



## MY COLLEAGUE FROM UKRAINE

A blog series by our Ukrainian guest researcher  
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### Ukrainian CSOs in the field of culture at times of war

In this blog I would like to share with you about the activities of Ukrainian NGOs and other CSOs in the field of culture during the war. As I have mentioned in the previous blogs, the war pushed many civil organizations in Ukraine to change temporarily the focus of their activity or at least to add some activities in response to the current situation.

Activists from the field of culture do not stay aside. Various cultural NGOs started a lot of initiatives aimed at supporting the cultural and art workers in the time of war, many dedicate their time to help the civilians onsite or to the purchase of medical and tactical supplies.

I will start with the several cultural initiatives from Mariupol, a city that has seen some of the worst devastation since Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 of February with about 20,000 civilians killed according to the [preliminary estimations](#) of Ukrainian officials. The city, the infrastructure of which is now virtually destroyed, including the Academic Regional Drama Theater, that served as a bomb shelter for an [estimated](#) 600 civilians and was destroyed in a Russian Air Force air strike in March, had in 2021 the status of the [Big Cultural Capital of Ukraine](#).

[Platform “Tu”](#) it’s an art platform in Mariupol whose history began in 2015, when some of the future members of the organization fled to the city from the occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The NGO was registered in 2016 and since that has been working on promotion of human rights and freedoms through culture and contemporary art through realization of a number of projects: art residences (among other, for example [Woven network/Women’s network](#) that addressed the pandemic and mass lockdown of the cultural sphere), workshops and [an art cluster Os`](#) — a project for teenagers and youth of Mariupol that aimed at increasing the inclusion of young people in the cultural life of the city.

Since the war came to Mariupol for the second time in February, 2022, the Platform “Tu” established an [Emergency Fund](#) to provides one-time financial assistance to those people who fled the city are in need of the financial support, primarily to the families of adolescents who are members of the Os`

art cluster, people who have got injured during the shelling or evacuation, people with disabilities, and families with children.

["Freefilmers"](#) is a cinemovement and NGO, that promotes independent filmmaking in Ukraine, especially East Ukraine and decentralization of the cultural process. It also states its goal as “making films as alert and sensitive to the reality as possible and whose main focus is the human life and struggle for equality and freedom”. Organization that cooperates with Platform “Tu” was born in Mariupol with some active members also living in other Ukrainian cities. Since the war started the team of "Freefilmers" whose members fled Mariupol and are now based in different cities got organized themselves to deliver various support that is not limited to the artists community only. Besides supporting the underground artists and queer activists affected by war on a horizontal basis of mutual aid, organization helps with the transportation of humanitarian aid, medical supplies, and equipment to the regions most affected by war, helps refugees with the transportation to get to the safer places, supports hospitals and volunteer centers. "Freefilmers" also [collects donations](#) to support these activities.

Moving towards central Ukraine, we should mention the cultural community center [Shelter+](#) which is based in the industrial city of Kryvyi Rih. This NGO sees its mission in “creation of an environment where people can feel free and safe, regardless of age, beliefs, nationality, social and financial status”. Since 2020 [Shelter+](#) has conducted various projects in the field of art, sports, and civic education mostly for the children, teens and young people. Now the organization is turned into a volunteer hub that provides various assistance to internally displaced people, including short-term accommodation and psychological support; supply the people in need and orphanages in Kryvyi Rih and nearby cities as well as in occupied towns and villages of the Kherson region with the medicine, food kits etc. Besides that, Shelter+ organizes evacuation of people with disabilities and their families and helps them to find a place to stay that would fit their specific needs in other countries. Shelter+ is work is also unter financed by [donations](#).

A large number of cultural organizations that are located in Kyiv have also reoriented their work because of the challenges the war has brought.

For example, so did the [Kyiv Contemporary Music Days](#) — an NGO from the field of music. Since 2015 it has conducted hundreds of lectures and master classes for composers and musicians as well as for the wider audience, many international festivals and concerts of chamber, orchestral, electroacoustic music. Organization sees its mission in nourishing the musician’s community, developing the ecosystem of modern academic music and creating new formats and opportunities for art education, professional interaction and creative realization of artists. After the war started, this NGO [created a fund](#) to support classical musicians, especially elderly musicians and musicians with disabilities, those musicians who lost their jobs and those who needed to flee from Ukraine. This support includes provision of the most basic needs such as ensuring a basic standard of living and security: food, medicine, and housing as well as one-time financial assistance. Besides that, this organization tries to help musicians to keep their music practice going by giving small financial support so they could buy an inexpensive instrument in case of loss and to maintain their instruments in a proper condition.

Kyiv Biennial is a project started by the NGO [Visual Culture Research Center](#) as an international contemporary art biennale, held every two years in Kyiv since 2015 and a forum for art, knowledge, and politics that integrates exhibitions and discussion platforms. Since the beginning of the war, the NGO launched the [Emergency Support Initiative](#) (ESI) to give various support to the members of the cultural and artistic community. While the primary goal of the ESI is to give immediate financial support to fulfill the basic needs for those who had to relocate because of the war and those who are remaining in the cities which are occupied by the Russian Army, it also supports art residencies in Ukraine that extended their capacities to host those who had fled the war zones.

Finally, I would also like to mention a relatively new initiative, which emerged during the war. [Museum Crisis Center](#) — is grassroots initiative developed by a director of a Lviv-based memorial museum of totalitarian regimes [Territory of Terror](#) and which is implemented by this museum together with two NGOs: [Insha Osvita](#) and The New Museum. It aims to provide financial, organizational, and human support to small regional museums and their teams in times of war. As the governmental financial support on the national level is still mostly focused on the major national museums and preservation of their collections, smaller museums located in the smaller cities and villages face significant difficulties and the local authorities are not always able to help them because of the lack of funds in local budgets. Therefore, Museum Crisis Center tries to help regional museums in this hard time and also seeks to develop a stable grassroots structure that could strengthen the museums in the process of after war restoration and to serve as a tool of mutual assistance between museums and NGOs in this field in different crisis situations after the war.

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