

# 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

Oleksandr Pashchenko<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3296-996X>  
Ye. Koroviaka<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Dnipro University of Technology, Dnipro, Ukraine*

*Corresponding author: pashchenkoa@gmail.com*

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.36059/978-966-397-609-9-42>

**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.

## References

- European Commission. (2026, February 24). *Erasmus+ support to Ukraine: Four years of solidarity and action*. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/node/5513>
- European Commission / Erasmus+ Programme. (2025). *ServU – Service-learning in Higher Education for Ukraine’s Recovery* [Project website]. <https://servu.ucu.edu.ua/en/>
- Kuleuven. *ServU – Service-learning in Higher Education for Ukraine’s Recovery*. <https://www.kuleuven.be/english/education/sl/servu>
- LUMSA University. *Service-learning in Higher Education for Ukraine’s Recovery*. <https://lumsa.it/en/Service-learning-in-Higher-Education-for-Ukraines-Recovery>
- ServU Consortium. (2025, February 3). *Service-learning in Higher Education for Ukraine’s Recovery: Results of the first year of the ServU project*. Ukrainian Catholic University. <https://global.ucu.edu.ua/novyny/service-learning-in-higher-education-for-ukraines-recovery-results-of-the-first-year-of-the-servu-project/>
- UNICEF. (2025, November 26). *More than 340 educational facilities damaged or destroyed in Ukraine this year*. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-340-educational-facilities-damaged-or-destroyed-ukraine-year>
- World Bank. (2025, March 25). *Learning and school reforms continue in Ukraine despite war challenges*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2025/03/25/learning-and-school-reforms-continue-in-ukraine-despite-war-challenges>

European University Association. (2024, February 23). *European universities remain committed to supporting Ukrainian higher education and research after two years of war*. <https://www.eua.eu/news/eua-news/european-universities-remain-committed-to-supporting-ukrainian-higher-education-and-research-after-two-years-of-war.html>

United Nations Development Programme. *EU4Recovery – Empowering Communities in Ukraine*. <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/projects/eu4recovery-empowering-communities-ukraine-eu4recovery>