

Project “Engaging the Ukrainian Diaspora in Reconstruction and Development”

sponsored by the Research England Policy Support Fund at
Warwick University

Policy Memo 1, 11 June, 2024

The Translocalism Principle and How It Matters for Ukrainian Local Government and Communities

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Key Points

The principle of **translocalism** is useful to consider when thinking about different ways to engage the Ukrainian diaspora and global community with the local governance of Ukraine. This policy memo advocates that there is **scope to institutionalize relationships** between Ukrainian self-governing authorities (*hromadas*), local businesses and NGOs and the Ukrainian diaspora and global community living abroad while identifying with a particular locality in Ukraine. Win-win solutions could be found to develop jointly governed programmes and projects that give voice, votes and/or decision-making power to members of the diaspora in the local governance of Ukraine.

Background

Decentralization reforms in Ukraine since 2014 have empowered local governance by devolution of power from the central to the local and regional levels of authority. Such reforms are considered as one of the big wins of Ukraine’s EU association and accession process. Decentralization has allowed the creation of territorial communities (*hromadas*) from the amalgamation of smaller into bigger municipalities. *Hromadas* are working on developmental planning, raising of local taxes and taking important decisions on projects of local significance, such as in education, healthcare, sport, culture and social welfare, among others.¹ *Hromadas* can use such powers by way of the local councils and their executive bodies.²

By having powers institutionalized before Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion on the local level, *hromadas* became resilient and capable to provide public goods even during the war and to assist with the delivery of humanitarian aid, including aid gathered by the Ukrainian diaspora and global community.³ Local authorities in Ukraine have already established relations with kinship networks from abroad. Between 2014 and 2022 Ukrainian diaspora organizations transitioned from a spontaneous approach to

¹ Umland and Romanova 2019

² <https://decentralization.ua/en/news/17176>

³ DEMAC report 2022.

support those in need to developing long-term relationships with communities and local organizations.⁴ Yet, such relations remain primarily informal and trust-driven.

This policy memo asserts that there is more scope to think how to **institutionalize such relationships** between the local authorities in one place in Ukraine and the diaspora stemming from that place yet living abroad. The principle of **translocalism** can be useful to think how to bring win-win solutions to *hromadas*, local businesses and NGOs, as well as to kinship networks to harness their potential.

The Translocalism Principle

Diasporas as a phenomenon are “outside the state but inside the people.”⁵ Yet policy-makers in home-states experiencing emigration and host-states receiving it often think in terms of “here” or “there”. This translates to thinking about “here” in Ukraine, and “there” abroad where refugees, migrants and diasporas live. However, in reality, migrant function transnationally, in what scholars call “transnational social fields” where durable linkages are formed between the migrants, their host-states, home-states and different localities migrants connect to.⁶ Within these broader “fields” spanning the globe, particular **spaces** merit our attention here: the **localities** from which migrants originate and to which they keep connecting even if living abroad, and which they strongly identify with.

The principle of **translocalism** is based on the idea that the locality is stretched beyond its borders.⁷ This means that a village, town or another settlement has durable connections to people from that place who live in many places abroad or are relocated to other places within that state. Let us say, Vynnytsya in Ukraine has networks of people who stem from Vynnytsya, but live in different countries abroad, or are displaced to other parts of Ukraine. Local-to-local connections emerge, whereas diasporas participate translocally in exchanges that include information, ideas, goods, commodities, remittances, funds, visits, communications, services, labour, and others.⁸

Diasporas function in translocal networks especially well when countries of origin experience conflicts or post-conflict reconstruction. This is because diasporas can clearly identify with the challenges of family, friends and wider communities left at “home” where they need help and needs met. Translocal exchanges can relate to humanitarianism, as visible in Ukraine. My earlier work has shown that diasporas can be also quite active in rebuilding housing, running for political office, and developing business projects that include the locality.⁹ Diasporas can also seek to commemorate during postconflict reconstruction the atrocities committed in that locality.¹⁰ Translocal exchanges are excellent to foster a sense of diaspora belonging to the homeland by way of the locality. My earlier interviews in Kosovo have shown that depending on capacities and leadership in different municipalities, the diaspora from a particular place has been approached to register, with various degrees of success. Capitals of post-conflict countries do not carry the same translocal allegiances. They

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Shain and Barth 2003.

⁶ Faist 2000 on transnational social fields, Koinova 2021 on spatial dynamics within such fields.

⁷ Appadurai 1995.

⁸ Peth 2018.

⁹ Koinova 2021.

¹⁰ Koinova and Karabegovic 2018.

usually become a focal point for exchanges between diaspora and institutions that concern the entire origin state.

Hometown associations (HTAs) are a particular manifestation of translocality, widespread in the development contexts of Latin America and Africa. Only Mexican HTAs in the USA are estimated between 600 and 3,000, and Ghanaian HTAs in the USA are at least 200.¹¹ HTAs are formed on the translocal principle, usually by extended families or people originating from the same town or village. They can be spread across different states of the USA, with California and Chicago being home to many of these. HTAs respond to specific community needs. Such needs are understood during diaspora members' visits to the hometown community, and often concern the need to build schools, renew public infrastructure, assist for healthcare, support church and town gentrification, among others. HTAs leaders are usually elected democratically by board members, and collaborate with various institutions on the local level, notably mayors and municipal leaders.¹² In Mexico, interactions among HTAs and various local stakeholders have led to the development of the Citizens Initiative Programme (Iniciativa Ciudadana 3x1), a matching grant programme involving the Mexican government (on three levels) to support HTA projects.¹³ While the coordination of projects is implemented by local counterparts, diaspora individuals are engaged in the co-governance of local public affairs through the HTAs. HTAs are further important to bring a sense of belonging through collective action.¹⁴ They help migrants adjust to often challenging circumstances in foreign countries while giving them an opportunity to simultaneously exercise their "voice" and "loyalty" to a local community.¹⁵

Connecting Ukrainian Localities Through Twinning Projects

As a recent policy paper prepared for the 2024 Ukrainian Recovery Conference demonstrates, there are ongoing efforts among Ukrainian *hromadas* and local civil society to build twinning projects with other municipalities abroad.¹⁶ For example, such efforts between Cherniv in Ukraine and Aachen in Germany have brought the involvement of the UNESCO Chair at Aachen University to work on the design of the reconstruction plan for Cherniv's main street. *Hromadas* are further developing a transnational dialogue with EU institutions through municipal staff in liaison offices located in Brussels with accumulating expertise on how EU institutions work. They also connect local municipalities to the EU Committee of the Regions. Such extraterritorial outreach of Ukrainian *hromadas* is well suited to provide information about localities to investors, and to mobilize resources for other projects associated with Ukraine's recovery on the local level.¹⁷

¹¹ Sommerville et al 2008.

¹² Orozco with Lapointe 2004

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Lamba-Nieves 2018.

¹⁵ Portes and Rumbaut 2006.

¹⁶ This paragraph is based on Keudel, Koinova, Pavlova and Pryhomytska 2024. https://openplatform-backend.onrender.com/uploads/Why_and_How_Involve_the_Global_Ukrainian_Community_for_the_Recovery_of_Ukraine_04972f1904.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid.

Recommendations

While twinning efforts are ongoing, they are primarily based on *bilateral* relations between *hromadas* or civil society in one locality in Ukraine and another abroad, with the notable exception of the supra-national EU Committee of the Regions.¹⁸ The following figure illustrates a model through which *hromadas* and other local actors in Ukraine can use the *multi-pronged* (rather than bilateral) channels to mobilize the diaspora linked to a particular place, using the translocalism principle within and beyond Europe.

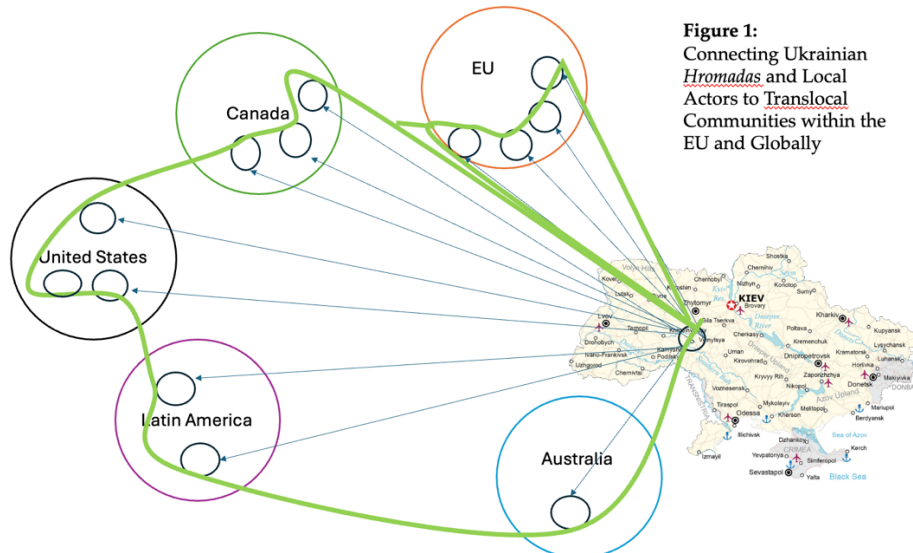


Figure 1:
Connecting Ukrainian
Hromadas and Local
Actors to Translocal
Communities within the
EU and Globally

Figure 1 represents schematically the relationships between one municipality in Ukraine and migrants related to that municipality abroad. The small black circles in the EU, Canada, United States, Latin America and Australia represent migrants related to a municipality abroad, whether recent protection seekers, refugees or migrants, or individuals descending from that place. The thin black lines represent bilateral relationships between them and one locality in Ukraine. The thick green line represents connections of that locality to all relevant municipalities abroad in line with the translocality principle.

Using the translocality principle, Ukrainian municipalities can harness the potential of the diaspora in multiple ways. They can seek to scrutinize and adapt the model of HTAs and matching grants discussed above, yet they can also go beyond. Given the high digitalization of Ukrainian society, local councils can use online platforms to issue a registration of interested parties abroad, issue calls for specific projects and invite diaspora members to meet online at this point and in person in Ukraine when this becomes possible. These could be crucial points when all stakeholders can build and deepen their relations, identify common needs and projects.

Most importantly, diasporas and migrants abroad linked to a particular place could be given a *voice and actual capacity to co-govern* such projects. This will enhance their ownership, motivation, fund-raising, sharing of expertise and even prospects for return. Thereby relations between local authorities and diaspora from a particular place can become *institutionalized*.

¹⁸ Author's individual conversation, Brussels, 6 June, 2024.

Given the supranational nature of the EU, municipalities with interest in a particular locality in Ukraine can be connected within its institutions and given specific institutional and financial backing to function translocally. This means further that the EU and international donors' funding dedicated to Ukraine's recovery could find mechanisms to be distributed to local governments.¹⁹ Thereby *hromadas* would be potentially given capacities to engage the diaspora translocally.

This policy memo could be used when cited as:

Koinova, Maria. 2024. "The Translocalism Principle and How It Matters for Ukrainian Local Government and Communities," Research England Policy Support Project "Engaging the Ukrainian Diaspora in Reconstruction and Development," University of Warwick, 11 June, 2024.

¹⁹ Author's individual conversation, Brussels, 10 June, 2024.