

ANALYTICAL REPORT

Based on the Results of the
Study “Youth Involvement in
Local Decision-Making”:

 Bashtanska ATC

The study was conducted within the framework of the Vidnova project implemented by the Charity Foundation “Stabilization Support Services” and the Public Union “Legal Development Network” in cooperation with the humanitarian organization “People in Need” and with the financial support of the Czech Development Agency.

INTRODUCTION

The sociological study analyzing the involvement of young people in the Bashtanska community in community initiatives and projects highlights important aspects of their participation in community life and the factors that influence young people's activity. This study is extremely relevant, as it allows us to understand the obstacles to active youth participation better and determine how to support their desire for social and civic engagement.

The results show that the youth of the community are mostly interested in development and are ready to join various initiatives, but only a limited number of them are actively involved. The main barriers include limited support from local institutions, lack of funding, some skepticism from parents, and the impact of distance learning, which has had a negative influence on the social activity of young people. There is also a noticeable outflow of young people due to the consequences of the war, which further reduces the number of those who can participate in local events.

The study showed that increasing the level of youth engagement requires a comprehensive approach: inviting them to offline meetings, creating platforms for sharing experiences, and receiving support from local authorities can be important tools. In addition, active outreach through social media and the involvement of local influencers can help overcome information barriers and engage more young people.

Further studying and supporting youth engagement is of strategic importance for the community. Regular monitoring of youth involvement will not only allow local programs to be adapted to current needs but will also form the basis for long-term changes aimed at integrating young people into the social life of the community. It will also contribute to sustainable development, in which young people can play a leading role in ensuring both the social and economic progress of the community.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted to analyze youth involvement in decision-making **at the local level in the Bashtanska community.**

A total of three focus group discussions were held (hereinafter referred to as FGDs):

- An FGD with young people aged 16-19
- An FGD with young people aged 20-25
- An FGD with parents and teachers

Five in-depth interviews (hereinafter referred to as IDIs) with key stakeholders were also conducted:

- Representatives of the authorities
- Social workers
- Youth leaders from youth councils
- Representatives of youth centers and spaces

KEY FINDINGS

When analyzing the activity and involvement of representatives of the Bashtanska community in various projects, events, initiatives, etc., it should be noted that a small number of local youth are highly motivated to participate and initiate such activities. At the same time, the overall level of interest among this share of young people is quite high.

The Bashtanska community hosts many projects and events involving young people, organized by local self-government bodies, donor organizations, or by young people themselves. However, respondents noted that the number of young people involved in these activities is relatively small.

Several reasons for this situation were given by respondents: passivity of some youth, lack of motivation, officials ignoring some youth initiatives, lack of funds for organizing events, departure of some active youth from the community due to the military invasion, lack of adequate meeting space, lack of time for youth, war and its consequences, and skepticism from parents. Respondents also noted the negative impact of distance learning, which has been ongoing since the COVID-19 pandemic. In their opinion, the lack of face-to-face communication and the reliance on gadgets for everyday communication negatively affect young people's desire to take their own initiative offline, to consolidate and unite for a common goal and community development.

Among the main factors that could contribute to an increase in youth activity, offline events where young people could communicate with each other and with invited notable individuals, experienced speakers, etc., were most often mentioned. It was noted that traveling to other communities to exchange experiences is also an interesting option for young people. It is also important that local officials support youth initiatives, as sometimes this support is insufficient or non-existent.

One of the potentially effective methods mentioned by the survey participants is high-quality and timely information through social media. Suggestions were made to create a special app or involve popular local bloggers in community projects. However, it was also noted that the dissemination of information about public events is prohibited by the oblast military administration, which significantly reduces the opportunities for local youth to participate in various events.

The respondents provided quite a few recommendations on how to increase youth participation in decision-making. Among them, the first was the desire for more active cooperation with local authorities, as well as increased funding for youth initiatives and awards for participants in youth projects. They also emphasized the importance of joint trainings and seminars for youth and parents, as older people are often skeptical of any civic activity on the part of children and it is they who limit their initiative and opportunities for participation.

MAIN RESULTS OF THE STUDY

ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

In the Bashtanska community, the level of interest and participation of young people in the recovery process and local self-government activities is considered to be quite high by the participants of the focused and in-depth interviews, but only among a small active part of these young people. Respondents note the presence of a large number of different projects in the community that are available for local youth to participate in. Among the most frequently mentioned are the projects of the Youth Council, the UNICEF UPSHIFT project, and events organized by NGOs such as the Red Cross, Stabilization Support Services, Nadiia Ye, Suzirya, and Depaul. At the initiative of young people, a youth center was opened and an information screen was installed in the city. At the same time, the issues of motivation of local youth, their initiative, proactive behavior of participants, etc. are problematic.

“Our youth council organized five fairs last year alone. Charity fairs, yes, and baking fairs... Girls were involved in trading, baking, and preparing food. Village councils and starostas were also involved. They organized holidays in the same way.” (FGD, Adults)

“Thanks to the youth council, I also went to Mykolaiv to learn how to make a project. It was the Charity Foundation ‘Stabilization Support [Services]’ that organized project management for young people, so that they could participate in the project, and that’s where they were trained.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

“Upshift has a team. We have a team from UNICEF, From the People of Japan, Depaul, a kindergarten that opened there. Speaking of UpshifTERS, they worked on a mobile STEM lab. They presented a series of workshops here, already presenting their project. We have a beautiful screen from Safe-Ed.” (FGD, Adults)

“Sessions for children and even teenagers are held there. You can sign up and come. For example, the last time they analyzed emotions. These were negative, bad habits, stress. There are sprints, where you analyze problems in the community and write a plan to solve them. It can be solved if you write it down and submit it there. In the Red Cross, they seem to be able to allocate 8 thousand hryvnias for this. I don’t know much about children there. There was one more time when we were sitting in the Red Cross, on a holiday, and we were eating there, and there was a session. You can join them, I don’t know how, and you will be with facilitators, or something like that, and conduct sessions, go to courses, and conduct live sessions.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

“We have an organization called Suzirya. I don’t know if it exists now or not. Svitlana Lyashchenko was responsible for it. As far as I know, she is not working now. And, like, she started a school. Well, there, like, you could participate, and they took children and chose them for this.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

“In 2023, we opened a youth center, where various clubs that I helped to create are now held. I was involved in the whole of 2023 and half of 2024, organizing events there, and leading a music training group. I held meetings where children and teenagers learned 3D modeling. Then I went to the city for offline training, but now I hear that they are still holding events for children and youth. And at school, but on the basis of this youth center, a team called ‘Asorti’ has now been created.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

Interviewees say that they generally have the opportunity to contact local government representatives about youth initiatives and projects. They note that it is often the community leadership that takes the initiative and engages young residents in joint projects.

"It is the starosta himself who takes the initiative. He is very proactive, so to speak, participating in all these competitions. He gives us the opportunity to write that very project." (Ivan)

"In 2019, a new village starosta came to the village and he began to actively introduce the idea that the population should help or even help the community develop, and the community should listen to its population, and in particular to young people. It is only since these years that such listening to the community and youth has begun." (FGD, Youth 19-25)

"There are groups, separate groups of young people, where there is a starosta, they communicate, he gives them examples of projects, they discuss them, they like them, they don't like them, that is, this kind of thing. That is, it works for us. At the level of other communities, I see that this is not the case, and this is a disadvantage. Because young people are on their own, they are not capable of anything in terms of being able to implement something without some kind of external support. It is very difficult. And if there is support, then it's more or less." (IDI, Daryna)

At the same time, the youngest participants in the study doubt that without adult support, their initiative will be taken seriously by the community leadership.

"You can approach, I know I don't want to, but you can approach his secretary and they will make an appointment and you can discuss it, but whether they will accept you or not, it depends... You still need someone else's support... of adults." (FGD, Youth 16-19)

"Because we are just considered as children... We are not taken seriously... We see it. We can see it from a kilometer away." (FGD, Youth 16-19)

Youth representatives believe that their participation in local self-government can have a positive impact on the life of the community, especially its young representatives. In addition, some focus group participants emphasized that youth participation can help attract additional donor funds to the community.

"The young people who attend the meetings can at least say what is best for young people. They are young people, and it is important that these young people are listened to and not ignored." (FGD, Youth 19-25)

"This can attract a lot of donors of different projects, that is, funding will come to this community, because they see that the community is active, the community is working, and when they see this feedback, it motivates them to provide some funds for the development of the whole community." (FGD, Youth 19-25)

At the same time, the respondents noted that only a small proportion of young people are often involved in many different projects. In their opinion, most young people are mostly passive and need even more active involvement and additional motivation. Some participants emphasized that they would only help the community in exceptional cases.

"There is a small group, maybe 10 people, who are actively involved in the development of the village. When they see the result of their work, it can stimulate them to work further." (IDI, Ivan)
"Young people are simply afraid to speak their minds. They are afraid not because they are afraid in the sense of the word "afraid", they are just inactive, not socialized. They don't want to show interest in anything and don't want to start something interesting, something new, something to offer. They would rather not be touched at all, to be invited to something, to come, attend, and leave. This is the majority of young people now, unfortunately." (FGD, Youth 19-25)

"In my opinion, they have no desires, they do not want to develop. They just sat in class and either sat or slept through the lessons online. They went for a walk somewhere and that's it." (IDI, Ivan)

"We lack motivation, because nowadays teenagers, youth, need something interesting, and maybe some gifts or something. They don't want it to be like, 'We're going to do this, that, the fifth, the tenth thing...' We are the kind of people who need either gifts or some snacks. And maybe some games should be added to make it interesting." (FGD, Youth 16-19)

"But as children, there is a human factor, a child factor is also present. You have to gather them, constantly remind them, constantly keep them under control, because then they start to wander off, slack, standing there and not wanting to do anything." (IDI, Maryna)

"I don't know, I would never want to help my community. If the situation there is very critical, such as the shelling of Bashtanka, then yes, I would help." (FGD, Youth 16-19)

Some youth representatives noted that since they do not see their future in this community, they are not motivated to develop anything here.

"There is no need. Not for me, anyway. Well, I have a year left here... Well, it seems to me that almost everyone is planning to move to the city. Because there are few opportunities here. Well, of course, not everyone will leave. There are various circumstances and so on that we cannot predict. For example, if a person plans to go somewhere, and then it happens that he or she will not go. Everyone wants the best." (FGD, Youth 16-19)

In addition to implementing various projects and participating in the activities of civil society organizations, youth participation in community life is manifested in volunteer work.

"There was volunteering. It was relevant now, people were involved in volunteering: we wove [camouflage] nets, and, for example, we held the same fairs. What else did we have? Photo zones, fundraising." (FGD, Adults)

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Representatives of the Bashtanska community identified a large number of barriers that prevent young people from being more active in rebuilding their community. Many adult participants consider social isolation caused by distance learning and predominantly online contacts that have been taking place in the community since the COVID-19 pandemic to be one of the main barriers.

“It seems to me that when this isolation began during the quarantine and during the war, they became a little less self-confident or perhaps they have some moments of fear, afraid to express themselves, to show themselves... Many children after this so-called isolation at home, when they were forced to do so, it became easier for them. They got used to being on their phones and playing games or talking on their phones. They are so used to communicating in instant messengers or something like that that they don’t need live communication as much anymore.” (IDI, Daryna)

“This remote learning has slowed down children a lot. A very big step was made this year when two schools were opened. I can see from my children, even from my younger brother, that this process of socialization has begun. Children communicate with children, they start to participate more actively. Now they are a little bit, as they say, welcoming, a little bit thawed out from all this domestic and mundane, and they will start to be interested in something. And here we are, with our products, clubs, events, and I think it just takes a little time.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

Another significant barrier, which was mentioned a lot during the interviews, is the impact of the military invasion and its consequences, including the fact that many families left the country, anxiety about those family members who stayed behind, a sense of insecurity, lack of understanding of the community’s future prospects, inability to plan ahead, etc.

“Some people, if they have the opportunity, are starting to leave. It was not quiet and peaceful here, so many people have already left. Having settled down there, while such events are happening here, they will not return. And this is the reason. And many people are leaving now, if they have the opportunity. Because everyone is in limbo. We don’t know what will happen tomorrow. We cannot talk about any development now if we are talking about survival.” (FGD, Adults)

“But as long as there is a war, I think everyone will feel uncomfortable at some point. Therefore, it still has its consequences. Because it’s not so much the war as the youth... They are more concerned about other things. Things like, for example, my dad’s in Vuhledar now, and my brother and family and so on. These are things like that, someone is there, someone died. Things like that, they are also very disturbed by it.” (IDI, Daryna)

“Basically, it’s 9-10 grade. At school, they are about 16-17 years old. This is the main involvement. There are no young people who are over 18-19 years old, up to 25, we will take them. Most of them have left. They are not in the village, they live in the city.” (IDI, Ivan)

“Many people have left and it so happened that if they are students, they either stayed in the countries they are in now or in the cities of Ukraine where they are studying. That’s why there is such a main resistance now – it’s either, let’s say, Youth 14+, or people who have young families, who are now staying in the city, who are not students, but just full-fledged citizens.” (IDI, Svitlana)

It is also noted that not all young people have the resources, such as time and energy for civic activities due to their busy schedules of study, recreation, or household chores.

“Well, I don’t have any free time... I’ll put it this way. I can find time to rest and go out with friends, but if I cut down on my parties, I won’t survive. I need to breathe.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

"We are still an agricultural region, and most of the population of our city lives in the single-family home sector. And the single-family home free time is not when one goes to the theater. Even if it was, for example, there is still a question of priorities. No one will do the repairs for me, no one will clean the garden, no one will do the sweeping, that is, if I go somewhere, no one will do it for me. This is just the reality of our area. There are young people who are active, but they are busy."
(FGD, Adults)

Among the barriers, respondents also noted the lack of bilateral communication and distrust of the authorities, as there is a lack of interest of local officials in youth initiatives.

"The biggest obstacle is that they are not heard. They are not heard and they are not supported. This is the biggest obstacle." **(IDI, Maryna)**

"The first main barrier is still a lack of trust in the authorities, as in anything. It's not about the fact that we have bad authorities, 'the local authorities in particular'. It's about certain stereotypes. The boss is always bad. And, again, there are some military moments where you cannot please everyone and there are some local opinions and so on." **(IDI, Svitlana)**

Some representatives of the Bashtanska community noted that their parents, who prioritize their children's school performance and often do not believe in the possibility of success in the civil society sector, can hinder youth civic engagement.

"And this is their question, 'Will she have time to study?'. I know if it is this child and how much time he or she needs to work on that homework paragraph, and there are several more per day. And I cannot guarantee parents, and I am afraid of these conflicts with parents, and I am afraid of the fact that I myself entered the university not so long ago, and I understand how important it is for both parents and children to enter the university that the child wants." **(FGD, Youth 19-25)**

"Alternatively, I can say that parents can hinder a child's development. That is, not all parents are interested in their child being an active public figure. They want him or her to learn the lessons and listen to mom and dad. Well, as an option." **(FGD, Youth 19-25)**

*"There is another situation that may be on the part of parents... They even demotivate them... They themselves are limited in knowledge, the parents are limited. Parents do not understand what it is, how to get this grant, for example, in what way. First of all, they will say, 'There is such corruption here, you will do nothing, what will you do there.'" **(FGD, Adults)***

The main problem in relations with local authorities, according to some research participants, is the indifference of the authorities to the implementation of youth projects. Even the ideas that they have implemented are then left without attention and development, as there are no people in local self-government bodies who would be specifically involved in monitoring such projects.

"When we were working with Upshift, there was no help from the authorities at all. We just stumbled around, we didn't know who to go to, how to do it right, it was very difficult and the children just burned out. The children burned out because there were many questions, many difficulties, and no help. And after that, they said, why should we do this if we don't actually get help with it? For example, to agree on a letter of guarantee that they will give us a bus, for example, to travel to communities." **(IDI Maryna)**

“Even when you ask them to help you with something, you won’t get much help. In this regard, this is why no one really wants to work in the Youth Council. And they come new, they see it all and they just leave.” (IDI, Maryna)

“We have a screen that was installed by one of the Upshifters, which just shows four videos of children dancing. That is, it is completely inconsistent with what was stated and what is being done now... As far as I know, the problem is that there is no person who is specifically responsible for this. That is, there was some girl there, she was given this and that, she put it up, but there is no person who would implement or look for information herself or consult with someone about what we are launching or not on that screen. So, really, people do not understand what it is all about. The kids are upset because they worked on this project, they won it, they did well, and it’s just off.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

In addition, due to martial law, all meetings of local self-government bodies are held behind closed doors, and as a result, even representatives of the Youth Council cannot attend them, which in some ways does not help to increase the involvement of young people in the life of their community, as there is a lack of understanding of community affairs.

“As a Youth Council, we are an advisory and consultative body. Our direct responsibilities include attending sessions and executive committees. We have to analyze the work of the deputies, the city council, the mayor, and the secretary. But now, because of the war, many people are using this as an excuse. There is a war, you can’t, wait, you will have an event, but if you want to hold an event, you will direct all your efforts to the event, not to things you should not interfere with.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

To engage young people, some respondents believe that there is a lack of opportunities to meet offline, as there are not prepared and safe shelters in every community. As a result, there are far fewer events than before the war.

“The security situation is much better now, but yes, there is no shelter. We are fighting very hard for these shelters because the school is currently undergoing repairs. The school would be working now if the shelter was built. There would be more communication with children, and now it is like this... We have all the materials to communicate and work with children, but unfortunately, it is difficult to gather children to communicate with them, work with them and learn something from them about their problems.” (IDI, Ivan)

“There are few such trainings, school events, very few, rarely. This is my first training where I heard enough interesting things. I don’t know, maybe there have been others... There were, but when the war started, it stopped, because it’s more of a school.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

Young people also note that it is often difficult for the authorities to find the necessary funds to implement their projects.

“They also need to find some donors who will probably be able to invest in some construction and so on. They don’t have endless money.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

ENGAGEMENT FACTORS AND DRIVERS

The main factor contributing to youth activism, according to the majority of the study participants, is the holding of “live” meetings and any offline events. Direct, face-to-face communication with peers and new people is very important for building strength in the community of young people in the community. Stimulating or encouraging means (gratitude, certificates, awards, etc.) are also important.

“I think that if we continue to work at this pace, to hold more meetings like this, where they feel comfortable with other teenagers, young people, and so on, and can express themselves freely, then they will feel comfortable in principle and in everything. Then they will take the initiative, get involved in some public affairs, mean to organize something more themselves, initiate, well, in this way, and not what they are offered.” (FGD, Adults)

“For me, the process of this movement, communication with people, new acquaintances is important. For me, the praise itself is not even that important, although it is certainly nice. When I received the certificate, I thought, ‘Cool, thanks!’” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

“I don’t know. I think we need to organize more events, especially offline... I don’t think it will be the same if it’s online.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

The effectiveness of the implemented ideas and the efficiency of the projects is also very important. The lack of results is often very demotivating for young people.

“Live communication and results. That is, if, again, the children wrote a project, they won it. You know, this is the star time, and then other children watch and think, we want to do it too. That is, if a youth space is opened in a village, you need to find one person who will do it, so that others can see that it is possible.” (IDI, Svitlana)

“They wrote and submitted the application, but there is no 100% guarantee that it will be approved, that this particular project will be implemented. And here, too, they are children, well, like children. For example, I’m an adult, I understand that if I don’t win now, it means I’ll win later. I have it, so we will launch it sometime later. But their project didn’t work out, and they are starting to give up. They start losing faith in themselves and start doubting whether it will work or not.” (IDI, Maryna)

Among other factors that can contribute to the involvement of young people in community reconstruction, interview participants mentioned high-quality timely information and the right selection of topics and projects that are interesting to young people.

“We need to choose topics that are interesting. We have, for example, a male student. When I see some grants for robotics, for some such things, you tell him about it, he immediately gets involved, and he starts doing something.” (IDI, Oleksandr)

“After the organization ‘Building Ukraine Together’ came to us, they held, they had a schedule of (what is it called), several clean-ups. And so they held a clean-up. And it was announced to those who were at the clean-up that they should come in the evening at such-and-such time, and we would be telling jokes, playing volleyball, and so on. The difference between the first and second cleanup was three times. Three times as many people came to the second cleanup. So, I think we need to announce some interesting things locally.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

Some survey participants would like to see more openness and more effective communication with youth representatives from the local authorities.

“Some kind of coffee, for example, so that the younger people could gather, so that he [the government representative] could hear what ideas they have, so that they could invite us to the executive committee, for example, so that we could participate as well. Because, in fact, according to the charter, the Youth Council is an advisory body of the city council. So they have to do this, they have to take into account the opinion of young people. And not to do what they want, for example, according to the fact that they make decisions, but they should also listen to people, both young people and other age groups living in the community.” (IDI, Maryna)

There is also a demand for more active involvement and information about opportunities to participate in community reconstruction in schools from teachers and local self-government officials.

“On social media, in schools, to conduct some kind of explanatory work, informational lessons. To help teenagers get involved in some way.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

“Well, I think that, as I said, teachers should involve children more in schools. Back then, we definitely didn’t watch any news, like now, and we didn’t subscribe to anything, they just came and informed us about the opening of something new.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

Regarding the exchange of experience with other communities, respondents noted both positive and negative examples of such cooperation.

“We were gathered by the Halytsynivska community, Berezhuvata, and Bashtanska. And even I made friends with some of them... There was a game, we were given numbers, and if we had similar numbers, we became a team. Each community had its own number. And we would get together and talk about projects from our community... I noticed that no one from other communities heard me. They didn’t want to listen, they just talked.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

“We have done this before. We just organize our joint bus, find a sponsor to fill it up, and go to the center, to the library, to see their robotics club. I mean, it’s cool that they told us all about it. And then they go home, and their eyes are burning, ‘We wish we had something like that.’” (IDI, Oleksandr)

At the same time, young people have a demand for similar projects, travel, new acquaintances, and new experiences. For some, such trips can be an important motivator to further intensify their activities and engage in other events.

“I guess it’s traveling that motivates me a lot. When we went to Mykolaiv, I didn’t know what the project was at all, I wasn’t interested. But when we arrived, they started telling us, informing us. And I think it’s a cool thing. I think we can do this in the future. Not only this, but also to bring it together with other people. With other people. Other experiences, to learn something about them. So that they can learn what we have. Maybe we will adopt something. And it will be in Bashtanka” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

ENGAGEMENT METHODS AND TOOLS

Some respondents believe it is crucial to work directly with parents, as they often do not understand why young people should spend time on community projects. At the same time, information should come not from the government or NGOs, but from close friends of parents.

“Parents should also be informed that it can be useful, and that grades are not the most important thing in life. It definitely should not be news. It does not always work from the authorities. It should be some good friends of parents whom they trust.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

At the same time, some respondents do not consider the involvement of teachers to be useful, as they have a heavy professional workload and/or lack motivation for such activities.

“I think that teachers are already tired of all kinds of trainings now, to be honest. All these different conferences and things.” (IDI, Daryna)

“If you take, for example, a teacher with 20 years of experience, she is now very happy to have online training, and she just gave up the tasks and doesn’t go out anymore. And 80 percent of our school staff are retirees, old-timers. So it’s a problem, it’s hard to get them involved.” (IDI, Oleksandr)

However, having a mentor or a coach who can help, advise, and show the opportunities that are open to young people by example is very important.

“An example of a person I know. Interesting. My favorite of the trainings was Ania Rozhenko, Horyusenko, or whatever their name is. That is what we had yesterday. Kseniya Pecherska... Just so someone can notice. You don’t know much, and someone can tell you.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

Despite the fact that all information about local projects or opportunities is posted on social media, some participants emphasize that such news is not visible to most young residents of the community.

“There is the city council website. Would you say that it is heavily visited? No, but people are covering it in good faith. That is, whoever needs to go there and see that this information is available. Facebook... Again, these grants and programs and so on, it’s all posted on Facebook, but it mostly gets scrolled through.” (IDI, Svitlana)

“We conducted a small social survey at a meeting with the mayor, where 70% of people who visit Facebook look at the city website, but not a single person can tell what was last published there, or at least for a Sunday or a month. That is, people automatically just scroll through and do not remember this information.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

Most respondents see social media and new technologies as having great potential for engaging young people in community restoration and urban self-government projects. Suggestions include developing an app or website where information about potential projects will appear, or engaging local popular bloggers who have experience influencing local authorities and public opinion.

“Well, in general, you could create some kind of program to download as an application... Like a social network... A million-dollar dream... A thousand-dollar dream... Grant projects... Public info... I have two names: ‘Bashtanka Acorns’. And the second one is ‘Little Bashtanka in half the amplitude’... I would like all grants and projects to be listed for everyone.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

“Local bloggers with a lot of followers can be involved. Because really, when Katia Bolharchuk, for example, our local photographer, who used to live here, posts this, everyone knows about it. Because she has a large number of followers there. Katia has moved away, but today there are other people there with a large number of followers, namely from Bashtanka. That is, you can involve them, ask them to post a repost or something about the event.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

“An opinion leader. If it is social media, then nothing works more effectively than a person who influences another person... From Bashtanka, because the other person does not know our needs. We have Antonina Poserdnikova, a blogger. She is just starting her journey. She didn’t like the fact that there was no electricity when children leave school in the fall, at this time of year, there is no light. She raised this issue in her blog, went and collected signatures and came to Khomelsky. The electricity was turned on.” (FGD, Adults)

An important barrier to high-quality and timely information is martial law, which prohibits the advance publication of information about any mass events.

“There is a legal prohibition at the level of the oblast state military administration that we should not report where the event is taking place, when, how many. Only after the fact, when it has already happened, can we publish it. Or, for example, it is directly transmitted by word of mouth somewhere, so, of course, it limits the number of people who can participate.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

“Now we have a very difficult security situation, and that is why we cannot put any information in the public domain, we are not allowed to do it. Sometimes we are not even allowed to organize events for children because of the security situation. Sometimes they allow us to, and sometimes the military administration sends a letter that it is not advisable to do this at the moment, so we cancel everything.” (Maryna)

At the same time, many interview participants of all age groups emphasize that Internet technologies should be used only as a means of informing young people. And all events should be held exclusively offline.

“Yes, if he comes in person, then maybe, yes, it will be interesting. But if it’s on social media, I don’t want to go on social media, I don’t like it... We may not even know what it is. If they came, they would just tell us.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

“As for young people, I don’t know, I don’t think there is anything like live communication. As practice shows, it is very difficult to motivate them through social media unless we gather them in person. It is very difficult. And live communication is live communication. Just yesterday, I was with my children, and we posted an announcement on the Telegram channel, the fifth or tenth raffle. I said: “Kids, did you see what I posted on Telegram? Did you read it?” – “No.” – “Why?” “We don’t know.” I said: “Look, I just sent you a message: shoppers, bags, cups are being raffled off. If you want, you can participate.” They registered in three minutes and signed up their friends that they didn’t call because gifts were being given away. They were motivated to participate, but they were too lazy to read it. That is, there is no substitute for live communication.” (IDI, Svitlana)

Representatives of the Bashtanska community emphasize the importance and necessity of special events to educate local residents. Adults note that they lack knowledge about the legal peculiarities of local government, the format of interaction with officials, and examples of successful cases of influence on the authorities. Young people also want to learn public speaking and communication skills.

“But more so, how can you legally influence or defend your needs, your personal problems at the local level? Not from the point of view of the law and the court, but of local self-government. Even in basic terms, most people don’t know who to contact and how to do it. How to request information from the local self-government. They don’t know how. Phone calls can be made, but where to get the number?” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

“I had this idea to hold workshops, trainings, intensive courses, educational sessions for young people, so that they could see what the Youth Council is for, what young people are for, what they can do, what they can influence. So do young people and even parents, because there are different people living in the community, and each of them has some influence. And I would like to see some kind of informal education, both for young people and, for example, for people aged 30+, perhaps in the form of a game, where they can, for example, influence the authorities or a situation. So that they could see it in practice. Not just in words, in dry words, but in practice, and they would work out all these moments and nuances.” (IDI, Maryna)

“A very good skill is to memorize all the information in detail... Concentration... Communication is the same... Expanding vocabulary is also good... Being able to find NGOs.” (FGD, Youth 16-19)

“I would like to learn how to speak very well, how to be a speaker, how to be a great speaker. I’m just learning. And to become more socialized, to learn how to communicate better with people. Like that.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

RECOMMENDATIONS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

One of the main recommendations made by many respondents was that local self-government bodies should pay more attention to youth projects and involve youth representatives directly in meetings of these bodies.

"To involve them in planning, in sessions, in what we talked about, to provide access to information. This includes educational programs and trainings and informing about opportunities for participation. And to create platforms for communication and exchange of ideas. These are youth councils and clubs, online platforms and social media." (FGD, Youth 19-25)

"As I see it, our authorities should listen to their residents, not only to young people, but to the residents of their community in general. And that every person who worked in the city council should fulfill their professional duties, which are written down in their statutes. Why? Because when you come here, we have a bureaucracy, when you come here, they send you back and forth, simply not wanting to do their job or to pass it off to someone else. That's why we have this kind of situation." (FGD, Youth 19-25)

It is also important to provide some kind of reward for those who are actively involved in community development and youth organizations.

"In my opinion, you need, first of all, to encourage them, or show them that you can, for example, get some kind of reward. If a person goes only for the reward, maybe they will see how everything works there, and they will like it, and they will be involved in other activities." (FGD, Youth 19-25)

Another recommendation is to increase the level of funding, as activists have to finance some projects on their own.

"I would like to see more funding, because whatever event we plan with our students or something else, we need to find the money to carry it out. Even if it's small, many of my friends refuse to participate right away because they know that it's 100 hryvnias each way. And then over the course of six months, for example, it turns out to be a considerable amount of money that people could spend on their own pleasure and needs. Personally, I would like to see more funding for young people who are active and do something in the community and for the community." (FGD, Youth 19-25)

The study participants expressed some ideas for special trainings and events involving their parents, among others.

"Do you mean what, develop it? To involve these people who want to, foundations that give people this education. Three-day trainings, one-day trainings, where people will take something away anyway. It will already be good." (FGD, Adults)

“Perhaps it would be advisable to create some such trainings for several days with the involvement of parents and children. I once talked about it. Realizing a child’s dream. A mother knows what her child has always dreamed of. And when they are in some kind of, you know, group where a father and mother are working with a child and realizing their dreams, they are like that. And it costs such-and-such an amount of money. And the mother understands what’s going on, and the child understands, and psychologically receives the support of the mother right away. And even if it remains only on a piece of paper, it is still a milestone. When the person becomes more mature, perhaps the mother will continue on her own path. And the child will have some experience, and he or she will be inspired, he or she will realize that it is real, and then implement it. That is, as options.” (IDI, Svitlana)

Community representatives emphasized that any such projects should be carried out without discrimination based on appearance, age, or wealth.

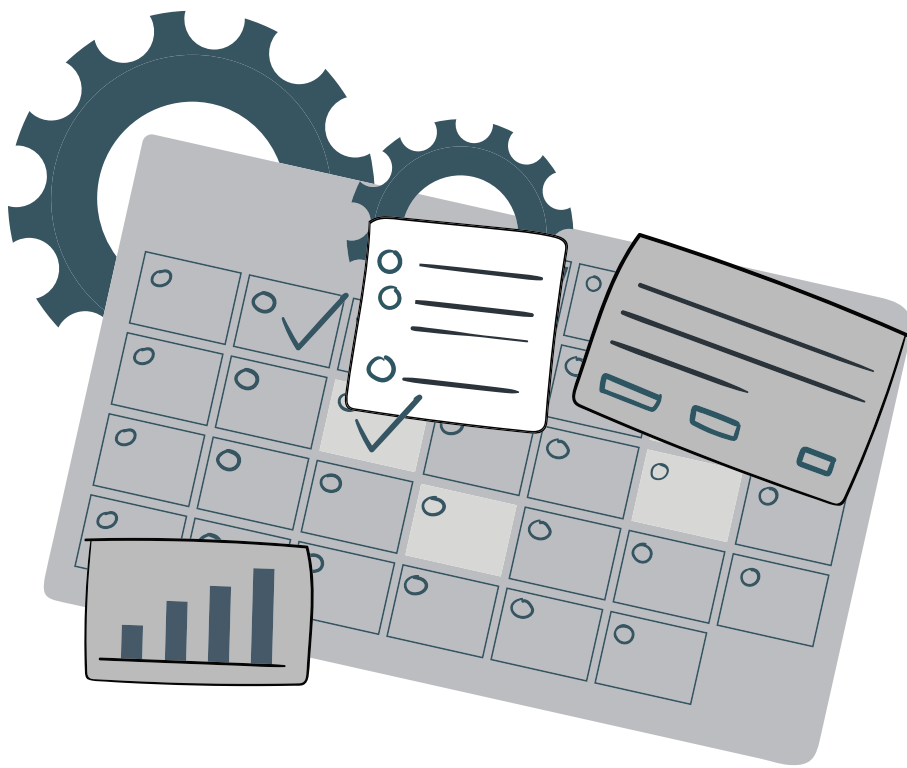
“The usual simple rule in all trainings and in life is equal to equal. We are people without “hey, girl”, “hey, boy” and so on, with respect, not to humiliate by external, social, monetary equivalent.” (FGD, Adults)

Interviewees noted that they do not see much activity from young IDPs, but their number is also small. At the same time, the respondents believe that they do not need to create special conditions or to be singled out in any way.

“There are very few initiatives from IDPs, as far as I understand, as far as I was told when it came to this. They are more encouraged, they are invited more, they are invited to come, there will be such and such, there will be fun or something else... I think this is due to the fact that they left their hometown or their home community, moved for an unknown distance. Everyone is different, they came from different communities. I think it’s just hard for them to start a new life or start a new temporary life.” (FGD, Youth 19-25)

“It is necessary to emphasize this, but not in a way that would make them stand out, but perhaps there should be a variety of activities that would unite them with the local population as much as possible, or, I don’t know, “mix” them. We don’t have such experience, but I think that, in principle, the local population still needs to be united, in my opinion.” (IDI, Daryna)

The materials were prepared by the Charity Foundation “Stabilization Support Services” in cooperation with the humanitarian organization “People in Need” and with the financial support of the Czech Development Agency.



The materials were prepared by the Charity Foundation “Stabilization Support Services” in cooperation with the humanitarian organization “People in Need” and with the financial support of the Czech Development Agency.