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Landscape analysis: Examples of citizen engagement initiatives for Ukraine organized by Baltic Universities

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Baltics4UA: Supporting Ukraine through citizen engagement at Baltic Universities

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Consortium

The consortium governing the project is adequately representing a wide range of expertise, as 5 Higher Education Institutions (Tallinn University, Lviv Polytechnic National University, Kaunas University of Technology, University of Tartu, University

of Latvia) join hands with a web education specialist (Web2Learn). This mix of knowledge, skills, experiences and networks guarantees a layered approach toward a diverse range of stakeholders.

	Name	Short Name	Country
1	Tallinn University	TLU	Estonia
2	Lviv Polytechnic National University	LPNU	Ukraine
3	Web2Learn	W2L	Greece
4	Kaunas University of Technology	KTU	Lithuania
5	University of Tartu	UT	Estonia
6	University of Latvia	UL	Latvia



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V1.0	18/09/2023	Aiste Pranckute (KTU)	Final touches on a layout; last content review

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Synthesis



Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had a devastating impact on the lives of many people. Ukrainian citizens have had to flee war-torn regions to safer places. The Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have taken in Ukrainian people seeking shelter and are working to create the best possible conditions for them to adapt and integrate into their societies. Baltic higher education institutions are working to respond to the humanitarian crisis caused by Russia's military actions through the international project "Supporting Ukraine through citizen engagement at Baltic Universities" under the Erasmus+ Programme Key Action 2: Partnerships for Cooperation.

The Baltics4UA project partners (University of Tallinn, University of Tartu (Estonia), University of Latvia (Latvia), Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania) and the Lviv National Polytechnic University (Ukraine)) aim to gain a deeper insight into the experiences of Ukrainian citizens when they arrive in the Baltics, the needs and experiences of the people affected by the war and the challenges and barriers they are facing. It is also important to assess how higher education institutions and their communities in the Baltic region are engaged in the management of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, what actions are already being implemented, and where further attention and ideas should be focused.

To achieve these goals, the universities participating as partners in Baltics4UA organised practical discussions on their premises, inviting not only students, lecturers and faculty staff from their own university community but also Ukrainian citizens, students and lecturers. Some universities involved representatives of organisations outside the university – ministries, NGOs, school teachers, etc. A total of 5 workshops were organised with a total of 155 participants.

All discussions organised by the universities were designed according to the World Cafe approach. The main motivation for choosing this method is to create a non-committal, welcoming environment that allows participants to feel free and confident to share their personal experiences, insights and ideas. In addition, the structure of the World Cafe allows the main discussion question to be structured into sub-topics (tables), with supplementary questions, so that the subject is revealed in more detail. The rotation of participants and the short rounds allow all participants to have the opportunity to express themselves, avoiding repeating the same idea and tiredness. Each university was free to define its own topic for discussion. The target group was Ukrainian citizens who had come to Lithuania, Latvia or Estonia, as well as Ukrainian citizens who had stayed in Ukraine but had to move to safer regions. The topics of the discussions organised by the universities covered the experiences of Ukrainian citizens and the possibilities of support in the fields of education, science, culture and other areas.

Tallinn University focused on a particular segment – education. The main obstacle in the Estonian education system for Ukrainians is the transition of Ukrainian children from primary to secondary education. Another insight is that career education in educational institutions needs to be more accessible so that Ukrainian students can find learning and career opportunities. In this case, more human support is needed to help Ukrainian children find what they need from digital information and make the right choice of learning opportunities in vocational training institutions and gymnasiums. The Tallinn Folk University has proposed the possibility of providing students with supportive training for their integration into society as one of the



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lifelong learning opportunities. An example would be training for parents to better understand Estonian study and career opportunities. The need for a cooperation institution was also raised, bringing together various representatives from the public sector, universities and non-profit organisations, as well as organisations representing Ukrainian communities, to work on lifelong learning opportunities for Ukrainians in Estonia.

The LPNU workshop focused on clarifying the roles of the university, students and the academic community in dealing with the humanitarian crisis. The focus was on the experiences and needs of IDPs in the face of the crisis caused by war. The discussion focused on the development and promotion of volunteering ideas within the University community. Participants emphasised the importance of initiating changes in education policy so that volunteering is recognised as non-formal education at the national level, and the University could be the one to initiate these changes. Moreover, the university can play an important role in developing universal rules for the reception of refugees and IDPs. As an educational organisation, the university could be the one to retrain IDPs and refugees in the professions according to the actual needs of the areas they live in, as well as to collaborate in developing basic mechanisms for the employment of refugees and displaced persons.

The KTU has categorised the needs of Ukrainians into the following areas: education, science, culture, basic social needs and support opportunities for IDPs remaining in Ukraine. The participants of the event discussed what the University could do to preserve and promote Ukrainian culture in Lithuania. They also touched upon general issues of support to the Ukrainian community, discussed practical actions that the University community is doing and/or can do to improve the lives and livelihoods of Ukrainians, and what initiatives the University could provide to address the basic needs of Ukrainians. The discussion highlighted the need for psychological support and legal aid for Ukrainians. Questions were also raised about the involvement of Ukrainian researchers in the University's research, support for Ukrainian researchers conducting research in Lithuania, and the possibilities for them to contribute to collaborative research by creating virtual research networks. Opportunities to initiate and carry out research aimed at restoring Ukraine's economy and helping people to return to normal life were discussed.

The main aim of the TU event was to initiate a dialogue between university staff and students about the university's attitude towards the Ukrainian community that has migrated to Estonia since Russia launched a war against Ukraine in February 2022. The participants in the discussion stressed the war fatigue threat in terms of public support for Ukraine. With the continuation of the war, there is a risk that the public's desire to engage in initiatives in support of Ukraine is diminishing, which is why it is necessary to strengthen volunteering and keep motivation up consistently. Empathy and compassion were highlighted as key elements to encourage community involvement in Ukraine support initiatives. This was reflected in the approach of the UT support services. The International Office organised information seminars in Ukrainian (online and in person) to provide advice on study opportunities at UT and career guidance in Ukrainian. They have also individually waived some formal admission requirements and developed an online English language test for Ukrainian students. Participants argued that the most effective response to the crisis needs to be fast and flexible, focusing on specific needs in specific situations. A committee set up by the UT Rector's Office, whose members include Ukrainian students and faculty, was crucial in making quick and oriented needs decisions to



coordinate the university's response to the crisis. Cooperation with the University's management and decision-making structures allowed for exceptions to be made that were necessary to provide rapid and targeted assistance in crisis situations.

The aim of the University of Latvia event was to find out how educational institutions empower students and citizens to take social action in times of crisis, as well as to learn about the best practices of the University of Latvia in responding to crises. In addition, the discussion aimed to share valuable research experiences from Ukraine in Riga, to provide participants with insights and experiences on how to improve crisis management strategies in educational institutions. Participants discussed university research on the impact of the Ukrainian War on Ukrainians living in Latvia. The students actively participated in this research initiative. Given the challenges of isolation faced by Ukrainian students, it was suggested to include networking events in the learning process. These events would be compulsory and would provide support to Ukrainian students and help them cope with the feeling of isolation.

A special mention should be made of the webinar¹ organised by Baltics4UA partner Web2Learn (Greece). This event was quite different from the other 5 universities as it did not follow the principles of the World Café, but it made a significant contribution by showing how HEIs are contributing to the Ukraine crisis by working with the business sector. 5 business representatives from the Baltic countries spoke at the seminar and presented initiatives in Ukraine in which academic institutions were actively involved.

All the World Café events organised by the partner universities, together with the webinar from Web2Learn, succeeded in achieving the common goal of helping participants to rethink their work and visions on how to foster academic resilience in response to the Ukraine crisis in the Baltic region.

¹ The recording is available on Youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34iC_9L8D0M.