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THE ROLE OF WESTERN CITIES IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF UKRAINE¹

ABSTRACT The paper focuses on the long-term challenge of reconstructing Ukraine and the role cities may play in this process. The authors attempt to answer the following research questions: *What avenues are available for cities to support or participate in Ukraine's reconstruction? Are such recovery activities restricted only to the post-conflict period, or are they undertaken while the armed conflict is still ongoing?* The information has mostly been obtained from the websites of institutions such as the EU Committee of the Regions and city networks like Eurocities, as well

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as through emails from the International Affairs offices of the examined cities: Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Geneva, London, Madrid, Munich, Paris, Stockholm, Strasbourg and The Hague. The authors conclude that avenues that may be utilised by cities to participate in the reconstruction of Ukraine include the bilateral channels of the twin or sister cities system and multilateral city networks (both international and national). Furthermore, some reconstruction efforts have already been made, indicating that such activities are not limited to the post-conflict phase.

Keywords: cities, city diplomacy, Ukraine, reconstruction

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Throughout human history, cities have been targeted in wars due to their significance for politics, the economy, transport networks and population. As warfare has evolved, new methods have been employed to destroy cities when capture is not possible, such as aerial bombings and nuclear explosions. Some conflicts have involved prolonged urban fighting to capture or recapture cities, as seen in Nanjing, Stalingrad, Berlin, Sarajevo, Grozny and Aleppo.² One of the oldest continuously inhabited human settlements, Aleppo, has been severely damaged by massive bombings and urban fighting, resulting in an estimated 120,000 residents seeking refuge elsewhere and the destruction of approximately 36,000 structures.³ Today, such Ukrainian cities as Kyiv, Mariupol, Kharkiv and Irpin can be added to this list.

Currently, the role of cities in multi-level global governance is growing, and the impact of modern-day cities on global initiatives is comparable to the power of Italian city-states during the Renaissance.⁴ National governments are increasingly unwilling or unable to promote progressive international policies. Despite this, cities are taking action on urgent global challenges such as pandemics, climate change, migration, housing, inequality and extremism, sometimes without the support of their states. As a result,

² D. Palmieri, "War and the City: A History," *Humanitarian Law & Policy*, 21 April 2021, at <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2021/04/29/war-city-history/>, 6 April 2023; A. Mourby, "Where Are the World's Most War-Damaged Cities?," *The Guardian*, 17 December 2015, at <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/dec/17/where-world-most-war-damaged-city>, 30 August 2025. See also "War in Cities. Villes en guerre," May 2018, at https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/event/file_list/warincities-book.pdf, 6 April 2023.

³ J. Spencer, "The Destructive Age of Urban Warfare; or, How to Kill a City and How to Protect it," *Modern Institute of War*, 28 March 2019, at <https://mwi.usma.edu/destructive-age-urban-warfare-kill-city-protect/>, 6 April 2023.

⁴ Ch. Swiney, S. Foster, "Cities Are Rising in Influence and Power on the Global Stage," *Bloomberg*, 15 April 2019, at <https://www.citylab.com/perspective/2019/04/city-leadership-international-policy-mayors-u20-uclg-c40/587089/>, 30 August 2025.

cities are becoming more influential at the national and international levels, leading to a paradigm shift in global politics and international law.⁵ In response to this shift, cities are demanding recognition of their position and participation in decision-making processes within the United Nations system, as stated in the Joint Political Declaration from the Virtual Mayor's Summit in Mannheim in 2020, where mayors emphasised that cities are important partners for maintaining a multilateral, rule-based world order and achieving the goals of sustainable development. They called for institutional reform within the United Nations to ensure the formalised participation of cities in decision-making processes.⁶

While the full-scale stage of the war in Ukraine began on 24 February 2022, the conflict itself has been ongoing since 2014. The invasion by Russia has caused significant damage to Ukrainian infrastructure and buildings, including schools, hospitals, civilian housing and cultural landmarks. As of the end of 2022, experts estimated the total cost of destruction to be more than EUR 750 billion, with a predicted 35% decrease in GDP, according to the International Monetary Fund. The economy of Ukraine has experienced a 30% to 50% reduction in its productive capacity, particularly in the crucial economic areas located in eastern and southern Ukraine.⁷ This immense human suffering and material destruction has been exacerbated by the intentional targeting of Ukrainian cities. Like elsewhere around the globe, cities in Ukraine not only house large populations, but also serve as hubs of political and economic power, culture and national identity. They are responsible for providing important infrastructure and services to their citizens, including housing, water and transportation, while also playing a vital role in maintaining the social fabric of the country. Unfortunately, the capacity of these cities to fulfil these roles has been partly destroyed in recent months. Despite this, the leaders and citizens of these cities have demonstrated incredible resilience in the face of adversity. If Ukraine hopes to rebuild and recover, a significant portion of the work will need to be accomplished by and within its cities.⁸ As rightly noted by

⁵ Ch. Swiney, "The Urbanization of International Law and International Relations: The Rising Soft Power of Cities in Global Governance," *Michigan Journal of International Law*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2020), p. 228.

⁶ "Joint Political Declaration within the Scope of the Virtual Mayor's Summit in Mannheim," 2020, at https://www.mannheim.de/sites/default/files/2020-09/EN_Declaration_formated.pdf, 30 August 2025. On the growing role of cities in international relations, see also: S. Curtis, *Global Cities and the Transformation of the International System*, Ann Arbor 2014; B. Oomen, M. Baumgärtel, "Frontier Cities: The Rise of Local Authorities as an Opportunity for International Human Rights Law," *European Journal of International Law*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2018), pp. 607-630; M. Acuto, *Global Cities, Governance, and Diplomacy: The Urban Link*, London-New York 2013; K. Ljungkvist, *The Global City 2.0: From Strategic Site to Global Actor*, London 2016.

⁷ CoR, "Opinion Factsheet: The Role of EU Cities and Regions in Rebuilding Ukraine," CIVEX-VII/018, 2022, Para. 2, at <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions/cdr-4172-2022>, 30 August 2025.

⁸ H.P. Normandin, "Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction: Cities Must Be Part of It," *CIDOP Opinion*, 736, p. 1, at https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/opinion/2022/ukraine_recovery_and_reconstruction_cities_must_be_part_of_it, 30 August 2025.

Henri-Paul Normandin,⁹ *[t]here is an urban dimension to this war. And there will have to be an urban dimension to recovery and reconstruction.*

Outside Ukraine, the response of cities to the Russian aggression against Ukraine has been dynamic and diverse. For example, they host and support Ukrainian refugees, send material aid to partner cities in Ukraine, break cooperation with Russian cities as part of the twin cities or sister cities cooperation networks and organise solidarity days with Ukraine (more than 150 cities stand with Ukraine as of 2022). Certain cities have taken it upon themselves to impose restrictions on Russia by either implementing state-imposed sanctions or calling for even stricter measures. In doing so, cities have transformed from being merely supportive of the enforcement of international norms to sources of political power and influence in their own right. This means that cities have not only followed or implemented national policies, but have also attempted to pressure their nation-states to adopt more aggressive sanctions, as seen in the “Urgent Call from Mariupol,”¹⁰ which demanded the cessation of all trade relations with Russia and Belarus.¹¹

2. DATA AND METHODS

The aim of this paper is, however, to move beyond the activities concentrated on the ad hoc assistance to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, and focus on the long-term challenge of the reconstruction of Ukraine and the role cities may or should play in this process, a process that has to be planned and coordinated to be effective. At the same time, the paper sheds light on a very important aspect of contemporary international relations pertaining to the growing role of cities in international decision-making processes. The authors attempt to answer the following research questions: *What avenues are there for cities to support or participate in Ukraine’s reconstruction (in other words, how can cities take part in this process)? Are such recovery activities restricted only to the post-conflict period, or are they being undertaken while the armed conflict still lasts?* The answers to these questions will identify the ways cities may contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine as well as the phases when such contributions take place (post-conflict or during conflict).

The primary research method is desk analysis supported by online interviews. The online interviews were justified by the necessity of accessing information not available in the public domain. The authors asked international affairs officers from the examined cities two questions: whether their cities were already participating in the Ukraine reconstruction efforts or were planning to join them and whether there were any materials that could be shared with the authors.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ “Urgent Call from Mariupol,” 15 March 2022, at <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Mariupol-Call-15.03.2022-final.pdf>, 30 August 2025.

¹¹ A. Szpak, J. Modrzyńska, R. Gawłowski, P. Modrzyński, M. Dahl, “Reaction to the Russian Aggression against Ukraine: Cities as International Standards’ Supporters,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4, p. 13.

The information has mostly been obtained from the websites of institutions like the European Union Committee of the Regions (EU CoR) and city networks like Eurocities, as well as via emails from the International Affairs offices/officers of the examined cities. The latter comprise 12 European cities (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Brussels, Geneva, London, Madrid, Munich, Paris, Stockholm, Strasbourg and The Hague) that were chosen as part of a broader research project that the authors are implementing. The authors selected these cities based on various rankings and indexes, including influence, power and wealth. These rankings reflect the growing role of cities in international relations and international decision-making processes and include rankings such as the Global Power City Index,¹² Global Cities Index,¹³ Cities of Influence,¹⁴ OECD National GDP growth contributed by metropolitan areas,¹⁵ Most Dynamic Cities in Europe,¹⁶ the Wealthiest Cities in the World¹⁷ and Largest Urban Agglomerations in Europe in 2020.¹⁸ The rankings are not the newest ones as the project has been in progress since the beginning of 2022. The nine selected cities that appeared most often in the rankings were London, Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Moscow (which was left out due to Russian aggression against Ukraine), Amsterdam, Berlin, Munich and Stockholm. The list was expanded with Brussels, The Hague, Geneva and Strasbourg, which were considered important political centres and reflected the geography of international law (The Hague is the capital of justice and Geneva is closely associated with human rights). However, as of the 12 cities, six answered and six did not, the authors examined only the ones that replied, namely Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, The Hague, Stockholm and Strasbourg. All of these cities are considered important political centres, nodes in a global political network of interdependencies. The authors chose to focus on cities because their role in international affairs is not a standard topic in international relations studies and requires in-depth research. Furthermore, the selection of these cities, and not those known from the very beginning for their intense participation in the reconstruction of Ukraine, prevents the authors from reaching

¹² "Global Power City Index," 2020, at http://www.mori-m-foundation.or.jp/pdf/GPCI2020_summary.pdf, 30 August 2025.

¹³ "New Priorities for a New World. Global Cities Index," *Kearney*, 2020, at <https://www.kearney.com/global-cities/2020>, 30 August 2025.

¹⁴ "Cities of Influence. Talent – Location – Cost – Risk," *Colliers International*, 2018, at <https://www.colliers.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/cities-of-influence-2018-180309-colliers.pdf>, 30 August 2025.

¹⁵ "OECD National GDP Growth Contributed by Metropolitan Areas," 2016, at https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/reg_glance-2016-20-en.pdf?expires=1611908139&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=CD176572D9823612DD973B34EA9B714C, 30 August 2025.

¹⁶ "Most Dynamic Cities in Europe," *World Economic Forum*, 6 July 2017, at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/07/these-are-the-17-most-dynamic-cities-in-europe/>, 30 August 2025.

¹⁷ "The 150 richest cities in the world by GDP in 2020," *City Mayors Statistics*, 2020, at <http://www.citymayors.com/statistics/richest-cities-2020.html>, 30 August 2025.

¹⁸ "Largest Urban Agglomerations in Europe in 2020," at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1101883/largest-european-cities/>, 30 August 2025.

predetermined conclusions. Moreover, as the literature review will prove, there is a research gap that has to be filled.

The main contribution of this article is that it presents a fresh perspective on post-conflict urban reconstruction, shifting the focus from considering cities as passive recipients of reconstruction efforts to recognising them as active participants that play a crucial role in rebuilding foreign states and their cities. By analysing online sources representing the views of city authorities, city networks and the EU Committee of the Regions regarding the reconstruction of Ukrainian cities, the article provides valuable insights. It contributes significantly to the understanding of the effects of the ongoing Russian war on the reconstruction process in Ukraine, addressing a gap in the existing literature on the topic. This contribution opens up possibilities for incorporating its research findings into the implementation of effective governance practices in Ukrainian cities and communities impacted by the extensive military aggression of the Russian Federation.

Some of these cities' potential for aiding the reconstruction of Ukraine will be indicated within the avenues available for cities' participation in the reconstruction process. In other words, examples of these cities' planned or actual involvement in the reconstruction of Ukraine will serve as an illustration of the role of cities in this process.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will be brief, as there is not much literature on the role or participation of cities in post-conflict reconstruction in general and on foreign cities contributing to the post-conflict reconstruction of another state (mostly its cities) in particular. The literature review will also encompass the concept of destruction in the form of "urbicide", meaning "city killing", with special emphasis on the context of Ukraine. This body of literature is important for understanding the scope and approaches to urban reconstruction in Ukraine.

The available literature refers to post-conflict reconstruction *in* cities and not *by* cities. Hence, cities are treated as objects, places and spaces to be rebuilt and not as actors that may or should contribute to this process. For example, "The Post-conflict Reconstruction and Local Government"¹⁹ concentrates on decentralisation in post-conflict states. The book presents a combination of case studies, cross-case analyses, reflections from practitioners and theoretical discussions that explore the role of local governments in post-conflict countries undergoing decentralisation. It features contributions from both academic experts and policy-makers. Assem, Abdelmohsen and Ezzeldin²⁰ explore methods of effective long-term city reconstruction management in a post-conflict

¹⁹ P. Jackson, G. Wall (eds), *Post-conflict Reconstruction and Local Government*, London 2020.

²⁰ A. Assem, S. Abdelmohsen, M. Ezzeldin, "Smart Management of the Reconstruction Process of Post-Conflict Cities," *International Journal of Architectural Research Archnet-IJAR*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2020), pp. 325-343.

situation. The authors have a strong focus on assessing, planning strategically, carrying out reconstruction projects and implementing them. They have developed a platform that incorporates the construction of systems for information modelling and geographic/geospatial information to enable real-time analysis, reporting, strategic planning and decision-making for managing reconstruction operations and projects. This platform involves multiple stakeholders, such as government agencies, funding organisations, city managers and members of the public. The second of these two publications at least includes city managers among the stakeholders. Similarly, Briefing Paper 11²¹ stresses that the reconstruction of damaged cities involves various parties, but the local residents should be considered the most important stakeholders. To ensure effective reconstruction, it is essential for all parties with different abilities and resources – including local, state, regional and international groups – to collaborate with each other.

Bugalski and Lorens²² outline how the reconstruction of Polish cities after World War II has developed compared to the examples observed in Western Europe during the same period. They also offer a framework to comprehend the current urban design paradigms in Central and Eastern Europe. Even though the article presents mostly a historical perspective, it points out that the process of reconstructing historic cities has not yet been finished. The past is also important for Gruia Bădescu,²³ who examines the reconstruction of Sarajevo after the Bosnian War and how it relates to the process of societal reconciliation. The paper investigates the role of dealing with the past in the context of urgent reconstruction needs, such as infrastructure repair and housing shortages, as well as the impact of funding considerations and local and national politics. The author questions how the process of coming to terms with the past can be integrated into urban reconstruction efforts, given the complex and competing demands. In another publication, the same author²⁴ discusses the different urban outcomes in Beirut and Sarajevo after the respective civil wars, despite their similar experiences of urban warfare and post-war reconstruction. The Lebanese government aimed to promote religious diversity and coexistence in downtown Beirut, but it resulted in new divisions based on fear, security issues and class differences. Meanwhile, Sarajevo's post-war political configuration institutionalised spatial segregation. Bădescu argues that in these contexts the city becomes an arena of conflicting geopolitical articulations of state-level politics and local dynamics, rather than an autonomous entity.

²¹ "Destruction and Reconstruction: How Urban Recovery Has Become an Integral Part of Conflict and War," *Briefing Paper*, 11, at <https://www.urbanconflicts.arct.cam.ac.uk/system/files/documents/briefing-paper-11-2019.pdf>, 30 August 2025.

²² Ł. Bugalski, P. Lorens, "Post-Second World War Reconstruction of Polish Cities: The Interplay Between Politics and Paradigms," *Urban Planning*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2023), pp. 182-195.

²³ G. Bădescu, "City Makers, Urban Reconstruction and Coming to Terms with the Past in Sarajevo," in B. Kotzen, S. Garcia (eds), *Reconstructing Sarajevo: Negotiating Socio-political Complexity*, London 2014, pp. 15-21.

²⁴ G. Bădescu, "Post-War Reconstruction in Contested Cities: Comparing Urban Outcomes in Beirut and Sarajevo," in J. Rokem, C. Boano (eds), *Urban Geopolitics: Rethinking Planning in Contested Cities*, Abingdon 2017, pp. 17-32.

The linkage between the past and the future plays a significant role in an article by Ammar Azzouz²⁵ that explores how memories of the pre-war Syrian city of Homs have become a refuge for many Syrians as they struggle to survive and envision a future. The paper argues that by engaging with Syrians and their stories, the element of human agency can be introduced to the question of Syrian reconstruction, which is often overlooked in studies of the Syrian crisis and cities at war.

Hussein, Abdulla and Daood²⁶ propose urban regeneration tactics to be implemented in the redevelopment of the old city of Mosul. The suggested strategies concentrate on the need to preserve the area's urban identity while also addressing contemporary environmental, socio-economic and political challenges. The recommendations prioritise integrating new designs with the existing urban fabric and ensuring that the physical environment complements the original buildings, whether they are still standing or have been destroyed. Steinø, Dabaieh and Bih²⁷ focus on the same geographical region when discussing post-conflict reconstruction in war-torn cities in the Middle East and North Africa. They suggest that instead of simply re-establishing pre-conflict conditions, new formats for urban settings should be adopted, including improved design and quality of urban space and building processes. The proposed approach is a combined top-down and bottom-up design strategy.

Kai Vöckler²⁸ discusses a critical issue related to the post-war reconstruction of urban neighbourhoods: the significant demographic changes caused by war. When a conflict occurs, some people leave the city and do not return for various reasons, such as seeking better opportunities elsewhere or feeling unsafe going back home. This poses a challenge for cities trying to rebuild themselves after a war. Sameh Wahba, Maitreyi Bordia Das and Yuna Chun²⁹ explore how urban planning can contribute to promoting peace and building resilience in cities affected by conflict. The paper focuses on four cities: Medellín, Colombia; Mogadishu, Somalia; Timbuktu, Mali; Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although each city offers unique lessons, none provides a perfect solution for post-conflict reconstruction. The goal of the article is to demonstrate the intricacies and difficulties of the reconstruction process and how a comprehensive, people-centred approach can enhance the resilience of war-affected cities.

²⁵ A. Azzouz, "A Tale of a Syrian City at War: Destruction, Resilience and Memory in Homs," *Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, Action*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2019), pp. 107-122.

²⁶ S.H. Hussein, Z. Abdula, N.M. Daood, "Urban Regeneration through Post-War Reconstruction: Reclaiming the Urban Identity of the Old City of Mosul," *Periodicals of Engineering and Natural Sciences (PEN)*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2019), pp. 294-301.

²⁷ N. Steinø, M. Dabaieh, K.B. Bih, "Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the Middle East and North Africa Region: A Bidirectional Parametric Urban Design Approach," *International Journal of Architectural Computing*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2020), pp. 296-313.

²⁸ K. Vöckler, "Post-Conflict Cities and Neighborhoods," *Trafo. Blog for Transregional Research*, 18 December 2019, at <https://trafo.hypotheses.org/21143>, 30 August 2025.

²⁹ S. Wahba, M. Bordia Das, Y. Chun, "Building Back Stronger: Urban Resilience Through Post-Conflict Reconstruction," *Columbia SIPA Journal of International Affairs*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27169781>, 15 September 2025.

One of the rare publications focusing on the role of cities in the post-conflict reconstruction of a state is the one by Henri-Paul Normandin,³⁰ where the author stresses that cities must be part of Ukraine's reconstruction. This article attempts to fill the gap discussed above and prove that cities are not only objects, but also subjects of post-conflict reconstruction processes. The Russian aggression against Ukraine, combined with the growing role of cities in international relations, has created favourable conditions for the increase of cities' potential to participate in the post-conflict reconstruction of Ukraine. However, the authors would like to stress once again that most publications on post-conflict reconstruction and cities approach cities as objects or places of reconstruction and not as actors playing a vital and subjective role in this process.

As to the second part of the literature review referring to the concept of "urbicide", Graham, building on Marshall Berman's ideas,³¹ introduces the term "urbicide" to depict the deliberate and violent targeting of cities, defined as the intentional denial or destruction of the city, in contrast to concepts like genocide or ethnic cleansing.³² Ken Hewitt³³ argues that the destruction of cities remains largely unexplored in urban social science. While some progress has been made in the following decades, the intentional destruction of cities still requires thorough analysis. Marin Coward's case study on the destruction of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) reveals that the objective was to eliminate a shared space of multicultural relations and exchange.³⁴ The destruction of such common spaces deprives residents of opportunities to connect, a significant element of urban fabric destruction. Coward further develops this perspective in a 2006 article, employing the concept of urbicide to analyse the nature of the destruction of the built environment. In his 2009 book, Coward focuses on purposeful urban environmental destruction, utilising the concept of urbicide to understand the specific forms of violence that deny local populations the ability to establish and maintain relationships, eradicating "a condition of possibility of being-with-others".³⁵ These publications offer diverse perspectives on approaching the destruction of cities. They are relevant in the context of Ukraine, as today one can add to the long list of destroyed cities those in Ukraine, such as Mariupol, Kharkiv or Irpin.

³⁰ H.P. Normandin, "Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction..."

³¹ M. Berman, "Among the Ruins," *New Internationalist*, 1987, at <http://newint.org/features/1987/12/05/among/>, 30 August 2025.

³² S. Graham, "Cities and the 'War on Terror'," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2006), p. 255.

³³ K. Hewitt, "Place Annihilation: Area Bombing and the Fate of Urban Places," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 73, no. 2 (1983), p. 258.

³⁴ M. Coward, "Community as Heterogeneous Ensemble: Mostar and Multiculturalism," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2002), p. 32.

³⁵ M. Coward, *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction*, Abington 2009, p. 14.

4. AVENUES CITIES MAY USE IN THE PROCESS OF UKRAINE RECONSTRUCTION

Reconstructing Ukraine after the conflict will be a colossal effort, complicated by the typical obstacles that accompany any such undertaking, such as coordinating with numerous international and Ukrainian parties. Ultimately, decision-makers will need to create systems that fit the unique circumstances at hand. It is essential to recognise that, unlike many other post-war scenarios, Ukraine is not a failed state and, therefore, it must be in control of its own reconstruction process.³⁶

Cities should be a part of this process. There seem to be two (possible) main avenues for cities to contribute: 1) through bilateral relations in the form of sister cities; 2) through multilateral contacts in the form of city networks (first of all international ones but sometimes also lower-level ones, such as national associations of local governments). The role of international institutions such as the EU Committee of the Regions is rather supplementary. These two channels are not new, but since the start of the large-scale conflict in Ukraine, collaborations of this nature have taken on a new significance, and twin cities from around the globe have shown even greater support for their Ukrainian counterparts since the initial days of the Russian invasion.³⁷

Regarding the sister/twin cities system, the act of city twinning does not require a formal legal basis, only a mutual agreement between local governments. The appeal of such cooperation lies in the willingness to collaborate and address local issues, rather than in legal or organisational goals. This form of “local diplomacy” has added a human touch to international relations and has resulted in the development of social capital, empathy and mutual understanding. The importance of individuals and interpersonal interactions has become increasingly significant in foreign affairs analysis.³⁸ The abundance of these initiatives demonstrates that territorial cooperation through city twinning has been a vibrant form of collaboration, albeit confined to specific locations.³⁹ Cities have been viewed as important partners that play a crucial role in the reconciliation process between post-war societies. One of the initiatives that contributed to this process was the establishment of sister-city partnerships, which began in the German-French border region after the Second World War.

As to city networks, Adam Newmark⁴⁰ suggests that cities collaborate within such networks not only because they face similar problems, but also because they have

³⁶ H.P. Normandin, “Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction...,” pp. 1-2.

³⁷ T. Anakina, P. Spalek-Lipcean, H. Kovalchuk et al., “Challenges and Opportunities of LRA’s Involvement in the Reconstruction of Ukraine (Report for EU CoR),” *European Committee of the Regions*, 2022, p. 18.

³⁸ M. Holmes, N. Wheeler, “Social Bonding in Diplomacy,” *International Theory*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2020), pp. 133-161.

³⁹ A. Szpak, J. Modrzyńska, P. Modrzyński et al., *The Role of Cities in International Relations: The Third-generation of Multi-level Governance?*, Cheltenham 2022, p. 60.

⁴⁰ A.J. Newmark, “An Integrated Approach to Policy Transfer and Diffusion,” *Review of Policy Research*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2002), pp. 151-178.

solutions to share that can benefit others. There are various reasons why city networks are established, such as geographical proximity, a common feature or a shared problem that can be addressed through cooperation. City networks typically focus on areas such as ecology, sustainable development, economics, migration and security. However, some networks cover a broad range of interests. Networks enable cities to mobilise their resources, participate in global advocacy and exchange innovative technologies and policies. By joining global networks of cities, localities can strengthen their influence and work together to solve common issues, which marks a break from the competitive order of nation-states.⁴¹ These avenues that may be used in the process of Ukraine reconstruction will be examined below. But before that, a few remarks will be devoted to the supplementary role of CoR as it established a framework and principles that should guide cities' reconstruction efforts. Even though this is an EU organ, its guidelines should or may easily be accepted worldwide.⁴²

The CoR, along with the EU and Ukrainian associations of local and regional authorities, initiated on 30 June 2022 the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine. This alliance was formed to synchronise their collective efforts towards supporting the restoration and revival of Ukraine.⁴³ The principles that should guide the reconstruction efforts include: Ukraine's territorial integrity; a bottom-up approach that empowers local self-government to play a significant role in the recovery and reconstruction process;⁴⁴ support for Ukraine's journey towards EU accession and a "build back better" approach that prioritises sustainability, environmental responsibility, innovation and inclusivity;⁴⁵ good local and regional governance; promotion of local and regional business development and innovation; and modernisation of rural areas while respecting the country's decentralisation reform.⁴⁶ In its opinion on the role of EU cities and regions in rebuilding Ukraine, the EU CoR⁴⁷ recommended establishing a Ukraine Reconstruction Platform that should involve the Alliance as *a fully-fledged partner at all stages of its planning and implementation phases*.

⁴¹ Y. Blank, "The City and the World," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2006), p. 923.

⁴² For more details on the principles applicable to Ukraine reconstruction, see: Y. Gorodnichenko, I. Sologoub, B. Weder di Mauro (eds), "Rebuilding Ukraine: Principles and Policies," Centre for Economic and Policy Research, 7 December 2022, at <http://cepr.org/publications/books-and-reports/rebuilding-ukraine-principles-and-policies>, 30 August 2025.

⁴³ "European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine," at <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/pages/european-alliance-of-cities-and-regions-for-the-reconstruction-of-ukraine.aspx>, 30 August 2025.

⁴⁴ The bottom-up approach was also stressed in the CoR, "Opinionfactsheet: The Role of EU Cities and Regions in Rebuilding Ukraine," Para. 5.

⁴⁵ The 'build back better' approach was also mentioned in *ibidem*, Para. 14.

⁴⁶ "European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine...," "European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine Declaration," 2022, at <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Documents/Declaration%20Berlin.pdf>, 30 August 2025.

⁴⁷ CoR, "Opinionfactsheet: the Role of EU Cities and Regions in Rebuilding Ukraine," Para. 9.

The Alliance recommends the implementation of several measures, including a straightforward method for EU/European municipalities, regions and associations to assist their Ukrainian counterparts with reconstruction efforts. They also propose a peer-to-peer and twinning programme to enhance capacity building and facilitate an equal exchange of knowledge. Adequate resources should be allocated to promoting cluster-twinning partnerships on both the EU and Ukrainian sides. It is important to adopt an inclusive approach that involves cities, towns, villages, communities and regions while maintaining coherence with the existing sustainable territorial development efforts in Ukraine and the EU. Additionally, a strong emphasis should be placed on promoting local and regional self-government, good governance and local democracy.⁴⁸ The CoR added that the Alliance aims to provide technical assistance and capacity building to Ukrainian cities and regions for sustainable infrastructure rebuilding, education, democracy and governance. It also suggested that investment schemes involving a larger group of cities and stakeholders may be necessary to prepare for the approximation of the EU regional policy governance patterns. The Alliance will facilitate twinning and peer-to-peer exchange programmes to build capacity and promote good governance in Ukraine.⁴⁹

As for the two possible avenues for cities' participation in the reconstruction of Ukraine, city networks are one option, and one of the city networks most active in this field is Eurocities. At the Eurocities Conference in 2022, politicians and officials from Ukraine discussed ideas for the reconstruction of Ukrainian cities and how Eurocities can assist. They emphasised the need for city-to-city partnerships with Ukrainian cities, coordinated through Eurocities. Eurocities President and Mayor of Florence Dario Nardella suggested mapping out each city's contributions and matching them with requests from Ukrainian peers, focusing on rebuilding schools, hospitals and critical infrastructure. The Eurocities Executive Committee agreed on guidelines and principles for collaboration with Ukrainian cities, building on existing partnerships and concentrating on the needs of citizens and sustainable development.⁵⁰

Within the Eurocities framework, on 19 August 2022, mayors from various European cities went to Kyiv to sign a political agreement that aims to support the sustainable reconstruction of cities in Ukraine⁵¹. The agreement includes plans to align the reconstruction needs of Ukraine with the capacities of other European cities. To oversee this collaborative initiative, a joint task force consisting of political representatives from Eurocities and Ukraine's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities under the President of Ukraine will convene regularly to supervise the development and execution of this plan. The mayors pledged to provide immediate reconstruction support and to

⁴⁸ "European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine..."

⁴⁹ CoR, "Opinionfactsheet: The Role of EU Cities and Regions in Rebuilding Ukraine," Para. 23-24.

⁵⁰ "Cities preparing the Ground for Ukraine Reconstruction," 10 June 2022, at <https://eurocities.eu/latest/cities-preparing-the-ground-for-ukraine-reconstruction/>, 30 August 2025.

⁵¹ "Memorandum of Understanding to Support the Sustainable Rebuilding of Ukrainian Cities," Euro Cities, 2022, at <https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Memorandum-Eurocities.pdf>, 30 August 2025.

coordinate with other emerging initiatives, such as the EU's 'Rebuild Ukraine' and the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Ukraine. Moreover, Eurocities will utilise its network of more than 200 cities (including four Ukrainian ones) to support the rebuilding of Ukrainian cities destroyed during the war with Russia. Meanwhile, Ukraine's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities will provide information on the vital reconstruction required in the affected cities. Additionally, the Congress will oversee the rebuilding efforts to prevent duplication and ensure efficient coordination.⁵² In October 2022, a group of mayors who visited Ukraine expressed their commitment to providing immediate support for reconstruction efforts and to coordinating with other initiatives aimed at rebuilding the cities destroyed by the war. They also emphasised the importance of sustainable rebuilding and sharing examples of failures to avoid repeating mistakes that other cities have made in the past. The mayors discussed their involvement in initiatives such as the EU's 'Rebuild Ukraine' and the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Ukraine, in which Eurocities is represented. They also expressed their willingness to work together with other emerging initiatives. Mayor Mārtiņš Staķis, from Riga, shared his experience in repairing similar Soviet-style buildings in Kyiv, Borodyanka and Irpin, and expressed his willingness to help in the reconstruction efforts. He noted that his city has companies that have completed several similar projects. Mayor Grégory Doucet from Lyon shared his observation that reconstruction work was already happening in Ukraine, citing the example of a bridge that was bombed several weeks earlier and was already under reconstruction. He highlighted the importance of reconstruction for the morale of the Ukrainian people and expressed his willingness to help. Overall, the mayors emphasised the significance of sustainable rebuilding and the need for cooperation among various initiatives to ensure a successful reconstruction process.⁵³ These examples indicate the coordinating, facilitating and mobilising role of Eurocities in supporting its member cities with the reconstruction efforts in Ukraine.

While Eurocities is an international city network, national associations of local governments are also capable of participating in the process of Ukraine's reconstruction. A good example is the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), which, among other activities, devoted its international day to Ukraine and the possibilities of its reconstruction. At that event, 49 municipalities and regions from Sweden discussed the potential ways in which they can assist Ukraine, particularly in the country's reconstruction efforts. The event also showcased the Cities 4 Cities | United 4 Ukraine initiative, which aims to create lasting partnerships between European and Ukrainian communities.⁵⁴ The objective of the Cities 4 Cities | United 4 Ukraine

⁵² "On Ukraine Visit, Mayors Pledge Sustainable Rebuilding," *Euro Cities*, 20 August 2022, at <https://eurocities.eu/latest/on-ukraine-visit-mayors-pledge-sustainable-rebuilding/>, 15 September 2025.

⁵³ "Mayors Talk Ukraine and Energy with Commission President," *Euro Cities*, 13 October 2022, at <https://eurocities.eu/latest/mayors-talk-ukraine-and-energy-with-commission-president/>, 30 August 2025.

⁵⁴ "Swedish Municipalities Interested in Partnership with Ukrainian Counterparts," *cities4cities*, 31 March 2023, at <https://unitedforua.org/swedish-municipalities-interested-in-partnership-with-ukrainian-counterparts/>, 30 August 2025.

initiative (which has the patronage of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe)⁵⁵ is to foster enduring partnerships between European and Ukrainian communities, with an emphasis on promoting decentralisation. The initiative seeks to showcase resilient and courageous Ukrainian communities to the global community and encourage European municipalities to collaborate with them. As such, a Swedish-Ukrainian cooperation forum for municipalities will be held in Stockholm to facilitate the establishment of partnerships between interested Ukrainian and Swedish communities. On the website of Cities 4 Cities | United 4 Ukraine, it is indicated that the forum's dates and registration information will be made available shortly.⁵⁶ The Cities 4 Cities | United 4 Ukraine initiative was created by SALAR International in collaboration with the cities of Lviv (Ukraine) and Sindelfingen (Germany). It is supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The initiative's strategic partners include the All-Ukrainian Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities and the Association of Cities of Ukraine.⁵⁷

Interestingly, SALAR International is an enterprise owned by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. It concentrates on enhancing the efficiency of local and regional governments.⁵⁸ Since 2014, SALAR International has provided support to numerous municipalities in Ukraine. Initially, the emphasis was on enabling them to fulfil their obligations related to the significant decentralisation reform. From 2022, the assistance has been adapted to ensure that municipalities are still able to operate and provide essential services to residents in regions directly affected by the conflict or receiving a high number of internally displaced individuals. SALAR International offers guidance to local governments and related ministries on fiscal matters in times of war, assisting them in operating under such conditions. Additionally, the organisation has provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Education to tackle the challenges faced in maintaining educational continuity, such as reduced budgets for teacher salaries, the displacement of teachers and students and the destruction of numerous school facilities. There are two ongoing projects supporting Ukraine, namely the PROSTO project and the DSP project. The objective of the PROSTO project is to enhance the ability of local self-governments to offer high-quality services to Ukrainian residents; meanwhile, the DSP project provides strategic policy guidance and assistance in implementing Ukraine's decentralisation reform.⁵⁹ These examples prove that reconstruction efforts are already being undertaken, although the armed conflict has not yet ended.

⁵⁵ See: "Declaration on the Russian Federation's War against Ukraine," *Congress of Local and Regional Authorities*, 2023, at <https://rm.coe.int/declaration-6-the-anniversary-of-russia-s-war-against-ukraine-rapporte/1680aaa274>, 30 August 2025.

⁵⁶ "Swedish Municipalities Interested in Partnership..."

⁵⁷ "About Us," *Salar International*, 24 April 2023, at <https://salarinternational.se/salar/aboutus.67999.html>, 30 August 2025.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ "Salar International Intensifies its Support to Ukraine," *Salar International*, 16 March 2023, at <https://salarinternational.se/salar/aboutus/news/news/salarinternationalintensifiesitsupporttoukraine.69549.html>, 30 August 2025.

With reference to twin or sister cities, the pre-war twinning agreements primarily emphasised cultural and educational collaboration, as well as knowledge-sharing related to decentralisation reform, the functions of local and public administration and various other aspects of effective local and regional governance, including urban planning. After the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, these agreements have been modified to meet the new requirements of Ukrainian local and regional authorities, particularly in areas that have been on the frontlines of the hostilities. Cities in Ukraine have been actively pursuing and receiving requests from cities, towns and regions around Europe and the world to establish new partnerships. These partnerships have been primarily focused on providing humanitarian aid such as food, medical supplies, vehicles and accommodation for refugees.⁶⁰ However, there are also plans for longer-term reconstruction efforts. For example, in April 2022, Stockholm expressed its desire to become a twin city of Kyiv and provide expertise in various fields such as education, democratic governance, sewage and water management, urban planning, electricity and information technology.⁶¹ Stockholm's move is quite remarkable as, according to its international strategy, Stockholm should not sign any twinning agreement – moreover, the strategy stipulates that Stockholm does not sign general agreements. Only agreements that have a clear purpose and clear time limits should be considered.⁶² The twinning agreement with Kyiv may be regarded as such an agreement with a clear purpose and also as a measure undertaken in extraordinary conditions. A letter from Anna König Jerlmyr, Mayor of the City of Stockholm, to Mayor of Kyiv Vitaliy Klitschko, dated 1 April 2022, stated that: *As capital cities, Kyiv and Stockholm are sister cities by nature. And as such, the City of Stockholm would like to propose an agreement. Yesterday, our City Board unanimously adopted a statement expressing solidarity with the residents of Kyiv and a promise to assist the City of Kyiv in the rebuilding of your great city in the aftermath of the war. We offer you our expertise in regards to, for example, urban planning, water and waste, electricity and more.*⁶³

Among the Ukrainian cities, Kyiv is the one that has ties with some of the cities examined in the authors' larger project – Brussels, Geneva, Munich, Paris and, since 2022, Barcelona, Madrid and Stockholm.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ A. Szpak, J. Modrzyńska, R. Gawłowski, P. Modrzyński, M. Dahl, "Reaction to the Russian Aggression..."

⁶¹ T. Anakina, P. Spalek-Lipcean, H. Kovalchuk et al., "Challenges and Opportunities of LRA's Involvement...", p. 18.

⁶² "Stockholm's International Strategy" (obtained via e-mail from Stockholm International Affairs Unit), 2016, p. 5.

⁶³ A letter obtained via e-mail from Kristoffer Bengtsson, International Affairs Officer, City of Stockholm, Executive Office, 11 April 2022.

⁶⁴ "Bilateral Cooperation," *Київська Міська Рада. Офіційний веб-сайт*, at <https://www.kmr.gov.ua/uk/content/cooperation>, 30 August 2025; "Kyiv and Copenhagen to Become Twin Cities," *We are Ukraine*, 10 January 2023, at <https://www.weareukraine.info/kyiv-and-copenhagen-to-become-twin-cities-2/>, 30 August 2025; "Barcelona and Kyiv Strengthen Their Ties with a Collaboration Agreement," *Barcelona Ciutat Global*, 2022, at https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/relacionsinternacionalsicooperacio/en/noticia/barcelona-and-kyiv-strengthen-their-ties-with-a-collaboration-agreement_1233371, 2 April 2023; T. Anakina, P. Spalek-Lipcean, H. Kovalchuk et al., "Challenges and Opportunities of LRA's Involvement...", p. 18.

What is relevant in this context is the aforementioned mapping out of each city's potential strengths and contributions. For example, *The Hague will host the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression (ICPA), which will work under the auspices of Eurojust in The Hague. Also, as a result of a United Nations General Assembly resolution, an international Register of Damages for Ukraine (RD4U) will be established and will also be hosted in The Hague.*⁶⁵ In this way, The Hague takes part in broadly understood post-conflict reconstruction and offers its best, which is the experience of being the international city of peace and justice. Recently, the deputy mayors of Kherson, Mykolaiv and Mariupol visited The Hague and spoke with its mayor about Ukraine's reconstruction plans. It is expected that the coordination of municipal aid will be done through the Dutch Association of Municipalities (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, VNG) (e-mail response from Rob Schuurmans, Deputy Director of International Affairs, Municipality of The Hague, 6 April 2023). Similarly, Amsterdam's involvement in this effort is facilitated by the Dutch Association of Municipalities. At the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, VNG has collaborated with its Ukrainian counterpart, the Association of Ukrainian Cities, to create a collaboration programme. Experts from Amsterdam will contribute to reconstruction efforts, and most of the activities are conducted online (e-mail response from Sabine Gimbrère, Director of the International Office/City of Amsterdam, 6 April 2023).

According to the new Cooperation Master Plan 2023-2026 of Barcelona City Council, which has been initially approved, Kyiv is a new priority city. Regarding economic resources, Barcelona City Council agreed (in 2015) to allocate 0.7% of its own resources to Official Development Assistance and will maintain this commitment throughout the validity of the new Master Plan (Aprobado inicialmente el Plan Director de Cooperación para la Justicia Global 2023; e-mail from Jorge Fuentealba, an assistant to the Director of the Department of International Relations of Barcelona, 14 April 2023).

When signing the twin city agreement in September 2022, Barcelona and Kyiv decided that over the next three years, efforts would be made to enhance the connections between the two cities in areas such as technology, education, healthcare, arts and culture, tourism, transportation, urban management and public safety.⁶⁶ These areas may be regarded as fields of expertise where Barcelona is strong and experienced and where it can provide lessons and good practice exchange – all this within the twin city collaboration. In fact, in June 2022, Barcelona was already collaborating with the Ukrainian Consulate in Barcelona, the Ukrainian State Emergency System and the Department of Global Justice and International Cooperation of the Barcelona City Council to coordinate the delivery of specialised equipment and materials for firefighting and rescue (for example, a pumper truck, an articulated self-arm vehicle, biological protection equipment, masks, lamps, chainsaws, helmets and radio stations).⁶⁷ Regarding the co-

⁶⁵ E-mail response from Rob Schuurmans, Deputy Director of International Affairs, Municipality of The Hague, 6 April 2023.

⁶⁶ "Barcelona and Kyiv Strengthen Their Ties..."

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

operation and support during 2022, during the visit of the Mayor of Kyiv to Barcelona in September and the signing of a cooperation agreement, information was released that since the beginning of the Russian invasion, Barcelona allocated EUR 354,000 from an Emergency Appeal to subsidise five projects carried out by entities working on the ground in Ukraine: the Catalan Committee for Refugees, the Red Cross, Farmamundi, Clowns Without Borders and UNICEF. The institution collaborating with these projects is the Global Justice and International Cooperation Directorate of the Barcelona City Council (e-mail from Jorge Fuentealba, an assistant to the Director of the Department of International Relations of Barcelona, 14 April 2023). This indicates that cities are cooperating with entities other than cities.

Moreover, Barcelona's Mayor went to Kyiv in December 2022 to strengthen support and cooperation. Some announcements were made: on 16 December, Barcelona made a shipment of electricity generators, which was particularly necessary in light of the winter drop in temperatures. Hydraulic equipment for the rescue of people will also be sent, in addition to 300 biological protection suits, 100 chemical protection suits and 15,000 masks. In the second batch of shipments, the delivery of two additional vehicles is being prepared: a crane with the capacity to lift pieces of up to 40 tonnes, suitable for removing rubble and carrying out rescue operations, as well as a new fire truck⁶⁸ (La alcaldesa de Barcelona... 2022; e-mail from Jorge Fuentealba, an assistant to the Director of the Department of International Relations of Barcelona, 14 April 2023).

Another Spanish city, the capital Madrid, also signed a partnership agreement with Kyiv on 29 June 2022, concentrating on sustainable development, technical cooperation, culture and tourism and infrastructure.⁶⁹ These are the areas where Madrid has comparable advantages and much to share. Madrid has implemented other initiatives, including "Ukraine Needs You", a month-long project aimed at collecting material aid and donations for Ukrainian cities that contribute to their reconstruction during the war. The Madrid City Council has set aside EUR 2.4 million in funding to directly support projects in Ukraine (which is another example of in-conflict reconstruction efforts) and has also outlined other measures to provide assistance for Ukrainian refugees.⁷⁰

Berlin has expressed its commitment to aid Ukraine in its reconstruction efforts through humanitarian aid and infrastructure assistance. However, no specific reconstruction aid projects have been planned as of April 2022. Berlin will collaborate with its Ukrainian partners to determine their needs and work closely with them during the design and implementation of any future projects. Unfortunately, no timeline has been published for when such a project may begin, and there are no official documents available so far.

⁶⁸ "La alcaldesa de Barcelona visita a Kíiv para reforzar el corredor humanitario y de cooperación con la ciudad," *Barcelona Ciutat Global*, 12 December 2022, at https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/relacionsinternacionalscooperacio/es/noticia/la-alcaldesa-de-barcelona-visita-a-kiiv-para-reforzar-el-corredor-humanitario-y-de-cooperacion-con-la-ciudad_1235901, 30 August 2025.

⁶⁹ T. Anakina, P. Spalek-Lipcean, H. Kovalchuk et al., "Challenges and Opportunities of LRA's Involvement...", p. 94.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 101.

The City and Eurometropolis of Strasbourg strongly mobilised throughout 2022, both in favour of welcoming and integrating Ukrainian refugees into its territory, as well as in terms of political support for Ukraine via European networks of cities, donation drives, symbolic and cultural actions and the provision of emergency financial aid. Strasbourg also engaged with its German twin cities, Stuttgart and Dresden, in a partnership with the western Ukrainian city of Khmelnytskyi, which has a population of 300,000 and was the winner of the 2021 Europe Prize awarded by the Council of Europe. This original and unprecedented quadripartite partnership format aims, beyond emergency aid, to achieve a long-term objective of reconstruction and resilience of territories through the exchange of experiences and concrete projects that respond to local needs and populations (e-mail from Ignacio Felpeto Santero, Chargé de mission [Strasbourg Capitale Européenne] Ville et Eurométropole de Strasbourg Direction des Relations européennes, internationales et transfrontalières [Department of European, International and Cross-Border Relations], 19 April 2023; Strasbourg.eu, 2023).

5. CONCLUSIONS

It is expected that international city partners will offer tangible aid for both emergency relief and reconstruction, but their financial contribution will be significantly lower compared to national governments and multilateral agencies. Hence, the expertise and know-how of cities, ranging from urban planning to the provision of essential services and addressing social issues, are likely to be their real added value. However, it is important to acknowledge that despite good intentions and available resources, effective development cannot be guaranteed solely by international cooperation. Many assistance programmes have failed due to insufficient local knowledge, dysfunctional partnerships, inadequate management, incomplete risk assessment or unforeseeable circumstances.⁷¹ Ideally, in successful situations, a diverse group of stakeholders – such as international, regional and local actors, including community organisations, urban planners, engineers, architects, politicians, donors, local and international NGOs, economists and sociologists – collaborates and engages in consultations. These individuals and organisations may have distinct objectives and capabilities in their participation in the reconstruction process.⁷² Hence, it is important to match the capabilities of the helpers with the needs of the recipients.

The avenues that might be used by cities in order to participate in Ukraine's reconstruction include bilateral channels of the twin or sister cities system and multilateral city networks, both international and national, as shown by the examples of Eurocities and Swedish SALAR or Dutch VNG. Both of these avenues facilitate lesson learning and an exchange of good practices and expertise. Organs such as the EU CoR or the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities act as

⁷¹ H.P. Normandin, "Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction...", p. 2.

⁷² "Destruction and Reconstruction...", p. 4.

supplementary institutions, creating a general framework for reconstruction as well as a discussion forum for cities and regions. One of the newest examples of such a framework is the Declaration of the International Summit of Cities and Regions of 20 April 2023. The summit took place in Kyiv and gathered representatives of local governments from Europe, the USA and Israel as well as the EU CoR and the CoE Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. All the participants expressed their readiness to *promote Ukraine’s ownership, close cooperation and coordination with international donors and partners; to support the initiative to provide coordinated political, financial, expert and technical assistance for the post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian communities and regions based on a bottom-up approach*.⁷³

As the research shows, some reconstruction efforts have already been made, which means that they are not limited solely to the post-conflict phase. This conclusion aligns with another that the reconstruction involves providing immediate stabilisation through humanitarian and technical assistance, for example, restoring electricity and water supply (which is necessary during the conflict).

War in Ukraine and the growing role of cities in multi-level governance have given rise to unprecedented – both current and even more so future – participation of cities in the post-conflict reconstruction of Ukraine, a state destroyed by an aggressive war. Table 1 below summarises the avenues through which European cities contribute to Ukraine’s post-conflict reconstruction as well as the stages at which this occurs.

Table 1. Cities’ contribution to Ukraine’s post-conflict reconstruction

Avenues		Time of contribu- tion – in conflict	Time of contribu- tion – post conflict
Sister cities	yes	yes	yes (main efforts)
City networks	yes	yes	yes (main efforts)
National local governments’ associations	yes	yes	yes (main efforts)
EU CoR	supplementary/ facilitative role	yes	yes (main efforts)
CoE Congress of Local and Regional Authorities	supplementary/ facilitative role	yes	yes (main efforts)

Source: authors.

Taking into account the various actors engaged in Ukraine’s reconstruction efforts, it is important to indicate that the success of the reconstruction effort requires efficient collaboration among all levels of government. Local leaders’ ability to bring together various partners towards shared goals is critical. For example, in this line of reasoning,

⁷³ “Declaration of International Summit of Cities and Regions,” *President of Ukraine. Official Website*, 20 April 2023, at <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/deklaraciya-mizhnarodnogo-samitu-mista-regioniv-82381>, 30 August 2025.

Eurocities expressed its readiness to work with the EU to achieve the reconstruction goal for the benefit of the Ukrainian people and contribute to building a future of peace, unity and democracy.⁷⁴ All of this is the expression of a concept of multi-level reconstruction. Just as multi-level governance is a necessary solution to many global problems, so is multi-level reconstruction to the problem of rebuilding Ukraine. All the actors, including cities, have to play their roles.

It is fitting, in the author's opinion, to finish with a quote from Dario Nardella, President of Eurocities, commenting on the plans for Ukraine's sustainable reconstruction: *At city level, we have long developed relationships and networks, many of which have been strengthened over recent months as we have accepted refugees and sent aid. We are ready to respond quickly to people's needs and to plan for the future. By cooperating with many municipalities and regions through [the European Alliance for Cities and Regions for the reconstruction of Ukraine], we will help Ukrainian people get back on their feet.*⁷⁵ In this way, cities may also contribute to international peace and stability.

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⁷⁴ "Cities preparing the Ground..."

⁷⁵ "Cities and Regions Launch Alliance for Ukraine Reconstruction," *EuroCities*, 1 July 2022, at <https://eurocities.eu/latest/cities-and-regions-launch-alliance-for-ukraine-reconstruction>, 30 August 2025.

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