



 UK/Ukraine – Creative Impact Fund

The Possible: A Community Action Lab for Recovery & Renewal in Ukraine

Harnessing the skills, ingenuity and resilience of entrepreneurs is essential in rebuilding towns in Ukraine



a COMMUNITY ACTION LAB FOR RENEWAL IN UKRAINE

CIRCE 2023 Final Report by Civic

I. SUMMARY

The Possible Community Action Lab in Ukraine is a proactive response to the pressing socio-economic challenges faced by towns affected by the Russian invasion. At its core, the Lab harnesses the U-Process methodology to prototype initiatives that contribute to the comprehensive revitalization of towns and the strengthening of community resilience.

The long-term impacts of the war in Ukraine pose significant challenges across various facets of society. For entrepreneurs, adapting to this new landscape requires access to flexible capital, relevant partnerships, and a robust entrepreneurial support infrastructure. Unfortunately, international organizations' top down processes for allocating funds have great difficulty meshing with emerging solutions coming from within local communities.

The Possible Community Action Lab addresses this central challenge by understanding and mapping the community's realities, synthesizing insights to shape a shared vision (referred to as a "Living Blueprint"), and co-creating and implementing initiatives (prototypes) that respond to the needs of local residents.

The primary goal is to support impact entrepreneurs on the ground by helping to establish a healthy grass-roots ecosystem for community revitalization in smaller Ukrainian towns and cities. The approach of The Possible Lab is based on a collaborative, place-based, citizen led framework. It convenes a diverse group of stakeholders under the banner of a Citizens Assembly, creating a participatory platform for ongoing dialogue, innovation, and collective action, led by the participants themselves.

Operating within a diverse coalition that includes local leaders, social entrepreneurs, urban planners, Civil Society Organizations (CSO's), government officials, and members of the Civic team from the UK and Ukraine, The Possible Lab seeks to provide an answer to the central question that guides its mission:

"How can we rebuild Ukrainian communities to be more inclusive, vibrant, nourishing, and rich in opportunities?"

The journey of The Possible Lab began with a pilot phase in Ivano Frankivsk, a small city in South-West Ukraine, reknown for its entrepreneurial spirit and nurturing environment for displaced business-owners from around the country. The Lab invited participants from the existing entrepreneurial ecosystem to help define the Lab strategic direction, identify key beneficiaries,

select a community/region, and delineate impact goals. Zaid Hassan, author of "The Social Labs Revolution: A New Approach to Solving our Most Complex Challenges,"¹ played a key role as a consultant and mentor in establishing the foundations for our approach.

Building on the insights from the pilot phase, the project decided to undertake a second pilot in Voznesensk, a recently-liberated town in South-East Ukraine. The focus shifted towards supporting Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which play a crucial role in providing essential income to vulnerable families. This phase involved collaboration with ReStart Ukraine, described as "an open (source) collective of researchers and practitioners exploring and developing the best ways to restore afflicted urban and rural areas after destruction of such scale."

This project is now an ongoing endeavor, running agile innovation "cycles", securing additional funding and working in partnership with advisors from the City of Amsterdam Circular Economy Initiative. While the final selection of prototypes is still underway, initial projects include: a water and waste-management co-op, a micro-finance bank offering revolving loans, an outdoor youth camp to rehabilitate children and families in nature, a 'pop-up' farmers market, therapeutic beekeeping for veterans to learn honey-making (together with physical and psychological rehabilitation), temporary housing for returning residents and internally displaced persons (IDPs), an affordable community art-space, cafe, and 'graphics' museum, and the holistic restoration and revitalization of the Mertvoid River and its ecosystems. These initiatives collectively address the core environmental and social dimensions of the town's rejuvenation and cater to the pressing needs of its entrepreneurs, residents, and IDP's.

The Possible Lab places a significant emphasis on an 'innovation process', characterized by a rapid, iterative, and adaptive approach to funding new initiatives. This strategy accommodates the constantly changing landscape while fostering continuous learning. In navigating differences in language, culture, worldviews, and work practices, the Lab facilitators strive to create an environment conducive to deeper listening, helping the bottom up and top down processes to adapt and connect.

The Lab aligns with Civic's broader activities at the national level, including a catalytic impact investment fund and building an alliance of partner organizations in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to support the nascent "enabling environment". Depending on the Lab's long-term impacts and potential for scale, Civic is considering redirecting the impact fund to directly serve the prototypes and teams of these local Labs.

As the Lab continues to evolve, significant changes are already evident within our team and in the Voznesensk community. Even the prototype initiatives are leading to new thinking about health, education, and rehabilitation outcomes and improving access to key municipal resources. The prototyping teams are also contributing to the growth of cultural, natural, and financial capital, essential for community revitalization. Although the full realization of these initiatives is yet to be seen, the development of the "Living Blueprint" and the launch of The Possible Lab are significant milestones. We also expect these efforts to extend beyond Voznesensk, potentially impacting other Ukrainian communities.

Our journey has underscored the importance of adaptability and collaborative decision-making in a dynamic environment. Key learnings include the need to develop all four 'stacks' of Zaid Hassan's model of Lab Architecture, to ensure the Lab's long-term effectiveness. We've also recognized the importance of connecting to existing global and regional solutions to avoid duplicating efforts. Cross-pollination between labs is also another crucial area for improvement. We are now

¹ "The Social Labs Revolution: A new approach to solving our most complex challenges." by Zaid Hassan (Berret-Koehler 2014)

streamlining processes for clearer, more effective communication and knowledge sharing. Addressing funding constraints is also a priority, acknowledging the need for parallel fundraising efforts to ensure sustainability. These learnings are actively shaping our approach to future Community labs which we hope to implement across Ukraine and beyond.

As this is an emergent collaboration and the prototypes are still underway, we wish for the storytelling to be led by the actors involved with an official public launch. We look forward to sharing more insights about our journey and process as well as an open-source Blueprint when the Lab in Voznesensk is more established in the coming months. If you would like to read the full CIRCE report, please contact anna.elliott@civic.co



THE POSSIBLE LABS

Impact entrepreneurs at the forefront of rebuilding their communities



THE POSSIBLE ALLIANCE

Building the enabling environment for impact entrepreneurs to thrive



THE POSSIBLE FUND

A Fund of Funds supporting impact entrepreneurs through the alliance partners

Civic's three pillars of activity.