



**CROSS-CRISIS RESPONSIVENESS AND THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITIES**  
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Author: **Larissa Jõgi, Tallinn University**

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## CROSS-CRISIS RESPONSIVENESS AND THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract:	<p>The activities carried out within the framework of WP3, and are conceptualized in the context of the main statements from the theory of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Putman 2000), the study of socio-cultural, legal and political dimensions of citizen engagement and Hart's model (1992). Overview of the experience of the conducted Experience Cafés and lessons learned based on the materials and photos collected by the all partners are presented in the main part of the report. At the end of the report, the Lessons learned are presented and recommendations are summarized.</p> <p>The Experience cafés succeeded in highlighting the key challenges, best practices, and collaboration opportunities in supporting Ukraine in the ongoing war. Experience cafés demonstrated the transformative power of cross-sectoral collaboration, support, underscoring the critical roles of open innovation, inclusivity, and sustained engagement in tackling societal challenges, but also some problems and challenges. Participants emphasized the importance of sustained support, deeper collaboration between institutions, and the need for continued public engagement.</p>
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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	<b>Tallinn University</b>	TLU	Estonia
2	<b>Lviv Polytechnic National University</b>	LPNU	Ukraine
3	<b>Web2Learn</b>	W2L	Greece
4	<b>Kaunas University of Technology</b>	KTU	Lithuania
5	<b>University of Tartu</b>	UT	Estonia
6	<b>University of Latvia</b>	LU	Latvia



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Higher educational institutions (HEI) and universities with partners from different fields and civil society and experts from business sector play a meaningful role in driving social change and societal advancement. Such cross-sectoral collaboration can raise complex challenges more effectively than single sector. Social dialogue, critical reflections and collaboration are the main components of the participatory processes which are powerful tools for enhancing cooperation between universities, experts and various stakeholders.

There are important factors that play meaningful role in the cross-sectoral collaboration, networks, relationships and partnerships: social capital is embedded in networks of relationships, which provide partners with access to opportunities and support.

The challenges posed by the war in Ukraine and other societal issues require ongoing effort and commitment. The relationships and partnerships are the crucial assets for future initiatives.

The Experience Cafés and other activities such as podcasts, discussions and learning materials created an excellent example for active evolving a diverse groups and participants and encourage to implement similar activities in the future actions.



## FOREWORD

The social mission of higher education and universities, especially in the crisis caused by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine is a part of the third mission of the universities.

This report was written as part of Work Package (WP) 3 of the EU-funded project Baltics4UA Project (2022-2-EE01-KA220-HED-000096422) "Supporting Ukraine through citizen engagement at Baltic Universities".

Within this context, the Baltics4UA project foster connections and enhancing capabilities across the Baltic region to address the multifaceted challenges posed by crises, such as the ongoing war in Ukraine. At the heart of this endeavor the WP3A1 and WP3A2 experience cafés, designed to cultivate a culture of inter-comprehension and responsiveness in academia-driven social actions.

In the introductory part of the report, the activities carried out within the framework of WP3 is conceptualized. Then, an overview of the experience of the conducted Experience Cafés and lessons learned based on the materials and photos collected by the partners are presented. At the end of the report, conclusions and recommendations are summarized and presented.



## INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

Social world is characterized by increasing complexity, interdependence, risks and crisis. These crises have revealed enormous inequalities in life, power and wealth, and social polarizations (Finnegan & Fleming 2023). Previous studies and report from our project (Zourou, Oikonomou, & Stavros, 2023) confirmed the importance and significance of continuing collaboration and dialogue between universities and different stakeholders in contribution in the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and Ukrainian humanitarian crisis.

Social dialogue, critical reflections and collaboration are the main components of the participatory processes which are powerful tools for enhancing cooperation between universities, experts and various stakeholders. By integrating social dialogue and collaboration, universities can strengthen their relationships with different stakeholders, leading to more effective partnerships and greater impact in their social mission.

The goals of this report are: to provide an overview of the WP3 A1 and A2 activities as Experience Cafés carried out; to map the experience; to summarize the results and share the main lessons learned.

Experience cafés are events designed to foster dialogue, share insights, and cultivate collaborative strategies among a wide range of stakeholders within the quadruple helix framework. This includes university students, academic and support staff, business and civil society representatives and other key individuals who are actively involved in academia-driven social actions (Zourou et al., 2024).

**The experience café (EC)** as a method was agreed to run by partners using either the Open Space methodology or the Constructive Dialogues methodology. **Experience Café method** is a small-group conversation method that based on informal dialogue and which invites people to take part in discussions about different issues in an informal setting (Lefica, & Mearns, 2015). **EC** as an approach is quite similar to the **Knowledge Café method**, which is based on a conversational process that brings a group of people together to share experiences, learn from each other, build relationships and make a better sense of a rapidly changing, complex, less predictable world to improve decision making, innovation and the ways in which we work together. A Knowledge Café is an effective way of both sharing knowledge, but also of testing ideas through active conversation (Lefica, & Mearns, 2015, 31). The aims of the Knowledge Café include the surfacing of the group's collective knowledge; learning from each other; sharing ideas and insights; gaining a deeper understanding of a topic and the issues involved and exploring possibilities (Lefica, & Mearns 2015).

**The Open Space** methodology was suitable for raising different topics, and when it was foreseen, that participants had the issues, topics or questions to raise, it was run through eight stages.

1. Welcoming words and getting to know each other.
2. Ground rules: the right people are in the right place right now; two legs rules - you may leave the conversation, and join another one as soon as you feel comfortable; when it is over then it is over.





3. Raising the questions: participants sit in the circle. The papers and markers are available, each one raises the topic or question to find an answer, and should be ready to lead the discussion. Papers will be spread out in the middle of the circle.
4. Participants get to know the topics, and choose the one they are most interested in moving to the sheet with the topic.
5. Groups are formed based on the interest; the leading participants who offered the chosen topics will lead the discussion.
6. If the answers are found, the new topics may be chosen. And new members will join the discussions.
7. Summing up. All the leading members will introduce the results they got, and report it on the paper.
8. Thank you, and agreements on sharing the results (Open Space World, 2024).

**The Constructive Dialogue** is a method offered by the Time Out team (2024) which are suitable for discussions.

The Timeout Template of the Constructive Dialogue includes 13 steps:

1. Welcoming words and getting to know each other.
2. Ground rules for a constructive discussion.
3. Introduction for the theme (short reading or video or presentation).
4. Buzzing in pairs and/or self - reflection.
5. Joint dialogue.
6. Themes to be discussed further.
7. Buzzing in pairs and/or self-reflection.
8. Joint dialogue.
9. Reflecting on the insights,
10. Sharing your insights with others.
11. Wrapping up.
12. What happens after the dialogue?
13. Thank you (Time Out, 2024).

**The method of constructive dialogue** was used four times, by TLU, LPNU, UT and KTU, and open space were used once by LU. Once the combination of open space and constructive dialogue was in use by Tallinn University. The online experience café, which was conducted by Web2learn, followed its own procedure.

EC-s took place between May to September 2024, each lasting for one to four hours. The aim, and the topics of Experience Café earned the project's aim for broadening the competences of higher education staff in citizen engagement actions. As an output instant report as Deliverable (D 9) was created.



To assess citizen engagement, partners based on Hart's ladder of participation (1992) and on the study of socio-cultural, legal and political dimensions of citizen engagement.

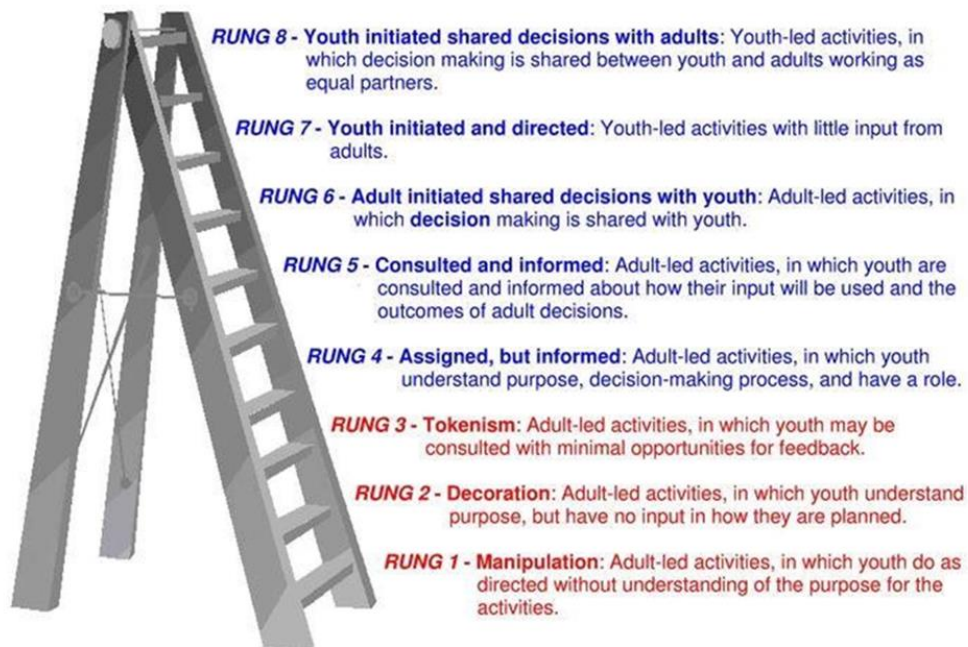
Additionally, as a result of this knowledge the open access educational materials for academic staff (D10) was created to provide academic staff with insights on how to engage diverse groups of people in citizen engagement actions.

## 1. FRAMING OUR EXPERIENCE

When framing the experience, the main statements from theory of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Putman, 2000), Hart's model (1992) and on the study of socio-cultural, legal and political dimensions of citizen engagement.

Theory of social capital focuses on relationships of networking and cooperation between people, emphasizing collective action and trust between people and groups. Social capital refers to the benefits individuals derive from their social networks, including access to resources, information, and support. Social capital consists from trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions. Hart's model describes how people can move from being passive participants to active collaborators (Hart, 1992).

### ROGER HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, as cited in [www.freechild.org/ladder.htm](http://www.freechild.org/ladder.htm)

Figure 1. Ladder of participation (Hart, 1992).



The Hart's (1992) model (in the form of a ladder) consists of eight stages and demonstrates the importance of involving people, giving them the opportunity to express their ideas and emphasizing the importance of each person's contribution (Figure 1).

In the Baltics4UA project the higher levels of Hart's model were followed where participants are not just spectators of activities but participate actively in dialogues and play an active role in the process.

Different contexts generate different trust levels that correspond to the development of social capital (van Bakel & Horak, 2024). Informal groups and networks are the one possible form of social capital. Social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam 2000, 18).

This kind of informal or/and diverse groups with participants from different sectors were formed based on the experience cafe method (Prewitt, 2011).

In the context of the Baltics4UA project, social capital has a main dimension as it facilitates cooperation and relationships between the universities, experts, public sector, businesses, and civil society. In times of crises, such as in the context of Russian full invasion into Ukraine, collaboration and mutual trust among different groups and people is essential to achieve common goals and provide effective solutions. Our project activities, such as event organization, development of models of cooperation and community involvement, helped to strengthen the social cohesion needed to increase accountability in crisis situations.

During the crises different groups and individuals need more attention and support from each other and from the communities. Universities have an important role to play applying the third mission. How university can contribute to crises? How universities can collaborate with the partners and different stakeholders and build the trust? Can and how universities can offer a stories of hope and inspiration?

Trust is a sense of security created in the interaction between people, where knowledge, feelings, social values can be shared without fear that they will be used against you (Rannala & Karu, 2023, 8). Cooperation, trust and dialogue were also pervasive in the planning and implementation of experience café.

Among such activities as podcasts, learning cafés, creating learning materials the Experience Café method was used as the core activities of the WP3. Experience Cafés took place under the leadership of all partners of the project Baltics4UA between May and September 2024.

The participants were invited to participate in EC and in the discussions based on constructive dialogue approach and open space method. The dialogue is a valued and also the most acceptable form of interactions between people. The dialogical approach values openness, trust (Valsiner, 2002) and reflective positioning that is a single kind of capital person can articulate through social relations (Bourdieu 1986).

A safe and supported space for discussion was created. This made possible to focus on what was important in the form of a dialogue and, in turn, to share ideas, suggestions, to discuss together and learn from each other and develop a shared vision that aligns with the interests of both the universities and stakeholders.



According to the previous research little is known about the effects of the Experience and Dialogue Café on participants and facilitators experience in the context of crisis (Son et al., 2023). Therefore, we paid special attention on the Lessons learned from the experience cafe.

### 1.1. Experiences from the experience cafés

Baltics4UA project's ECs were designed as a safe and dialogical environment in which the aim was to develop and share ideas by engaging participants from different groups.

A methodology of EC is centered around open discussion and the exchange of ideas was employed, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives and experiences could be shared. This approach facilitated a deeper comprehension of the varied, multidisciplinary strategies required for addressing such complex societal issues (Zourou et al., 2024).

### 1.2. Overview of experience cafés

Experience cafés with the participants from universities and different organisations including academics, research fellows, experts, students, teachers, business leaders, youth workers, civil society representatives, and other stakeholders were organized and took place during the May-September 2024.

The main goal was to foster an open dialogue and collaboration among academia, businesses, public sector and civil society representatives in the Baltic region to tackle the crisis resulting from the Russian full invasion to Ukraine. This was a great stimulus for ECs organized by partners and was the transformative power of cross-sectoral collaboration, underscoring the critical roles of open innovation, inclusivity, and sustained engagement in tackling societal challenges.

Table 1. Experience cafés, goals, activities and time-line.

EC, PARTNER, DATE USED METHODS	GOALS and MAIN ACTIVITIES
<p><b>W2L, 15.04.2024</b> Experience café (on-line): Academia-society-business social actions for crisis response in Ukraine. On-line, open space, dialogues, sharing stories, presentations from experts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enhance university resilience in the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis (in the Baltics);</li> <li>- Leverage universities' social responsibility through cooperation among the quadruple helix actors (policy, industry, society, academia);</li> <li>-Upskill academic staff and students to actively engage in social action to support Ukrainian populations in the Baltics.</li> </ul> <p>EC involved presentations and moderated discussions; discussion and idea exchange highlighting successful examples of cross-sectoral collaboration.</p>
<p><b>LPNU, 09.05.2024</b> The Experience Café "Cooperation in social actions initiated by academia as a response to crisis situations" was held at Lviv Polytechnic National University.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cooperation between university management and the academic community in responding to crisis situations;</li> <li>-Further improvement of crisis management mechanisms at universities, and will help to increase the level of preparation for dangers and challenges.</li> </ul>



EC, PARTNER, DATE USED METHODS	GOALS and MAIN ACTIVITIES
<p><b>UT, 21.05.2024</b> Experience Café: A Dialogue on Ukraine-related projects Constructive dialogues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Broadening the competences of HE's staff in citizen engagement actions;</li> <li>- Sharing experiences of organizing academia-driven social actions as responsiveness in crises in quadruple helix;</li> </ul> <p>Experience cafe aims to provide networking platform for individuals involved in Ukraine-related projects, across various sectors.</p>
<p><b>LU, 23.05.2024</b> Experience café.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Broadening the competences of HE's staff in citizen engagement actions;</li> <li>- Sharing experiences of organizing academia-driven social actions as responsiveness in crises in quadruple helix;</li> <li>- Adding the students view into citizen engagement, and university's tasks in social responsibility.</li> </ul>
<p><b>TLU, 08.05.2024 &amp; 04.06.2024</b> Experience café, Learning Café, Open Space. Constructive dialogues: presentation, sharing experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Broadening the competences of HE's staff in citizen engagement actions;</li> <li>- Sharing experiences of organizing academia-driven social actions as responsiveness in crises in quadruple helix.</li> </ul>
<p><b>KTU, 16.09.2024</b> Sharing experience in support of Ukraine: an inter-institutional dialogue, Constructive dialogues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting cooperation between organizations providing assistance to Ukrainians;</li> <li>- To invite researchers, academic staff, representatives from non-governmental institutions, citizens who all have one goal to provide support to Ukrainians that suffer from the effects of humanitarian crises.</li> </ul>

### 1.3 Participants

Total number of the participants in experience cafés was **126**. The participants from diverse backgrounds include academic and support staff, students and librarians from various universities, business leaders, experts, civil society representatives, teachers, youth workers, communication specialists and other stakeholders involved in academia-driven social actions. Participants have a variation of experiences and very different professional background. Many of participants have had experience with the migrants or refugees.

In EC organized by KTU participated researchers from KTU and Vytautas Magnus University, representatives from international relations office of KTU, Ukraine centre, a non-governmental school Herojus, Caritas organization, librarians from KTU who are actively involved in projects that provide support to Ukrainian people.

For instance, most of the institutions who participated in EC organized by UT have experienced working with refugees. Specifically, the NGO Ukraina Maja (*Ukraine House*) is actively involved in assisting Ukrainian refugees and fostering connections between the Estonian and Ukrainian communities in Tartu. Among the institutes at the UT, the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies is engaged in several projects concerning Ukrainian refugees. One such project involved surveying Ukrainians about the challenges they face in the labor market, "Equal Access and Support in the Workforce for migrants and refugees," with the aim of consulting employers to prevent discrimination. Another noteworthy project



presented at UT's event was "Taking Shelter in Estonia: The Stories of Ukrainians Fleeing from the War," conducted by the Institute of Cultural Research. In the EC organized by UT a wider group of participants participated from very different institutions: Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies (UT), the Institute of Cultural Research, and the Institute of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Tallinn University of Technology, the Estonian University of Life Sciences, the Estonian Military Academy, E-Governance Academy, NGOs Ukraina Maja, KOLO, International Women's Network in Estonia.

Web2Learn organized online EC with international group of participants represented University of Hamburg, Kherson State Maritime Academy, Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman, TLU, LU, KTU, UT, and LPNU; research and cultural institutes like the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art of the LU; non-academic organizations such as Garage48, ScienceForUkraine and Web2Learn. These institutions are located across several countries, including Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, and Greece.

Table 2. Participants of Experience Cafés.

PARTNERS AND PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (126)
W2L. Academic and support staff from academia, business, civil society: various universities, business leaders, civil society representatives, and other stakeholders involved in academia-driven social actions. They are from diverse backgrounds and have a commitment to addressing the challenges posed by crises like the war in Ukraine.	26
TLU. Youth workers (from 10 municipalities) working at youth centers, youth organizations, hobby schools, schools and culture houses; librarians, academics, students. The common feature is that they are students or academic staff at TLU or TalTech.	20
KTU. Researchers (KTU and Vytautas Magnus University), representatives from international relations office of KTU, Ukraine centre, a non-governmental school Herojus, Caritas organization, librarians from KTU who are actively involved in projects that provide support to Ukrainian people.	19
LPNU. Teachers, students and non-academic staff of Lviv Polytechnic.	27
LU. Most participants were students of LU as well as participants from the student council.	19
UT. Participants from UT (including the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, the Institute of Cultural Research, and the Institute of Foreign Languages and Cultures), Tallinn University of Technology, the Estonian University of Life Sciences, the Estonian Military Academy, E-Governance Academy, NGOs Ukraina Maja, KOLO, International Women's Network in Estonia.	15



## 2. FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

The number of responds from participants related to feedback was variative, but the main results showed that such events had a great impact on fostering constructive dialogue.

Participants rated **the understanding the importance of the events** as very high (**4,85**). The majority of participants expressed a quite strong understanding of the importance of the topic, as evidenced by their high motivation scores for future engagement (**4,65 - 5**).

**Motivation for further organization of social action** was also rated as very high (**5**), except for LPNU and KTU where the participants rated it 2.

**General satisfaction with organization** was rated from participants who gave the feedback was very high (**4,61 - 5**).

The feedback and rates suggest that the organized events conveyed its aims and significance, also engaged the participants appropriately. This demonstrates a strong commitment among attendees to continue engaging in similar activities, emphasizing the event's success in inspiring action.

**For instance**, Experience Cafe as online event organized by Web2Learn revealed a strong positive response regarding in all three components of the feedback from participants (**5**). General satisfaction with the organization of the event was very high also (**5**).

Based on the feedback from the participants, it can be generalized that the Experience Cafés created an excellent example for active evolving a diverse groups and participants and encourage to implement similar activities in the future actions or activities also.



### 3. MAPPING SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENTS

Several activities from two methods were used for social engagement: Constructive Dialogue by KTU, TLU, UT, LPNU, Open Space by LU, Open Space with the combination of Constructive Dialogue (TLU), and with adaptation for online meeting by W2L. The aim of Open Space was to create open social space and open dialogue and to facilitate collaboration by using collaborative strategies. Constructive dialogue is an interactive method that give the possibilities for the flexible and open discussion. The method was used as an interactive approach for all experience cafes. Additionally, several activities were used during the experience cafes. For instance, expert's presentations, moderated discussions, sharing examples of cross-sectoral collaboration were used by partners from Web2Learn.

According to Hart's model (1992) all used activities were related to level 8, 7, 6 and 5 (Vovk, Shilinh, & Teder, 2024). Engagement took place primarily in legal, political and in socio-cultural context and emphasized three types of high level of engagement. Participants of EC-s described their activities through the lens of engagement and participation ladder.

**Example (level 8):** Lithuanian public employment services give free of charge Lithuanian language courses to Ukrainians, in schools where children from Ukraine study parents are also involved in cultural events, platforms such as <https://stipruskartu.lt/> mentioned as a good example of engagement, students from Ukraine that are currently studying in KTU actively use international mobility opportunities available at KTU (KTU).

In the context of the Baltics4UA project, legal engagement ensures that all collaborative efforts align with laws related to educational cooperation, cross-border partnerships, and emergency responses in crises like the war in Ukraine.

**Examples (level 8):** Creation of joint committees and working groups; open forums and discussions: organizing regular meetings where every member of the academic community can express their opinion; using different formats, such as meetings, online forums, surveys and focus groups; publication of reports on decisions made and their justification; engagement of independent experts to evaluate the processes and results of cooperation; use of online platforms for joint decision-making and discussion; creation of a database with open access to information on current projects and initiatives (LPNU).

**Example (level 7):** The initiatives at KTU exemplify this, as academic-societal partnerships actively engaged both students and faculty in real-world applications of academic insights to address societal challenges (KTU).

**Example (level 7):** Establishment of working groups with representatives of management and the academic community for joint decision-making; regular exchange of information between management and the academic community to ensure mutual respect and understanding (LPNU).

**Example (level 7):** One of the initiatives led by the Estonian E-Governance Academy involves engaging Ukrainians in trainings, after which they form teams to further educate other Ukrainians in Estonia, aiming to improve their digital skills. While these training sessions are coordinated by decision-makers, Ukrainians take the lead in conducting activities themselves once they have acquired sufficient knowledge. Link to the project is <https://ega.ee/project/deuce/> (UT).





Example includes #ScienceForUkraine, where academic and civil society sectors initiated and directed actions with little need for external decision-making influence (W2L).

**Example (level 6):** Ukrainian students who are currently studying at KTU participated in social actions organized by Baltics4UA project partners in Lithuania. One of the students approached librarians and asked if there would be a possibility to organize their events by their own. Ukrainian students initiated and organized three events: screening of the documentary [White angel](#) the end of Marynka, opening of the exhibition „[Unissued diplomas](#)“ and a meditation session (KTU).

**Example (level 5):** In Lithuania is established non-governmental school “[Heroiam slava](#)” where teachers are from Ukraine and students are Ukrainians. In this event took part school director and a teacher and they shared their success story how community from Ukraine successfully integrates in Lithuania, students have a possibility to study in their mother tongue while teacher from Ukraine can continue their professional development. <https://www.herojus.lt/lt/ukrainieciu-mokykla> (KTU).

**Example (level 5):** LU faculty students facilitated the event, consulting Ukrainian participants and informing them of the university’s potential resources (LU).

**Example (level 5):** The Ukrainian community was surveyed to gather insights into their experiences with employment in Estonia. Given the diverse experiences Ukrainians have had with Estonian employers, the project aimed to consult with the Ukrainian community. The feedback collected will then be used to inform decision-makers, with the goal of reducing discrimination for Ukrainians in the Estonian employment landscape (UT).

**Example (level 5):** The basics is informing and sharing truthful information to the target group. Groups can make their own choices to participate in society. And engaging Estonian Ukrainians in integrating refugees (TLU).

**Example (level 5):** Participants were consulted and informed about how their input would be used, which is evident in how the feedback from discussions was used to shape ongoing and future initiatives (W2L).

**Example (level 5):** One of participants presented the project ŠASA (Lithuanian and English lessons for Ukrainian children). This project invites Ukrainian children to learn Lithuanian and English by playing games, doing various exercises and activities, socializing and having fun. It was explained that children who came to these lessons and are more advanced in English language, were encouraged and enabled to help other children to study <https://azuolynobiblioteka.lt/renginiai/projektas-sasa-lietuviu-ir-anglu-kalbu-pamokos-ukrainieciu-vaikams/> (KTU).

At the political level is crucial to ensure that the strategies developed are supported and facilitated by appropriate policies, thereby ensuring a more coordinated and effective response to crises. The political engagement involves advocacy and the promotion of policies that support inclusive, innovative, and sustainable solutions to societal challenges. For instance, centralised support from European Commission for Ukrainians who experienced humanitarian crisis (KTU).

Socio-cultural engagement focused on the integration of diverse cultural perspectives, utilizing the societal knowledge and experiences of participants to enhance community resilience and responsiveness (W2L).



#### 4. COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF HE STAFF

The ECs' discussions transcended traditional sectoral boundaries, emphasizing the necessity for a cross-disciplinary approach to solving complex social issues.

The insights garnered from the café underscored several key lessons, including the immense potential of cross-sectoral collaboration, the importance of open innovation and entrepreneurial thinking in crisis response, and the crucial role of science and academic research in guiding practical social actions (Zourou et al., 2024).

The experience café at Web2Learn spotlighted the inspirational story of Sanita Reinsone, the founder of #ScienceForUkraine. Reinsone's initiative, stemming from a grassroots movement on Twitter, has evolved into a vital NGO supporting the Ukrainian academic community through partnerships with higher education institutions and research organizations. Her narrative emphasized the critical role of science and academic research in sustaining the intellectual and cultural vitality of Ukraine during the crisis. Through activities like monitoring support opportunities, advocacy, and partnership building, #ScienceForUkraine has fostered a robust network of support for Ukrainian scholars, demonstrating the power of collaborative scientific endeavors in crisis response and recovery (Zorou et al., 2024).

Experience cafés aimed to provide networking platform for individuals involved in Ukraine-related projects, across various sectors including academia, NGOs, business, public sector and student community to exchange their experiences, discuss challenges and seek out opportunities for potential collaborations.

The sharing of best practices and the establishment of future collaboration opportunities among participants from different sectors were pivotal outcomes of the event.



## 5. LESSONS LEARNED

Experience cafés demonstrated the transformative power of cross-sectoral collaboration, support, underscoring the critical roles of open innovation, inclusivity, and sustained engagement in tackling societal challenges, but also some problems and challenges.

Key takeaways included the importance of leveraging academic research for practical social actions, the benefits of entrepreneurial thinking in crisis response, and the need for ongoing engagement and collaboration across sectors (W2L).

*One of the most poignant lessons drawn from the participants' experiences is the significance of inclusivity in fostering effective collaboration. Participants noted that understanding the lived experiences, fears, and hopes of the Ukrainian community, as well as those of various stakeholders involved, was pivotal in creating a common ground for collaboration. Participants learned that by valuing and integrating diverse voices, especially those of marginalized or affected communities, collaborations become more innovative, empathetic, and impactful (Zorou et al., 2024).*

*Participants and partners had a constructive dialogue based deep discussions that gave us the possibility to present below several good examples and experiences from partner's reports and also highlight some problems. One of the key themes that emerged from the discussions was the set of challenges encountered in providing effective support (KTU).*

**Example:** *Latvian universities can support Ukrainian students by offering scholarships, flexible admissions, and psychological support. They can assist Ukrainian institutions by providing academic collaboration, sharing digital resources, and facilitating research partnerships, especially in online and remote formats. The most beneficial collaborations could include student and faculty exchanges, joint research projects, and shared online learning platforms. The University of Latvia can increase its support by organizing fundraising initiatives, and promoting solidarity events. As well it can also build research partnerships with Ukrainian institutions (LU).*

**Example:** *Dr. Tautkevičienė and Ms. Jonaitytė shared their journey in catalyzing academic-societal partnerships, thereby harnessing the intellectual and creative capacities of the university community to address and mitigate the impacts of the Ukrainian crisis. Through initiatives like art therapy sessions for Ukrainian students, film screenings with open discussions, and exhibitions paying tribute to the resilience of the Ukrainian spirit, KTU has exemplified the transformative potential of universities as agents of social support and empowerment (W2L).*

Participants highlighted significant barriers such as cultural differences, financial limitations, a lack of access to timely and reliable information, language difficulties, which complicate communication and integration process for Ukrainians. Financial limitations also present a critical issue, particularly as the resources for aid are decreasing and concerns over the sustainability of support grow, especially after the completion of project-specific funding. Moreover, many noted a lack of access to timely and reliable information, making it difficult for both support providers and recipients to connect with necessary services.

Attention and involvement from the broader public have also waned, with fewer initiatives and decreasing media attention on the crisis. Cultural differences were another challenge identified, particularly in terms of how they influence public involvement and understanding.



Additionally, much of the aid is currently provided through personal initiatives rather than well-coordinated efforts, which reduces its effectiveness. Psychological support remains insufficient, despite the increasing mental health needs of those affected by the war.

Finally, the ongoing influx of refugees has revealed the necessity for clearer rules and procedures to manage the flow more efficiently (KTU).

## 6. LEARNED LESSONS. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE AND LEARNING MATERIALS

Based on the discussions in Experience Cafés and partner`s reports the recommendations for the future activities and for the learning materials are presented below.

As the event focused on cooperation between university and the academic community with the different groups in responding to crisis situations in Ukraine, the following activities were proposed (LPNU):

- Creation of specialized commissions for crisis management, which will include representatives of the academic community and administration for effective crisis management.
- Developing and improving an action plan to respond to different types of crisis situations.
- Conducting training and seminars on crisis management to improve crisis management skills.
- Creation of a system for prompt information exchange between participants in the joint crisis response process.
- Using the expert potential of the academic community to analyze crisis situations and develop recommendations for their resolution.
- Creation of information and analytical centers that will monitor the situation and analyze data for rapid response to crisis events.
- Organizing joint interdisciplinary projects between different institutes, universities and disciplines to address specific crisis-related issues.
- Creating a system of psychological and practical support for those who need help in crisis situations.
- Developing mechanisms of interaction with the public to inform it and involve it in crisis response.
- Creating a network of partners for rapid crisis response and resource sharing



**THERE ARE NEEDS FOR** different types of the learning materials and educational resources:

- **Traditional resources** like textbooks, reference books, lesson plans, workbooks, flashcards, charts and supplemental reading materials on civic engagement methods.
- **Graphic and interactive materials:** physical objects, photographs, illustrations, charts, graphs, maps, multimedia, movies and games.
- **Visual and interactive materials:** to enhance understanding and engagement among participants was evident in the presentations of the guest speakers and was distributed after the event to participants as well as to the general public on the project website.
- **Presentation items:** lecture notes, slideshow applications and interactive presentation software like Prezi, Pear Deck and Canva.
- **Tests and assessments:** classroom assignments, quizzes, essays, standardized tests and group projects.
- **Polls for gathering insights** and facilitate interactive discussions.
- **Accessibility, reusability of learning materials.** Learning materials should be creative, visual, innovative; relevant; easily updated, accessed.
- **Reusability:** material can be easily updated, repurposed, or reused across different courses or learning contexts.
- **Accessibility:** Design materials with accessibility in mind, ensuring they can be easily accessed and understood by all learners, including those with disabilities. Learning materials as an educational resource should be accessible to all age groups, older people should have access to educational resources that is most relevant for them; it was expressed the need for more online platforms such as <https://stipruskartu.lt/>, also more media channels should be used.
- **Relevant to use in mobile devices.** Mobile devices provide access to educational content anytime and anywhere, allowing students to learn outside the classroom or during travel, as well it helps if there is instant access to PC, making education more flexible and inclusive.



## CONCLUSIONS

Higher educational institutions and universities with partners from different fields and civil society and experts from business sector play a meaningful role in driving social change and societal advancement. Such cross-sectoral collaboration can raise complex challenges more effectively than single sector could alone and creates a strong social capital for academic institutions. According to the social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) there are important factors that play meaningful role in the cross-sectoral collaboration.

Networks, relationships and partnerships: social capital is embedded in networks of relationships, which provide partners with access to opportunities and support.

*The challenges posed by the crisis in Ukraine and other societal issues require ongoing effort and commitment. The relationships and partnerships formed during the event were seen as crucial assets for future initiatives. By maintaining and nurturing these connections, participants acknowledged the potential for a continued collaborative response to not only the current crisis but also other challenges that may arise, fostering a resilient and responsive community of practice (Zorou et al., 2024).*

**Trust and dialogue** are fundamental to building and maintaining social capital of the network and collaboration. It plays an important and meaningful role in collaboration and in supports the collective open dialogue.

*The dialogue and interactions among participants highlighted the necessity of acknowledging and valuing each sector's unique contributions to the crisis response. This recognition fostered a sense of respect and appreciation among the participants, facilitating smoother collaborations and minimizing conflicts (Zorou et al., 2024).*

**Empathy, shared values and collective efficacy:** shared values within an open dialogue strength empathy, promote social cohesion, bridging different groups and facilitate collaboration, enhance collective efficacy, the group's ability to achieve common goals and address challenges.

*The experience café demonstrated that empathy not only strengthens the bond between collaborators but also amplifies the effectiveness of the engagement activities, as solutions are crafted with a genuine consideration of the beneficiaries' needs (Zorou et al., 2024).*

**Bridging knowledge and social action.** The main activities centered around collaboration with the different and diverse groups from academia, civil society and the business sector required the involvement of participants followed the higher levels of the social collaboration.

There are several conclusions that based on the collective experience and related to impact, meaningfulness, sustainability and transferability of all activities.

**Impact:** the used activities are made a visible impact on collaboration between academic and other sectors.

*The WP3A1 and WP3A2 experience cafés represent a crucial step forward in harnessing the power of academia to foster resilient communities and responsive actions in the face of crises. By emphasizing intercomprehension and the multifaceted nature of citizen engagement, these initiatives contribute significantly to the overarching goals of the*



*Baltics4UA project, paving the way for more inclusive, effective, and empathetic approaches to crisis response and community empowerment (Zourou et al., 2024).*

**Meaningfulness:** implemented activities and collaborative involvement of diverse groups of participants created socially valuable results which lead to novelties in terms of future activities (i.e. knowledge, know-how, practices).

*Key takeaways from the event included the immense potential of the discussions reinforced the importance of open innovation, entrepreneurial thinking in crisis response, and the role of science and academic research in informing practical action for social impact.*

*Moreover, the event underscored the importance of inclusivity, empowerment, and the necessity for ongoing engagement and commitment to collaboration across sectors (Zourou et al., 2024).*

**Sustainability:** there are evidences that the methods and results could be integrated in any future activities and also will reach new audiences.

*The event succeeded in highlighting the key challenges, best practices, and collaboration opportunities in supporting Ukraine in the ongoing crisis.*

Participants emphasized the importance of sustained financial and organizational support, deeper collaboration between institutions, and the need for continued public engagement. Moving forward, there is a shared commitment among the attendees to enhance their efforts and create more structured, impactful means of supporting Ukraine in the future (KTU).

**Transferability:** the experience cafes that based on constructive dialogue and open and supported social space can be clearly implemented in other contexts and benefits other sectors.

There is a growing realization of the extensive activities concerning Ukraine, revealing the importance of specific guidelines when engaging the Ukrainian refugee community in Estonia for projects.

Organizations that have access to these communities emphasize the need for initial coordination of ideas and assistance with the communities themselves.

Furthermore, there's an encouragement to explore potential collaborations, investigate the initiatives of others to discover synergies, and emphasize knowledge sharing and network building for future projects related to Ukraine (UT).

Notable practice discussed was the innovative approach to crisis response through open innovation programs and hackathons, as shared by expert Kadri Tiisvel from Garage48 Estonia during the event organized by W2L.

This approach leveraged the power of innovation, technology, and entrepreneurial thinking to address social challenges, thereby showcasing the transformative potential of such initiatives. Through fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, empowering youth and women, and supporting startup communities, these programs highlighted how innovative thinking and technological advancements could serve as catalysts for societal progress and resilience (Zorou et al 2024).

The experience cafes succeeded in highlighting the key challenges, best practices, and collaboration opportunities in supporting Ukraine in the ongoing war.



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Participants emphasized the importance of sustained financial and organizational support, deeper collaboration between institutions, and the need for continued public engagement.

Moving forward, there is a shared commitment among the attendees to enhance their efforts and create more structured, impactful means of supporting Ukraine in the future. In conclusion, the experience cafes underscored the importance of inclusivity, empowerment, and the necessity for ongoing engagement and commitment to collaboration across sectors.



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