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CULTURAL STRATEGY IN LARGE CITIES OF UKRAINE FROM 1991 TO THE PRESENT: TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN CULTURAL POLICY

Abstract

This article provides a culture-studies and policy-analytical interpretation of the transformation of urban cultural policy in Ukraine's large cities from 1991 to the present. It conceptualises the large city's contemporary culture as a network-based, multi-centred system that combines everyday cultural practices, institutions, environments, and governance, and shows how municipal policy has shifted from a post-Soviet, sectoral-institutional model oriented to maintaining public cultural networks toward strategic planning and policy strategizing based on indicators, cultural mapping, participatory instruments, and infrastructure priorities. The paper identifies key institutional stages of this trajectory: the 1990s transition under resource scarcity; the 2000s stabilisation with event- and tourism-driven urban branding; the 2010s expansion of strategic planning under decentralisation; the post-2014 growth of partnerships, grant-support models, and multifunctional hubs; and the post-2022 reframing of culture as an element of urban resilience, social cohesion, mental recovery, memorialisation, and international representation. On this basis, the study compares approaches to cultural planning through municipal strategic documents and programmes, illustrating how shared policy motifs (human-centredness, heritage, accessibility, digitalisation, infrastructure modernisation, and international communication) are adapted to different urban identities and risk profiles, including wartime threats to heritage that require risk-informed governance. The article argues that the key

governance implication for the 2020s is the need to strengthen the analytical capacity of municipal cultural policy – data, harmonised definitions, monitoring, evaluation, and participation – so that cultural strategies operate as implementable mechanisms of recovery and long-term urban development rather than as declarative documents. Methodologically, it synthesises indicator-based measurement and cultural-infrastructure perspectives with the normative-institutional effects of decentralisation and European cultural cooperation, while foregrounding the structural problem of fragmented city-level data and definitional variability of cultural and creative sectors.

Keywords: urban cultural policy; cultural strategy; municipal governance; cultural infrastructure; cultural mapping; creative industries; decentralisation; resilience and recovery; heritage protection; Ukraine.

Problem statement. Urban cultural policy has become a key domain of municipal governance in Ukraine's large cities, shaping how cultural services, infrastructures, and public participation are organised. Yet the post-1991 evolution of this domain remains insufficiently synthesised in culture-studies scholarship. After 1991, Ukraine's large cities found themselves in a situation of dual transition: from a post-Soviet model of cultural governance oriented toward maintaining a network of public "social-cultural institutions" to a policy increasingly articulated as strategic planning and policy strategizing—through indicators, mapping of cultural supply, assessment of creative potential, participatory instruments, and infrastructure priorities. At the same time, culture-studies generalisation of this transformation at the level of the large city (as a system of everyday practices, institutions, environments, and governance) remains fragmentary: first, due to the conceptual dynamism of the boundaries of cultural/creative sectors; second, due to a shortage of comparable city-level data and policy-relevant indicators. The deficit of harmonised approaches is evident in attempts to measure the cultural and crea-

tive potential of cities [1], in debates on how to define and measure cultural infrastructure [2], and in the gap between the normative framework and actual regimes of local responsibility under decentralisation [3].

Analysis of recent research and publications. Recent publications form several complementary lines of analysis that are significant at the urban level. First, empirical approaches to measuring culture and creativity, proposed by Cedos research, offer indicator-based models and document constraints in data availability, which directly affect cities' capacity to plan culture as a public policy domain [1]. Second, research on cultural infrastructure in the article by S. Ovcharenko emphasises typologies (from classical institutions to hubs and multifunctional spaces) and the problem of definitional/statistical compatibility without which comparison and effectiveness assessment are impossible [2]. Third, the normative-institutional context is outlined in the Ukraine cultural policy profile in the Compendium prepared by Council of Europe/ERICarts, with an emphasis on the role of local self-government and the significance of the post-2014 decentralisation reform [3]. Fourth, in the 2020s the wartime context has radically strengthened the resilience/recovery and cross-sectoral coordination discourse in the analytical report by the European Commission (DG EAC) and the Cultural Relations Platform, where local cultural institutions, hubs, and community centres are described as key agents of social cohesion and mental recovery [4], while international heritage protection regimes are also foregrounded as a component of risk-informed urban planning in UNESCO communications [5], [6]. Finally, M. Pesenti's research report on cultural revival and social transformation documents the emergence of new institutional formats and partnerships among cities, civil society, and donors [7], which provides a basis for interpreting urban strategies as practices of managing change rather than merely as documents.

Purpose of the article. The purpose of the article is a culture-studies and analytical interpretation of the transformation of urban cultural policy in Ukraine's

large cities from 1991 to the present through: (1) clarifying the concept of "contemporary culture of the large city" as a network-based and multi-centred system; (2) identifying institutional stages in the development of urban cultural policy; (3) comparing approaches to official cultural planning using examples of municipal strategic documents and programmes; (4) outlining key challenges and governance implications for cultural strategies in the context of war, decentralisation, and European integration.

Presentation of the Main Material. After 1991, urban cultural policy in Ukraine's large cities gradually shifted from the inertia of a sectoral-institutional model of the cultural sphere toward the language and practices of strategic planning: measuring cultural supply, identifying creative potential, shaping participatory instruments, and setting infrastructure priorities. However, culture-studies generalisation of this transformation at the level of the large city (as a system combining everyday cultural practices, institutions, environments, and urban governance) remains fragmentary, due both to definitional variability (instability of conceptual boundaries) of the cultural/creative sectors and to the lack of comparable urban data and policy indicators. This is evident in attempts to construct indices of the cultural and creative potential of Ukrainian cities and in debates on how to define and measure cultural infrastructure [1], [2].

The long period of post-Soviet transformation unfolds against a complex multi-level normative framework that combines state definitions of culture, the networked character of cultural services, and the competences of local self-government. The Ukraine cultural policy profile (Compendium) emphasises the role of legislation in the sphere of culture and local self-government, and notes that the decentralisation reform launched in 2014 changes regimes of responsibility and resources for local cultural provision [3].

The relevance of analysing urban cultural strategies in the 2020s has sharply increased due to the combination of the wartime context, European integration

processes, and recovery needs. A report prepared within European mechanisms of cultural cooperation stresses that during the full-scale war innovative solutions emerged in the cultural sphere (local institutions, hubs, community centres), while themes of social cohesion, mental health, recovery, and cross-sectoral coordination were intensified; it also highlights the potential of decentralisation as a "motor of change" for local development [4].

The conditions of full-scale war have brought cultural policy in large cities into the domain not only of development but also of safeguarding tangible heritage, symbolic landscapes, and mobilising international support mechanisms. UNESCO reported in 2023 that the Historic Centre of Odesa was inscribed on the World Heritage List and simultaneously on the List of World Heritage in Danger, which activates instruments of enhanced technical and financial assistance for protection and, if necessary, restoration of the property [5]. In autumn 2023 UNESCO also reported the inscription of Ukrainian sites in Kyiv and Lviv on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to the threat of destruction, underscoring that urban cultural policy is now compelled to integrate a risk-oriented planning regime as a постоянна (permanent) variable in governance decisions [6].

In this context, the cultural system of the large city at the contemporary stage can be defined as a network-based, multi-centred, event- and infrastructure-organised system comprising: (a) cultural life as the production and consumption of symbolic meanings in public and semi-public spaces; (b) the creative economy as a segment of employment, entrepreneurship, and innovation linked to cultural practices; (c) enabling conditions—accessibility, mobility, safety, digital tools, administrative capacity, and residents' participation. This tri-sphere logic is proposed by attempts to measure the cultural and creative potential of five Ukrainian cities, where data limitations and the need to develop monitoring approaches are explicitly articulated [1].

A key shift compared to the late twentieth-century model lies in changing the basic governance object of cultural policy: from culture as a set of institutions (theatre, museum, library, house of culture) to culture as a plurality of platforms, spaces, clusters, festivals, local initiatives, and institutions of a combined format. A scholarly article on cultural infrastructure emphasises typologies that include not only classical objects (museums, libraries, theatres) but also cultural hubs/districts and multifunctional venues; at the same time, it stresses that harmonising definitions and statistics remains a core problem for systemic governance [2].

The historical trajectory of urban cultural policy from 1991 to the present can be described as a sequence of several stages without a detailed chronological narration, but with attention to institutional turning points. In the 1990s, post-Soviet transformation dominates: cultural infrastructure inherits extensive institutional networks and practices of administrative governance, but faces resource deficits and a redefinition of culture's role in urban development; at the societal level, the role of informal initiatives and new forms of cultural mediation gradually increases. In the 2000s, relative stabilisation and city "branding" through eventfulness, tourism, major festivals, and investments in central spaces lay the groundwork for further institutionalisation of creative discourses. In the 2010s, strategic planning intensifies, the terminology of the "creative city" concept spreads, decentralisation reforms are launched, and local strategic cultural documents appear either as a distinct policy or as an integrated development block [3].

After 2014, the role of culture as a resource of urban resilience and social integration visibly increases: in practice, the trend of multifunctional cultural hubs expands, municipal programmes supporting local projects (from education to urban history) grow, and a new ecosystem of interaction among city administrations, civil society, and donors takes shape. The Chatham House report highlights the nationwide trend of multifunctional cultural hubs and the strengthening of partner-

ships in the cultural sector, which provides grounds for scaling such models at the city level, including in the capital [7].

After 2022, cultural policy in large cities is increasingly less "sectoral" and increasingly becomes a framework for resilience, memorialisation, trauma-related work, mental recovery, and international representation. The European analytical report explicitly articulates the need to describe and scale the experience of local cultural institutions/hubs during wartime, treat culture as a factor of social cohesion, and integrate it into recovery, education, and economic policies [4].

Official strategies and programmes of cultural planning in large cities demonstrate both shared features (human-centredness, heritage, infrastructure, accessibility, digitalisation, international communication) and differences shaped by distinct urban identities, economic models, and wartime risks. For Lviv, the "Culture Development Strategy 2025" is indicative: it formulates priorities for reforming cultural policies and participation and emphasises decentralisation of culture (developing modern infrastructure in all districts and creating active community cultural spaces), responsible attitudes to heritage, innovative interdisciplinary cultural education, culture as a space of dialogue, and effective financing and governance. Importantly, the document directly identifies the "Soviet" network of cultural-educational infrastructure as requiring material and substantive renewal and proposes a vision of new centres of attraction—from coworkings and incubators for creative industries to multifunctional centres in districts [8].

At the same time, in 2025, according to the municipal institution responsible for monitoring and implementation, Lviv adopted a long-term Strategy to 2035, whose mission is formulated as "culture: a force for transforming the city in the wartime and post-war period"; among the priority directions it explicitly names "Culture as national security," "Cultural heritage and memory," "Cultural diplomacy," and "Governance, financing, infrastructure," while also underscoring the involvement of the public and expert community in preparing the document ("…a

questionnaire for residents, over 30 interviews with opinion leaders and 6 expert focus groups") [9]. This indicates an evolution of strategic planning at the municipal level: from a logic of "modernising the cultural sphere" to a logic of "culture as an integrated mechanism of security, memory, and international positioning" [9].

In Kyiv, the strategic discourse of recent years consistently links culture with creative industries, spatial policy, and digital services. In the draft "Kyiv City Development Strategy to 2027" (2024), the cultural block is formulated as one of the strategic directions of urban development: it includes, among other things, creating cultural spaces and clusters as an instrument for improving the quality of cultural services (with principles of multifunctionality, polycentricity, and accessibility), modernising the material and technical base of cultural institutions, expanding cultural services in the digital environment, and international promotion of national cultural products. In this logic, culture appears not as a secondary component of urban development but as one of its operational mechanisms (space, accessibility, data, digitalisation, partnerships) [10].

The degree of transition from strategic formulations to implementation practices in the capital can be partially traced through public reporting. In the report on the implementation of the city target programme "Capital Culture: 2025–2027" for the first quarter of 2025, the programme's aim is defined as creating conditions for high-quality and accessible cultural services and strengthening culture's role in social consolidation and civic identity formation, as well as restoring cultural and artistic potential and ensuring culture's role in post-war recovery; it also highlights tasks of mental recovery through art for those affected by the full-scale invasion, digital innovations in cultural governance, and support for intercultural dialogue. This formalisation demonstrates how the wartime context is integrated into the toolkit of municipal cultural governance and operationalised within the logic of key performance indicators (KPIs) [11].

For Odesa, an early point of "official strategic planning" is the "Strategy for Economic and Social Development of the City of Odesa to 2022" (2013), which combines economic goals with the image of the city as a tourist and cultural centre, and frames the cultural dimension through the combination of tourism, historical distinctiveness, and architectural appearance (a separate priority direction "Pearl by the Sea"), as well as support for mass cultural events (exhibitions, festivals, etc.) and the formation of tourism clusters. Importantly, the document fixes an organisational mechanism of strategic planning through focus groups and the involvement of experts and city authorities, marking a transition from a directive-administrative planning model to a more communicative and participatory model, albeit with the socio-economic framework dominating over cultural policy as an autonomous direction of public governance [12].

International frameworks influence urban cultural strategies not only through project funding but also through the formation of a globally standardised discourse of cultural policy and heritage protection regimes. First, local strategies adopt universalist approaches that interpret culture more broadly than art and literature—as a way of life, a system of values, and forms of coexistence—thereby shifting planning from a sectoral-institutional approach (primarily oriented toward the network of cultural institutions) toward environments, practices, and cultural ecosystems [8]. Second, in wartime, World Heritage instruments bring cities to the level of international responsibility and assistance, thereby affecting local priorities (inventorying, protection, restoration planning, digital documentation, and communication of heritage value) [5], [6].

Beyond officially approved strategic documents, a distinct layer of cultural planning as a governance practice is clearly visible: cultural mapping, surveys, consultations, grant-support models, and multifunctional cultural spaces that operate simultaneously as infrastructure resources, event platforms, and socially oriented services. In Lviv's 2025 strategy, mapping cultural institutions and develop-

ing alternative routes are named among practical tasks in the heritage block, and the document describes involving residents through open meetings, discussions, interviews, and sociological research [8]. In the case of Kyiv, public reporting under the "Capital Culture" programme records cultural services as an object of regular monitoring and management, indicating a transition from fragmented project activity to an institutionalised governance cycle of "planning—implementation—reporting," although the problem of alignment between strategic declarations and actual funding/capacity remains structural [11].

In summary, contemporary culture of a large Ukrainian city can be defined as a system of producing and circulating meanings and practices (creative, memorial, educational, leisure-related) unfolding within urban infrastructure and public spaces, regulated by a combination of municipal policies and civic initiative, and increasingly integrated into urban development strategies through clusters, digital services, tourism, international partnerships, and humanitarian functions (supporting cohesion, mental recovery, work with trauma). This approach aligns both with the indicator-based logic of assessing "cultural life / creative economy / enabling conditions" and with contemporary understandings of cultural infrastructure where hubs and multifunctional venues coexist with classical institutions [1], [2].

Key challenges for the culture of large cities in the 2020s concentrate around five nodes: physical destruction and risks (including heritage); migration and changes in audiences; unequal access to cultural resources between central zones and peripheries; competition between a "festival showcase" and long-term institutional development; and digital asymmetry (simultaneous demand for digital cultural services and limited resources/competences). The wartime context makes these challenges structural and turns culture into an element of the recovery system—from international heritage protection to support for mental health and social cohesion [4], [5].

Conclusions. The general conclusion is that urban cultural strategies in Ukraine should strengthen the analytical capacity of cultural policy—i.e., data, mapping, participation, monitoring, and evaluation instruments—not as a technical add-on but as a condition of realistic implementation under war, decentralisation, and European integration. Academic culture-studies analysis is necessary to translate dispersed documents and practices into comparable models of urban cultural development, where culture is understood as infrastructure, economy, public space, and a mechanism of collective recovery, not merely as a "sector of institutions" [1], [3].

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