

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PROCESS OF UKRAINE'S SUSTAINABLE POST-WAR RECOVERY – IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RESILIENCE AND MODERNIZATION

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Purpose: The objective of this paper is to analyze the role of civil society in the process of Ukraine's post-war recovery with regard to the principles of sustainability, resilience, and equitability. The framework for the National Recovery Plan is established and the priorities of post-war reconstruction aim to foster just and sustainable transition. The question of civil society contribution and community-led approach to act for societal change is addressed in the paper.

Design/methodology/approach: To achieve the objective of this paper, the analysis of available secondary data, which consists of reports and studies of international institutions, research agencies, Ukrainian national program documents and statistics, research conducted by international and domestic NGOs. Secondary research material was enriched with the use of virtual ethnography methodology - i.e. online material obtained as part of participation in the Telegram group "Program for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine", bringing together leaders of Ukrainian civil society.

Findings: Due to the ongoing war, Ukraine is facing devastating humanitarian losses as well as catastrophic damage to its infrastructure and natural environment – it's economy deteriorated by a 30% decline in 2022. The cost of Ukraine's reconstruction is estimated from USD 349 billion to 750 billion. The issue of civil society role in the sustainability oriented post-war recovery was discussed. According to experts successful reconstruction require involvement of national actors, including variety of stakeholders e.g. local officials, entrepreneurs, civil society organizations etc. The unprecedented power of social commitment unleashed with the beginning of the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022 and the role civil society mechanisms and institutions play in the current situation in Ukraine should be understood as a trigger of democratization and modernization of the country.

Research limitations/implications: The presented study is of conceptual character and is based on available secondary data. Collecting original data during ongoing war is imitated mostly to the virtual ethnography approach. Trying to measure civic engagement and civil society's contribution to the post-war recovery require the use of more complex methodologies.

Practical implications: Presented paper outlines a framework for rethinking civil society mechanisms and institutions during post-war recovery. The issue of sustainable transition and resilience is vital for policy makers, local communities' leaders, educators, social workers, etc.

Social implications: Considering the civic engagement during the war, it seems clear that civil society institutions and mechanisms will become essential for Ukraine's post-war

reconstruction. Apart from a vision consistent with the principles of sustainability, recovery requires reconciling the needs of different stakeholders – civil society is a key player enabling facilitation of the dialogue.

Originality/value: Contemporary Ukrainian civil society is not only a support for the authorities in the ongoing conflict, but also a pillar of democratization and modernization. It is worth monitoring whether the civic response to war will turn into lasting social initiatives and will contribute to achieving greater cohesion and sustainability by Ukraine. Certainly, a deeper look at the role of civil society institutions and mechanisms in the process of post-war reconstruction is necessary, addressing the issue with tailor-made methodologies.

Keywords: civil society, sustainability, resilience, post-war recovery, Ukraine.

Category of the paper: conceptual paper.

1. Introduction

On February 24, 2022, Russian Federation initiated a full-scale military aggression on Ukrainian territory to achieve a goal that it failed to achieve despite annexing Crimea in 2014 and fueling the conflict in the east of the country. Vladimir Putin's intention was to seize Kiev, overthrow the Ukrainian government and gain political control over the entire country – military intervention in Ukraine is a part of broader Russian strategic plan to maintain its sphere of influence over territories of the former Soviet Union (Dyner, Lorenz, Legucka, 2023). The largest military conflict in Europe since the World War Two caused thousands of civilian casualties, extensive internal and external migration, and large-scale material losses. According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Ukraine is facing devastating humanitarian losses as well as catastrophic damage to its infrastructure and natural environment; “a joint assessment by the Ukraine government, the European Commission, the United Nations and the World Bank estimated the cost of reconstruction and recovery across social, productive and infrastructure sectors in Ukraine to be USD 411 billion” (iisd.org, April 25, 2023). Ukraine's economy deteriorated by a 30% decline in 2022. Furthermore, the scientific facilities – crucial for the country's reconstruction and development towards integration with EU structures – also suffered. It is estimated that the war has damaged about 120 research institutions, costing the research sector about US\$500 million (Gaiind, Liverpool, 2023).

The objective of this paper is to outline the framework for the question of Ukraine's post-war recovery with regard to the principles of sustainability, resilience, and equitability. The issue of Ukraine's ongoing challenges is examined referring to the available secondary data (surveys of domestic and international organizations, research groups, and think-tanks), and road maps of recovery drawn by Ukraine's authorities in cooperation with international partners and experts. In particular, the role of civil society in the sustainable recovery process is analyzed, and the implications of stakeholders' engagement may cause for the potential

EU membership. Ukraine's ongoing challenges are discussed also referring to the insights outlined from the online sessions conducted with Ukrainian civil society leaders in the field of local development, democracy enhancement and clustering in June 2023 within the use of Telegram group "Program for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine" (Cluster Sustainable Recovery UA),

2. Methods

The course of study involved analysis of secondary data, which consists of available reports and studies of international institutions, research agencies, national documents and statistics, research conducted by international and domestic NGO's. The main question posed in the paper address opportunities and challenges arising from the adoption of sustainability-focused recovery concerning civil society role in the process. To achieve this objective the method of virtual ethnography was appointed (Kozinets, 2012) – netnographic study required content analysis of posts of civil society leaders in the Telegram group @Program for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine. The group consists of 140 members from various regions of Ukraine, related to the R&D sector, local communities development, project management and social and economic innovations. This group was created to discuss and implement the principles for sustainable post-war recovery of communities and regions of Ukraine. The analysis of the text material from the Telegram group and participation in online ZOOM sessions on networking for sustainable recovery took place from June to July 2023. Texts in the group were searched using the #together and #sustainability tags – as a result, 107 posts were obtained for the content analysis.

3. Results

3.1. Ukraine's post-war recovery

The consequences of the Russian war against Ukraine, which has been going on since February 24, 2022, apart from tremendous humanitarian consequences, also have an economic and ecological dimension. In terms of losses not only the destruction of infrastructure should be regarded, but also damage of assets such as business potential of enterprises, education, natural environment or unpredictable future outcomes of demographic crisis caused by out migration processes (money.pl, 14.06.2022). Ukraine's losses are constantly increasing: as reported by the Kiev School of Economics, in December 2022 the total value of damage caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine increased by almost USD 2 billion and then was

valued at USD 137.8 billion (Kiev School of Economics, 22.03.2023). The Polish Economic Institute estimates that Ukraine's GDP decreased by over 30% in 2022 as a result of Russian aggression, and the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the experience of other countries affected by the armed conflict show the lengthy and costly nature of the reconstruction process. Returning to pre-war GDP per capita in 5 years was achieved only in every third country, while in 50% of the war-torn countries GDP endured below the pre-war period for 25 years (Kopiński et al., 2022). The cost of Ukraine's reconstruction is estimated from USD 349 billion to 750 billion (Kopiński et al., 2022) – for example the expertise of the World Bank estimated the cost of reconstruction and recovery across social, productive and infrastructure sectors in Ukraine to be USD 411 billion” (iisd.org, April 25, 2023).

According to experts from the Kyiv School of Economics, damages to infrastructure, education, energy, transport, trade, and healthcare continue to grow (Report on Damages..., 22.03.2023). Detailed data on Ukraine's losses in infrastructure, construction, energy, agriculture, industry and other sectors of the economy are provided by the project “Russia will pay”. The “Russia will pay” is a result of cooperation of scholars from Kyiv School of Economics with government agencies, the project's objective is to collect data on material damage caused by the war (damage.in.ua). The data collected so far under the project show three spheres that suffered the most since the war has started: infrastructure (USD 35,6 billion), industry and enterprise assets (USD 13 billion) (Report on Damages..., 22.03.2023). “Damages from the destruction of the housing stock are estimated at \$54 billion. In December, this amount increased by another \$1.5 billion. For more than ten months of the war, a total of 149,300 residential buildings were damaged or destroyed, including: 131,400 private houses, 17,500 apartment buildings and 280 dormitories” (Report on Damages..., 22.03.2023). The ongoing war in Ukraine significantly complicate reconstruction and increase its costs.

Assessments of the damages are made due to document claims for reimbursement against Russia in international courts. Both the EU and the US have literally admitted that Russia is to blame for the damage caused, and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has hinted that “Russia will eventually bear the costs of Ukraine's reconstruction” (The Moscow Times, 21.06.2023). The EU is looking for solutions to use Russian frozen assets for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine – it was already confirmed by EU authorities that across the bloc there are more than 200 billion euros that belong to the Russian central bank and Russian citizens (Cnbs.com, 13.06.2023).

The war continues, but the Kyiv authorities, together with international organizations, are developing plans for post-war reconstruction. A special body was also established: the National Council for the Recovery of Ukraine from the war. The council is an advisory board under the President of Ukraine (Presidential Decree, № 266/2022 as of April, 21, 2022 about the National Council for the Recovery of Ukraine from the War). The prerogatives of the Council include, among others: development of the Post-War Recovery and Development Plan for Ukraine; identification and preparation of proposals for priority reforms, the implementation

of which is necessary in the war and postwar periods; preparation of strategic initiatives, draft regulations, the adoption and implementation of which are necessary for the effective operation and recovery of Ukraine in the war and postwar periods (kmu.gov.ua). The main task of the Council is to develop a Roadmap for the post-war reconstruction. “The Council of Europe is already involved in discussions with stakeholders in Ukraine in order to support the further development of the reforms and policies under the Roadmap that will include Ukrainian local and regional governments, ensuring that they are in line with Council of Europe standards and best practices” (Council of Europe, 7.06.2022). The National Council for the Recovery of Ukraine identified three objectives for the recovery plan: 1) economic and environmental resilience on the path to victory; 2) recovery – efficient solutions for the soonest recovery of the crucial economic and social processes, and natural ecosystems; 3) modernization and growth – modernization regarding sustainable economic growth and improvement of the quality of living in Ukraine (Ukraine’s National Recovery Plan, National Recovery Council, July 2022). The recovery plan outline strategic goals of integration with the EU together with national security accomplishment, pointing to strategic vectors of development such as the Green Deal and digitalization. In order to achieve strategic goals, Ukraine has recognized two key conditions for the post-war recovery: business enabling environment and macro-financial stability. As for a business enabling environment, the plan assumes deep economic, social and cultural transformation of the conditions for economic performance by means of the introduction of a series of institutional changes concerning investment attractiveness, fiscal system, labor market, tackling corruption, and development of entrepreneurship Ukraine’s National Recovery Plan (National Recovery Council, July 2022, p. 6). The drivers for the reconstruction were defined as: 1) priority sectors transformation taking into account global trends and Green Deal policy; 2) strengthening human capital by increasing the quality of life and immigration policy standards encouraging returns of people who fled Ukraine after 2022, February 24th; 3) effective infrastructure including transport infrastructure, housing and energy, and impact on digital development. As underlined by international experts, “Ukraine’s recovery will encompass a wide-ranging effort beyond ‘mere’ physical rebuilding. It will need an unprecedented modernization project encompassing transformation of state institutions, the recovery of human capital, environmental restoration, new urban planning, and connectivity” (Chathamhouse.org, 29.03.2023). The priorities of National Recovery Plan aim to foster a complex, just and sustainable transition on national and regional levels. Deep societal change require community-led approach so the question of empowering communities to act for the transition is vivid and worth reflecting on.

3.2. Development of civil society in Ukraine

The authors of the report *Experiences of post-war reconstruction. Inspirations for Ukraine* emphasize that “the success of reconstruction depends on the extent to which national actors are involved in it. This applies to the widest possible group of stakeholders - the highest

representatives of the authorities, local officials, civil society organizations, the private sector, state-owned enterprises, etc. Including them in the reconstruction process allows not only to properly identify financial needs and priorities, but also to create a sense of shared responsibility for the effects” (Kopiński et al., 2022, p. 5).

The question of mobilization of the internal resources due to the socio-political, economic and cultural changes in Eastern European Countries was widely discussed in sociological literature since 1990s. The implicit condition for civil society development is stimulation of social resources – as Piotr Sztompka claims: it is in the network of interpersonal relations that social subjectivity is created, the driving force of all more complicated social phenomena at the micro, meso and macro level - groups, organizations, institutions, etc. - as well as the driving force of social change, the constant transformation of society” (Sztompka, 2016, p. 32). Until recently, most Western researchers emphasized that civil societies in the post-Soviet area are still weak due to low participation in social organizations and a low level of civic awareness compared to Western European and North American countries (Burlyuk et al., 2017).

The reasons for this phenomenon were sought primarily by referring to a broader social, political, cultural and historical context – as for example Victor Stepanenko justified the deficiency of the ethos of civil society in Ukraine with weakness of the Ukrainian state itself: “In the post-Soviet context, this still implies (to varying degrees) the shortage of developed modern traditions, practices, and especially institutionalized mechanisms that enable systematic (not spontaneous) citizens’ political and social engagement. The lack of historically stable democratic institutions, values, and often civic identities for the people living in post-Soviet countries still places tremendous obstacles on their road to democracy” (Stepanenko, 2006, p. 2). However, since the period of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution Stepanenko is referring to, many changes have taken place in Ukraine, also in the institutional sphere, at least mentioning the decentralization reform (2014), which to some extent became the trigger of self-organization of a non-spontaneous nature at the local level. Many observers of socio-political life noted the development of civil society in Ukraine in relation to the heritage of the so-called Revolution of Dignity 2014. But even in 2018, despite a noticeable increase in trust in social organizations, participation in some form of social activity was declared by only 7% of respondents, which corresponded to the level of social involvement in 2008; majority of the pollees expected top-down initiatives and solutions (Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2018).

This new kind of paternalism was recognized by sociologists as part of the *homo post-sovieticus* syndrome: the category describing the permanence of manifestations of the Soviet mentality useful for the analysis of socio-cultural effects of transition in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc (Ganev, 2018). Volunteer movement in Ukraine has been developing rather slowly until the events of Revolution of Dignity, Crimea annexation and war in Donbas in 2014 – “In December 2014 GfK Ukraine conducted a nationwide research of volunteering in Ukraine, commissioned by the United Nations. According to the stud, 23% of Ukrainians

possessed volunteering experience” (Matychak, 2019). Anne Applebaum called this social upheaval supporting military needs “the other Ukrainian army” (Applebaum, 2022).

The unprecedented power of social commitment was unleashed with the beginning of the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022. The survey conducted by the Sociological Group “Rating” on April 6, 2022 showed that “About 80% of respondents are involved in defending their country in one way or another. 45% of the respondents help protect the country by financial contributions (in March 2022, this share was 39%). 35% volunteer: they help other people or the military. 18% participate in information resistance, 13% work in critical infrastructure, 3% serve in territorial defense, and 3% serve in the military. A quarter of the respondents are unable to help defend Ukraine” (Rating Sociological Group, 6.04.2022). Social commitment is visible on many levels of support both in the rear and at the front, “Ukraine is showing that an investment in civil society, as part of the essential social fabric, is an investment in resilience” (Civicus Lens, 24.02.2023). Civil society organizations since the very beginning of war are involved in fundraising, delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid, organization of assistance for internally displaced, building shelters for animals, food donation, recording war crimes and human rights violations etc. More than a year after the war outbreak civic activists and volunteers are perceived as a category of population that, according to 26% of respondents, will contribute the most to the Ukraine’s development in future (Rating Sociological Group, 6-11.06.2023). Findings of the research conducted by the Research Triangle Institute in 2022 among Ukrainian nationals and representatives of Ukrainian diaspora also show the significant shift in civic engagement: 86% of respondents donated their money and 42% volunteered to support Ukraine (Leonchuk et al., 2023). “This study provides evidence of ongoing strengthening of Ukraine’s democratic society. Despite the fears and reports about people illegitimately trying to take money, 99% of the participants did not regret donating money to organizations and individuals (...). A high level of trust in civil society and the government was made evident by the sustainable nature of giving behavior (...)” (Leonchuk et al., 2023, p. 11).

4. Discussion

4.1. Civil society in the process of post-war reconstruction: implications and conclusions

Reference to the material obtained through the use of virtual ethnography is intended to derive implications for the post-war modernization and development of Ukraine with the support of civil society mechanisms. In particular, the question of civil society development in regard with the potential accession of Ukraine to the European Union is interesting. As it was already mentioned – collecting original research material in the conditions of ongoing war is very difficult, however researchers still can reach interviewees through social networks sites

such as Facebook, Telegram or Twitter. The special position of Telegram App in Ukrainian society is worth noticing – this messenger is perceived as a digital tool for countering Russian propaganda, since the president Volodymyr Zelenskiy used the communicator to disclaim fake news about Kyiv's surrender (The Guardian, 5.03.2022). Currently the app is recognized as source of information beyond the wide information field established by state and private media sector; “it has become a 24 hour news lifeline for civilians, journalists and even the military” (The Guardian, 5.03.2022). This is the reason why particularly Telegram environment was chosen as a site of digital observation. The idea was to confront the picture of civil society development emerging from the reports and program documents with reporting on social initiatives and activities undertaken for the reconstruction of Ukraine declared by the members of the analyzed Telegram group. As a result of preliminary monitoring of 107 posts searched by the tags #together and #sustainability. On this basis, general implications were derived for further exploration of the issue of the role of civil society in the process of Ukraine's transformation towards sustainability and social cohesion. Contemporary Ukraine is described by the concept of highly developed self-organization - both scientists and journalists underline this fact, deriving the traditions of self-organization in Ukraine from the Cossack movement and the specific Slavic category of collective activities for the community called *toloka* (The Economist, 22.04.2022). What is interesting: both historical concepts of Ukrainian self-organization mentioned above do not assume permanent engagement; involvement results from a particular social demand to be fulfilled.

“Everyone fights on one's own front” – this phrase is often used by social activists in the Telegram group and on their private Facebook accounts, which illustrates the thesis about self-organization in practice. The large-scale social turmoil called by Anne Applebaum the raise of the “other Ukrainian army” (2022), from the point of view of social theory can be categorized as a social capital revival. Concerning the notion of social capital, the explanation suggested by Adam Bartoszek (2008) can be appointed: “(...) social capital should be perceived as a set of factors determining the ability to act, and not only as something objectified or reified in the form of a network of connections and structures. Social capital is then associated with cultural capital, and both have the form of a moral and competence resource resulting from the activity of people in social networks” (p. 74).

Ukrainian activist evaluate the strength of civil society on the basis of four components: actions (i.e. participation, donation), values (common views), responsibilities (duty, desire to change) and belonging (societal, national, citizenship) (Zaremba, Martin, 2023). In terms of engagement the approach on local communities as development triggers is noticeable. Post-war recovery is a complex process affecting communities to different extent, depending on many factors, such as direct exposure to violence, experience of internally displaced influx, internal conflicts and crises etc. Activist involved in the group clearly understand this feature while underlying the priority of “needs recognition”, “prioritize local interventions adequate to the situation”, “necessity to meet local needs” “overcoming mistrust towards local administration”

(Telegram group @Program for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine, 17.06.2023). There is an awareness of work in the sphere of reconciliation and intergroup relations – especially in communities where internally displaced persons from areas affected by direct hostilities arrived.

Reference to moral competence, i.e. the link between social activity and the sphere of values, is also identified in the analyzed posts. For example, the sustainable restoration of communities and regions is understood as “the restoration of mental and physical health, secondly, the restoration of infrastructure and the use of smart technologies in the management of territories and, thirdly, the circular economy at all levels: from the household - to national production” (Telegram group @Program for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine, 13.06.2023); “The change in the state of the community occurs due to the activation and unification of cultural, intellectual and material resources of people who live in the territory of the community and are involved in the production and distribution of a high-quality, competitive, local product/service” (Telegram group @Program for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine, 13.06.2023). Values in this context can be examined as sharing common views and a sense of being united against the evil symbolized by Russia (both in Ukrainian official and unofficial discourses, Russia is depreciated at the axiological level, through the use of the vocabulary from fantasy literature like “non-humans”, “orcs”, “Mordor” etc.).

Responsibility is understood as individual and collective contribution to the victory but also as willingness to involve in sustainable transition process: “And we have to do our part - help the army!”, “And, one day, boys and girls will return from the front and ask us how we brought Victory here. And we may not even answer, but each of us will have to look into those eyes. “What is starting a MOVEMENT? It's finding the right time, place and people so that every word comes true”, “It all starts with PEOPLE who have aspirations. Then, around people united by an idea, a system is formed. Today, each and every one of us, we bring the Victory closer where we can be most effective” (Telegram group @Program for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine, 5-7.06.2023).

Belonging – the sense of being a part of the society, nation, or community has also changed. Issues of national identity in Ukraine are very complex and not directly related to the presented topic, so in this study they will not be discussed. As result of Russian aggression the sense of community emerged powerfully (Zarembo, Martin, 2023). Participants of the group are aware that for the successful implementation of sustainability principles there is a need of networks of new leaders, who will be able to act effectively in the interests of the community. Community development can be done mainly by the recognition of possibilities and resources and making advantage of it for seeking new solutions and undertake difficult challenges.

The conviction about the agency of the individual, emerging from the collected statements, is the result of institutional changes taking place in Ukraine, but also illustrates the shift in thinking about common interests and values. The new context, which is the ongoing war, is an impulse for social activists to think about long-term changes consistent with the idea of

sustainable development. As aptly noted in one of the discussions in the analyzed group: “small communities are part of the overall picture of Ukraine, small communities are crucial for the integrity and stability of Ukraine as an independent country with its own identity and competitive economy” (Telegram group @Program for Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine, 20.07.2023).

Anne Applebaum predicts that “the *volonteri* will create Ukraine’s postwar culture, rebuild the cities and run the country in the future” (Applebaum, 2022, para. 32). The process of social change currently taking place in the society of Ukraine in the conditions of the ongoing war is a particularly important vector of analysis. Ukrainian society has already made a Western choice, however overwhelming post-war aftermath concerns many aspects of social life in Ukraine, including re-establishing of social capital potential, and constituting conditions encouraging Ukrainian refugees to come back to the homeland.

5. Conclusion

The question of civil society role in Ukraine’s sustainable post-war recovery is current and worth analyzing in terms both of issue of resilience as well as modernization. Some – like Anne Applebaum anticipate the role of bottom-up actions and institutions as crucial to these processes. The choice of the Ukraine’s “Western track of development” is already being legitimized, although the path to achieve it will require deep structural changes, like prevailing over corruption. The sustainable restoration of communities and regions demand contemporary approach to the use of resources and social organization, which was indicated in Ukraine’s National Recovery Plan. A separate question is the reintegration of war refugees into society - numerous experiences in the field of conflict resolution and community building can be applied here. It is worth to mention that Ukraine encountered this problem already in 2014, when internally displaced persons from occupied Crimea and Donbas experienced hostile attitudes from the media and host communities. Research on civic engagement and civil society’s contribution to the post-war recovery require the use of more complex methodologies, mostly when we move from the level of national strategies to the level of action in local communities and try to measure the actual impact of bottom-up initiatives in different contexts of *hromadas* and regions.

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