Lviv – European Youth Capital 2025

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Lviv is the first city in Ukraine to carry the title of European Youth Capital for the year 2025. We interviewed Taras Chura, Program Director of the network TVORY! and Initiative Lviv EYC2025 to learn more about what this title brought in, how the program managed to engage youth and citizens, and how the activities were carried out whilst surrounded by the challenging reality of war in their country.

Lviv was awarded the European Youth Capital 2025 – what did it mean for the city and communities affected by the war?

When we submitted our application in 2022, we obviously didn’t know what would happen. And, accordingly, when we decided to continue participating in this competition, despite the challenges of life in Ukraine, we embraced one crucial understanding: that this win is necessary for Ukraine, it is essential for Lviv, and for the whole country. The award is meaningful, especially for the youth community, because it will allow us to tell more about our country, our people, and what is truly happening. Having this spotlight will also allow us to shatter the fake information that was proliferating around the topic of the war. For us, this is a kind of microphone through which we can amplify the voice of youth abroad, making the youth of Ukraine heard across Europe.



How did the title help Ukrainian youth implement programs that support them in dealing with the challenges of the ongoing war, such as encouraging young people to stay in Ukraine, and those who left to return and to build connections between young people in Ukraine and the rest of Europe?

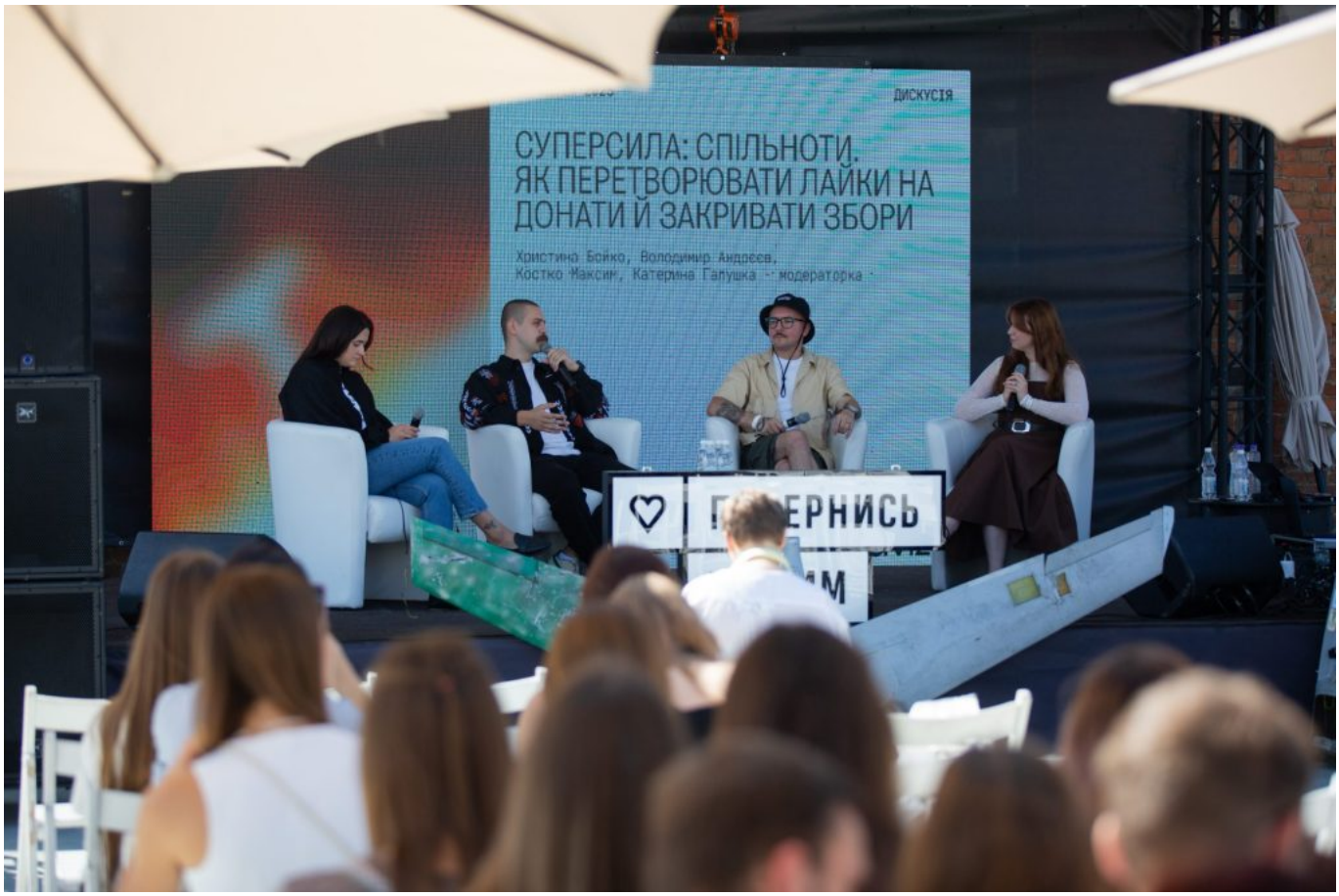
Of course, we do not possess specific data regarding the number of young people who left Ukraine during the full-scale invasion. At the same time, throughout the European Youth Capital year, we held a number of flagship events, including Molodvizh, Dysarium, Science Festival, Youth Day, as well as the opening of the European Youth Capital year, and more than a hundred smaller event.

The combined attendance of these flagship events and the year's capital activities covered **42,000 young people**.

Our goal was to create the maximum number of connections and opportunities among young people within Ukraine. So that they could understand that there are people here who understand them, that their like-minded peers are here, that their families are here, and that there is an opportunity to create their projects here and to work here. Through our projects, we inspired people to stay in

Ukraine and also to return from abroad, by demonstrating that there are opportunities here – they can stay, live and work here – the country has potential.

We conducted our flagship events even before the European Youth Capital year, and we will continue to hold them in the coming years. And we are certain they will gain in quality, host more participants, and, consequently, more people will be able to learn about the opportunities that surround them.



How did this aspirational program activate youth and other citizens and contribute to their participation and engagement? Tell us more about the role of the European Youth Capital Ambassadors you had?

We can talk a lot about this. We developed a separate program for European Youth Capital Ambassadors. These Ambassadors were young people who promoted the projects of the European Youth Capital 2025. Over **50 young people** joined the Ambassador program. They volunteered at our events, participated in the exchanges we organized throughout the year, and spread the word about the projects and values of the European Youth Capital, which was extremely important to us. These young people were constantly with the team; they got empowered throughout this process, and they wanted to share with others what it means that Lviv is the European Youth Capital. The Ambassadors were coming from various cities in Ukraine, not just Lviv.

It is also worth mentioning the **Youth Fund** project, which was established specifically during the European Youth Capital year. This fund gave young people the opportunity to receive financial support for their projects. This was the first municipal youth fund created in Lviv. We engaged international partners to finance the projects, and we also developed a separate program to support veterans. International funds cannot always support veterans' projects because veterans are often still active military personnel, and most international funds cannot support active military personnel.

Therefore, we created the concept of **Business Ambassadors of the European Youth Capital**. With each of these businesses, we created a special co-branded product, such as coffee, a dish, a T-shirt, a fleece jacket, socks, a cup, and much more. Embroidered shirts ("*vyshyvanky*") were also an exclusive item of the Youth Capital year. A percentage of the cost of this product went to replenish the Youth Fund. The Fund will continue to operate next year as a sustainable product of the European Youth Capital year.



For a country in a war environment, there must have been many challenges in terms of fulfilling your plans for the European Youth Capital 2025, can you tell us more about it?

Living in a country at war, there is a constant feeling that we have been continuously living under

stress and facing life challenges. Our first major challenge was the loss of our colleague, friend, and Program Manager of the European Youth Capital, Yaryna Bazylevych, on September 4, 2024. Since then, we have lived under an even greater challenge, as no document has ever been issued stating what to do when your colleague dies just a few days before a huge event (at the time, we were organizing Molodvizh). This was the first challenge that made us understand the value of human life, the value of the moment, the value of being here and now, and the value of what we must carry forward.

Taking into account all the challenges we faced, they essentially boil down to one huge challenge: the war and the loss of loved ones. While we were working, living, preparing our projects, and studying, we were also attending funerals, burying our friends, donating to the military, and supporting the troops. This is the constant rhythm in which you realize that after a night of air raids, you take an extra few hours to sleep, and then you roll up your sleeves and work, specifically for the sake of those who are fighting and holding the front line. The military inspires us, and they don't allow us to stop here in the rear. We have no other option but to work, work to the maximum, while they defend our country, and we develop it here without losing time.



Another challenge stemming from the main challenge of the war is security. Unfortunately, in my opinion, we were unable to bring a large number of Europeans to Ukraine this year. We had a large number of exchanges, but not such a large number of Europeans physically in Ukraine. We would like

to change this in the coming years. We hope that after the end of the full-scale invasion, or even before that, tools will be found to increase the number of young people, the number of Europeans in Ukraine, who could come to us for visits, exchange experiences, and feel the youth vibe of Lviv.

Taking into consideration current circumstances, what's the way forward for Lviv as a city with a focus on youth and their livelihoods?

At the very least, the European Youth Capital year program continues until March, and possibly a little longer. This is the national program for the European Youth Capital—a kind of "sharing title" with other cities. We are sharing the title with Zaporizhzhia, Poltava, and Mykolaiv—cities located closer to the East of Ukraine. In the future, we will continue to develop the youth strategy that crystallized throughout the Youth Capital year, the Youth Fund, as well as all our flagship events. We plan to scale up, grow, make projects more qualitative, and use this year, during which we had the opportunity to build a huge number of bridges, both with Ukrainian cities and businesses, and with European and foreign cities. Accordingly, we are not going to stop, as we have no other choice. We want to live here, we want to work here, develop, and continue our lineage. And as we say in the Youth Capital: **not east, but move!**

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