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Making sense of multi-level and multi-actor governance of recovery in Ukraine

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Abstract: This paper sheds light on the complex recovery governance in Ukraine by providing a snapshot of the evolving national recovery actors' networks and examining them within a multi-level governance framework, using interviews, social network analysis, and a sense-making workshop. It highlights the ambiguity of the multi-level recovery governance structure in Ukraine, which shows characteristics of decentralization while representing a rather centralized machine and tends to be multi-actor while leaving some groups of actors behind. The paper offers suggestions for improvement but concludes that a bottom-up recovery process that leverages the decentralization potential and multi-actor energy is needed to benefit the current system constellations. In general, the paper provides a starting point for further research and analysis to deepen our understanding of Ukraine's emerging recovery governance landscape.

Key words: decentralization, social network analysis, bottom-up, recovery governance

JEL classification: D85, H77, O20, R58

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Correction: Table 2 was missing. It was added on 30 June 2023.

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1 Introduction

The world was shocked by Russia's full-scale military attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Although the war is still ongoing, its impact is already apparent and far-reaching, with significant displacement of the population, increased unemployment, economic recession, and widespread physical destruction, among other effects. The UNDP (2022) recently assessed that the war had caused the loss of 18 years of socio-economic progress in Ukraine.

This means that the scale of recovery projects is already immense and complex. However, the Ukrainian people remain hopeful, with the recovery motto 'we will build back better' and the aim of 'becoming part of the EU' lifting their spirits and giving hope for the future (KiSI 2022).

A vast development gap created by the war, paired with high societal expectations, requires work not to be limited to a single region or territory, nor to be designed and executed by one agency or department. It also requires substantial resources, exceeding the actual cost of damaged and destroyed assets and already exceeding by far the capacities of Ukraine's state budget and pre-war economy. This means that a good deal of the required funding for recovery is expected to come from international partners, among many other sources (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2022; Kiel Institute 2023).

Recovery can quickly become a complex and messy situation, with international actors rushing to help and adding to the already chaotic network of national actors struggling to find their place in the new governance landscape (O'Driscoll 2018). To bring clarity to this situation, this study aims to make sense of and visualize the emerging complexity of Ukraine's recovery governance. Given that information about the international actors has already been presented and analysed (Bergmann and Romanyshyn 2022; KPMG 2023; OECD 2022; Skidmore et al. 2022), the study focuses specifically on the national system and national actors. This is enabled by the knowledge of national complexities, languages, and local realities that the authors possess.

The study uses the multi-level governance (MLG) theoretical framework to analyse this emerging system. This framework has often been used for describing and analysing this type of complex system, in terms of showing the vertical interplay of different levels of government and multi-actor relationships horizontally (Bache et al. 2022).

This study is not meant to be a comprehensive representation of the MLG of recovery in Ukraine, but rather a snapshot and an initial step towards making sense of the emerging complexity. Using the parable of the blind people and the elephant,¹ the paper attempts a collective exploration of the elephant by using interviews and a sense-making workshop in combination with quantitative data collection and analysis.

¹ A group of blind people encounter an elephant and try to understand it by touching different parts. One person mistakenly believes that they are touching a tree when they are actually touching the elephant's leg, while another erroneously claims that the animal is a snake after touching the trunk. The parable highlights how humans tend to claim absolute truth based on their own limited perspectives, ignoring others' equally valid experiences. It originated in ancient India and emphasizes the importance of recognizing diverse viewpoints.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Multi-level governance (MLG)

There are a number of definitions of MLG. The most common is dispersion of the central government authority among levels of government vertically and among different actors horizontally (Bache et al. 2022; Hooghe and Marks 2010; Stephenson 2013). In general, vertical interactions in MLG are based on the principle of subsidiarity, which states that decisions should be made at the lowest level of government capable of effectively addressing the issue at hand (Estella de Noriega 2002).

In general, MLG can be understood as both a normative and an analytical framework. As a normative framework, MLG refers to the idea that governance should be dispersed, and that power should be shared among different levels of government and other actors to promote greater accountability, participation, and effectiveness in policy-making. As an analytical framework, MLG is used to study and understand the reality of governance in contemporary societies. This approach focuses on the ways in which governance is actually organized and conducted across different levels and sectors, and the relationships between different actors and institutions involved in governance.

In this study, we use MLG as an analytical framework to investigate the case of Ukrainian governance and will look at the normative aspects before drafting possible improvement suggestions.

Vertical interactions in MLG

The concept of MLG was introduced by Gary Marks in the mid-1990s (Marks et al. 1996), targeting the institutional future of the EU. In this early view, MLG was considered a system of continuous negotiation among institutions at different territorial levels. The concept has since expanded, as supra-national (e.g. international global governance) and sub-national (decentralization to cities and communities) levels have gained in importance globally.

When looking at post-conflict or post-disaster recovery governance, supra-national vertical interactions are crucial. The United Nations (UN) and other international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), often play an important role in coordinating post-disaster/conflict reconstruction efforts and in shaping policies and decisions, of course interacting closely with the national governments of the affected countries (Cogen and De Brabandere 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2010; Jabareen 2013).

The sub-national level is also critical in recovery governance, as it is often closest to the communities affected by conflict or disaster and can therefore better understand their needs and respond to them effectively (Baser 2011). According to Collier (2009), a bottom-up approach that empowers local communities to take part in the reconstruction process leads to more sustainable outcomes, as it creates a sense of ownership and investment in the recovery process. In addition, Kern and Bulkeley (2009) have shown that cooperation among different sub-national levels (e.g. through transnational climate city networks) can speed up knowledge and technology transfer and, by bypassing the national level, lead to even faster international transformations (in the case of international cities networks).

Although many studies have highlighted the benefits of cooperation and coordination between different levels of governance, this can also lead to confusion, delays, and conflicts (Hooghe et al.

2001). Scholars therefore recognize the importance of establishing clear ‘rules of the game’, defining roles and responsibilities, as well as vertical interactions and coordination mechanisms, such as intergovernmental agreements, joint policy-making bodies, and regular meetings and information-sharing (Bache et al. 2022; Hooghe and Marks 2010; Stephenson 2013).

Horizontal interactions in MLG

Early MLG theory focused on vertical interactions between government institutions and, since successful governance requires cooperation among different actors, was criticized for not considering non-state actors. To address this, horizontal interactions were added, to include a range of actors such as government, private sector, civil society, academia, and citizens (Stephenson 2013).

Like vertical interactions, however, horizontal interactions among multiple actors can lead to confusion, delays, and conflicts and significantly slow the decision-making process (Ongaro 2015). According to Burt (2004), increasing the density of the multiple actors’ network can improve the situation, by enhancing the flow of information, resources, and opportunities among actors and levels, and by providing a diverse range of perspectives and ideas, leading to greater effectiveness, collaboration, innovation, and creativity. This can be achieved by encouraging the formation of new relationships and connections among actors and through events (conferences, events, forums), online spaces (such as digital platforms), and physical spaces (such as living labs and citizen science spaces) (Bulkeley and Castán Broto 2013; Stephenson 2013).

Furthermore, Wolfram (2016) highlights the importance of working across levels and actors by recognizing, acknowledging, and sustaining broker organizations. They can act as facilitators, providing technical assistance, building relationships, and coordinating activities. Usually, organizations are doing this job in an informal capacity. One proposed strategy to strengthen this role is to formalize it (Borgström 2019). Creating formal mechanisms for cooperation is another way of improving the effectiveness of the horizontal interactions. Creating multi-actor task forces or committees, for example, can help to promote cooperation and coordination between actors (Borgström 2019).

3 Research questions, methods and approaches

This study aims to map and analyse the ecosystem of national actors involved in the reconstruction of Ukraine. To achieve this, we address the following research questions:

- Who are the main actors involved in planning and acting on recovery strategies?
- What are the interactions among these actors in terms of MLG?
- What potential improvements can be identified from an MLG perspective?

We provide answers to the first two questions in the following sub-sections; the third question is addressed in Section 6.

3.1 Identification of actors in the emerging recovery governance

In the initial phase of the study, we collected secondary data through desk research, including publications, news reports, official websites, and policy documents. We complemented these data with participatory observations and informal conversations during key events such as the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC 2022) in Lugano, the World Urban Forum (WUF 2022) in Katowice,

the International Expert Conference on the Recovery, Reconstruction, and Modernization of Ukraine (2022) in Berlin, and the ReBuild Ukraine Conference in Warsaw (2023). These sources helped us to develop a preliminary understanding of the recovery governance system in Ukraine.

On the basis of this understanding we constructed a background for this paper and conducted basic stakeholder mapping. The stakeholders selected for formal interview included representatives of national government, local government, civil society organizations, academia, private sector entities, and urbanist organizations. We conducted a total of 20 in-depth interviews between November 2022 and May 2023. We used a semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions, allowing participants to provide detailed and in-depth responses. The interviews were conducted in person, by telephone, or via video conference, depending on the participants' preferences. They were conducted in the participants' native language and ranged in duration from 30 minutes to 1 hour.

The interviews served two primary purposes:

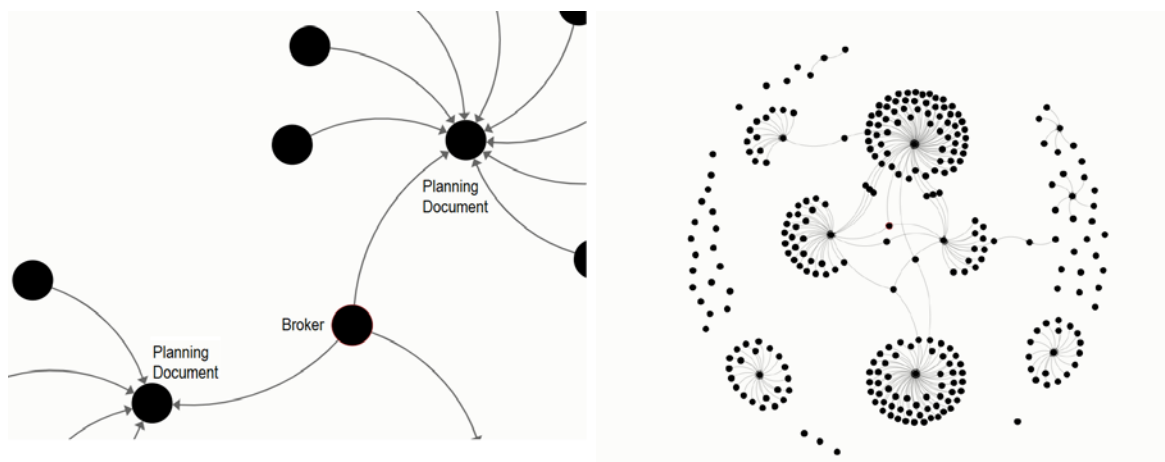
- To identify the actors involved in the planning process (through identification of the main recovery planning documents);
- To identify the actors involved in implementing recovery actions (through identification of the main recovery action initiatives).

We focused on well known cases and those developed by multiple organizations. From our initial research and the interview data, we compiled a list of 10 key planning documents and 14 key action initiatives. We then identified the organizations involved in writing these documents and participating in the action initiatives. This resulted in a list of 351 actors.

3.2 Analysis of interactions among actors

Interactions among organizations became evident when they were found to be associated with the same planning documents or action initiatives. To visualize these interactions, we employed the kumu.io software. The visual representation and simple social network analysis allowed us to identify organizations that were involved in multiple documents/initiatives. These organizations can be considered brokers within the analysed system (Figure 1). Additionally, we employed social network analysis (SNA) to identify influencers within the network.

Figure 1: Visualization of the brokers in the mapped system



Source: authors' construction.

We utilized the MLG framework to structure and analyse the collected data. The framework provided a comprehensive lens through which to identify and understand the interplay between actors in the recovery governance system. We enriched this analysis with information collected from the interviews.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the MLG governance system, we conducted a sense-making workshop with the interviewees, during which we presented the results generated by the analysis and incorporated feedback from the participants. This iterative process led to a simplified depiction of the MLG governance system, analogous to the parable of the blind people and the elephant, providing a more profound understanding of the overall system.

4 Background: the main governance structures in Ukraine and their transformation during the war

Since Ukraine's independence, the country has undergone a series of transformations, both gradual and accelerated, due to three revolutions (the 1990 Revolution on Granit, the 2004/05 Orange Revolution, and the 2013/14 Revolution of Dignity or Euromaidan).

In terms of horizontal interplays of MLG, this transformation has been described as a change from a society characterized by people that valued passive acceptance of government actions, respect for hierarchy, and bureaucracy (termed *Homo Sovieticus* by Zinov'ev 1983) to one that values horizontal social links and independent decision making (sometimes called *Homo Dignus*, after the Revolution of Dignity) (Asmolov 2022; Boulègue and Lutsevych 2020; Pesenti 2020; Romanova 2022; Shapovalova and Burlyuk 2018; Sigov 2022; Udovyk 2017).

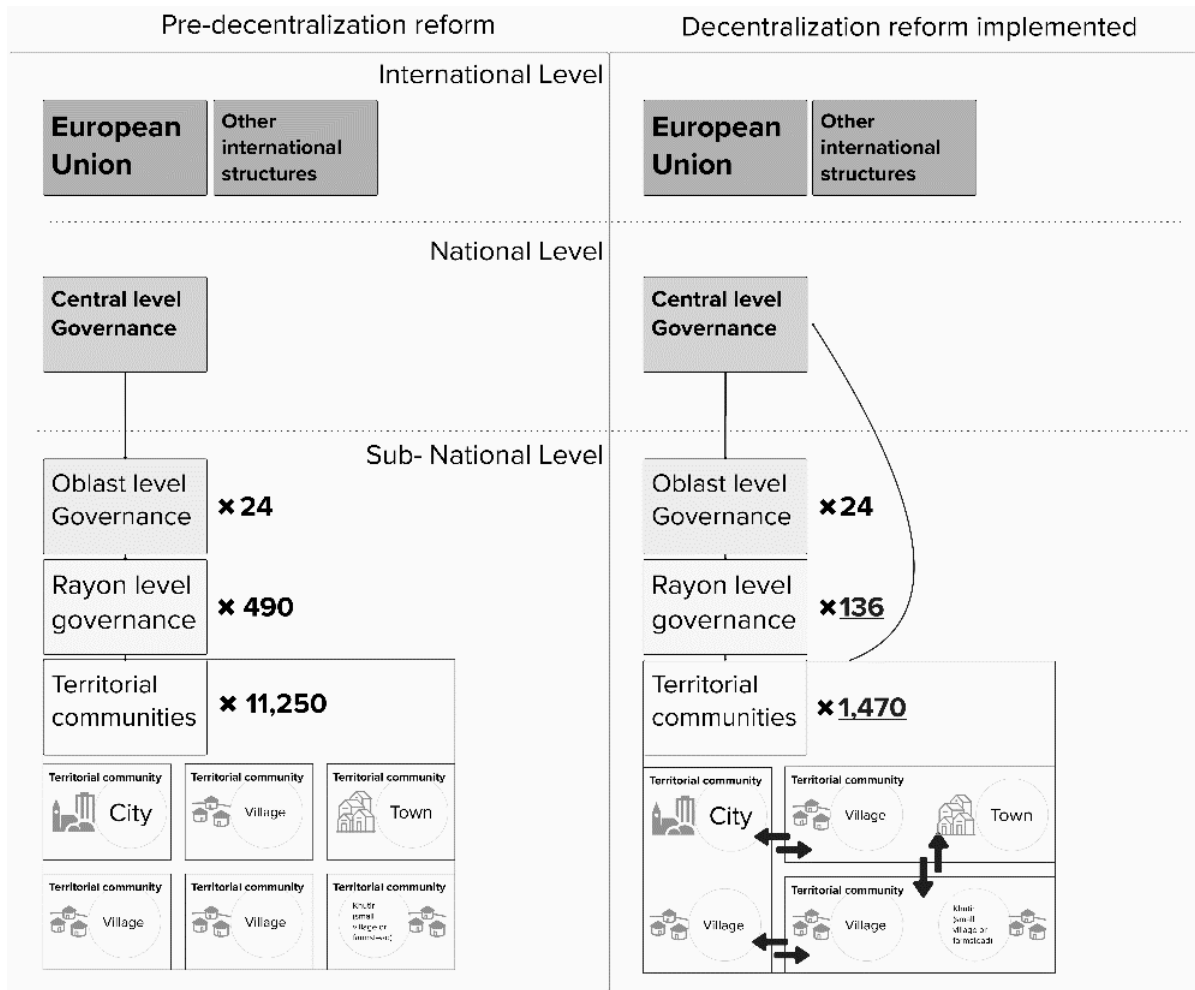
In terms of the vertical interactions of MLG, the main transformation trends have been decentralization (sub-national level transformation) and a focus on EU integration (supra-national level aspirations).

Figure 2 shows Ukraine's three levels of sub-national government: (1) oblasts, (2) rayons, and (3) territorial communities. The top level includes 24 oblasts, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and the two cities with special status: Kyiv and Sevastopol. The middle level includes 136 rayons, and the last level includes 1,470 territorial communities. In 2015–21, as a part of a national decentralization programme, the third level underwent a significant consolidation, forming empowered territorial communities into self-governing units with independent budgets and locally elected representatives (Romanova and Umland 2019).

Due to the Russian invasion, martial law was introduced in Ukraine (Figure 3), temporarily putting military-civilian administrators appointed by the President of Ukraine on top of the sub-national governance structure, including most territorial communities (red circles).

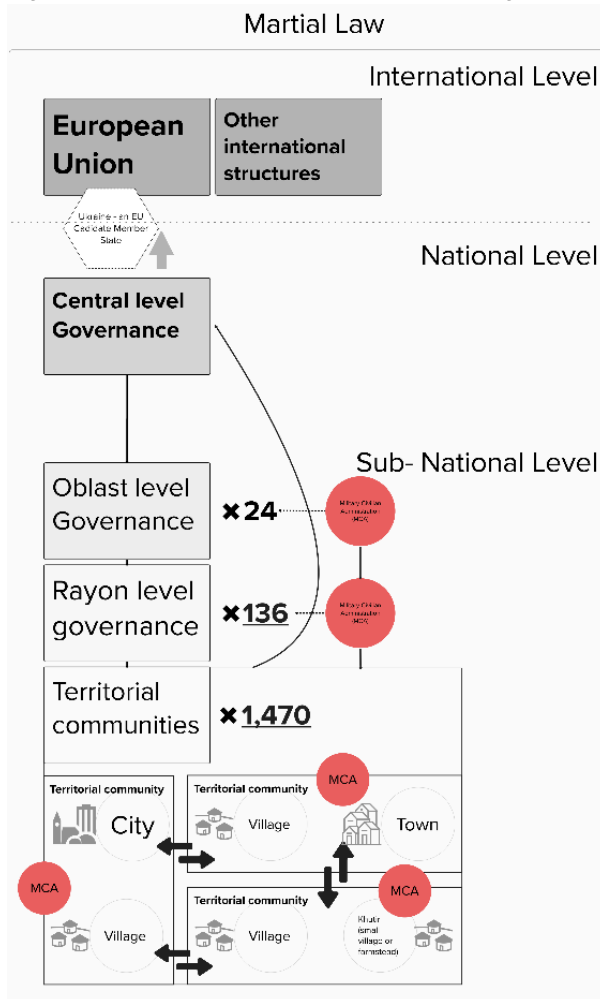
Ukraine has been on the path to EU integration for over 20 years, but this agenda gained special attention after the Orange Revolution (2004) and the Euromaidan (2014), and further accelerated when Ukraine gained EU candidate status on 17 June 2022 (Sologoub 2022). In Figure 3, the EU is coloured orange to denote its importance among the supra-national actors.

Figure 2: Simplified representation of vertical government structure in Ukraine



Source: authors' construction.

Figure 3: Simplified representation of vertical government structure in Ukraine during the war time (martial law)



Source: authors' construction.

All these trends have become even more marked during the current war, as decentralization and horizontal social interlinks have been credited for the successful resistance against Russian invasion (Romanova 2022).

Meanwhile, recent EU candidate status and the resulting positive societal outlook on EU accession have given clear direction to supranational development. Thus, some researchers have suggested combining Ukraine's recovery process with the country's EU integration. Sologoub et al. (2022), for example, propose creating a Ukraine Recovery and European Integration Agency that will both lead the recovery process and prepare Ukraine for EU accession (the agency would 'sunset' on the date of EU accession).

Since the beginning of the war, the government has made several changes at central level with the aim of ensuring close coordination and strong governance of recovery and development projects. First, it established the National Recovery Council as an advisory body under the President of Ukraine, chaired by three co-heads—the Prime Minister of Ukraine, the Speaker of the Parliament of Ukraine, and the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine—thus bringing executive and legislative branches of power together to work on the recovery and development agenda. The Council's work was spread across 23 working groups, in which over 2,000 various stakeholders (experts, CSOs, academia) had an opportunity to participate in developing the National Recovery Plan.

Next came the transformation of two major ministries into one ‘super’ ministry: the Ministry of Regional Development and Construction of Ukraine was merged with the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine to form the Ministry of Communities, Territories and Infrastructure development, or Ministry for the Restoration of Ukraine for short.² The new ministry has a complex mandate ranging from decentralization and setting building and construction standards to roads, ports, and airports development. etc. This transformation puts in the hands of one ministry nearly the full scope of policy development and implementation mandates that are required to ensure recovery projects, while the government, represented by the Prime Minister, is responsible for planning the overall recovery and redevelopment.

Finally, the Ministry for the Restoration of Ukraine established The Agency for the Restoration of Ukraine, whose main task is the coordination and support of reconstruction projects. Like any state agency, it can work not only with budget money but also with funds from other sources.

This information about transformation at central government level is relatively easy to find and analyse, but what of the transformations and actors on the different MLG levels vertically and horizontally? Keeping in mind the previously described background on horizontalization, decentralization, and EU integration, it is logical to assume that we will see many more actors engaged in recovery governance. Who they are and what their relationship and position in the MLG constellations are will be explored in the next section.

5 Results: mapping the actors

We identify five categories of actors—governmental actors; private sector organizations; civil organizations, grassroots groups, and individuals; urbanists, architects, and designers; universities, academia, and think tanks—as discussed below.

5.1 Governmental actors

National governmental actors play a central role in the recovery governance according to all the respondents. They ensure coordination between international and state actors, develop guiding visions, and implementing them.

The major effort in terms of planning was made by national government actors at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano in July 2022. Just a few months after the start of the war, the National Recovery Council was created and tasked with developing a National Recovery Plan to be presented at the conference. ‘This was the first and a very powerful attempt to co-create a country strategy involving as many actors as possible’, commented a respondent from the national government. Indeed, the National Recovery Council consists of 24 working groups involving all the Ministries and more than 2,000 national and international experts and stakeholders (see Section 4). The Plan has become the main reference document regarding Ukraine’s planning at national and international levels, as highlighted by all interviewees.

In terms of actions, national government actors have overseen the rebuilding of Ukraine from the first day, whether critical infrastructure or citizens’ homes. ‘It is impossible to name one initiative out of millions’, commented one respondent. Nevertheless, several respondents highlighted UNITED24, created by the President of Ukraine to mobilize funding (in particular, donations) for

² <https://mtu.gov.ua/>

specific recovery projects, and DREAM, a digital system for managing recovery in a transparent way. ‘The idea is to create a platform where everyone can see everything about reconstruction in Ukraine’, commented one respondent.

Sub-national governmental actors are also present in the governance picture. Being close to the actual destruction and impact of the war, they are the key actors of recovery. Understanding their important role, several sub-national governmental actors started to develop their own vision and master plans of recovery. Interviewees mentioned the efforts of the cities of Bucha, Irpin, Mykolaiv, Chernihiv, and those of a number of oblasts.

However, most interviewees agreed that the Kharkiv Master Plan is the exemplary planning document. Being the second biggest city in Ukraine, Kharkiv attracted the attention of world-famous architect Norman Foster, along with Arup and various UN agencies, which are now working on the new Master Plan for the city.

Interviewees also shared examples of other cities collaborating with ‘sister’ cities and countries abroad (e.g. Mykolaiv and Denmark), highlighting the role of city and territorial communities, oblasts, and rayons in regional and transnational cooperation efforts. In particular, the Cities4Cities/United4UA platform was cited as one of the best examples of an action initiative, uniting Ukraine with EU counterparts to enable the exchange of information and ideas. Table 1 shows the governmental planning documents and action initiatives we identified.

Table 1: Governmental planning documents and action initiatives

	Details	Level
Planning documents		
National Recovery Plan	Document envisioning post-war recovery for the whole country, developed by the National Recovery Council (an advisory body under the President of Ukraine), which comprises 24 working groups chaired by the Heads of Parliamentary Committees and includes representatives of executive power, mobilizing more than 2,500 experts and business and civil society representatives. Presented at the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC 2022) in Lugano.	National
Kharkiv Master Plan	Developed jointly by Norman Foster, Arup, UN agencies, and local Kharkiv architects at the invitation of the city administration.	Sub-national
Action initiatives		
UNITED24	Launched by the President of Ukraine and the Ministry of Digitalization as the main platform for collecting charitable donations in support of Ukraine’s recovery.	National
DREAM	Digital platform developed by the Ministry for the Restoration of Ukraine, Agency for the Restoration of Ukraine, Ministry of Digitalization, and RISE coalition.	National
Cities4Cities/United4UA	Platform that stimulates partnerships between municipalities in Ukraine and in other countries for short- and long-term revitalization of institutional, societal, entrepreneurial, and physical structures, developed by the Association of Ukrainian cities with EU counterparts.	Sub-national, going supra-national

Source: authors’ construction.

5.2 Private sector organizations

The private sector was highlighted as a key player in post-conflict recovery in our interviews, as it is seen as a major source of funding for reconstruction and a crucial component of the country's new economy. Although the private sector did not feature prominently at the Lugano and other high-level conferences, businesses arranged parallel events during each of the conferences, which meant that they were 'less visible, but not less important', as a business representative commented. While there are not many publications on the topic of the future of Ukraine coming from individual companies, these business coalitions and associations have published visions such as the 'Memorandum' of the Coalition of Business Communities for Modernization. According to one private sector respondent, Ukrainian companies are more visible in actions than in written plans and visions: 'We are acting on the recovery of the country, not writing about it.' Companies that continue to pay taxes, maintain jobs, and hire new employees despite the economic challenges caused by the war are already making a significant contribution to the current and future state of the country, according to the same respondent. In addition to existing companies, a number of new companies have emerged that aim to address the recovery and reconstruction demand, such as TerraMonada, which is creating modular homes that can be installed in just five hours.

The IT sector is noteworthy. Most IT companies have been able to maintain almost all their contracts in wartime conditions, according to the government respondent. Currently, IT companies and government partnerships are seen as one of the important partnerships for Ukraine among respondents from government and business. For example, respondents highlighted the collaboration of EVO IT with the government to create a major international digital marketplace (Made with Bravery) that will enable Ukrainian companies to sell globally.

Construction companies are also important actors in the physical reconstruction process. Not surprisingly, around 300 companies from 22 countries registered to participate in the Rebuild Ukraine conference, which was focused on the physical rebuilding of Ukraine. Our interviewees highlighted the Trostyanets Inclusive train station initiative of the Saga construction company and its partners as an example of current reconstruction action initiatives (Table 2).

Table 2: Private sector planning documents and action initiatives

	Details	Level
Planning documents		
Memorandum of the Coalition of Business Communities for Modernization	The Coalition of Business Communities for Modernization of Ukraine unites 77 leading business associations to promote, advocate, and implement the agreed principles of post-war economic policy.	National
Action initiatives		
Made with Bravery	Official international marketplace for items made by Ukrainian businesses. Part of the profit is transferred to United24 to reconstruct Ukraine.	National
A Brick for the Family	Ukrainian social start-up founded in 2022 with the mission to build quality housing for Ukrainian people who have lost their homes in the war.	Sub-national
Trostyanets Inclusive train station	Reconstruction project for the Trostyanets railway station and the station square	Sub-national

Source: authors' construction.

5.3 Civil organizations, grassroots groups, and individuals

A large number of Ukrainian civil groups have formed coalitions to propose plans and visions for the recovery of Ukraine. The largest of these, the Lugano Coalition, was created at the first Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano. During a side event, the Coalition presented its ‘Manifesto for Recovery’, affirming the vital importance of civil groups in efforts to rebuild Ukraine’s infrastructure and institutions and contribute to sustainable reforms—not just as watchdogs, but as true partners throughout the process.

Another coalition that emerged after Lugano, RISE, united more than 50 organizations to promote integrity and participation in the recovery process and published its own vision of recovery: Principles for Ukraine’s Reconstruction and Modernization. Currently, RISE is growing in size and importance and developing the digital DREAM system mentioned earlier in partnership with the government of Ukraine.

Ukrainian environmental organizations have also formed coalitions to develop visions for reconstruction, emphasizing the importance of the environmental dimension of the planned recovery and development activities (see Green Reconstruction of Ukraine in Table 3).

In terms of action initiatives, there is a growing number of cleaning and rebuilding volunteer initiatives, notably Dobrobat and Building Ukraine Together (BUR). While Dobrobat emerged after the Russian invasion in 2022, BUR dates back to 2014, since when it has not only helped tens of thousands of Ukrainians to rebuild their homes but also created a community around them with mentorship programmes, training courses, camps, toolkits, etc. Meanwhile, urbanist groups—usually working with 3D and laser printers in a do-it-yourself (DIY) and do-it-with-others (DIWO) manner—have been organizing repair parties, hackathons, workshops, etc. (see e.g. Tolocars in Table 3) in order to help local communities to rebuild what has been lost in the war.

Additionally, many individuals have taken it upon themselves to rebuild their own homes, towns, and the country in general by volunteering within a number of initiatives. ‘Ukraine is turning into a beehive of individuals working for the common good’, commented one individual respondent. It is, of course, impossible to mention all those initiatives here, but salient examples are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Civil groups' planning documents and action initiatives

	Details	Level
Planning documents		
Manifesto for Recovery (Lugano Coalition)	More than 100 Ukrainian civil groups presented the Manifesto at the Lugano conference, laying down their version of the recovery principles, red lines, and priority tasks for Ukraine's recovery.	National
Green Reconstruction of Ukraine (Position of Civil Society)	More than 50 Ukrainian civil groups working on environmental aspects of Ukraine's recovery.	National
The Institutional Architecture of Ukraine's Recovery (proposals of RISE Ukraine Coalition)	The RISE Coalition consists of more than 40 Ukrainian and international civil society organizations. This document aims to initiate a meaningful conversation among both RISE Coalition participants and the general public.	National
Action initiatives		
Building Ukraine Together (BUR)	BUR has developed a unique model of youth empowerment through reconstruction volunteering, non-formal education, financing of business and educational projects, mentoring, and building trust, which has been successfully applied in 87 cities across Ukraine since 2014.	Sub-national
Dobrobat	A volunteer construction battalion that assists survivors in the de-occupied territories in the urgent restoration of housing and social infrastructure: re-roofing damaged buildings, repairing broken windows, and rebuilding damaged walls in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts since 2022.	Sub-national
Tolocars	A Tolocar is a converted van that offers the possibilities of a makerspace or a FabLab on wheels.	Sub-national

Source: authors' construction.

5.4 Urbanists, architects, and designers

Like many Ukrainian organizations, architectural, design, and urban planning studios have most of their commercial projects on hold, with some staff fighting on the front line and the rest spread around different countries. At the same time, the country's rebuilding needs to make these organizations among the most important players in the Ukrainian recovery—and they, too, have a vision for the future; as one interviewee commented, 'Rebuilding under shelling is a crazy thing to do, but here we as architects and urbanists have a chance to jump in before developers that build fast and cheap. We can try to change the usual ways things are done and build back better.'

Our interviewees mentioned a number of interesting initiatives, but there were a few that stood out (Table 4). In the first days of war, the Architectural Chamber of the National Union of Architects of Ukraine, the National Union of Architects of Ukraine (NSAU), the NGO Ukrainian BIM Community, and other architectural bureaus and businesses compiled the 'Manifesto of Architects of Ukraine', in which they expressed their united desire that the new architecture of Ukraine should be modern and European, but based on the continuity of Ukrainian traditions, without typical Soviet narratives and forms.

'What Shapes the Future of Ukrainian Cities?' is a draft of a visionary strategy—one might say methodology—for urban and community spatial development created by ReStart Ukraine, another initiative that emerged in the first days of the war, after a Facebook post by the Ukrainian urbanist Alexander Shevchenko calling for friends to unite in the common goal of developing a roadmap for Ukraine's recovery.

Several action initiatives are emerging around practical rebuilding. For example, the METALAB urban planning laboratory and partners have launched project CO-HATY to transform abandoned houses into comfortable housing for people forced to leave their homes by the Russian invasion,

with successful pilots in Ivano-Frankivsk city. Ro3kvit, a coalition of 80 experts in architecture from Ukraine and abroad, also emerged in the first months of the war and created a number of capacity-building programmes. Interviewees referred to their webinar course in conjunction with New European Bauhaus, ReThink, ACE, CoME, Eurocity, and Housing Europe.

Table 4: Urbanists' documents and action initiatives

	Details	Level
Planning documents		
Manifesto of Architects of Ukraine	Draft by the Architectural Chamber of the NSAU and around 100 other architects', urbanists', and designers' organizations of their vision of Ukrainian recovery.	National
What Shapes the Future of Ukrainian Cities? (ReStart Ukraine)	The urban recovery vision developed by the ReStart Ukraine coalition.	National
Action initiatives		Level
KO-HATY	Co-housing project for people who have lost their homes in the war. Architects and urbanists are cooperating with local governments and property owners to renovate abandoned buildings and create housing with love and dignity, raise budgets for repairs and furnishing, coordinate the construction process, and design furniture for retrofitted spaces.	Sub-national
Ro3kvit capacity-building course	Kharkiv School of Architecture, New Housing Policy, and around 50 architects, urbanists, and designers from Ukraine and abroad run a number of capacity-building programmes in the form of webinars, seminars, and the new New European Bauhaus initiative.	National, going supra-national

Source: authors' construction.

5.5 Universities, academia, and think tanks

Universities, academia, and think tanks play an important role in Ukraine's recovery as a driving force for ideas, innovation, and knowledge to 'build Ukraine back better'. 'The new economy of Ukraine has to be a knowledge economy and the role of education and science is enormous here,' commented a government respondent. The Ukrainian research community is supporting the development of plans and ideas for the National Council, with a focus on the scientific sector rather than the country as a whole: 'Ukrainian scientists see the post-war period as a crucial moment to revamp the research system, with this sentiment reflected in their plans, visions, and papers,' commented one interviewee.

Some relatively new universities and think tanks, such as the Kyiv School of Economics, the Ukrainian Catholic University, and the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, have gone beyond the focus on the research sector and started working on science-based visions for the country's development, often in partnership with international colleagues and institutions. For example, as early as 7 April 2022, the Kyiv School of Economics and international scientists under the CEPR research network umbrella put forward a 'Blueprint for the Reconstruction of Ukraine'. 'Ukraine after the Victory: Imagining Ukraine in 2030' is another proposal for Ukraine's recovery developed by the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and other researchers and practitioners.

In terms of actions, many Ukrainian universities and research institutions have shown resilience and solidarity during the war. They have welcomed displaced students, faculty members, and researchers and, despite the war, many universities have continued to admit a similar number of full-time students by adopting hybrid or online learning, thereby acting as the main driver behind developing talent for the future of Ukraine, according to respondents from the university. Curriculum changes have also been made so that it is more relevant to the future recovery. For

example, the Kharkiv School of Architecture, when forced to move to Lviv (KHSA in Displacement), refocused its curriculum on post-war reconstruction. Modules under development will cover pre-fabrication, urbanism and peace, heritage and reconstruction, typology and climate, sustainability, and technology.

Finally, an exponential increase in collaboration with international partners was mentioned by interviewees as the backbone for future knowledge economy development in Ukraine. Examples are the Ukrainian Global University and the international campuses of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The key documents and action initiatives are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Academia planning documents and action initiatives

	Details	Level
Planning documents		
A Blueprint for the Reconstruction of Ukraine	Document envisioning the future of Ukraine written by researchers under the CEPR umbrella.	Supra-national
Ukraine after the Victory: Imagining Ukraine in 2030	Document envisioning the future of Ukraine written by a coalition of around 50 organizations.	National
Action initiatives		
Ukrainian Global University	Vast network of educational institutions joining efforts to rebuild Ukraine by providing high school and university students, scholars, and tutors with scholarships, fellowships, and postgraduate programmes.	National, going supra-national
Kyiv-Mohyla Academy	the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy has opened campuses in Europe and North America.	Sub-national, going supra-national
KHSA in Displacement	The Kharkiv School of Architecture is adapting its programmes to address the challenges faced by Ukraine's cities and citizens amidst war. These changes aim to equip future professionals with the skills needed for rebuilding and creating a better future.	Sub-national

Source: authors' construction.

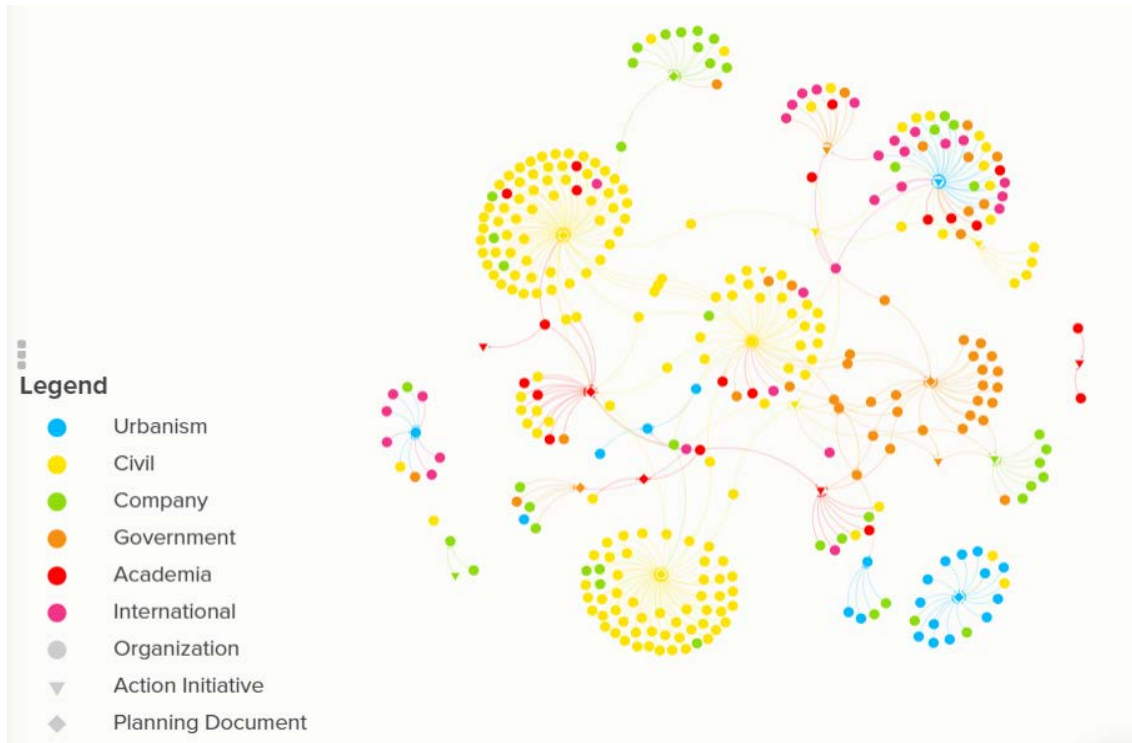
5.6 Attempting to see the elephant: analysing the interactions among actors

Interactions from the social network analysis perspective

In the previous sub-sections, we listed the 10 planning documents and 14 action initiatives that were identified during our research. By examining these, we were able to identify the organizations involved in writing them and in participating in the respective action initiatives or coalitions. This resulted in a list of 351 actors associated with the mapped recovery governance system in Ukraine (Figure 5³).

³ The full version is available at: <https://embed.kumu.io/ec830928ea3631b634deedecafae77c3>

Figure 5: Visualization of networks of organizations that are parts of mapped planning documents, action initiatives, and coalitions



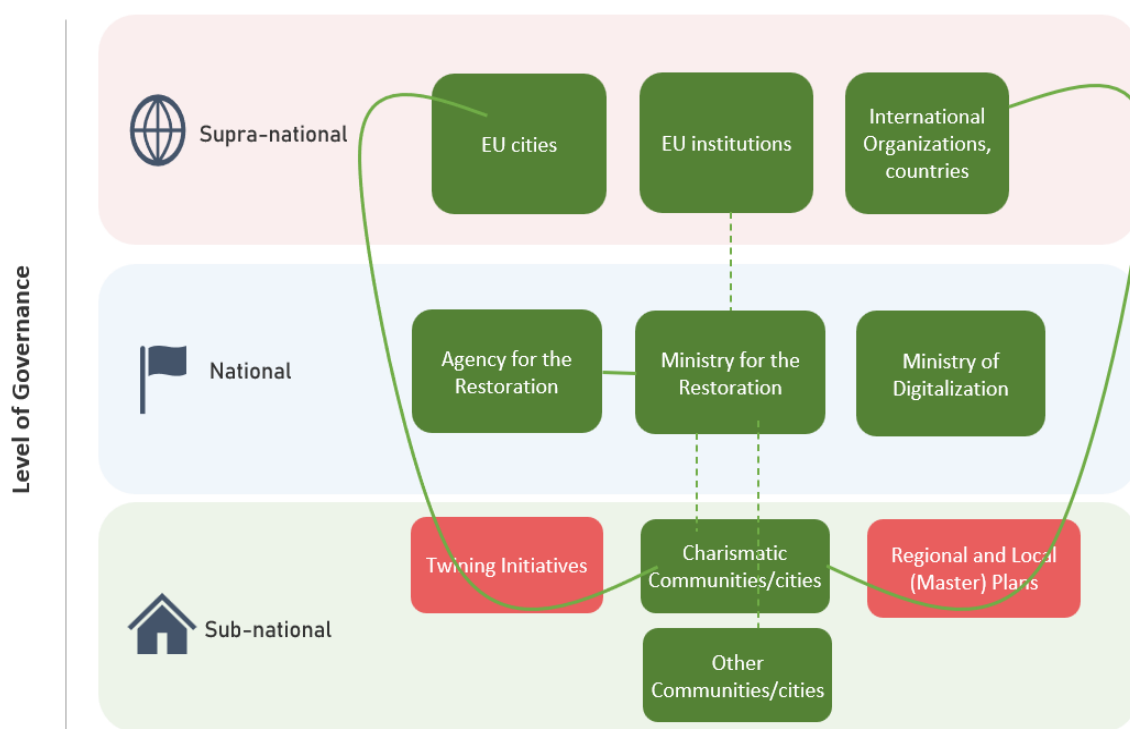
Source: authors' construction.

On closer inspection, we see that many organizations are associated with more than one planning document or action initiative (having an outdegree of more than 2⁴), thereby acting as a glue or 'brokers' in the system. By looking only at the relations among those organizations in the system, we can 'trim' the system to a simplified version (Figure 6⁵).

⁴ Outdegree measures the number of outgoing connections for an element. Elements with a high outdegree can spark the flow of information across a network.

⁵ The full version is available at: <https://embed.kumu.io/6063ba76e8821b01bbad34621e45981a>

Figure 7: Visualization of the vertical interactions in the mapped and discussed recovery governance in Ukraine



Source: authors' construction.

The Ministry of Reconstruction, the Agency for the Restoration of Ukraine, and the Ministry of Digitalization within the national government stand out as prominent and increasingly influential actors. The first two are straightforward brokers, since their mandate is specifically focused on reconstruction. The Ministry of Digitalization shows up in mapping, interviews, and the sense-making workshop, proving the importance of the ‘smart-digital’ aspect of the reconstruction and also the influence and power of this relatively new Ministry.

The majority of interviewees agreed that the recovery process should be led by the national government; as commented by one of the respondents, ‘Recovery should be centralized since its speed, quality, and effectiveness require centralization.’ At the same time, during the sense-making workshop, respondents highlighted that many actions are taking place at local government level. As commented by a respondent from local government, ‘It is easier to address visible and tangible needs, such as rebuilding kindergartens, than to wait for everyone to agree on a “common religion” of the National Recovery Plan.’

We also observe more direct connections between Ukrainian and EU cities through platforms like Cities4Cities/United4UA, or directly with international organizations, charitable foundations, etc. (e.g. the case of Kharkiv; see Figure 7). A national government respondent stated that cities and communities were indeed encouraged to collaborate directly with other countries on humanitarian and reconstruction actions. Another respondent said, ‘the Government of Ukraine has requested foreign countries to “adopt a Ukrainian city” and work with it directly. We already have a clear pairing in Mykolaiv and Denmark, along with many smaller city-to-city collaborations.’

However, this approach was criticized by some respondents. While some ‘charismatic’ cities (e.g. Kharkiv) are actively engaged in this process and have received significant attention from donor communities or twinning cities, many small cities and towns have yet to receive any attention or

sufficient support. This was mentioned by interviewees as an issue related to the city's size and media attention, the charismatic nature of the Mayor, the capacity of the authorities, and even whether there are fast road connections (e.g. internationals visit Irpin due to its one-hour connections to Kyiv and Lviv), rather than to the recovery needs of the city.

Regarding the application and receipt of funds from the state budget and international donors to finance local recovery projects, smaller communities also fear receiving less support overall, as mentioned by one respondent. This fear stems from limited capacity, including human resources, training, and experience, not only in writing grant proposals but also in ensuring the quality implementation of projects.

There was a general fear of 'chaotic' and unequal reconstruction in different communities. In this regard, creating national reconstruction guidelines and rules, as well as straightening connections between local and national governments, was discussed in the sense-making workshop. Currently, there are a number of institutional connections between communities and national government: regional military administrations, local self-government bodies, and communal enterprises are sending reconstruction needs petitions to the Ministry for the Restoration of Ukraine, while the Agency for the Restoration of Ukraine is also looking at these petitions. What was highlighted by the workshop is a need to create a specific forum, structure, or agency within the Ministry for the Restoration of Ukraine dedicated to constant 'listening' and communication with the communities, to devise better mechanisms for such communication and interaction, and to co-create wider reconstruction visions from the bottom up.

Horizontal interactions

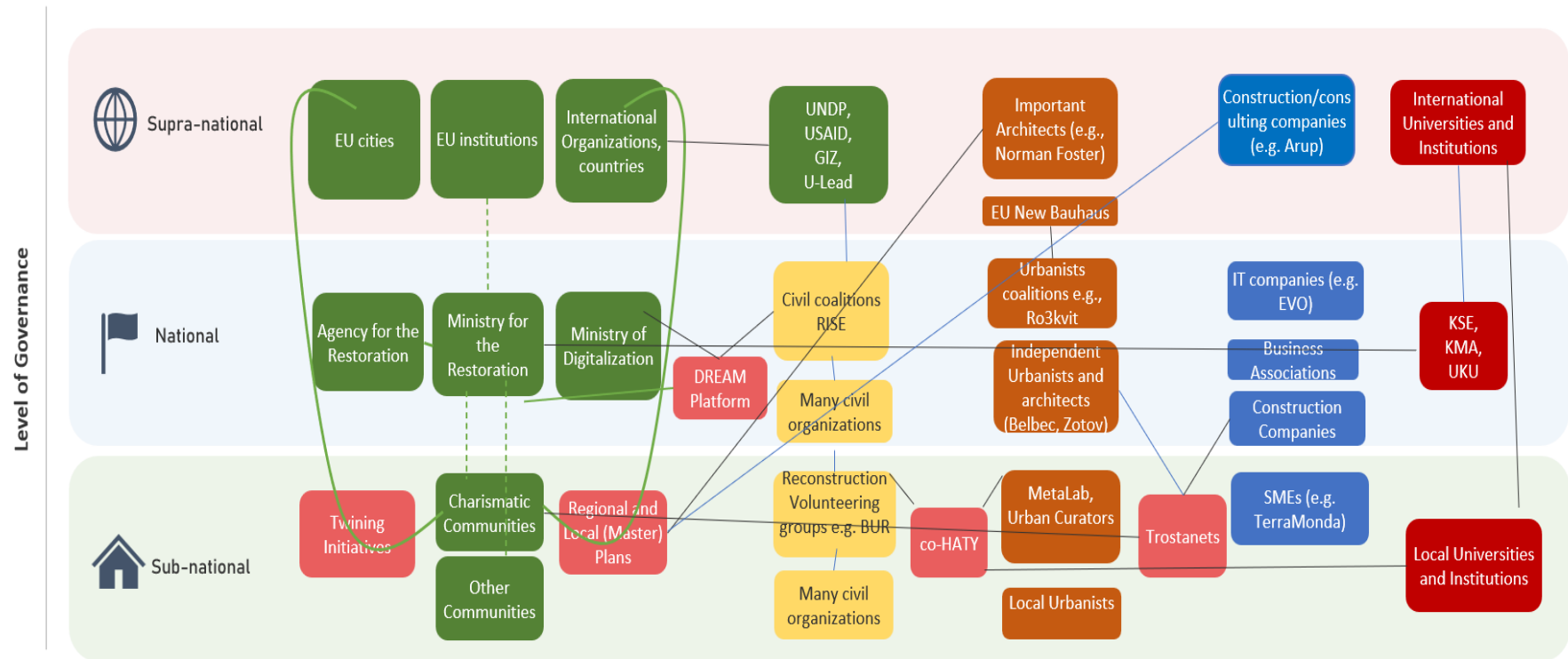
The inclusion of non-government actors in the system adds another layer of complexity. We observe the presence of civil societies, private organizations, urbanists/architects, and academia operating at different levels: sub-national, national, and supra-national (Figure 8).

In our sense-making workshop, it became evident that civil organizations constitute the majority of actors involved. Among them, the coalition known as RISE holds a prominent position and serves as the voice of civil society. RISE maintains close ties with established structures within the national government and actively contributes to the development of the new digital DREAM platform in collaboration with the relevant ministries.

While there are numerous connections among these civil organizations, the number of connections with other actors is comparatively few. During our sense-making workshop, we discovered strong connections between civil organizations and various international donors and development organizations. The UNDP, USAID, GIZ, and ULEAD emerged as the most prominent organizations among these connections.

Additionally, urbanists, architects, and designers play a significant role, as recognized by the interviewees. However, their connections with other actors in the system are relatively weak in this exercise. Among them, the Ukrainian–international specialists coalition of Ro3kvit demonstrates stronger ties with EU institutions like New European Bauhaus than with the national ecosystem.

Figure 8: Visualization of multi-actor interactions in the mapped and discussed recovery governance in Ukraine



Source: authors' construction.

Ukrainian–international coalitions like Ro3kvit and cooperation with EU urbanism initiatives were nevertheless seen as positive developments. At the same time, the invitation for Norman Foster and Arup to develop a master plan for Kharkiv was criticized, some interviewees mentioning the need for caution in dealing with international partners and emphasizing the importance of local expertise and vision for rebuilding the country: ‘While foreign architects may and should certainly take part, it is us, the architects, who have grown up here in Ukraine, who know our country’s nuances and are closer to the people’s vision for post-reconstruction, who should lead the process.’

Moving on to private companies, our mapping exercise reveals their relatively disconnected status within the system. It is through business associations and their unity, as enshrined in the ‘Memorandum of Business Coalitions’, that organized connections to the system are established. The exceptions are construction companies. These seem to have better connections to the reconstruction network; at least, we see that in the case of the Trostyanets train station and square reconstruction. However, those connections are more difficult to trace and concerns have been raised regarding the mechanisms used to select these actors for reconstruction projects such as Trostyanets.

Lastly, academia, think tanks, and similar entities are also present in the simplified picture. Local university institutions undertake numerous micro-level initiatives in collaboration with international partners, primarily within the EU, through specialized exchange programmes that have emerged during the war. Our social network analysis and sense-making workshop highlight three universities that hold significant influence in the system: Kyiv School of Economics, Kyiv Mohyla Academy, and Ukrainian Catholic University. These universities exhibit stronger connections to the national government’s initiatives and at other levels.

The diversity of actors and visions poses a significant challenge for creating a common plan and taking unified action and, as mentioned by the government respondent, this is where coalitions like RISE can help to ensure that the voices of actors are heard. A digital system and platform like DREAM can also play a role in addressing this challenge. The government respondent further commented that the new IT system will enable monitoring of the entire project cycle, from design to audit of finished facilities, according to the principle that ‘everyone sees everything’.

In this regard, as the civil society respondent mentioned, the Electronic Management System for the Reconstruction established by RISE can communicate only facts, e.g. the number of schools destroyed; it does not allow space for questions such as, ‘Will we need to rebuild all the schools we had, or should we build one school for the whole town since almost all the kids are abroad? Or should we start a new digital education hub? And what kind of initiatives are already innovating on this in our city? This is something that we all as a society have to discuss.’

While the majority agree that the national government, along with the National Recovery Council, the new Ministry for the Restoration of Ukraine, and Agency for the Restoration of Ukraine, should lead the process, many doubt the government’s capacity to manage such a complex multi-actor process, especially considering the ongoing challenges. For instance, the National Recovery Plan is referred to as a huge co-creation success, and yet concerns have been raised by civil organization representatives regarding the transparency and inclusiveness of its two dozen working groups and numerous meetings conducted via Zoom calls. The need for multi-actor participatory planning was often highlighted by the interviewees and in the sense-making workshop.

6 Conclusions and discussion

To bring clarity to the post-conflict recovery muddle, this study has attempted to make sense of the emerging recovery governance picture in Ukraine, using a Multi-Level Governance framework.

First of all, it showed that the picture is complex and crowded, like other international cases (O'Driscoll 2018). Within this complexity we could identify a number of actors (governmental, private, civil, academic) interacting horizontally and vertically, whether by participating in the planning space or by acting in the field.

Second, the paper revealed the multi-level nature of the recovery project. It showed that planning and acting on recovery is happening at sub-national, national, and supra-national levels. It highlighted the importance of the sub-national level actors, but it also showed that the governance constellation tends to have a rather centralized logic, with the Ministry for the Restoration of Ukraine and other national government actors taking the lead.

Third, our study showed the multi-actor nature of MLG constellations. In addition to national government actors, non-governmental actors are developing plans for Ukraine's future and are already acting and innovating in the recovery field. We discussed a number of horizontal interactions organized in clusters (coalitions) among different actors. However, coalitions often do not interact among themselves, and some actors are less connected to the mapped network than others.

Thus, we can say that the MLG of recovery in Ukraine has rather ambiguous settings. On the one hand it shows characteristics of decentralization, while on the other it represents a rather centralized machine. It shows a multi-actor nature, but also reveals that a number of coalitions and actors are disconnected. We can conclude that the current governance constellation does not generally seem to fully benefit from the multi-level and multi-actor potential that exists in the system.

One possible way to sustain the efficient functioning of the current constellation vertically is by establishing clear national recovery guidelines, as well as interactions and coordination mechanisms, such as intergovernmental agreements (Hooghe and Marks 2010), joint policy-making bodies, and regular meetings and information-sharing (Bache et al. 2022; Hooghe and Marks 2010; Stephenson 2013) or a 'listening' agency under the Ministry for the Restoration of Ukraine, as suggested in the sense-making workshop. This type of structure would enforce MLG dynamics, providing both top-down and bottom-up interaction mechanisms.

We also see the enormous potential to build on established city-to-city projects and ties with EU cities. This could be a way to softly integrate Ukrainian cities into the EU urban governance system, following the logic of transnational city networks (Carmichael 2004; Fuhr et al. 2018; Kern 2019; Kern and Bulkeley 2009).

Horizontally, the current constellation could better benefit from the multi-actor energy in the system. An active civil society, a committed private sector, and a motivated academia, in addition to a powerful network of individuals, are 'turning Ukraine into a beehive of individual bees working for the common good'. Indeed, around 80 per cent of the population is currently involved in some kind of volunteering activity (Rating 2022). This is something that researchers observe as the transition from Homo Sovieticus to Homo Dignus and we depict here in a dense network of horizontal connections. But this energy needs to be carefully channelled into Ukraine's recovery project.

Another way to improve the system is by supporting so-called brokers (Borgström 2019; Wolfram 2016). This study did identify a number of brokers in the network that we have mapped, but it is important to note that the study is explorative and mapped only certain parts of the network. Expanding this analysis further would provide a better indication of which brokers might be able to ‘glue’ the system even more effectively together.

The constellation can be improved by the establishment of ‘spaces’ for actors to interact and learn in real time about each other’s activities, observing and ensuring synergies, so that there is no fragmentation, duplication, or conflicting actions. Digital platforms, such as the Electronic Management System for the Reconstruction (DREAM), are a possible connecting space. At the same time, the current aim of DREAM is to increase the transparency of procurement and other rebuilding processes rather than to create a space for multi-level actor interactions. But this space also needs to generate different types of multi-actor discussions: instead of simply entering details into the existing national framework or the Electronic Management System, the space must question the needs and purpose of regeneration initiatives.

Similarly, in place of attempts to stretch National Recovery Planning by involving yet more actors a local, bottom-up process could be an alternative ‘space’ for such discussion and ideas co-creation. Such a process would not be merely about identifying what has been damaged, how much it will cost to reinstate, and who will get the contract to build it; it would provide a space for innovation, to ensure that Ukraine ‘builds back better’. EU examples of Living Labs, deep demonstrations, citizen science initiatives, etc., in combination with Ukrainian practices of public budgeting, are worth exploring in this connection.

As argued by Abbott et al. (2015), in line with the current debate on the orchestration of collective action, a local, bottom-up process does not need to be led by local public authorities. Spaces, platforms, and areas for discussion and co-creation could be facilitated by other organizations (international organizations and academia). This process would require a new role for local public administration (Lund 2018), which means providing the opportunities, arenas, and power for civic networks to form and act. While Sirianni (2010) presents several examples of ways of enabling local public administrations, he also warns of the need for cultural change in many public organizations before this becomes mainstream practice.

At the same time, there need to be national guiding principles and ‘clear rules of the game’ to ensure that this process is accessible to all communities and, since there seems to be agreement (at least among the respondents to our survey) that the national government should be leading this effort, that the results of the process can feed into the national reconstruction structures.

It is important to acknowledge that mapping a complex system is a challenging task. The system is constantly evolving and emerging, making it difficult to capture all its intricacies accurately. But, by treating a map as a living document open to collective inputs, we can continuously update and expand it. This dynamic approach allows us to include new actors, documents, and initiatives, and observe how they interact and form new constellations within the system.

Adding more details to the model, however, will not necessarily bring more clarity. There is a fine balance between providing sufficient information and overwhelming the model with unnecessary intricacies. It is crucial to exercise judgement and prioritize relevant factors that contribute significantly to the system’s dynamics. In navigating these challenges, drawing on the literature of MLG proves valuable. Applying this approach to the initial messy mapping has allowed us to distil the information available and initiate discussions and formulate recommendations based upon it.

Bringing this knowledge back to the community of the interview respondents by means of a sense-making workshop allowed us to simplify, and thus enrich, the mapping picture significantly. As Meadows (2008) notes, a system is not just the sum of its parts, and by looking only at the actors map we would not see the ‘elephant’. To gain a comprehensive understanding, we must continually seek a collective interpretation of the results.

It is also worth noting that this explorative study could serve as a basis for developing a more specific actors ecosystem; for example, focusing on a particular aspect of the recovery (e.g. net-zero reconstruction) and/or specific territory (e.g. one city) would instantly become practicable and could be a good starting point for the development of the local multi-actor spaces mentioned in this paper.

In summary, while the initial mapping of the complex system may be messy and incomplete, it serves as a starting point for discussions and basic recommendations. By treating the mapping as a living document and incorporating additional actors and information gradually, and interpreting results collectively, we can gain a better understanding of the system and uncover new insights. Further specialization of the topic or territory of concern can make the mapping exercise more practicable.

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