



servU

**Service-Learning
for Ukraine's Recovery:
Education, Citizenship,
and Community Resilience**

Book of Abstracts

International Research Conference
June 9, 2026
Ukrainian Catholic University

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This volume contains abstracts accepted for presentation at the International Research Conference *Service-Learning for Ukraine's Recovery: Education, Citizenship, and Community Resilience*, organised within the Erasmus+ CBHE project *Service-Learning in Higher Education for Ukraine's Recovery (ServU)*.

The conference brings together scholars, educators, practitioners, and community partners working at the intersection of service-learning, higher education, civic engagement, and recovery. It provides a platform for presenting research findings, sharing practice-based evidence, and advancing institutional and policy-oriented approaches to service-learning in wartime and post-war contexts.

The submissions included in this volume were reviewed by the Conference Scientific Committee and selected based on their academic quality, relevance to the conference themes, and contribution to the development of service-learning in Ukraine and the broader European Higher Education Area.

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ABOUT THE SERVU PROJECT

Service-Learning in Higher Education for Ukraine's Recovery (ServU) (Project No. 101128922) is an Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) project coordinated by the Ukrainian Catholic University and implemented by a consortium of higher education institutions from Ukraine, Belgium, Germany, and Italy. The project responds to the profound social, economic, and infrastructural challenges caused by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and explores how universities can contribute to recovery through education, civic engagement, and collaboration with local communities.

At the heart of the project is service-learning, an educational approach that integrates academic learning with meaningful community service and structured reflection. Through service-learning, students apply disciplinary knowledge to real societal challenges while developing civic responsibility, leadership, teamwork, problem-solving abilities, and active citizenship competencies. At the same time, universities strengthen their third mission by becoming more engaged partners in addressing local needs and supporting community development.

ServU focuses on three categories of communities most affected by the war: communities hosting large numbers of internally displaced persons, liberated territories, and communities located near the frontline whose infrastructure has been significantly damaged. Working together with local authorities, civil society organisations, schools, cultural institutions, and community representatives, partner universities identify priority needs and co-create educational responses that contribute to resilience, social cohesion, and recovery.

The project adapts service-learning methodology to wartime and recovery conditions, redesigns community needs assessment approaches, develops and pilots innovative service-learning courses, strengthens university-community partnerships, and establishes a national Service-Learning Resource Platform for knowledge sharing, networking, and dissemination of good

practices. Through international cooperation and teaching partnerships, ServU also facilitates the exchange of expertise between Ukrainian and European universities and supports the long-term institutionalisation of service-learning within Ukrainian higher education.

The consortium includes Ukrainian Catholic University, Sumy State University, Dnipro University of Technology, KU Leuven (Belgium), Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (Germany), and LUMSA University (Italy), supported by a wider network of international organisations, public authorities, and community stakeholders. Together, the partners seek to strengthen the contribution of higher education to democratic participation, inclusive development, and sustainable recovery in Ukraine.

The International Conference Service-Learning for Ukraine's Recovery: Education, Citizenship, and Community Resilience and the present Book of Abstracts represent an important platform for sharing research findings, pedagogical innovations, and practical experiences emerging from this work. They bring together scholars, educators, students, practitioners, and community representatives committed to advancing service-learning as a meaningful and sustainable response to Ukraine's recovery challenges.

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



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Her research appears in top-tier outlets such as the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, the *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Management Learning*. She is a recipient of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Award for Teaching Excellence (2011) – awarded to only three educators nationally per field per year – and multiple Carrick Citations for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning. After eleven years on disability leave in treatment for cancer, Dr. Kenworthy rejoined Bond Business School in 2022 with renewed scholarly energy. She is currently partnering with colleagues teaching through war in Ukraine, co-authoring work on their resilience – making her presence at this conference both academically significant and deeply personal.

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1_SERVICE-LEARNING FOR RECOVERY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

1_Short Papers

PROVISION OF PARTICIPATORY LAND MANAGEMENT IN TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE-LEARNING

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Keywords: participatory land management; collaborative governance; decentralization reform; spatial planning; service-learning.

The management of land resources in the era of decentralization requires a fundamental shift from technocratic, top-down administration to inclusive, participatory frameworks that reconcile economic growth with social equity and environmental sustainability. This article substantiates the principles of decision-making as a core component of participatory land management (PLM) within territorial communities, with a specific focus on Ukrainian legislative context. Utilizing a transdisciplinary methodology that integrates systemic, logical-structural, and informational analysis, the research includes a three-stage model for effective land-use planning: goal determination, analysis of sustainable development factors, and the evaluation of expediency and efficiency. The paper examines the integration of these paradigms into the educational process through the “Learning Lab” model and service-learning frameworks, specifically applying Tronto’s “ethic of care” cycle to enhance students’ social capital and professional competencies in post-conflict restoration. The study concludes that institutionalizing participation and bridging the information gap between communities and authorities are essential for fostering territorial resilience and sustainable recovery.

1. Introduction and Review of Current Research

The management of land resources within territorial communities has undergone a transformative paradigm shift, transitioning from rigid, centralized state administration toward decentralized, participatory frameworks. This evolution is a response to the increasing complexity of socio-ecological systems and the historical failure of top-down, “place-blind” sectoral policies to address local developmental needs effectively [3]. Participatory land management (PLM) is conceptualized as an inclusive, transdisciplinary decision-making process where citizens, local authorities, and diverse stakeholders collaborate to manage land resources, ensuring legitimacy, social equity, and environmental sustainability [11].

1.1 The landscape of Ukrainian decentralization and land reform

In Ukraine, the reform of local self-government has been systemic and permanent since 2014, grounded in the principle of subsidiarity – ensuring that decisions are made at the administrative level closest to the citizenry. Between 2015 and 2020, Ukraine consolidated 10,961 local units into 1,469 amalgamated territorial communities (hromadas), which were granted significant financial and managerial autonomy. A critical milestone was the “ubiquity of jurisdiction,” established by Law No. 1423-IX, which transferred the power to dispose of land parcels outside settlement boundaries from the State Service for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre to community property.

This administrative modernization provided the spatial basis for economic development, yet it created an urgent need for transparent, participatory management algorithms to navigate the changed conditions of modern times. The current context of martial law has further emphasized the role of hromadas as resilient actors capable of coordinating humanitarian aid and maintaining local governance stability despite infrastructure losses totaling approximately \$155 billion by the end of 2024.

1.2 Theoretical Foundations and Global Paradigms

Contemporary academic discourse emphasizes the integration of traditional knowledge with empirical scientific modeling to

bridge the “epistemological mismatch” between local systems and Western planning paradigms [10]. Key theoretical frameworks influencing PLM include:

- participatory and negotiated territorial development – a methodology promoting social dialogue and negotiation to improve trust among social actors and promote systemic territorial development;
- multi-level governance – a theory distinguishing between Type 1 governance (administrative tiers) and Type 2 governance (flexible collaboration between state and non-state actors for specific tasks).
- instrumental and relational value theory – a “lens” through which land-use decisions are viewed not just as profit-maximization (instrumental) but as a reflection of human relationships with the landscape and society (relational) [10].

Research by Malek and Verburg (2020) mapping global land-use decision-making identifies six distinct types of decision-makers: survivalist, subsistence-oriented smallholder, market-oriented smallholder, professional commercialist, professional intensifier, and eco-agriculturalist [9]. Decisions are heavily influenced by socio-economic, climatic, and soil conditions, with “survivalist” objectives predominating in areas with high poverty.

Furthermore, the DESIRE project demonstrated that combining local traditional knowledge with empirical evaluations of sustainable land management (SLM) technologies facilitates broad-scale adoption [15]. By presenting scientific evidence within a local context, researchers can trigger shifts in stakeholder perceptions, leading to more sustainable land-use trajectories.

2. Methods

The methodology for substantiating decision-making principles in PLM utilizes a transdisciplinary framework integrating systemic, informational, and logical-structural analysis [1].

The method of systemic and logical-structural analysis defines the functional components of the participatory management system. It identifies “mode-forming objects” – industrial or agricultural facilities that dictate the functional purpose and restrictions of

surrounding territories [12]. This involves mapping “hot spots” of degradation and “bright spots” of sustainable management.

Participatory rural appraisal and mapping tools engage stakeholders throughout the research phases. These include:

- social mapping and brainstorming to identify community values and land-use patterns;
- fuzzy cognitive maps used in workshops to represent relationships between socio-economic drivers and environmental impacts;
- participatory process to agree on and establish boundaries between distinct ownership or use areas.

GIS-based land suitability and accessibility analysis in regions with official data shortages, researchers employ GIS to assess land suitability. A critical component is the “access time criterion,” which calculates the ease with which land can be reached for exploitation, allowing for more realistic assessments than purely biophysical models [4].

Econometric and efficiency modeling to quantify the performance of industrial land use, the research applies mathematical modeling. Efficiency is defined as the ratio between production volume and the total spatial footprint, including the area of restrictions. Productivity is measured using tools like the Malmquist Productivity Index and Data Envelopment Analysis [13].

Participatory monitoring and evaluation framework involves a horizontal approach consisting of seven phases: (1) selection of the working group, (2) definition of objectives, (3) establishment of the baseline, (4) selection of indicators, (5) data collection, (6) analysis, and (7) social learning. This bridges the gap between scientific and local communities by integrating Technical Indicators of Soil Quality with Local Indicators of Soil Quality.

3. Results

Effective participatory land management in territorial communities necessitates a structured three-stage decision-making model:

- Stage 1 – determination of land-use purposes;

- Stage 2 – analysis and assessment of sustainable development factors;
- Stage 3 – deciding on expediency and efficiency.

The stage 1 is decisive for planning industrial and territorial development. It requires a comprehensive analysis of existing and potential enterprises:

- utilizing statistical information and geospatial data to identify existing industrial assets;
- engaging investors, environmental specialists, and residents to define the community’s industrial trajectory;
- determining environmental carrying capacity and aligning industrial activity with urban planning documentation [12].

An inclusive four-step model for decision-making includes: (1) community reflection on investor requests, (2) documentation of a historical timeline to foster land-belonging, (3) inclusive dialogue with companies, and (4) an inclusive voting process using a “direct tracking matrix”.

During the stage 2 the effective factor analysis must consider:

- factors like agricultural intensification and water quality often have synergistic or trade-off relationships [2];
- quantitative and qualitative indicators of factor impact must be periodically reviewed to account for technological innovation;
- the adoption of sustainable practices is influenced by education levels and socio-demographic factors.

The stage 3 decisions on land use must be acceptable to stakeholders, consistent with regional development plans, and transparent. Research substantiates that efficiency in industrial land management is expressed through a mathematical relationship.

The Efficiency Factor is formulated as: where is the volume of products produced, is the area of the land parcel, and is the area of restrictions (e.g., sanitary protection zones) impacting surrounding land.

Land use is most efficient when production volume per unit of area is high and negative spatial impact on third-party parcels is minimized. Key factors for increasing efficiency include:

1. Strategic placement near transport nodes and resource clusters to minimize infrastructure costs.

2. Use of resource-saving and low-emission production cycles to reduce the radius of sanitary protection zones.
3. Rational placement of structures and use of non-agricultural land reserves to free land for social infrastructure.

4. Discussions

Participation exists on a gradient from coercive (check and balance) to interactive (shared responsibility/co-management). While R&D projects utilize participatory methods, they often face tensions between short-term project goals and the institutional stability required for long-term territorial continuity [14]. Effective PLM requires “bridging the information gap” between communities and state institutions to empower local leaders.

A recurring challenge in industrial land management is the regulation of sanitary protection zones around “mode-forming objects”. Research identifies two planning models: those with and without an overlap [12]. Systemic modeling can identify and eliminate overlaps, reclaiming land for social infrastructure. Precise determination of centroids for these objects is critical for accurate registration in the state land cadastre.

In Ukraine, the 2024 legislative updates institutionalize the role of citizens in reconstruction planning. The postponement of mandatory spatial development plans until 2028 acknowledges wartime constraints while prioritizing communities with established plans for international financial aid. Decentralization has provided hromadas the organizational capacity for infrastructure projects (water supply, shelters), reflecting 41,33 % of initiated community ideas.

The transition toward participatory land management requires a fundamental shift in how future land managers, urban planners, and public administrators are trained. Higher education institutions in Ukraine and beyond are increasingly adopting innovative pedagogical frameworks to bridge the gap between technical diagnostics and community-led decision-making [8].

Modern land management education is moving toward the “Learning lab” model, particularly in response to the 2024 European nature restoration law. These labs function as trans-disciplinary spaces where students, municipal officers, NGOs, and residents co-produce evidence.

Now students are trained to be “technically fluent” (remote sensing, GIS, modeling) and “socially literate” (participatory facilitation, ethical reflexivity, policy communication). In post-conflict areas pedagogy includes memory walks and oral histories to ensure that restoration proposals are “community-legitimate” and recognize local historical contexts. Students are able to produce evidence packages, data-stewardship templates, and containerized software stacks that municipalities can directly adopt for nature restoration law reporting.

SL is a core tenet of educational reform, explicitly connecting academic learning with community service [7]. Applying an “ethic of care” lens (Tronto’s cycle) helps students move beyond a “serving others” charity perspective toward a critical approach that dismantles structures of injustice. Tronto’s cycle includes: (1) caring about (attentiveness), (2) caring for (responsibility), (3) care-giving (competence), and (4) care-receiving (responsiveness).

Participatory planning projects show a positive and statistically significant correlation with the development of students’ social capital and social awareness. Practicing these skills increases students’ sense of responsibility to society, resulting in “socially conscientious” professionals whose projects better address the needs of diverse populations.

The scale of decentralization in Ukraine has prompted the launch of targeted lifelong learning programs for civil servants and community land managers. The “New opportunities for communities in land management” (2021-2022) program offered distance learning for community leaders, focusing on the latest legal requirements and GIS applications for decision-making. Updated pedagogical designs integrate student awareness, experiential learning, and mental resilience, strengthening public administration affected by the crisis.

The convergence of participatory projects and SL represents a powerful pedagogical synthesis that transforms both the educational environment and community resilience. In this framework, participatory projects serve as the “real-world laboratory”, while service learning provides the “reflexive and ethical scaffolding” necessary for sustainable outcomes.

6. Conclusions

The substantiation of decision-making principles within participatory land management provides a roadmap for the sustainable development of territorial communities. The research demonstrates that the greatest potential for increasing land-use efficiency lies in the transition from technocratic state administration to collaborative co-management structures. The three-stage decision-making model – integrating goal determination, sustainable factor analysis, and mathematical efficiency evaluation – offers local authorities a transparent algorithm for managing industrial resources while minimizing negative environmental externalities.

A critical finding of this study is that efficiency in industrial land use must be viewed through a synthetic lens of economic output and spatial footprint optimization. By utilizing innovative technologies and rational building placement, communities can reclaim “dead zones” from overlapping sanitary protection zones, thereby freeing land for social infrastructure and ecological restoration.

Furthermore, the integration of these paradigms into the educational sector through “Learning Labs” and service-learning initiatives is essential for cultivating a new generation of “socially conscientious” professionals. Applying an “ethic of care” to the educational process ensures that land management practices in post-conflict settings like Ukraine are community-legitimate and trauma-informed. Ultimately, bridging the information gap through e-democracy tools and permanent participatory structures will strengthen the social capital of territorial communities, ensuring their long-term resilience and compliance with global sustainability objectives.

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TRANSFORMING STUDENTS INTO AGENTS OF CHANGE FOR RECOVERY: A FRAMEWORK FOR SERVICE-LEARNING IN UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION DURING WARTIME

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Introduction

The full-scale war in Ukraine has fundamentally transformed the epistemological, social, and practical roles of higher education institutions. Historically operating primarily as centers of traditional knowledge transmission and human capital development, universities must now radically reimagine their paradigms due to the exigencies of an active, high-intensity conflict. Today, universities are shifting from being isolated academic enclaves to becoming active, indispensable participants in societal resilience, regional stabilization, and physical reconstruction. In conditions marked by constant air raid alerts, systematic disruptions in energy supply, and ongoing psychological trauma among students and faculty, universities are required to drastically expand their mission beyond the classroom.

As recent literature on Higher Education in Emergencies (HEiE) highlights, the contemporary university in a conflict zone must be conceptualized as an essential social, political, and epistemic space – a hub of resilience, resistance, and hope in times of extreme adversity [1]. This paradigm shift embodies the activation of the “Third Mission” of the university, which aims to dismantle the historical barrier between abstract academic knowledge and the acute crises facing society. In the context of the Ukrainian war, universities act not merely as educational centers but as key “agents of change” of social transformation, pillars of community support, and catalysts for local innovation ecosystems [2]. They

are tasked with providing scientifically grounded solutions and institutional support for the long-term sustainability of communities facing existential threats.

Thus, based on the conducted analysis, it is established that despite this clear theoretical mandate, immense practical challenges remain. Traditional pedagogical approaches prioritizing theoretical knowledge dissemination fail to address the complexity, scale, and urgency of these local challenges. This is particularly evident in frontline-adjacent territories, such as the Dnipropetrovsk region, which are simultaneously dealing with infrastructure destruction, the massive influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and severe economic contraction. A standardized curriculum, designed for peacetime stability, lacks the agility to respond to a community that urgently needs energy audits for bomb shelters or crisis financial literacy for displaced youth.

Furthermore, the psychological toll of living, learning, and teaching within an active war zone cannot be overstated. The educational environment is characterized by chronic threat, uncertainty, and collective trauma [3]. Expecting students to maintain high levels of academic motivation solely for abstract career goals is pedagogically unsound in this context. Thus, based on the analysis of current educational gaps, there is a desperate need for educational strategies offering immediate communal value alongside rigorous academic training. It has been established that the core research problem lies in defining and implementing pedagogical mechanisms that facilitate the transformation of students from passive recipients of knowledge into active “agents of change”. This transformation is an absolute necessity to prepare youth for active participation in national recovery processes while simultaneously mitigating the severe risk of academic burnout and psychological despair.

Methods

To conceptualize, facilitate, and measure this transformation, we propose a highly adaptive methodology integrating the pedagogical principles of Service-Learning (SL) with robust Community Needs Assessment (CNA) frameworks tailored specifically to a wartime environment. Foundational literature defines Service-Learning as a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in organized service

activities that meet identified community needs, followed by structured reflection to deepen their understanding of course content and enhance civic responsibility [4, 5]. In an active crisis, this approach requires students to engage with a pedagogy of “disruptive discomfort,” pushing them to solve unplanned, critical, and emotionally taxing challenges in real-time [6].

The analysis demonstrates that the integration of Service-Learning and Community Needs Assessment constitutes an adaptive methodological response to the challenges of wartime higher education. To ensure academic interventions are accurately adapted to the local context and avoid imposing top-down assumptions on vulnerable populations, this methodology utilizes sociological assessment tools – such as focus group interviews and stakeholder mapping – developed within international frameworks like the ServU-ERASMUS-EDU-2023 project [2]. This ensures a democratic, reciprocal partnership between the university and the territorial community. Empirical data to evaluate the effectiveness of the model was collected through post-course reflective essays submitted by students and semi-structured feedback sessions with community stakeholders. This approach allowed for identifying recurring patterns related to student transformation and community impact

Results

Based on the conducted analysis, it is established that the transformation of students into “agents of change” is not a spontaneous outcome, but a structured, multi-stage pedagogical process. The proposed methodological framework consists of a dynamic Four-stage transformation cycle, designed to guide the student from the classroom into the community and back to a state of profound reflection:

1. Identification (Needs Assessment): This stage initiates the university-community partnership. Students and faculty interact directly with municipal authorities, NGO leaders, and community members to identify urgent vulnerabilities. Rather than relying on generic case studies, students confront real deficits – such as infrastructural damage, lack of digital and financial education, or localized energy instability.

2. Planning (Academic Alignment): Once a community need is identified, it must be rigorously mapped to the specific learning

outcomes of university courses. This ensures the project remains a high-level academic endeavor rather than mere volunteerism. Academic integrity, theoretical frameworks, and standardized evaluation metrics are aligned with the community’s objectives.

3. Action and Impact (Field Execution): Students execute the planned project in the field utilizing real community data. At this critical stage, they transcend the boundaries of standard coursework. They are no longer practicing for a future profession; they act fully as “agents of change” whose immediate work has tangible consequences for community survival and efficiency.

4. Reflection (Critical Analysis): The cycle concludes with structured reflection. Students critically analyze their professional efficacy, the limitations of their theoretical knowledge when applied to wartime chaos, and their emotional growth. This reflection is evaluated alongside technical deliverables.

To elucidate the depth of this methodological shift Table 1 summarizes the key structural differences between traditional academic pedagogy and the proposed wartime Service-Learning framework.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Educational Paradigms

Dimension	Traditional Academic Pedagogy	Wartime Service-Learning Framework
Primary Objective	Individual human capital development and career readiness.	Community resilience, regional stabilization, and national recovery.
Educational Space	Isolated classrooms, controlled laboratories, and theoretical simulations.	Frontline communities, municipal facilities, and real-world crisis environments.
Role of the Student	Passive recipient of standardized knowledge; consumer of education.	Active agents of change; co-creator of localized, applied knowledge.
Curriculum Driver	Pre-determined state educational standards and historical syllabi.	Urgent Community Needs Assessment (CNA) aligned with academic outcomes.
Emotional Paradigm	Driven by grade acquisition and academic performance anxiety.	Driven by civic duty, empathy, and meaning-making amidst trauma.

Considering the above, it is important to emphasize that running parallel to the four operational stages is a continuous, transversal process of emotional and value-based transformation. In the psychological landscape of wartime, the search for meaning becomes a primary motivator for survival and cognitive function. By directly aiding their communities and seeing the immediate results of their academic labor, students convert chronic anxiety and trauma into proactive civic agency. This transversal component acts as a form of educational therapy, fostering long-term psychological resilience and preventing the academic apathy that accompanies prolonged exposure to conflict.

This comprehensive methodological framework was operationalized and evaluated through two socially-oriented courses at the Dnipro University of Technology. Both courses were implemented in direct partnership with the Chumakivska Territorial Community, a region heavily impacted by the socio-economic and infrastructural fallout of the war. The empirical evidence gathered provides deep insights into the efficacy of the “Agents of Change” Model.

Case Study 1: Personal Finance and Economic Resilience

Macroeconomic instability caused by the invasion, characterized by inflation, job loss, and displacement, necessitates high financial adaptability among youth. To address this, the “Personal Finance” course (4 ECTS credits) was transformed into a Service-Learning practicum.

Implementation Parameters. The project engaged 56 finance bachelor students to mitigate economic vulnerability by developing financial literacy programs for schoolchildren in the Chumakivska Territorial Community. The university students acted as direct trainers, utilizing interactive workshops to teach personal budget formation, income and expenditure management under crisis conditions, savings mechanics, and investment resource allocation. A key component was instilling an understanding of entrepreneurship as a viable tool for increasing personal income in an unstable economy.

Outcomes and Reflection. Based on the conducted analysis of educational outcomes, the initiative successfully developed the financial, business, and critical thinking competencies of the

target schoolchildren. However, the most profound transformation occurred within the university students. They reported significantly enhanced skills in applying abstract theoretical finance principles to practical, human-centered problems. Furthermore, they demonstrated an increased awareness of personal responsibility for financial decisions. The course instructor noted the dramatic pedagogical shift: *“Thanks to the implementation of the Service-Learning project, students developed a sense of responsibility towards representatives of the territorial community for the results of their work. This contributed to a more responsible attitude to the learning process, a critical understanding of learning outcomes, and better alignment of the developed skills with community needs.”* The motivation was no longer grade acquisition, but the ethical obligation to provide accurate information to the children relying on them.

The results confirm that practical engagement significantly enhances not only professional competencies but also students’ sense of responsibility and agency.

Case Study 2: Energy Management and Infrastructural Recovery

The systematic destruction of Ukraine’s energy grid has rendered energy management a matter of acute national security. Responding to this existential threat, the “Energy Management Systems” course (4 ECTS credits) mobilized students to address municipal energy deficits.

Implementation Parameters. This project involved 42 engineering and energy master students mandated to conduct professional-grade energy audits for the Chumakivska Territorial Community. It has been established that using real municipal data rather than textbook scenarios, students utilized modern monitoring tools to analyze the energy efficiency of critical social infrastructure, specifically local schools. Based on their audits, students proposed comprehensive modernization measures aimed at improving energy efficiency, systemic reliability, and supply system safety – factors directly contributing to the physical recovery and winter survival of the region.

Outcomes and Reflection. The impact on student motivation was transformative. The realization that engineering calculations could determine whether a school remained heated during a winter

blackout fundamentally altered their disciplinary approach. One student reflected profoundly: *“It is an incredible feeling to understand that you are not just doing a regular laboratory work for a grade, but that your project has real value for society. Our energy modernization project will help save money for the school in the Chumakivska community. It is interesting to participate in the development of a project for a specific community. We would like to visit the community more often – we could offer even more solutions if we had more field trips.”* This encapsulates the essence of the “agents of change”: a professional who is technically proficient, deeply motivated by societal impact, and eager to expand their scope of assistance.

Considering the above, it is evident that the real-world impact of student work serves as a key driver of intrinsic motivation and professional identity formation.

The success of the Service-Learning model is heavily reliant on the utility derived by community partners. Feedback from Chumakivska community representatives underscored the immense practical value of the university’s “Third Mission” engagement:

“Our community’s participation in the implementation of the socially-oriented course “Energy Management Systems” became an important experience of cooperation with the university and young professionals. We had the opportunity not only to outline our own problems in the field of energy consumption but also to see their professional analysis and modern approaches to solving them. It was especially valuable that students worked with real community data, investigated the energy efficiency of social infrastructure facilities, and offered practical recommendations for its improvement. For the community, this became not just an educational project, but a foundation for the formation of an energy management system and the making of future managerial decisions”.

This validates the premise that students, when properly guided, can produce professional-grade outputs that directly alleviate the administrative and financial burdens of war-torn municipalities.

The findings indicate that it is necessary to critically reflect on the contextual and methodological limitations of the study. While empirical outcomes present a compelling case for the efficacy of Service-Learning in wartime, it is imperative to critically

acknowledge the limitations inherent in conducting pedagogical research within an active conflict zone.

- **Contextual Unpredictability:** The research environment is highly volatile. Scheduled educational activities, field trips, and data collection phases were frequently interrupted by security threats (air raid alerts requiring immediate evacuation) and infrastructural failures (rolling blackouts). This limits the ability to maintain a controlled, standardized pedagogical setting.
- **Geographic and Sample Scope:** This study focuses on specific courses within a single institution partnering with one territorial community. While the findings are deeply qualitative, they are highly context-specific to a frontline-adjacent region and may not universally generalize to universities in safer regions or different global conflict zones.
- **Longitudinal Tracking Constraints:** A core objective of Service-Learning is the long-term cultivation of civic responsibility. However, due to mass internal displacement, continuous mobilization, and the unpredictable trajectory of the war, tracking the longitudinal career impacts of these “agents of change” over a multi-year horizon is currently unfeasible.
- **Subjectivity in Crisis:** Reflective evidence relies heavily on qualitative feedback gathered during a period of intense, sustained emotional stress. The psychological phenomena of wartime solidarity and a heightened desire for positive impact may influence self-reported data, making it difficult to isolate pedagogical impact from the broader psychological environment.
- **Pedagogical Burden on Faculty:** Transitioning to this model requires an immense expenditure of time and emotional labor to redesign curricula, establish community trust, and manage the psychological well-being of traumatized students executing high-stakes projects, raising questions about scalability without significant institutional support.

Discussion

The results of the study demonstrate that the implementation of the Service-Learning approach in a wartime context produces measurable educational and social outcomes. For schoolchildren, participation in the project led to the development of financial

literacy, entrepreneurial thinking, and practical decision-making skills. For university students, the impact was significantly deeper and structural.

It can be observed that student transformation occurs through direct engagement with real community problems. Students demonstrated an increased ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical tasks, particularly in the areas of financial planning and energy efficiency. Importantly, this was accompanied by a shift in motivation: academic performance was no longer driven primarily by grades, but by responsibility toward community stakeholders.

Instructional feedback confirms that the integration of real-world tasks into the learning process leads to higher levels of engagement, accountability, and quality of outputs. This indicates that Service-Learning does not reduce academic rigor but, наоборот, підсилює його через контекст застосування.

The implications of this study can be formulated at three interconnected levels.

At the level of educational practice, the findings confirm the necessity of integrating Community Needs Assessment (CNA) into standard curricula. The cases of “Personal Finance” and “Energy Management Systems” demonstrate that aligning course outcomes with real community needs significantly improves student motivation, critical thinking, and problem-solving capacity. In crisis conditions, theoretical instruction without practical application shows limited effectiveness.

At the level of institutional policy, the results indicate that the sustainability of this approach depends on formal recognition. The integration of Service-Learning components into ECTS frameworks would allow universities to institutionalize community-engaged learning and ensure its scalability. Without such formalization, the approach remains dependent on individual ініціативи and cannot be системно впроваджений.

At the level of community recovery, the study confirms that student-led projects can produce applied, decision-relevant outputs. The case of the Chumakivska Territorial Community demonstrates that student-generated data – such as energy audits – can be directly used in local management processes. This suggests that universities can function as operational partners for municipalities rather than purely educational institutions.

Conclusion

The results confirm that the experience of the Dnipro University of Technology demonstrates that Service-Learning is not merely a supplementary pedagogical approach, but a essential component of higher education in crisis contexts. By transforming students into active “agents of change”, the educational process remains relevant, practice-oriented, and resilient. The integration of courses such as Personal Finance and Energy Management Systems with the needs of the Chumakivska Territorial Community confirms that academic rigor and societal engagement are mutually reinforcing. The proposed model provides a scalable framework for other conflict-affected or post-crisis regions, demonstrating that universities can contribute to community development and resilience even under disruption.

Considering the above, the findings confirm the transformative potential of higher education in wartime, positioning students not only as recipients of knowledge, but as “agents of change” – active participants in processes of societal recovery and resilience.

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RELATIONAL RESILIENCE THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING IN WARTIME UKRAINE: SUPERVISORY REFLECTIONS FROM THE SERVU PROJECT

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Abstract

This paper examines the ServU project, Service-Learning (SL) in Higher Education for Ukraine's Recovery, through the lens of relational resilience. Focusing on two pilot courses, Communities of Memory at Ukrainian Catholic University and Child Mental Health Support at Sumy State University, it explores how SL can support wartime and postwar recovery by linking academic learning with community-defined needs. The analysis shows that resilience in higher education emerges not merely through institutional continuity, but through reciprocal relationships among students, teachers, communities, and international partners. The paper argues that SL act as a pedagogy of recovery grounded in reciprocity and civic responsibility.

Introduction

The war in Ukraine has profoundly affected the country's higher education system, forcing universities to operate under conditions marked by insecurity, displacement, infrastructural damage, and

widespread psychosocial distress (UNESCO, 2026). In this context, resilience cannot be reduced to the mere continuation of teaching activities. A more adequate interpretation is that resilience concerns the capacity of universities to reorganize their educational mission around urgent social realities while preserving academic quality, ethical responsibility, and civic relevance (Błaszczuk et al., 2025). The ServU materials consistently suggest that wartime service-learning (SL) should be understood in precisely these terms: not simply as continuity under pressure, but as a structured effort to reconnect higher education with communities experiencing loss, rupture, and recovery (Culcasi et al., 2024).

This paper develops that perspective by reading the ServU experience through the concept of relational resilience. In its broadest sense, relational resilience refers to the capacity of human systems to withstand disruption, reorganize under stress, and emerge with renewed resources through processes grounded in connection, communication, and shared meaning (Jordan, 2004). Applied to wartime higher education, this concept makes it possible to understand resilience not only as an institutional characteristic, but as a relational accomplishment produced across boundaries between universities, students, teachers, communities, and international partners. In other words, universities remain resilient not simply because they keep their internal structures functioning, but because they sustain and renew ties capable of carrying knowledge, care, responsibility, and public purpose in situations of uncertainty.

Within the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education project SL in Higher Education for Ukraine's Recovery (ServU), this understanding is especially productive. The project was explicitly designed to strengthen synergies between Ukrainian higher education institutions and local territorial communities through SL. Across the available materials, ServU emerged as an initiative that aimed to transform disruption into pedagogical structure: local needs were assessed, faculty were trained, courses were co-designed with European partners, and pilot activities were implemented in direct relationship with communities.

From a LUMSA supervisory perspective, the most significant contribution of these pilots was not simply that they allowed educational activity to continue, but that they created reciprocal relationships in which service and learning remained mutually shaping. This paper focuses on two emblematic cases: UCU's Communities of Memory and SumDU's Child Mental Health Support. Although they respond to different domains of recovery, one centred on cultural memory and the other on psychosocial support, both show that resilience in wartime higher education is relational before it is procedural.

Approach and methodology

The analysis presented here is based on an interpretive reading of the project materials and course documents developed within the ServU project. More specifically, it draws on the uploaded draft texts prepared for the ServU conferences, the short paper and abstract drafts, the UCU syllabus for scientific and psychoeducational practice, and the Child Mental Health Support course document prepared for SumDU. These materials make it possible to reconstruct not only the thematic focus of the two selected pilots, but also the broader pedagogical architecture within which they were developed (Culcasi et al., 2024; Hoth de Olano et al., 2024).

Under the ServU project, the participating universities followed a multi-stage process. The first stage consisted of needs assessment and community engagement. Local priorities were identified through focus groups and consultation with community representatives, public authorities, and other local stakeholders. These processes highlighted a broad range of concerns, including cultural preservation, psychosocial support, digital literacy, civic participation, and local economic recovery. This grounding in community-defined needs is crucial, because it shows that the pilot courses did not originate only from disciplinary interests or institutional agendas; rather, they were shaped by an effort to listen to communities affected by war and to translate their concerns into educational action (Hoth de Olano et al., 2024).

A second stage involved training and co-design. Ukrainian educators collaborated with European partners, including KU Leuven, Università LUMSA, and Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, in teaching tandems that supported the co-design of SL courses. This part of the process is analytically important because it demonstrates that wartime resilience was not left to individual improvisation. Instead, it was institutionalized through guidelines, toolkits, pedagogical exchange, and structured reflection. In this setting, LUMSA's contribution can be understood as methodological accompaniment: supporting course development, helping preserve the balance between service and learning, and encouraging forms of critical reflection capable of sustaining reciprocity rather than reducing community engagement to unidirectional assistance (Visser et al., 2026).

The third stage concerned pilot implementation. Six SL courses were developed and piloted from September 2025 across the Ukrainian partner universities. The two cases considered in this paper were supported through a supervisory lens that emphasized methodological rigour, reflective practice, and the ethical quality of collaboration. Finally, the fourth stage involved reflection and dissemination. Students and faculty participated in reflection seminars and shared course outcomes through public events and project materials, which contributed to the broader ServU guidelines and toolkit. This combination of needs assessment, co-design, implementation, reflection, and dissemination provides the methodological basis for the present analysis. Rather than measuring standardized impact across all pilots, the paper examines how two SL courses operationalized relational resilience and what lessons they offer for higher education in crisis contexts from the perspective of our international relation with the two universities that we had the pleasure to work with.

Case study 1: Communities of Memory at UCU

The first case concerns Communities of Memory, a course that offers a compelling example of how SL can contribute to recovery through cultural and narrative co-production. The course

engaged students with the community of Kozova in the Ternopil region, a locality seeking to preserve local knowledge and create meaningful public cultural spaces amid war, displacement, and social rupture. In this context, memory was not treated as a passive archive of the past, but as a living and contested social practice shaped by silence, responsibility, vulnerability, and the need for public recognition.

The pedagogical structure of the course is significant. Students were involved in oral history interviews, ethnographic observation, memory walks, participatory mapping, and curatorial work, eventually contributing to co-created outputs such as exhibitions, memory maps, and digital archives. This organization matters because it placed students in a relationship of reciprocity with the community. They did not simply collect stories as detached observers, nor did they enter the field as volunteers delivering a predefined service. Rather, they participated in a shared process through which community actors contributed to defining what counted as meaningful memory work, which narratives deserved visibility, and how these narratives should be represented publicly. In this way, the university became part of a collaborative ecology of remembrance and cultural recovery.

From a learning perspective, the course developed a range of competences that extended well beyond technical research skills. Students learned to conduct oral history work, interpret marginalized narratives, communicate across generations, and engage in ethical listening. They also developed reflexive awareness of their own positionality in relation to memory, loss, and representation. This reflexive dimension is particularly important in wartime conditions, where work with memory can involve emotional complexity, political sensitivity, and moral responsibility. The supervisory role was therefore essential not simply in methodological terms, but also in helping students navigate the ethical and affective demands of collaborative memory work.

The course also generated meaningful community-facing outcomes. The co-production of public memory artefacts supported the preservation and articulation of local identity

and encouraged intergenerational dialogue. More broadly, it suggested that democratic recovery is not only a matter of rebuilding infrastructure, but also of creating spaces in which lived experience can be narrated, shared, and publicly recognized. From the standpoint of relational resilience, Communities of Memory shows that universities can become resilient when they sustain forms of partnership grounded in listening, reciprocity, and shared authorship. Here resilience is enacted through cultural co-production and public dialogue, not merely through the maintenance of academic routine.

Case study 2: Child Mental Health Support at SumDU

The second case, Child Mental Health Support, addresses a different but equally urgent domain of wartime recovery: psychosocial support for children and adolescents living with war, displacement, poverty, loss, and prolonged uncertainty. The course was explicitly designed to prepare students to identify signs of emotional and behavioural distress and to provide basic psychosocial support in community settings. Its stated aim was to combine theoretical preparation with practical engagement, thereby translating academic knowledge into accessible and low-threshold forms of care.

The course document outlines a five-module structure covering foundations of child mental health, early detection of emotional disorders, effective communication with children and adolescents, interactive practices for stress reduction, and community practice with supervision. The learning outcomes are notable because they combine clinical sensitivity with community responsiveness. Students were expected to recognize signs of distress across age groups, communicate empathetically with children and caregivers, apply play-based and creative methods, identify mental health concerns in adolescence, and critically evaluate their own role as facilitators. This balance between competence and reflexivity is central to SL in crisis contexts, where educational value depends not only on knowledge acquisition, but also on students' capacity to act responsibly in situations of vulnerability.

The pedagogical methods used in the course reinforce this orientation. Interactive lectures, case-based learning, role play, workshops, and guided supervision were combined with community-based practice. The practical component included anti-stress games, storytelling, sensory exercises, art-based activities, “emotion circles,” “musical stories,” and the creation of “anti-stress boxes” for younger children. For adolescents, the course introduced group discussions, emotion mapping, reflective exercises on stress and coping, and Psychological First Aid-oriented activities designed to strengthen peer support and encourage help-seeking. These tools are important not simply as techniques, but as relational devices: they help create safe spaces, reduce anxiety, foster trust, and open channels of communication in settings where distress may otherwise remain invisible or unspoken.

Another crucial feature of the course is its embeddedness in local support ecologies. The implementation involved collaboration with schools and school psychologists, ensuring that student action was anchored within existing community structures rather than operating as an isolated intervention. This collaboration strengthened the relevance and ethical grounding of the activities, while also contributing to broader mental health literacy among educators, parents, and local stakeholders. The expected impact described in the course materials includes strengthened child mental health support within communities, greater awareness among parents and educators, and the development of students’ practical and soft skills. These outcomes align closely with the logic of relational resilience: resilience here depends on the capacity to build trustful and responsive relationships through which professional knowledge becomes socially meaningful and practically useful.

Analysis and discussion

Taken together, the two cases show that wartime SL is strongest when it creates horizontal rather than hierarchical partnerships (Culcasi and Fontana, 2023). In both examples, communities were

not positioned as passive recipients of university expertise. In Kozova, community actors shaped the direction and meaning of memory work. In Sumy, community actors, educators, psychologists, children, and caregivers influenced the format and ethical limits of psychosocial support activities. In both settings, knowledge emerged through reciprocity, co-production, and shared responsibility. This is why relational resilience is a more precise interpretive concept than institutional endurance alone.

Several broader insights emerge from the comparison. First, the cases show a movement from continuity to reciprocity. University resilience was not limited to keeping courses running; it consisted in reorganizing academic activity around relationships that could hold together learning, service, and community relevance. Second, the pilots demonstrate the value of interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral engagement. Communities of Memory connected heritage, ethnography, and civic education, while Child Mental Health Support brought together psychology, education, and community care. Third, the two cases reveal that wartime recovery must be understood in multidimensional terms. Recovery is not only infrastructural. It also involves cultural memory, psychosocial care, democratic participation, and the rebuilding of trust (Hoth de Olano et al., 2024).

A further point concerns the role of structured supervision and reflection. The materials consistently suggest that reciprocity is not automatic. It must be supported through pedagogical design, critical reflection, and attention to the ethical dimensions of collaboration (Mufron & Vann, 2025). From this point of view, LUMSA's contribution – as well the contribution offered by KU Leuven and Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt – is best understood as methodological accompaniment: helping translate local needs into academically meaningful pedagogies, preserving the mutuality of service and learning, and supporting reflective processes capable of sustaining the ethical quality of engagement. Such accompaniment is especially relevant if SLg is to move beyond isolated pilots and become institutionalized as a durable contribution to recovery.

At the same time, the evidence should be interpreted carefully. The available materials are strong in documenting partnership-building, course design, and illustrative community-facing outcomes, but they do not yet provide a single standardized dataset enabling direct impact comparison across all pilots. For this reason, it would be too strong to claim equivalent measurable outcomes for every course. A more rigorous conclusion is that the consortium demonstrated substantial adaptive and networked capacity, with particularly well-documented cases showing how universities transformed wartime conditions into structured, reciprocal, and socially meaningful relationships.

Implications for policy and institutionalization

The two cases also speak to the institutional conditions that make resilient SLg possible. If universities intend to use SL as a contribution to wartime and postwar recovery, they need to protect time for supervision, recognize community partners as co-educators, and integrate structured reflection into curricular design. Evaluation should not be based only on outputs such as the number of activities delivered or products created, but also on the quality of collaboration, the degree of civic learning achieved, and the continuity of partnerships over time. This is especially relevant in recovery settings, where fragile trust is itself a public good. Under these conditions, universities can model democratic and participatory forms of reconstruction rather than reproducing paternalistic or extractive relationships.

The ServU experience also indicates that recovery-oriented higher education should not separate educational innovation from social responsibility. The diversity of the pilot portfolio, ranging from cultural memory to psychosocial care and from entrepreneurship to territorial resilience, suggests that SL can operate as a flexible framework able to connect disciplinary knowledge with local realities without collapsing academic learning into generic volunteering. For European partners, this has implications as well: international cooperation is most valuable when it strengthens local capacities, supports context-sensitive

pedagogy, and enables methodological dialogue rather than one-way transfer. In this sense, EU–Ukraine cooperation becomes part of the resilience process itself, because it helps sustain networks through which educational action can remain intellectually grounded and socially relevant even under extreme conditions.

Conclusion

The ServU experience suggests that university resilience in wartime Ukraine was realized less as institutional persistence alone than as the creation of reciprocal infrastructures linking students, teachers, communities, and international partners. Through Communities of Memory and Child Mental Health Support, higher education became capable of contributing simultaneously to learning, civic engagement, cultural repair, and psychosocial support. These cases show that SL can function as a powerful pedagogy of recovery when it is grounded in community-defined needs, critical reflection, and horizontal partnership.

From a LUMSA supervisory perspective, the most important lesson is that SL contributes to wartime and postwar recovery not only because it mobilizes action, but because it creates relationships capable of carrying knowledge, care, responsibility, and public meaning across institutional and community boundaries. In this sense, resilience is relational before it is procedural. It is produced when universities do not withdraw into self-preservation, but remain able to act with communities in ways that are academically rigorous, ethically attentive, and socially transformative.

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PSYCHOLOGY IN ACTION THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING APPROACH: A CASE STUDY OF THE KOZOVA TERRITORIAL COMMUNITY (UKRAINE)

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Abstract

This case study presents the design, implementation, and outcomes of a community-based psychoeducational intervention conducted within the master's level course "Scientific and Psychoeducational Practice" for psychology students at UCU, Lviv, in 2025. The intervention was developed using a Service-Learning framework integrated with Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles and implemented in collaboration with the Kozova territorial community in the Ternopil region of Ukraine. The initiative aimed to address mental health literacy, reduce stigma, and strengthen community resilience through co-created psychoeducational activities. Over 400 participants, including approximately 300 children, were engaged across schools, healthcare settings, and community spaces. The report outlines the stages of needs assessment, co-design, implementation, and evaluation, highlighting both outcomes and challenges. Findings suggest that embedding psychoeducational interventions within existing community systems enhances the possibility for maintaining resiliency and relevance, while structured reflection supports the development of students' professional and civic competencies.

1. Background

Mental health challenges in communities affected by social, economic, and wartime stressors require approaches that are both context-sensitive and resilience-focused. In Ukraine, the growing need for accessible mental health support is accompanied by persistent barriers, including stigma, limited awareness, and insufficient integration of psychological services into everyday community structures such as schools and primary healthcare (Gaschet MAP, Suvalo, Klymchuk, 2025).

Public mental health is an essential field of social life, especially in the context of prolonged crises such as a pandemic or wartime, where psychological consequences are often delayed and manifest as long-term mental health issues (Wadsworth, 2015; Martsenkovskyi et al, 2024). Despite the apparent stability in self-reported mental health among Ukrainians, a closer analysis reveals a gradual deterioration masked by the normalization of distress, as evidenced by the open reports of the Gradus research company in 2024 (Gradus, 2024), by rising dissatisfaction, increasing prevalence of negative emotions, and the sustained psychological burden of the full-scale war.

The war in Ukraine has created mental health issues that no one can solve alone. Preventing maladaptive responses and strengthening the individual's and the community's resource capabilities are essential strategies for improving psychological well-being in difficult life circumstances. Especially true for veterans returning and their families as they try to integrate into civilian life and address their war experiences (Shevchenko & Varina, 2025; Slozanska & Biront, 2025).

Traditional academic training in psychology often lacks sufficient real-world engagement, which may limit graduates' readiness to respond to complex community needs and the reality of trauma-related distress. One of UCU's key strategies is healing the wounds of war. We realized that to heal a nation, we had to transform how we train our professionals in the mental health field. We are moving

psychology education out of the classroom into the “field” by the Service-Learning approach. Service-Learning combines academic instruction with meaningful community engagement, fostering both professional competence and civic responsibility (Butin, 2003; Choi, Han, & Kim, 2026). When integrated with Participatory Action Research (PAR), this approach allows communities to act not merely as recipients of services but as co-researchers and co-designers of interventions (Cawston, Mercer, & Barbour, 2007; Kagan, 2012; Cornish, Breton, Moreno-Tabarez, et al., 2015).

2. Context and Case Description

The course “Scientific and Psychoeducational Practice,” designed for first-year master’s students in psychology, was developed to operationalize a combined Service-Learning and Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework. Its central aim is to prepare future psychologists to contribute to public mental health through psychoeducation, prevention, and community-based support, although this objective presupposes that such competencies can be effectively developed within short-term, practice-oriented formats.

This case study examines the implementation of the course within the Kozova territorial community, analyzing how academic learning was translated into practical interventions and how community collaboration shaped both the process and outcomes. The project was carried out within the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education initiative “Service-Learning in Higher Education for Ukraine’s Recovery” (ServU), under the supervision of colleagues from LUMSA, Roma, Italy.

The Kozova territorial community in the Ternopil region represents a small town setting characterized by diverse and evolving mental health needs, particularly in the context of ongoing war-related stressors. Like many Ukrainian communities, Kozova faces challenges, including psychological distress, social isolation, and limited access to structured and sustainable mental health services, especially outside formal institutional settings.

The intervention involved master's students collaborating with local stakeholders, including school personnel, healthcare professionals, local authorities, and community service providers. A key principle guiding the intervention was the attempt to move away from a strictly top-down approach. Rather than imposing predefined solutions, students engaged in dialogue with community members to identify locally relevant concerns. However, this process remained shaped by institutional frameworks and academic expectations, highlighting the inherent tension between participatory ideals and structured educational settings. As a result, while activities were grounded in locally expressed needs, they were also influenced by external project timelines and pedagogical objectives.

3. Methodology

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The course is framed within a Service-Learning approach and informed by the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), both of which emphasize integrating knowledge production with social engagement. Rather than treating learning and community intervention as separate domains, this combined framework positions them as mutually constitutive processes. Students are expected not only to apply academic knowledge to real-world problems, but also to co-construct that knowledge through interaction with community actors.

The integration of Service-Learning and PAR supports a model of reciprocal learning, in which students, educators, and community members collaboratively shape both research and intervention processes. This approach foregrounds key concepts such as reciprocity, shared ownership, and contextual relevance, while challenging more traditional, expert-driven models of knowledge transfer. Within this model, the development of students' civic and social competencies—such as critical thinking, responsibility, and engagement with issues of social justice—is understood not as an isolated educational outcome, but as emerging through situated

practice. This positioning also requires careful negotiation of roles and expectations, particularly in contexts where power asymmetries and differing priorities may shape the collaboration.

The course structure, which includes intermodular assignments, intergroup and supervision sessions, is designed to support both experiential learning and critical reflexivity. These elements function as key mechanisms through which students process their engagement, adapt to community feedback, and navigate the ethical and practical complexities of applied work. In this sense, reflection and supervision are not supplementary components but are central to the operationalization of the conceptual framework.

3.2 Structure of the course as an intervention for implementation

The intervention was implemented in three main phases:

Phase 1: Participatory Needs Assessment and Research Planning

The first phase of the project focused on participatory needs assessment and the co-development of a research framework. Students began by engaging with academic literature and materials provided by community and NGO partners to contextualize local mental health challenges. This preparatory stage also involved internal group coordination, including role distribution and the formulation of guiding questions, which inevitably shaped the direction of subsequent interactions.

Direct engagement with community representatives constituted the core of this phase. Through community dialogue, collaboratively identified key mental health concerns and potential intervention areas. The needs assessment resulted in the identification of several recurring challenges, including stigma associated with seeking psychological support, emotional distress among vulnerable groups such as children and veterans, and broader issues related to social isolation. While these findings were grounded in community input, they were also shaped by the interpretive frameworks students brought into the field, highlighting the co-constructed nature of the data.

The primary output of this phase was a mini research proposal outlining the problem definition, research objectives, hypotheses, methodology, and required resources. Beyond its practical function, this activity represents a critical moment in which lived experiences and community-articulated concerns were formalized into academic categories and researchable questions. Reflection and reporting components further supported this process by encouraging students to critically examine how their assumptions, disciplinary knowledge, and interactions with the community influenced both the identification of needs and the design of proposed interventions.

Phase 2: Co-Design of Psychoeducational Interventions

The second phase focused on co-designing psychoeducational interventions, building on the needs identified during the initial assessment. This stage involved ongoing collaboration between students and community partners to translate identified concerns into feasible and contextually appropriate activities. Rather than a linear progression from assessment to implementation, the process required continuous negotiation between community priorities, academic requirements, and practical constraints. A central component of this phase was the joint development of intervention protocols. Students worked with stakeholders to define objectives, select appropriate formats, and establish evaluation criteria incorporating both quantitative indicators (e.g., participation rates) and qualitative feedback (e.g., participant reflections). These protocols were not developed in isolation but were refined through dialogue with community representatives, allowing for validation and adjustment based on local expectations and capacities.

Ethical considerations played a significant role throughout this phase. Issues such as informed consent, cultural sensitivity, and the potential impact of interventions on vulnerable groups were actively discussed with community partners. However, these considerations extended beyond procedural compliance, requiring students to navigate context-specific ethical dilemmas, including

balancing inclusivity with feasibility and managing differing expectations among stakeholders. Anticipated challenges, such as limited resources, time constraints, and variations in stakeholder engagement, were not only identified but also influenced the design of the interventions. In this sense, the co-design process shapes both the scope and format of proposed activities.

Reflection remained a key component of this phase, serving as a mechanism for students to critically examine their role in decision-making, their communication with community partners, and the evolving balance between responsiveness and structure.

Phase 3: Implementation and Evaluation

The final phase involved implementing psychoeducational interventions across local settings. Activities addressed previously identified needs and took diverse forms, including workshops, informational materials (e.g., leaflets and infographics), video content, and interactive sessions. These formats were selected to maximize accessibility and engagement across different target groups. Students co-facilitated activities alongside community partners, reinforcing the collaborative nature of the intervention while also navigating the practical realities of shared responsibility.

Implementation functioned as a critical testing ground for the assumptions developed during earlier phases. While co-design aimed to ensure contextual relevance, the delivery of activities revealed challenges related to participant engagement, resource limitations, and variability in stakeholder involvement. In some cases, planned interventions required adaptation to unforeseen constraints or differing expectations, highlighting the dynamic, non-linear nature of community-based work.

Evaluation was conducted using a combination of participant feedback forms, informal discussions, and observational notes. These methods provided experience-based insights into the perceived usefulness of the activities: focusing on challenges encountered, group dynamics, unexpected outcomes, and interactions with community members. Joint reflection sessions with community

participants further contributed to this process, offering additional perspectives on the intervention's relevance and effectiveness. However, the evaluation approach remained primarily short-term and qualitative, raising questions about the extent to which longer-term impact or deeper behavioral changes could be assessed. Additionally, reliance on voluntary feedback may have introduced biases, privileging more engaged or vocal participants.

Overall, this phase underscores the gap that can emerge between planned and enacted interventions, while also demonstrating the capacity of reflection and collaboration to partially bridge this divide. Implementation thus becomes not only the execution of prior plans but also the continuation of the learning process initiated in earlier stages.

4. Intervention Activities and Results

The intervention engaged more than 400 participants, including approximately 300 children. In local schools, interventions focused on increasing mental health literacy, reducing stigma around seeking help, and introducing self-help strategies. Activities were designed to be age-appropriate and interactive, encouraging student participation and engagement. In collaboration with healthcare providers, students worked to integrate psychoeducational elements into existing medical settings. This included efforts to address veterans' needs, particularly regarding social isolation, cognitive challenges, and emotional regulation. One innovative approach involved using LEGO-based activities (including robotics) to facilitate engagement and cognitive stimulation. These activities served as a bridge between psychological support and everyday interaction, making participation less stigmatizing and more accessible.

Students also attempted to create informal community spaces for interaction, such as shared gatherings intended to foster dialogue and connection among different groups. Although some of these initiatives were constrained by external factors (e.g., weather), they highlighted the importance of accessible, low-threshold environments for mental health support.

Observed community outcomes included increased awareness of mental health issues among participants during the feedback session. Also, we suggested that one step toward reducing stigma around psychological support is to improve communication between community members and local institutions, as well as to introduce practical tools for emotional self-regulation. Importantly, the intervention did not function as a one-time external initiative. Instead, efforts were made to integrate psychoeducational practices into existing systems such as schools and healthcare facilities.

Students demonstrated significant development in research and planning skills, ethical awareness, communication and teamwork, and civic responsibility. Exposure to real-world complexity allowed students to better understand the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.

Despite its successes, the intervention faced several challenges, including logistical constraints, such as limited time and resources; high community expectations, which sometimes exceeded the students' capacity; environmental limitations affecting planned activities; and coordination difficulties across multiple stakeholders. These challenges underscored the complexity of community-based work and highlighted the need for flexibility and adaptive problem-solving.

5. Discussion

This case demonstrates that Service-Learning combined with Participatory Action Research (PAR) can function as an effective model for community-based (public) mental health interventions, particularly in contexts of prolonged psychosocietal stress. Importantly, communities were not positioned as passive recipients of university expertise, but as active co-producers of knowledge and practice. A key insight is that interventions are more sustainable and impactful when embedded within existing community systems rather than implemented as external, time-limited initiatives. The use of schools and healthcare institutions not only provided logistical stability but also enhanced trust and legitimacy, though this reliance may simultaneously limit access for more marginalized populations outside these structures.

The findings also underscore the importance of reciprocal learning processes. Students adapted their approaches in response to community feedback, thereby enhancing cultural relevance and contextual sensitivity. This suggests that effectiveness is not solely a function of technical expertise, but of relational and adaptive capacity. Furthermore, structured supervision and reflection played a critical role in supporting ethical decision-making and emotional processing, particularly in a high-stress environment.

At the same time, the challenges encountered during the project highlight important limitations, including issues of scalability and long-term sustainability beyond the duration of university engagement. Nevertheless, these challenges served as significant learning opportunities, helping students navigate uncertainty, ethical complexity, and real-world constraints.

Overall, the case points toward the potential of integrating Service-Learning and PAR as a systemic, rather than project-based, approach to community mental health—an insight that may be particularly relevant for other conflict-affected or resource-constrained settings.

6. Conclusion

The integration of Service-Learning and Participatory Action Research within psychology education offers a powerful framework for addressing community mental health needs while simultaneously preparing future professionals.

This case study illustrates that even within the constraints of an academic course, it is possible to design and implement meaningful, community-centered interventions. By prioritizing collaboration, contextual relevance, and sustainability, such initiatives can contribute not only to individual learning but also to broader social impact.

The experience of the Kozova community suggests that embedding psychoeducational support into local systems can enhance both effectiveness and continuity. Expanding this model across educational institutions in Ukraine could help establish mental health support as a stable component of social infrastructure.

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NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-TRAUMATIC RECOVERY

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1. Context and Problem Statement

Since November 2023, Ukraine has been implementing the ServU project – ‘Service-Learning in Higher Education for Ukraine’s Recovery’ – involving three domestic and three European universities with Erasmus+ support. One of the project’s key objectives is adapting the service-learning (SL) methodology to wartime and recovery conditions (ServU, 2024). This objective is not merely methodological. Behind it lies a deeper question: what does genuine partnership between a university and a community look like when both sides carry the weight of unhealed wounds?

Service-learning as a pedagogical concept involves interaction between a university and a community in which students engage with real social needs while simultaneously gaining academic and personal experience (Brintseva & Hatcher, 1996). In Ukraine, where full-scale war has caused mass displacement, infrastructure destruction, and profound psychological trauma, SL takes on special significance – as a space where learning and recovery intersect.

At the same time, research on Ukrainian universities during wartime indicates that students and faculty function under conditions of chronic stress, reduced academic productivity, and emotional exhaustion (Brintseva, 2026; Coping with adversity, 2025). The psychological state of participants directly affects the quality

of interaction. In this context, the question 'how do we speak to one another?' becomes no less important than 'what do we do together?'

This paper proposes Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as developed by Marshall Rosenberg as a psychological resource for enhancing the quality of SL interactions. We argue that NVC is not a technique of politeness, but a way of remaining in contact with another person's reality even when one's own reality is difficult.

Originality. Unlike existing studies that address NVC primarily in school mediation or clinical settings, this paper proposes, for the first time, a conceptual framework for applying NVC as a systemic psychological tool within service-learning in the context of war and post-traumatic crisis. The combination of three analytical fields – NVC, SL, and post-traumatic context – drawing on sources published after 2020, constitutes an original contribution to the international discussion on the psychological preconditions for university–community partnership.

2. Approach and Methodology

This paper employs a conceptual-analytical methodology. Drawing on a systematic review of literature published between 2020 and 2026 across three intersecting fields – NVC research, SL pedagogy, and trauma-informed education – it constructs an integrative framework for applying NVC within SL practice. The analysis is supplemented by reflective evidence in the form of illustrative scenarios derived from documented SL interactions in Ukrainian higher education. The paper does not report original empirical data; rather, it offers a theoretically grounded and practice-oriented conceptualisation that can serve as the basis for future empirical inquiry.

3. Analysis

3.1 *Nonviolent Communication: Psychological Foundations*

Nonviolent Communication was developed by clinical psychologist Marshall Rosenberg in the 1960s–70s and has since spread into educational, clinical, and peacebuilding contexts (Rosenberg, 2015). The name can be misleading: NVC does not presuppose that

we are inherently violent. It simply points to the fact that most of us were taught to speak in the language of judgement, diagnosis, and demand – rather than in the language of observation, feeling, and need. Rosenberg captured this distinction metaphorically: the 'language of the wolf' versus the 'language of the giraffe.'

The four components of NVC form not an algorithm, but a way of listening – to oneself and to another:

Component	Meaning and Example
Observation	Describing a concrete situation without evaluative judgement. Not 'you never come on time', but 'you arrived 15–20 minutes late to the last three meetings'.
Feelings	Expressing one's own emotional state. It is important to distinguish feelings from thoughts: 'I feel disappointed' is a feeling; 'I feel that you don't care' is an interpretation.
Needs	Identifying the underlying need behind the feeling. All feelings are signals of a satisfied or unmet need – safety, recognition, connection, stability, justice, and so on.
Request	A concrete, feasible, positively framed request – not a demand. 'Could you let me know in advance if you expect to be late?'

From a psychological perspective, NVC draws on Rogers' (1951) humanistic tradition – in particular, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding. Recent evidence confirms that NVC training improves empathic communication, reduces conflict behavior, and enhances emotional intelligence across diverse populations (Chen et al., 2026; Espiritu, 2023). A 2024 scoping review of NVC in high-stress healthcare environments found it to be a significant resource for improving interpersonal relationships at work (Wikipedia NVC, 2025). Koopman and Seliga (2021) demonstrated that when higher education faculty learn to listen empathically and speak with greater openness, students begin to share not only their successes but also their difficulties – directly improving the quality of learning and interaction.

There is also a neuroscientific basis: evaluative and blaming language activates the amygdala and defensive responses, while need-oriented language supports engagement of the prefrontal cortex and capacity for cooperation (van der Kolk, 2014). In a post-traumatic context, where many participants' nervous systems are

chronically in a state of arousal or shutdown, this distinction carries direct practical significance.

3.2 Challenges to Service-Learning in the Post-Traumatic Context

Research on Ukrainian universities during wartime reveals that students and educators are functioning under conditions of persistent stress and emotional exhaustion (Brintseva, 2026). A qualitative study of Lviv University students during the winter examination session of 2022–2023 showed that educational continuity was maintained through collective resilience and mutual support – yet this resilience was not automatic, and required deliberate nurturing (Coping with adversity, 2025). For SL, this has immediate implications: the quality of university–community interaction depends on the psychological availability of participants. Three specific challenges can be identified. First, chronic stress impairs the capacity for open communication: a nervous system in threat mode simplifies perception, heightens reactivity, and narrows the capacity for empathy (van der Kolk, 2014). Trauma-informed pedagogy proceeds from precisely this observation – not because students ‘do not want’ to be open, but because their bodies are functioning in survival mode (Stromberg, 2023).

Second, SL initiatives in Ukraine often bring together people with fundamentally different experiences: students and veterans, local residents and internally displaced persons, people from frontline and relatively protected regions. This difference can generate hidden tensions and mutual incomprehension. Without conscious management of this dynamic, participants may be physically present together while emotionally inhabiting parallel realities.

Third, there is the risk of paternalism in ‘helping’ relationships. When a university ‘comes to help’, it can inadvertently position the community as a recipient rather than a partner (Mitchell, 2008). In a wartime context, this asymmetry is sharpened: those who help may lack the personal experience of crisis that community members carry – and this is felt. Trauma-informed approaches to community recovery emphasise that people must be engaged not as ‘objects of assistance’ but as agents of their own future, with attention to how trauma may affect the capacity for longer-term planning (Rosenberg et al., 2022).

3.3 NVC as Psychological Infrastructure: Three Levels of Application

We propose analysing the potential of NVC across three interconnected levels of SL practice.

At the level of student preparation, NVC training builds several competencies that are critical for SL engagement: the capacity for empathic listening without judgement; the ability to distinguish observations from interpretations; and the recognition of one's own triggered responses. Particularly important is what may be called 'reflective capacity' – the ability to remain aware of one's internal state during emotionally charged interactions. This is key to preventing secondary traumatization, a well-documented phenomenon in volunteer and social work. Three targeted exercises can be integrated into a preparatory seminar (two to three hours):

Exercise 1. 'Observation Without Judgement' (15 min.)

Students receive five scenario descriptions from SL practice. Each must be reformulated: remove the evaluation, retain the fact. For example: 'Community members seemed indifferent to our proposal' → 'After our presentation, three people left the room and two did not respond to questions.' Post-exercise discussion: what changed in your perception of the situation?

Exercise 2. 'Needs Map' (20 min.)

In pairs, students role-play a scenario: one is the SL coordinator, the other is a community representative with a 'difficult' reaction (reluctance to participate, scepticism, open criticism). The coordinator's task is not to persuade, but to listen: 'What need might be behind this?' Debrief: what was hard to hear? When did the impulse to defend or explain arise?

Exercise 3. 'Check-In Before Going Out' (5 min., before each SL encounter)

A brief individual self-assessment using four NVC questions: 'What do I observe in my own state right now? What am I feeling? Which need is especially strong today? What am I asking of myself in this meeting?' Recorded in a personal reflection journal. The aim is to

increase quality of presence and reduce projection of personal stress onto the interaction.

At the level of university–community interaction, NVC offers a concrete way to reframe 'help' as 'encounter.' Instead of 'we can offer you X,» there is a dialogue in which both parties first speak about their needs, and then together identify forms of collaboration. Consider a scenario typical of SL in Ukraine: a student team proposes psychological support workshops to a community. The community leader responds briefly: 'We don't have time for this right now.' A conventional response might be to clarify, persuade, or withdraw. An NVC-informed response is to listen for what lies beneath:

'I hear that something more pressing is happening right now [observation]. You don't need to explain if it's not comfortable. But if you're willing – what is weighing most heavily on you at the moment? [request] We didn't come with a ready plan, but to understand what is actually needed [need for connection rather than programme delivery].'

This response is not a technique of manipulation. It reflects a genuine shift in position: from 'we know what you need' to 'we want to find out what you need.' This shift, as Mitchell (2008) argues, is precisely what distinguishes critical from traditional service-learning.

At the level of institutional culture, NVC can support the formation of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) – an environment in which participants can speak openly about difficulties without fear of judgement. A structured reflection circle after each SL session (25–30 minutes) provides a practical mechanism. Each participant responds to four questions: What did I observe today – in the interaction, in myself? What was I feeling, and did that change? Which of my needs was met today, and which was not? What do I ask of myself or the team before the next meeting? These questions map directly onto the four NVC components while simultaneously structuring the academic reflection that is central to quality SL.

4. Implications for Education, Policy, and Recovery

For SL coordinators and educators, the practical implications are direct: a two-to-three-hour NVC module can be integrated

into preparatory seminars, structured reflection circles can be introduced after each SL session, and first meetings with community partners can be restructured as 'needs encounters' rather than programme presentations. These changes do not require lengthy specialist training; they require a shift in orientation – from delivery to dialogue.

For institutional policy, embedding NVC principles into the pedagogical culture of SL programmes represents a step toward the kind of sustainable, psychologically safe, and inclusive models that the ServU project and the broader European service-learning community are seeking to develop. Psychological safety is not a soft add-on to SL; it is a precondition for the genuine civic engagement and community partnership that SL aims to foster.

For the wider field of post-traumatic recovery, this paper contributes a framing in which communication quality is understood as infrastructure – as necessary to the rebuilding of trust and civic life as physical reconstruction. A community that has experienced war does not only need materials and plans; it needs spaces in which people can be heard without judgement. Universities, through SL, can be one such space – if they are prepared for it.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. NVC is not therapy and does not replace specialised work with trauma; its role here is supplementary. There is also a risk of psychologising structural problems: improved communication does not remove resource constraints or institutional power asymmetries, though it may make them more visible. This paper is conceptual-analytical and requires empirical verification through pilot implementation, pre-post measurement of interaction quality, and qualitative research on participants' experiences. Such designs could be pursued within the ServU project or related initiatives.

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2_Conceptual Abstracts

SERVICE-LEARNING AS A TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATIONAL RESPONSE TO WAR IN UKRAINE

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Keywords: service-learning; higher education; wartime education; university resilience; human capital development; critical reflection; civic engagement.

Introduction

As defined by Robert Sigmon, "service learning (SL) occurs when there is a balance between learning goals and service outcomes, each enhances the other for all participants". The experience of Ukrainian higher education, particularly at Ukrainian Catholic University, offers a model for using SL during crises. This approach allows universities to fulfill their core mission of education while increasing their social impact and making studies more meaningful for students, even during major disruptions like a full-scale invasion. This does not limit the case to war or any other difficult crises and can be used in what can be called normal times with great results for the community engagement, however it becomes especially helpful in crisis times. As hypotheses we consider that in "normal" times it is learning and education enhances the service outcomes, but in crises it can be vice versa – great disruption and need for social help drives learning and education as it happened in Ukraine since February 2022.

Our research question is therefore, how does the Ukrainian experience of war as major disruption and ability of the institution to connect learning process with country and community urgent needs helps students to follow their educational journey and have purpose through Service Learning.

Context

Ukrainian universities had barely recovered from the challenges of the COVID pandemic when Russia's full-scale invasion of

Ukraine began in February 2022. The invasion is causing a massive humanitarian crisis. Every single day Ukrainians live under constant attacks on civilians and infrastructure providing basic needs: water, heat, electricity. It is important to note that the destruction and damage to educational infrastructure occurs systematically, regardless of the zone of active hostilities. 4358 educational institutions have suffered bombing and shelling, and 400 of them have been destroyed completely. [2] Russia deliberately targets institutions that have a long term impact on the future of Ukrainian society, its human capital and identity.

Living for more than 1500 days in war experience transformed perceptions of young people in Ukraine. The country became a “social laboratory” where every 6 months context changes and educational institutions have to be places which not only react and help with urgent needs but first of all fulfill their missions and help to sustain the human capital of the country, prevent brain drain.

Ukrainian universities had to adapt to these new challenges in many ways, therefore the educational process has many new elements and Universities actively practice “service” to those in need, communities and country as educational instruments. For University the goal became not only to help with the most urgent needs of the society but help our students reflect and have conclusions on level of values and attitude. A number of scholars (Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles Jr. 1999) claims that learning is the most effective when students not only employ their cognitive processes to education but also their affective thought process and emotions. The service learning approach became a crucial tool for that.

Integrating Mission and Action: The ServU Project and the Transformative Power of Service-Learning in Wartime Ukraine

What we have experienced in 2022 was a sudden and rapid increase of requests from society. The response to that request was rather intuitive than with deep research about what we should do. Students of UCU were very focused on volunteering (the idea of being useful for the country was prevailing in their thinking) and after we (management and faculty of the University) realized it is not for weeks, hopefully for months but might be for years

we understood that we have to bring them back to classrooms (physical or virtual), as their primary role in winning this war is to continue education. Therefore, offering our students to combine volunteering and studies, suggesting assignments and intellectual tasks connected to the needs of specific organizations and communities kept them both physically safe but also in a rich learning environment.

In December 2022, realizing our students were desperate to feel a sense of purpose and be useful to their country, six universities—three Ukrainian and three European—formed the ServU project. We realized that while "nonsense" prevails in global news, "sense" is found in the coordinated collective action of students working directly with their local communities. Within the project Guidelines for Service Learning during wartime and recovery and Guidelines of Need Assessment of Local Territorial Communities during wartime and recovery were developed. Six service learning courses were introduced within the framework of the project in 3 local territorial communities in Ukraine: 4 in Sumy and Dnipro region - close to the frontline, and 2 in Western Ukraine.

Through the project, we experienced that SL serves as a transformative pedagogical approach that bridges academic knowledge with practical action to address community challenges, which continue to grow with every day of the war. Furthermore, this methodology helps students become more self-aware through reflection, a process that profoundly influences their thoughts, emotions, psychology, and coping strategies

Growing Sense of Purpose through Service Learning

Felten, Gilchrist, and Darby (2006) explore how the emotional dimensions of service-learning projects contribute to developmental outcomes. In crisis situations, these emotional experiences can lead to enhanced motivation, empathy, and persistence, helping students face adverse situations in a positive way. Service-learning helps cultivate a sense of purpose by transforming students from passive consumers of knowledge into active agents of positive impact. Especially in times of crisis, it provides a structured framework that connects academic study to the urgent, real-world needs of the community, helping participants find meaning in their contributions.

From experience of ServU project and wider experience of enabling learning process in wartime we can observe that using SL courses in very disrupted learning environments allows students to:

See the tangible benefits of learning: by using their academic skills to help others. For instance, such as business students pushing for ethical market boycotts or helping veterans with legal issues at the Law clinic, psychology students providing career mentoring for high school graduates—students see that their education has immediate relevance and usefulness.

Goal-oriented framework: SL provides a clear objective that focuses energy of students and faculty and feeds internal resolve, which is a core pillar of resilience. Engaging in "coordinated collective action" helps students move beyond the feeling of helplessness that often accompanies major disruptions.

Build the "frontline" at home and overcome despair: for Ukrainian students, SL provides a way to serve their country without necessarily being in the military, helping them find the "meaning of their contributions" through academic and humanitarian work.

Exercise student agency: the pedagogy encourages learners to recognize how their actions shape social reality, fostering a belief in their own capability to secure a fulfilling future. SL serves as a vital instrument to restore order and meaning.

Ash, Clayton and Atkinson (2005) highlight that service-learning is uniquely suited to develop higher-order reasoning and critical thinking through guided reflection. This capacity for informed judgment is vital for people navigating through surrealism or absurdity caused by conflict or war.

Conclusions:

The Ukrainian experience demonstrates that service-learning can become a powerful educational strategy during periods of extreme disruption and crisis. In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion, universities were forced not only to preserve educational continuity, but also to respond to urgent social and humanitarian needs. This situation transforms service-learning from an optional pedagogical practice into a central mechanism for sustaining both education and social resilience.

The case of Ukrainian universities, particularly the ServU project, shows that integrating academic learning with meaningful community service helps students maintain motivation, purpose, and engagement during wartime. Rather than abandoning studies for volunteering, students were encouraged to combine civic engagement with academic tasks, allowing education itself to become a form of contribution to national resilience.

The urgent needs of communities naturally pushed Universities to create authentic learning environments where students developed practical skills, emotional resilience, critical thinking, and a stronger sense of agency. Through reflection and real-world action, students became active participants in shaping social reality instead of passive recipients of knowledge.

Moreover, service-learning proved especially valuable for students' psychological and emotional well-being. Participation in coordinated community action reduced feelings of helplessness and despair, replacing them with a sense of usefulness, responsibility, and belonging. The approach also strengthened empathy, persistence, and higher-order reasoning, all of which are essential for coping with uncertainty and trauma.

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BETWEEN METHODOLOGY AND REALITY

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Keywords: service-learning; war; higher education; community engagement; methodology.

Service-learning, while still a relatively new concept in Ukraine, has a history spanning several decades globally. Its methodological foundations have been extensively developed and systematized by scholars such as Andrew Furco and María Nieves Tapia, who articulated general theoretical frameworks, as well as by Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová, who explored regional adaptations. Additionally, the methodology has been elaborated within specific academic disciplines by numerous researchers, confirming that, in principle, service-learning is a well-established and structured pedagogical approach. However, a critical question emerges when this clearly defined methodology encounters the disruptive reality of war: to what extent can it be consistently applied while implementing service-learning projects under such extreme conditions?

War is an overarching tragedy that profoundly affects all aspects of life, including education. Its impact is predominantly negative and can be categorized into several interrelated dimensions. First, human losses – including mortality, migration, and internal displacement of both students and faculty – disrupt the continuity of educational processes. Second, material losses – such as the destruction of infrastructure, reduced funding, and economic decline – limit institutional capacity. Third, the constant psychological pressure caused by exposure to traumatic information, heightened responsibility, and decision-making under stress further complicates teaching and learning processes. These factors inevitably affect the implementation of service-learning. Paradoxically, however, such conditions may also strengthen motivation for participation in service-learning initiatives, as individuals seek meaningful ways to respond to urgent societal challenges.

Service-learning remains a powerful educational tool fostering collaboration among students, educators, and communities. In wartime, its significance is amplified by the need to reassess societal priorities, address urgent needs, and support community

well-being. At the same time, the implementation of service-learning faces multiple challenges. Educational systems become disrupted due to closures, displacement, and infrastructural damage. Community needs shift rapidly toward survival, safety, psychosocial support, and reconstruction, requiring service-learning initiatives to remain highly adaptive and responsive. Social cohesion and trust – essential for effective partnerships – are often weakened, complicating cooperation and needs assessment. Political instability and legal uncertainty may impose restrictions on mobility and project implementation. Economic decline reduces both funding and community capacity to engage. Ethical considerations become central, requiring heightened attention to participant safety and the avoidance of harm. Furthermore, projects must address trauma and contribute to reconciliation, while coping with compressed timelines that prioritize immediate impact. At the same time, students often demonstrate increased motivation and empathy, though emotional challenges such as stress and despair necessitate supportive measures, including creative activities and structured rest.

Adapting service-learning to wartime conditions requires rethinking the roles of key participants. Students, educators, and community partners must collaborate while acknowledging personal trauma. University leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring safety and managing physical, informational, and reputational risks. Wartime conditions may also shift the balance between “service” and “learning,” often emphasizing immediate service outcomes. Nevertheless, maintaining the educational dimension remains essential to preserve the dual purpose of service-learning. Educators are therefore challenged to align disciplinary content with urgent societal needs and transform existing forms of civic engagement into structured service-learning experiences.

Traditionally, the implementation of service-learning follows five stages, each of which is significantly influenced by wartime conditions. The motivation stage, which in peacetime focuses on demonstrating the value of service-learning for personal and societal development, becomes a key factor in sustaining students’ engagement in education by emphasizing its immediate relevance. The diagnosis stage is shaped by urgency, often relying on direct community requests, media reports, and observation rather than extensive research, while also requiring an assessment of institutional capacity. During project planning, safety considerations, stakeholder communication, and alignment with academic schedules are critical, though long-term planning may

be replaced by short-term initiatives. Implementation is inherently unstable, as projects may be disrupted by sudden changes; in such cases, reflective activities can substitute for direct engagement. Finally, the closure and repetition stage requires flexible evaluation, as community needs evolve rapidly, making some projects one-time interventions while others may be adapted or replicated.

Across all stages, continuous reflection, documentation, and communication are essential. They support emotional resilience, counter misinformation, and enable the development of scalable solutions for future crises. Through flexibility, ethical awareness, and a balance between immediate and long-term goals, service-learning can remain a transformative educational approach even under extreme conditions.

In light of these considerations, a fundamental question arises: at what point does a project, significantly modified by wartime realities, cease to be service-learning and instead become another form of community engagement? In our view, if a service-learning initiative fulfills at least one clearly defined learning objective within the framework of an academic course, it may still be considered service-learning, even if other methodological principles are only partially implemented or adapted to the constraints of wartime reality.

ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS AND IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL DIRECTIONS FOR THE APPLICATION OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN COMMUNITY RECOVERY

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Keywords: service-learning; community recovery; stakeholders.

In the framework of the research project “Service Learning Model for Ensuring Resilience and Post-Conflict Recovery of Border Communities of Ukraine”, an empirical study was conducted aimed at identifying current threats and challenges in the development of border regions under martial law in Ukraine. The study employed qualitative methods, including in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The interviews enabled the collection of individual perspectives, experiences, and assessments of stakeholders’ challenges, while the focus groups, comprising a mixed composition of participants (local self-government bodies (LSGs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business, and education sectors), facilitated the identification of shared problems, comparison of approaches, and formulation of consensus-based solutions within communities.

The purpose of the survey was to obtain empirical data for identifying the needs, expectations, and constraints of key stakeholders in the context of post-conflict recovery of border communities, as well as to substantiate the feasibility and potential of integrating the service learning approach into higher education institutions’ activities.

The study involved 120 respondents from five communities of the Chernihiv region (Koriukivka, Nizhyn, Pryluky, Horodnia, and Chernihiv community). The subsequent analysis summarizes the results regarding the potential directions of service learning identified by the respondents.

Respondents representing local self-government bodies noted that service-learning is viewed as a tool for practical support of

community development and simultaneous formation of human resource capacity for the public sector. In particular, they emphasize the feasibility of involving students and lecturers in strategic planning processes, development of community strategies and project (grant) proposals, as well as in conducting analytical research necessary to substantiate managerial decisions and monitor recovery programs. A particular focus is placed on organizing internships and placements within local self-government bodies (in the fields of public administration, law, and social work), which would contribute to preparing specialists for the needs of local governance, healthcare, and education. Respondents also identify the digitalization of administrative processes and the introduction of electronic services as an important direction, particularly through the involvement of IT students in the development and maintenance of relevant solutions. In addition, representatives of local self-government bodies highlight the potential of service-learning in implementing joint practical courses in project management and grant writing, as well as in providing analytical support for energy management and developing spatial and architectural solutions for community development.

Respondents representing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emphasized the significant potential of service-learning for strengthening their activities, particularly in the areas of psychosocial well-being and work with vulnerable population groups. They highlight the possibility of engaging students in conducting group sessions, including in schools and in work with veterans, incorporating elements of art therapy, especially in the context of a shortage of qualified staff. An important direction identified is the conduct of analytical studies of the needs of target groups (youth, veterans, internally displaced persons). Respondents also underline the effectiveness of a partnership-based approach to grant proposal development, where NGOs provide contextual and practical insights, while students contribute analytical substantiation. Particular attention is given to the development of communication and fundraising strategies, social media management (SMM), and media content creation, as well as the implementation of communication campaigns.

Respondents representing the business sector emphasized that service-learning holds significant potential for supporting the development of small enterprises while simultaneously fostering

students' practical competencies. In particular, they highlight the possibility of involving students in conducting market research and customer base analysis, developing marketing strategies and business analytics, as well as optimizing business processes. An important direction identified is the implementation of digital solutions, including the development and execution of advertising campaigns and the broader digitalization of business processes with the participation of IT students.

Respondents from the education sector noted that service-learning can serve as an effective mechanism for expanding access to educational services and strengthening the practice-oriented component of learning. They emphasize the potential of developing legal and social clinics with outreach to communities or online consulting, as well as implementing environmental monitoring projects, including sampling, laboratory analysis of water and soil quality, and preparation of recommendations for communities. A particular focus is placed on joint grant proposal development, where students provide scientific justification while communities ensure the practical implementation base. An important direction identified is the development of digital services for utility enterprises and community residents. In addition, respondents underline the importance of involving students in social and volunteer projects, educational and youth initiatives, conducting analytical studies. Among other areas, they highlight career guidance activities for school students, training programs for NGO and LSG teams in new tools, organization of speaking clubs and international cultural exchanges, participation in conferences and working groups of local self-government bodies, as well as the development of digital literacy programs and intergenerational initiatives.

The obtained empirical results indicate that service-learning is interpreted by different stakeholder groups primarily as a tool for integrating educational activities with community development practices in an applied dimension. The identified directions include analytical support, strategic and project planning, digitalization of processes, as well as the provision of social, educational, and business services, which allows service-learning to be viewed as a mechanism for strengthening the institutional capacity of communities in the context of recovery.

However, the results also indicate a limited level of conceptual understanding of service-learning among stakeholders: the dominance of an applied perspective suggests an incomplete awareness of its educational and transformative potential. This highlights the need for targeted information dissemination, promotion, and institutionalization of service-learning as an integrated model combining educational, socio-economic, and institutional functions and capable of generating long-term effects in the recovery of border communities.

RECOVERY-ORIENTED EDUCATIONAL CASES OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE TRAINING OF MEDIA PROFESSIONALS AND JOURNALISTS

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Keywords: journalism education; textual content; video formats; media; recovery; public resonance.

At the core of the educational and professional programs in journalism and media communications at the School of Journalism and Communication of the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) lies the concept of practice-oriented journalism and media communications education. Service-learning within both programs is organically integrated into this concept: on the one hand, it enables students to combine professional training with the study of socially significant issues, and on the other hand, it allows them to actively participate in addressing issues important to the community through media publication (this, for instance, is the foundation of solutions journalism).

The School offers master's students several courses that embody the objectives of service-learning, including *Creative Writing*, *Cultural Journalism*, and *Video Formats*. The first two focus on the creation of textual content (students work on publications for media outlets). Here, interaction with lived experience and work with memory, trauma, and recovery occur primarily through texts. In contrast, the course *Video Formats* is oriented toward the creation of visual content, where authentic stories preserve the authenticity of visual documentary testimony and the truthfulness of recorded facts.

In the *Creative Writing* course, students write memorial feature stories about those killed on the front line and in captivity, and create stories about veterans' recovery, particularly through the lens of post-traumatic growth. In these texts (features, essays, sketches), not only factual accuracy, the documentation of

testimonies, and a trauma-informed approach are important, but also ethical responsibility – the ability to give voice to those whose experiences are often reduced to statistics. Collaboration with stakeholders – editors, journalists, human rights advocates, psychologists, and the protagonists themselves – provides professional feedback and depth in addressing the assigned tasks. Human rights advocate Max Butkevych emphasizes the importance of restoring the human dimension of war in students’ reports about those who died in captivity, where each story of imprisonment or death constitutes an entire world that cannot be reduced to generalization. Editor-in-chief of *The Ukrainian Week* Marharyta Dykaliuk notes that students’ texts about veterans combine personal stories with broader issues of rehabilitation, inclusion, and socialization, thereby creating long-term value as testimonies of their time. Psychologist Khrystyna Topolnytska from *Superhumans* highlights the importance of these stories as spaces for reflecting on post-traumatic growth.

Interaction with media outlets ensures publicity and real impact: students’ texts are published and distributed by media such as *The Ukrainian Week*, *Novynarnia*, *LB.ua*, *Sensor*, and *Zaborona*, as well as on the platforms *Memorial* and *RECviem*. The publications resonate on social media, receive audience feedback, and become part of a broader public dialogue.

Within the *Cultural Journalism* course, master’s students, in partnership with the local online media outlet Lvivska Poshta, work on creating a series of multi-genre materials united by the theme “Culture for Veterans: From Recovery to Self-Expression”. Their focus includes various local events and experiences, such as the Festival of First-Year Playwrights and initiatives of the *Theater of the Unbroken* (part of the “Art Therapy” project within the UNBROKEN ecosystem).

Students also write reviews of performances staged based on plays by veterans and with veterans’ participation, such as *One-on-One* by Mykhailo Fateiev (directed by Oleh Oneshchak), *Balance* by Alina Sarnatska at the Les Kurbas Lviv Academic Theatre, and *The Elevator Director* (directed by Svitlana Fedeshova) by the “Theater of the Unbroken” at the First Theatre. They conduct interviews and tell stories, making them visible to the community while simultaneously gaining valuable experience in empathy and

acceptance. They also communicate with actors serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (for example, Volodymyr Kravchuk, known from the film *You Are Space*, or Volodymyr Rashchuk, the “face” of the recruitment campaign for the “Svoboda” battalion).

Students cover relevant initiatives of the Lviv Regional Philharmonic, the Lviv Organ Hall, the music and arts space Homin Center, the publishing house *Mriieslovy* founded by veteran Andrii Kaspshyshak, the All-Ukrainian Forum of Military Writers, and more. They also publicize initiatives of the Department of Culture within the project “Culture as a Rehabilitation Tool”. All of this contributes to awareness of the city’s cultural space and integration into community life.

The collaboration with media partners *The Ukrainian Week* and the *Public Broadcaster* within the *Video Formats* course is centered on shared professional values, where trust is built through open dialogue, transparency, and mutual respect. Within the framework of service-learning, this is already the third joint year of projects combining education with content production while offering audiences new materials about the people of Lviv and the region. In the special project with *The Ukrainian Week*, together with Olha Vorozhbyt, deputy editor-in-chief of *Tyzhden*, students communicate with representatives of civic organizations, tell stories about the fascinating work of scholars, and seek to answer the question: what does it mean to be Ukrainian today?

At *Suspilne* studio, students master live television production while working on video stories about unusual professions and hobbies. Cultural heritage became the theme of the travel show and video stories. Students act as editors and producers, working on finding protagonists, filming, and editing. They master the roles of commissioning and second editors, as well as line producers, and learn how the team of a national television project at *Suspilne* operates. Students studied in teams together with staff members at *Suspilne Studio*, participating in mentoring sessions with Maksym Voloshyn, production producer of the western hub at *Suspilne* and at *Suspilne: Lviv*, as well as with leading correspondent of *Suspilne: Lviv*, Ivanka Dusko.

Despite differences in methodological tools, all the described cases share many common features. Such projects acquire particular value for the protagonists of textual and audiovisual media content

themselves (veterans, families of the deceased, civic activists working in various spheres of recovery, and other community representatives), as publications become a form of recognition, a means of preserving memory, and a way of restoring dignity through the public articulation of their stories. Media content here fulfills not only an informational function, but also therapeutic and memorial functions.

The described cases are equally important for the master's students themselves: they enable them to recognize their responsibility for change within the community. The results of their work do not remain mere academic exercises but begin to "live" within the media space – highlighting and restoring names and experiences, provoking reactions, fostering empathy, and becoming focal points for discussion. Thus, their activity evolves from being community-oriented to becoming socially significant.

The initiated projects do not end within the framework of the course: they often develop into practical and research-based master's theses. For some students, they become the foundation of a professional trajectory – determining the topics they continue to work on and shaping them as authors within public discourse. In this way, the described projects of the School of Journalism and Communication contribute to "shaping our educational spaces to provide connection, engagement, knowledge, and care, enabling students and community members to come together to support each other" (Kenworthy et al. 2025). Through them, education is transformed into an important instrument of recovery, and students become active and motivated actors in this process.

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ADVANCING CIVIC COMPETENCE THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING IN CRISIS CONTEXTS

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Keywords: civic competence; service-learning; crisis contexts; civic resilience; pre-service teacher education.

The ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine has transformed higher educational settings into an academic space of civic resilience, public involvement, and social responsibility. In crisis contexts, universities become key agents of social integration and moral leadership, addressing both academic and community needs. Under these emergency conditions, higher education institutions play a critical role in fostering active citizenship, resilience, and democratic values among students.

Within this framework, service-learning emerges as a pedagogical approach to integrate academic learning with socially meaningful action. This study explores the development of civic competence in a wartime environment through service-learning practices among pre-service English teachers in Ukraine. It focuses on a case study in the course “Practical English and Translation” implemented at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University.

The study is grounded in the university’s philosophy of servant leadership and its mission: “Service to the individual, the community, and society,” which emphasizes human dignity, responsibility, trust, and social engagement as core educational values. At Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University (BGKMU), servant leadership is not just a concept but the core philosophy of its corporate culture.

According to the university’s institutional vision, higher education should promote personal development and contribute to society’s advancement through socially responsible practices and active citizenship. This educational philosophy has become particularly significant during wartime, when students and teachers must respond to humanitarian, psychological, and communicative challenges during rapidly changing social realities.

The theoretical framework of the research integrates concepts of civic competence, experiential learning, critical pedagogy, and service-learning. Civic competence is understood as a multidimensional construct that includes democratic values, ethical responsibility, critical thinking, intercultural communication, participation in community life, and the ability to act for the common good. The course “Practical English and Translation” was redesigned in line with service-learning principles to connect language acquisition with socially meaningful engagement. In addition to traditional classroom activities, students participated in translation, communication, and educational support initiatives aimed at assisting internally displaced people, children affected by war, volunteer organizations, and international communication projects. These activities included translating informational materials for humanitarian initiatives, creating bilingual educational resources for children, and conducting online English-speaking clubs for school students.

The service-learning model was structured around three interconnected dimensions: linguistic development, civic participation, and reflective practice. Thus, students applied translation and communication skills in authentic social contexts, increasing motivation and professional confidence. Pre-service English teachers engaged directly with social issues related to war, displacement, trauma, inclusion, and intercultural solidarity. Reflective journals, group discussions, and digital storytelling tasks enabled the fourth-year students to critically analyze their experiences and connect them to broader democratic values and professional ethics.

The findings demonstrate that service-learning in crisis contexts contributes significantly to the development of civic competence among pre-service teachers. Also, several key outcomes were identified.

First, students demonstrated increased social responsibility and empathy. Direct interaction with vulnerable populations encouraged future teachers to review the social role of language education and recognize the moral aspects of teaching and translation. Reflection activities revealed that students perceived English not only as an academic subject but as a tool for advocacy, intercultural mediation, and humanitarian communication.

Second, participation in socially oriented translation projects strengthened democratic and intercultural awareness. Students

became more attentive to issues of inclusion, representation, accessibility, and ethical communication. Working with international audiences also improved their understanding of global citizenship and international solidarity. This finding is especially important in the Ukrainian context, where intercultural communication has become central to international cooperation and public diplomacy during wartime.

Third, service-learning enhanced resilience and agency. Wartime education often generates emotional exhaustion, uncertainty, and a lack of motivation. However, students involved in meaningful community-oriented activities reported higher levels of engagement and inner strength.

Fourth, the case study revealed the transformative potential of reflective pedagogy. Reflection sessions encouraged students to critically evaluate stereotypes, misinformation, ethical dilemmas, and communication challenges emerging in wartime contexts. Such practices contributed to the development of critical thinking and dialogic interaction, both of which are central components of civic competence. The findings resonate with broader educational initiatives at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University that emphasize interactive and human-centered learning under martial law conditions.

The study suggests that service-learning should not be treated as an additional extracurricular activity but rather as an integrated pedagogical strategy within teacher education curricula. In crisis contexts, service-learning creates opportunities for combining professional training with civic engagement, emotional support, and active citizenship.

The research also highlights several challenges. These include emotional overload among students, technological inequalities during online learning, difficulties coordinating community partnerships during wartime, and the need for institutional support for reflective and trauma-informed pedagogy.

The study concludes that service-learning represents an effective tool for developing civic competence among pre-service English teachers in Ukraine. Through the incorporation of academic content, social engagement, and reflective practice, students acquire not only professional communication skills but also democratic values, ethical awareness, resilience, and active citizenship.

The pedagogical model at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, integrating servant leadership theory, creates an effective teaching strategy to develop ethically aware, socially responsible educators capable of navigating complex modern challenges. In the broader European and global context, this case contributes to discussions on the role of higher education in sustaining democratic culture during periods of war, displacement, and social uncertainty.

3_Case-Based Abstracts

THE APPLICATION OF SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND ETHICAL LEARNING (SEEL) PRINCIPLES IN THE HUMANITIES AND NATURAL SCIENCES FOR FOSTERING DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

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Keywords: Social, Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEEL); democratic culture; critical thinking; interdisciplinary education.

In the contemporary context, the professional role of educators is undergoing further expansion and redefinition. Teaching has long ceased to be limited to the mere transmission of knowledge; instead, it combines educational, developmental, and supportive functions, increasingly acting as a facilitator of students' psychosocial development and well-being. In the Ukrainian realities of information warfare, hybrid threats, and, since 2022, full-scale war [4], this role gains particular significance, as the educational process occurs under conditions of heightened stress, traumatic experiences, and social instability [3]. Accordingly, educators not only ensure the continuity of learning but also create a safe educational environment, support students' emotional stabilization, foster resilience, and cultivate skills in mutual aid, empathy, and social cohesion.

An effective instrument in this process is social-emotional and ethical learning (SEEL), which can be considered socially oriented, as it comprehensively promotes psychological resilience, social connection, collaboration, and the development of an active civic stance, preparing students for active civic participation and engagement with socially significant challenges [9]. The SEEL program is based on approaches and methodologies developed, tested, and refined over more than two decades by an

international team of researchers at Emory University (Atlanta, USA). Its theoretical foundation draws on the concept of emotional intelligence, particularly the work of Daniel Goleman, the teachings of the 14th Dalai Lama, and leading educational practices worldwide [1; 2].

SEEL is structured around three core dimensions: awareness, empathy, and active engagement, each considered at the personal, social, and systemic levels. Motivation for independent thinking, question formulation, and active learning is promoted through key educational trajectories, including critical thinking development, participation in community projects, reflective practices, creative expression, scientific inquiry, collaborative learning, and environmental education [5]. Fundamental components of SEEL include self-awareness (understanding one's emotions, their causes, and effects on behavior), self-regulation (managing emotions, controlling impulses, and adapting to change), social awareness (empathy and understanding others' emotions), interaction skills (effective communication, collaboration, and accountability), responsible decision-making, and the ability to form and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships [7, p. 91]. These competencies are essential for transitioning from a state of psychological survival to active and conscious engagement in educational and social life.

It is important to emphasize that students' psychosocial well-being is a prerequisite for effective learning, conscious engagement in social projects, and the development of skills for participating in democratic processes. Prolonged stress and anxiety reduce students' capacity for critical thinking, constructive dialogue, and responsible decision-making. Therefore, integrating SEEL elements into school and university practices is particularly relevant. Traditionally, humanities disciplines have been tasked with developing critical and reflective thinking, value orientations, dialogue skills, empathy, responsibility, and fostering civic and democratic competencies, respect for human rights, and readiness to engage in community and state life. The cultivation of democratic culture in educational settings primarily occurs through the promotion of critical thinking, practical participation mechanisms, discussions, and debates [10].

Natural sciences can and should complement this process, expanding opportunities for developing these qualities through

a different type of knowledge and activity. Physics, in particular, provides significant potential in this regard. Today, physics education increasingly goes beyond purely theoretical content, gaining applied and personally meaningful dimensions, fostering logical thinking, the ability to make reasoned decisions, and responsible action in diverse life situations. Engagement with physics gradually leads students beyond formal knowledge acquisition toward a deeper understanding of the laws of the world and their role within it [6]. Through interest in experiments, game-based activities [8], explanation of phenomena, and inquiry, students develop intrinsic motivation and the ability to comprehend complex processes in a broader societal context.

Physics plays an important role in developing critical thinking, as it trains students to work with evidence, analyze cause-and-effect relationships, and evaluate the reliability of information, contributing to the formation of informed citizens capable of rational analysis of political and social processes. It also directly contributes to cultivating a safety culture through understanding physical phenomena, such as the effects of blast waves, propagation of sound and shock waves, behavior of glass under stress, heat transfer, or pressure effects. Engaging students in practical tasks, such as assessing building energy consumption, analyzing heat losses, or exploring alternative energy sources, links learning to real community needs, fostering both professional and civic competencies, as well as a sense of responsibility for the common good.

An important aspect is the personal dimension of learning. Explaining physical phenomena through students' bodily experiences enhances comprehension and awareness of their own state (for example, learning Pascal's law through the sensation of pressure with closed nose/mouth, demonstrating changes in internal energy during evaporation by cooling a wet palm, etc.). Discussion of ethical aspects of scientific activity (e.g., nuclear weapons development and use) fosters responsible attitudes toward scientific progress. Highlighting the achievements of prominent Ukrainian scientists, such as Serhii Koroliov, Ivan Pulu, George Gamow, and others, helps cultivate values of perseverance, resilience, and civic responsibility in learners.

Thus, the application of social-emotional and ethical learning principles across both humanities and natural sciences is relevant

and effective. In the current conditions of heightened stress and social challenges, these approaches create a safe environment, develop emotional resilience, empathy, collaboration skills, and responsible decision-making, which form the essential foundation for active civic engagement and the cultivation of democratic culture in educational settings. Traditionally, humanities develop value orientations and dialogue culture, while natural sciences provide tools for understanding objective reality, fostering critical thinking, safety culture, and practical problem-solving skills. This synergy ensures holistic development of individuals who not only understand social processes but also act responsibly, contributing to the development of a democratic society.

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THE ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION IN STRENGTHENING SOCIAL COHESION IN POST-WAR RECOVERY

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Keywords: adult education; social cohesion; post-war recovery; veterans' reintegration; social entrepreneurship.

Abstract

The full-scale war in Ukraine has caused profound social, economic, and psychological transformations that have significantly affected the structure of society, the level of trust between social groups, and the ability of communities to act collectively. Social fragmentation, traumatic experiences, forced displacement of the population, as well as the difficulties of reintegration of veterans, create new challenges for state policy and civil society. In this regard, the search for effective tools to foster social cohesion as a prerequisite for sustainable post-war recovery is of particular importance.

Social cohesion in the proposed study is considered a complex phenomenon encompassing levels of trust, the inclusiveness of social institutions, the intensity of horizontal ties, and readiness for collective action. In post-war conditions, it serves not only as a social characteristic but also as an economic resource that determines society's ability to recover and develop. Accordingly, policies and practices aimed at strengthening it should take into account both institutional and behavioral aspects.

One of the tools for building social cohesion is adult education, which goes beyond the traditional understanding as a system for transferring knowledge and skills. In modern conditions, it appears as a multifunctional platform that combines human capital development, social integration, civic engagement, and the restoration of social capital. Practice-oriented educational programs that integrate learning with real community challenges and promote participants' involvement in joint activities are gaining particular relevance.

The purpose of this work is to examine the role of adult education in fostering social cohesion during post-war reconstruction, using a case study of participation in an educational program on social entrepreneurship. The program was implemented with the support of DVV International and the Center for Lifelong Learning NGO as part of an initiative aimed at veterans' reintegration through the creation of educational opportunities and the development of entrepreneurial competencies.

The course under study had a clearly structured educational architecture and lasted from 2024 to 2025. Its total duration was 24 academic hours and included 6 thematic modules (4 hours each), combining theoretical and practical components. This format ensured not only the acquisition of basic knowledge in social entrepreneurship but also the development of applied skills through active participation in practical tasks.

The course covered issues in creating and developing social enterprises. In particular, the first module was dedicated to entering social entrepreneurship and included a practical analysis of social problems, which allowed participants to identify current challenges of communities. The second module focused on the business models of social entrepreneurship, in which participants, in the practical part, developed their own business models using the Canvas approach. The third module was dedicated to financing issues and included the practice of forming a social enterprise budget. The fourth module revealed marketing tools in the field of social entrepreneurship, and the practical part involved developing a marketing plan. The fifth module focused on social impact assessment, during which participants conducted a SWOT analysis of their own business ideas. The final module was dedicated to the ethical issues of social entrepreneurship and included developing their own code of ethics. Such a comprehensive approach to building the educational process ensured the integration of knowledge and practice, contributed to the development of systems thinking, and fostered participants' ability to work on socially significant projects. It is important that the training took place in an interactive, cooperative format, which created conditions for the formation of trust, mutual understanding, and social ties among participants.

The case demonstrates that adult education programs can create inclusive learning environments that unite representatives of

diverse social groups (veterans, civilians, internally displaced persons) around shared activities. An important characteristic of such environments is the horizontality of interaction, which helps overcome social barriers, reduce stigmatization, and build mutual trust.

Within the program, training was built on a project-oriented approach, learning through experience, and social constructivist principles. Participants worked in teams to develop social entrepreneurship ideas to solve current community problems. This format allowed combining the acquisition of practical entrepreneurial competencies with the development of social skills, in particular communication, cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. At the same time, joint work on projects created conditions for the formation of long-term social ties that go beyond the educational process. The study paid special attention to the role of social entrepreneurship in fostering social cohesion. Unlike traditional forms of entrepreneurial activity, social entrepreneurship focuses on creating social value, making it an effective mechanism for combining economic activity with social integration. Within the program, participants not only developed business ideas but also assessed their potential social impact, thereby fostering responsible thinking and an orientation to community needs.

For veterans, participation in such educational initiatives opens the door to transforming their own experience into activities of social significance. This contributes to their economic adaptation, the restoration of social roles, and the formation of a new identity outside the military context. At the same time, interaction with other participants in the educational process contributes to the dismantling of social stereotypes and the creation of a more inclusive environment, an important factor in long-term social stability.

An important result of the study is the identification of the role of partnerships in ensuring the effectiveness of adult education programs. Cooperation between civil society organizations, international institutions, and local communities ensures the adaptation of educational programs to real needs, their resource support, and sustainability. In addition, such partnerships contribute to the dissemination of best practices and the formation of networks of interaction that strengthen social capital. Based

on the analysis, it can be argued that adult education plays an important role in post-war recovery. It contributes not only to the development of human capital and economic activity but also to the formation of trust, strengthening horizontal ties, and increasing communities' ability to self-organize. Thus, adult education is an important tool for building sustainable and cohesive societies.

The study's practical conclusions include the need to integrate adult education into national and regional recovery strategies. It is advisable to expand support for programs focused on social entrepreneurship, the development of inclusive educational environments, and the stimulation of intersectoral partnerships. It is also important to ensure that such programs are accessible to different social groups. Thus, adult education in modern conditions appears not only as a learning tool but also as a strategic resource for social recovery, helping to form inclusive, sustainable, and cohesive communities in the post-war period.

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PROJECT-BASED SERVICE-LEARNING IN LEGAL EDUCATION AS A MECHANISM FOR ENHANCING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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Keywords: legal education; civic engagement; project-based learning; local democracy.

In the training of future lawyers, alongside a solid theoretical foundation, the development of practical skills such as legal reasoning, critical thinking, advocacy, emotional intelligence, and communication skills is equally important. Modern legal education should not be limited to the transmission of theoretical knowledge; instead, it should prepare students to address real social and legal challenges. One of the most effective approaches to achieving this goal is the project-based method combined with service-learning, which enables students to apply academic knowledge in practice while contributing to community development and civic engagement.

The project method has surged in popularity because it merges theoretical learning with hands-on application. Its core principle is that students must grasp the purpose of studying a subject and how this understanding translates into real-world action. This approach centers on personal and professional growth through motivated individual and collaborative efforts targeting socially significant challenges.

Project-based learning is particularly valuable in legal education because it encourages students to synthesize knowledge, integrate information from related disciplines, develop analytical and communication skills, and cooperate within a team. Through collaborative activities, students learn to define objectives, identify effective means to achieve them, allocate responsibilities, and demonstrate professional competence. Such activities contribute not only to the acquisition of legal knowledge but also to the development of essential soft skills required for future legal professionals.

The project method is actively used in the teaching of legal disciplines at Sumy State University. An illustrative example is the discipline “Local Democracy: Best European Practices,” which aims to develop students’ understanding of European approaches to local democracy and civic participation. During the course, students study Ukrainian and European instruments of local democracy, including petitions, participatory budgeting, public consultations, and elections. Afterward, they work in groups to identify a specific problem in their community and develop a practical project to improve local life through democratic mechanisms.

Implementing student projects usually involves several stages. First, students identify a socially relevant problem and formulate clear and measurable objectives. These problems may concern environmental issues, waste management, infrastructure accessibility, or other local challenges. Second, students determine the activities and instruments needed to achieve the project goals, establish timelines, and distribute responsibilities within the group. Finally, they define the expected outcomes and the methods for evaluating the project’s effectiveness.

Students develop projects over extended periods, ranging from one month to a semester, enabling them to immerse themselves in authentic challenges while applying theoretical insights. This engagement builds critical thinking, ingenuity, teamwork, and communication abilities. Crucially, project-based service-learning inspires students to become active contributors to community life rather than passive recipients of information.

The practical impact of this approach is already evident. For example, during the 2025–2026 academic year, two students submitted petitions to local self-government bodies to address actual problems in their communities. Such initiatives demonstrate that students are capable of transforming academic learning into meaningful civic participation and social action.

The project-based approach confers numerous advantages in legal education. First, it strengthens the link between theory and practice, enabling students to validate and apply legal knowledge in real-world contexts. Second, it boosts motivation to study law, as students recognize the relevance of legal rules and tools. Third, it fosters autonomy and accountability, urging students to

make informed decisions, manage time, and collaborate. Lastly, it cultivates crucial soft skills, including public speaking, teamwork, analytical reasoning, and problem-solving.

Participation in project-based service-learning also contributes to the development of broader life competencies, particularly social, informational, political, and cultural competencies. Students become more aware of their communities' needs and are better prepared for active civic engagement. As a result, legal education becomes more practice-oriented, socially responsible, and student-centered.

Thus, the essence of project-based service-learning is to spark students' interest in pressing societal issues and to illustrate the practical utility of their knowledge through direct involvement in community solutions. Merging academic expertise with experiential learning, this method enriches the professional and personal development of future lawyers and reinforces their civic responsibility.

“SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS” AS A PRACTICE OF SERVICE-LEARNING: EXPERIENCE OF ORGANIZING AND IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

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Keywords: service-learning; psychological education; psychology students; adolescents; war.

The “School of Psychology for High School Students” project was launched in 2016 at the Department of Psychology and Psychotherapy of the Ukrainian Catholic University as an educational and awareness-raising initiative for high school students. Its main idea was to popularize psychological knowledge among adolescents and to enhance their psychological competence. Since 2023, in the context of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine, the project has been rethought and has begun to function as a practice of service-learning, in which educational goals are combined with a response to urgent societal needs.

At the center of the “School of Psychology for High School Students” project is the creation by university students of a series of psychological trainings for high school students. This format allows students not only to acquire theoretical knowledge, but also to transform it into an accessible, safe, and practically useful educational product for an adolescent audience.

The program usually includes 10–15 meetings in the format of trainings, interactive sessions, and group discussions. Depending on security, organizational, and technical circumstances, the sessions may take place offline on the UCU campus, fully online, or in a hybrid format. Such flexibility is especially important in wartime, when some participants cannot always be physically present in Lviv or participate in sessions consistently.

The training topics cover issues that are important for adolescents during the period of growing up, social instability, and wartime experience: emotions, self-regulation, social relationships, personal

boundaries, stress, traumatic experience, mental health, resilience, leadership, and career orientation. Special attention is paid to ensuring that the material is psychologically accurate, clear, practical, and age-appropriate.

As a service-learning practice, the “School of Psychology for High School Students” has several goals. For high school students, it creates an opportunity to receive high-quality psychological education, discuss complex topics in a safe environment, and acquire tools useful in everyday life. For psychology students, the project is a space for professional learning through action: they learn to adapt psychological knowledge to the needs of a specific age group, plan trainings, work with group dynamics, respond to the needs of the audience, and reflect on their own role as future professionals.

A separate component of social action is the charitable dimension of the project. Participation for high school students involves an organizational fee, and the funds collected are donated to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Depending on the year, the project has raised approximately UAH 40000 to 60000. Thus, the “School of Psychology for High School Students” combines psychological education, practical student learning, and a concrete contribution to supporting the country in wartime.

An important aspect for reflecting on the project is the experience of two different models of student involvement. The first model involves integrating the “School of Psychology” into an academic course. In this case, all students enrolled in the course participate in the project, the completion of tasks is mandatory, and the preparation and delivery of trainings are assessed as part of the learning outcomes. This format has advantages for the institutionalization of service-learning: the project becomes a stable part of the educational program, students go through the full cycle of working with an audience, and the instructor can systematically support the process and connect practical activity with educational goals.

At the same time, the mandatory format has its limitations. Since the project is part of a course, all students are involved regardless of whether training, educational, or group work with adolescents is of genuine interest to them. For some students, this activity may not correspond to their professional interests. In such cases,

participation may be perceived more as an academic requirement for which they need to receive a grade than as their own initiative. This can reduce intrinsic motivation, the level of creative engagement, and the quality of the trainings.

The second model involves implementing the project outside the framework of a mandatory course. In this case, only those students who voluntarily express a desire to participate join the “School of Psychology for High School Students”. They may come from different years of study, choose topics according to their own interests, and form teams around issues that are personally meaningful to them. This format has proved to be more productive in terms of the quality of the training work. Voluntary participation strengthens students’ sense of ownership: they are not merely completing an assignment, but implementing their own idea that they want to communicate to high school students. This makes the trainings more creative, dynamic, and adapted to the needs of the adolescent audience.

The role of the instructor remains fundamentally important in both models. The instructor acts as an organizer, coordinator, and consultant: setting the framework of the project, helping to define educational and social goals, advising on the structure of sessions, selection of materials, age-appropriateness of topics, ethical boundaries, and safe communication. At the same time, the majority of the substantive, organizational, and creative work belongs to the students themselves.

The experience of the “School of Psychology for High School Students” shows that service-learning is most effective when it combines institutional support from the university with space for student initiative. Integrating the project into an academic course ensures sustainability and a connection with learning outcomes. At the same time, the quality of the trainings depends significantly on whether students have the opportunity to act from their own interest, choose topics, demonstrate creativity, and feel ownership of the process. It is precisely the balance between instructor support, educational structure, and voluntary student motivation that may be a key condition for successful service-learning in higher education.

PRO LOVE: EXPERIENCE OF CREATING A STUDENT-LED EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN ON SEXUALITY WITHIN SERVICE-LEARNING

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Keywords: service-learning; psychology of sexuality; sexuality education; consent culture; healthy relationships.

The PRO Love project was implemented by fourth-year students of the Bachelor's Program in Psychology at the Ukrainian Catholic University within the course "Psychology of Sexuality" as a practice of service-learning during the 2024–2025 academic year. This was the first experience of implementing this format within the course; therefore, the project had not only an educational and awareness-raising purpose, but also an experimental character. Its aim was to combine academic study of sexuality-related topics with the preparation of accessible informational materials for a broader audience.

The project was based on the understanding that love and sexuality are not limited to romance or intimate relationships, but are also connected with choice, responsibility, freedom, boundaries, self-acceptance, and care for another person. The relevance of this topic is shaped by the fact that today's information space contains a great deal of sexualized content and reports of sexual violence, while there is a lack of simple, accurate, and accessible educational materials that would help people speak about sexuality without shame, stigma, or oversimplification.

Within the project, students created 25 sexuality education materials aimed at presenting sexuality more broadly: through the themes of consent, embodiment, self-acceptance, boundaries, safety in relationships, traumatic experiences, and pathways to recovery. The materials were disseminated mainly through social media – Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook – on

the department's pages. This made it possible to bring the results of students' work beyond the classroom and make them accessible to a wider community.

As a service-learning practice, PRO Love had a dual focus: educational and social. For students, the project became an opportunity to apply knowledge from the psychology of sexuality to a real communication task. They had not only to master theoretical material, but also to translate it into language understandable to people of different ages and experiences. This required critical selection of information, ethical sensitivity, and the ability to speak about complex and often taboo topics in a simple, delicate, and non-harmful way. For the broader community, the outcome was a set of educational materials that may support a culture of healthy relationships, mutual respect, trust, and responsibility. The project aimed to broaden the understanding of sexuality and to show its connection with psychological well-being, personal boundaries, safety, embodiment, self-acceptance, and respect for another person.

At the same time, since PRO Love was the first experience of such a service-learning format within the course, it also revealed directions for further development. One of the key tasks for the following years is to expand the channels for disseminating the materials. Publishing part of the students' work on social media demonstrated the project's potential; however, for a stronger social impact, more systematic communication channels should be developed. These may include cooperation with schools, youth centers, non-governmental organizations, university pages, psychological services, and other platforms that work with young people. This would make students' materials more accessible to different audiences and ensure a longer "life cycle" for the created resources.

The organization of feedback from the audience also requires further improvement. In future implementations of the project, it will be important not only to create and disseminate materials, but also to better understand how readers perceive them, which topics are most relevant to them, which formats

work best, and which needs remain insufficiently addressed. This may help connect students' learning tasks more precisely with the real needs of the community.

The experience of PRO Love shows that a course in the psychology of sexuality can go beyond the limits of a traditional academic discipline and become a space for service-oriented social action. Through the creation of educational materials, students learn not only "about sexuality," but also how to speak about it responsibly with society. The project contributes to the development of a culture of conscious approaches to intimacy, the dismantling of stereotypes, and the growth of respect for one's own body, feelings, and boundaries, as well as those of other people. At the same time, this first experience showed that, in order to strengthen the project's impact in the coming years, it is important to plan dissemination, feedback collection, and partnerships with relevant communities more systematically.

BARRIER-FREE ENVIRONMENT POLICY: COMMON INTEREST AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY OF THE UNIVERSITY, COMMUNITY AND STATE

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The development of a barrier-free environment in contemporary Ukraine has gained particular significance in the context of full-scale war, which has caused profound socio-demographic changes and transformed the structure of population vulnerability. As a result of hostilities and attacks on civilian infrastructure, the number of people with disabilities has increased substantially among both military personnel and civilians. A considerable proportion of contemporary cases of disability is of a traumatic nature and is directly related to injuries, generating new demands in the fields of social protection, healthcare, and rehabilitation.

Statistical data confirm the scale of these challenges. According to the Social Protection Fund for Persons with Disabilities, as of December 2025, approximately 47,000 individuals received around 168,000 different rehabilitation aids, including about 5,000 prosthetic devices. At the same time, state policy demonstrates a commitment to a responsible and systematic response. In particular, the 2025 state budget allocated 4.6 billion UAH for prosthetics, with an additional 1 billion UAH designated for high-tech prosthetic devices. This indicates the gradual formation of a comprehensive state response to emerging social risks and needs.

In a broader context, these developments demonstrate that under conditions of war and forthcoming reconstruction – accompanied by political, economic, and social transformations – the resolution of issues and satisfaction of the needs of persons with disabilities becomes a long-term priority of state social policy. In this regard, barrier-free policy acquires key importance as an integrative instrument for ensuring equal access to societal resources and opportunities.

Conceptually, a barrier-free environment may be defined as a “complex of internal and external conditions of human life that ensures an individual’s inclusion in the social space for the satisfaction of personal needs and interests in the context of the interests of society as a whole” (Otych & Opanasiuk, 2024). This definition emphasizes the systemic nature of barrier-free accessibility, encompassing not only the physical environment but also social institutions, communicative practices, and economic opportunities.

At the same time, barrier-free accessibility should be understood as a value-based paradigm of contemporary social development. Barrier-free accessibility as a philosophy of a society without constraints is grounded in ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all individuals in the areas of self-realization, employment, mobility, access to services, education, leisure, and personal development. The implementation of this philosophy in Ukraine requires its integration into all spheres of public life, which necessitates coordinated efforts of the state, educational institutions, and civil society.

In this context, the experience of implementing the academic course “Barrier-Free Environment Policy: Ukrainian and International Experience” at Sumy State University is particularly noteworthy. This course represents a practical example of applying barrier-free principles in higher education and in the training of future social professionals.

The methodological framework of the course is based on a socially oriented approach, which involves active student engagement in addressing real social challenges through case studies, meetings with practitioners, project-based learning, and volunteering. This approach is complemented by a communicative learning model aimed at developing interaction skills, as well as a research-based approach that fosters analytical thinking and evidence-based decision-making.

The course content covers both international and Ukrainian experiences in implementing barrier-free policies. It takes into account that international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the European Union, and UNESCO establish global accessibility standards, which Ukraine is gradually integrating into its national development strategies and policies.

An important component of the course is the study of different types of barrier-free accessibility, including physical, informational, digital, social and civic, educational, and economic dimensions. This structure enables students to develop a comprehensive understanding of barriers and mechanisms for overcoming them.

In particular, physical accessibility is explored through practical activities. Students conduct assessments of social infrastructure facilities, map the accessibility of public spaces, and develop and implement projects aimed at expanding the barrier-free environment within the community. Educational accessibility is realized through informational and awareness-raising activities in schools, meetings with practitioners, familiarization with multidisciplinary team work, and psychosocial education of young people.

The socially oriented nature of learning also implies active cooperation between the university and non-governmental organizations of persons with disabilities, veteran support centers, and resilience centers, which contributes to the development of civic engagement and the formation of social responsibility among students.

The further development of barrier-free policy is associated with scaling up the accumulated approaches. This includes the integration of barrier-free principles into other academic disciplines, such as applying comprehensive analysis of interactions between public authorities and civil society within the Master's program in Political Science, incorporating barrier-free approaches into veteran policies within courses in Psychology and Social Work and Counseling, as well as expanding students' project activities within the course "Democracy: Values, Principles, Mechanisms".

A key condition for the effectiveness of this policy is the development of cooperation with stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, local self-government bodies, social service providers, state institutions, and mass media. Such interaction ensures the practical orientation of educational initiatives and promotes a partnership-based model for implementing barrier-free policy.

Thus, barrier-free environment policy as a common interest and shared responsibility of the university, community, and state is a determining factor in shaping an inclusive society in Ukraine. The

implementation of this policy requires the systematic integration of accessibility principles into public administration, educational practice, and civic participation, thereby not only removing existing barriers but also creating a new quality of social interaction based on equal opportunities, respect for human dignity, and social cohesion.

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LEARNING BY SERVING: A MENTAL HEALTH DAY INITIATIVE IN A UKRAINIAN REAR COMMUNITY

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Abstract

The ongoing war in Ukraine has profoundly affected the psychological well-being of communities in rear areas generating unprecedented levels of stress and pressure. Considering the enormous negative impact on mental health, it is crucial to provide people with adequate support, educate about coping strategies, promote mental well-being through community initiatives and reduce stigma associated with psychological health problems. In response to these challenges, service-learning has emerged as an innovative pedagogical approach which allows students to engage their knowledge and skills while contributing to the community.

A group of first-year Master's students in Clinical Psychology chose to organize a Mental Health Day (MHD) for the course of "Scientific and Psychoeducational Practice". The event was arranged for the community of Kozova, as part of cooperation between this community and Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) on 10 October 2025. This initiative was implemented as part of the ServU project – "Service-Learning in Higher Education for Ukraine's Recovery," supported by Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education which is coordinated by the UCU and implemented in cooperation with Ukrainian and international partners.

The goals of the practice were to raise public awareness and educate about mental health; provide psychological support; reduce stigma associated with seeking mental health assistance;

contribute to community resilience, and enable students to develop practical skills and civic competencies. The workshop engaged 15 university students supervised by academic staff, alongside community members, local practitioners, and representatives of vulnerable groups, including veterans and children.

The event was co-designed by the students and community partners, and structured as a four-step process, with student self-reflection after each part. As the first preparatory step students visited the Kozova community to interview the representatives about their needs, identify key participants and preferred workshop format. In the second phase, the Mental Health Day activities were planned and finalized. In the third phase, students facilitated the Mental Health Day event. The workshop was structured around interactive formats, including discussions, a range of psychoeducational activities for children and adults, initiatives for veterans and hospital personnel working with them, and a community social evening. The majority of activities took place at a local school, involving 299 children, 25 teachers, and 16 other members of school staff. The final fourth phase focused on results evaluation and structured self-reflection. Several feedback sessions with community representatives were conducted. Students completed a final reflection on their own professional and personal growth throughout the practice.

Feedback collected from participants indicated that the event increased awareness of mental health well-being, highlighted key stigma points, prompted calls to action and fostered a broader culture of psychological safety within the local community. The interdisciplinary discussions generated new models of cooperation and became cornerstones of future mental health support projects. All participating students found conducting MHD a valuable opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in a real-world setting and develop a deeper understanding of how they can assess the community's needs. The activity served as an applied learning environment in which theoretical knowledge was transferred into practical action. Reflection sessions held before, during and after the event allowed students to critically examine their experiences, connect practice to academic content, and analyse their role in the process. Students' self-reflections highlighted not only professional development but also significant personal transformation.

Evaluating, examining, and responding to real community needs allowed students to reassess their values, motivations, and sense of what it means to be a psychologist in times of crisis. This experience increased their sense of empathy, broadened their perspective on professional self-awareness, and strengthened their sense of civic responsibility as future mental health professionals. As some students reflected, the experience allowed them to create change, be part of change, and change from within.

This experience confirms that community-based service-learning practices focused on mental health can serve as meaningful educational and social interventions in contexts of crisis. These outcomes align with the broader goals of the ServU project– to embed service-learning as a sustainable pedagogical model within Ukrainian higher education and develop active citizenship competences among students through service-learning courses.

2_UNIVERSITY–COMMUNITY COLLABORATION IN WARTIME AND RECOVERY

1_Short Papers

RECONSTRUCTING BELONGING THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING: MOBILIZING SPATIAL MEMORY IN UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY COLLABORATION FOR UKRAINE’S URBAN RECOVERY

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Abstract

This paper examines how service learning can contribute to post-war urban recovery through university–community collaboration, foregrounding spatial memory as a critical yet underexplored resource in reconstruction processes. Focusing on war-affected urban neighborhoods in Ukraine, the paper presents a design-based educational project in which architecture master students collaborate with members of the Ukrainian diaspora in Flanders. Through this collaboration, pre-war spatial memories–embedded in everyday practices, routinized movements, and social encounters–are mobilized as a form of situated knowledge that informs recovery-oriented design thinking.

Challenging dominant post-war reconstruction paradigms that prioritize either radical modernization or faithful material reconstruction, the paper argues that both approaches risk marginalizing the lived social realities embedded in the pre-conflict urban fabric. Drawing on sociological theories of place, memory, and belonging, the research proposes a memory-informed alternative that situates reconstruction within processes

of social resilience, collective meaning-making, and civic reattachment. Central to this approach is the use of architectural artefacts—such as sketches, annotated maps, and physical models—not as representational end products, but as epistemic and dialogical tools. These artefacts function as mediators that enable participants to articulate lived experience, negotiate shared understandings, and imagine socially resilient futures of reconstruction.

Methodologically, the research is structured as a design research framework grounded in service learning and organized around a three-step space-making process applied through participatory workshops with members of the Ukrainian diaspora. By integrating architectural education, community engagement, and recovery practices, the project repositions the university as a civic intermediary rather than an external expert authority. The paper contributes to debates on service learning, recovery-oriented higher education, and socially sustainable post-war urban reconstruction by demonstrating how co-designed, practice-based approaches can foster citizenship, ethical awareness, and community resilience in contexts of displacement and wartime disruption.

Introduction: War, Urban Rupture, and the Question of Recovery

Armed conflict disrupts cities not only through the destruction of buildings and infrastructure, but through the rupture of everyday spatial relations that sustain social life and belonging. Familiar routes, meeting places, thresholds, and routines vanish or become inaccessible, fracturing the mnemonic continuity through which urban environments are lived and understood. Cities affected by war are therefore not merely damaged physical systems, but destabilized socio-spatial assemblages in which material loss, memory, and meaning are deeply entangled.

Post-war reconstruction is often approached as a technical task of rebuilding or as a symbolic project of renewal. Such framings tend to privilege expert-driven planning, visual coherence, and quantifiable outcomes, while sidelining the restoration of everyday spatial practices and social relations. Yet reconstruction is also a narrative and educational process through which collective understandings of the past and imaginaries of the future are

renegotiated. Decisions about what to rebuild, transform, or erase are inseparable from questions of citizenship, responsibility, and belonging.

This paper argues that post-war urban reconstruction should be understood as a process of translation rather than representation. Drawing on theories of place, spatial memory, and belonging, it conceptualizes spatial memory as situated and relational knowledge embedded in everyday urban practices. Mobilizing such memory allows recovery to be grounded in lived experience rather than imposed abstract visions, thereby supporting social resilience alongside material renewal.

The argument is developed through a service-learning-based university–community collaboration focused on Ukraine’s ongoing war and long-term recovery. Through a design-based educational project involving architecture master students and members of the Ukrainian diaspora in Flanders, the university is positioned as a civic intermediary facilitating knowledge co-production across distance, displacement, and disciplinary boundaries. Architectural artefacts function as epistemic and dialogical tools through which spatial memory is articulated, negotiated, and translated into recovery-oriented imaginaries.

By integrating service learning (SL), design research, and participatory engagement, the paper contributes to debates on recovery-oriented higher education and university–community collaboration in wartime contexts, asking how architectural education can engage spatial memory, displacement, and ethical responsibility when direct access to post-war sites is limited.

Post-War Reconstruction and the Limits of Expert-Centric Narratives

Historical debates on post-war reconstruction reveal a recurring oscillation between two dominant paradigms. On one end, destruction is framed as an opportunity for radical modernization, clearing the ground for rationalized spatial orders, infrastructural efficiency, and economic renewal. On the opposite end, reconstruction is approached as an act of continuity through faithful material replication, often transforming damaged urban centers into heritage artefacts oriented toward representation, tourism, and symbolic identity (Shanken, 2022; Gantois, 2025). While

ideologically opposed, both paradigms produce singular narratives of renewal framed through visual coherence and expert authority.

Reconstruction becomes a project of representation—of modernity, heritage, or national resilience—rather than a process of translation between past experience and future inhabitation, marginalizing everyday practices, informal uses, and spatial routines that constituted pre-war urban life.

Empirical research in post-conflict contexts confirms this bias. Reconstruction initiatives frequently prioritize housing provision, infrastructure repair, and iconic buildings, while the social dimensions of recovery remain underdeveloped (Legnér, 2018). Participatory practices, when present, are often limited to consultation on predefined plans rather than genuine co-production of knowledge (Jackson, 2002; Lambert & Rockwell, 2012). Communities are invited to respond to expert proposals rather than to shape the epistemic foundations of reconstruction.

For displaced populations, this limitation is particularly consequential. Return to the city is not only a physical movement but a process of reattachment that depends on the recognition of familiar spatial anchors and everyday practices. When these dimensions are overlooked, reconstruction may result in technically functional environments that nevertheless fail to support social recovery and belonging.

Spatial Memory, Place, and Social Resilience

Sociological and spatial scholarship has long argued that places are not neutral containers of social life, but active participants in its production. Gieryn (2000) conceptualizes place as a stabilizing anchor for individual and collective biographies, providing material reference points through which social life is organized and rendered meaningful. Through repeated interaction, places accumulate layers of meaning that sustain feelings of belonging and attachment (Hawke, 2010; Hester, 2014).

Within this relational understanding, spatial memory emerges from everyday interaction between people and their environments. Memories of place are embedded in routines, paths, sequences of movement, and social encounters rather than in abstract representations alone. These memories are embodied and

relational forms of experiential spatial knowledge grounded in everyday interaction.

When spatial anchors are destroyed or radically transformed, mnemonic continuity is disrupted. Truc (2011) demonstrates how insensitive urban transformations can erase memory-laden qualities of place, producing disorientation and loss of belonging even in contexts of physical improvement. In post-conflict settings, reconstruction therefore holds a dual potential: it may restore social continuity by reconnecting spatial memory, or deepen alienation by disregarding it.

Engaging spatial memory in reconstruction is thus neither nostalgic nor merely commemorative. Rather, it enables reconstruction to operate as a forward-looking process in which past experiences inform future-oriented imaginaries. This requires methodological tools capable of translating experiential knowledge into spatial propositions without reducing it to anecdote or symbolism.

Ukraine, Displacement, and the Civic Role of the University

The ongoing war in Ukraine provides an urgent context in which the social and mnemonic dimensions of reconstruction acquire immediate relevance. Since the full-scale invasion of 2022, extensive damage has been inflicted on civilian neighborhoods, infrastructure, and culturally significant urban areas. Hereby, the targeting of urban environments functions not only as physical destruction but as an assault on collective memory and social cohesion (Bevan, 2006; Hoteit, 2015).

Alongside destruction, the war has generated large-scale displacement and a substantial Ukrainian diaspora across Europe, including Belgium, whose members often retain strong attachments to pre-war urban environments through embodied memories of everyday life. These memories constitute a rich repository of situated spatial knowledge.

Universities are uniquely positioned to engage this form of knowledge through SL, integrating education, research, and civic engagement as mediators between displaced communities and recovery-oriented design practices. In doing so, universities move beyond their traditional role as producers of abstract expertise and assume responsibility as civic actors engaged in social repair.

In the project discussed here, members of the Ukrainian diaspora are not approached as passive beneficiaries or consultees, but as active knowledge holders and co-designers. Their spatial memories form the epistemic foundation for collaborative inquiry into recovery-oriented urban futures.

Architectural Artefacts as Epistemic and Dialogical Tools

Architectural education traditionally relies on visual artefacts—drawings, sketches, maps, models—not only as representational devices but as tools for thinking. Schön's (1983) concept of reflective practice highlights how design knowledge emerges through iterative interaction with artefacts. In post-war reconstruction contexts, however, architectural representations are often mobilized as final communication tools that reinforce expert authority and limit dialogue.

This research adopts an alternative understanding of architectural artefacts as: epistemic objects that generate knowledge through interaction rather than merely conveying solutions (Whyte, 2007; Ballestrem & Gasperoni, 2022). Such artefacts are incomplete and open-ended, inviting interpretation, negotiation and reinterpretation. As objects of speech, they enable the articulation of tacit and embodied knowledge that may be difficult to express verbally alone (Gantois, 2022). Through sketching, mapping, and model-making, spatial memory becomes externalized and discussable. Artefacts function as boundary objects that facilitate dialogue across differences in disciplinary language, cultural background, and spatial distance, offering indirect modes of expression particularly suitable in contexts of trauma and displacement.

Diaspora Communities as Situated Epistemic Actors

Members of the Ukrainian diaspora in Flanders occupy a central role within this research, though one that is carefully situated. Members of the Ukrainian diaspora are positioned neither as substitutes for local participation nor as neutral transmitters of information. Instead, they are approached as epistemic actors whose spatial memories reflect a specific positionality at the intersection of attachment, absence, and future-oriented concern.

Diasporic spatial memory is shaped by distance, temporal disjunction, and uncertainty about return. Memories are not continuously recalibrated through everyday presence but remain anchored in pre-war routines and relations. At the same time, the research explicitly avoids privileging diaspora perspectives over those of current residents in Ukraine. Diasporic engagement is understood as one situated contribution within a longer reconstruction trajectory. Architectural artefacts mediate this positioning by materializing memory in provisional forms.

The engagement of diaspora communities expands conventional understandings of participation by showing how meaningful involvement in recovery can occur across distance through memory, artefacts, and dialogue. This expanded view of participation does not replace localized, on-site collaboration, but complements it by foregrounding the temporal and relational dimensions of belonging that persist beyond displacement.

A Service-Learning Space-Making Methodology

Building on the understanding of spatial memory outlined earlier as situated, relational, and practice-based knowledge embedded in everyday urban life, this section explains how this framework is operationalized through a service-learning-based space-making methodology. Rather than reiterating conceptual foundations, the focus lies on the translation of spatial memory and belonging into concrete pedagogical and collaborative design practices.

The methodological approach is positioned at the intersection of design-based research, SL, and participatory inquiry. Post-war reconstruction is not treated as a linear problem requiring expert resolution, but as a process of collective inquiry in which meanings, memories, and future imaginaries are continuously negotiated. Service-learning functions here not only as a pedagogical format, but as an epistemic stance linking disciplinary learning to civic responsibility, ethical engagement, and social recovery.

The project is embedded within architectural education and positions students as co-learners and facilitators rather than autonomous designers or external experts. Ukrainian participants are invited to articulate memories of pre-war urban life through accounts of everyday spatial practices—such as routes, thresholds, informal meeting places, rhythms of movement, and habitual

encounters—rather than through comprehensive narratives of loss. This approach foregrounds ordinary and often overlooked dimensions of urban life typically absent from conventional planning documentation.

Architectural artefacts play a central mediating role throughout the process. Sketches, annotated maps, and physical models are introduced iteratively and continuously reworked in response to participants' contributions. Early artefacts emphasize spatial sequences, routes, and relations, while later iterations allow comparative engagement with historical maps, archival photographs, architectural plans, and contemporary satellite imagery. Rather than stabilizing meaning or prefiguring design outcomes, the artefacts structure dialogue over time and support the translation of experiential knowledge into shared spatial propositions.

A deliberate balance between precision and openness guides the development of these artefacts. Their intentional incompleteness invites engagement as provisional propositions rather than authoritative representations of “the city as it was.”

Following established accounts of research through design, knowledge is understood as emerging *in action*. Through acts of pointing, annotating, narrating, and repositioning, participants actively reshape the artefacts, enabling knowledge to emerge through iterative cycles of making, reflection, dialogue and re-making rather than through the verification of predefined hypotheses (Schön, 1983; Lawson, 1997). Analytical attention shifts from individual buildings or landmarks toward the urban fabric understood as a relational system of everyday practices and spatial connections.

Within the service-learning context, the space-making process produces reciprocal learning outcomes. Students develop architectural competencies alongside civic awareness, ethical sensitivity, and an understanding of the social implications of reconstruction. They learn to work with uncertainty, engage non-expert knowledge, and reflect on their own positionality when collaborating with conflict-affected communities. Community participants, in turn, gain access to architectural tools and languages that allow them to articulate spatial memory in forms relevant to recovery-oriented discourse, even when physical return remains uncertain.

Importantly, the methodology does not aim at producing design proposals as a primary outcome. Instead, it prioritizes shared understanding and the articulation of socially grounded imaginaries of recovery. Hereby, past spatial practices inform future-oriented conversations without prescribing definitive spatial solutions.

Taken together, this service-learning space-making methodology repositions architectural education and research as civic practices embedded in processes of social recovery. By integrating design, dialogue, and memory work, it demonstrates how universities can facilitate careful, reflexive, and socially grounded knowledge co-production in post-war contexts.

Methodological Rigor, Ethical Care, and Educational Responsibility

Methodological rigor in this research is grounded in criteria appropriate to design-based and participatory inquiry rather than in conventional standards of reproducibility or empirical generalization. The value of the research therefore lies not in the representational accuracy of its outcomes, but in the epistemic productivity of the processes it establishes.

Validity is ensured through prolonged engagement with participants, iterative workshops, and the triangulation of multiple forms of material: narrative accounts of spatial memory, architectural artefacts, historical documentation, and contemporary spatial data. These heterogeneous sources do not converge toward a single authoritative account of the pre-war city; instead, they support a relational understanding of how urban configurations sustained particular forms of everyday life and belonging. Insight emerges through the negotiation of partial perspectives rather than through their aggregation into a unified representation.

Reflexivity is an integral component of methodological rigor. Students and researchers are positioned as facilitators and co-learners, and reflexive practices are embedded throughout the process through annotated sketchbooks, collective debriefings, and iterative reinterpretation of models and drawings. These practices enable participants to critically reflect on their assumptions, positionalities, and ethical responsibilities when engaging with conflict-affected communities. Architectural artefacts themselves function as reflexive devices: they expose uncertainty and prevent premature closure around fixed design solutions.

Ethical considerations are central to the research design rather than treated as procedural requirements. Engagement with members of the Ukrainian diaspora involves working with communities potentially affected by displacement, loss, and trauma. Ethical practice is therefore approached as an ongoing, relational commitment unfolding throughout the research process. Participation is voluntary and based on informed consent, while collaboration with local gatekeepers and partner organizations ensures sensitivity to contextual and personal boundaries.

Architectural artefacts play a crucial ethical role as mediators. Indirect, spatial modes of expression allow participants to articulate memories of everyday urban life without requiring verbal recounting of traumatic experiences. By focusing on routines, places, and practices rather than on events of violence, the methodology avoids extractive forms of testimony while still acknowledging the impact of war on lived environments. Artefacts thus function not only as epistemic tools, but also as instruments of care that support respectful and non-intrusive engagement.

From an educational perspective, the project demonstrates the potential of SL to reposition architectural education as a civic and ethical practice. Learning outcomes are defined less in terms of formal design proficiency than in students' capacity to engage uncertainty, negotiate difference, and reflect on the social implications of architectural intervention. Through sustained interaction with community participants, students develop an understanding of architecture's role in processes of social recovery and resilience. Education becomes an encounter with responsibility rather than an exercise in autonomous problem-solving.

The reciprocity inherent in SL is central to this educational impact. Community participants are not positioned as clients or informants but as co-producers of knowledge whose spatial memories actively shape the direction of inquiry. Learning thus emerges as a shared process in which academic knowledge and lived experience mutually transform one another.

Taken together, methodological rigor, ethical care, and educational impact are not separate dimensions of the research but mutually reinforcing aspects of a coherent design-based, service-learning approach. The research demonstrates how universities can

contribute meaningfully to post-war recovery by creating conditions for careful, reflexive, and socially grounded knowledge production.

Conclusion

Building on the conceptual framework developed throughout this paper, the research has argued that post-war urban reconstruction cannot be reduced to a purely material or symbolic endeavor, but must be understood as a socially embedded process through which belonging is actively reconstituted. By foregrounding spatial memory as an operative form of situated knowledge, the paper challenges expert-driven reconstruction paradigms that marginalize everyday spatial practice and lived experience.

Through a service-learning-based design research framework, architectural artefacts were mobilized as epistemic tools mediating between memory, dialogue, and future-oriented imagination. Rather than stabilizing a single narrative of recovery, these artefacts enabled the negotiation of multiple perspectives and the translation of embodied experience into shared spatial propositions. Reconstruction was thus approached as a process of collective inquiry rather than representational closure.

The Ukrainian context underscores both the urgency and the complexity of such approaches. Conducted under conditions of ongoing war and displacement, the research relied primarily on remote engagement through collaboration with members of the Ukrainian diaspora, complemented by archival and digital materials and sustained contact with partners familiar with local conditions. This configuration inevitably shapes the scope and limits of participation, yet it demonstrates how spatial memory can inform recovery-oriented thinking even in the absence of immediate physical access to damaged sites.

Recognizing these limitations, a subsequent phase of the research seeks to extend the service-learning framework through direct collaboration with architecture students, academic institutions, and community participants in Ukraine itself, as conditions allow. Building on the memory-based groundwork developed through diasporic engagement, this phase aims to integrate locally situated participation within post-war environments, strengthening the university's role as a civic intermediary in longer-term recovery processes.

More broadly, the paper contributes to debates on SL, university–community collaboration, and recovery-oriented higher education by demonstrating how design-based, memory-sensitive approaches can foster citizenship, ethical awareness, and community resilience. While grounded in the Ukrainian case, the methodological principles developed here offer transferable insights for socially sustainable reconstruction in other conflict-affected and displacement contexts.

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UNIVERSITIES AS SOCIAL ACTORS: RESPONSIBILITY, MISSION, AND INSTITUTIONAL PURPOSE. CASE OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

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Introductaiton to the problem

The role of universities in contemporary societies has undergone a significant transformation, moving beyond their traditional functions of teaching and research toward a broader societal engagement. This evolution, conceptualized as the “third mission,” reflects increasing expectations that higher education institutions (HEIs) contribute directly to addressing social, economic, and civic challenges (Boyer, 1996; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). While this transformation has been gradual in most European contexts, it has been accelerated under conditions of crisis, where institutional purpose is tested against urgent societal needs.

The case of Ukraine provides a particularly salient empirical context. The full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 profoundly disrupted the higher education system while simultaneously catalyzing an expansion of universities’ societal roles. Universities were compelled to assume functions traditionally associated with civil society and public administration, including humanitarian coordination, psychological support, and policy advisory functions. These developments suggest that crisis conditions do not generate new institutional roles per se but rather expose latent capacities and structural limitations within existing institutional frameworks.

This concept note advances the argument that the third mission should be understood rather as an organizing principle of institutional behavior, than additional functional domain to university agenda. Based on the experience of the Ukrainian Catholic University during the wartime, it examines how mission-driven strategies enable universities to act as social actors,

particularly under conditions of systemic disruption. The analysis adopts a qualitative analytical approach combining conceptual synthesis with case study evidences derived from prior research on Ukrainian higher education institutions during wartime. The analytical framework is structured around three components:

First, a **conceptual analysis** of the third mission draws on foundational scholarship, including Boyer's (1996) "scholarship of engagement" and innovation system models such as the Triple and Quadruple Helix (Carayannis & Campbell, 2009).

Second, a **policy analysis** situates the third mission within European higher education governance frameworks, particularly the European Strategy for Universities (2022) and Bologna Process communiqués, which emphasize civic engagement and democratic responsibility.

Third, a **case-based analytical reflection** uses the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU, 2023) as an illustrative example of a mission-driven institutional model, enabling examination of how abstract principles translate into organizational practice.

The Third Mission as Institutional Responsibility

The third mission is commonly defined as the contribution of universities to society beyond teaching and research, encompassing social, cultural, and economic engagement (Boyer, 1996). Contemporary literature distinguishes between three dominant models of this mission. The **economic-utilitarian model** emphasizes innovation and knowledge transfer within the Triple Helix framework, positioning universities as drivers of economic growth. The **civic-democratic model** extends this perspective by incorporating civil society actors, aligning with the Quadruple Helix and emphasizing co-production of knowledge and democratic participation. Finally, the **transformational model** conceptualizes universities as agents of systemic change, particularly in contexts of crisis or structural transition.

The existing literature on the third mission is dominated by functionalist interpretations, which conceptualize engagement as an additional domain alongside teaching and research (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020). While useful, this approach poses several limitations. First, it treats the third mission as additive rather than integrative, often resulting in fragmented

institutional practices. That logic cause the management to focus on measurable **instruments (e.g., courses, partnerships, outreach projects)** rather than underlying decision-making logics.

The Ukrainian case, on the contrary, demonstrates the convergence of these models. Universities simultaneously contribute to innovation ecosystems, civic resilience, and social transformation. Empirical evidence indicates that the majority of Ukrainian HEIs incorporate elements of societal engagement into their strategic documents, although the degree of formalization varies.

Crucially, the third mission should be conceptualized not merely as a set of activities but as a form of institutional responsibility. This framework allows the third mission to be conceptualized as **institutional behavior under normative constraint**, rather than as a set of activities. It also explains why crisis contexts, such as war, accelerate its emergence: they compress the distance between institutional purpose and societal need. Responsibility in this context entails three dimensions: awareness of societal needs, institutional capacity to respond, and willingness to act. Wartime conditions in Ukraine have activated all three dimensions, transforming societal engagement from a peripheral activity into a core institutional function.

If universities are understood as social actors, mission assumes a central strategic role. In many institutions, mission statements remain symbolic and weakly connected to decision-making processes. In contrast, mission-driven universities operationalize their purpose as a guiding logic that structures institutional behavior. Three mechanisms are particularly relevant for understanding how mission operates as an organizing principle within higher education institutions (Schuetze, 2012).

First, *mission defines strategic priorities*, determining which societal problems the institution chooses to engage with and how it positions itself within broader ecosystems of actors. This mechanism operates through processes of selection and exclusion. Universities do not respond to all societal needs equally; rather, mission functions as a filtering device that distinguishes between “material” and “peripheral” issues. In this sense, mission is not only about engagement, but about strategic focus. For instance, an institution oriented toward regional development will prioritize partnerships with local governments and SMEs,

whereas a university with a global justice orientation may invest in international advocacy networks or humanitarian research. The Ukrainian case demonstrates that under crisis conditions, this prioritization becomes more explicit: universities rapidly reoriented toward humanitarian support, community resilience, and national recovery, thereby redefining their partnership configurations toward municipalities, civil society organizations, and international donors. Mission, therefore, structures not only what universities do, but with whom they act.

Second, *mission shapes organizational architecture*, influencing how institutional resources, structures, and practices are configured. This includes the design of curricula, the orientation of research agendas, and the construction of incentive systems. At this level, mission translates from an abstract normative statement into embedded institutional routines. The critical analytical point is that organizational architecture is not neutral; it encodes priorities. For example, curricula that incorporate service-learning or community-based research signal that societal engagement is integral to learning outcomes, not an extracurricular activity. Similarly, research funding schemes that privilege applied or policy-oriented outputs reshape academic behavior. However, empirical evidence suggests that in many systems, including Ukraine, this translation remains partial. Engagement activities often coexist with traditional academic structures rather than being integrated into them. This results in what can be termed structural dualism, where the third mission exists alongside, but not within, teaching and research. Overcoming this dualism requires not only new programs but reconfiguration of institutional incentives, particularly promotion criteria and workload models, which remain heavily oriented toward publications and teaching hours.

Third, mission structures resource allocation and trade-offs, functioning as a decision-making algorithm under conditions of scarcity. Universities operate in environments characterized by limited financial, human, and temporal resources. Mission provides a framework for prioritization, enabling institutions to decide what to scale, sustain, or abandon. This is particularly evident in crisis contexts, where resource constraints intensify and the cost of misalignment increases. In the Ukrainian case, wartime conditions forced universities to reallocate resources away from certain

traditional activities toward urgent societal functions such as humanitarian coordination, infrastructure sharing, and psychological support. Importantly, this mechanism reveals the political dimension of mission: decisions about resource allocation are not purely technical but reflect normative judgments about institutional purpose. Mission, in this sense, acts as a legitimizing framework for redistribution, allowing universities to justify shifts in priorities to internal and external stakeholders.

These three mechanisms operate across normative, strategic, and operational levels, which together constitute the architecture of mission-driven institutionalism. The normative level defines values and purpose; the strategic level translates these into priorities and positioning; the operational level implements them through programs and practices. A persistent challenge in higher education systems is the misalignment between these levels. Mission statements often articulate ambitious societal roles (normative level), but these are only weakly reflected in strategic planning or operational practices. This misalignment produces a gap between declared mission and enacted behavior, undermining institutional coherence and reducing the effectiveness of engagement initiatives.

Service-learning emerges as a key instrument for bridging this gap, precisely because it operates simultaneously across all three levels. Normatively, it reflects a commitment to civic responsibility and societal engagement. Strategically, it positions the university within local ecosystems as a partner in problem-solving. Operationally, it embeds engagement within curricula, directly linking teaching with societal impact. This multi-level functionality makes service-learning particularly valuable as a mechanism of integration.

However, its effectiveness is contingent upon institutionalization. Without integration into formal curricula, service-learning risks remaining episodic and dependent on individual faculty initiative. Without alignment with incentive systems, it competes with traditional academic priorities and is often deprioritized. Without evaluation frameworks, its impact remains difficult to assess, limiting both accountability and scalability. In many contexts, including Ukraine, service-learning is expanding rapidly but remains unevenly institutionalized, reflecting broader challenges in embedding the third mission within core university structures.

From a theoretical perspective, this conceptualization suggests that the effectiveness of the third mission depends less on the presence of engagement activities and more on the degree of alignment between mission, structure, and practice. Mission-driven institutionalism thus provides a lens for understanding why some universities succeed in acting as social actors, while others remain confined to symbolic engagement.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine represents a critical juncture in the evolution of the third mission. The dominant majority of universities report significant changes in their engagement models following 2022. These transformations can be categorized into three interrelated domains:

First, universities assumed **humanitarian and community support functions**, including shelter provision, aid coordination, and psychological services. These activities positioned universities as central nodes within local resilience systems.

Second, institutions expanded **applied knowledge functions**, redirecting research and expertise toward immediate societal needs, including technological solutions, policy analysis, and social services.

Third, universities intensified **international engagement**, leveraging global networks to secure resources, maintain academic continuity, and contribute to global knowledge production.

These developments challenge traditional distinctions between local and global engagement. Ukrainian universities became embedded in transnational networks that simultaneously addressed local needs and global challenges. Notably, wartime conditions shifted the emphasis of the third mission from market-oriented activities toward human security and social resilience. This reorientation underscores the adaptability of the engaged university model and its relevance in crisis contexts.

The UCU Model: Institutionalizing the Third Mission

The Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) provides a particularly instructive case of how mission-driven institutionalism can be operationalized through both pedagogical innovation and organizational design. UCU demonstrates a model of **systemic integration**, where societal engagement is embedded into the core architecture of the university – its Strategy 2030 explicitly positions societal service as a core institutional purpose.

At the center of this model is the early formalization of service-learning as a university-wide pedagogical approach, introduced in 2019. This positions UCU as one of the first institutions in Ukraine to institutionalize socially oriented learning as a structural component of education. From a theoretical perspective, this reflects a transition from what may be termed *additive engagement* to *embedded engagement*. In additive models, universities attach community-oriented projects to existing curricula. In contrast, UCU integrates societal engagement into the logic of curriculum design itself, ensuring that knowledge production and application are co-constitutive processes.

This integration is operationalized through a **multi-stage student engagement pathway**. At the entry level, all first-year students are required to participate in volunteer activities, embedding civic responsibility as a foundational element of academic socialization. At subsequent stages, students engage in more specialized forms of service-learning through structured courses and projects, including those coordinated by the “Volunteer Laboratory.” This staged approach is analytically significant because it transforms engagement from episodic participation into a **cumulative competency-building process**, linking personal development with societal impact.

A second critical dimension of the UCU model is the **redefinition of communities as strategic partners rather than beneficiaries**. Engagement activities span a wide range of domains, including collaboration with territorial communities, support for internally displaced children, development of social enterprises, and environmental initiatives. This reflects a shift toward **co-production of knowledge**, consistent with Quadruple Helix frameworks, where civil society actors actively shape research agendas and learning processes. Importantly, this partnership logic extends beyond individual projects into **inter-institutional and policy-oriented initiatives** (f.e. assisting municipalities with their medium-term strategies as a part of MPA courses).

From an organizational perspective, the UCU model highlights the importance of administrative integration. Engagement is not driven solely by academic staff or student initiatives but is actively coordinated by administrative structures. This addresses a common limitation in higher education systems, where civic engagement

is often confined to individual actors without institutional support. At UCU, administrative personnel play a key role in organizing, sustaining, and scaling engagement activities, contributing to a whole-institution approach.

A third defining feature is the alignment of engagement with institutional governance and performance monitoring. Societal service is explicitly positioned as a core element of the university's strategic development, and progress is systematically tracked at the leadership level. Indicators include the number of service-learning courses, student participation in volunteering, the volume of community-oriented projects, and their impact on communities. This reflects an important shift from activity-based reporting to impact-oriented governance, even if measurement challenges remain. The presence of a designated vice-rector responsible for monitoring engagement ensures that the third mission is not only implemented but also evaluated and adjusted.

Taken together, these elements illustrate a coherent model of mission-driven institutionalization, characterized by three interrelated dynamics:

- *pedagogical integration*, where societal engagement is embedded within curricula and student development pathways;
- *organizational alignment*, where administrative structures and governance mechanisms support and coordinate engagement;
- *ecosystem positioning*, where the university operates as a broker within networks of communities, institutions, and international partners.

However, the UCU case also reveals structural tensions – despite high levels of integration, challenges persist in coordination across initiatives, resource allocation, and especially in measuring long-term societal impact. From a theoretical standpoint, the UCU model supports the argument that the effectiveness of the third mission depends on its integration across institutional functions, rather than its formal recognition as a separate domain. It also demonstrates that mission-driven institutionalism requires not only normative commitment but organizational translation, where values are embedded into structures, incentives, and practices.

In general, the institutionalization of the third mission in Ukraine remains uneven. Three structural challenges are particularly salient. First, **fragmented governance** limits coordination and

accountability. Most universities rely on hybrid or decentralized models, enabling flexibility but reducing strategic coherence. There is evidence of **symbolic compliance**, where engagement activities are reported but not fully integrated into institutional practices. This reflects a broader pattern identified in the literature as “checkbox engagement” (Benneworth et al., 2016). Third, **weak measurement frameworks** hinder evaluation of societal impact. Existing metrics focus on outputs rather than outcomes, limiting the ability to assess long-term effects. These challenges indicate that while the third mission has expanded significantly, its institutional foundations remain underdeveloped.

Conclusion

The transformation of universities into social actors reflects a broader redefinition of higher education’s institutional purpose. The Ukrainian case demonstrates how the third mission becomes central under conditions of systemic disruption, revealing both the potential and limitations of existing institutional frameworks. universities require **dedicated governance structures**, such as engagement offices and leadership positions, to ensure coordination and accountability.

The **capacity-building initiatives** are necessary to equip academic and administrative staff with the skills required for effective societal engagement. The development of **robust evaluation frameworks** is essential for measuring impact and ensuring sustainability. Finally, universities should be integrated into national recovery strategies as key actors in reconstruction, leveraging their roles as knowledge hubs and civic institutions. These implications extend beyond Ukraine, suggesting that the third mission should be considered a central component of higher education systems in contexts of war and post-conflict transformation. The few conclusions can be drawn:

- 1) mission-driven strategies enhance institutional capacity to respond to societal challenges;
- 2) crisis conditions accelerate transformation, exposing latent institutional capabilities and structural gaps;
- 3) the sustainability of these transformations depends on institutionalization through governance, incentives, and evaluation systems.

4) war and crisis contexts should be integrated into higher education theory. The Ukrainian case demonstrates that universities can function as **critical infrastructure for societal resilience**, a role largely absent from existing models.

Universities are inherently normative institutions. Their choices regarding teaching, research, and engagement shape societal trajectories. The key question is whether these choices are made strategically and in alignment with societal needs. The Ukrainian experience suggests that when universities act as mission-driven social actors, they become not only providers of education but also anchors of resilience, recovery, and societal transformation.

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BUSINESS ON THE FRONTLINES AT UCU: SERVICE-LEARNING AS AN INSTRUMENT OF TERRITORIAL RECOVERY IN WARTIME UKRAINE

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1. Context and problem framing

Can service-learning function as an instrument of territorial recovery in wartime Ukraine, and not only as an instrument of student civic formation? This paper examines one attempt to find out, and identifies the design conditions under which it worked.

Ukraine's recovery happens at the level of territorial communities. National reconstruction frameworks and international financing matter, but the unit of lived recovery is the community (*Hromada*): a specific town or group of villages, its organisations, its municipal authorities, its returning residents. Each faces a combinatorial problem – aging infrastructure, capital constraints, demographic loss, disrupted markets, unresolved heritage assets, and in many cases proximity to active conflict. The applied managerial expertise needed to address this problem is scarce, unevenly distributed, and rarely available to second-tier communities on terms they can afford. This is where higher education institutions (HEIs) have an under-exploited role.

Service-learning (SL) is one of the pedagogical bridges between HEIs and communities (Furco, 1996; Jacoby, 2015). At Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU), the number of credit-bearing SL courses grew from 13 in 2021 to 44 in 2025. But most Ukrainian SL practice – like most international SL practice – sits at the undergraduate level: modest intensity (1–3 ECTS), short community engagements, and deliverables that are primarily pedagogical rather than operational. This is appropriate for the civic formation of young students. It leaves the recovery question open.

Block and Bartkus (2019) provide the cleanest frame for asking it. In their study of thirty international SL projects across eight years of *Business on the Frontlines* at the University of Notre Dame, they distinguish between indirect and direct value for partner organisations: most SL projects generate some indirect value (exposure, relationships, fresh perspectives), but direct value – outputs the partner actually uses – is rarer, and depends on three design conditions they call partner readiness, project design, and project execution.

This paper applies that frame to the autumn 2025 delivery of *Business on the Frontlines* (BOTFL) as a 9-ECTS elective in UCU Business School's Key Executive MBA programme, co-delivered with the course's originators, with three interlinked partners in the Novyi Rozdil (Rozdil) community in the Lviv region. The paper is a practitioner reflection from inside the course team. Its purpose is descriptive and design-oriented rather than theoretical: to report what BOTFL produced for the community, to identify the design choices that produced those effects, and to make those choices explicit enough that other Ukrainian HEIs and their EU partners can reproduce them deliberately rather than hope for them. The setting is unusual on three dimensions Block and Bartkus's sample did not foreground in combination – active wartime, an executive cohort, and students who are themselves embedded in the recovery economy rather than visiting it from outside – and these dimensions shape the design choices we report.

2. Approach and methodology

This is a reflective single-case study from the vantage point of the course team. The first author was the instructor of record for BOTFL 2025; the second author, as CEO of UCU Business School, holds institutional responsibility for the course's integration into the School's programme portfolio and for the partnership architecture with the Business on the Frontlines Initiative. Our access to evidence is therefore privileged and partial, and we declare that positionality rather than conceal it.

The evidence base comprises: the course syllabus and its mapping to UCU Business School programme learning outcomes; final deliverables produced by the three student teams (strategic memoranda, multi-scenario financial models with CAPEX

projections, an export-market assessment, an ESG report, and an industrial-park repositioning analysis); memoranda of understanding (MoU) signed between each team and its partner; partner evaluations of student deliverables; two individual reflection essays per student (pre- and post-immersion); daily team debrief logs from the immersion week of 26 October – 1 November 2025; final grades including a partner-assigned component; and the course team’s observations across the September–December 2025 cycle.

We analyse what BOTFL produced for the Novyi Rozdil community and what explains it, treating student learning as an associated outcome rather than the primary object. The limits are real. Single-case designs do not generalise. Instructor-authored reflection is not a substitute for independent partner evaluation. Six months after completion is too short to observe whether partner adoption of student recommendations translates into community-level outcomes. Where evidence rests on partner self-report rather than independent verification, we mark the claim as such. We flag claims that stretch beyond the evidence.

The case sits at the intersection of three literatures that rarely speak to each other: SL pedagogy (Furco, 1996; Jacoby, 2015; Block & Bartkus, 2019), universities in post-conflict reconstruction (Milton & Barakat, 2016; Milton, 2019), and entrepreneurship in necessity contexts (Bacq et al., 2022; Boychuk et al., 2021). We do not claim to bridge them. We draw on them selectively to interpret what we observed and to position the design choices we report. In particular, Milton and Barakat’s account of HEIs that underperform their potential contribution to reconstruction by defaulting to narrowly-defined teaching missions helps explain why intensive applied-engagement formats are rare and why the design choices BOTFL required were non-trivial for the institution to make. We are not arguing that SL is sufficient for territorial recovery, only that it can be a non-trivial component of the institutional architecture recovery requires.

3. Case description – BOTFL’s architecture for recovery

BOTFL originated at the University of Notre Dame in 2008 under Dr Viva Bartkus. By 2024, the course had delivered more than ninety projects across thirty countries, typically in post-conflict or

deep-poverty contexts (Block & Bartkus, 2019; Sweeney, 2024). The Ukrainian adaptation was developed jointly with UCU Business School and delivered over a full semester, with Bartkus and her colleagues Kelly Strait and Joe Sweeney travelling to Lviv to co-lead all projects in Novyi Rozdil and transfer the course methodology.

The cohort was thirteen Key Executive MBA students, most of them holding senior positions in Ukrainian companies. Students were organised into three teams, each matched to one project in the Novyi Rozdil community.

The **Rozdil Palace Revitalisation** team worked with EFI Group and Heritage.UA on a sustainable business model for converting an eighteenth-century palace – one of Ukraine’s most significant heritage sites – into a self-sustaining cultural and tourism anchor. The team delivered refined CAPEX estimates, three-scenario financial models, and an expert network map.

The **Novyi Rozdil Industrial Park** team worked with the Novyi Rozdil City Council and the park’s management consortium on repositioning a post-industrial site stagnant for nearly a decade. The team reframed the park from land asset to infrastructure platform, proposed an eco-specialisation and circular-economy positioning consistent with regional logistics and energy endowments, and delivered recommendations on youth retention and vocational-curriculum alignment.

The **Zakhid Solod (Rozdil Brewery)** team worked with a private producer – supplier of roughly sixty per cent of Ukraine’s domestic barley malt – on an export strategy for artisanal malts to North American and European buyers, an organisational restructuring plan, an ESG report, and a digital communications strategy.

Two design features distinguish BOTFL from many other SL formats. First, the partnership instruments were formalised: each team signed an MOU specifying scope, deliverables, and timelines, and partners retained the right to evaluate the thirty-mark partner-assigned component of the final grade. Second, the course was deliberately intensive in both credit weight (9 ECTS) and calendar commitment, including a week of full-time community presence.

The course was structured in four phases, summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. BOTFL 2025 course architecture

Phase	Timing	Activity
Retreat	September 2025	Two-day residential. Conceptual grounding; team formation.
Online deep-dive	10 weeks (Sept–Oct)	Structured readings on the role of business in post-conflict and deep-poverty contexts; weekly partner calls; team working sessions.
Immersion	26 Oct – 1 Nov 2025	All three teams simultaneously in Rozdil. Overlapping stakeholder interviews; joint evening debriefs; scheduled encounters with municipal, religious, and community leaders.
Delivery and reflection	Nov–Dec 2025	Final deliverables; partner presentations; individual pre- and post-immersion reflection essays; partner-assigned grade component.

4. Analysis – three mechanisms of direct partner value

Block and Bartkus (2019) found that direct value – outputs the partner uses – is comparatively rare in SL, and that when it occurs it depends on partner readiness, project design, and project execution. They classify a wider set of relational and perspective-shifting outcomes as indirect value. BOTFL 2025 produced direct value on all three Rozdil projects and produced indirect value of the kind their framework anticipates. We organise our reflection around three mechanisms by which the course produced value for the community. The mechanisms are not parallel and we should say so plainly: they operate at different levels of analysis and on different timescales. Mechanism 1 is an organisation-level direct-value output, observable immediately in partner deliverables. Mechanism 2 is a network-level relational outcome – of the kind Block and Bartkus would categorise as indirect value, but operating across the community network of HEI, municipal authorities,

multiple firms, and civil society rather than at any single partner organisation. Mechanism 3 is an individual-level reframing in the executive student's decision frame, whose effects are slower and harder to attribute. We name them together because each reaches partner needs the others cannot.

4.1 Consulting-grade deliverables absorbed into partner strategy

Each team delivered artefacts of a quality and specificity the partner could use. Partner evaluations submitted as part of the thirty-mark grading component report the following uses. The Palace team's multi-scenario financial model and refined CAPEX structure are being used by EFI Group as inputs into ongoing capital allocation decisions for the site. The Industrial Park team's repositioning analysis has been integrated by the city council into its regional development framing in subsequent stakeholder communications. The Zakhid Solod team's export strategy, organisational restructuring plan, and ESG report are being used by the company in preparing its 2026 brewing expansion and its initial approaches to international buyers. These uses rest on partner self-report and would benefit from independent longitudinal verification, which we discuss in §5.

This is not student project work "shared with partners" in the soft sense the SL literature sometimes describes (Kolenko et al., 1996; Papamarcos, 2005, as critiqued by Block & Bartkus, 2019). It is the absorption of specific analytical instruments into partner decision-making. The mechanism that made absorption possible is the combination of student capability – mid-career executives applying skills they already use professionally – with a partnership structure that obliged partners to treat deliverables as operational rather than pedagogical. The MOU did this explicitly; the thirty-mark partner-evaluated grading component reinforced it.

This mechanism generalises poorly to undergraduate SL. It depends on a student cohort with pre-existing professional capability, on partner organisations sophisticated enough to specify operationally useful scopes of work, and on a calendar that permits genuine analytical depth. It generalises well to other executive and graduate professional education programmes where SL is currently rare.

4.2 Trust infrastructure as a durable community asset

The second mechanism is less visible in deliverables and more visible in relationships. Over seven days of simultaneous multi-team presence in Rozdil – with structured interactions that included the mayor of Novyi Rozdil, management of three distinct organisations, Greek Catholic clergy, and community members associated with a local orphanage – the immersion week produced a web of relationships between UCU, municipal authorities, local organisations, and Heritage.UA that did not exist before the course and that has outlasted it.

This relational infrastructure is itself a recovery asset. It lowers the cost of subsequent HEI–community collaboration; it gives the community a credible channel to UCU’s wider expertise beyond BOTFL; it makes future SL projects in Rozdil easier to scope, match, and deliver. In the Ukrainian recovery context – where the coordination problem between HEIs and territorial communities is often more binding than the expertise constraint itself – this infrastructure may be more valuable than any single deliverable. Block and Bartkus would categorise relational outcomes of this kind as indirect partner value. The observation we want to flag for practitioners is one of scale rather than category: when a course immerses several teams simultaneously across a connected set of partners in one community, the resulting relational outcome is not a bilateral HEI–partner tie but a multi-node network across the community, and its practical consequences for future collaboration are correspondingly different.

The same logic appears in impact-investing work on Ukrainian post-industrial territories, where the relational and institutional scaffolding around a deal often matters more than the capital (Boychuk et al., 2021). It also appears in recent work on social intermediaries in necessity contexts, where the intermediary’s role is less to deliver any single intervention than to knit together communities that lack pre-existing bonds (Bacq et al., 2022). BOTFL in Rozdil functions as exactly that kind of intermediary. Durable recovery depends on the infrastructure that makes the next transaction possible, not only on the first.

4.3 Civic formation of executive decision-makers

The third mechanism is distinctive to BOTFL's cohort composition. Standard SL theory emphasises the civic formation of students as future citizens (Furco, 1996; Jacoby, 2015). BOTFL students were already mid-career executives making capital, hiring, and strategic decisions in their companies. Reshaping the moral imagination of a twenty-year-old is pedagogically valuable, but the multiplier is diffuse and long-delayed. Reshaping the moral imagination of a general manager, founder, or finance director is at least a candidate pathway to faster, more concentrated effects – though the hypothesis that such reshaping translates into observable downstream decisions is one our design enables but does not yet test.

The reflection structure – two individual essays framed around pre- and post-immersion stances, daily team reflection debriefs on positionality and ethical dilemmas, and explicit engagement with themes of the dignity of work and service as privilege – was designed to make this reframing explicit and discussable. The final reflection essays show evidence of reframing in a majority of the cohort, with particular density around the visit to the local orphanage, encounters with clergy, and interactions with workers at the industrial park and the brewery. Several rounds of verbal reflection across the cohort and staff supplemented the written essays.

The mechanism is consistent with frames in the social-enterprise literature that treat identity and meaning-making as constitutive of the enterprise form rather than decorative (Murphy et al., 2018; Murphy, Kornetsky, & Nixon, 2022). Applied to executive SL, the practical implication is that the pedagogical intervention and the territorial-recovery intervention are not separable: reshaping executive cognition is plausibly one of the ways the course contributes to recovery, because executive cognition is an input into recovery. We treat that as a hypothesis worth designing future evaluation around, not as a finding.

5. Implications and open questions

For Ukrainian HEIs, the first implication is that SL's community-recovery value is not uniform across formats. Intensive executive SL, of the kind BOTFL represents, produces a distinct category

of outputs – consulting-grade deliverables, durable trust infrastructure, reshaped executive cognition – that shorter formats are unlikely to replicate. This argues for a portfolio view of SL within an institution’s offer rather than a single dominant format. UCU’s trajectory from thirteen to forty-four SL courses usefully illustrates the point: the question now is not only how many SL courses the institution runs but which categories of community value they collectively cover.

For EU partners supporting Ukraine’s recovery through higher education – the ServU consortium being the immediate case – the implication is that pedagogical transfer of proven SL formats from European and North American institutions is feasible and can be high-value, provided the transfer is genuinely co-delivered rather than templated. The BOTFL Initiative representatives’ direct presence at weekly synchronisation and on the ground in Rozdil was not symbolic. They were the channel through which two decades of BOTFL practice entered UCU’s operational capability.

Maintaining intensive-format SL requires institutional support that lighter formats do not. The conditions are specific and not prohibitively expensive, but their absence is what typically causes executive SL pilots to fail to institutionalise: partner-facing MOU templates with operational scopes; grading structures that formally include partner evaluation; faculty workloads that accommodate a week of full-time community presence; and a working relationship with employers of executive students who must release them for that week. ServU sustainability planning should treat these as line items, not goodwill.

Three open questions remain, and we lead with the most consequential.

5.1 Scalability and funding

BOTFL 2025 ran with one instructor, thirteen students, three teams, and one community. A second cohort is planned to run across two different communities, which requires a second instructor, two big partnership negotiations, and two immersion logistics packages. The binding constraint is funding rather than methodology: faculty time, immersion logistics, and the cost of bringing co-teaching partners are real line items that should somehow be covered. Sustainability conversations within ServU and with prospective

philanthropic and corporate partners should treat this as the practical bottleneck. Without a financing model, the format is replicable in principle and unaffordable in practice.

5.2 Partner-side evaluation over time

We have treated partner absorption of deliverables as evidence of direct value, but we have not presented a systematic longitudinal evaluation methodology. Future iterations should build one, probably at eighteen- and thirty-six-month post-completion intervals, to test whether absorption translates into decisions and decisions into community-level outcomes. Block and Bartkus's (2019) framework offers a starting point; a wartime adaptation will need to account for partner organisations whose strategic decisions are themselves disrupted by the war, and for an evaluation timeline that may need to be longer than usual because effects are interrupted rather than absent.

5.3 Recovery-oriented and civic-participation-oriented SL within one portfolio

Recovery-oriented SL and conventional civic-participation-oriented SL are not the same intervention. They should not be evaluated against the same criteria, and the institutional support structures they need are not identical. Evaluation documents that were designed for the conventional cases should be adapted to assess intensive recovery-oriented formats fairly. That could be a near-term task for the institutions and ServU partners facing the same portfolio question.

6. Conclusion

Service-learning can function as an instrument of territorial recovery in wartime Ukraine, but only under specific conditions. BOTFL 2025 produced direct partner value through three distinguishable mechanisms: organisation-level deliverables absorbed by partners into strategic decisions; a community-level relational network across HEI, municipal authorities, local organisations, and civil society that outlasts the course and lowers the cost of the next collaboration; and individual-level reframing in executive decision-makers whose downstream effects are plausible

but not yet measured. None of these is automatic. Each rests on design choices – intensity, formalised partnership, executive cohort composition, genuine pedagogical co-delivery with the course’s foreign originators, and a financing model that treats faculty and immersion costs as real – that Ukrainian HEIs and their EU partners can reproduce, but only deliberately. The ServU consortium’s legacy will depend in part on how well these conditions are written into the sustainable SL infrastructure Ukrainian HEIs carry forward.

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PRINCIPLES OF BUILDING A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE OF DNIPRO UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY: LEGAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL DIMENSIONS

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Introduction

In the current conditions of a radical transformation of the higher education system in Ukraine, accompanied by the growing role of universities as drivers of social progress, the issue of building effective and sustainable interaction between higher education institutions (HEIs) and territorial communities is becoming particularly relevant. Decentralization processes, combined with the challenges of full-scale armed aggression and the critical need to restore regions, lead to a rethinking of the role of universities. They are increasingly becoming not only educational and scientific centers, but also active participants in local and regional development [1].

Traditionally, the educational and scientific activities of universities have a predominantly indirect impact on society, but the implementation of the concept of the “third mission” requires a transition to direct, practical interaction with society. In the context of overcoming the consequences of the war, this actualizes the expansion of applied aspects of HEI activities and the joining of efforts through strengthening partnership cooperation with local self-government bodies [5]. Despite the established practice of formalizing relations through memoranda, such interaction is often formal in nature and does not ensure the achievement of clear strategic results. This necessitates a scientific rethinking of approaches to the structure of partnerships and the identification

of fundamental principles that would guarantee their effectiveness, sustainability, and practical value for both parties.

The purpose of the study is to systematically substantiate the key principles of building effective partnerships between universities and territorial communities in the unity of legal and organizational dimensions, as well as to verify them based on practical experience.

Empirical basis and research methodology

The study is based on a thorough analysis of the development of the partner network of Dnipro University of Technology, which as of March 2025 unites 23 territorial communities of the Dnipropetrovsk region. The chronology of the concluded agreements illustrates a steady trend towards expanding cooperation: from the first projects with the Pidhorodnenskaya and Novooleksandrivskaya communities (November 2022) to the involvement of various types of municipal entities – from powerful urban centers to rural and settlement areas. Such a diversity of partners allowed us to confirm the universality of the developed approaches in various socio-economic and security conditions.

The process of forming interaction included the identification of potential partners, establishment of communication channels, negotiations and detailed elaboration of the regulatory framework. The author's direct participation in the coordination of these processes allowed to identify restraining factors (difference in expectations of the parties, intermittent communication) and develop mechanisms for their elimination. The experience gained confirms that the quantitative growth of the network should be accompanied by a qualitative update of the content of the partnership.

Legal context and regulatory basis

Substantiating the principles of building a partnership is important for the transition from a declarative to an effective model of cooperation. The defined principles serve as the basis for strategic planning and monitoring of joint initiatives, ensuring the coordination of interests and the formation of a high level of trust between organizations.

In the dimension of state policy, this issue corresponds to the guidelines of the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Ukraine for 2022–2032, where one of the goals is the

active participation of HEIs in socio-economic development [2]. At the same time, an analysis of the Laws of Ukraine “On Higher Education” and “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine” shows that these acts do not contain clear rules regarding models and principles of partnership interaction [3, 4]. Thus, the legislative recognition of the possibility of cooperation needs to be supplemented with specific mechanisms and scientifically based principles at the level of individual institutions and communities.

System of key principles for building effective partnerships

Based on the practical experience of Dnipro University of Technology, it is proposed to single out the following principles:

1. The principle of value trust and transparency. It is the basic foundation formed through openness of intentions, consistency of actions and clear fulfillment of commitments. Trust reduces organizational costs, while its absence levels the potential of even legally impeccable relationships.
2. The principle of systemic dialogue and feedback. It involves creating conditions for constant communication, which allows for timely correction of joint projects. Ignoring this principle leads to the risk of creating unnecessary products (for example, complex digital services without taking into account the needs and capabilities of the population), which entails ineffective planning and waste of resources.
3. The principle of joint planning and consistency of goals. It consists in the transition to an equal partnership, where the needs of the territories are combined with the intellectual potential of the HEI at the stage of developing ideas. The lack of a single strategic vision leads to the creation of “cabinet” projects that cannot be implemented, including due to a lack of resources in communities.
4. The principle of mutual benefit (Win-Win). Defines partnership as a strategic exchange: the community receives scientifically sound solutions to its problems, and the university – practical verification of developments in real conditions and strengthening its social role.
5. The principle of institutional sustainability and long-term sustainability. Aimed at transforming individual activities into permanent interaction through the creation of joint structures (councils, development offices). This allows us to preserve the

experience of cooperation and ensure the continuity of processes, including when changing leadership.

6. The principle of knowledge and technology transfer. It consists in introducing innovative developments into the activities of local government and business. This contributes to the economic development of territories and the introduction of modern management models (data-driven decisions).

7. The principle of adaptive innovation. It assumes the partnership's ability to flexibly respond to various challenges (from military threats to digitalization) through the use of the "Living Labs" format, where the community becomes a platform for testing the latest technologies.

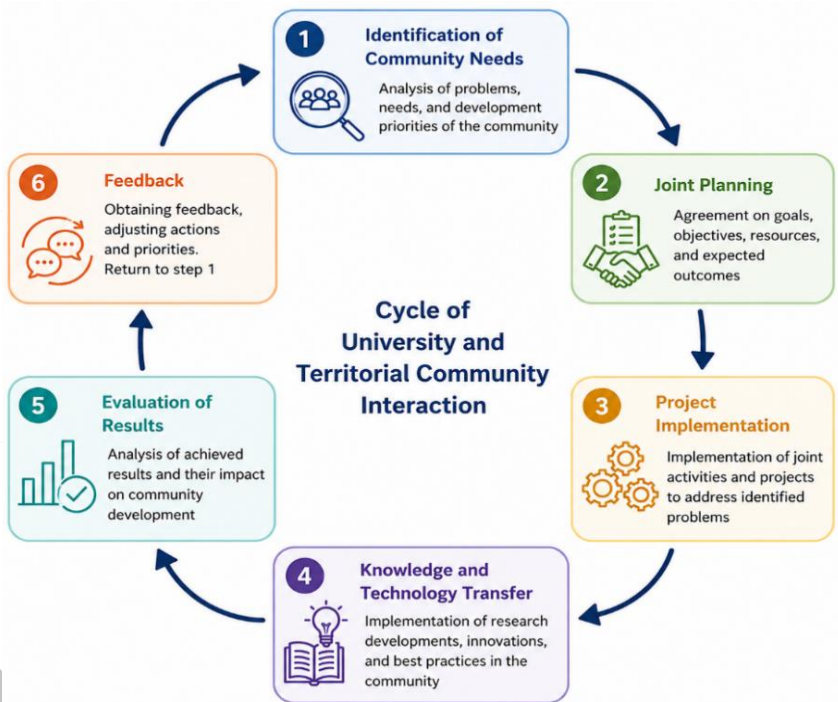


Fig. 1. Cycle of University and Territorial Community Interaction

These examples illustrate the implementation of the “third mission” of the university, where scientists become active participants in the restoration and modernization of territories.

Conclusions

The study proves that successful interaction between HEIs and communities is based on a combination of legal instruments and organizational flexibility. The implementation of systemic principles of partnership allows to overcome formal barriers and combine academic potential with practical needs of regions. This creates a reliable basis for transforming universities into key participants in regional development, capable of ensuring sustainable progress of the country in the conditions of recovery.

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FROM CLASSROOM TO POLICY: INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AT UCU AS AN ACTOR OF MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT IN UKRAINE

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Keywords: mental health; policy; recovery; collaboration in mental health; capacity building.

Abstract

The Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has generated one of the most acute mental health emergencies in modern European history. Against a backdrop of systemic underfunding, inherited Soviet-era institutional structures, and deep public mistrust of mental health services, the Institute of Mental Health at Ukrainian Catholic University (IMH UCU) has developed a service-learning model that integrates postgraduate training, civic partnership, and direct policy participation at the national and local levels. This article examines the model across four dimensions: the structural and historical context that makes it necessary; the institutional methodology that distinguishes it; the evidence base that demonstrates its impact; and the implications it holds for education, mental health policy, and post-war recovery in Ukraine.

Context and Problem Framing

The Revolution of Dignity and the outbreak of war in 2014 set in motion far-reaching reforms to health-care funding that gradually reshaped the mental health sector, ultimately leading to the adoption of the Mental Health Care Concept Note 2018–30 in 2017 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2017). In 2020 the WHO itself designated Ukraine a Special Initiative for Mental Health, even before the full-scale invasion, acknowledging the scale of unmet need (World Health Organization, 2020). Since the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, the country has faced a convergence of trauma exposures – combat, displacement, bereavement, torture, and chronic existential uncertainty – affecting

every segment of the population. Ukraine's Ministry of Health estimates that approximately 50 percent of the national population will require some form of psychological support in the coming years (Ukrinform, 2023). In 2023, the World Health Organization estimated that around 9.6 million people in Ukraine were at risk of or living with a mental health condition, and 3.9 million people were estimated to suffer from moderate to severe symptoms (World Health Organization, 2023). Now Ukraine is living through a public mental health emergency of historical proportions.

The system that must respond to this crisis is structurally fragile yet transforming in many sectors. The Ukrainian mental health system, shaped by institutional logic, has historically centered on large inpatient psychiatric hospitals and social care homes (internats) operating in isolation from primary care and community services (Suvalo & Borovets, 2024). This architecture carried twin deficits: it was clinically inadequate for treating the range of war-related conditions – post-traumatic stress, grief, addiction, moral injury, traumatic brain injury – and it was culturally toxic, given the Soviet state's well-documented weaponisation of psychiatry against dissidents. Trust in mental health institutions and services remains low. Help-seeking behaviour is inhibited by stigma that is not merely cultural but historically determined (Suvalo & Borovets, 2024). Meanwhile, Ukraine faces an acute workforce shortage. Decades of underinvestment in professional training, accelerated by wartime emigration and casualty, have left the country with far fewer psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, and social workers than its population requires. The WHO estimates that the consequences of the current conflict for mental health will persist for at least ten years, meaning any adequate response must be systemic – not a temporary emergency measure but a rebuilt infrastructure for care (World Health Organization, 2020). This is the problem into which the Institute of Mental Health intervened in 2017, drafting the Concept Note on Mental Health Care in Ukraine until 2030, approved by the government in December 2017 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2017). Situated within Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv – an institution founded on the principle that education exists in service of society, not merely in service of individual career outcomes – since its founding, IMH UCU has understood that training clinical specialists is necessary but not

sufficient. Ukraine does not only need more psychologists; it needs a transformed relationship between professional knowledge, community life, and governance. Achieving that transformation requires institutions capable of inhabiting the boundary between academy and society, between research and practice, between education and policy.

Approach and Methodology

IMH UCU's approach can be characterised as service learning with embedded policy participation – a model that differs from both conventional professional training and from pure research advocacy. Its defining feature is the refusal to treat these domains as sequential: first train students, then deploy them, then perhaps influence policy. Instead, the model treats education, community service, and policy formation as simultaneous and mutually constitutive processes.

The pedagogical foundation is service learning, embedded formally in UCU's institutional strategy. Students in psychology, social work, and occupational therapy undertake supervised community placements in hospitals, veterans' support centres, schools, and civil society organisations, with field experience integrated into academic assessment and curriculum development. The community is not a site for applying pre-formed knowledge but a source of knowledge in its own right.

The institutional model extends this logic upward into governance. IMH UCU does not merely train practitioners for a system that others design; its faculty participate directly in designing the system. The draft of the Mental Health Concept Note in Ukraine for the period until 2030, which the government approved in December 2017, was developed by the Institute's team (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2017). Dr. Oleh Romanchuk, the Institute's Director, and Dr. Orest Suvalo, its Executive Director and the manager of the Ukrainian-Swiss project "Mental Health for Ukraine", are among the named expert contributors to the national "MHPSS Target Model 2.0" – the comprehensive blueprint for restructuring Ukraine's mental health and psychosocial support system, developed under First Lady Olena Zelenska's All-Ukrainian Mental Health initiative with WHO partnership (Coordination Center for Mental Health, 2023). Policy expertise and training work are

concentrated in IMH UCU, with increasing vision and steps towards research capacity development.

The methodology also encompasses capacity-building beyond UCU's own enrolled students. Recognising that the solution to a workforce shortage cannot come only from new graduates, IMH UCU delivers continuing education to practitioners already working in the system – teachers, primary care physicians, psychologists, and psychotherapists – in trauma-informed practice and cognitive behavioural therapy (in cooperation with the Ukrainian Institute of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), and psychosocial support frameworks. The EU-PROMENS programme, financed through EU4Health, provides one multilateral vehicle for this, delivering training workshops across 27 EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland, and Ukraine; sessions were provided by IMH UCU in Uzhhorod, Lutsk, and Lviv in 2026 (EU-PROMENS, 2026).

A further methodological strand targets the pastoral workforce. IMH UCU is currently training priests in the fundamentals of psychology – a significant step for a Catholic university and a recognition that clergy often reach populations that resist engagement with formal clinical services. By extending mental health literacy into the pastoral domain, IMH UCU effectively multiplies the reach of psychologically informed support into communities where institutional trust is lowest. Underpinning all these methodological streams is an institutional logic of coalition-building. In 2023, UCU initiated the Alliance of Ukrainian Universities – a consortium of six higher education institutions collaborating on post-war reconstruction projects (UCU Strategy, 2024). IMH UCU's mental health expertise anchors the Alliance's work on community wellbeing and social recovery, creating a platform for multi-site research, shared curriculum development, and coordinated policy advocacy that no single university could sustain alone. UCU is also among five higher education institutions that have created a consortium within the framework of First Lady Olena Zelenska's All-Ukrainian Mental Health initiative "How Are You?" to build a scientific cluster on mental health.

Analysis and Reflective Evidence

The most concrete demonstration of the model's effectiveness is the Lviv Regional Complex Programme on Mental Health and

Psychosocial Support of the Population for 2023–2026, presented at UCU in September 2023. This programme was developed by a working group convened under the Lviv Regional Military Administration, with UCU as a primary institutional partner alongside the DiahnomeD charitable foundation, the Ukrainian-Swiss “Mental Health for Ukraine” project, the “Family Circle” Mental Health Center, and the civic organisation “Bird of Ukraine” (Ukrainian Catholic University, 2023; UCU Foundation, 2023).

The programme is significant on several counts. First, it is a government programme, not a university initiative: it is formally coordinated by the Lviv Regional State Administration through its departments of healthcare, education, and social protection. UCU’s role is to provide the educational and research infrastructure that makes programme delivery possible – training professionals, supervising practitioners, generating evidence, and maintaining intellectual rigour. This positioning, as structural partner rather than service provider or external advisor, represents a mature and arguably more durable form of policy engagement than lobbying or publication alone.

Second, the programme directly integrates the service-learning logic into its design. Its three priority areas – public education and awareness, healthcare capacity-building, and development of a networked social services system – all require trained practitioners embedded in communities, which is precisely what IMH UCU graduate programmes produce. Third, the programme operationalises the national policy framework at the regional level. It is explicitly designed as a continuation of the All-Ukrainian Mental Health Programme ‘How Are You?’ – the initiative launched by First Lady Olena Zelenska in May 2022, coordinated by the Cabinet of Ministers’ Coordination Center for Mental Health with WHO support (President of Ukraine, 2025). IMH UCU experts, having contributed to the national Target Model 2.0 that underpins ‘How Are You?’ (Coordination Center for Mental Health, 2023), then participated in translating that model into a specific regional programme.

Reflective evidence from programme participants and university leadership corroborates this analysis. The feedback loop between education and policy is closed rather than aspirational: the programme creates the institutional context in which UCU

students could undertake placements, simultaneously contribute to programme delivery.

Implications for Education, Policy, and Recovery

For higher education, IMH UCU's model poses a direct challenge to the conventional demarcation between academic formation and social engagement. The dominant model of professional education – in which universities produce graduates whom society then deploys – presupposes a functional ecosystem of institutions, employers, and policy frameworks into which graduates can slot. In Ukraine, that ecosystem is in active reconstruction. IMH UCU's response is to make the reconstruction of the ecosystem itself a pedagogical object: students learn by participating in system-building, not by preparing for a finished system to receive them. This is educationally demanding – it requires faculty who are simultaneously researchers, practitioners, and policy actors – but it is arguably the only viable model in a context where the system does not yet fully exist.

The implication for curriculum design is significant. Mental health training in Ukraine cannot be abstracted from the political economy of the health system, the cultural history of institutional distrust, the demographic realities of IDP communities, or the governance structures that will fund and regulate care. IMH UCU has responded to this by integrating policy literacy, community partnership, and evidence synthesis into core training, alongside clinical skills. The result is graduates who understand not only how to provide therapy but how to advocate for the conditions under which interventions are possible.

For policy, the model demonstrates that universities can function as genuine co-designers of governance rather than as post-hoc consultants. The national MHPSS Target Model and the Lviv Regional Programme (Coordination Center for Mental Health, 2023; Ukrainian Catholic University, 2023) were not academic outputs subsequently adopted by government; they were produced through working groups in which UCU experts participated alongside ministerial officials, international organisations, and civil society from the outset.

For post-war recovery, the deepest implication may be cultural. Ukraine's mental health crisis is not only a clinical problem or

a workforce problem; it is a trust problem. A population that has experienced state institutions as dangerous, professionals as unavailable, and psychological distress as shameful does not become a help-seeking population simply because new services are created. The cultural work of normalising care – reducing stigma, building trust in practitioners, creating environments where veterans, displaced persons, and traumatised people feel safe enough to seek help – requires sustained presence in communities over time. IMH UCU’s service-learning model builds exactly this presence, through students and practitioners who are embedded in specific communities long enough to be known rather than merely encountered. First Lady Zelenska’s articulation of the “How Are You?” programme’s goal – to make mental health support accessible, friendly, and free (President of Ukraine, 2025) – points to precisely this cultural ambition. UCU IMH’s contribution is to provide the professional human capital and the community trust infrastructure without which accessibility, friendliness, and affordability remain aspirations rather than realities. In this sense, the Institute’s work is not only a service to Ukrainian society but a structural precondition for the policy ambitions that Ukrainian society has set for itself.

The model also holds broader comparative relevance. Post-conflict and transitional settings across the world face analogous challenges: acute mental health need, degraded or distrusted institutions, workforce shortages, and the urgency of building systems that did not previously exist (Suvalo & Borovets, 2024). IMH UCU demonstrated capacity to link service learning, community partnership, and policy co-design within a single institutional framework offers a transferable template – not one that can be replicated without modification, since its coherence depends on UCU’s specific civic mission and cultural positioning, but one whose logic is exportable: the insight that in contexts of system reconstruction, the university must learn and govern at the same time as it teaches.

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UNIVERSITY-CULTURAL INSTITUTION COLLABORATION IN SMALL COMMUNITIES: WORKING WITH CULTURAL MEMORY THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING

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Keywords: service-learning; cultural memory; cultural institutions; museum; university-community partnership; war; recovery; participation; youth.

Context and Problem Formulation

The University's 'Third Mission' During Wartime

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has triggered a crisis of social institutions, confronting universities with a fundamental question: how can they be of service to society not only after a crisis has passed, but during it? The university's 'third mission' – service to society – ceases to be a declarative aspiration and becomes a real, urgently demanded function. It serves as an instrument for supporting societal resilience and for participation in the country's recovery processes.

The response to this challenge is embedded in the institutional vision of the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU). According to UCU's Strategy 2030, the university's mission extends beyond the campus, centred on the idea of 'A University That Serves.' This logic underpins the international project ServU ('Service-Learning in Higher Education for Ukraine's Recovery', Erasmus+ CBHE), within which the 'Communities of Memory' course was developed. The ServU project aims to integrate the methodology of community-engaged learning into Ukrainian universities, thereby strengthening their capacity to support communities in times of crisis.

Symbolic Transformations and Cultural Deficits in Rear-Area Communities

At the same time, local communities across Ukraine are experiencing significant demographic and social changes. War disrupts intergenerational bonds, dismantles established narratives, and

generates new experiences that require sense-making. Rear-area communities are not located in active combat zones, yet they function in a state of 'deferred trauma,' prolonged uncertainty, and the need to integrate newly arrived residents.

The Kozova Territorial Community of Ternopil Oblast became the partner community for the 'Communities of Memory' course. According to the ServU (2024) report on community needs research, the Kozova community has hosted more than 1,300 internally displaced persons (IDPs) since the beginning of the war. These changes pose a challenge to social cohesion and call for a new articulation of local community identity.

Against this backdrop, the central research question emerges: can university education function not merely as an instrument for the transmission of knowledge, but as an effective partner in processes of community cultural recovery through collaborative work with memory? This article analyses the 'Communities of Memory' course as a case of such interaction, examining it as a form of pedagogical and cultural intervention that organically combines academic reflection with the practice of social action.

Research Methodology

The article is grounded in a qualitative case study that combines elements of pedagogical action research with field-based reflexive analysis. The choice of the case study method is motivated by the nature of the research object: a singular yet conceptually rich instance that allows for an in-depth analysis of the mechanisms of university–community interaction, the generation of theoretical insights, and the formulation of hypotheses for subsequent comparative research.

The empirical base comprises four sources: (1) the results of the final evaluation report of the 'Communities of Memory' course (11 December 2025, response rate 80 %); (2) written and audio reflections of students collected throughout all phases of the course; (3) instructor field observations; and (4) feedback from community partners – representatives of cultural institutions (NGO 'Kozova.zamok', Centre for Culture and Leisure) and local self-government.

The study acknowledges several limitations. First, the single-case design limits the possibility of direct generalisation. Second, the

author's dual role as instructor and researcher creates a risk of interpretive bias, which is partially mitigated by the inclusion of external data sources (partner feedback, formalised evaluation). Third, student reflective texts may contain elements of social desirability – a typical challenge in service-learning research.

Theoretical Framework and Course Architecture

Community-engaged learning (service-learning, SL) is defined as a structured educational experience in which students participate in organised activities that meet identified community needs, and engage in deep reflection to enhance their understanding of course material and to strengthen civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). The fundamental distinction of SL from traditional academic practice lies in the principle of reciprocity: the university and the community do not stand in a relationship of 'expert to beneficiary,' but enter into an equal dialogue in which local knowledge is recognised as equivalent to academic knowledge.

In accordance with Andrew Furco's typology, the course operates on a model of balanced partnership, wherein academic knowledge and community needs carry equal weight. In contrast to 'extractive' methods of data collection from communities, the community here acts as an active participant. The philosophy of such interaction draws on John Dewey's theory of experiential learning, which holds that knowledge is formed at the intersection of theory and practice. The course was structured around David Kolb's experiential learning cycle: students lived through concrete practical experience, reflected upon it, and only thereafter conceptualised it in the form of new cultural products.

The theoretical framework of memory studies provides the scholarly foundation for practical action. Students employed Maurice Halbwachs's concepts of collective memory and Pierre Nora's 'lieux de mémoire', viewing Kozova's memorial landscapes not as static objects but as dynamic elements of identity. In the context of war, Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' becomes critically important for understanding the mechanisms through which trauma is transmitted from previous generations to the present-day youth of the community. Avishai Margalit's 'Ethics of Memory' is central to answering the question of how we remember within communities, and whether memory can constitute

an obligation. It was this philosopher's work that gave the course its name. The aim of the community-engaged project was not merely to assist in preserving the past, but in working through it – in collaboratively searching for a new language with which to address complex experience, an endeavour essential to societal resilience.

The course is structured in five phases that combine theory with social action. The first, motivational phase helps students overcome internal biases and build a productive group dynamic. An exercise in mapping the memory landscape of one's own city allows students to become conscious of their positionality before working in another community's space. Hearing stories of Donetsk, Hurzuf, Dnipro, Chornomorsk, Kostiantynivka, and Lviv – and creating space for varied experiences – proved valuable. This ethical preparation provides the foundation for the second, diagnostic phase. The methodological importance of this stage is confirmed by the ServU (2024) data, which identified a need for youth cultural spaces and cultural education (Priority No. 3). Accordingly, the course set the goal of making memory more accessible through contemporary formats of public history.

The planning phase introduced students to oral history and visual storytelling techniques, enabling the transition to the intensive implementation phase. This phase included three field visits, in which each stage – from introduction to public presentation – was accompanied by iterative feedback and reflection. Students did not simply 'arrive with ready-made solutions,' but developed products (such as the historical game 'Mafia' and community quests) in dialogue with the community. In this scheme, the community functioned as an equal co-author, validating the accuracy and appropriateness of representations of its own heritage.

The inner scaffolding of this structure is a cycle of structured reflection embedded within each phase. Reflection not only consolidates learning but also guards against the instrumentalisation of community experience. It enables the conversion of the emotional and professional stress of fieldwork into a considered civic disposition. The final multiplication phase ensures the durability of outcomes: the tools created are transferred to the cultural institutions of the partner community, and such partnerships sustain the project beyond the conclusion of the semester.

Empirical Analysis of Outcomes: Educational and Social Dimensions

The evaluation was conducted through an anonymous online questionnaire administered immediately after the course concluded. The response rate was 8 out of 10 students. The questionnaire comprised nine closed Likert-scale items (scored 1-5) and two open-ended reflective questions. This evaluation approach allows for the assessment of the service-learning methodology as an effective instrument not only of social action, but of a profound anthropological transformation of young researchers in cultural studies. The analysis demonstrates that the educational process extended beyond the conventional acquisition of knowledge and became an experience of developing professional and civic agency. The central indicator here is overall student motivation ($M = 4.00$), which exhibited the U-shaped curve characteristic of intensive SL projects. An initial period marked by academic idealism and expectations of rapid results was followed, as expected, by a phase of temporary crisis during active immersion in fieldwork. This phase was defined not only by logistical strain but by the emotional exhaustion arising from direct engagement with complex, and frequently traumatic, community narratives. During the final phase, however – the public presentation of results in Kozova – motivation levels reached their peak. This dynamic is best understood through the lens of Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory: the key drivers were the sense of personal competence derived from producing a viable cultural product and a profound feeling of belonging to a community, which transformed an external academic obligation into an internal value commitment.

“On the eve of one of our planned visits to the community, a major missile strike took place. We spent the night in a shelter. The following morning we were still uncertain whether to go, but we decided to proceed. We had made a commitment to the community, and they were expecting us.”

– Sofia Lazorko, course teaching assistant, at the international ServU seminar in Leuven

A notable finding is that all respondents without exception (100 %) reported significant progress in those competencies they had identified as deficient at the beginning of the semester. The highest-rated item was the development of ethical dialogue

(M = 4.63), indicating the overcoming of research-centred self-involvement. Student reflections highlight the complexity of this process: the recognition that a community is simultaneously invested in and biased towards its researchers prompted students to seek subtle 'points of contact.' Working with memory under such conditions required the ability to 'listen and catch what is said between the lines,' to distinguish durable strata of identity from silenced zones of estrangement. Interaction with local youth proved challenging, with the primary goal being to 'break the ice' while avoiding intrusiveness and maintaining an ethics of presence.

"My image of the community has changed – though I cannot say in which direction. It turned out to be nothing like I had imagined. The community is simultaneously interested in us and guarded. Memory, too, is complex material, so individual that each case requires a careful approach, a search for points of contact. Community memory is, on one hand, something enduring – something on which identity is built – and on the other, still not fully comprehensible to me. Working with young people is difficult, because (as it seems to me) they often perceive you as a threat, since you are an outsider. The main thing is to break the ice and avoid being intrusive or overly persistent."

– *Kateryna Voitovych, course student, written reflection*

The indicator for the growth of civic responsibility (M = 4.38) correlates with a somewhat lower, yet symptomatic, index for the change in students' perception of small towns (M = 3.75). The statistical dispersion of this parameter suggests that for some students, the Kozova experience constituted a radical discovery of the subjectivity of the Ukrainian province. In practice, the stereotype of the small community as mere 'backdrop' for a larger history was overcome. Instead, the community emerged as a centre of multilayered cultural dynamics. This awareness of peripheral agency is critically important for forming a new generation of recovery professionals capable of viewing communities as equal partners rather than passive recipients of assistance.

In the evaluation report, the highest score was awarded to the block on creating final products (M = 4.75), which exemplified effective public history. Students successfully addressed the community's 'symbolic deficit' through innovative formats. The first area was the gamification of memory – developing a historical quest and the game 'Historical

Mafia: Kozova.’ The application of game mechanics legitimised the discussion of difficult topics – the Holocaust, deportations, war – in a youth context, reducing psychological resistance through the safe space of play. This approach received a strongly positive reception from local intellectuals; Volodymyr Yarema, founder of the Kozova Brewery, noted that these formats ‘bring people and histories to life’ – histories that typically remain on the margins of official chronicles, including the stories of ordinary grandmothers and grandfathers whose lives in the twentieth century were equally extraordinary. The second and third areas of work – a pop-up exhibition, memory mapping, film screening and discussion, and a digital Instagram diary – ensured the visual visibility of local heritage for diverse audiences, from visitors to the ‘Kozova.zamok’ space and the Centre for Culture and Leisure, to the community’s digital sphere.

“The course gave me the opportunity to rethink many things that might have seemed ordinary or banal. It was fascinating to observe our progress, our work, and our ideas. Collaborative work is what gave life to our projects.”

– *Anonymous course evaluation*

The success of service-learning depends on the durability of its outcomes. Marichka Yurchak of the cultural institution Kozova.zamok shared: We are currently in the process of restoring and revitalising the castle and will in time become a fully-fledged cultural hub. But the soft formats (the quest and mafia game) can work right now, and we will certainly continue using them. Such feedback confirms that the materials co-created by students and community youth have become a viable format that local youth can continue to develop and implement. Furthermore, the university presence generated indirect social effects: the director of the Centre for Culture and Leisure, Svitlana Andrushkiv, noted that local youth – inspired by the engaged students – took the initiative to establish a Youth Council at the community cultural centre. This demonstrates that the university in the community functions as a mirror, helping the local community to see its own potential and latent resources.

Implications for Education and Recovery

The experience of creating and implementing the ‘Communities of Memory’ course permits the formulation of several strategic

conclusions relevant not only to the local context, but to the broader development of higher education and state recovery policy in Ukraine. This case confirms that community-engaged learning is not merely a pedagogical innovation, but the optimal framework for humanities education under conditions of systemic crisis.

First, the application of service-learning in the context of an ongoing war requires an expansion of the methodological base. Classical SL models – such as those advanced by Bringle and Hatcher or Furco – were developed for the relatively stable societies of Western democracy, in which social challenges are largely predictable. The Ukrainian reality generates a need for additional pedagogical tools: skills for working ethically with grief and trauma directly in the field; high flexibility of formats under conditions of constant uncertainty (for example, conducting events between air-raid alerts); and the researcher's capacity to 'hold a space of presence' alongside another's pain without discontinuing academic work. This new 'pedagogy of the fragile world' constitutes a distinctive Ukrainian contribution to the international debate on the role of universities.

Second, the project confirms that cultural memory, as the subject of community-engaged learning, holds unprecedented potential for community recovery. Unlike infrastructural or economic projects, working with memory addresses questions of identity. It offers the community an answer to the existential question: 'Who are we?' Challenges naturally remain – the ethics of memory and a trauma-sensitive approach – but this approach to a course on cultural memory enables the diagnosis and navigation of those very challenges.

Practice demonstrates that humanities courses can have a measurable societal impact: the collaborative creation of quests, games, and memory maps enables the overcoming of alienation, the integration of marginalised groups (including thousands of IDPs) into a local context, and the formation of an inclusive local identity. Furthermore, the collaboration of universities with cultural institutions in small towns dismantles the postcolonial 'centre-periphery' hierarchy. The Kozova community demonstrated itself not as a passive recipient of cultural services or an object of research, but as an equal co-creator of innovative educational products.

Third, the sustainability of outcomes is directly dependent on the duration of the partnership. Partners from Kozova clearly identified a systemic challenge: the pace of a single academic semester is too fast for the organic processes of community life. For state educational policy, this implies the need for institutional support of multi-year, strategic university–community partnerships, rather than merely the stimulation of one-off courses or short-term grant initiatives. Only the long trajectory allows for the sustainability of the products created and a deep level of trust.

The project also refuted the widespread academic prejudice that social engagement diminishes the theoretical quality of learning. On the contrary, engaging students in the resolution of real community problems enhances academic quality through practical impact. In conditions of war, education must prepare young people to make decisions under total uncertainty. Service-learning cultivates critical reflection and tolerance for ambivalence.

The case of the 'Communities of Memory' course demonstrates that community-engaged learning is not merely a pedagogical innovation, but the optimal framework for humanities education under conditions of systemic crisis. The course fulfilled a dual mission: an educational one – developing measurable, evaluation-confirmed competencies in students; and a social one – leaving the community with durable instruments for working with its own memory and for engaging youth.

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PROACTIVE UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AS A DRIVER OF RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Context and problem framing

The shocking events under which universities in Ukraine have been forced to exist over the past six years have highlighted the need for them to establish themselves as key players in the national resilience system, contributing to the “maintenance of security and the continuity of operations in the key spheres of society and the state before, during and after a crisis” (President of Ukraine, 2021). This extremely complex task necessitates particular attention to ensuring the university’s own institutional resilience.

Confronting numerous challenges and hybrid threats (Karpenko, 2024; Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, 2023; Giannopoulos, Smith & Theocharidou, 2021; Erasmus+ project WARN, 2024; Jungwirth et al, 2023), within which higher education institutions in Ukraine function and develop, along with an understanding of the importance of proactive subjectivity in the national resilience system (President of Ukraine, 2021, 27 Sept.) and the implementation of international and cross-sectoral partnership projects contribute to the creation of a new dimension of organisational culture in modern universities – a culture of resilience – complementing the dimensions of quality and integrity (Aziukovskyi, Pavlychenko & Mamatova, 2025).

The war has exacerbated the vulnerability of local communities: infrastructure damage, energy shortages, demographic challenges, the influx of internally displaced persons, and the integration and support of veterans, as well as the need for further sustainable development and the implementation of circular

economy principles. At the same time, communities need not only humanitarian aid, but also the systematic transfer of knowledge, innovative solutions and jointly developed initiatives for recovery. Universities play a leading role in these processes.

The Development Strategy 2026–2030 emphasises that Dnipro University of Technology is growing as a university of applied sciences and, at the same time, is strengthening its development trajectory, which is focused on strengthening partnerships with businesses and communities (Dnipro University of Technology, 2026). This includes: recognising the university's third mission; implementing local and regional development projects in collaboration with business partners and local communities in the region; and developing a system of service-learning. The University is actively pursuing a strategic portfolio of programmes and projects in priority policy areas aimed at ensuring resilience, particularly in the domains of systematic quality management, the creation of an inclusive and accessible environment to engage a broad range of stakeholders, risk management, and the development of partnerships (education/research – business – governance – community) with the aim of ensuring security, energy and financial autonomy (Aziukovskyi, Pavlychenko & Mamatova, 2025; Dnipro University of Technology, 2026).

In this context, a preliminary analysis and reflection are proposed regarding the case of the Dnipro University of Technology on the development of a proactive university–community partnership as a driver of resilience and sustainable development.

Approach/methodology

The study employs a qualitative single-case study design (Baškarada, 2014) with elements of reflective practitioner inquiry (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). The primary unit of analysis is the institutional transformation and partnership practices of Dnipro University of Technology during 2022–2026.

The analytical framework integrates:

- concepts of the third mission and service-learning as mechanisms for co-creating knowledge and solutions with communities (Compagnucci, & Spigarelli Spânu, Ulmeanu, & Doicin, 2024; Coelho, & Menezes Resch, 2018; Petersen, Kruss, & van Rheede, 2022);

- organizational resilience principles and attributes set out in international standard ISO 22316:2017 (The International Organization for Standardization, 2017) and guidelines for resilience policy provided in the international standard ISO 22336:2024 (The International Organization for Standardization, 2024);
- the International Consortium for Organizational Resilience (ICOR) corresponding set of framework models (Resilience Frameworks) (The International Consortium for Organizational Resilience, n.d.a), in particular the “Organizational Resilience Model” (The International Consortium for Organizational Resilience, n.d.b).

Data sources include: strategic university documents, internal project reporting documentation, and materials relating to the implementation of initiatives aimed at proactively building partnerships with local communities, local businesses and civil society organisations; reflective evidence from the author’s and colleagues’ participation in international projects) and local initiatives developed jointly with territorial communities, businesses, and veteran organizations; secondary sources, including academic publications on hybrid threats, national resilience frameworks, and, organizational resilience.

Methodology of reflection combines systematic analysis of the case with critical self-reflection on the process of initiating and implementing partnership projects. Particular attention is paid to how international project experience (methodological rigor, stakeholder engagement, monitoring) was adapted to local community needs in the conditions of war and uncertainty. This approach allows not only to describe practices but also to reveal mechanisms of proactive partnership formation and their contribution to resilience.

Analysis or reflective evidence

The ability of social and socio-technical systems (countries, communities, organisations, teams, individuals) to absorb disruptive influences whilst maintaining their core functions and structure is defined as resilience. Ensuring resilience involves consciously managing the system’s adaptation process with the aim of preserving certain qualities and allowing others to fade away, whilst maintaining the essence (or “identity”) of the system (Mamatova & Borysenko, 2023).

The basic requirements, principles and guidelines for ensuring organisational/institutional resilience are specified in the international standard ISO 22316:2017 (The International Organization for Standardization, 2017). Based on these guidelines, the International Consortium for Organizational Resilience (ICOR) has developed a corresponding set of framework models (Resilience Frameworks) (The International Consortium for Organizational Resilience, n.d.-a), in particular the “Organizational Resilience Model” (The International Consortium for Organizational Resilience, n.d.-b). The combined use of ISO 22316:2017 and ICOR guidelines, along with the ISO 22336:2024 approach (The International Organization for Standardization, 2024) for the elaboration of resilience policies and strategies enabled the authors to propose a draft conceptual model for ensuring the resilience of Dnipro University of Technology as a systematic representation of a complex of interrelated components. The model represents a combination of preparedness, agility, and robustness, emphasising the ability to adapt and maintain core functions in the face of extraordinary challenges. It also highlights the importance of ensuring the resilience of individuals (students, academic and administrative staff, and other categories of personnel), leaders and teams operating within the university, as well as the flexibility of processes and strong social networks.

The institutional resilience of the university is underpinned by a system of shared corporate values and principles, as well as a clearly defined strategic vision and development priorities. The next steps relate to the university’s growing maturity as measured by the ‘enabling behaviours’ of a resilient organisation according to ISO 22336:2024 (The International Organization for Standardization, 2024), namely: adaptability; inclusivity; integration; accountability; preparedness; reliability; and innovation.

In this context, we emphasise that the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines resilience as “the ability to adapt to a changing environment” (The International Organization for Standardization, 2017), with a focus on the ability not only to survive but also to prosper. The realisation of such a development trajectory does not seem possible without considering the mutual influences of the university’s institutional resilience and the resilience of the local communities (Borysenko & Borysenko, 2025).

As noted in the context of the study, the Dnipro University of Technology transformation demonstrates that proactive partnership is not a supplementary activity but a strategic lever for building resilience at multiple levels.

Firstly, the university has placed greater emphasis on its third mission by shifting from reactive measures (such as voluntary initiatives and humanitarian aid) towards the systematic joint development of projects with local communities and businesses. For the past three years, the Scientific and Practical Conference 'International Forum: A Safe, Comfortable and Capable Local Community' has been held in October – an open platform for bringing together the efforts of public authorities, academia and business to rebuild communities. Over 30 agreements have been signed with local communities in the region, local government associations, and think tanks with expertise in local and regional development. In particular, in 2025, memoranda of cooperation were signed with the Dnipro City Council and the “Dnipro Development Agency”, as well as with the Dnipropetrovsk regional branch of the All-Ukrainian Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities.

Collaboration with communities, representatives of local self-government bodies, and state administration also takes place within the framework of several projects, including:

- the nationwide project “Strengthening Communities’ Capacity for Reconstruction by Piloting Their Collaboration with Universities,” supported by the International Renaissance Foundation. This project was an initiative to bring together academic circles and community leaders to bolster local recovery plans with the robust expertise of Ukrainian universities. Thanks to specialized training programs developed by university experts, communities were able to prepare and submit their own projects for international funding, aimed at addressing local sustainability challenges;
- collaboration with ALTEK in 2024 to establish an innovative authorized renewable energy laboratory at the university opened up a new avenue for engagement with communities;
- founding of one of 12 European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) in Ukraine. Created under the “Digital Europe” project, the Central Ukrainian EDIH focuses on innovation, energy efficiency, and digital transformation to develop sustainable and industrial regions in central Ukraine.

Second, the development of service-learning involves incorporating real-world challenges faced by the local community into educational programs. Short-term micro-certificate programs and training courses for internally displaced persons, veterans, and young local professionals focus on entrepreneurship, digital skills, and competencies relevant to recovery in line with the principles of “Industry 5.0”. Students and educators participate in learning formats that combine theory with practice, where academic knowledge is applied to solve specific local problems – from energy audits to inclusive infrastructure design.

The university’s capacity has been significantly strengthened through its participation in the ServU Project “Service-learning in Higher Education for Ukraine’s Recovery” (2023–2026). By growing its service-learning capacity, the university is already implementing a range of projects in areas that are most in demand in the region during wartime and which serve to prepare local and regional development stakeholders for post-war recovery. Some examples include: as part of the Ukrainian Energy Initiative of the UN Global Compact in Ukraine, in collaboration with DTEK Energo, the creation of specialised professional development programmes in the field of thermal power generation; modernisation of the Mechatronic Lab in partnership with Interpipe and Fischertechnik: classes using modern robotic systems and equipment in the fields of robotics, mechatronics and electromobility for students and schoolchildren; an interactive offline project “WOW! Physics” for pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 in Dnipro, in collaboration with Interpipe. Another key focus is supporting the integration of veterans and IDPs into the local community: an opportunity for veterans, military personnel and their family members to start their own business through the “Lab2Market Veterano” project; training for veterans under the “Solar Energy Specialist” programme; the “Motanka” Centre has opened in a student hall of residence – a space where war victims, displaced persons and local residents can receive free support.

Thirdly, Dnipro University of Technologies’ strategic portfolio comprehensively covers key areas of sustainability:

- quality management and risk management: the creation of adaptive planning systems that take into account hybrid threats and uncertainty;

- an inclusive environment: creating barrier-free spaces and mental health support programmes for students, employees, veterans, representatives of local communities and internally displaced persons;
- talent management: unique career paths for teaching and administrative staff, supporting everyone’s talents, and engaging staff and applicants in international, national, regional and local projects;
- energy sustainability and financial independence – projects on renewable energy sources, efficient use of resources and diversification of funding through partnerships and technology transfer.

An analysis of project implementation experience shows that success depends on several factors: mutual trust built through continuous dialogue; aligning the university’s development priorities with those of the local community and the region; and iterative learning from both successes and challenges (for example, adapting to power cuts or security risks). Experience in implementing international projects has provided valuable methodological tools (mapping stakeholder needs, impact assessment, joint strategy and design workshops), which have been effectively adapted to local conditions.

Partnerships with business and local authorities have proved particularly effective in creating “quadruple helix” models (education–science–business–government/community), which strengthen the university’s contribution to the region’s recovery.

Implications for education, policy, or recovery

A reflective analysis of the case study on Dnipro University of Technologies allows us to draw the following conclusions across three key areas of guidance:

- for higher education institutions: HEIs must systematically integrate approaches based on service-learning and community engagement into their educational programs, moving beyond traditional placements toward jointly created projects with a measurable impact on the community. This requires rethinking the third mission as a key strategic pillar and developing relevant competencies among faculty and students. Priority areas include

micro-certification programs and lifelong learning focused on the needs of resilience and post-war recovery;

- for policy: national and regional policies – both in the sphere of ensuring national resilience and in post-war recovery – must be structured to stimulate proactive partnerships between universities, communities, and innovative businesses through targeted funding, simplification of regulatory requirements for joint projects, and recognition of the outcomes of the third mission in university performance evaluations (Hynes, Lees & Müller, 2020). To achieve this, it is necessary to synchronize the interaction of actors within the national resilience system and stakeholders in regional and local development in compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals;
- for ensuring community resilience: the proactive involvement of higher education institutions accelerates resilience by providing evidence-based solutions, building local capacity, and fostering social cohesion. Local communities gain access to scientific expertise, innovative technologies (particularly in energy, the circular economy, and inclusive development), and motivated human capital. Such partnerships contribute to “building back better” – not merely restoring pre-war conditions, but creating more sustainable and resilient local systems.

In conclusion, the model of proactive partnership between a university and a community, exemplified by Dnipro University of Technologies, demonstrates that higher education institutions can and should serve as pillars of resilience and catalysts for sustainable development even (and especially) in the context of war and post-war recovery. The institutional implementation of such an approach requires leadership commitment, cultural change, and the development of supportive ecosystems at the national, regional, and local levels.

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FROM CRISIS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: HIGHER EDUCATION RESILIENCE IN WARTIME THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND SERVICE-LEARNING: SUMY STATE UNIVERSITY CASE

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Keywords: higher education resilience; international cooperation; service-learning; wartime; case study.

Abstract

The full-scale war in Ukraine has caused profound transformations in the higher education system, jeopardizing its stable functioning, accessibility, and quality of educational services. Higher education institutions have found themselves in the need to quickly adapt to crisis conditions, including security risks, the forced digitalization of the educational process, and changes in the social role of universities. In these conditions, the concept of higher education resilience, as the ability of the system not only to withstand crisis impacts but also to transform while maintaining its social function, becomes of particular importance.

One tool for increasing universities' resilience is international academic cooperation, which provides access to resources, knowledge, and innovative educational practices. At the same time, the importance of service-learning is growing as an approach that integrates the educational process with the real needs of communities, especially in conditions of war and reconstruction.

Despite active development of these approaches, the issue of their synergy in ensuring university resilience in crisis conditions remains insufficiently researched. Particularly relevant is the analysis of specific cases of Ukrainian universities that combine international cooperation and socially oriented learning in their practice.

The study is based on a qualitative case study approach, drawing on elements of descriptive and analytical approaches. The object of the study was Sumy State University, as one of the leading Ukrainian higher education institutions that actively implements international educational initiatives and practices of service-learning in wartime.

The methodological basis is:

- analysis of official university materials and project documentation;
- case study of the results of the implementation of international educational projects (in particular, Erasmus+);
- generalization of practices of university interaction with local communities.

This approach not only allows for describing practical experience but also for identifying mechanisms for transforming educational activities in times of crisis.

The experience of Sumy State University demonstrates that the combination of international cooperation and socially oriented learning can be an effective means of enhancing the sustainability of higher education.

Firstly, the university's participation in international projects, in particular the Erasmus+ program, plays an important role, within which the initiative to develop socially oriented learning is being implemented. Thanks to its cooperation with European partners, the university gains access to modern pedagogical approaches, methodological materials, and opportunities to improve teachers' qualifications. This contributes to the transfer of knowledge and adaptation of best practices to the Ukrainian context.

Secondly, an essential component is integrating service-learning into curricula. At Sumy State University, this is implemented through the development of courses that combine academic learning with the solution of real social problems. For example, students are involved in projects aimed at supporting children's mental health, developing entrepreneurial skills in communities, and increasing the population's digital literacy.

Thirdly, the university actively cooperates with local territorial communities, enabling it to develop educational programs in line with current societal needs. An important stage is conducting

preliminary research, in particular, focus groups and consultations with representatives of communities, authorities, and businesses. This ensures the relevance of educational initiatives and increases their social impact.

The adaptation of the educational process to war conditions deserves special attention. A significant part of the training has been transferred to an online format, ensuring the continuity of the educational process even in the face of threats. In parallel, the university is developing international educational partnerships that allow supporting academic mobility and joint educational initiatives. The case of Sumy State University demonstrates the transition from a traditional educational model to a more flexible, open, and socially oriented system capable of functioning in crisis conditions.

The results indicate that ensuring the sustainability of higher education in war conditions requires a comprehensive approach that combines international cooperation, innovative pedagogical practices, and active community engagement. For educational practice, this means integrating socially oriented learning into educational programs as a systemic element rather than as separate initiatives. It is also important to develop teachers' competencies in community work and interdisciplinary learning. At the level of educational policy, it is advisable to support international partnerships and create conditions for Ukrainian universities to participate in global educational projects. This will contribute to improving the quality of education and integration into the European educational space. Accordingly, in the context of post-war reconstruction, universities can act as agents of community development, providing training of specialists, generating knowledge, and implementing socially significant initiatives.

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UNIVERSITIES AND COMMUNITIES IN TIMES OF WAR: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY- ORIENTED LEARNING

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Keywords: community-oriented learning; university-community cooperation; war and recovery; social solidarity; higher education.

Introduction

The contemporary challenges arising from the war and the socio-economic transformation in Ukraine compel the higher education system to seek innovative learning models that not only foster professional competencies but also contribute to social changes. In this context, the concept of service-learning gains relevance. This pedagogical approach integrates academic studies with practical engagement for the benefit of local communities, accompanied by systematic reflection on personal experience. Ukrainian researcher T. Rozvadovska defines community-based learning as an educational approach aimed at developing academic knowledge, practical skills, and responsibility through community service, problem-solving, and working with the community [1].

Such a model enables students not only to acquire knowledge but also to cultivate horizontal solidarity grounded in partnership, mutual support, and collective responsibility. In situations where the traditional vertical model of interaction (university → student → community) fails to ensure effective social integration, service-learning emerges as a tool for behavioral transformation—reshaping young people’s modes of thinking, interaction, and conduct.

Community-oriented learning has four main characteristics: comprehensive and high-quality education; initiatives aimed at meeting real needs in the community; active role of students in planning, developing and evaluating a community-oriented project; integration of educational content with practice with the community and for the community [2].

Moreover, service-learning opens pathways for developing future-oriented competencies, including communication, social, emotional, and civic skills—critical in the context of war and post-war recovery. The full-scale war initiated by Russia against Ukraine has led to a growing number of vulnerable populations: internally displaced persons (IDPs), veterans with varying degrees of injury and PTSD, families of fallen or missing defenders, individuals who have lost loved ones or housing due to shelling, those who have lost employment, people forced to emigrate due to lack of support or prospects, volunteers at high risk of emotional burnout, residents of depressed small towns, elderly individuals and persons with disabilities, families living below the poverty line, and individuals with addictions (alcohol, drugs, gambling, eating disorders, etc.).

To understand the financial situation of IDPs and former IDPs (those who have returned to their place of residence), a noteworthy survey was conducted by Rating Online LLC as part of the project “Women in War: Motivations to Stay and Reasons to Leave.” The survey covered the entire territory of Ukraine, excluding temporarily occupied areas and regions without Ukrainian mobile coverage at the time of data collection. The survey conducted between 23rd to 30th Jan 2025 targeted women of ages 18–60 residing in Ukraine. The sample included 2,337 respondents. According to the findings, 14 % of participants reported the lowest income level—insufficient even for basic food needs. The largest group (34 %) had enough for food but struggled to afford clothing. Thus, nearly half of Ukrainian women fall into the two lowest income categories. One out of four respondents reported a moderate level of financial well-being, while only 2 % belonged to the highest-income group, capable of making any purchases [3].

Considering these findings, engaging students in social projects becomes a critical task for both higher education institutions and communities. This necessitates the cultivation service culture – one that constructively counters excessive individualization and promotes socially responsible citizenship.

Methodology

The research employs a combination of methodological approaches:

Socio-pedagogical approach – to analyze educational practices, learning strategies, and competence development;

Behavioral approach – to examine changes in student behavior patterns, the influence of group norms, peer effects, incentives, and nudges;

Systems approach – to assess the interaction among students, educators, and communities as an integrated system of horizontal solidarity.

Service-learning is rooted in experiential learning, whereby students engage in community-based activities, critically reflect on their experiences, and integrate these insights into their educational, volunteer, and professional trajectories. Some educational institutions offer master's programs in Nonprofit Organization Management. At the Lviv Polytechnic National University or instance, the undergraduate program in Management includes a third-year course titled "Social Management."

Service-learning comprises three core elements:

- Learning;
- Serving;
- Reflecting.

Bachelor's level students are required to complete a mandatory course project in teams of four, comprising a project leader, a marketing specialist, a content manager, and a fundraiser. This project involves the analysis of social initiatives in terms of their feasibility, relevance, social significance, the needs they address, the target groups they serve, planning for project implementation, creation of social media resources and their informational content, negotiation with key stakeholders, and achievement of project goals.

To conduct the analysis, a combination of research methods are employed:

- theoretical literature review;
- empirical methods: student surveys and questionnaires, interviews with instructors and project supervisors, observation of group interactions among students, and case analysis of social and marketing projects.

"A compelling case from the field of education: "How to hold a mathematical function in your hand." Johannes Kepler University Linz is integrating 3D printing into the learning process to make mathematics more visual and accessible. Instructors use GeoGebra

software to create physical models of complex functions and geometric objects, helping students better understand abstract concepts through touch.

Special attention is given to inclusive education, as tactile models allow blind learners to study material that was previously inaccessible to them. The university chooses reliable equipment from the Czech manufacturer Prusa, known for its ease of use, enabling future teachers to focus on creativity rather than technical challenges.

This approach prepares a new generation of educators to implement modern technologies in everyday teaching, transforming learning into an engaging exploration” [4].

Analysis or reflective evidence

Since the 1980s, the term service-learning has gained recognition as an educational approach aimed at developing academic knowledge, practical skills, and responsible attitudes through addressing community problems in collaboration with the community itself [5]. Over time, however, the term service has increasingly come to be associated with customer service. As a result, the term community-oriented learning has been adopted to better reflect the pedagogical intent. This form of learning is grounded in a deep understanding of the concept of solidarity.

Culture of Solidarity refers to a set of values, norms, practices, and modes of interaction based on mutual support, empathy, and shared responsibility. It manifests when individuals and communities act not only in their own interest but also consider the well-being of others – especially during times of crisis or adversity.

Key features of a culture of solidarity:

Empathy – the ability to recognize and respond to the needs of others with compassion.

Mutual assistance – the willingness to offer support even in the absence of direct personal benefit.

Trust – the recognition of shared goals and belief in collective action.

Civic responsibility – active participation in societal processes, volunteerism, and community initiatives.

Tolerance in diversity – embracing differences as sources of strength rather than threats.

In educational system and social practices, fostering a culture of solidarity entails:

- developing collaboration and dialogue skills;
- learning through social initiatives and collaborative projects;
- cultivating critical thinking about social inequalities and shared responsibility for changes.

The recognition of solidarity as an acknowledgment of fundamental human rights is interpreted by some scholars as horizontal solidarity. It differs from vertical solidarity, or what is sometimes referred to as naïve solidarity, in that the latter typically focuses on charity or state assistance delivered in a “top-down” manner, often framed through patronage and condescension.

Social oriented learning aims to go beyond the vertical model, as it recognizes the dignity of all individuals and communities, as well as the right to mutually beneficial relationships.

Horizontal solidarity is grounded in the recognition of others’ identities and in the acceptance that – even in contexts marked by unequal access to economic and cultural resources – we all have something to give and something to learn: from those who are stronger than us, and from those who are more vulnerable.

It is evident that contemporary Ukrainian society is deeply polarized: between those who have fought in the war and those who have not; those who have lost loved ones and those who have not; those who have experienced domestic violence and those who have not, and so forth. Nevertheless, engagement with the lives of vulnerable populations – through initiatives, support programs, and mutual aid – offers students, educators, and mentors invaluable experiential learning.

To foster horizontal solidarity, students must develop critical thinking skills, the ability to understand complex causal relationships and social issues, and a high level of emotional intelligence. Lviv Polytechnic National University is one of the most dynamic educational hubs in Ukraine, where engineering, humanities, and management education are integrated into a shared space of societal development. The principle of the “university as a city driver” is implemented here through numerous initiatives that combine science, innovation, and social responsibility.

Educational programs are designed with elements of social impact. Specifically, at the bachelor’s and master’s levels, Lviv Polytechnic

National University actively develops project-based learning, where academic tasks are directly linked to the real needs of the community. For example:

The Institute of Economics and Management (Department of Management of Organizations), within the course Social Management, develops projects with a social mission to support families at social risk, pensioners, children with illnesses, and veterans who have returned from the war, etc.

The Institute of Architecture and Design offers courses in which students create urban concepts for public spaces in Lviv, regional towns, or communities affected by the war. Some of these projects have been showcased in public exhibitions, and several have formed the basis for real urban planning solutions.

Students of the *Vyacheslav Chornovil Institute of Sustainable Development* participate in the Green City and Energy-Efficient Community programs, where they design models of environmental education for schools and municipal institutions, and conduct energy-saving training for residents.

As part of the Smart City Lviv program, students of technical disciplines develop digital solutions – from chatbots for municipal services to systems for monitoring traffic and air quality. These practices combine academic training with public benefit, fostering systems thinking, innovation, and social empathy.

Several university-based structures function as educational collaboration labs, including:

Tech StartUp School – a platform that supports student startups focused on social innovation. Examples include mobile apps for assisting people with disabilities, eco-filters for water purification, and systems for safe movement at night.

Urban Curators Lab – an inter-institutional initiative that brings together architects, designers, sociologists, and programmers to create inclusive urban solutions. One of its projects, Barrier-Free Lviv, involved mapping public buildings and creating a digital accessibility database.

These platforms foster the development of co-creation, teamwork, and entrepreneurial competencies, teaching students not only technical skills but also social responsibility, civic engagement, and empathy.

An important component of socially oriented practices at Lviv Polytechnic National University is the activity of the Student Government and the Council of Young Scientists. They initiate and implement socially significant projects such as the charity campaigns Lviv Polytechnic Supports the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Warmth for the Front, where students produce trench candles, camouflage nets, and collect humanitarian aid. They also lead the Green Polytechnic project, organizing campus greening events, recycling drives, and more.

Lviv Polytechnic National University participates in numerous international programs aimed at advancing socially oriented approaches:

ERASMUS+ “Social Impact of Education”, where students develop projects to improve the educational environment in local communities.

Horizon Europe “Sustainable Cities and Communities”, within which Lviv-based researchers work on urban solutions for climate adaptation. The *“CivicTech4Democracy”* program, in collaboration with universities from Poland and Germany, promotes the development of a digital culture of civic engagement.

Participation in these programs fosters students’ transcultural communication, digital literacy, and global thinking.

One of the defining features of Lviv Polytechnic National University is its integration into the urban development ecosystem. The university collaborates with the Lviv City Council, the IT Cluster, and NGOs such as Khmarochos, Eco-Busol, and the Platform of Urban Initiatives, among others.

During the Innovative Community project, students developed IT solutions for municipal services.

In partnership with businesses, the university established the Career Hub, which combines academic learning with mentorship from socially responsible companies.

Within the Urban School of Urbanism, students engage in discussions with community representatives, exploring models of sustainable urban planning.

These examples show that Lviv Polytechnic cultivates a humanistic dimension of engineering education, guiding students not only toward professional success but also toward public benefit.

Thus, the university's activities demonstrate that education can serve as a tool for social impact, and the formation of future competencies is the result of combining academic preparation, hands-on community experience, interdisciplinary collaboration, and value-based education.

The university becomes a space of collaborative action, where students learn not only to think, but also to act – innovatively, ethically, and responsibly.

Implications for education, policy, or recovery. Socially-Oriented Learning (SOL) enables students to better understand social realities and develop a sense of empathy – compassion and shared experience. It also fosters reflection as a pathway to building effective forms of solidarity. SOL is an educational approach that combines theoretical learning with practical activities for the benefit of society, encouraging a shift from passive knowledge consumption to active, horizontal solidarity. It involves student collaboration with communities to address social challenges, develop critical thinking, and cultivate leadership. This approach makes learning more practical and positions students as active participants in civic life rather than passive recipients of services. Socially oriented educational practices enhance community resilience. They mobilize human potential, strengthen civic participation, and foster a culture of collaboration – especially vital in times of war and national reconstruction.

Institutional support for socially driven educational programs is essential for modernizing education. Integrating socially oriented practices into university development strategies, educational standards, and partnership policies will ensure the sustainability of these mechanisms and embed them into national education and youth development policy.

The formation of future competencies is a strategic goal of national education policy. As Ukraine undergoes transformation and recovery, it needs a generation of young professionals who combine intellectual potential with civic maturity – individuals capable not only of adapting to change but of actively shaping a new quality of social life.

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SERVICE-LEARNING, CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN WARTIME UKRAINE: THE CASE OF ZENA-HLYNIANY-ART-STUDIO

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Keywords: service-learning; community resilience; cultural heritage; creative industries; wartime Ukraine.

Context and Problem Framing

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally transformed the role of higher education institutions. Universities are increasingly expected not only to provide academic instruction, but also to contribute directly to community resilience, recovery, and social cohesion. In this context, service-learning has gained particular significance as an educational approach capable of connecting academic knowledge with real societal needs.

At the same time, Ukrainian communities face the challenge of preserving cultural heritage under conditions of war, economic instability, migration, and demographic change. Small local cultural initiatives often become spaces of resilience, identity preservation, and social solidarity. However, many of these initiatives remain vulnerable due to financial, legal, reputational, and organizational risks.

This paper presents a reflective and analytical account of a service-learning project implemented within higher education in Ukraine using the case of ZENA-HLYNIANY-ART-STUDIO in the town of Hlyniany, Lviv region. The project focused on analyzing the socio-economic security of a creative industry initiative dedicated to

preserving the tradition of Hlyniany patterned textiles and carpet weaving.

The paper argues that service-learning can function not only as a pedagogical method but also as a mechanism for strengthening community resilience, developing security-oriented thinking, and supporting local recovery processes in wartime conditions.

Approach and Methodology

The conceptual foundation of this study is grounded in interdisciplinary scholarship on service-learning, experiential education, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Existing research demonstrates that service-learning should be understood not merely as volunteer engagement, but as a structured pedagogical approach that integrates academic learning, community partnership, and reflective practice.

One of the foundational contributions to service-learning pedagogy is the work of Robert G. Bringle and Julie A. Hatcher, who emphasize the importance of systematic curricular integration of service-learning within higher education (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Their approach highlights that community engagement becomes educationally meaningful only when it is intentionally connected to clearly defined learning outcomes, reflective processes, and faculty support mechanisms. The authors argue that instructors require methodological preparation and institutional support in order to transform community interaction into a coherent educational experience rather than isolated volunteer activity. This perspective is especially relevant for wartime educational contexts, where universities increasingly engage with complex societal challenges requiring structured interdisciplinary responses.

A similarly important contribution is offered by Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles Jr., who investigate the mechanisms through which learning actually occurs in service-learning environments (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Their work shifts attention from service activity itself toward the pedagogical conditions that transform experience into learning. The authors identify reflection, meaningful interaction with community partners, and the integration of practical experience with academic knowledge as central components of effective service-learning. Importantly, they argue that educational outcomes do not emerge automatically through participation alone;

instead, learning must be intentionally designed through reflective and analytical processes. This approach directly informs the present study, where reflective analysis of cultural heritage, community resilience, and socio-economic security became an essential part of student engagement with the community partner.

The practical and organizational dimensions of service-learning are further developed in the work of Barbara Jacoby, whose framework conceptualizes service-learning as a systematic pedagogy with its own principles, quality standards, and evaluation criteria (Bingle, R. G., 2015). Jacoby pays particular attention to partnership-building, assessment practices, and the alignment between educational goals and community needs. Her work highlights the importance of reciprocity and sustainability within university-community collaboration. This perspective is especially valuable in the context of the present study because the project aimed not only to provide students with practical learning opportunities, but also to generate meaningful analytical and developmental contributions for the local community partner.

The cultural dimension of the project is strongly connected to the framework established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003). The Convention defines intangible cultural heritage as a living cultural practice that requires active preservation, transmission, and community participation. It emphasizes that safeguarding heritage cannot rely exclusively on institutional protection mechanisms; rather, it requires collaboration with communities, awareness-building, and sustainable transmission practices. This framework is highly relevant for the case of ZENA-HLYNIANY-ART-STUDIO, where traditional weaving practices function not only as cultural artifacts, but also as mechanisms of local identity, social cohesion, and community resilience in wartime Ukraine.

Taken together, these sources provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding service-learning as a pedagogical, social, and community-oriented practice. They also support the broader argument of this paper that service-learning projects connected to cultural heritage preservation can contribute simultaneously to education, community resilience, and local recovery processes under conditions of war and societal uncertainty.

The project was implemented within a university course using a service-learning methodology that combined academic learning, field research, interdisciplinary teamwork, and community-oriented analytical work. Students worked directly with a real community partner – ZENA-HLYNIANY-ART-STUDIO – which combines cultural preservation, social entrepreneurship, museum activities, educational initiatives, and local tourism development.

The methodological framework was interdisciplinary and included elements of management studies, economic security, legal analysis, digital communication, cultural studies, and community development. Students conducted a field visit to Hlyniany, observed the work of the studio and museum, communicated with representatives of the organization, and analyzed available informational and digital materials.

The analytical structure of the project was built around six interconnected dimensions of socio-economic security: Social security; Financial security; Legal security; Economic security; Reputational security; Digital security.

The six dimensions are best interpreted here at the meso level of analysis: not as state security categories in the narrow political sense, but as interdependent conditions that make a cultural-heritage organization socially legitimate, economically viable, and resilient under disruption. The synthesis draws primarily on English-language frameworks from the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. In this reading, financial security concerns liquidity and solvency at the organizational level, while economic security refers more broadly to livelihoods, productive continuity, and local value creation; the other four dimensions describe the social, normative, relational, and infrastructural conditions that allow those material goals to endure.

In this framework, social security refers to the degree to which a heritage-based organization protects and reproduces the social conditions that allow people to participate, belong, and transmit culture across generations. The ILO defines social protection or social security as the provision of benefits against life-cycle risks,

poverty, and social exclusion, while UNESCO locates heritage safeguarding in respect for communities and in their active participation in identifying and maintaining living heritage. For a community-facing cultural enterprise, social security therefore includes inclusion, accessibility, intergenerational knowledge transfer, stakeholder care, and social cohesion rather than welfare provision alone. In wartime or displacement settings, it also covers the preservation of community ties and culturally grounded forms of support that help people remain socially connected and visible. (UNESCO, 2003).

Financial security means the organization's capacity to maintain operational continuity through adequate liquidity, stable cash flow, solvency, and access to affordable finance. The World Bank emphasizes that viable firms survive shocks when credit and working capital remain available, and the OECD treats payment delays, bankruptcies, and non-performing SME loans as meaningful indicators of financing stress and survival prospects. For a small cultural-heritage enterprise, financial security also includes the ability to build reserves, diversify income streams, and finance preservation, training, and outreach without entering chronic cash-flow distress. Unlike economic security, which concerns livelihoods and value creation more broadly, financial security is centered on the monetary architecture of continuity and shock absorption. (World Bank, 2021; OECD, 2026).

Legal security is the condition in which organizational activity is protected by clear, coherent, and enforceable rules, and by institutions capable of making those rules usable in practice. The World Bank's rule-of-law framework ties this to confidence in contract enforcement, property rights, courts, and protection from violence, while ILO and OECD work on formalization and the business environment emphasizes clear, coherent, enforceable rules and predictable, fair, and efficient contract enforcement. In a heritage-centered social enterprise, legal security includes lawful registration, labour and tax compliance, enforceable contracts, protection of intellectual and cultural property, and access to timely dispute resolution. Analytically, it is best understood as legal certainty plus enforceability at the enterprise-community interface. (World Bank, 2025; ILO, 2025; OECD, 2023).

Economic security should be distinguished from financial security: it refers not only to the organization's internal finances, but to

the stability of livelihoods, productive activity, and local value creation around it. Within the human-security tradition, economic security denotes an assured basic livelihood derived from work or reliable social safety nets, and it is visibly eroded when income and employment are lost. Applied to a cultural-heritage initiative, economic security therefore concerns the continuity of decent work, demand for goods and services, market access, supply reliability, and the enterprise's capacity to generate multiplier effects for the surrounding community. In wartime conditions, it also captures the ability to adapt production and exchange so that cultural work remains economically meaningful rather than symbolically valued but materially unsustainable. (UNDP, 2022; OECD, 2023).

Reputational security is the organization's capacity to preserve a credible, trusted, and legitimate standing among key stakeholders over time. Seminal reputation research defines reputation as a collective or perceptual representation of an organization's past actions and future prospects, while OECD trust research shows that trust affects the value of intangible assets and organizational resilience, and OECD stakeholder-engagement guidance links early engagement to lower reputational risk and a stronger "social licence to operate." In a heritage-based community project, reputational security therefore depends on perceived authenticity, fairness, transparency, quality, and responsiveness to community concerns. This dimension matters because reputation mediates access to partners, donors, clients, volunteers, and public legitimacy. (Barnett et al., 2006; OECD, 2017).

Digital security is the coordinated management of risks arising from the use, development, and dependence on the digital environment. OECD defines digital security risk as a category of risk that can undermine economic and social objectives by disrupting the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of activities and systems, and it stresses that such risk should be integrated into overall organizational decision-making rather than treated as a purely technical issue. NIST operationalizes this logic through the functions Govern, Identify, Protect, Detect, Respond, and Recover, which frame digital security as a continuous governance and resilience process. In a heritage-and-community context, this dimension covers not only IT hygiene, but also the protection of

digital archives, communication channels, online transactions, educational content, and any digital tools used to extend cultural access. (OECD, 2015; NIST, 2024).

Students worked in teams and prepared analytical recommendations regarding risks, opportunities, sustainability mechanisms, and possible development strategies for the community partner. The project also incorporated elements of reflective learning. Students were encouraged to analyze not only the organization itself, but also the broader relationship between cultural heritage, local economic development, social cohesion, and wartime resilience.

Analysis and Reflective Evidence

The case of ZENA-HLYNIANY-ART-STUDIO demonstrates how a local cultural initiative can become a multidimensional platform for community resilience. The studio functions simultaneously as: a cultural institution preserving traditional weaving practices; a creative business; a museum and educational environment; a community gathering space; a local tourism actor; a mechanism of intergenerational knowledge transfer. One of the most important findings of the project was the recognition that cultural heritage in wartime should not be viewed exclusively as a symbolic or historical category. In the Ukrainian context, cultural heritage increasingly performs economic, social, psychological, and security-related functions.

Students identified several key dimensions of community impact.

First, the project revealed the economic significance of local creative industries. The revitalization of Hlyniany carpet weaving contributes to local employment, stimulates tourism, supports small entrepreneurship, and creates new forms of economic activity. Students emphasized that even small-scale cultural initiatives may generate broader economic effects through interconnected local services such as food businesses, tourism, transportation, and educational events.

Second, the project highlighted the importance of social cohesion. The studio creates opportunities for intergenerational cooperation, engagement of vulnerable groups, and community interaction. Students paid particular attention to the role of educational workshops, cooperation with children and youth, and the inclusion

of internally displaced persons, veterans, and families affected by war.

Third, students identified legal and reputational vulnerabilities connected to cultural heritage preservation. One of the most important concerns involved insufficient legal protection of traditional designs, digital materials, and intellectual property. Students reflected on the risks of copying, commercialization without attribution, and the appropriation of Ukrainian cultural elements in international contexts. These discussions became especially important in wartime conditions, where cultural identity itself becomes part of broader societal resilience.

Another important dimension was digital visibility and communication. Students observed that social media and digital storytelling play a critical role in shaping public trust, attracting visitors, and strengthening the symbolic value of local heritage. At the same time, digital openness also creates cybersecurity and copyright risks, particularly when cultural content is distributed online without legal safeguards.

The project additionally demonstrated the educational value of service-learning for students themselves. Rather than working with hypothetical cases, students engaged with a real organization facing real challenges. This significantly changed the quality of student learning and reflection.

Students developed analytical, managerial, and communication competencies while also strengthening civic responsibility and empathy. Many participants reflected on the fact that the project allowed them to perceive cultural heritage not as an abstract museum concept but as a living ecosystem connected to people, local identity, and economic survival.

An especially important aspect of the project was the implicit development of security-oriented thinking. Although the course was not formally framed as a “security studies” course, students continuously analyzed vulnerability, sustainability, adaptation, and resilience. This demonstrates the potential of service-learning projects to contribute to broader security literacy and responsible decision-making in conditions of uncertainty and crisis.

The project also revealed the importance of university-community partnerships during wartime. In contexts where communities face institutional fatigue, economic instability, and social fragmentation,

universities can act as facilitators of dialogue, analysis, visibility, and innovation.

Importantly, the relationship between the university and the community partner was not extractive. The community organization did not simply become an object of observation. Instead, the project aimed to create mutual benefit. Students produced recommendations, analytical materials, and development ideas that could potentially support future institutional growth and visibility of the studio.

Implications for Education, Policy, and Recovery

The case of ZENA-HLYNIANY-ART-STUDIO provides important implications for higher education, community resilience, and post-war recovery processes in Ukraine. The project demonstrates that service-learning may function not merely as a pedagogical technique, but as a strategic educational approach capable of strengthening the social role of universities during periods of crisis and reconstruction. In wartime conditions, such educational practices enable higher education institutions to move beyond predominantly theoretical instruction and participate directly in local recovery, civic engagement, and community resilience building.

The project also confirms the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches in analyzing and addressing contemporary societal challenges. Community resilience in wartime cannot be adequately interpreted exclusively through economic, managerial, or cultural perspectives. Instead, it requires the simultaneous integration of legal, financial, social, digital, reputational, and managerial dimensions. Such multidimensional analysis allows students to better understand the complexity of recovery processes and the interconnected nature of modern security challenges.

An additional implication concerns the growing role of cultural heritage as an active resource for recovery and development rather than solely as a historical or symbolic artifact. In the Ukrainian context, cultural heritage increasingly performs strategic social and economic functions. It contributes to the preservation of identity, strengthens psychological resilience within communities affected by war, supports local economic initiatives, and enhances international visibility and solidarity. Consequently, cultural

heritage projects may become important platforms for sustainable local development and community cohesion under conditions of prolonged instability.

The experience further illustrates the educational value of service-learning for the development of civic agency among students. Under conditions of war, uncertainty, and social transformation, students require learning environments that encourage active participation in societal processes. Community-engaged education enables them to perceive themselves not as passive recipients of knowledge, but as actors capable of contributing to recovery, resilience, and social change. Such experiences are particularly important for the formation of socially responsible and security-oriented thinking.

The project additionally highlights the increasing significance of university–community collaboration within the framework of the university’s third mission. Ukrainian universities are progressively transforming into institutions that perform not only educational and research functions, but also broader social roles associated with local development, democratic participation, social cohesion, and resilience building. In this regard, service-learning may serve as an effective mechanism for strengthening sustainable partnerships between universities and communities.

The case of ZENA-HLYNIANY-ART-STUDIO also demonstrates the transformative potential of community-engaged education in wartime Ukraine. Through the combination of interdisciplinary analysis, field engagement, cultural heritage preservation, and reflective learning, the project generated practical and educational value both for students and for the local community. The experience confirms that service-learning can contribute simultaneously to community resilience, local recovery processes, and the development of socially responsible managerial competencies.

Importantly, the project illustrates that the different dimensions of security within cultural-heritage service-learning are mutually reinforcing rather than isolated or additive. Social security and civic participation create the relational trust upon which reputational security depends; legal security stabilizes rights, responsibilities, and institutional interactions; financial and economic security support continuity and local livelihoods; while digital security protects communication, documentation, learning, and commercial

infrastructures that increasingly shape community sustainability. In this context, cultural heritage becomes not only a symbolic value, but also an operational resource for resilience and recovery.

These conclusions correspond with UNESCO's principles concerning the safeguarding of living heritage in conditions of armed conflict and social disruption. Communities directly affected by war, displacement, and crisis should play a central role in identifying, preserving, and activating cultural heritage as a resource for resilience, trust-building, recovery, and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, the six interconnected dimensions of security identified within the project may be interpreted as an analytical framework demonstrating how heritage-oriented service-learning can evolve from cultural preservation initiatives into mechanisms of community resilience and post-war recovery.

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2_Conceptual Abstracts

COLLABORATIVE PUBLIC GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENT BASED ON CIVIC TECH: THE CASE OF THE ANALOGUE-DIGITAL PLATFORM “ME TO YOU”

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Keywords: collaborative public governance; civic technology; community recovery; resilience; digital platform.

Abstract

The ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine has triggered unprecedented transformations in public administration, accelerating the processes of digitalization and decentralization at the early stages of invasion. Under critical conditions, local communities, volunteer networks, and self-government bodies face a pressing need for innovative tools to manage shared resources and complex humanitarian challenges. Collaborative public governance has emerged as a vital analytical framework, illustrating a shift from traditional state administration to network-based models. Within these models, trust, distributed responsibility, and civic engagement become the cornerstones of effective management.

This paper explores the theoretical grounds and empirical implication of the development of the civic technology “Me to you”, created as a social platform prototype for enhancing capacities of local communities and their self-government bodies. To address the critical structural problem of limited capacities of local governments in crisis settings and at the same time fragmentation of non-organised volunteer movement (which lacks a unified ecosystem and occasionally suffers from trust crises) this study conceptualizes and evaluates a prototype solution

of analogue-digital platform, initiated at Dnipro University of Technology as a response to this problem.

Methodologically, the research employs an action-research approach combined with a case-study. This enabled iterative prototyping and reflexive analysis based on the authors' direct involvement in designing this concept and practical work in the intersection of action research and crisis-responsive volunteering. The research unfolded across four interconnected stages: identifying structural barriers in the Dnipropetrovsk region's volunteer movement; empirical prototyping of the ICT-enabled solution as an e-democracy module; conceptualizing empirical insights; and adapting technical components to integrate with existing state platforms (such as E-DEM).

Findings show that civic tech solution could function as a dual-purpose system: it is both technological infrastructure and socio-organizational environments. It facilitates new mechanisms for distributed decision-making and transparency, which are particularly vital when traditional democratic mechanisms are under crisis-induced strain. Developed by the authors conceptual model illustrates the multilayered capacity of hybrid sociotechnical architectures to integrate offline and online solidarity networks with digital tools and optimised solutions.

Architecturally, the proposed platform concept relies on three functional pillars designed to optimize collaborative public administration in crisis settings. First, it establishes an infrastructure of trust: by enforcing user authorization through qualified electronic signatures (QES), the platform mitigates opportunistic behavior risks, securing peer-to-peer interactions. Second, it provides geospatial coordination: an interactive map of community needs optimizes volunteer logistics by visualizing distances to requested objectives. Third, it acts as an analytical tool: dashboards visualize real-time community needs, helping to shift local governance efforts from reactive responses to proactive planning.

A key topic of discussion is the acceptable boundary of civil society's intervention in public services. While accepting the critiques on volunteer involvement in humanitarian tasks as a duplication of state functions, it is perceived as critically necessary compensation for temporary institutional incapacity caused by the war. Establishing complementarity, rather than

competition, with public institutions allows to ensure the long-term legitimacy of such civic initiatives and enhance the ecosystem of national public services from grassroots level.

The paper concludes that integrating such civic tech models into the broader public administration ecosystem represents a highly viable pathway for post-war recovery. By institutionalizing volunteer networks on a partnership basis, where civil society executes operational responses while government authorities maintain strategic coordination, Ukraine can solidify a collaborative governance model that fundamentally enhances community resilience in crisis periods.

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3_Case-Based Abstracts

A CASE STUDY OF COOPERATION BETWEEN UCU AND TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES OF THE TERNOPIL REGION: THE “INVEST IN THE COMMUNITY” PROJECT

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Keywords: investment; territorial community; service-learning.

Ukrainian Catholic University has been actively integrating service-learning (SL) projects into its curriculum since 2019. In 2024, fourth-year students of the Ethics-Politics-Economics program participated in the “Invest in the Community” SL project as part of the “Foundations of Investment” course. The project aimed to develop modern, competitive investment passport presentations for territorial communities in the Ternopil region in both Ukrainian and English.

On one hand, it is evident that investing during wartime is highly risky. However, first, all wars eventually end, necessitating proactive preparation for post-war reconstruction. Second, the participating communities are located in western Ukraine, where security risks are lower than in regions closer to the frontline. Consequently, the probability of attracting foreign investment remains significant. The English-language presentations were specifically designed to showcase the communities’ investment passports to international investors. Furthermore, such initiatives may indirectly enhance the communities’ capacity to participate in INTERREG cross-border cooperation projects.

Three communities were selected for the project: the Velyka Berezovytsia territorial community, the Zalishchyky urban community, and the Berezhany territorial community. Three student subgroups were formed, each led by a designated leader who selected their team members. The communities were assigned to the teams by lot.

During the first stage, students conducted desk research, analyzing publicly available materials on the communities' official websites. In the subsequent stage, students prepared proposals to improve website content from an investor's perspective and provided feedback on the user-friendliness and accessibility of the sites for the general public. Key observations included outdated information, a lack of statistical data, and unclear site structures. The next stage involved online meetings with community representatives, which allowed the students to present their initial findings and request additional information.

An essential stage of the project involved fieldwork, during which student teams conducted site visits to all three participating communities. Firstly, it should be noted that these visits provided significant practical value, offering students firsthand experience in communicating with representatives of territorial communities. Each visit commenced with a meeting at the municipal administration, where students received formal presentations regarding the community's governance and strategic profile.

Secondly, students visited various investment sites within the communities. Naturally, the local authorities sought to showcase their most successful investment cases. These included visits to Agroprodservice, the "Keramik" Berezhan Brick Factory, and the "Western Ukrainian Industrial Hub" Industrial Park. These visits allowed students to observe the operations of large-scale industrial facilities and gain insights into technological processes. Students actively engaged with enterprise representatives to discuss the challenges of business development during wartime, including the relocation of enterprises, energy grid instability and export complexities despite protests by European farmers.

The fieldwork also introduced students to the region's cultural heritage, which holds significant investment potential. Key sites visited included the Berezhan State Historical and Cultural Reserve, Chervonohorod Castle, and the Dnister River Valley in Zalishchyky. Representatives of the Zalishchyky community presented a project for the restoration of the Dnister river beach, noting that Zalishchyky was one of Eastern Europe's most renowned resorts during the interwar period of XX century. While this project won a nomination within the participatory budget (Buchko, 2021), its funding was suspended due to the full-scale invasion.

Furthermore, students visited sites with future investment potential, such as the waste-sorting complex in Berezhany. This complex was recently launched thanks to additional funding from the Ukrainian Veteran Fund. An information campaign and the installation of vandal-proof waste collection containers were implemented through the “Partnership for Recovery” program, funded by the Government of Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Future plans include developing facilities to process organic waste into biogas and bioenergy. (Saskiv, M., & Savytska, D 2025).

In addition to their primary objectives, these SL projects yielded several positive “side effects.” Notably, the visits included recruitment-oriented activities. Students visited the Vitaliy Skakun Lyceum in Berezhany, where they met with high school seniors to share their experiences of studying at the Ukrainian Catholic University. While such efforts alone cannot solve the issue of youth migration abroad, they serve as targeted interventions to demonstrate that high-quality education remains accessible in Ukraine despite the war. The visit to the lyceum also illustrated to pupils that learning extends beyond classroom theory.

Another secondary benefit was the establishment of personal networks with local government officials, who were subsequently invited to participate in various university educational programs. Finally, the project significantly enhanced the social cohesion of the student group. Having enrolled during the COVID-19 pandemic and continued their studies during the full-scale war, this fieldwork represented one of the few opportunities for the cohort to travel and bond as a community.

The project culminated in the delivery of three English-language presentations at the Ukrainian Catholic University for representatives of the participating communities. Tetiana Chetvertak, a deputy of the Ternopil District Council, commented:

“This project represents the first signs of active cooperation between the communities of the Ternopil region and UCU. We are grateful for your hard work and recommendations, and we intend to implement the corresponding changes. We are committed to developing our communities; therefore, it is vital for us to hear your student perspectives, as the task of rebuilding Ukraine after our victory will fall upon the youth!” (Kyrchiv, 2024).

In conclusion, SL projects prove highly valuable for both students and communities alike. They demonstrate the essential link between theoretical education and the practical application of knowledge, thereby creating significant added value within the curriculum. Furthermore, in the context of Ukraine's post-war recovery and the resulting shortage of qualified personnel, the readiness of students to contribute to this process according to their competencies is of paramount importance.

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MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL COOPERATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES BASED ON OPEN DATA: THE EXPERIENCE OF STUDENT PROJECTS AT UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY AND LVIV CITY COUNCIL

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Keywords: open data; universities; communities; student projects.

The full-scale war in Ukraine has highlighted the need for new models of interaction between universities and communities that combine the educational process with solving real management challenges. One such tool is the use of open data as a basis for applied student research, which simultaneously strengthens the capacity of communities and develops students' practical competencies.

In 2022–2025, the Ukrainian Catholic University and the Lviv City Council implemented a cooperation model within group course projects for second-year students of the Faculty of Applied Sciences, specializing in “IT and Solution Analytics”. The foundation of this collaboration was the use of open data from the Lviv community to analyze urban processes, primarily in the fields of transport infrastructure and urban planning.

The initiative was led by entrepreneur and founder of an IT company, Lviv City Council member Oleksa Voznyak, who acted as the “customer” for student projects on behalf of the city council. He defined research topics according to the community's needs, formulated practical tasks, ensured access to data, organized communication with city council employees, and provided feedback during weekly sprints. On the university side, coordination was carried out by Oleksiy Datsiv, lecturer of the “IT and Solution Analytics” course at the Faculty of Applied Sciences, who formed student teams and supervised the execution of course projects.

The working model followed an iterative format: weekly sprints with presentations of interim results and discussions with both academic staff and representatives of the city council. This allowed for continuous refinement of problem statements and alignment of research with the real needs of the city.

Within this collaboration, several projects important for the Lviv community were implemented:

- In 2022, students studied the network of public transport stops and routes in Lviv to assess the accessibility of different urban areas. The results included visualizations of the route network and identification of areas with insufficient public transport coverage.
- In 2023, an analysis of public transport schedules was conducted. Students compared official timetables with actual movement patterns, revealing gaps between planning and real route load and proposing approaches for optimization.
- In 2024, a “stress test” of the “Arena Lviv” intercept parking project was carried out, simulating transport flow scenarios, load levels, and the effectiveness of integrating the facility into urban mobility.
- In 2025, a student team worked on optimizing public transport schedules, taking into account real traffic conditions, drivers’ breaks, and other operational constraints.

The practical implementation of the projects was accompanied by challenges related to data quality and availability. Students worked with open data from the city council, public sources, interviews with Lviv City Council employees, and their own field observations. In several cases, the lack of structured data required additional on-site data collection.

The results of student work were presented both in the academic environment of the university, where detailed technical discussions of methodology took place, and at meetings with representatives of the Lviv City Council. This created a space for direct professional interaction between students, the university, and local self-government, and allowed for discussion of the practical application of the results.

In 2025, within a similar format, the Edu4Civic digital platform project was launched, aimed at scaling this cooperation model to other universities and communities. The platform is intended to

coordinate student projects, facilitate interaction with communities, and accumulate research results for further use.

The experience gained demonstrates that open data can serve not only as a transparency tool but also as the foundation for a sustainable model of cooperation between universities and communities, combining educational goals with practical tasks of urban recovery and development.

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UNIVERSITY AND TERRITORIAL COMMUNITY COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR AND RECOVERY: THE PRACTICE OF IMPLEMENTING SERVICE-LEARNING FOR THE STUDENTS OF ENERGY SPECIALTIES

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Keywords: university-community cooperation; service-learning; energy management; territorial communities; post-war recovery.

In the context of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a number of challenges have emerged for the population, communities, and higher educational institutions, including the need to enhance energy awareness, ensure energy security, strengthen infrastructure resilience, and promote sustainable development. The implementation of service-learning in higher education institutions not only helps bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and the practical application of acquired knowledge, but also contributes to addressing a range of pressing community challenges.

The shortage of specialists in the energy sector, along with their critical role in ensuring the resilience of community-level critical infrastructure, creates preconditions for the early engagement of higher education students in practical activities. The introduction of service-learning facilitates the integration of students into community contexts and broadens their perspectives with regard to both core energy-related tasks and adjacent challenges encountered in real-world settings. This contributes to the enhancement of students' qualifications, fosters collaboration with representatives of territorial communities, and supports the transfer of advanced educational and research-based expertise to local contexts.

Within the framework of the international project “Service-Learning for Ukraine’s Recovery (ServU),” a course entitled “Energy

Management Systems” was developed and implemented at Dnipro University of Technology for second-cycle (Master’s level) students majoring in G3 Electrical Engineering. The course delivery is based on service-learning approaches, which involve the integration of the educational process with the solution of real-world community problems. A total of 42 Master’s students were engaged in the course implementation.

The Chumaky Rural Territorial Community acted as a partner in the implementation of the service-learning course. Within the framework of the discipline, students were involved in developing selected sections of the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP), particularly those related to climate change projections, associated risk assessment, and the development of measures to address potential challenges.

During practical sessions, students were provided with opportunities to:

- conduct field visits to the territorial community;
- carry out on-site assessments of community infrastructure facilities;
- collect and analyse data related to community development planning and the organisation of energy management processes;
- identify key challenges in energy consumption and the adaptation of the community’s energy sector to climate change;
- work in teams with task allocation across different sections of the document;
- engage in communication with representatives of local self-government bodies and community residents;
- present their findings.

The implementation of the service-learning project within the educational process yielded a number of significant outcomes for all participants. First, students were able to apply their knowledge in practice and developed the ability to identify urgent societal needs, as well as to assess the responses of different population groups to proposed solutions. Direct interaction with the community enabled a deeper understanding of real-world challenges, particularly in crisis conditions.

Second, teamwork, communication, and decision-making processes contributed to the development of so-called “soft skills.”

Collaborative work on individual sections of the SECAP ensured an interdisciplinary approach and fostered individual responsibility for the final project outcomes.

Third, tangible practical outcomes were achieved for the community. Selected sections of a strategic planning document—the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan—were developed to enhance energy efficiency, resilience, and security.

At the same time, several limitations were identified. In particular, the data collection process was complicated by restricted access to certain information and the heterogeneity of baseline data. Additionally, the limited timeframe of the course, as well as the online format of lectures and working meetings for some students, affected the depth of elaboration of certain sections.

The results were validated through students' participation in the international forum “Safe, Comfortable and Capable Territorial Community – 2025” and the International Scientific and Technical Conference of Students, Postgraduates, and Young Scientists “Youth: Science and Innovation – 2025,” which enabled external evaluation of the outcomes.

The results of implementing the service-learning course indicate an increase in students' motivation to generate their own outputs and to master the core learning material. An additional effect is achieved through the strengthening of partnership-based interaction between the university and the community, as well as through opportunities to engage the most motivated students in community governance processes.

For higher education institutions, the adoption of service-learning approaches represents one of the possible pathways for attracting students from partner communities, as well as an additional mechanism for shaping individual educational trajectories.

The results obtained by students, with the support of academic mentors and community partners, demonstrate the potential of universities as institutional actors supporting territorial communities in strategic planning processes.

In the context of post-war recovery, the scaling up of such practices may contribute to the development of local expertise, the enhancement of energy, climate, and societal resilience, and the implementation of sustainable development principles both at the level of individual communities and across the country as a whole.

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IMPLEMENTING SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE COURSE “ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND DIGITAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS”: A TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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Keywords: service-learning; entrepreneurship education; digital business communications; community engagement; post-war recovery.

Abstract

In the Sumy Urban Territorial Community, one of the identified needs is a lack of understanding of entrepreneurship fundamentals, digital communication tools, and the integration of traditional business concepts with digital skills required in the modern business environment. This need has become especially relevant under martial law and in the context of post-war recovery in Ukraine. At the same time, education today goes beyond knowledge transfer and becomes a tool for resilience, social cohesion, and community recovery. In this context, service-learning transforms education into a socially engaged and practice-oriented process. Therefore, a service-learning approach was implemented in teaching the course “Entrepreneurship and Digital Business Communications” at the Department of Financial Technologies and Entrepreneurship of Sumy State University.

This was the first service-learning experience for both the lecturer and first-year bachelor students enrolled in economic educational programs. As the course is mandatory, it involved more than one hundred students studying in full-time, part-time, and distance-learning formats. The 5-ECTS-credit course consists of eight topics, including 24 hours of lectures and 42 hours of practical classes.

Through service-learning, the course integrated academic knowledge with community engagement and equipped students with entrepreneurial competencies and digital skills. Particular attention was paid to the digital economy and business digitalization. By responding to real community challenges, students directly applied their learning outcomes to local needs,

contributing to economic resilience and sustainable community development.

The methodology included interactive lectures, case studies, individual projects, reflection activities, and collaborative practical work. In addition to the academic curriculum, students participated in the Online Business Laboratory led by Ukrainian entrepreneurs and in the project intensive “Women’s Leadership and Entrepreneurship.” These activities created opportunities for communication with local entrepreneurs and representatives of the Department of Strategic and Socio-Economic Development of the Sumy City Council.

Direct service-learning activities within the community were implemented through socially significant events. One group of female students conducted an offline training session for women of different ages, including socially vulnerable groups attending the NGO “Girls” space. Participants were introduced to the process of registering as individual entrepreneurs through the Diia portal and learned how to develop business ideas using the Business Model Canvas. The training provided practical tools for starting a business, motivation to move from ideas to action, and support in overcoming digital fears. It also contributed to increasing self-confidence, encouraging lifelong learning, and promoting entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic independence. The long-term impact includes the potential growth of women entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, job creation, and the reduction of social vulnerability.

Another group of students conducted a webinar for community residents in cooperation with the NGO “Lifelong Learning Center.” Using presentations of their own business idea projects, students shared their experience in developing and implementing business ideas. Beneficiaries received accessible and practice-oriented information that reduced barriers for individuals considering entrepreneurship. The fact that the speakers were young people already taking their first entrepreneurial steps created an additional motivational effect. This format helped participants better understand how to transform a business idea into a viable project and contributed to the development of local entrepreneurship.

In addition, students developed a questionnaire and conducted a survey among local entrepreneurs and individuals interested in starting businesses using modern digital tools and the

university's Mix e-learning platform. The survey assessed interest in entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and readiness to use digital technologies in business. The results may be useful for the Department of Strategic and Socio-Economic Development of the Sumy City Council in improving programs related to business support, digital inclusion, and local economic development.

The implementation of service-learning revealed several challenges. Firstly, participants were first-year students in their first semester of study, which caused uncertainty among some community partners regarding students' ability to conduct activities at a sufficiently high level. Secondly, the project involved an unusually large number of students. Thirdly, as the course was mandatory, not all students were equally motivated to participate in community-oriented activities. Finally, the predominantly online learning format and wartime conditions limited opportunities for offline interaction and created additional emotional pressure.

At the same time, the project demonstrated significant benefits for all stakeholders. Students developed entrepreneurial and digital competencies as well as soft skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership, adaptability, and problem-solving. Direct interaction with the community strengthened their confidence, empathy, and civic responsibility.

For the lecturer, service-learning became both a professional and personal learning experience, expanding the role from traditional teaching to mentoring and community partnership building. Cooperation with the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt strengthened international collaboration and introduced European service-learning practices.

For the community, the activities provided practical entrepreneurial and digital support, especially for women and socially vulnerable groups. Trainings, webinars, and student-led research contributed to reducing digital barriers and promoting self-employment.

Overall, the experience strengthened university–community partnerships and demonstrated that service-learning is not merely a formal educational approach but a transformative practice supporting education, local development, and resilience-building in wartime Ukraine.

3_INSTITUTIONALISATION, SUSTAINABILITY AND INCLUSIVE MODELS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

1_Short Papers

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SERVICE-LEARNING: ASSESSMENT AND IMPACT TOOLS

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Keywords: service-learning; quality assurance; assessment tools; impact evaluation.

Context and problem statement

In the current conditions of war and post-war reconstruction in Ukraine, the role of higher education institutions as active participants in societal transformation is growing. One of the effective tools for combining the educational, civic, and social missions of a university is service-learning, which integrates students' academic knowledge with practices for solving real-world community problems. This approach contributes to the formation of civic and democratic competencies, the development of responsibility, leadership, and the ability to collaborate.

At the same time, the active integration of service-learning into the educational process raises the issue of ensuring its quality. Unlike traditional forms of learning, which focus primarily on educational outcomes, service-learning aims to achieve a dual effect – educational and social, which significantly complicates the assessment process, as it requires consideration of the interests and outcomes for various stakeholders: students, teachers, the university, and local communities.

Among the key challenges, it is worth highlighting the lack of standardised approaches to assessing the quality of service-learning, the insufficient integration of such practices into internal quality assurance systems in higher education, and the limited availability of tools for measuring social impact [1]. Often, assessment boils down to recording students' participation in projects without a thorough analysis of the results achieved and the actual changes in communities. Furthermore, mechanisms for obtaining systematic feedback from LTC partners and incorporating their assessments into the quality assurance of the educational process remain underdeveloped.

In this regard, there is a need for theoretical reflection and practical justification of effective tools for assessing the quality of service-learning, which will allow for a complex consideration of both educational outcomes and social impact, and will also contribute to its institutionalisation as a standard practice in higher education institutions.

Methodology

The methodological basis of the study is an understanding of service-learning as an integrated educational practice that aims to achieve both learning outcomes and measurable social impact.

The study applies both qualitative and quantitative research methods (a mixed-methods approach), which ensures a comprehensive assessment. In particular, the following were applied: analysis of academic sources – to summarise theoretical approaches to ensuring the quality of service-learning and to identify key evaluation criteria; student surveys – to identify perceptions of the effectiveness of service-learning and the level of competence development.

Analysis

Service-learning is considered an educational approach that combines the academic preparation of higher education students with their active participation in addressing real-world social issues. Its essence lies in integrating educational objectives with the needs of the community on the basis of partnership, mutual benefit, and reflection. Key characteristics of service-learning include: a practical

focus of learning, an orientation towards achieving specific learning outcomes, the involvement of external stakeholders, and the mandatory inclusion of a reflective component that ensures the comprehension of the experience gained and its connection to theoretical knowledge.

Unlike traditional educational formats, where the transfer of knowledge within the classroom setting dominates, service-learning involves active interaction between students and the real social environment. While classical approaches focus primarily on individual academic achievement, service-learning integrates individual and collective outcomes, combining the educational component with social responsibility. Furthermore, traditional assessment methods are largely oriented towards testing knowledge and skills, whereas in service-learning, the assessment of the interaction process, the level of engagement, and the practical impact on the community are key.

The distinctive feature of service-learning lies in its multidimensional nature. Firstly, it is an educational outcome that encompasses the development of professional, social, and civic competencies, as well as the development of critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills. Secondly, an important dimension is the social impact, which manifests itself in actual positive changes within the community, the resolution of local problems, the strengthening of social capital, and an increase in civic engagement. Thirdly, significant importance is given to the quality of partnership, characterised by the level of trust between the university and the community, mutual engagement, alignment of expectations, and the sustainability of cooperation [2].

Therefore, the quality of service-oriented learning cannot be reduced to educational indicators alone, but requires a comprehensive approach to assessment that takes into account the interconnection between academic achievements, social impact, and the effectiveness of the partnership.

Ensuring the quality of service-learning requires a systematic approach that combines internal mechanisms of education quality management with the specific nature of service-learning as a practice-oriented and socially directed activity. One of the key areas is the integration of such practices into the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions. This

involves incorporating service-learning into educational programs, monitoring procedures, periodic reviews, and assessments of learning outcomes, as well as alignment with institutional quality policies.

An important approach is to focus on learning outcomes and the development of competencies. In this context, quality is determined not only by the knowledge acquired but above all by students' ability to apply it in real-life situations and to demonstrate civic responsibility, critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills. Accordingly, assessment tools should be designed to evaluate the achievement of these specific outcomes, taking into account the specific nature of practical activities within communities.

A key component of quality assurance is the involvement of stakeholders – community representatives, employers, students, and lecturers – in the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning. This approach helps to increase the relevance of educational programs, ensures that the real needs of communities and the labour market are taken into account, and fosters a culture of partnership and shared responsibility for outcomes [3].

These approaches are implemented on the basis of a number of principles. The principle of partnership involves equal interaction between the university and the community as co-creators of the educational process. The principle of reflection ensures that students reflect on their experiences, which contributes to a deeper acquisition of knowledge and the development of competencies. The principle of mutual benefit emphasises achieving a balance between the university's educational goals and the needs of the community, which is a necessary condition for the sustainability of such practices.

Consequently, quality assurance in service-learning is based on the integration of institutional mechanisms, a focus on outcomes, the active involvement of stakeholders, and adherence to key principles of cooperation, which together ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of this approach.

The effectiveness of any quality assurance system cannot be assessed without direct feedback from its key stakeholders – the students. Since service-oriented learning is based on reflection and the subjective experience of engagement, analysing the

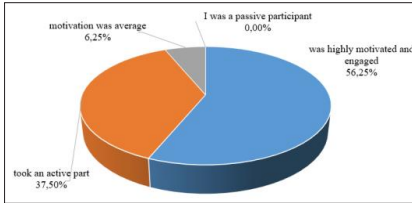
perception of this format by the students themselves becomes crucial for understanding the actual impact of the methodology on their professional and personal development [4]. For this purpose, a survey was conducted on the effectiveness of the implemented initiatives. In December 2025, a survey was conducted among higher education students at Sumy State University who were enrolled in the courses 'Entrepreneurship and Digital Business Communications' and 'Child Mental Health Support'. The object of the study was the experience of students involved in the implementation of community-oriented projects within the framework of these courses. The survey was based on a system of indicators covering the level of motivation, the quality of acquired professional competencies, and the effectiveness of interaction with communities. The results of the student survey are summarised in Fig. 1.

An analysis of the survey results indicates an exceptionally high level of inner motivation among higher education students, as the vast majority of respondents described their level of engagement as high or active. An important indicator of the success of the Service-Learning methodology is the complete absence of passive participants, which confirms the ability of this format to transform academic learning into an activity that is personally meaningful to the student.

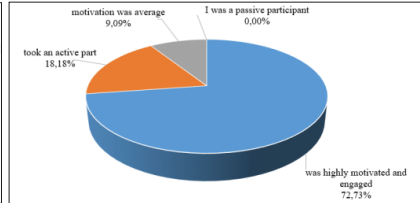
In terms of competence development, the survey results demonstrate significant progress in several areas. The most prominent improvement was in professional communication skills and the presentation of work results, noted by over half of the respondents. In addition to professional knowledge, participation in projects contributed to the development of analytical thinking, the search for creative solutions, and teamwork. Of particular importance is the values-based approach to learning, as a significant proportion of students highlighted an increase in empathy, social responsibility, and civic stance. This demonstrates the transformation of knowledge into a tool for genuine service to the community.

Assessing the effectiveness of the Service-Learning methodology in comparison with traditional teaching approaches, the vast majority of respondents recognised service-learning as more effective for the qualitative acquisition of material.

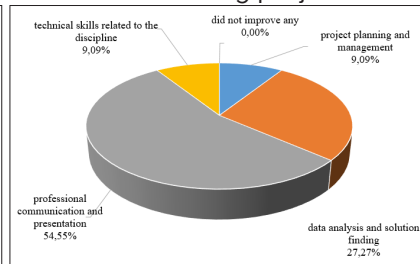
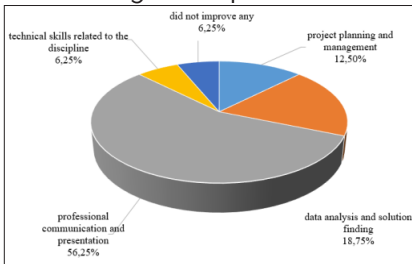
Students who studied the discipline “Child mental health support”



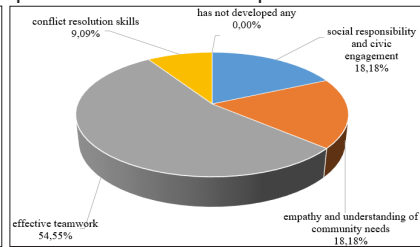
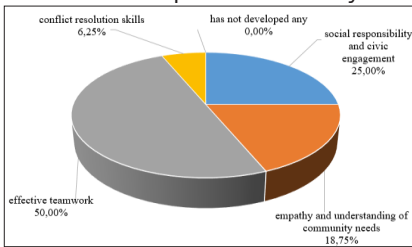
Students who studied the discipline “Entrepreneurship and Digital Business Communications”



How would you rate your level of involvement and motivation during the implementation of a Service-Learning project?

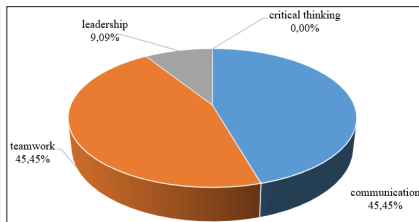
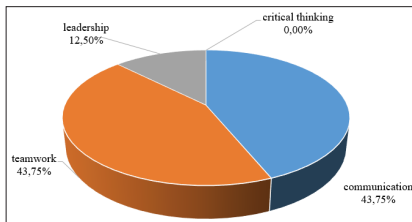


What competencies did you improve due to this experience?

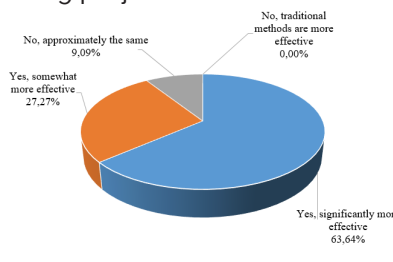
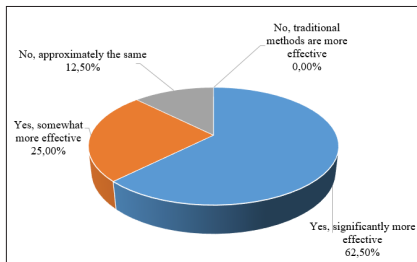


What social and civic competences did you develop during the implementation of the project?

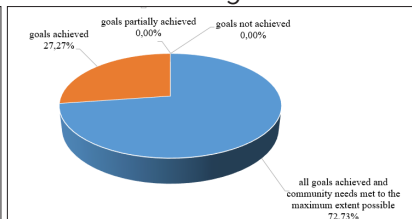
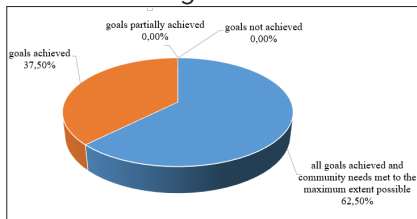
Fig. 1. Results of a survey of students regarding their experience of participating in a service-learning project



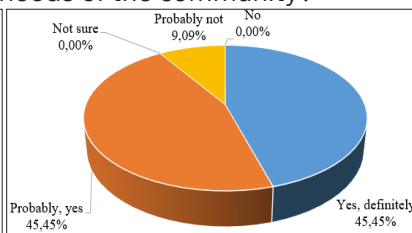
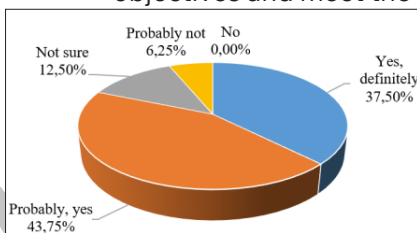
What skills did you develop while participating in the Service-Learning project?



Do you think that the Service-Learning format was more effective for learning the material than traditional teaching methods?



How successfully have you managed to achieve the project's objectives and meet the needs of the community?



Would you like to participate in projects of Service-Learning in the future?

Fig. 1 (continuance)

The full achievement of the set goals and the fulfilment of community needs confirm the high level of organisational preparation and practical significance of the initiatives. Despite isolated organisational difficulties and external challenges, the overall experience is assessed by participants as positive and motivating, expressed in their willingness to continue participating in similar projects in the future. Therefore, the analysis conducted demonstrates that integrating learning with social contribution is a powerful mechanism for developing well-rounded professionals capable of professional self-realisation and active participation in the processes of societal renewal.

During interviews, representatives of the Sumy local community confirmed the high relevance of service-learning as an effective tool for fostering cooperation between the university and the region, particularly in the context of war and post-war reconstruction. They noted that this model facilitates the practical integration of the educational process with the real needs of the community, encourages involvement of young people in addressing socially significant issues, particularly regarding support for child mental health and the development of entrepreneurial and digital skills, and also enhances the level of civic responsibility among higher education students.

It was also emphasised that service-learning creates the conditions for the formation of partnerships between the university, LTC, and non-governmental organisations, which is particularly important for consolidating efforts in the reconstruction of affected areas.

Thus, ensuring the quality of service-learning requires a systematic approach that integrates social practices into the academic environment. A key aspect is the use of combined assessment tools: from quantitative surveys to qualitative interviews with stakeholders. Research on the experience of Sumy State University proves that such a learning model not only enhances students' professional and soft skills but also has a tangible positive impact on the development of communities. In the context of martial law and Ukraine's future recovery, service-learning is becoming a strategic mechanism for strengthening partnerships between the academic community and civil society, shaping responsible professionals capable of addressing pressing social challenges.

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FROM ENGAGEMENT TO BELONGING: REFLECTING ON SERVICE-LEARNING AND THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

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Keywords: service-learning; human dignity; inclusion; disability studies; belonging; connection; community engagement; theological anthropology.

This article explores service-learning methodology as a pedagogical and institutional practice grounded in the dignity of the human person. Drawing on theological perspectives on disability and dignity, alongside a case study from the Ukrainian Catholic University, this paper argues that inclusion must be understood as a relational and structural principle rooted in the inherent dignity of every person. It critiques both medical and purely social models of disability for their insufficient attention to relationality and proposes a dignity-centred framework that emphasizes mutual recognition, vulnerability, and encounter.

The case study of the inclusive service-learning project “I Want to Be Your Friend” demonstrates how inclusive practices can be institutionalized through curriculum integration, reflective assessment, and mutual community partnerships. The findings suggest that inclusive service-learning not only improves student learning but also builds the university as a space of belonging. Ultimately, the article proposes that inclusive service-learning, when grounded in dignity, has the potential to transform both educational institutions and the broader social imagination by fostering relationships that affirm the equal worth of all participants.

Introduction

Contemporary education increases beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and the formation of professional skills. It is becoming a space of responsibility, encounter, and the co-creation of the common good. In this context, service-learning emerges not only as a pedagogical innovation but as a response to a deeper anthropological question: how can we teach a person to be with

others, for others, and together with others? As the experience of Ukrainian Catholic University demonstrates, being the first university in Ukraine to implement this approach institutionally¹, service-learning integrates academic learning with real community needs, shaping not only competencies but also a responsible attitude toward society.

At the same time, service-learning cannot be reduced to a tool of experiential education or social volunteering. Its deeper meaning lies in transforming the very logic of interaction: from a vertical model of assistance to a horizontal model of participation. It is not an activity done *for* the community, but an experience lived *with* the community, where each person becomes both a learner and a teacher. Such an approach opens the possibility of cultivating a culture of reciprocity in which human dignity is revealed not as an abstract principle, but as a lived experience of encounter.

This article is grounded in the confidence that service-learning has the potential to transform the educational process from mere engagement to a deeper sense of belonging. While engagement implies participation in activities, belonging signifies something more profound – to be accepted, to be needed, to become a co-creator of a shared space. It is precisely in this transition that the connection between education and the dignity of the human person becomes visible.

The experience of implementing service-learning in courses in philosophy, theology, and the humanities shows that education can become a space of genuine encounter. Service-learning is not merely a method it is a spiritual and cultural pathway, one that connects knowledge with compassion and transforms teaching into an act of hope. In this sense, teaching becomes an act of faith in the human person and a practice of hope, especially in times of crisis, war, or social instability.

Thus, this article approaches service-learning not only as a pedagogical model, but as an anthropological and ethical space in which dignity is formed through exchange, encounter, and

1 “УКУ – перший університет в Україні, який на інституційному рівні впроваджує освітній підхід Service Learning – «Суспільно-орієнтоване навчання»”, Український католицький університет, November 16, 2021, <https://ucu.edu.ua/news/uku-pershyj-universytet-v-ukrayini-yakyj-na-instytutstijnomu-rivni-vprovadzhuye-osvitnij-pidhid-service-learning-suspilno-orijentovane-navchannya/>

belonging. The movement from engagement to belonging opens a new vision of education—as a space where a person not only learns to act, but learns to be with others, and through this, discovers their own dignity.

Words Matter: Rethinking Inclusion

The concept of inclusion in higher education is often approached through institutional frameworks that emphasize access and participation. While these dimensions are essential, they risk overlooking a more fundamental question: what does it mean to recognize the dignity of another person?

Contemporary disability studies have highlighted the limitations of the medical model, which tends to define individuals in terms of deficits or impairments. In this model, the person is often reduced to a problem to be solved or a condition to be treated. Although this perspective has contributed to important medical and rehabilitative advances, it can inadvertently undermine the agency and subjectivity of individuals with disabilities.²

In contrast, the social model of disability shifts attention from the individual to the environment, emphasizing the role of social barriers in producing exclusion. Accessibility, accommodation, and rights-based frameworks emerge from this model, enabling greater participation in public life. Yet even this model has its limits. As theological reflections on disability suggest, the social model may fail to account for the relational and existential dimensions of human life, particularly vulnerability, dependence, and the need for meaningful relationships.³

A deeper understanding of inclusion must therefore be rooted in the recognition of human dignity as intrinsic and non-negotiable. Human dignity is not something that needs to be proven, justified, or earned. A particularly powerful illustration

² See. World Health Organization, *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10th Revision (ICD-10)*, vol. 1: Tabular List, 5th ed. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2016).

World Health Organization, *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2001).

³ See. Talitha Cooreman-Guittin & Armand Léon van Ommen (2022) Disability theology: a driving force for change?, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 22:1, 1–4, DOI: 10.1080/1474225X.2022.2046760

of this problem emerges not from abstract theory but from lived experience. Sophie Lutz, the mother of Philippine (a girl with multiple disabilities), reflects on an invitation she once received to speak about the dignity of persons with disabilities. What initially appeared as a well-intentioned request gradually revealed a deeper, troubling assumption: that people with disabilities must somehow explain or justify their dignity. As she recognized, such a request implicitly communicates a hidden message: “Explain why you have the right to be here. Prove that your dignity is equal to that of others.”⁴ This expectation exposes a fundamental misunderstanding of human dignity. Dignity is not something that needs to be demonstrated, argued for, or earned; it is inherent and equal in every human person.

This example reveals how deeply embedded the logic of conditional worth remains, even within inclusive or educational contexts. It also shows that exclusion does not always take the form of overt rejection; it can manifest in subtle demands for justification that place the burden of proof on those whose dignity should never be questioned.

Gordon Temple, who is responsible for fostering inclusive environments in British churches, argues that when we speak of *impairment*, we refer to the person, whereas when we speak of *disability*, we refer to the environment and society’s response to that person.⁵ A fundamental principle of an inclusive society, he emphasizes, is “Nothing about us without us.” In other words, it is inappropriate to speak about people with disabilities without their participation. They must have a voice, rights, and responsibilities that enable them to act in accordance with their own interests. Temple also stresses that both the medical and the social models of disability have their respective roles, and that they are most effective when they complement rather than exclude one another.

At the same time, the very term *inclusion* carries an implicit belief: it accepts that someone has first been excluded and must now be “brought back” into society. In this sense, inclusion is not a neutral concept; it reveals prior processes of marginalisation and

⁴ Sophie Lutz *Derrière les apparences* (Emmanuel, 2012), 27–31.

⁵ Gordon Temple *Enabling Church: A Bible-Based Resource Towards The Full Inclusion Of Disabled People* (SPCK Publishing, 2012) (Kindle).

exclusion. This raises a deeper question, whether inclusion should be understood merely as the act of incorporating those who were previously excluded, or as a more radical transformation of the social order itself, in which no one is ever positioned outside the community to begin with. Yet, for now, we do not have more enough language, and the term “inclusion” remains both necessary and insufficient.

Marilyn Hull, the wife of theologian John Hull, who lost his sight in adulthood, once remarked that it is not enough merely to speak about inclusion or to make minor adjustments toward a more inclusive world. Rather, the world should become so fully inclusive that we, as people who will all eventually experience some form of limitation (such as through aging) would not even notice it.

Service-Learning as a Practice of Encounter

When viewed through the lens of dignity, service-learning undergoes a profound transformation. Traditional models often position students as active agents who provide assistance to passive recipients. This asymmetry can reinforce paternalistic attitudes and obscure the dignity of those being “served.”

Inclusive service-learning challenges this dynamic by emphasizing encounter rather than service. Encounter implies a meeting between persons who are equally endowed with dignity, even if they occupy different social positions. It is not oriented toward solving problems alone but toward recognizing the presence of the other.⁶

Theological reflections on disability offer a powerful insight in this regard: the most significant form of “healing” in the Gospel is not always physical restoration but the restoration of relational visibility.⁷ Those whom Christ encounters, often marginalized, excluded, or deemed impure are first made visible, touched, and included in community. Healing, in this sense, involves overcoming

⁶ See. Yuliia Vintoniv, “Theology of DisArt: Service-Learning Experience.” In Proceedings of the IV Uniservitate Global Symposium, De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines, November 8–9, 2023. Uniservitate Collection, 2024.

⁷ John M. Hull In the beginning there was Darkness. A blind person’s conversations with the Bible (Trinity Press International, 2001), 34–59.

social and symbolic exclusion rather than merely correcting physical conditions.

This perspective has important implications for service-learning. It suggests that the primary goal is not to change the other but to enter into a relationship that allows both participants to be transformed. Students are not simply agents of change; they are also recipients of an encounter that may challenge their assumptions, expose their vulnerabilities, and reshape their understanding of themselves and others.

Vulnerability plays a central role in this process. As Brené Brown suggests in *Daring Greatly*, the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead. In the context of service-learning, this insight reveals that genuine encounters require openness to uncertainty, emotional exposure, and the possibility of being changed by the relationship.⁸ Students may face situations where their knowledge is insufficient, their expectations are disrupted, and their role becomes unclear. Rather than being a failure, this experience can become site of learning, revealing the limits of instrumental approaches and the importance of presence.

Service-learning can be seen as a response to the growing “normalization of disconnection” in higher education.⁹ Even though we are more connected than ever through technology, many students and teachers still experience isolation and a lack of real relationships. This sense of disconnection becomes even stronger in times of crisis. In Ukraine, the ongoing war has deeply affected everyday life, creating fear, uncertainty, and fragmentation, while at the same time intensifying the need for connection and solidarity. In this context, service-learning creates opportunities for real encounter. It brings people together and reminds us that “we need each other. We need connection”¹⁰. Human dignity is not something we experience alone it becomes visible in relationships with others, especially in moments of vulnerability and shared struggle. A key

⁸ See. Brené Brown *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (Avery, 2012) (Kindle).

⁹ Amy L Kenworthy, Sophia Opatska, and Yulia Vintoniv “Provocation Essay (Re)discovering connection and community: A call to move beyond the ‘normalization of disconnection’” *Management Learning*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505076251324651>

¹⁰ Ibid.

shift in this process is the movement from “I” to “We”.¹¹ Students, teachers, and community members begin to work together, not as helpers and recipients, but as partners who learn from each other and support one another. This kind of learning requires vulnerability. It asks people to be open, to listen, and to accept that they may be changed by the encounter. In a context of war, such encounters can become a form of solidarity a way of staying connected to reality, to others, and to a shared sense of purpose.

Inclusive Leadership as Presence: The “I Want to Be Your Friend” Project

The course “The Art of Leadership” introduced in the autumn of 2022, emerged as a response to the urgent need to form a new generation of leaders capable of contributing to the rebuilding of Ukraine in the context of war. Conceived as a laboratory of inclusive leadership, the course integrates theoretical reflection with lived encounter, challenging students to rethink leadership not as power but as presence, responsibility, and relationship. It is structured around video lectures and meetings with Archbishop Borys Gudziak¹², complemented by course readings, discussions, and a range of academic assignments. At its core, however, lies a service-learning project. Implemented in partnership with the NGO Maisternia Mrii (Dream Workshop), the course engages students in sustained, relational interaction with people with intellectual disabilities through the project “*I want to be your friend.*” In this way, leadership is learned not abstractly, but through concrete practices of encounter, friendship, and shared experience. Inspired by Archbishop Borys Gudziak’s vision of leadership as service, the course redefined leadership beyond administrative or hierarchical frameworks. Leadership here was not understood as influence, control, or efficiency, but as presence, responsibility, and friendship. This shift was not merely conceptual; it was embodied

¹¹ Amy L Kenworthy, Sophia Opatska, and Yulia Vintoniv “Provocation Essay (Re)discovering connection and community: A call to move beyond the ‘normalization of disconnection’” *Management Learning*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505076251324651>

¹² Ukrainian Catholic University, “Leadership: What Really Matters? A Reflective Course with Borys Gudziak,” *UCU Online*, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://online.ucu.edu.ua/courses/66d23471e4ee1dd97d93754b>. Based on this course, the author co-teaches the course “The Art of Leadership.”

in concrete practices of encounter, co-creation, and shared time. As an integral element of the course, service-learning provided the framework in which these practices could take shape, allowing students to experience leadership through real relationships and shared responsibility within the community. Students did not “serve” others in a traditional sense. Rather, they entered into relationships that challenged asymmetries between helper and recipient. The experience gradually destabilized preconceived notions of ability, usefulness, and value. As one student reflects: “I began to perceive people as people. Not higher, not lower, but here, nearby”¹³. This recognition of equality marks a foundational transformation: dignity is not granted through action but revealed through encounter. In this context, leadership becomes the capacity to remain in relationship without reducing the other to a task or problem.

A key pedagogical dimension of the course was structured reflection. Students were required to articulate their experiences, including moments of discomfort, confusion, and transformation. These reflections reveal that one of the most significant shifts was the move from doing to being. Presence itself became meaningful: “They are okay with me just sitting there... they do not need me only when I am in a ‘good state’”¹⁴. Such insights challenge deeply ingrained assumptions about productivity and worth. Students discovered that their value in the relationship was not tied to performance, but to authenticity and availability.

The relational nature of the experience also reconfigured students’ understanding of belonging. Rather than entering as outsiders who contribute, they found themselves becoming part of a shared space: “I can just be. I can receive what others give...I am finally present to myself”¹⁵.

Importantly, the experience was marked by mutuality rather than one-directional giving. Students repeatedly emphasize that what they received exceeded what they offered: “I am glad that I could bring a little warmth into their lives and receive even more in return.”

¹³ Anastasiia Brus, BA student in Sociology at Ukrainian Catholic University, reflection on the course “The Art of Leadership” (2022–2023).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ This mutuality interrupts the logic of charity and replaces it with a model of shared humanity. Leadership, in this sense, is not about changing others but about allowing oneself to be changed through relationship.

Moments of shared joy, simplicity, and co-presence further reinforced this transformation: “We sincerely talked with each other as equals”¹⁷ and “They rejoiced in every small detail as if it were a diamond.”¹⁸ These experiences reveal that inclusive leadership is not enacted through extraordinary interventions, but through attentiveness to ordinary moments. The ability to recognize value in what appears small or insignificant becomes a key leadership competency.

At the same time, students encountered vulnerability, both their own and that of others. They faced uncertainty, emotional intensity, and the limits of their own expectations. Yet these moments were not obstacles but essential to learning: “In difficult situations... there is always someone who is also here, and in this, a friend appears.”¹⁹ Such reflections point to a crucial insight: inclusion is not the elimination of difficulty, but the willingness to remain in relationship within it.

Ultimately, the course demonstrates that inclusive leadership emerges not from mastery, but from encounter. It is grounded in the recognition that dignity is already present and does not need to be produced. What is required is the capacity to see, to remain, and to respond. In this sense, the project “I Want to Be Your Friend” embodies a fundamental reorientation of leadership: from power to presence, from action to relationship, and from service to shared life.

At its deepest level, this also redefines the purpose of education itself. The most important learning does not consist in acquiring skills or achieving outcomes, but in recognizing that human dignity

¹⁶ Lilia Biliak, BA student in Social Pedagogy at Ukrainian Catholic University, reflection on the course “The Art of Leadership” (2023–2024).

¹⁷ Danyil Rozvodovskyi, “The Art of Leadership” 2024–2025.

¹⁸ Khrystyna Havryliv, BA student in the Ethics–Politics–Economics program at Ukrainian Catholic University, reflection on the course “The Art of Leadership” (2022–2023)

¹⁹ Mykhailo Rozum, BA student in Law at Ukrainian Catholic University, reflection on the course “The Art of Leadership” 2024–2025.

is a given, something that precedes all action, performance, and evaluation. Education, therefore, becomes the space where this dignity is not taught as a concept but encountered as a reality. To learn, in this context, is to learn to see the other not as a task, a role, or a problem, but as a person whose worth is already complete.

Conclusion

Inclusive service-learning, when grounded in the dignity of the human person, offers a powerful framework for transforming higher education. It challenges instrumental approaches to learning and invites a reimagining of education as a relational and ethical practice.

The case of the Ukrainian Catholic University demonstrates that such transformation is possible when inclusion is understood not as an obligation but as a response to the inherent worth of every person. In this context, service-learning becomes more than a pedagogical method; it becomes a way of encountering others and, in doing so, rediscovering what it means to be human.

In the most recent iteration of the course (2025–2026), this approach has begun to develop further, as the partnership with *Maisternia Mrii* gradually evolves into forms of shared service directed toward a third party. This emerging dimension suggests a new stage in the development of inclusive service-learning, where relationships of encounter extend into broader networks of solidarity. While this direction opens important questions about the transformation of both leadership and community engagement, it will be explored in future research.

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METHODOLOGY OR MINDSET? A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO SERVICE-LEARNING IN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Service-learning is widely praised in higher education as a vehicle for civic engagement, community partnership, and socially relevant learning. Yet its institutional status remains unstable. Universities often endorse service-learning rhetorically while failing to embed it in budgets, workload systems, quality assurance, or partnership structures. This paper argues that the persistent ambiguity between service-learning as a methodology and service-learning as a mindset is not merely semantic; it has direct institutional consequences. Drawing on foundational service-learning scholarship and recent literature on institutionalisation, sustainability, community participation, and learning predictors, the paper develops the Service-Learning Institutional Commitment Model (SLICM). The model explains how normative endorsement does not automatically produce sustainable implementation. Instead, service-learning becomes institutionally durable only when a civic mindset is translated into codified pedagogical design and then into budgeted organisational infrastructure. The paper contributes to the literature by identifying a missing causal link between definitional ambiguity and weak institutional commitment. It further argues that this gap is especially consequential in conflict-affected and recovery-oriented systems such as Ukraine's, where universities are increasingly expected to contribute to community resilience, territorial recovery, and civic regeneration. The paper concludes that service-learning should be judged not only by its moral appeal or pedagogical promise, but by the extent to which institutions make it operationally and financially real.

Introduction

Service-learning occupies an unusually attractive position in higher education discourse. It promises to connect academic learning with community needs, civic development, and public purpose. Foundational definitions already frame it as more than volunteering: it is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience structured around service, reflection, and reciprocal learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Furco, 1996). At the same time, later scholarship has shown that service-learning also carries normative assumptions about justice, citizenship, and the role of higher education in society (Butin, 2010; Mitchell, 2008). That dual status has made the concept influential, but also institutionally unstable.

The problem is not that service-learning can be understood both as methodology and as mindset. The problem is that universities often benefit from that ambiguity. They celebrate the language of engagement, responsibility, and public mission, yet avoid the operational consequences of treating service-learning as a real pedagogical modality. As a result, service-learning is frequently praised without being staffed, budgeted, assessed, or normalised. This paper argues that the methodology-versus-mindset distinction matters because it structures institutional commitment.

This argument addresses a genuine gap in the literature. Recent work shows that service-learning remains difficult to implement at scale and that insufficient capacity, funding, and educator attitudes are major barriers to institutional uptake (Álvarez-Vanegas et al., 2024). Other research has moved toward institutional frameworks for embedding service-learning in universities, stressing the importance of leadership, communication, teamwork, and project design (Rodríguez-Zurita et al., 2025). At the same time, systematic review evidence suggests that the community side of service-learning remains weakly conceptualised, insufficiently involved in design and evaluation, and inadequately assessed in terms of real impact (Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2026). Student-level research also shows that outcomes depend on specific pedagogical conditions, particularly collaborative learning, reflective learning, and course satisfaction, which means that implementation quality matters materially rather than symbolically (Zhu et al., 2026). What remains under-theorised, however, is the mechanism linking conceptual framing to resource allocation. This paper addresses that missing link.

From conceptual ambiguity to institutional undercommitment

When service-learning is framed primarily as a mindset, it is easy for institutions to endorse it at very low cost. It can appear in mission statements, strategic plans, accreditation narratives, and donor-facing documents without producing changes in staffing or budgeting. A mindset can be admired without being funded. By contrast, when service-learning is framed as methodology, it becomes harder to evade its implementation requirements. It must then be designed, coordinated, assessed, and resourced.

This distinction matters because methodologies have cost structures. Service-learning requires community partnership development, faculty time, reflection design, student coordination, risk management, and monitoring. It also requires some institutional mechanism that outlasts individual enthusiasm. Foundational work already implied that successful service-learning depends on institutional, faculty, student, and community conditions rather than goodwill alone (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Recent literature reinforces that point. Álvarez-Vanegas et al. (2024) identify funding and educator capacity as structural obstacles to implementation. As Álvarez-Vanegas et al. (2024) conclude, “the three major challenges are insufficient educator capacity, funding, and educator attitudes” (p. 13). They further argue that educators are central to implementation and that, unless they are “trained and incentivized and this is systematized,” service-learning is unlikely to transform higher education environments at scale (p. 13). Rodríguez-Zurita et al. (2025) emphasise that the institutionalisation of service-learning depends on structured organisational conditions rather than isolated instructional effort, identifying “critical success factors and challenges related to leadership, teamwork, project design and execution, and communication.” The study further presents service-learning as a “replicable institutional approach” which supports the argument that sustainable implementation requires coordinated institutional architecture rather than stand-alone course initiatives. Zhu et al. (2026) state that “collaborative learning, reflective learning, and course satisfaction positively predicted students’ achievement in SL” (p. 2). This finding matters conceptually because it shows that student gains in service-learning are linked to specific pedagogical conditions rather than to participation alone. In that sense, service-learning cannot

be treated as a purely symbolic or value-based practice; its effectiveness depends on deliberate pedagogical architecture.

At the same time, weak institutionalisation distorts reciprocity. Ruiz-Corbella et al. (2026) show that much service-learning research still under-specifies the community, limits its active participation, and insufficiently evaluates community impact. This pattern is not accidental. Where institutions do not budget for partnership governance or impact assessment, the community is more likely to become a recipient or setting rather than a co-responsible actor. In that sense, underfunding is not only an administrative problem. It is a reciprocity problem.

The Service-Learning Institutional Commitment Model

To explain this mechanism, this paper proposes the Service-Learning Institutional Commitment Model (SLICM). The model is built around a simple claim: service-learning becomes sustainable only when normative endorsement is translated into pedagogical codification and then into organisational investment.

The first layer is **normative legitimacy**. Here, service-learning is endorsed as part of the university's civic mission, public role, or social responsibility agenda. This layer is necessary because institutions rarely invest in practices they do not consider legitimate. Yet it is insufficient because legitimacy alone does not create implementation capacity.

The second layer is **pedagogical codification**. At this stage, service-learning is defined not merely as “engagement” but as a recognisable educational design. Its core features include curricular integration, reciprocity, structured reflection, collaboration, and assessment (Bingle & Hatcher, 1996; Furco, 1996). This layer matters because it converts abstract values into operational educational requirements.

The third layer is **organisational commitment**. Here, the university accepts that service-learning has an institutional cost structure and allocates visible support accordingly. This includes workload recognition, partnership coordination, operational funding, staff roles, quality assurance procedures, and community impact evaluation. This layer is where institutional sincerity becomes visible.

The fourth layer is **sustainable implementation**. Only when the previous layers align can service-learning plausibly generate

durable student gains, reciprocal community benefit, and continuity beyond grant cycles. Without organisational commitment, service-learning remains either rhetorical or episodic.

The model therefore predicts three distinct implementation states. Where only normative legitimacy exists, service-learning will remain symbolic. Where normative legitimacy and pedagogical codification exist without organisational commitment, service-learning will survive only as a fragile pilot dependent on heroic faculty labour. Where all three antecedent layers are present, service-learning can be normalised as part of ordinary institutional functioning.

Why this matters in recovery-oriented higher education

This argument becomes sharper in conflict-affected settings. In recovery-oriented systems such as Ukraine's, universities are increasingly expected to do more than deliver instruction. They are being asked to contribute to social cohesion, local problem solving, displaced population support, and territorial recovery. In such contexts, the institutional underfunding of service-learning is not neutral. It produces strategic weakness.

If universities want students to work with municipalities, displaced communities, veterans, or recovery actors, service-learning cannot rest on informal enthusiasm alone. Fragile contexts require more structure, not less. Community engagement in wartime and post-war conditions may require safeguarding, coordination, flexible course design, transportation, contingency planning, and sustained communication with partners. If these requirements are treated as external or optional, the result will be symbolic participation, extractive partnerships, or post-project disappearance.

For that reason, the key institutional question is not whether universities believe in service-learning. The real question is whether they are willing to make it administratively and financially real. Recovery governance demands universities that can link knowledge, pedagogy, and territory through stable structures rather than temporary moral energy.

Table 1. Summary of the Service-Learning Institutional Commitment Model (SLICM)

Model component	What it means	Key institutional question	If present	If absent
1. Mindset / normative legitimacy	The university recognises service-learning as part of its civic mission, public role, and social responsibility.	Does the institution see service-learning as aligned with its mission and values?	Service-learning gains rhetorical legitimacy and strategic visibility.	Service-learning remains marginal, optional, or invisible in institutional discourse.
2. Methodology/ pedagogical codification	Service-learning is defined as a structured educational approach with curricular integration, reciprocity, reflection, collaboration, and assessment.	Is service-learning treated as a real pedagogical design rather than a general value statement?	The practice becomes teachable, replicable, and evaluable across courses and programmes.	Service-learning remains vague, inconsistently applied, and easily confused with volunteering or outreach.
3. Institutional commitment/ organisational translation	The university translates the methodology into formal support: workload recognition, staffing, coordination, operational support, QA, and evaluation.	Is the institution willing to allocate resources, roles, and procedures to support implementation?	Service-learning becomes administratively feasible and less dependent on individual enthusiasm.	Service-learning depends on uncompensated faculty effort, fragile pilots, and ad hoc arrangements.
4. Budgeted infrastructure/ material support	Dedicated or embedded resources are allocated for partnership management, student support, logistics, reflection, monitoring, and impact assessment.	Is service-learning budgetarily real, not only normatively endorsed?	The practice can scale, persist, and maintain reciprocity with community partners.	The institution symbolically supports service-learning while materially neglecting it.
5. Sustainable implementation/ durable outcomes	Service-learning becomes a normalised institutional practice with continuity, quality control, and credible outcomes for students and communities.	Can service-learning survive beyond isolated projects, grants, or individual champions?	The university achieves durable student learning, stronger community partnerships, and institutionalisation.	The practice remains episodic, project-bound, and vulnerable to staff turnover or funding gaps.

Conclusion

The literature already shows that service-learning faces implementation barriers, depends on institutional frameworks, struggles with reciprocity, and produces stronger outcomes when pedagogical design is robust (Álvarez-Vanegas et al., 2024; Rodríguez-Zurita et al., 2025; Ruiz-Corbella et al., 2026; Zhu et al., 2026). What has been less clearly articulated is why universities repeatedly endorse service-learning while failing to institutionalise it. This paper argues that the missing explanation lies in conceptual ambiguity.

Service-learning is both a methodology and a mindset. But universities often exploit that duality asymmetrically. They retain the moral legitimacy of the mindset while avoiding the material obligations of the methodology. The contribution of this paper is therefore not simply to restate that the distinction exists, but to model how that distinction structures institutional commitment. The Service-Learning Institutional Commitment Model shows that sustainable implementation depends on a sequence: civic legitimacy, pedagogical codification, and budgeted organisational support. Break that sequence, and service-learning remains fragile. Complete it, and service-learning becomes institutionally credible.

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FROM RESPONSE TO RECOVERY: SERVICE-LEARNING AS A COMPONENT OF KNOWLEDGE INFRASTRUCTURE IN TIMES OF WAR AND GEOPOLITICAL TURBULENCE

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Abstract

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has revealed the limits of traditional academic and civic systems while underscoring the need for agile, democratic, and socially embedded knowledge production. In this context, service-learning (SL) – linking academic study with community engagement – has become a vital element of Ukraine's knowledge infrastructure during the most turbulent times. This paper examines how SL functions as a connective, participatory, and resilience-building educational practice within a broader landscape of geopolitical turbulence. Focusing on the Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) experience and drawing on the international ServU project, it shows how SL has enabled students, faculty, and local communities to co-create knowledge relevant to immediate challenges including displacement, community support, trauma response, and local governance under stress. The analysis situates the Ukrainian case within a comparative international framework and concludes by proposing the creation of a Policy Lab as a mechanism for institutionalising SL – moving from course-based engagement to a sustained, university-wide platform for applied research and policy co-creation.

Problem Framing

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, launched in February 2022, has confronted higher education institutions with a crisis that is simultaneously physical, epistemic, and civic. Universities have faced the destruction of infrastructure, mass displacement of students and faculty, the psychological burden of sustained

warfare, and the imperative to remain socially relevant in conditions of urgent community need. What the war has exposed with unusual clarity is that traditional academic structures – designed for stability and continuity – are inadequately equipped to respond to the complex, urgent, and rapidly shifting problems that communities under stress actually face.

This crisis is, on the other hand, an epistemological one. The invasion has revealed the limits of knowledge systems that operate in separation from the communities they supposedly serve. It has underscored the need for agile, democratic, and socially embedded knowledge production: forms of inquiry and learning capable of generating practically useful understanding while remaining accountable to those most affected by war and displacement. In this sense, the crisis has not created new demands so much as made existing ones impossible to defer.

Service-learning (SL) – the pedagogical approach that links structured academic study with meaningful community engagement and critical reflection – has emerged in this context as more than a curriculum design strategy. At Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) in Lviv, and across a growing number of Ukrainian institutions, it has functioned as connective link between the university and the communities it serves, sustaining social ties and co-producing knowledge when other infrastructures have been disrupted. This paper argues that SL, when embedded institutionally rather than practised sporadically, constitutes a vital component of resilient knowledge infrastructure: the relational, institutional, and pedagogical arrangements through which knowledge is produced, shared, and put to use in times of both stability and crisis (see Figure 1).

The problem this paper addresses is threefold. First, there is a conceptual gap: SL has been extensively theorised in North American and Western European contexts but has received less systematic attention in conflict-affected or post-Soviet educational settings (Kenworthy et al., 2025). Second, there is a practice gap: many Ukrainian universities that have informally mobilised community-engaged activities since 2022 lack frameworks to institutionalise, evaluate, or scale these efforts. Third, there is a policy gap: existing national strategies for higher education recovery have tended to prioritise physical reconstruction and

internationalisation while undervaluing pedagogical innovation rooted in civic engagement.

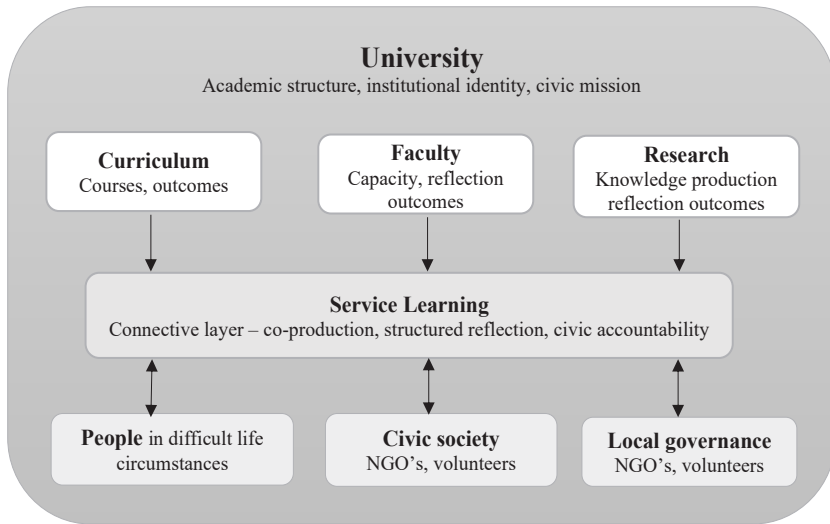


Figure 1. Service-learning as a connective layer of knowledge infrastructure

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Star & Ruhleder (1996) and Bringle & Hatcher (1996).

Approach and Sources of Evidence

This paper employs a combination of conceptual analysis and reflective practitioner evidence. It draws on the author's direct experience of integrating service-learning into university courses at UCU during the period 2022–2025, and on participation in the ServU international project – a grant-funded initiative that supported SL implementation across multiple universities through curriculum development, joint research by students and faculty in collaboration with the local community, teachers training, and train-the-trainer activities. This experience is situated alongside a selective review of international scholarship on SL in conflict-affected and post-crisis educational settings.

The analytical framework brings together three intersecting bodies of literature: service-learning theory (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996;

Eyler & Giles, 1999); knowledge infrastructure studies (Star & Ruhleder, 1996); and a growing body of scholarship specifically addressing SL and higher education in crisis contexts, including foundational work by Kenworthy and Opatska (2023), the collective provocation of Kenworthy et al. (2025), and the UCU-grounded empirical analysis of Chekh and Vasyltisia (2026). The reflective component follows Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-on-action: the practitioner retrospectively examines institutional responses for broader theoretical and policy implications – a mode of inquiry particularly appropriate in contexts where large-scale empirical study remains difficult to conduct.

Analytical Findings

UCU's engagement with service-learning preceded the full-scale invasion, and this prior institutionalisation is central to understanding its wartime relevance. UCU was, in fact, the first Ukrainian university to institutionally implement the SL approach (Ukrainian Catholic University, 2019). Before February 2022, several faculties had already developed course-embedded community engagement components: students in social work, communications, public administration and the humanities were placed in NGOs, schools, and civic organisations, as part of structured learning activities with explicit reflective requirements. The war did not suspend these practices – it intensified them and revealed their structural significance as a form of knowledge infrastructure that physical disruption could not easily destroy.

Analyzing UCU wartime SL experience we can define several dimensions:

- co-creating knowledge under displacement and stress;
- trauma response and the pedagogical value of reflection;
- local governance under stress and civic knowledge production;
- international collaboration and the exchange of knowledge.

Co-creating knowledge under displacement and stress. Lviv rapidly became a transit and settlement hub for internally displaced persons (IDPs) from eastern and southern Ukraine. Students in SL-integrated courses were positioned not as service providers in a charitable sense but as co-researchers and co-designers: documenting needs, mapping available resources, facilitating

communication between displaced families and local institutions, and contributing to the design of practical responses. As Chekh and Vasylytsia (2026) demonstrate through case-study evidence from UCU, this kind of wartime SL engagement effectively enacts the core principles of education for sustainable development – not as an abstract ideal, but as a lived pedagogical reality. The knowledge generated was simultaneously academically rigorous and immediately applicable, a combination that neither conventional coursework nor unstructured humanitarian voluntarism could easily produce.

Trauma response and the pedagogical value of reflection. Students working with displaced communities, veteran support organisations, and families of the wounded encountered psychological and emotional material that standard academic preparation does not address. This created demand for a new kind of curricular integration: one in which structured reflection – the defining pedagogical element of SL – became not merely an academic requirement but a necessary processing mechanism. Reflections, facilitated seminars, and peer dialogue provided epistemic consolidation: spaces in which raw, often disturbing experience was transformed into learnable, communicable, and transferable knowledge. This is a pedagogical function that neither purely academic nor purely humanitarian frameworks can replicate, and it represents one of SL’s most undertheorised contributions to crisis education.

Local governance under stress and civic knowledge production. A third dimension of UCU’s wartime SL experience concerns the challenge of local governance. Communities receiving large numbers of displaced persons, adapting to wartime resource constraints, and supporting families of mobilised soldiers faced governance challenges for which existing administrative frameworks were insufficient. SL courses that engaged students with local government bodies, community organisations, and civic initiatives created channels through which university-based analytical capacity was directed at real governance problems, such as policy briefs, facilitation support, communication materials. Modest contributions individually, but meaningful as part of a sustained pattern of engagement that a Policy Lab model, described in the implications section, is designed to scale.

International collaboration and the exchange of knowledge in crisis environment

The UCU faculty participation in the ServU international project offers an important comparative reference point. ServU, involving multiple European partner universities, worked to embed SL across different national higher education contexts through curriculum development, faculty capacity-building, and train-the-trainer programmes. The cross-national dimension highlighted both the universality of SL's core principles and the importance of contextual adaptation: what works institutionally in a stable Western European setting requires significant translation for a Ukrainian university operating under wartime conditions. Equally, the Ukrainian experience generated insights that enriched the project's comparative framework – about urgency, about community need as a curriculum driver, about institutional identity as an enabling condition.

This bidirectional learning resonates directly with the argument made by Kenworthy et al. (2025), whose essay constitutes an urgent provocation for academics in non-crisis environments to proactively reach out to colleagues in Ukraine and other severely disrupted contexts. Their call is not merely ethical but epistemological: crisis environments generate knowledge about SL, pedagogy, and institutional resilience that stable contexts cannot produce. The UCU experience, shaped by ongoing warfare, large-scale displacement, and sustained civic mobilisation, offers precisely this kind of contextually specific and theoretically generative knowledge. Making it visible and available to the international scholarly community is part of what knowledge infrastructure, in a genuinely democratic sense, requires.

Viewed together, these dimensions of UCU's experience confirm a central theoretical claim: the most resilient elements of institutional response were those that were already structurally embedded. Infrastructure, as Star and Ruhleder (1996) argue, becomes visible precisely when it breaks down. What the war has made visible is that relational, community-embedded pedagogical practices constitute a layer of educational infrastructure that physical disruption cannot easily dismantle and that their absence significantly constrains the quality and sustainability of institutional response.

Implications for Education, Policy, and Recovery

The analysis developed in this paper carries implications that extend beyond the Ukrainian case, though they speak most directly to the situation of conflict-affected higher education systems navigating the transition from emergency response to sustained recovery.

For educational practice, the UCU experience suggests that SL, when embedded in the curriculum prior to crisis, functions as a form of pedagogical resilience. Institutions seeking to build recovery-oriented curricula should move beyond emergency voluntarism toward sustained course integration: designing learning outcomes that explicitly connect disciplinary knowledge with community recovery challenges, embedding reflective practice into assessment structures, and building faculty capacity through train-the-trainer models of the kind developed in the ServU project.

For university leadership, the implication is that civic mission cannot remain a values statement disconnected from academic architecture. UCU's case illustrates that coherence between stated mission and actual curriculum design creates the enabling conditions for effective crisis response. Universities that treat community engagement as a public relations activity rather than a core pedagogical commitment will find, under pressure, that they lack the institutional grammar needed to respond with integrity and sustained effect.

For education policy in Ukraine, the argument points toward a reframing of the recovery agenda. Current frameworks rightly address physical reconstruction, academic mobility, and quality assurance under wartime conditions (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2023). What they address less systematically is what kind of knowledge and what kind of knowledge-producing relationships is required for genuine community recovery. SL, understood as knowledge infrastructure, offers a partial but significant answer: it is a mechanism for keeping universities epistemically accountable to the communities they serve.

The most concrete institutional proposal emerging from this analysis is the creation of a Policy Lab at universities engaged in SL. A Policy Lab would move beyond individual course-based engagement to establish a sustained, university-wide platform for applied research and policy co-creation, a space in which

community partners, students, faculty, and public institutions work together on challenges that require both analytical rigour and civic legitimacy. Unlike a standard research centre, a Policy Lab would be explicitly designed around participatory knowledge production: its outputs would include not only academic publications but policy briefs, facilitation processes, community consultations, and training programmes co-developed with public institutions.

At UCU, the foundations for such a structure already exist in the form of accumulated SL practice, established community partnerships, and demonstrated capacity for civic engagement under pressure. The Policy Lab model represents the logical next step: institutionalising what has been proven in practice, scaling it across the university, and connecting it to the broader national and international effort to rebuild Ukraine's civic and democratic infrastructure. It would also represent a tangible institutional response to the call made by Kenworthy et al. (2025) – creating a sustained structure through which international collaboration with colleagues in crisis environments can be formalised, deepened, and made mutually productive.

In a world characterised by geopolitical turbulence, disconnection, and epistemic uncertainty, universities that can serve as democratic infrastructures of knowledge – not merely as providers of credentials – will be among the most important contributors to long-term resilience and recovery. The Ukrainian experience, shaped by extremity, offers a powerful demonstration of what this can mean in practice.

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2_Conceptual Abstracts

ONGOING INSTITUTIONALISATION OF SERVICE-LEARNING AT BETHLEHEM UNIVERSITY: CLASSROOM PRACTICE, FACULTY INNOVATION, AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFORTS IN WARTIME PALESTINE

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Keywords: service-learning; institutionalisation; higher education in crisis; community engagement; resilience; Palestine

Institutionalising service-learning in higher education is widely recognised as a complex, multi-dimensional process that requires alignment across mission, curriculum, and institutional structures (Furco, 2002). Institutionalising service-learning in higher education is demanding even in stable contexts. In settings of prolonged conflict, it requires balancing the building of sustainable structures with the need for flexibility, maintaining mission alignment while responding to immediate social needs, and nurturing community partnerships when communities themselves face severe disruption. This paper explores the ongoing process of embedding service-learning at Bethlehem University in Palestine and reflects on what this experience may offer to other institutions working toward similar goals in crisis and recovery contexts.

As a Catholic Lasallian university committed to quality higher education and service to Palestinian society, Bethlehem University has been actively advancing service-learning through a combination of classroom innovation and institutional support. An internal evaluative process drawing on the Uniservitate framework has indicated Advanced progress overall, with service-learning described as fully aligned with the institutional mission, very developed in regulations, and developed in curricular

integration. Support structures for faculty and students, community partnerships, and processes for reflection and evaluation are either in place or under active development. Full institutionalisation, however, remains an ongoing journey.

This progress builds directly on concrete pedagogical experiences. In English and communication courses, students engage in service-learning cycles that move from social diagnosis to project design, implementation, reflection, and public communication. Topics have included stigma reduction, women's empowerment, identity, and community awareness. Research conducted on these experiences (Awwad & Ayyad) highlighted gains in students' digital competences, critical thinking, leadership, autonomy, spirituality, and sense of agency, alongside contributions to collective resilience and social cohesion during wartime.

The institutionalisation process involves complementary roles and structures. The Academic Innovation Hub (AIH) supports broader curricular innovation, faculty development in andragogy and applied teaching methods, and the integration of service-learning into teaching practices across the university. The Institute for Community Engagement & Partnership provides additional coordination and oversight, while deanships in areas such as Arts, Nursing, and Education support integration into academic programmes. Faculty development activities, university events, and participation in international networks (including Uniservitate and ServU dialogues) further contribute to this work.

As an instructor, Layth R. Awwad implements service-learning directly in his courses, conducts research on its impact in the Palestinian wartime context, and presents this work at international conferences. Paola Handal, as Co-Director of the Academic Innovation Hub, contributes through faculty capacity-building in innovative and applied teaching approaches that help embed service-learning more systematically across programmes.

The paper argues that institutionalising service-learning in crisis contexts demands a dual approach: formal backing, mission coherence, and governance support on one hand, and pedagogical flexibility, ethical responsiveness, and reciprocal community collaboration on the other. Neither alone is sufficient. What makes this case significant is not that Bethlehem University has achieved institutionalisation despite the conflict, but that the conflict has

clarified what institutionalisation must be capable of – and that the resulting model has lessons for higher education institutions elsewhere seeking to make service-learning durable, mission-driven, and genuinely responsive to social need.

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INSTITUTIONALISING SERVICE-LEARNING FOR SDG-ORIENTED RECOVERY: A SCALABLE MODEL OF UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FROM THE SERVU PROJECT

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Keywords: service-learning institutionalisation; SDGs; university third mission; recovery; inclusive development

The war in Ukraine has exposed the limitations of traditional higher education models and accelerated the need for universities to act as active contributors to societal recovery. In this context, the institutionalisation of service-learning represents a strategic pathway for aligning higher education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and strengthening the societal impact of universities.

This paper presents a scalable model of university-community engagement based on the ServU (Erasmus+ EDU-2023) project.

The study is grounded in the concept of the university's third mission, reframed through an SDG-oriented lens [1]. Universities are not only knowledge providers but also facilitators of inclusive development (SDG 10), quality education (SDG 4), decent work (SDG 8) and resilient communities (SDG 11). However, in many cases, service-learning remains fragmented and project-based, limiting its contribution to systemic transformation. Institutionalisation is therefore critical for ensuring continuity, scalability and measurable impact.

Empirical evidence from focus group interviews in three communities of the Dnipropetrovsk region highlights a strong demand for structured, long-term cooperation with universities [2]. Communities expect practical, skills-oriented programs and co-created solutions addressing employment, infrastructure recovery, digitalisation and social inclusion. These needs directly correspond to key SDG priorities and underline the potential of universities to act as local drivers of sustainable development.

At the same time, the study identifies systemic barriers that hinder impact. Service-learning is rarely embedded into formal curricula and is often treated as an add-on activity. Institutional partnerships remain insufficiently formalised, and resource constraints limit the scaling of effective practices. As a result, existing initiatives demonstrate high local relevance but low structural sustainability.

Recent studies highlight the increasing role of universities in advancing SDG-oriented development through institutional transformation [3]. To address these gaps, the paper proposes a multi-level institutionalisation model. At the educational level, service-learning should be integrated into curricula with defined learning outcomes, credit allocation and assessment mechanisms. At the institutional level, universities need dedicated coordination structures, staff capacity building and strategic alignment with regional development agendas. At the ecosystem level, stable partnerships with local authorities, businesses and civil society organisations should be formalised through co-governance and co-creation mechanisms.

A key dimension of the proposed model is inclusiveness. Service-learning provides structured pathways for engaging vulnerable groups, including youth, internally displaced persons and women, thereby contributing to social cohesion and equitable recovery (SDG 10). By linking education with real-life challenges, it enhances employability and supports local economic revitalisation (SDG 8).

From an impact perspective, institutionalised service-learning enables the transition from short-term interventions to long-term systemic change. It strengthens social capital, improves trust between stakeholders and creates feedback loops between education, research and community needs. Importantly, it also enhances the accountability of universities by linking their activities to measurable societal outcomes.

Policy support is essential for scaling this model. National and European frameworks should recognise the third mission as a core function of higher education and provide incentives for SDG-oriented engagement. Instruments such as Erasmus+ demonstrate the value of transnational cooperation in developing methodologies, sharing best practices and ensuring transferability across contexts.

The ServU project illustrates how service-learning can be transformed into a scalable and transferable model of impact-driven education in crisis conditions. Its experience shows that aligning university activities with SDGs, embedding them institutionally and supporting them through policy frameworks can significantly enhance the contribution of higher education to recovery and sustainable development.

In conclusion, institutionalising service-learning is not only an educational innovation but a strategic lever for achieving SDG-oriented recovery. Universities that adopt this approach can move from reactive engagement to proactive leadership in rebuilding resilient, inclusive and sustainable communities.

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3_Case-Based Abstracts

THE RESPONSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE UNIVERSITY AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: A PARTICIPATORY CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE KORAIL INFORMAL SETTLEMENT, DHAKA, BANGLADESH

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Keywords: community engagement; higher education; sustainable development; experiential learning

Background and Rationale

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly expected to move beyond teaching and research toward a third mission of community engagement and social responsibility. Yet across the Global South, empirically grounded models of university–community engagement remain scarce. Most existing operational frameworks, including the Hazelkorn and TEFCE models, have been developed in North American, European, or Australian settings and reflect institutional conditions that cannot be presumed in Bangladesh. Nationally, there is no dedicated policy for university-led community engagement, though the University Grants Commission and the Bangladesh Accreditation Council indirectly support such work through Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and quality assurance mandates. This article addresses that gap through a longitudinal, participatory case study of the American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) and its engagement with Korail, one of Dhaka’s largest informal settlements, conducted between 2023 and 2025 under the Magna Charta Observatory (MCO) Responsive and Responsible University initiative.

Context and Setting

Korail covers roughly 100 acres and houses about 18,000 households and 55,000 residents, with a population shaped by successive migration driven by floods, drought, river erosion, and eviction drives in other Dhaka settlements between 2000 and 2008. Residents face overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to healthcare and education, yet demonstrate resilience through informal work and community organization. AIUB, established in 1994, is a private, self-financed university with approximately 14,000 students across five faculties. Its Academic Strategic Plan 2023–2033 identifies Sustainable Development as a core pillar, and the institution became a signatory to the Magna Charta Universitatum in 2020.

Methodology

The study adopted mixed methods, participatory case study design, integrating Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) with Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Four interdisciplinary, student-led interventions addressed women’s empowerment (Bachelor of Business Administration students), sustainable low-cost housing (Architecture students), adolescent health and hygiene (Master of Public Health students), and moral education for children (Shomoy Social Welfare Club students). Instruments included a structured baseline questionnaire (adapted from a 2014 Sutrapur study, pilot-tested with 40 respondents) administered to 397 women and adolescents across Korail’s four zones; focus group discussions; pre- and post-intervention questionnaires for adolescents and children; an OBE-aligned rubric for student empathy and ethics; and architectural field observation. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, qualitative data thematically coded, and findings triangulated across sources.

Key Findings

The baseline documented pervasive deprivation: 67.3 percent of women reported no formal education, 26.39 percent were unemployed, and 59.31 percent earned no more than BDT 2,000 per month. Focus groups identified restrictive gender norms, job scarcity, and inadequate infrastructure as principal barriers,

while revealing aspirations for vocational skills, microcredit, and improved educational opportunity. The housing intervention in four households prioritized natural ventilation and daylight using exhaust fans, eucalyptus wood, and fiberglass roofing, producing measurable indoor improvements. The adolescent health intervention deployed Communication for Development (C4D) strategies, including culturally adapted posters, community miking blending health messages with popular songs, and the Bengali-language Facebook page “Torun Alo,” yielding post-intervention gains in reproductive health awareness, the domain with the largest baseline gap. The children’s moral education intervention, delivered through five sessions combining storytelling, puppet-making, value-based games, and a Bengali video, produced clear shifts across nine ethical domains including sharing, honesty, respect, fairness, and responsibility. Participating students showed measurable growth in empathy and ethics as assessed through the rubric.

Challenges and Adaptive Responses

The case surfaces structural constraints. Community hesitance, particularly among women reluctant to disclose sensitive information, delayed data collection. Immediate economic needs often eclipse participation in longer-term skill-building. Political interference, law-enforcement issues, and a fire outbreak disrupted fieldwork, and the 2024 political transition following a student-led revolution stalled post-survey follow-up. The transience of slum populations complicated longitudinal tracking, and the exclusion of non-school-going children and adolescents left out the most vulnerable segment. In response, the management model has been progressively decentralized, with local participants engaged as peer educators, activities linked to academic courses for sustained student involvement, and reliance on one-off interventions reduced through shared ownership.

Theoretical Contribution

The central contribution is an inductively derived Community Engagement Framework for Higher Education Institutions, calibrated to Global South conditions. The framework specifies three institutional preconditions, Values (integrity, creativity, responsibility, equity), Readiness (infrastructure, dedicated centers,

partnerships, policy, curriculum), and Practice (student clubs, projects, collaboration), followed by a four-stage implementation cycle: Input (self-evaluation, community perspective, needs assessment); Process (Care, Connect, Coach, Contribute); Outcome (multi-actor impact and dissemination); and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning anchored in Continuous Quality Improvement. The framework extends Farner’s (2019) “adaptive braid” model by specifying concrete mechanisms for institutionalization and complements existing Western frameworks by centering preconditions that cannot be presumed in Global South settings.

Implications and Conclusion

The study demonstrates that culturally grounded, interdisciplinary, student-led engagement can deliver measurable community outcomes under significant resource constraints while simultaneously advancing student graduate attributes in empathy, ethics, and civic responsibility. Two transferable operational tools emerge: a self-assessment questionnaire supporting universities in evaluating engagement capacity, and an OBE-aligned empathy rubric that operationalizes otherwise abstract graduate attributes. For policy, the case illustrates the potential of embedding community engagement within national quality assurance and OBE criteria; a subsequent dialogue between the MCO General Secretary and the Bangladesh Accreditation Council represents one concrete policy-engagement outcome. For practice, the modular structure of the four interventions supports adaptation to other informal settlements. The study affirms that universities in the Global South can occupy a distinctive position in social transformation when engagement is grounded in institutional values, driven through distributed leadership, delivered by interdisciplinary student teams, and structured by a context-sensitive framework.

FROM PASSIVE CONTENT TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION: STRUCTURAL APPROACHES TO CIVIC EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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Keywords: civic education; textbook architecture; socially oriented learning; civic agency; Ukraine's educational recovery.

In the context of Ukraine's ongoing wartime challenges and the strategic imperatives of post-war recovery, education is increasingly positioned as a key instrument for strengthening democratic participation, civic resilience, and social cohesion. Civic education, in particular, is expected to move beyond the transmission of factual knowledge toward fostering students' capacity for critical reflection, responsible decision-making, and meaningful participation in community life. However, a persistent gap remains between these policy-level aspirations and everyday classroom practices. This paper examines how the design of textbooks as instructional tools can contribute to bridging this gap by embedding socially oriented learning into the structure of formal schooling.

The analysis focuses on the structural and pedagogical features of the Grade 9 "Civic Education" textbook authored by Olena Pometun, Olha Dudar, Viktoriia Kryshmarel, and Tetiana Remekh. Developed within the framework of Ukraine's competence-based reform and aligned with the State Standard of Basic Secondary Education, the textbook is grounded in a clearly articulated architectonics that organises the learning process as a sequence of interconnected stages. Its internal logic functions as a pedagogical script that guides classroom interaction and helps prevent passive, transmission-based instruction, repositioning both students and teachers as active participants in meaning-making processes.

This architectonics is operationalised through four interrelated stages. The first stage, Activation, connects students' prior knowledge, personal experiences, and emotional responses with

civic concepts, thereby establishing relevance and engagement from the outset. The second stage, Guided Inquiry, provides structured opportunities for analytical work with texts, including the development of critical media literacy and the capacity to interrogate ideological narratives—competencies that are particularly significant in the context of information warfare and contested historical memory. The third stage, Collaborative Engagement, introduces task formats based on simulations of civic processes, such as deliberative practices, local governance scenarios, and school self-governance models. For instance, by engaging in “unskippable” group projects or role-playing community council sessions, students practice dialogue, negotiation, and collective decision-making. These tasks position students as active agents rather than passive recipients of knowledge. The final stage, Reflective Synthesis, supports both individual and collective reflection, enabling students to evaluate their learning trajectories and to relate them to broader questions of civic responsibility and democratic participation.

Such a structural approach is consistent with established frameworks of service-learning and experiential civic education, which emphasise the integration of knowledge, skills, and values through active engagement with socially relevant problems (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Eyler & Giles, 1999). The textbook by Pometun, Dudar, Kryshmarel, and Remekh is intentionally designed to simulate real-life civic contexts within a safe learning environment, thereby creating a preparatory space for the development of civic agency. As highlighted in recent research on model curricula, the coherence and internal logic of instructional materials play a crucial role in sustaining competence-oriented learning, particularly in conditions of rapid social transformation (Kryshmarel, 2024).

In the Ukrainian context, this approach acquires particular significance. The development of civic competence requires a transition from episodic, project-based activities to a systematic integration of activity-based and value-oriented practices within everyday teaching (Pometun & Remekh, 2018). Textbook design, in this sense, becomes a key mechanism for ensuring the scalability and sustainability of socially oriented learning across diverse educational settings, including those affected by displacement, instability, and resource constraints. It ensures that the textbook is not merely a “reading book” but a functional classroom tool.

The paper argues that embedding collaborative, inquiry-based, and socially relevant tasks into the core structure of textbooks contributes to the institutionalisation of participatory competencies at the systemic level. While the effectiveness of such an approach remains dependent on teacher facilitation and broader pedagogical conditions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), rethinking textbook architectonics represents a strategically important step toward aligning classroom practices with the broader goals of Ukraine's educational recovery. By shaping not only what students learn but how they engage with knowledge and with one another, textbooks can support the development of a generation capable of contributing to democratic reconstruction and long-term societal resilience.

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THE INSPIRE-SL MODEL: INSTITUTIONALIZING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SERVICE-LEARNING IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Keywords: service-learning model; institutionalization; inclusion; sustainability.

Abstract

The present day context has made one realize that education for a long time has been lopsided by its narrow focus on academic achievement or professional preparation. Today the world needs well rounded individuals whose head, heart and hand are in alignment with itself as well as with others. Hence, Universities today are increasingly seen as spaces that must help students become socially responsible, ethically sensitive, environmentally conscious, and actively engaged citizens. In India, the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has further highlighted the importance of experiential learning, community engagement, multidisciplinary education, skill development, and holistic growth. At the same time, higher education institutions continue to face serious challenges such as rising social inequality, graduate unemployment, environmental concerns, digital exclusion, and a growing disconnect between classroom learning and real-life social issues. These realities call for educational approaches that connect knowledge with lived experiences and encourage students to become active contributors to society.

Service-learning addresses the gap between classroom learning and students' real-life needs by combining academic study with community engagement. Unlike traditional outreach that focuses only on service, service-learning fosters mutual learning among students, teachers, organizations, and the community. It allows learners to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations while

developing essential skills such as leadership, empathy, and social awareness.

Service-learning in Indian higher education is fragmented and overly dependent on individual faculty members or departments. Many initiatives are merely voluntary or short-term efforts, failing to be integrated into the curriculum, institutional policies, or long-term planning. This severely limits the transformative potential of service-learning. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive framework to systematically embed service-learning within the core academic and social mission of higher education institutions.

This paper decisively addresses the critical need for the institutionalization of inclusive and sustainable service-learning in Indian higher education by introducing the INSPIRE-SL Model. This conceptual and analytical framework is firmly grounded in the principles of experiential learning, transformative learning, social constructivism, critical pedagogy, and community-engaged education. It draws upon the influential educational theories of John Dewey, David Kolb, Paulo Freire, Lev Vygotsky, and Andrew Furco.

Moreover, this model aligns seamlessly with the ambitious goals set forth by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the University Grants Commission (UGC) Guidelines for Fostering Social Responsibility and Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions in India 2.0, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. It is also designed to address the diverse realities of Indian higher education, encompassing cultural diversity, indigenous knowledge traditions, tribal and rural contexts, regional inequalities, and the urgent demand for a digitally enabled yet human-centred educational approach.

The INSPIRE-SL Model views institutionalization as a gradual and ongoing process by which service-learning becomes a core component of the everyday culture and operations of higher education institutions. It emphasizes that service-learning should not be confined to isolated projects but should be integrated into the institution's vision, curriculum, teaching and learning processes, research activities, community partnerships, and assessment practices.

The acronym INSPIRE reflects seven interconnected dimensions that are essential for developing sustainable and inclusive service-learning practices:

1. Institutional Commitment and Inclusive Policy (I).
2. Needs-Based Community Partnership (N).
3. Sustainable Curriculum Integration (S).
4. Participatory Pedagogy and Reflective Practice (P).
5. Innovation, Interdisciplinarity, and Indigenous Knowledge (I).
6. Research, Reciprocity, and Resource Support (R).
7. Evaluation, Equity, and Empowerment (E).

Together, these dimensions provide a practical and comprehensive framework for enhancing service-learning in higher education institutions.

The model emphasizes that effective service-learning requires robust institutional support, inclusive policies, prepared faculty, equitable student involvement, ethical community engagement, and ongoing reflection and evaluation. It promotes credit-bearing and outcome-focused service-learning experiences that align with local community needs, sustainability issues, and social justice perspectives. The framework specifically highlights the importance of including marginalized and underserved communities, gender sensitivity, environmental sustainability, cultural responsiveness, digital inclusion, and the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems. By doing so, it encourages educational institutions to implement practices that are locally relevant and socially responsive.

The INSPIRE-SL framework highlights the importance of reflection, research, and evidence-based improvements for ensuring long-term sustainability and impact. It promotes participatory action research, community feedback, reflective journaling, social impact assessments, and institutional self-evaluations. The framework advocates for a collaborative approach in which institutional leaders, faculty members, students, service-learning centers, and community stakeholders work together as partners in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Additionally, the model supports the thoughtful integration of technology through blended and e-service learning practices, while emphasizing that empathy, human relationships,

reciprocity, and ethical engagement remain central to the learning process.

The paper argues that the institutionalization of inclusive and sustainable service-learning can significantly contribute to the holistic development of students. It strengthens civic responsibility, ethical leadership, sustainability awareness, employability, collaboration, critical thinking, and cultural understanding.

At the institutional level, this framework can enhance curriculum relevance, facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration, boost research productivity, improve accreditation practices, and promote community engagement, all while supporting the effective implementation of NEP 2020 reforms. At the societal level, the model fosters social inclusion, community empowerment, sustainable development, and participatory citizenship by encouraging universities to engage actively with real-world challenges and drive social transformation.

The study concludes that service-learning should not be seen as a peripheral or optional activity within higher education. Instead, it should become a core educational philosophy that shapes the academic and social missions of universities and colleges. The INSPIRE-SL Model thus provides a comprehensive, contextually relevant, and forward-looking framework for reimagining higher education through inclusive, sustainable, community-engaged, and transformative learning practices. This approach prepares students not only for careers but also for responsible and meaningful participation in society.

DECLARATION: AI WAS USED TO BRAINSTORM ON THE IDEA OF THE MODEL

4_EU-UKRAINE PARTNERSHIPS FOR SERVICE-LEARNING AND RECOVERY

1_Short Papers

EU-UKRAINE PARTNERSHIPS IN PUBLICLY-ORIENTED LEARNING AND COMMUNITY RECOVERY: FOSTERING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION COLLABORATION

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Keywords: EU-Ukraine educational partnerships; civic education; service-learning; community recovery; higher education cooperation; post-war reconstruction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has caused unprecedented damage to the country's education infrastructure and social fabric. According to various assessments, a significant portion of educational facilities has been damaged or destroyed, while millions of learners and educators have been displaced. Beyond physical destruction, the war has disrupted traditional learning processes, exacerbated mental health challenges, and intensified the need for education that builds societal resilience, democratic values, and active citizenship.

In this context, publicly-oriented learning – understood as education that connects academic knowledge with community needs, civic engagement, and social responsibility – emerges as a critical tool for recovery. This approach aligns with broader European concepts of civic education, service-learning, and community-engaged scholarship. It emphasizes not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of competencies for participatory democracy, social cohesion, and sustainable reconstruction.

The European Union has responded with substantial support, mobilizing over €208 million through the Erasmus+ programme since 2022, including €70 million for nearly 375 cooperation projects addressing war consequences in education, training, youth, and sport. Initiatives range from printing millions of textbooks and supporting mobility for over 52,000 Ukrainians to dedicated priorities for curriculum modernization, digital transformation, and alignment with the European Education Area. Ukraine's forthcoming association with Erasmus+ further institutionalizes this cooperation [1, 2].

However, challenges persist. Ukrainian higher education institutions (HEIs) face brain drain, infrastructure gaps, and the need to integrate civic and community-oriented components into curricula while meeting EU standards. Many partnerships remain project-based rather than systemic, and the link between academic collaboration and tangible community recovery is not always explicit. This paper examines how EU-Ukraine partnerships in higher education can strengthen publicly-oriented learning to support post-war community recovery, combining conceptual analysis with reflections on existing initiatives.

This analytical and reflexive material draws on a review of official EU and Ukrainian policy documents, Erasmus+ project outcomes, and selected case studies of university-community partnerships. It employs a qualitative, interpretive approach: conceptual mapping of “publicly-oriented learning” (integrating civic education, service-learning, and community engagement) against the backdrop of Ukraine's recovery needs and EU integration goals [3, 4].

Data sources include reports on Erasmus+ support, descriptions of specific projects (e.g., service-learning initiatives), and broader literature on university roles in post-conflict recovery [5, 6]. The analysis is reflexive, acknowledging the author's position as a researcher based in Ukraine, and aims to bridge empirical examples with policy implications. Limitations include the evolving nature of ongoing initiatives and the predominance of English-language sources on EU-level support.

EU-Ukraine educational partnerships have evolved from emergency support to strategic cooperation for recovery and European integration. A key mechanism is the Erasmus+ programme, which has funded capacity-building in higher education, virtual

exchanges, and projects responding directly to war impacts [7, 8]. Priorities include innovative pedagogies, student-centred approaches, digital and green skills, and lifelong learning – elements that naturally support publicly-oriented learning.

One promising example is the integration of service-learning in Ukrainian higher education. The SERVU project illustrates how HEIs can link academic programmes with local territorial communities (LTCs) for development during war and post-war recovery [3, 5]. Students engage in real community projects – addressing issues like social services, rehabilitation, or local resilience – while gaining practical skills and civic competencies. Such initiatives transform universities from knowledge transmitters into active partners in community rebuilding, fostering mutual learning between academia and local actors.

Broader university-community partnerships further demonstrate potential. Research highlights how Ukrainian HEIs, in collaboration with European counterparts, contribute to sustainable development and resilience by addressing local needs in reconstruction, social cohesion, and inclusive services. These efforts align with EU-supported platforms like U-LEAD with Europe and EU4Recovery, which emphasize local governance and civil society involvement [9]. Civic education components – promoting democratic values, tolerance, and participatory decision-making – become particularly relevant in a post-conflict society aiming for EU membership.

Reflexively, these partnerships reveal both strengths and tensions. On the positive side, mobility schemes and joint projects have sustained academic continuity, prevented isolation, and exposed Ukrainian educators and students to European best practices in civic engagement. Initiatives like European Universities alliances (with Ukrainian participation) and Twinning-style collaborations (including UK-Ukraine models adaptable to EU contexts) build long-term institutional capacity.

Challenges include unequal access (rural vs. urban institutions, displaced vs. resident students), the risk of “project fatigue,” and ensuring that civic-oriented learning translates into measurable community impact rather than remaining academic exercise. The war context adds layers of trauma-informed pedagogy and security considerations. Moreover, while EU funding has been substantial,

sustainability beyond grants requires deeper integration into national education policy and local budgeting.

Conceptually, publicly-oriented learning in this partnership framework can be framed through three interconnected dimensions:

1. Cognitive – acquiring knowledge of democratic institutions, EU values, and post-conflict recovery strategies.
2. Experiential – service-learning and community projects that build practical civic skills.
3. Reflective – fostering critical thinking about identity, resilience, and European integration.

These dimensions resonate with Council of Europe frameworks on Education for Democratic Citizenship and align with Ukraine's national goals of civic culture development.

EU-Ukraine partnerships in publicly-oriented learning offer concrete pathways for Ukraine's recovery and EU accession. For education, they support curriculum modernization that embeds civic engagement and service-learning as core components. Ukrainian HEIs should prioritize joint degree programmes or modules focused on community development, while EU partners can provide expertise in inclusive, trauma-sensitive pedagogies. Expanding teacher training in civic education and digital tools for hybrid learning would enhance resilience.

For policies, the EU and Ukraine could strengthen systemic mechanisms beyond project funding. Recommendations include:

- Formalizing Ukraine's association with Erasmus+ with dedicated strands for civic and community-oriented initiatives.
- Developing monitoring frameworks that measure not only academic outputs but also community impact (e.g., number of local projects implemented by students, improvements in social cohesion indicators).
- Encouraging multi-stakeholder platforms involving HEIs, local governments, and civil society, building on existing U-LEAD and recovery conference outcomes.
- Integrating publicly-oriented learning into Ukraine's National Recovery Plan, with clear benchmarks for EU alignment.

For community recovery, these partnerships position universities as hubs for inclusive reconstruction. Veterans' reintegration, support

for displaced persons, and youth empowerment through civic leadership programmes can be advanced via collaborative service-learning. Long-term, such efforts contribute to social cohesion, reduce vulnerability to disinformation, and build a generation equipped for democratic governance in a European Ukraine.

Ultimately, successful partnerships require reciprocity: EU institutions gain insights into resilience and innovation under crisis, while Ukraine accelerates its European integration through shared values of active citizenship and community solidarity. Sustained investment in people-to-people contacts remains the most powerful instrument for recovery.

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ETHICAL COMMUNICATION AS A FORM OF SERVICE-LEARNING: HOLISTIC PEDAGOGY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN WARTIME UKRAINE

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Keywords: ethical communication; veterans; service-learning; holistic EFL pedagogy; peace education; wartime Ukraine; community engagement; social-emotional learning

Context and Problem Statement

Ukraine's ongoing war has fundamentally reshaped the responsibilities of higher education. Universities can no longer function as purely academic institutions they are increasingly called to serve as spaces of social reconstruction, community healing, and ethical formation. This paper draws on both theoretical research and direct practice to argue that service-learning, when grounded in holistic pedagogy, can offer a meaningful response to wartime educational challenges.

A key social challenge highlighted by the war is the communication gap between civilian society and military veterans. Veterans returning from active duty carry complex psychological and emotional experiences that civilian interlocutors including students, educators, and journalists are often ill-equipped to navigate sensitively. Miscommunication, well-intentioned but harmful questions, and a general lack of communication ethics can cause significant re-traumatisation. This gap represents not only a social problem but a concrete educational opportunity.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this work rests on a holistic approach to EFL teacher education, it is believed that conventional EFL programs focused primarily on linguistic proficiency and methodological techniques are insufficient for educators working in crisis contexts and a comprehensive transformation is needed. This transformation has to integrate three interdependent pillars. [5]

The first pillar is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), which develops emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience competencies essential for navigating the psychological dimensions of wartime learning environments. SEL frameworks have demonstrated measurable impact on student engagement, classroom climate, and academic achievement. [3]

The second pillar is Trauma-Sensitive Pedagogy, which equips educators to recognise and respond to the signs of trauma without re-triggering distress. Empirical evidence from demonstrates that trauma-informed language instruction supports student engagement and creates emotionally safe learning environments particularly relevant in the Ukrainian context. [6]

The third pillar is Peace Education, understood not merely as the absence of conflict but as an active orientation toward dialogue, mutual respect, and nonviolent communication. As it is shown, peace-oriented classrooms develop students' critical thinking, intercultural sensitivity, and democratic participation skills making them capable of engaging productively with difference and trauma. [1]

Together, these pillars constitute an integrated professional standard for EFL teacher education one that positions ethical responsibility, emotional intelligence, and conflict sensitivity as core professional competencies rather than peripheral concerns.

Methodology

The theoretical framework was carried out through a concrete service-learning initiative – the micro project “Respectful Dialogue: Practices of Ethical Communication for the Internationalisation of Education,” developed within the VI Winter School of Higher Education Internationalisation of the NGO “Innovative University.” The project was implemented collaboratively by three Ukrainian universities: the National Academy of Internal Affairs (Kyiv), Uzhhorod National University, and Mukachevo State University.

The project's aim was to improve the culture of ethical communication with military personnel and veterans through a series of training events, the development of a bilingual practical guide, and the dissemination of results through academic channels. Three interrelated objectives guided implementation:

- to conduct a series of training events building students’ knowledge and skills in ethical communication with veterans, fostering cultures of respect and mutual understanding;
- to create a bilingual (Ukrainian–English) guide with practical recommendations for young people in communication situations with military personnel, suitable for use in educational settings and for international dissemination;
- to conduct research on the project’s themes and present findings at international conferences.

Two training events were held between March and April 2026, engaging approximately 60 students and educators across the partner institutions. The first event (12 March 2026) was an inter-university online training session titled “How to Communicate with Military Personnel Without Tension: Practical Advice,” facilitated by Oksana Chudnovska, a combat veteran of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and a military psychologist. Approximately 50 students from Kyiv, Uzhhorod, and Mukachevo participated, including journalism students from UzhNU and pre-service English language teachers from MDU.

The second training (2 April 2026), titled “Ethical Communication with Veterans: How Not to Wound with Words,” was facilitated by Maksym Shelepets a combat veteran and Director of the Veterans’ Development Centre at UzhNU. He spoke about the psychological dimensions of service, the importance of resilience and inner equilibrium, and practical strategies for sensitive dialogue. The session also drew attention to the often-overlooked emotional burden carried by veterans’ families, and the broader societal need for psychological recovery and reintegration.

Analysis and Reflective Evidence

The project’s outcomes demonstrate the practical viability of integrating holistic pedagogy with community-oriented service-learning in a wartime context. Several convergences between theory and practice are worth highlighting.

First, the training event instantiated the SEL principle of teaching the whole person. Students including future teachers, journalists, and economists were not positioned as passive recipients of information but as active participants in a shared civic learning process. Feedback

from participants (reflected in media coverage and post-event discussions) indicated increased self-awareness about their own communicative habits and heightened sensitivity to the emotional vulnerability of veterans.

The inclusion a military psychologist as a speaker utilized the trauma-informed principle of first-person authority. Rather than learning about veterans' experiences through abstract descriptions, students engaged directly with lived accounts. This approach mirrors the reflective practice model advocated in the holistic pedagogy framework, where biographical narratives function as powerful tools for developing professional empathy and ethical reasoning.

The second event, the inter-institutional format bringing together three universities across different cities embodied the peace education principle of building dialogue across difference. The multi-site collaboration also demonstrated the feasibility of cross-institutional service-learning partnerships in Ukraine, with implications for scalability and sustainability.

The ongoing development of a bilingual practical guide provides a further mechanism for knowledge transfer translating experiential learning into a structured resource that can be used in curricula across Ukraine and shared with international partners.

Implications for Education, Policy, and Recovery

This project offers several transferable insights for the broader service-learning and higher education recovery agenda.

- *Ethical communication as civic competence.* The ability to communicate respectfully with veterans and their families should be recognised as a core civic and professional competency for all university graduates, not only those in helping professions. Higher education curricula should integrate trauma-sensitive and peace-oriented communication practices across disciplines.
- *Service-learning as bridge-building.* The Respectful Dialogue project demonstrates that service-learning need not be confined to physical community placements. Dialogue-based, knowledge-sharing formats particularly when they bring civilian students into genuine encounter with military experience constitute a meaningful form of civic engagement with direct community benefit.

- *Inter-university collaboration as a model.* The three-institution partnership structure, developed within a professional development school framework, offers a replicable model for scaling service-learning initiatives in Ukraine. European partners can play a catalysing role by providing methodological support, co-developing bilingual resources, and creating channels for international dissemination.
- *Holistic teacher education as national resilience.* As argued in the accompanying theoretical article, the transformation of EFL teacher preparation toward a holistic, peace-oriented framework is not merely a pedagogical refinement it is a contribution to national recovery. Teachers who are trained to support students' emotional and social development, to communicate ethically across difference, and to reflect critically on their practice are precisely the educators Ukraine needs.

Conclusion The “Respectful Dialogue” micro project illustrates how the theoretical commitments of holistic pedagogy can be translated into concrete service-learning practice during wartime. By training students to communicate with empathy, respect, and ethical awareness, higher education institutions contribute not only to the immediate well-being of veterans and their communities, but to the longer-term project of building a society capable of sustaining peace. Victory, as one of the project’s speakers noted, is not only a military outcome it is the preservation of humanity, mutual respect, and inner resilience within society.

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RETHINKING INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS IN CONFLICT SETTINGS: LESSONS FROM UKRAINIAN-EU TEACHING TANDEMS

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Introduction

A society's ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from crisis, or in other words, its resilience, is shaped by a large extent to the nature and quality of its social capital. Social capital is understood as the relationships and networks among a society's members that foster trust and facilitate cooperation, coordination, and collective action (Aldrich, 2017; Ungar, 2011). However, certain forms of this social capital, particularly those that 'bridge' between groups and enhance social cohesion, tend to be negatively impacted by conflict, as detailed in the extensive literature review by Fiedler (2023). A similar deterioration in bridging social capital was identified in a study on the war's impact within the Ukrainian society (Hoch et al., 2025).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are uniquely placed to respond to this challenge. Research shows that community engagement pedagogies, particularly Service-learning (SL) programs, that promote equal partnership and reciprocity between students and communities are strongly associated with enhancing 'bridging' social capital and improve social cohesion (Campbell, 2000; Coleman & Danks, 2016; Dahan, 2020), while also helping students and faculty navigate periods of uncertainty and crisis (Kenworthy & Opatska, 2023). That said, HEIs are increasingly affected by, and more often, directly targeted during armed conflicts (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack – GCPEA, 2024). While international solidarity initiatives have sought to support these

institutions, they are frequently characterized by limited alignment with local priorities and a lack of focus on long term capacity building (Heleta, 2026).

Against this backdrop, the ServU project offers a relevant case for examining how international solidarity initiatives can be structured to align with locally identified needs and support sustainable institutional development. Initiated in response to the challenges of wartime and recovery, the project combines partnership based pedagogical training with community needs assessment approaches to embed SL within local contexts and to support its continuation beyond the project lifecycle. It therefore provides a useful case through which to analyse the factors that are critical in designing international partnership initiatives in higher education during ongoing armed conflict.

The study adopts a document-informed qualitative analysis to examine the 'teaching tandems' practice developed within the ServU project as a mechanism of international partnership and pedagogical transfer in a context of war and institutional disruption. The remainder of this paper first introduces the ServU project as the case under study, then outlines the methodology, examines the effectiveness of this mechanism, and concludes with recommendations for future projects.

Case description: the ServU project

The ServU (*Service-learning in Higher Education for Ukraine's Recovery*) is an Erasmus+ capacity building initiative involving three Ukrainian (UA) and three European (EU) universities. It aims to support Ukraine's recovery by embedding SL within higher education through collaboration with local territorial communities (LTCs). A central component of the project is the development of SL courses based on community needs. Within this framework, teaching tandems, a structured pairing of a UA (junior) partner with an EU (senior) partner from a similar domain and with expertise in developing SL courses, was established as a key mechanism to facilitate pedagogical transfer, capacity building, and the co-development of locally relevant courses.

Data and methodology

The data used in this analysis consists of three official project documents and reflections from teaching and support staff during

a facilitated group discussion at the project's closing seminar in February 2026. The documents, namely the ServU project proposal, the implementation guide of the pedagogical transfer and course development phase, and the teaching tandems process flow document, help reconstruct the intended design and operationalization of the partnership. The implementation guide contains not only task descriptions but also remarks on adjustments, coordination problems, and lessons learned during this phase. These notes along with the participant reflections, provide insight into how the intended partnership was experienced in practice.

The current literature on pedagogical transfer does not provide a readily adaptable analytical framework that can be applied to this specific context of inter-university partnerships for locally relevant pedagogical transfer during an active conflict. We therefore leaned on the critique of international partnerships described in Heleta (2026) and Johnson & Wilson (2006) as well as on the themes described in the project proposal to derive four dimensions that help us structure our assessment. These dimensions are local alignment, reciprocity, capacity building, and sustainability.

Analysis

The teaching tandems were designed as a central mechanism through which the ServU project sought to translate international solidarity into locally relevant SL course development. The project proposal frames the tandems as a form of collaborative partnership between EU and UA academics, while the implementation documents outline its operationalization in practice. In Table 1, we present an analysis of this mechanism's alignment to the four analytical dimensions mentioned above using the documentation and reflections to structure the assessment based on the stated goals, how it was designed and how it was experienced.

The comparison of intended design, operationalization, and implementation reflections across the four partnership dimensions reveals a consistent pattern: while the teaching tandem model was conceptually well aligned with principles of equitable and locally grounded partnership, its effectiveness in practice was mediated by contextual constraints and variation in how key concepts were understood and enacted among the participants.

Table 1. Partnership dimensions of teaching tandems: goals, operationalization, and reflections

Dimensions	INTENDED DESIGN	OPERATIONALIZATION	REFLECTIONS
Local Alignment	Reorientation of higher education towards real-world problem-solving in support of LTC needs viewed as an essential response to the war-induced disruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Needs Assessment and UA staff engagement with LTC through visits result in course outlines developed based on LTC needs. Use of LTC feedback for refining course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UA experts' relationship and knowledge of LTC needs was highly advantageous. Physical visits and feedback collection faced delays and challenges due to conflict activity.
Reciprocity	EU-UA collaboration as part of broader EU integration of UA universities. Emphasis on peer learning and knowledge exchange.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching tandems reflect structured pairing between senior EU staff and junior UA staff based on SL expertise. Guided co-development with course responsibility and ownership primarily on UA staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectiveness of tandems varied based on the level of alignment in expertise and domain knowledge, and on individual engagement whereby challenges were experienced in matching. Learning perceived as unidirectional.
Capacity Building	Emphasis on development of pedagogical capacity in UA HEIs through training, knowledge transfer, and acquisition of SL competencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operationalized through MOOCs, SL guidelines, mentoring, mobility to EU institutions, and iterative course development processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Group members selected based on SL expertise, but variation in understanding of SL and its quality criteria affected consistency in partnership and review processes. Mobility perceived as highly valuable but the limited duration of the mobility, combined with reliance on online contact and supervision, were viewed as limiting partnership dynamics.
Sustainability	Long-term objective of institutionalizing SL in UA HEIs through curriculum integration, development of shared resources, creation of academic networks, and continued collaboration with LTC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courses externally reviewed and subsequently approved at UA institution creating legitimacy. Online training material remains available after project. Post-implementation seminar to share and learn from experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review process built confidence as courses were perceived as meeting an international standard despite limits on reviewer's contextual knowledge. No clearly defined structures for maintaining and building interpersonal relationships were identified, limiting collaboration beyond the project period.

Source: *Author's compilation based on the ServU project proposal, the implementation guide of the pedagogical transfer and course development phase, teaching tandem documentation, and participant reflections from the February 2026 seminar*

¹ MOOCs are openly accessible web-based learning modules.

Among the four dimensions, alignment to local community needs was particularly robust within the project design and implementation. By relying on the contextual expertise and relationships of the UA academics with the local community to guide the course development, the tandems avoided the risk of importing engagement approaches suited to an EU context potentially misaligned with local realities. Simultaneously, we find that the realities of operating in a conflict-affected environment presented unique challenges in achieving this goal. Physical access to communities and the collection of feedback were subject to delays and logistical challenges. Local needs also evolved through the different stages of the war, which required additional consultation and re-work. Local alignment in the ServU project was thus not a result of project design alone but was also contingent on access to communities and the involvement of locally embedded actors.

On the other hand, on reciprocity, the project proposal refers to peer learning and collaboration, suggesting an orientation towards mutual exchange. However, in its operationalization, the tandems were designed in such a way that knowledge transfer and learning seem structurally unidirectional, from EU mentors to UA mentees. Although the process involved elements of joint course design and iterative feedback, the course development and implementation were explicitly for the UA context and UA students, and were primarily the responsibility of the UA academics. Moreover, no formal mechanisms required EU participants to systematically incorporate knowledge from their UA counterparts into their own institutional contexts.

This seeming disparity might be intentional and more a consequence of the specific context and needs at the time that the ServU was conceived. Given the disruption faced by UA institutions during the war, the partnership was necessarily oriented towards immediate capacity needs, supporting both community engagement and institutional resilience. Reciprocity therefore appears to have been operationalized in a more pragmatic and relational form, where EU participants gained contextual insight and established professional relationships, rather than engaging in fully symmetrical knowledge exchange.

This design choice might also explain why capacity building emerged as a dominant feature of the partnership. Various

mechanisms such as the MOOCs, the guidelines, the short UA to EU mobility, the online supervision, external review, etc., provided a combination of theoretical and practice-oriented learning aimed at substantially enhancing the knowledge and capability of UA partners to develop SL courses.

Reflections related to mobility in particular as essential, with participants emphasizing the importance of hands-on course development, methodological guidance, and exposure to established institutional practices. But such mobility in the context of an active war meant navigating travel restrictions enforced under martial law and disruptions in air travel, which substantially increased the complexity in travel planning. The short duration of these visits was also perceived as limiting the potential for deeper engagement between partners and in the time for absorbing and reflecting on the new knowledge on the part of the UA partners.

Additionally, due to the travel related constraints, the project relied considerably on online supervision, which suffered from unstable connectivity and power outages, and was experienced as less personal due to limited prior interaction among partners and communication in non-native languages. In addition, variations in understandings of SL and its quality criteria across EU partners, as well as mismatches between disciplinary expertise in some cases, posed challenges for effective collaboration.

Lastly, on sustainability, a distinction emerges between institutional and relational forms of continuity. Institutionalization of Service-learning (SL) practices was strongly embedded in the project design. This included the external review and approval of course curricula at UA institutions, the documentation and sharing of experiences through the final seminar, the continued availability of training materials and online resources, and the involvement of additional UA teaching staff beyond the core project group in course implementation. While online observation of pilot courses was also planned, this did not materialize due to contextual constraints. In contrast, relational sustainability was less clearly supported. No formal mechanisms were established to maintain or further develop the professional relationships formed within the teaching tandems, limiting opportunities for continued collaboration, co-creation, or knowledge exchange beyond the project period.

Discussion: Designing Partnerships in Conflict-Affected Higher Education

The ServU project illustrates how international academic partnerships can be adapted to function under conditions of disruption and conflict. As Malchykova & Pylypenko (2026) show in their analysis of Kherson State University, the war has fundamentally altered institutional capacities, infrastructure, and the conditions under which teaching and learning take place. It also necessitates a reshaping of the role of HEIs, pushing them towards crisis response, social solidarity, and institutional resilience. In this context, SL pedagogy has emerged as a particularly relevant approach, which enables HEIs to maintain meaningful student engagement while responding to urgent community needs (Kenworthy & Opatska, 2023). The ServU project responds to this unique circumstance, leveraging international partnerships through the teaching tandems to develop SL expertise and design courses aligned with locally identified needs. Additionally, as the project was initiated by the UA partners, it demonstrates strong local ownership and a clear orientation towards supporting recovery and strengthening institutional resilience.

A key strength of the teaching tandem model was the recognition of UA academics as contextual experts, while EU partners contributed methodological expertise in SL. Mobility and in-person interaction played an important role in building relationships based on mutual respect, supporting collaboration throughout the course development process. Yet, constraints related to travel, infrastructure disruptions, and the evolving needs of communities required continuous adaptation in both collaboration and course development processes. This reflects that university partnership models in conflict settings must prioritize adaptability and sustained communication, rather than rely solely on predefined structures within the project.

During the closing seminar, UA participants, looking to the future, also reflected on the potential value of fully co-created SL courses jointly implemented across EU and UA institutions, enabling interaction and learning between students of both institutions. While the ongoing conflict makes such levels of collaboration highly challenging, it could be a potential direction for strengthening reciprocity and mutual learning in a post-conflict setting.

The project also shows that pedagogical capacity building can be effectively supported through the combination of structured training and practice-based learning through collaborative learning. Workshops, guidelines, and online resources facilitated the transfer of general pedagogical knowledge, while mobility and tandem collaboration enabled more applied learning through co-development and exchange. That said, our analysis also notes the importance of careful partner matching and the need for a shared understanding of pedagogical nuances. Variation in interpretations of SL and differences in disciplinary expertise affected the consistency of the mentoring and review processes. Future initiatives may thus benefit from establishing clearer quality standards and provisioning training sessions for mentors and reviewers to improve alignment among all tandems. Developing these standards collaboratively would additionally provide opportunities for more reciprocal forms of knowledge sharing and learning between partner institutions.

At the level of course development, the project demonstrates that institutionalization can be achieved through curriculum integration, formal approval processes, and the creation of shared resources. However, in a conflict-affected environment, sustainability cannot be understood as the stabilization of course content. Community needs within a conflict and post-conflict setting will likely remain dynamic, as observed during the course of the project, and hence potentially necessitating periodic adaptation and renewed engagement. Institutional sustainability therefore depends not only on embedding practices within university structures, but also on maintaining the capacity for continuous responsiveness.

At the level of partnerships, sustainability was less clearly embedded in the project design. While the tandems facilitated the development of professional relationships and enabled meaningful collaboration during the project period, no formal mechanisms were in place to sustain or further develop these connections. In contrast to more stable contexts, where relationships may continue more organically, the constraints associated with conflict settings, such as restricted mobility, limited opportunities for in-person interaction, and disruptions to communication infrastructure, make organic development of relationships challenging. Given the project's emphasis on long-term partnership, this points to the

importance of embedding structures for continued interaction, exchange, and collaboration beyond the lifecycle of individual projects. Sustainability must therefore be considered not only in institutional but also in relational terms.

Taken together, these insights point at how, in the uniquely challenging context of an ongoing war, partnership models for pedagogical exchange benefit significantly from prioritizing alignment to local needs and on strengthening capacity development. Future initiatives should also consider how opportunities for reciprocal exchange and sustained collaboration throughout and beyond the project lifecycle can be more deliberately built into the structure of the engagement, to support more balanced knowledge exchange and foster longer-term collaborations.

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2_Conceptual Abstracts

SERVICE-LEARNING IN BUSINESS EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COURSE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION IN GERMANY AND UKRAINE

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Abstract

While service-learning (SL) has gained momentum across various academic disciplines, its systematic integration into business education remains comparatively underdeveloped and often insufficiently aligned with clearly defined learning objectives (Black, 2002). At the same time, numerous publications consider SL to be a valuable component of business education (Belinne, 2023; Crutchfield, 2017; Lamb et al., 1998; Moran, 2024; Rathore & Mahesh, 2025; Veiga et al., 2025).

This contribution examines the potential of SL to enhance business education by drawing on practical experiences from international teaching tandems established within the ServU project and courses in Germany. It focuses on the design, implementation, and comparative reflection of SL initiatives in Germany and Ukraine, highlighting both pedagogical challenges and added value for students, educators, and community partners. Four different courses will be showcased to illustrate how service-learning can be embedded in business education in practical and context-specific ways.

On the one hand, the contribution draws on experiences from Work Package 4 of the Erasmus+ project “Service-learning in Higher Education for Ukraine’s Recovery” (ServU), in which two international teaching tandems were established between a German university and two Ukrainian teachers in the fields of Entrepreneurship & Digital Business Communications and Personal Finance. The aims of the international teaching tandems

were studying and sharing the experience and best practices between partners, developing, presenting and improving a Syllabi and piloting the SL courses. This collaboration enabled the joint development and reflection of service-learning components across different institutional and national contexts. The project in the course “Entrepreneurship & digital business communications” aimed to rebuild critical skills among displaced persons through targeted training and professional development while simultaneously fostering entrepreneurial thinking within the local community. Students were actively engaged in designing and delivering digital business solutions, thereby linking theoretical knowledge with real-world impact. The second case focused on Personal Finance education. Students co-created and implemented a financial literacy training program for schoolchildren, addressing an urgent societal need to improve financial competencies among younger generations. This project illustrates how SL can contribute to community resilience by equipping participants with essential life skills while enhancing students’ ability to translate academic knowledge into accessible educational formats.

On the other hand, the contribution draws on experiences from two cases from business education in Germany. Both courses were conducted in the field of tourism with a strong background in business education. They demonstrate how existing practice-oriented approaches in business and tourism education can evolve into structured SL formats. In one of the presented cases, students collaborated with hosts in three German nature parks and one national park to explore the role of local stakeholders in regenerative development and tourism. The project investigated hosts’ expectations, existing knowledge, and implicit sustainable practices, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of community-based tourism development. The other course addressed rural mobility in cooperation with the department of diversification of the Bavarian State Research Center for Agriculture. Focusing on farm-based tourism, students analyzed current mobility challenges, identified barriers and potentials, and developed recommendations to improve accessibility for both residents and tourists.

A comparative perspective is applied to examine how service-learning is conceptualized and implemented in business education courses in Germany and Ukraine. While German business and tourism programs

have previously incorporated practice-oriented and community-based projects, these are increasingly being further developed into structured service-learning formats. In contrast, the ServU courses in Ukraine offer insights into the intentional integration of civic engagement and community resilience within higher education with a strong focus on immediate societal impact under conditions of crisis and recovery. In these cases, the international teaching tandem model proved to be a key enabler for knowledge exchange, pedagogical innovation, and intercultural learning.

The findings highlight key challenges, including the alignment of service activities with learning outcomes, institutional constraints, and differing academic cultures. At the same time, the international teaching tandem model emerges as a valuable framework for mutual learning, pedagogical innovation, and the co-creation of service-learning practices. The contribution discusses the added value of this approach for students, educators, and community partners, particularly in fostering intercultural competencies, societal relevance, and social responsibility within business education. The findings suggest that SL in business education benefits from clear alignment with course objectives, strong community partnerships, and structured reflection processes. Moreover, international collaboration enhances the transformative potential of SL by integrating diverse perspectives and addressing global challenges through locally grounded action.

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