АСАМБЛЕЯ ARTSLINK 2025

ЗА МЕЖІ ЗЕЛЕНІШОЇ ТРАВИ

РОЗШИРЕННЯ МОЖЛИВОСТЕЙ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ КУЛЬТУРНИХ СПІЛЬНОТ

JAM FACTORY ART CENTER
ЛЬВІВ, УКРАЇНА
23 - 24 ТРАВНЯ
НАЖИВО / ОНЛАЙН

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CONSOLIDATED SUMMARY & STRATEGIC REFLECTIONS

ARTSLINK ASSEMBLY 2025

BEYOND GREENER GRASS

EMPOWERING UKRAINIAN CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

JAM FACTORY ART CENTER
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ArtsLink Assembly: *Beyond Greener Grass*

Jam Factory Art Center, Lviv, Ukraine 2025

Consolidated Summary
and
Strategic Reflections

Contents

Critical Issues / Changing Context

- **Permanent Emergency & Emotional Fatigue**
  Ukrainian cultural workers continue to operate under conditions of protracted crisis — emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and grief were described as daily constants, not exceptions. Grief was discussed not only about death but also about disconnection, missed opportunities, and institutional neglect.

- **Asymmetry of Power & Visibility**
  Regional inequality is deepening: Western Ukrainian cities remain overrepresented in cultural funding and international access, while eastern and central initiatives face under-recognition and fatigue. The imbalance between those working inside Ukraine and abroad (especially the new diaspora) reinforces divisions and weakens collective leverage.

- **Infrastructural Void**
  Many cultural workers operate without legal, financial, or institutional protection. This leads to burnout, informal labor, and systemic vulnerability. Grant logic favors fast, visible outcomes — sidelining long-term, care-driven, and process-based practices.

- **Misaligned Collaboration Models**
  International institutions still operate on timelines, values, and expectations that fail to account for wartime realities. Ukrainian partners face barriers of language, mobility (esp. for men), and administrative overload, often without meaningful co-authorship.

- **Ethical Dilemmas in Representation**
  Panels repeatedly questioned: Who has the right to represent Ukraine's cultural experience? How can displacement, trauma, or grief be expressed without appropriation or oversimplification? Silence and ambiguity were also defended as legitimate artistic strategies.

Exemplary Projects / Strategic Developments

- **Decolonization Guide Focused on Ukraine**
  Developed through a participatory, interdisciplinary process across multiple cities, the guide rethinks how Ukrainian institutions can work ethically with memory, diversity, and narrative agency in a post-Soviet, postcolonial, and wartime context.

- **Regional-to-Regional Collaboration Initiatives**
  Projects connecting artists from Dnipro, Kharkiv, Kramatorsk, and Lviv showcased how trust-based, non-hierarchical networks allow for faster, more meaningful exchange than formal centralized models.

- **Diaspora-Ukraine Artist-Led Cooperations**
  Emerging formats of collaboration between artists based in Berlin, Warsaw, and inside Ukraine allow for flexible, project-based mobility, but also reveal challenges of disconnection and shifting identities.

- **Community-Based Memory Projects (e.g. Kramatorsk women's stories)**
  Ground-up storytelling initiatives show how cultural work can directly support community healing, especially when tied to specific local loss, gendered trauma, or ongoing erasure.

What Is Needed? — Towards a Sustainable Cultural Ecosystem

- **Soft Infrastructure First**
  Investment must prioritize people, skills, and relationships — not only buildings or exhibitions. Programs that offer long-term residencies, slow research, and healing-oriented practice are critical.

- **Shared Authorship & Mutual Design**
  Avoid tokenism: projects involving displaced, regional, or diaspora actors must include them from the beginning as co-designers, not late-stage additions for representational balance.

- **Mediation Roles & Institutional Translators**
  A new layer of professionals is needed — those who can bridge Ukraine's cultural scene with international platforms, translating not just language, but values, urgency, and process logic.

- **Care Structures**
  Artist well-being cannot be addressed through wellness workshops alone. Safety, mentorship, downtime, and space to grieve must be built into budgets and timelines.

- **Equity in Access**
  Special attention must be given to those unable to travel, those working outside major cities, and those without fluent English or legal protection. Mobility and access are structural privileges.

Informal Observations from Breaks & Social Moments

- Many attendees expressed quiet frustration with the gap between symbolic gestures and actual support from both state institutions and international partners. "We are visible, but not heard."

- Informal conversations revealed the deep need for non-public, intimate spaces where artists can share grief, burnout, and fear without performance or outcome expectations.

- Several practitioners working abroad voiced concern over "diaspora disconnection" — the fear of losing contextual grounding in Ukraine while also being expected to represent it.

- Participants consistently emphasized the value of being physically present, not just for events, but for building informal bonds that undergird long-term collaboration.

Forward-Looking Recommendations

- **Embed Documentation as Strategy**
Make interregional and process-based projects visible — not for PR, but to legitimize and replicate models. Documentation must serve movement-building and policy influence.

- **Invest in Continuity, Not Moments**
Projects must not end when funding cycles do. Donors and institutions must shift from extractive pilot models toward longer-term frameworks based on mutual accountability.

- **Move from Visibility to Narrative Power**
Being 'seen' is not enough. Ukrainian artists must be allowed to shape how their stories are told, what formats are chosen, and which audiences are prioritized.

- **Build Multilingual & Multi-tempo Infrastructures**
Cultural diplomacy must function in more than English and across more than one operational tempo. Emergency and slowness need to co-exist in future frameworks.

Session 1

Artists Solidarity Panel - Perspectives and Initiatives

Speakers: [Katya Taylor](), [Olha Sahaidak](), [Alevtina Kakhidze](), [Borys Filonenko]()

Context

The ArtsLink Assembly, held in Lviv, took place against the backdrop of the ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine. The opening panel positioned itself as a space for reflection, solidarity, and shared vulnerability within the arts and culture sector. It emphasized the urgent need for community, honest dialogue, and mutual support, especially among displaced or disoriented cultural practitioners.

Key Themes and Insights

1. **Solidarity and Emotional Reality**
   - Speakers stressed that beyond logistical and funding needs, artists face deep emotional fatigue, isolation, and uncertainty. These states define the creative and existential condition of many practitioners today. But there is a hope in things that they can control — creation, community building, and solidarity.

   - The notion of "solidarity" was problematized and contextualized: true solidarity is not a slogan, but a practice rooted in empathy, trust, and honest communication.

2. **Normalizing the War vs. Emotional Resilience**
   - While daily life continues, participants debated the idea of "normalizing the war." Some viewed it as a necessary adaptation; others warned against internalizing war as permanent and acceptable.

   - Memory loss, inability to sleep, and chronic stress were cited as collective symptoms, challenging the sustainability of the cultural field and in general.

3. **Bureaucracy and Grant Access**
   - A key barrier for artists is navigating grant systems that prioritize short-term project deliverables over long-term or process-based work (inability to build sustainable processes).

- Emotional and cognitive overload, as well as logistical constraints (especially for men who cannot travel), limit access to funding and international opportunities.

4. **Absence of Systemic Support**
   - There is a structural void in supporting institutions and individuals over time. Many artists operate without legal, financial, or institutional frameworks, relying instead on ad hoc networks and personal effort.

5. **Disconnection and Communication Breakdown**
   - The cultural field is fragmented. There are significant rifts between those who stayed in Ukraine, those who left, and those in nomadic situations. Mistrust and defensiveness often inhibit collaboration. Cultural workers seek solidarity even having different experiences.

6. **Crisis of Representation and Ethical Challenges**
   - Who can be more effective in representing Ukraine's culture abroad? Can someone living outside Ukraine for years still speak on behalf of the modern community challenges?

   - How can cultural workers advocate for institutional change or systemic repair while facing ongoing survival challenges?

7. **Local Agency vs. Institutional Neglect**
   - The example of unevacuated museum collections highlights local directors' fears (job loss, asset confiscation) and the lack of state support. It reflects a broader trauma of abandonment by institutions.

   - Participants argued that long-standing disregard for regional culture workers has fostered a "Stockholm syndrome" of clinging to local control over cultural assets.

8. **Necessity of Trust-Building**
   - A recurring theme was the need to rebuild interpersonal and sectoral trust: between institutions, individuals, and regions.

   - Trust is a daily practice and requires tolerance for mistakes, acknowledgment of past traumas, and open, ongoing communication.

9. **Alternative Models of Support and Exchange**
   - Residencies like [Assortment Room](#) were cited as examples of more open-ended, trust-based models of artist support.

   - The need for *grooming* (care, peer validation, space for expression) was invoked both literally and metaphorically.

10. **The Role of Art and Storytelling**
   - Several artistic interventions ([e.g., the window soiled with pigeon droppings sent from Vienna](#)) were discussed as examples of complex, layered storytelling in times of crisis.

   - Anonymity in critical texts and the rise of pseudonymous online discourse were seen as responses to a lack of safe and honest public dialogue.

Conclusion

The opening panel did not attempt to offer clean resolutions. Instead, it invited multiplicity, disagreement, and vulnerability as foundations for rebuilding the cultural fabric. It emphasized that the post-2022 cultural field is in flux: solidarity must be reinvented, trust in institutions rebuilt, and emotional states reckoned with. The Assembly became a place of collective reflection, with honesty and openness as the necessary tools for resilience and regeneration.

Session 2

Presentation: Decolonization Guide Focused on Ukraine

Speakers: [Anastasiia Manuliak](#), [Kristīne Milere](#), [Lucy Zoria](#)

Context

The session presented the outcomes of a project led by the Ukrainian Institute (Kyiv) in collaboration with the British Council, the UK Museums Association, and Ukrainian museum partners. The key deliverable was a practical guide for foreign museums on interpreting and handling Ukrainian heritage from a decolonial perspective.

Key Themes and Insights

1. **Project Goals and Approach**
    *   The project aims to support foreign institutions that manage or seek to manage Ukrainian collections, offering a structured framework for working with Ukrainian art and heritage in a decolonial context.

    *   Unlike guides developed by institutions in former colonizing nations, this guide is written from the standpoint of a formerly colonized country, making it a pioneering resource.

2. **Key Elements of the Guide**
    *   The guide is designed to be a flexible and living document, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of decolonization.

    *   Content includes methodologies, principles, and case studies relevant to museum professionals working internationally.

3. **Process and Methodology**
    *   Over 100 experts were consulted during the development, with 20 core contributors involved throughout.

    *   The process included workshops in Kyiv, Vienna, and other cities.

    *   Ukrainian experts contributed cultural, historical, and curatorial insight, while international voices added comparative and methodological perspectives.

4. **Regional Relevance and Broader Impact**
   - Representatives from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia emphasized the guide's significance not only for Ukraine but for the broader post-Soviet and Eastern European region.

   - It was recognized that many regional institutions face similar challenges in confronting imperial histories and reconstructing institutional narratives.

5. **Challenges and Philosophical Reflections**
   - The guide doesn't claim to be final or universal; instead, it opens a space for dialogue and future revisions.

   - A recurring theme was that decolonization is not an event but an ongoing process that must be continuously revisited and negotiated.

   - The project team emphasized the urgency of starting this work now, even without complete clarity, and acknowledged that the guide will likely need to be rewritten within a few years.

6. **Institutional Motivation and Use Case**
   - One core function is to help curators and institutions abroad understand why Ukrainian heritage deserves autonomous interpretive frameworks rather than being subsumed into Russian or Soviet narratives.

   - The guide supports recontextualizing collections, avoiding imperial taxonomies, and making space for contemporary Ukrainian voices.

   - It encourages museums to collect contemporary Ukrainian art and include Ukrainian experts in curatorial and interpretive processes.

7. **Closing Reflections**
   - The presentation highlighted the importance of transnational solidarity among institutions in formerly colonized countries.

- It also acknowledged that while this Ukrainian guide is a step forward, each national context will require its own tools.

- The guide's publication marks not a conclusion but a launch point for wider conversations, collaborations, and future updates.

Conclusion

The final document is expected to be published online by the Ukrainian Institute in collaboration with the British Council. Attendees were invited to subscribe for a free copy and contribute to the ongoing dialogue around the guide's usage and future iterations.

[visit: https://ui.org.ua/en/projects/]

Session 3

Panel: Recovery and the Future of Ukrainian Culture

Speakers: [Hnat Zabrodskyy](#), [Lia Dostlieva](#), [Kateryna Iakovlenko](#), [Natalia Matsenko](#)

Context

This panel focused specifically on culture as a core component of national recovery efforts. It explored how cultural reconstruction is inseparable from economic and societal renewal, and highlighted the necessity to integrate culture into funding and policy frameworks for postwar Ukraine. Rather than discussing general policy directions, the session addressed pragmatic challenges and strategies from active practitioners, building a case for culture as essential infrastructure.

Key Takeaways

1. Culture as Human Infrastructure: Culture must be seen not as a luxury or an afterthought, but as an integral part of societal recovery and identity reconstitution. Cultural activity supports psychological resilience and community cohesion during and after wartime.

2. Advocacy for Cultural Investment: Speakers emphasized the ongoing difficulty in conveying to both Ukrainian authorities and international donors why culture must be funded now, not after material needs are met.

3. Trust and Long-term Relationships: Sustained international partnerships, built over years, are more effective than short-term reactive collaborations. The success of recent cross-national projects was tied to existing trust and co-ownership.

4. Case Study – [Contemporary Music in Berlin](#): A multi-year collaboration between Ukrainian composers and the Berlin-based KNM Ensemble attracted hundreds of local (non-Ukrainian) attendees to a concert of new Ukrainian music. Its success stemmed from the credibility of local hosts and consistent investment in Ukrainian-German partnerships.

5. Common Experience as Basis for Collaboration: Shared traumatic histories between Ukraine, Poland, and Germany can be reinterpreted as common ground for deeper cultural dialogue. One of the proposed projects will explore this through contemporary dance across the three countries.

Insights and Strategic Implications

1. Reframing Identity as Shared, Not Isolated: The term "identity" should not only distinguish Ukrainians from others, but also be used to find points of resonance with international audiences. Common cultural trauma (e.g., war) can be a shared foundation for exchange.

2. Culture as a Platform for Building Trust: Especially in diaspora or exile contexts, cultural activity provides continuity and connection. Projects that involve artists and managers abroad help retain networks and amplify relevance.

3. Multiregional Stakeholder Involvement: A [project on women's stories in Kramatorsk](#) exemplified effective engagement of IDPs, local audiences, and displaced Ukrainian creatives abroad. The outcome was a polyphonic, emotionally charged discourse that enabled collective healing.

Conclusion

The panel demonstrated that Ukrainian cultural actors are not waiting for recovery to begin after the war ends—they are building it now. The discussed projects illustrate how culture creates bonds, enables healing, and asserts Ukraine's agency in shaping its own postwar narrative. For recovery frameworks to be effective, they must include and invest in culture as a fundamental component of rebuilding Ukraine.

Session 4

Panel: Interdisciplinary and Interregional Cultural Projects

Speakers: [Hnat Zabrodskyy](#), [Yevheniia Nesterovych](#), [Yuliya Kostereva](#), [Yuriy Kruchak](#), [Les Vynogradov, Polina Bulat](#)

Context

This panel explored how cultural collaboration across regions of Ukraine has evolved during the full-scale war. The discussion focused on the practicalities, tensions, and ethical dilemmas that arise when projects connect cities with vastly different levels of visibility, resources, and security. Rather than offering policy models, the session highlighted lived experience: how artistic and institutional actors navigate asymmetries, exhaustion, and representational imbalance.

Key Takeaways

1. **Unequal Cultural Geography:** Western Ukrainian cities are overrepresented in funding and international exchanges, while central and eastern initiatives often face marginalization. This creates representational fatigue and erodes trust.

2. **Horizontal Networks as a Tool for Resilience:** In the absence of strong institutional support, peer-to-peer models enable cross-regional solidarity. Trust-based collaborations often operate faster and with more nuance than formal systems.

3. **Challenges of Displacement:** Project teams increasingly work in hybrid constellations, where part of the team is in Ukraine and part abroad. This produces friction in roles, expectations, and decision-making power.

4. **Co-authorship vs. Extraction:** Genuine interregional collaboration requires equal participation from the outset. Partners should not be included only for visibility or outreach—they must be engaged early on as full co-creators, with real input into the project's direction and content.

5. **Emotional and Logistical Burnout:** Constant adaptation, safety concerns, and funding insecurity lead to burnout among cultural workers. The labor of holding interregional dialogue is under-recognized and under-compensated.

Insights and Strategic Implications

1. **Decentralization Must Be Practiced, Not Claimed:** Policy narratives around decentralization often mask continued structural inequality. For decentralization to function, decision-making and funding power must be genuinely redistributed.
2. **Infrastructure Doesn't Equal Buildings:** Soft infrastructure (teams, skills, trust) is more crucial than physical space. Regional initiatives that survived war did so thanks to human networks, not walls.

3. **Documentation as Strategy:** Interregional cultural work is often under-documented, which makes it invisible in the broader field. Recording and sharing these practices is not about promotion—it's about validating the work, sharing knowledge, and making it eligible for institutional or financial support.

Conclusion

The panel emphasized that interregional projects are not only about connecting different places—they are about who holds influence. The ability to collaborate across regions, and to be acknowledged for it, depends on deeper issues like trust, control over the story being told, and visibility within the cultural field. To truly rebuild Ukraine's cultural ecosystem, these imbalances must be addressed through policy, funding, and equitable collaboration.

Session 5

Panel: Artists, Memory, Healing, and Grief

Speakers: [Kateryna Semenyuk](#), [Alevtina Kakhidze](#)

Context

This panel brought together artists, curators, and researchers working with themes of trauma, loss, memory, and public expressions of grief during wartime. Participants shared practices that engage both ethics and aesthetics of testimony and reflected on the limitations of art in expressing pain that is ongoing. A key emphasis was placed on understanding memory not as passive archive, but as an active and transformative process.

Key Takeaways

1. **Grief as Ongoing Process:** Grief was discussed not as a singular response to loss, but as a continuous state that requires time, space, and ritual to be lived through. Art can support this process without necessarily visualizing trauma directly.

2. **Memory as Responsibility:** When working with wartime memory, artists engage not only with factual representation but with the ethical task of remembering together. It is essential to avoid turning others' experiences into symbolic material.

3. **Silence as Expression:** Silence, absence, or incompleteness within a work can be as powerful as overt expressions of suffering. Sometimes art needs to withhold, to protect memory from simplification.

4. **Invisible Losses:** Particular attention was given to "losses without bodies"—the missing, displaced families, or the loss of home. These are difficult to represent and demand careful, respectful engagement.

Insights and Strategic Implications

1. **Memory Work Is Never Neutral:** Projects dealing with memory are inherently political, raising questions of whose loss is acknowledged and who gets to speak. This is especially relevant in contexts of colonial history and ongoing war.

2. **Healing Requires Structural Support:** Artists need more than psychological resilience—they need safe spaces, sustained programming, and freedom from the pressure of constant output.

3. **Rituals Enable Shared Grief:** Participatory formats such as audio walks or collective rituals may be more effective than official memorials. They create horizontal, lived forms of remembrance.

Conclusion

The panel illuminated the tension between the urge to speak about loss and the need to protect what remains unspeakable. Art may not always heal, but it can hold space—for pain that has no clear language, and for presence without explanation. In times of active grief, allowing for silence, ambiguity, and co-existence is itself a radical act.

Session 6

Panel: Strategies for Cooperation Between Ukraine, the New Diaspora, and International Institutions

Speakers: <u>Volodymyr Sheiko</u>, <u>Simon Dove</u>, <u>Liza German</u>, <u>Kateryna Radchenko</u>, <u>Kateryna Rietz-Rakul</u>, <u>Anton Ovchinnikov</u>, <u>Olha Honchar</u>, <u>Anna Kopylova</u>, <u>Daria Prydybailo</u>, <u>Kateryna Alymova</u> <u>Georg Schöllhammer</u>

Context

This panel addressed how relationships between Ukrainian cultural actors, the post-2022 diaspora, and international institutions have shifted since the full-scale invasion. While the war has increased international visibility for Ukrainian culture, it has also created asymmetries in power, access, and narrative agency. Panelists examined how long-term cooperation can be built without reproducing extractive dynamics, and how Ukrainian voices can remain central in defining their cultural agenda abroad.

Key Takeaways

1. **Diaspora as a Double-Edged Resource:** The post-2022 wave of cultural displacement created new nodes of visibility abroad. While this increases access to global platforms, it also risks disconnecting from local contexts and replicating privilege within diaspora circles.

2. **Representation Without Infrastructure:** Ukrainian cultural actors are increasingly invited to represent "Ukrainian perspectives" in international forums, but often without the institutional support or capacity to do so sustainably.

3. **Temporal Misalignment:** Ukrainian initiatives frequently work in conditions of emergency, while international institutions operate on long-term cycles. This mismatch in tempo leads to misunderstandings, burnout, and missed opportunities.

4. **Gatekeeping and Access:** International institutions still often act as gatekeepers, even when claiming solidarity. There is a need for more horizontal and trust-based modes of engagement that allow Ukrainians to define the terms of collaboration.

5. **Diaspora Needs Support Too:** New diaspora cultural workers often lack funding, infrastructure, and recognition. Assuming they are "safe" or "privileged" overlooks the precarity many of them experience abroad.

Insights and Strategic Implications

1. **Build Continuity Beyond Projects:** Cooperation must extend beyond short-term projects. This requires sustained institutional partnerships, fair compensation models, and space for co-authorship across borders.

2. **Invest in Cultural Mediation:** There is a growing need for professionals who can act as intermediaries between Ukraine and the international cultural field—translating values, navigating systems, and holding space for nuanced narratives.

3. **Shift from Visibility to Agency:** The goal should not only be to increase visibility for Ukrainian culture, but to ensure Ukrainians have agency in how their culture is presented, interpreted, and contextualized.

4. **Care as Strategy:** Emotional and logistical care—within teams and with partners—is essential for maintaining long-term cooperation under strain. Relational practices should be embedded into strategic planning.

Conclusion

This panel emphasized that meaningful cooperation is not about invitations, but about co-ownership. For Ukraine's cultural sector to thrive globally and ethically, collaboration must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward structural equity. That means shared authorship, mutual learning, and commitment across time, not only across borders.

COLOPHON

ArtsLink Assembly: Beyond Greener Grass
Jam Factory Art Center, Lviv, Ukraine
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Consolidated Summary and Strategic Reflections
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All public sessions are available in English and Ukrainian and speakers biographies at CEC
ArtsLink website here
[https://www.cecartslink.org/session/beyond-greener-grass-2025/]

Let the Body Speak, a contemporary dance film project by the Ukrainian contemporary
dance platform, and the *Distant Pairs* digital commissions by ISSUE Project Room and Time
Based were screened throughout each day.

A live concert by *Distant Pairs* composer/musicians Maryana Klochko and Oleksii Podat
closed the Assembly.

ArtsLink Assembly music by Shri Sriram.

ArtsLink Assembly: Beyond Greener Grass

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