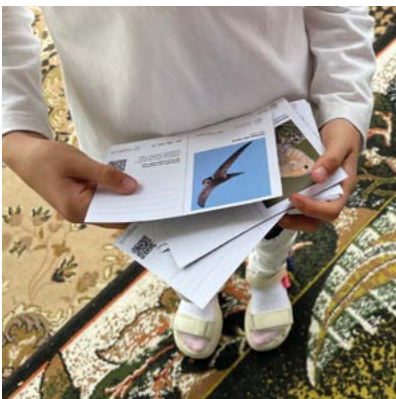
INFORMING AND INVITING. POSTCARDS

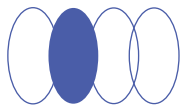
TARGET GROUP
Local residents, kids

Small, accessible printed materials that share information in a friendly, visual way. Ideal for direct outreach in public spaces, markets, and community centers.

USED IN
PIDHAITS

Postcards became one of the key and most frequently used tools in our project. The idea of creating them appeared already for the very first event and later accompanied all the others, turning into a recognizable visual element of the project. The postcards combined several functions. First of all, they served as a tool for spreading knowledge about the river valley: each postcard featured photographs and names of the animals that inhabit the valley, and on the reverse side — a map of the territory. In this way, participants received a physical, compact, visually appealing and informative material that could be kept or passed on to others. The second function the postcards performed was during introductions: at events, participants chose the postcard they liked the most and wrote their name in a specially designated space. This helped us get to know each other at the events and served as a participant badge. The third important role was the promotion of the project. The postcards contained the name of the initiative and a QR code through which participants could learn more about the project and join the chats. The postcards were particularly successful in engaging with children.





INFORMING AND INVITING. OLD MEDIA TOOLS

TARGET GROUP

Elderly residents, people with low digital literacy, and those without stable access to mobile internet.

Traditional formats such as radio, posters, local newspapers, and community announcements. They ensure inclusivity by reaching audiences with limited digital access.

USED IN PIDHAITSI

In the Pidhaitsi community, there is currently no single information source accessible to everyone, such as a newspaper, radio, or local television. Therefore, within our project, we chose a strategy of using traditional offline tools that can reach different groups of the population.

The main tool consisted of physical posters-invitations, which we developed specifically to announce the project's events and activities. These posters were placed in the most visited locations of the community – public transport stops, local shops, and near administrative and public buildings. We aimed to deliver information even to those residents who do not use social media.

Additionally, we prepared two large-format posters (A1) that contained information about the goals and elements of the project. These posters were placed in key community spaces for several months: the local school, the administration building, the cultural center, and churches. Thanks to this, information about the project remained constantly accessible to a wide audience.





In Lukashivka, where digital connectivity is unreliable and many residents do not use smartphones, traditional media became a crucial tool for inclusive communication. Posters, printed announcements, and word-of-mouth fulfilled the role that social media usually plays in urban settings: ensuring visibility, clarity, and accessibility for everyone, regardless of age or digital literacy.

The team combined old media formats with personal outreach. Simple, concise posters were placed near the shop, bus stops, and the old school—places where residents naturally cross paths. This approach proved especially valuable for older residents, who wanted to stay informed but lacked access to messaging apps or online platforms.

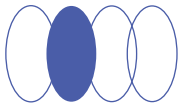
Announcements invited people to clean-ups, workshops, and gatherings, while also explaining the team's intentions and the purpose of each activity. They helped lower the barrier of distrust by showing that participation was open, straightforward, and did not require bureaucratic steps or specialized knowledge.

Traditional media also played a role in building rhythm and continuity. Seeing recurring posters announcing ongoing improvements made residents perceive the project as stable and dependable. Over time, these analog tools supported a gradual normalization of engagement, reinforcing a sense of shared process.

Thus, old media became the backbone of equitable communication—ensuring that no one was excluded from the participatory recovery simply because they lacked digital access.

To inform about the events and activities of the 'Spaces of Growth' project, the team used the distribution of paper posters and flyers in the target community, primarily in the common spaces of Chernivtsi. This helped to attract the attention of those residents who do not use digital communication channels. It also contributed to greater trust from all other people, because paper announcements are perceived as evidence of the importance of the event, the involvement of those institutions where these posters are placed in the event.





INFORMING AND INVITING. NEW MEDIA TOOLS

TARGET GROUP

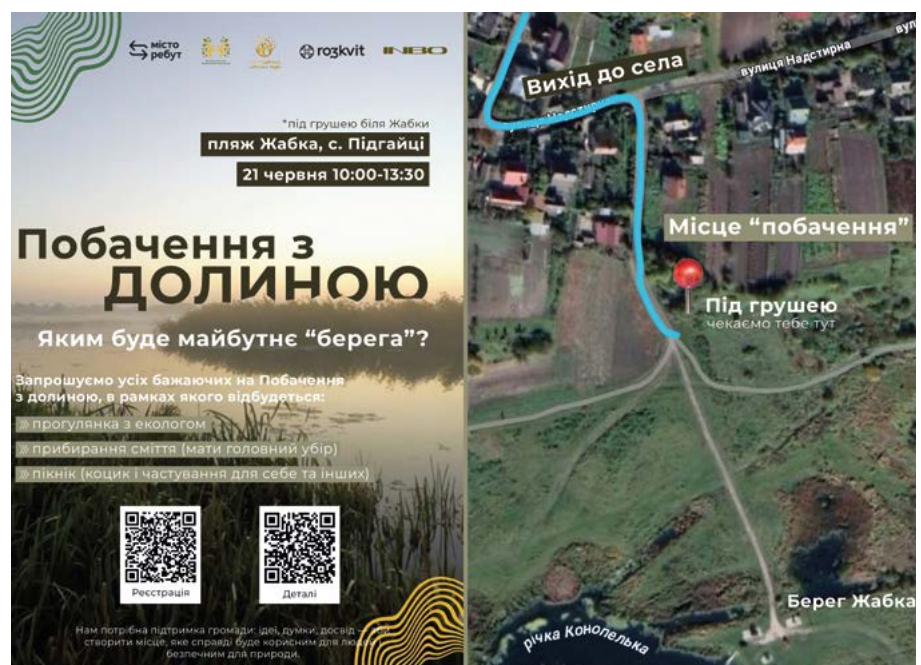
New media targeted active residents, teenagers, women who coordinate household and social communication, informal community groups, and members of the project team.

USED IN PIDHAITSY

Digital channels—social media, messaging apps, websites—that allow rapid dissemination, interactive engagement, and two-way communication.

We used this tool to announce events and engage community members. The main channel was social media — Instagram and TikTok. It was there that we published posts with event descriptions, invitations, and posters. We paid special attention to the name of each event: it had to be both interesting, easy to remember, and connected to the theme of the river valley. These channels worked for young people and those under 30, they came to our events.

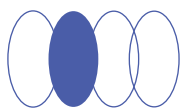
Another element was a QR code that led to a “link tree.” In it, residents could find the registration form for events and links to chats in three different messengers created by our team. We intentionally chose several platforms, since different age groups use different communication channels. The idea of the chats was to provide community members with a convenient space for conversations, exchanging opinions, and interacting with each other. However, this component did not work: no activity appeared in any of the chats. We assume that the reason is that the idea happened “top-down” — it was created by the team without a request from the community itself and was not picked up by participants.



New media tools became an essential complement to participatory work in Lukashivka, even though the village's digital environment is more limited than in urban contexts. The central component was a community messaging chat – the first informal “digital square” where residents could ask questions, receive updates, coordinate meetings, and respond to changes in real time. For a place that had lost all physical gathering spaces, this channel provided a much-needed connective tissue.

The team used digital media intentionally to make communication transparent and dynamic. Photos of ongoing work, informal invitations created a sense of momentum and clarity. Seeing visible progress online helped reduce skepticism: residents were more willing to join activities once they saw that the team delivered tangible results.

At the same time, the messaging chat enabled quick logistical coordination – adapting schedules to weather, organizing tools, and announcing last-minute changes. New media strengthened horizontal connections and complemented offline participation, making involvement more flexible, responsive, and accessible to different groups.



INFORMING AND INVITING. PLAY CARDS

TARGET GROUP

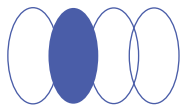
All participants in group
sessions and discussions

Interactive, game-like cards that simplify complex topics into approachable prompts and visuals. Used to stimulate curiosity and spark conversation.

USED IN AMSTERDAM AND LIVIV TEAM WORKSHOPS

We used cards in both team workshops in Lviv and Amsterdam. The visuals were initiators of associations and forced participants to verbalize those. Further it sticks better in the memories of all for later reference.





INFORMING AND INVITING. SYMPOSIUM

TARGET GROUP

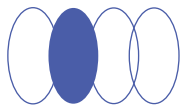
Local youth and university
students

A structured gathering of experts, policymakers, community leaders, and practitioners to share knowledge, discuss strategies, and build alliances around urban recovery themes.

USED IN CHERNIVTSI

The symposium was part of a large gathering to present the project launch in the Chernivtsi community on May 1, 2025. It brought together hundreds of students and was a large information and educational event, which was joined by teachers, architects, representatives of non-governmental organizations, etc. During the event, they learned about the planned activities within the project, the challenges that a participatory approach can help overcome, and the relevant tools proposed by international partners. There were also practical workshops that they joined and helped with their feedback on the needs assessment. Overall, it was a large information and educational event to communicate with people in Chernivtsi about the values, assumptions, and goals of the project in order to involve them in the process.





INFORMING AND INVITING. FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

TARGET GROUP

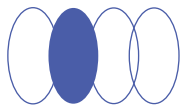
Specialized NGO's or
community groups

Small, facilitated discussion sessions where different community members are invited to share perspectives, compare experiences, and reflect on specific issues together.



USED IN CHERNIVTSI

The project team held small discussion sessions with users of a number of common spaces in Chernivtsi. These people were united by common needs and interests, such as living in an IDP shelter, belonging to vulnerable social groups of veterans or people with disabilities, belonging to a student community, etc. Such communication in a small circle helped people to talk more openly about their concerns and needs, in particular about the desired ways of using common spaces and the Chernivtsi Community Support Map. After such focus groups, ideas for future events were born, which were later organized within the framework of the project



INFORMING AND INVITING. TRAVELLING EXHIBITIONS

TARGET GROUP
Local residents

Mobile displays that bring information to different neighborhoods or towns. They raise awareness, spark dialogue, and invite participation in a visually engaging way.

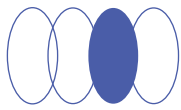
USED IN
PIDHAITSI

A tool that made it possible to go directly into the community, present ideas, and build open dialogue with residents. For this, we prepared a traveling exhibition consisting of two large A1 posters with visualizations, a description of the eco-park concept, and the key goals of the project. Additionally, we used a series of leaflets featuring images of local animals and QR codes leading to a “link tree” with information about the initiative and communication chats.

When visiting local communities, we tried not only to present the materials but also to interact with people: listen, ask questions, discuss their ideas, and record their feedback. This helped build trust, better understand the needs of the community, and involve residents in upcoming events. During such meetings, we met many locals, exchanged contacts, and invited them to join future activities.

In addition to the trips, the exhibition posters were installed in key public spaces for several months: in the local school, the administrative building, the cultural center, and in churches.





ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY. BUILDING A CAMP FIRE

TARGET GROUP

Adult residents, young people, families, and neighbors who previously had little interaction

USED IN LUKASHIVKA

An informal, culturally meaningful gathering tool that fosters storytelling, emotional connection, and trust-building within community groups.

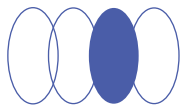
Building a campfire became one of the warmest and most meaningful tools in the participatory process in Lukashivka. In a village where all public buildings had been destroyed and interpersonal trust had been deeply shaken by war, the campfire offered a simple, culturally familiar way to restore a sense of togetherness. It required no formal invitations, no agenda — just the willingness to gather side by side.



The team chose this tool intentionally, recognizing that informal, emotionally safe environments are essential where people are not yet ready for structured discussions. Around the fire, residents began to speak not about “projects,” but about their lives. They shared memories of pre-war Lukashivka, stories of occupation, reflections on daily struggles, and quiet hopes for the future.

These gatherings helped rebuild trust in a gentle, organic way. For many participants, it was the first meaningful collective interaction since the occupation. The campfire created a non-hierarchical space where no one had to perform or justify themselves; people could simply be present.

Over time, the campfire became a symbolic anchor of the schoolyard revival — a place where small initiatives were born, relationships strengthened, and the fragile sense of community slowly re-emerged.



ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY. PICNIC

TARGET GROUP

Families with children, middle-aged women, teenagers, and residents who were hesitant to join more formal activities but were open to low-barrier social interaction

USED IN PIDHAITSI

A relaxed open-air event that encourages casual interactions, family-friendly participation, and cross-community dialogue in a welcoming atmosphere.

Picnic became a simple yet effective opportunity for us to bring the community together and establish first contact. The format of such a gathering made it possible to draw attention to the river valley area and create an informal atmosphere for getting to know one another. We chose a local landmark as the venue — “under the pear tree,” an old tree on the edge of the village and the valley, known among residents as a meeting place.

The location on a transit route and the appearance of elements unusual for this space — tents, blankets, food — sparked the curiosity of passersby, who joined the activities. The picnic became the final event of the day: after a walk with an ecologist and a community clean-up, participants could rest on the meadow, have a snack, and discuss issues of the valley, its challenges, and its potential.

For us, this tool served as a reason to gather people in an open format, create a space for dialogue, and build a sense of trust.



The picnic in Lukashivka served as a gentle engagement tool, offering residents a chance to gather without the pressure of formal activities or expectations. After months of isolation and daily hardship, people needed a space where they could simply exist together – no responsibilities, no structured conversations, no fear of “not fitting in.” The picnic created exactly this atmosphere: relaxed, welcoming, and warm.

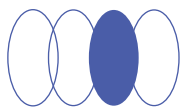
Held in the schoolyard where initial community improvements had begun, the picnic became a moment of lightness. Shared food, homemade treats, and informal activities helped restore small joys of everyday life. Residents could mingle freely, reconnect with neighbors, meet newcomers, and exchange stories in an unforced way.



Importantly, the picnic fostered intergenerational connection. Teenagers were burning a bonfire, adults chatted, and elderly women reminisced about past village gatherings. These simultaneous interactions created a sense of a living, breathing community returning to itself.

The picnic also functioned as a low-barrier entry point into participation. People who felt hesitant about joining workshops or clean-ups could still come for tea and observe. Often, this gentle exposure nurtured curiosity and encouraged further involvement.

In this way, the picnic became not just a social event but a catalyst for rebuilding comfort, familiarity, and the desire to take part in shaping Lukashivka's shared future.



ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY. DIGITAL PLATFORM

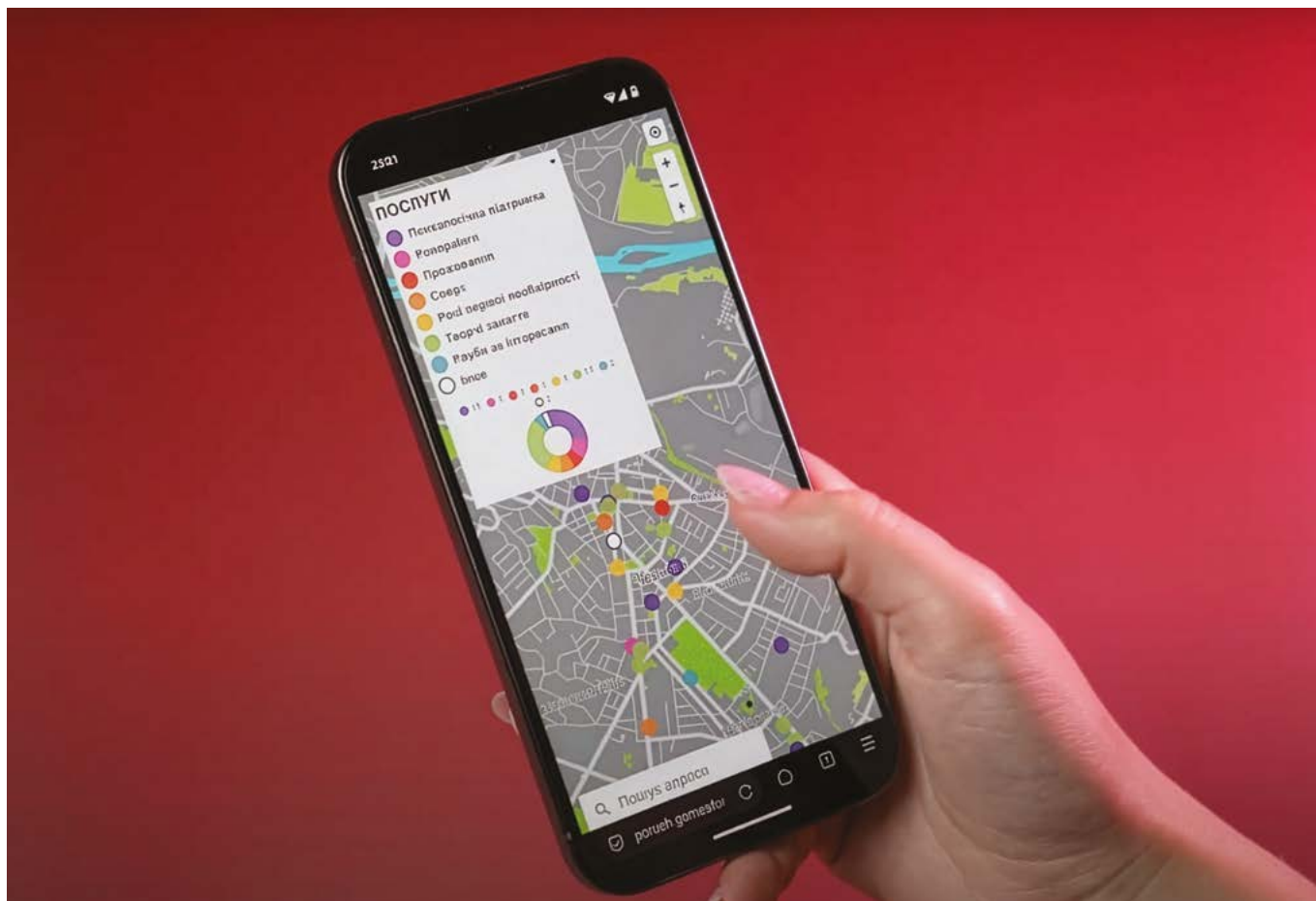
TARGET GROUP

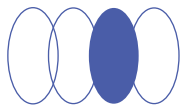
Local government, local residents and NGOs, philanthropists, educators and volunteer initiatives

An online space for continuous engagement, idea-sharing, co-design, and updates. Ensures ongoing communication even when physical meetings are disrupted.

USED IN CHERNIVTSI

The online platform PoruCh is the main tool of the project in Chernivtsi that was created specifically for this project. PoruCh (poruch.gamesforcities.com) is the city-wide interactive map visualizing all free support opportunities in Chernivtsi. Developed by Play the City, it combines a living map with a community-driven database of NGOs, volunteer groups, and services – from psychological support and children's courses to humanitarian aid, workshops, and coworking spaces. Users can easily find help. Organizations can add their services. The community keeps the map open, updated, and collaborative.





ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY. BURSTING YOUR BUBBLE

TARGET GROUP

Whole community

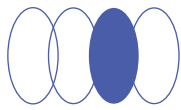
An intentional mixing of diverse groups—different ages, backgrounds, or professions—to encourage empathy, fresh perspectives, and stronger social cohesion.



USED IN PIDHAITSI

This tool was used after our first experience with a public event. We realized that inviting residents to come to us was not very effective. Therefore, we changed our approach and decided to “burst our own bubble” and go directly into the community groups.

We researched which communities in Pidhaitsi were already active and planned to visit them with a “travelling exhibition” about the project. We reached out to the priests — the village’s public figures — to promote our project within the religious communities, which are the largest in Pidhaitsi. They gladly supported the initiative and gave us the opportunity to present the project several times in two different churches, establish contact with active parishioners, and get to know representatives of other local communities.



ENGAGING WITH THE COMMUNITY. CLEAN UP DAY

TARGET GROUP

Adults capable of physical work, women committed to revitalizing shared spaces, teenagers participating in parallel activities, neighbors who had been socially disconnected. Local residents

This tool helps communities organize and manage local clean-up events. Residents can sign up, choose tasks, and track progress, while organizers can coordinate locations, equipment, and volunteer needs.



USED IN PIDHAITSI

The toloka became an important tool for the first introduction to the community's residents. The format of a toloka is well understood and popular in Ukraine. In the case of our project, it was especially relevant, since one of the main goals is cleaning the river valley from waste and forming a more ecological, responsible attitude toward natural areas.

Thanks to the toloka, we managed to engage people who care about the condition of the valley. The toloka became a certain pretext for getting acquainted. At the same time, it is a practical tool that provides quick, tangible results, which is important for fostering a sense of belonging and actions that bring visible outcomes.

This tool required some preparation: we provided participants with the necessary tools and materials for cleaning, and we also arranged with the municipal enterprise to remove the collected waste for recycling.

Toloka became one of the defining tools in Lukashivka, combining practical work with the rebuilding of social trust. In a village where, after the occupation, residents had retreated into private spaces and avoided collective activities, the toloka offered a safe, tangible way to reconnect through shared action and visible results.

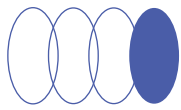
The first attempt to organize a toloka failed — no one came. This reflected the depth of exhaustion and skepticism within the community. The team adjusted the approach: instead of generic announcements, they used personal invitations; instead of broad calls to “clean together,” they proposed specific, manageable tasks — painting a bench, planting flowers, clearing debris around the school.



The second toloka gathered a small group of residents, marking the beginning of renewed social interaction. Each joint task — sweeping, repairing, assembling — generated a sense of belonging and mutual support. For many participants, it was their first collective effort since the war.

Tolokas also revealed local capacities: some residents had tools, others carpentry skills, others brought tea or helped with children.

In Lukashivka, the toloka became more than a work format. It evolved into a mechanism for rebuilding trust, equality, and a shared sense of “we” — essential foundations for participatory recovery.



CO-CREATING. MAKERS RESIDENCY

TARGET GROUP

Architecture students, local residents willing to participate in hands-on work, teenagers contributing to creative tasks.

USED IN LUKASHIVKA



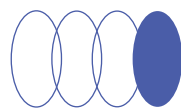
A hands-on creative residency where designers, artists, architects, and locals come together to experiment, prototype, and explore possibilities for recovery on-site.

The Makers Residency in Lukashivka was the most intensive, hands-on tool of the entire participatory process, combining creativity, physical making, and on-site collaboration. For three weeks, students from the Kharkiv School of Architecture lived in the village and worked directly in the old schoolyard. This format allowed them not only to design but also to experience the place's daily rhythms — morning routines, children's play, seasonal shifts, and everyday social interactions.

The residency followed the principle of “designing through doing”: solutions emerged not through drawings but through practical experimentation — building outdoor furniture, shaping a campfire area, installing seating, and intuitively forming pathways. Students worked side by side with residents, inviting them to select materials, paint structures, assemble elements, and participate in small repairs. This transformed the space from something delivered “by outsiders” into something co-created with the community.

Equally important, the residency fostered a horizontal dialogue. Students were not experts imposing visions but partners learning from local knowledge and responding to real needs. For residents, contributing physically to the site became a way to reclaim agency and pride over their environment.

Ultimately, the Makers Residency did more than improve the schoolyard. It catalyzed trust, nurtured participation, and initiated a symbolic reconstruction of Lukashivka's communal life.



CO-CREATING. CITY GAMING

TARGET GROUP

Local government, local residents and NGOs, philanthropists, educators and volunteer initiatives from Chernivtsi

Local government, local residents and NGOs, philanthropists, educators and volunteer initiatives from Chernivtsi

The Chernivtsi Civic Action Game is a collaborative simulation bringing together diverse stakeholders to co-create strategic responses that address both immediate needs and long-term civic ambitions. During gameplay, participants—including civic service providers, citizen initiatives, engaged residents, municipal representatives, funders, and donors—identify pressing needs and explore opportunities for mutual support. As the game progresses, participants form thematic teams aligned with the long-term visions of a Healthy, Creative, Socially Inclusive, and Entrepreneurial Chernivtsi, as outlined in the Integrated Urban Development Concept for Chernivtsi 2030. Players engage in dynamic exchanges of resources—such as skills, spaces, and funding—while mapping the ecosystem to uncover potential partnerships and foster a networked approach to civic action. In the final phase, teams present their collaborative proposals and receive expert feedback on their viability, sustainability, and long-term impact.



CO-CREATING. PLACEMAKING

TARGET GROUP

Residents involved in physical improvements, teenagers, students and Repair Together volunteers

Collaborative, action-based transformation of public spaces through design, art, and community-built interventions, turning ideas into visible improvements.

Placemaking in Lukashivka became a central tool for transforming the ruined schoolyard into the nucleus of a new communal space. With the loss of all public buildings — the club, the school, the church — the village lacked any physical anchor for collective life. This meant that every action aimed at reviving the space carried both practical and symbolic meaning.

Rather than producing a finished, polished design, placemaking in Lukashivka unfolded as an iterative, hands-on process. Benches, fire circles, seating areas, and small landscaping interventions appeared gradually, shaped through dialogue, experimentation, and collaboration with residents. Each added element strengthened the sense of ownership and familiarity.

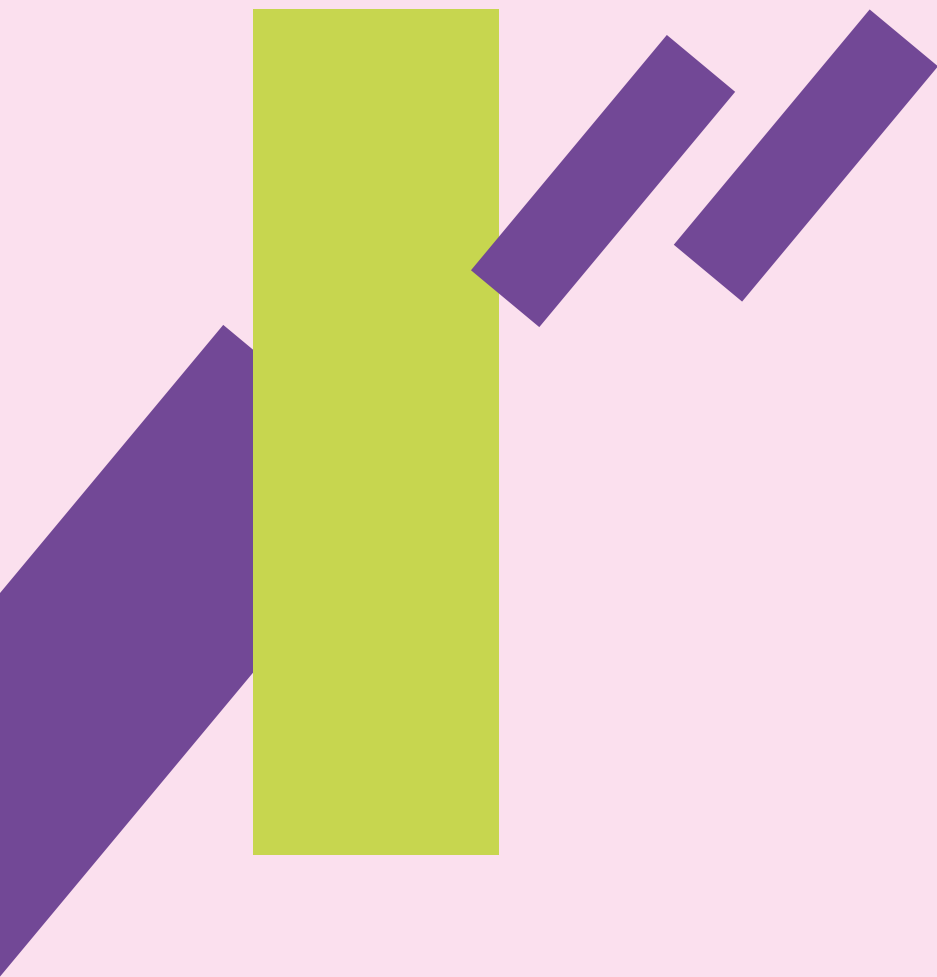
Accessibility was essential. Residents could participate in painting, cleaning, assembling structures, or simply sharing their opinions. This ensured that the emerging space was not perceived as something imposed from outside, but as a shared achievement rooted in collective effort.

Placemaking also allowed the team to test various uses of the site: children playing during the day, adults gathering around the fire in the evenings, community art sessions, and small events. These real-life scenarios clarified what functions the community needed most.

Ultimately, placemaking became a bridge between physical reconstruction and social recovery — a process through which residents gradually reclaimed not just a space, but their capacity to live and act together.



Working under stress



WORKING UNDER STRESS

Working under stressful circumstances has a significant effect on participation processes. Our insights are drawn from working in the context of war, but similar challenges arise in other high-stress situations, such as natural disasters or emergencies. We categorized our experiences into three categories: stress in your process, your team, and your community and target groups.

01.

STRESS IN YOUR PROCESS

The stress factor puts pressure on your process. Stressful and unpredictable circumstances cause instability and uncertainty. For instance on the availability of resources. People that have an important role might have to leave, funding could stop or resources for participation events are limited. This can be caused by changing priorities in the distribution of resources, but also by the perceived relevance of the project.



TIPS

The following tips will help you when working with instability and uncertainty in your process:

CREATE FLEXIBILITY

For instance by defining a clear goal, but designing an adaptive approach towards this goal.

ORGANISE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Try not to become too dependent on one person or organisation to lead or fund the project.

STATE THE IMPORTANCE

Why is your project relevant right now? This can be both in the current short term context, but also projects that focus on the long term future are of relevance in stressful circumstances.

STRESS IN YOUR TEAM

If you're working in stressful circumstances, your team is special. People in your team take both the responsibility and energy to do something they believe in. We found that this mindset brings people the energy 'to do something', but is also a high risk factor for overachievement and burnouts. In this project, most of the professionals also live in the stressful circumstances themselves. This causes a constant fear for team wellbeing, both by other team members as their families.

When being on site during participation events, there's extra stress on travel time (often much longer), insurances and recovery after (stress relief).

TIPS

The following tips will help you address and work with the element of stress in your team:

CHECK IN WITH EACH OTHER REGULARLY

Have an open conversation about stress, fears and uncertainties.

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

where people feel free to open up and have the personal freedom to decide on their own boundaries relating to traveling, joining events and needing a break.

DEVELOP A CLEAR PROTOCOL WITH EACH OTHER

on what to do when stress becomes too much or when incidents happen. Organise or have care-service ready for use when needed.

HAVE A GOAL TOGETHER

Use the urgent need to do something meaningful in a sustainable way by defining a clear and workable goal together

STRESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND TARGET GROUPS

Working in stressful circumstances often means there is stress and trauma in your community and target groups. We found this result in passive attitudes towards new projects and in lack of trust. Communities might feel abandoned or forgotten which causes doubt towards your project, possible results and your intentions.

On the other hand, stressful circumstances might also bring a sense of 'we are still here' pride in communities, which brings out a motivation to become active.

TIPS

The following tips will help you work with both the energy and/or lack of trust towards your project:

START ON THE PERSONAL LEVEL, BEFORE GOING INTO GROUPS

This opens up more space to understand each other and develop trust.

BE THERE, CONNECT WITH LOCALS

Participation process asks for professionals to be present on the spot. More than in the normal process, stressful circumstances ask for locals to be engaged.

BE PRESENT REGULARLY, NOT A ONE-TIME VISIT

Building trust asks for a continuous process with regular presence, where trust can be built up in small steps.

IT'S NOT ALWAYS POSSIBLE TO BE ON THE SPOT YOURSELF

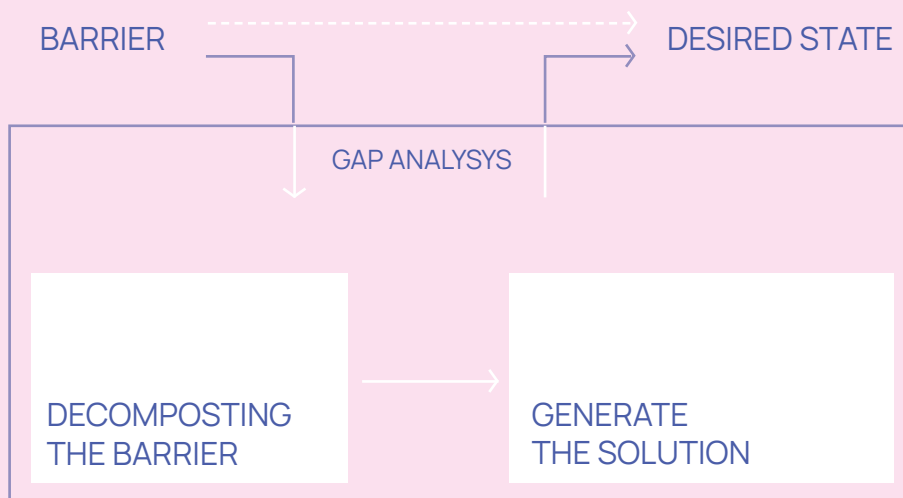
In that case try to build a small local team. They will also be able to carry on when your project ends.

WORKING WITH BARRIERS

BARRIERS: YOU ALWAYS HAVE THEM

Working with communities means overcoming barriers together. In any process, different barriers can arise. When working under stress, both general and specific barriers may appear. These can affect participants' engagement, comfort and effectiveness. Which means they can come in an undesired state of conflict, lack of trust or other states that influence their own wellbeing and the success of the project.

We developed the following scheme to help you to get participants in the desired state, both for themselves and your project. When barriers arise, this scheme helps you to analyse the underlying problems and provide different type of solutions to put from.



DECOMPOSING THE BARRIER

We were confronted with different barriers in our project. We found that these barriers exist in different categories. Deconstructing these barriers into these categories helped us to understand them better. Opening routes and alternatives to overcome them.

CATEGORY 1: PERSONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

On personal and psychological level, participants can experience lack of confidence, fear of conflict, low sense of impact and/or lack of trust and safety.

EXAMPLES WE FACED DURING OUR PROJECTS:

- Unsatisfied experience because of different expectations during a multi-activity event.
- Lack of interest in the project or specific activities.
- People were afraid to share data.
- No sense of personal benefit.

CATEGORY 2: SOCIAL

On the social level, barriers range from group dynamics, cultural or language barriers and/or exclusion, overlooking or marginalisation of groups more vulnerable or less integrated into the community.

EXAMPLES WE FACED DURING OUR PROJECTS:

- Individuals keep a distance from each other.
- An angry participant became a barrier for others to participate.
- Lack of information about the community.
- Hierarchy in the local community and people that were longer involved.

CATEGORY 3: PRACTICAL AND LOGISTICAL

Practical barriers have to do with time and availability of participants, accessibility of participation events, costs and a lack of clarity in information about goals and expectations.

EXAMPLES WE FACED DURING OUR PROJECTS:

- No structural resources to maintain a website.
- Bad weather conditions.
- Wrong timing of activities.
- Distance and accessibility of locations.

CATEGORY 4: STRUCTURAL

Structural barriers appear from institutional obstacles, lack of continuity in the process, power imbalance, lack of resources and/or lack of capacity among professionals on how to do participation.

EXAMPLES WE FACED DURING OUR PROJECTS:

- Institutions that are highly involved, but can't bring funding.
- Bureaucracy.
- Community members have no experience in participating.
- Important stakeholders were mobilised by the army.

GENERATE SOLUTIONS

After understanding them, the next step is to overcome the barriers you're facing in your participation process.

ACTIVITIES AND INTERVENTIONS

You can experiment with different types of activities and or interventions.

EXAMPLES/TIPS FROM OUR PROJECTS:

- Adding crowdfunding to our activity as an extra purpose.
- Specifying target groups for activities.
- Conducting a needs assessment during the first participation event.

MODERATION

Think about moderating your activities differently.

EXAMPLES/TIPS FROM OUR PROJECTS:

- Adding crowdfunding to our activity as an extra purpose.
- Specifying target groups for activities.
- Conducting a needs assessment during the first participation event.

BALANCING POWER

If there's a barrier resulting from power imbalance, you might want to directly solve it by changing power structures during the event.

EXAMPLES/TIPS FROM OUR PROJECTS:

- Focus on youth.
- Share responsibilities for follow-up and next steps.
- Make sure the weaker voices are heard

BUILDING TRUST

Building trust is at the core of working with communities.

EXAMPLES/TIPS FROM OUR PROJECTS:

- Go to the community, don't let them come to you.
- Use local leaders and connectors.
- Act, not just talk.
- Come back, not just show up once.

COMMUNICATION BEFORE/AFTER

Communication before and after events helps to reduce barriers during the event.

EXAMPLES/TIPS FROM OUR PROJECTS:

- Personal invitations.
- Show results, how small they are.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Strengthen the capacities of people involved in the participation - both professionals and the community - could be helpful to overcome barriers for the long term.

EXAMPLES/TIPS FROM OUR PROJECTS:

- Making people part of the process as well, by providing detailed timelines.
- Seeking spokespersons outside your organization.

To put 'communities at the heart of urban changes' is a growing movement in Ukraine. The teams from the three case studies already found ways to help each other with connections to institutions and reach out to other regions of the country. Organisations like Cedos, Metalab, Cite, Alda who are working on social and spatial development already for years, have scaled-up their work on participatory practices in the past years. Ro3kvit is working with participatory tools in almost every project and initiated several capacity building projects around it. The Ukrainian government issued a law on public participation procedures for local governments as an essential element in every new development.

If you became interested and feel the energy to join, please do so. Here are some national and international organisations you could follow, check their programmes and reach out with ideas: Cedos I think tank and urban bureau, Placemaking Europe, Ro3kvit Urban Coalition for Ukraine

Apart from this toolkit you can also check out these tools: Placemaking Europe - The Toolbox, Project for Public Spaces - publications, Ro3kvits', Handbook for Participation, Youtube channel and knowledge platform.

Capacity building never stops. If you want to further improve the capacity and knowledge of your team and partners, for instance have a look at those: Best Urban Planning Courses & Certificates [2025] | Coursera Learn Online, Trainings - The City at Eye Level, How to engage Residents in Decision Making.

For sure this is not an extensive list, as said there are many more initiatives and hopefully more will follow. We sincerely hope the network keeps growing so that indeed Ukraine will be rebuilt by and with all.

This publication has been made possible in the joined effort of all the teams involved in the Communities at the Heart of Urban Changes project.

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