



# Culture of defence, decolonisation and projection of future. Reflection on the impacts of the war in Europe on cultural practices and life of cities and communities

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Artículo recibido: 03/06/2021. Revisado: 16/09/2021. Aceptado: 08/10/2021

**Abstract:** This article presents an attempt to analyse the impact of the war in Europe on cities and the life of creators and communities. It is based on the analysis of publications in electronic media; posts in social networks; cultural and artistic projects and initiatives implemented in Ukraine, Germany and in virtual space; the author's own observations regarding cultural practices of residents of European cities; as well as on the results of communication with cultural professionals from Ukraine, Russia and other countries of Europe and North America published or happened from May to November 2022. Additionally, the article outlines some topics for future specialised research and address the topics for cultural cooperation projects and initiatives.

**Keywords:** International cultural relations; culture and security; anti-traumatic reflection and art practices; migrant arts and culture; decolonisation of culture.



**T**his article is the result of reflection on the socio-cultural effects of war on culture and the arts, cities and communities effected by military conflict and its immediate outputs and more distant impacts. It is not an academic work based on comprehensive multilateral analysis of the impact of the war on the cultural and creative sectors, the lives of creators and urban life, and changes in urban culture and cityscape, but such research is obviously recommended. The description of the situation and the proposed conclusions are based on the analysis of publications in electronic media; posts in social networks; cultural and artistic projects and initiatives implemented in Ukraine, Germany and in virtual space; the author's own observations regarding cultural practices of residents of European cities; as well as on the results of communication with cultural professionals from Ukraine, Russia and other countries of Europe and North America published or happened from May to November 2022. The author's reflections are illustrated by cases from visual and performing arts, the areas of

international cultural relations (ICR) and public diplomacy. The article touches on potential topics and directions for a future more thorough research. It also includes some practical issues to be addressed by ICR projects and initiatives that are needed, in the opinion of the author, during the war and after its end.

At the beginning, it is necessary to make one more comment regarding the fundamental "non-academic" nature of this article. This article has a rather emotional and journalistic tone. The author tried as much as possible to adhere to an unbiased and objective position in the analysis of cultural and artistic phenomena and description of the situation. However, this task is not easy as you constantly must make efforts to distract yourself from thoughts about whether all relatives and friends in Kyiv survived the morning rocket attack, how colleagues in the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine are working without electricity and water since yesterday, will there be a place to return to after the war? The editors of the magazine may not share the views of the author of the article. At the same time, the latter is very grateful for the opportunity to express her own

position. The possibility of expressing one's own position for Ukrainian artists nowadays will be specifically addressed in the article.

### **Ukrainian crisis, war in Europe or military conflict of contradicting civilisational models?**

What happened on 24 February 2022? What has been going on in Ukraine, Europe and in the world since then? It is necessary to express and explain the position of the author on this issue before moving to the socio-cultural aspects of the impacts of wars and other armed conflicts on the cultural life of the affected cities and communities. It is not a political statement, but rather a prism for interpreting events or a point of view for considering and understanding the situation.

The war started much earlier with the annexation of Crimea and partial occupation of Donetsk and Luhansk regions on the East of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. Now February 24 is another date of a tectonic break in the history of mankind – along with September 11.

It is not only Putin's or Russia's war against Ukraine, neither the war between Ukrainian and Russian people. It is a war against cruelty and for the possibility of any country freely choosing its own path of civilizational development. What's at stake is the survival of the whole of humanity.

Today the world is divided between those who understand the importance of security and respect for the sovereignty of any country for the survival of humanity and those who are ready to destroy the universe for the sake of imperial ambitions and/or allow the total brainwashing of their own consciousness.

People, nations, and countries that escaped from the captivity of the Russian-Soviet Empire after the fall Iron Curtain / Berlin Wall had the opportunity to choose their identity, values, and the path of civilizational development. Now we deal with the confrontation of idea and vision of a paternalistic hierarchic society with limited freedoms and no responsibility (represented by Putin's version of Russia) against a developmental path based on independency of the nation and personal responsibility of citizens (represented by Ukraine).

In October 2021 during the EUNIC Cultural Relations Forum "Looking back, moving forward. The future of the EU's international cultural relations", the participants had a discussion on what needs to be done if you look to

the future of Europe by the eyes of the Eastern Europe. In elegant premises of medieval Certosa di Pontignano in Siena the author urged her colleagues not to stop trying to maintain contact with the cultural community and civil society of Russia despite the growing militaristic sentiments in the country. It seemed that we still had time to prevent Europe and the world from sliding into the abyss of a new world war. It was so naive - cultural diplomacy against guns, planes, and missiles. Nevertheless, it is time to rethink today the role and potential of culture and art in preventing wars and preserving peace.

"What is happening to your country is happening to us all"

The author's friend and colleague Damien Helly in WhatsApp chat three hours upon the beginning of the war

This is our common war. But not Russia's war against Ukraine. For artists and cultural professionals, this is a war against cruelty and for the possibility of any country freely choosing its own path of civilizational development. What's at stake is the survival of the whole of humanity.

In this respect, security, understood as the guarantee of non-violent and diplomatic solving of any international disputes and prevention of any kind of military escalations, may become a fifth pillar of sustainable development along with economic growth, social inclusion, environmental balance, and culture development and inclusion into public policies. Even more, security and peace must be the focus of societal development, as without it the humanity is really approaching to the planetary disaster and self-destruction too close.

### **Ukraine from 2014 to 2022: The culture of understanding and reconciliation**

The war started in 2014. The same way cultural projects aimed to reduce barriers in understanding and foster cooperation among different communities were happening in conflict-affected regions since then.

"Frozen conflicts" can be as much about cultural identity as about economic and political differences. At the same time, an underestimation of cultural factors and a shortage of appropriate culture related actions can become the crucial

factors allowing internal – national level – conflicts as well as external conflicts between the countries to be established and developed. The case of Ukraine in respect to internal conflicts of socio-cultural nature as well as external conflict with Russian Federation illustrates the statement. Reconciliation involves the acknowledgement of common values and a common space. The main, or the first task, would be to consolidate the society consisting of many groups with different (sometimes polar) visions of country's future and the way of desired development and acceptable civilization model(s). Therefore, any cultural policies should be backed by profound sociological research and concentrated on identification of common and non-contradicting values that can be shared by majority of the groups in each country. With appropriate design, cultural cooperation initiatives can help reduce the tensions (pls., see more in 3).

Dozens of the initiatives by art activists, volunteer movement and public institutions aimed at development of intercultural dialogue and reconciliation were launched in the arts and culture sector since the beginning of military conflict in Eastern Ukraine. In 2014 – 2015 some projects aimed at developing dialogue and preventing escalation of the military actions were happening with the involvement of cultural actors and intellectuals from both countries – Ukraine and Russian Federation. Many charitable concerts, lotteries and other events have been held to raise funds for wounded soldiers, displaced citizens and museums in the conflict zones. Groups of artists, such as People's Philharmonic Initiative, visited Donetsk and Lugansk regions to play concerts before those on the frontline. Some projects provided art therapy and psychological support to the residents of the towns freed from separatists, e.g. Slovyansk and Severodonetsk in Donetsk region. Within the New Donbas Initiative cultural actors focused their efforts on teenagers as one of the most vulnerable groups and offer creative programmes combining drama, pantomime, and filmmaking to relieve the psychological pain in children and rebuild their trust in "mainland" Ukraine through human relations. Just established for that time Charity Foundation "The Depths of Art" was organizing interdisciplinary art forums in Kyiv and other cities devoted to certain regions of Ukraine. DonCult was the most remarkable of these art-forums. Support for Dialogue and Reconciliation in the Regions of Ukraine project by STAN

Art Group, a civil society organisation from Lutsk, should also be noted in this context. The Art Group attempted to strengthen the social dialogue and understanding in different Ukraine's regions by studying stereotypes towards internally displaced persons from Eastern Ukraine in cities such as Dnipropetrovsk, Lutsk, Kremenchuk, Melitopol, Kharkiv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv and Kyiv.

### **Ukraine in 2022: The culture of counterpropaganda and resistance, reflection and recovery, decolonisation and envisioning of future**

Even though the war has been lasting since 2014, majority of Europeans and many Ukrainians were hiding themselves from the reality.

"Immediately after Russian President Putin announced the start of a "special military operation in Donbas", powerful explosions were heard in Kyiv and Kharkiv. Russia resorted to a massive missile attack on Ukraine and went on the offensive on land from the north (from the territories of Belarus and the Russian Federation), the south (from Crimea) and the east (from ORDLO<sup>1</sup>)"

Chronicle of the defence of Ukraine. Day 1 – 24.02.2022 (7)<sup>2</sup>

In the early morning of 24 February millions of Ukrainians woke up to what sounded like a giant firecracker exploding outside their windows. Along with the ruptures and flare-ups, a new reality burst into their lives. Ukraine has been different since then. Europe has changed. Life and the world will never be the same as before the 24 February 2022.

For several months, citizens of Ukraine have all read in the news and heard from everywhere that the eight-year war in eastern Ukraine could cease to be a semi-frozen conflict like Nagorno-Karabakh and spread further; that Putin was preparing for a full-scale war; and that Russian troops were preparing to invade. Ordinary citizens – civilians – were packing "alarming suitcases"; receiving at work not very realistic instructions on actions in the event of an air alert; preparing for the testing of sirens before the New Year, which for some reason did not happen in Kyiv; attending first aid courses. At the same time, nobody wanted and could believe that in the 21st century, people from the neighbouring

country, which for so long positioned itself as a “brother”, would turn into barbarians and start killing their neighbours.

The life of cities and communities in Ukraine has radically changed since 24 February 2022.

- 6,5 million of internally displaced people registered in Ukraine
- 7 million children in Ukraine became IDPs/refugees
- 6,595 Civilian casualties (killed)
- 10,189 Civilian casualties (injured)
- 323 Attacks on health care institutions
- 2,430 Educational institutions damaged
- 337 Educational institutions destroyed
- UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs data as of 24 November 2022 / IOM data of 27 October 2022 (18), and Data of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine checked on 24 November 2022 (9)

Civil protection systems and particularly air alarms did not properly function; and the majority of Kyiv residents had no idea how to distinguish the sound of shelling by small arms, mortar fire or volley fire systems when the aggression started. Almost no one was prepared for situations when there is only 10 minutes or seconds to find a shelter and have a better chance of saving your life.



Picture 1

Kyiv downtown after the missile attack on 10 October 2022. Photo from social networks

The Ukrainian cityscapes got drastically impacted by the war. The residents of Ukrainian capital city will forever remember the post-apocalyptic views of Kyiv – deserted, sprinkled with anti-tank hedgehogs, rammed with protective concrete blocks and sandbags. There were roadblocks and sirens on the streets. Many people moved to live in the subway and underground parking lots. The statues of St. Volodymyr and Princess Olga, and many other monuments familiar from childhood and now wrapped in the sandbags. All those who were had to flee from their

homes to the West of Ukraine and further abroad will remember and see in their nightmares the pictures of travel out of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Chernihiv surrounded by a shrinking ring of enemies, to the south and then west: going through small country roads with uncountable checkpoints to avoid shelling and bombing; and the checkpoints and barricades built by the ordinary but brave residents of small towns and villages of Kyiv region in the very first days of the war so that no one could pass through and capture the capital. The memories will keep people who welcomed refugees in the premises of Ukrainian vocational schools with delicious dumplings and borscht, sheltered them in dormitory rooms with hastily made light masking from the blankets of teenagers who fled from the shelling to their homes just yesterday. The memories will also fix in every detail young women with children in pyjamas and house slippers along with their dogs or cats from Irpin or Hostomel. They simply woke up in the early morning of 24 February from explosions outside the window and saw that the neighbouring houses were no longer existing out there. Then they had time only for grabbing their children and pets before living the homes, often forever.



Picture 2-4

*Monuments to prominent cultural figures protected from being destroyed by Russian attacks. Kyiv. Photos of the author*

The war in Ukraine has led to the sudden suspension of usual cultural life in Ukraine. Most artists lost their revenue stream, while art collections are threatened, and cultural heritage objects destroyed or damaged. Many artists and cultural professionals have been currently residing in the EU countries and working in exile.

123 cultural heritage sites in Ukraine damaged

9 cultural heritage sites completely destroyed

144 religious buildings destroyed / damaged

43 memorials to historical figures or events destroyed

31 buildings and complexes of museums and reserves damaged

79 constructions of houses of culture / theatres / libraries damaged/destroyed

Data of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine as of 24 June 2022 (17)

Ukrainians went through the horrors of war and keep living, defending, and even thinking of future – some on the front line of the war; another under tough conditions of black-outs due to the regular attacks by kamikaze drones and missiles; and some in exile cordially sheltered by the citizens of European cities. Ukrainian cultural actors consider the life in Ukraine nowadays very dangerous, but highly creative (full of creativity) at the same time (pls., see 5). Culture helps reimagine and construct the future of the country, while cultural practices play an important role in providing the feeling of security for Ukrainians in the country and abroad. Culture influences the speeding grows of Ukrainian civil society and is impacted by tis grows at the same time.

In the difficult conditions of war, the need for support and unity of society becomes more urgent. Cultural practices related to co-creation are actively developing and spreading, including in virtual space and social networks. Videos of musicians playing on the streets of cities to the sounds of air raid sirens, dancing Ukrainian soldiers, challenges to perform traditional Ukrainian songs of a patriotic nature in the modern context are becoming viral. Public diplomacy projects telling the story of Ukraine and explaining its position disseminated in social networks. Documentaries and videos depicting Ukrainian cities and towns before and after Russian aggression are very frequent today (pls., see 14 and 18).

Internationalisation of Ukrainian arts and culture manifests itself in various aspects: the boundaries between Ukrainian migrant (diaspora or refugees) creators and those residing in the country are disappearing faster and faster; collaboration projects of Ukrainian and international artist, particularly musicians, as well as art projects of international creators about Ukraine or on Ukrainian territory are growing in number.

Many Ukrainians especially of young generations impressed by the series of seven murals recently created by the British street artist Banksy in various locations in Ukraine hit by Russian bombardments, including Kyiv, Irpin and Borodyanka (1).





Pictures 5 – 11

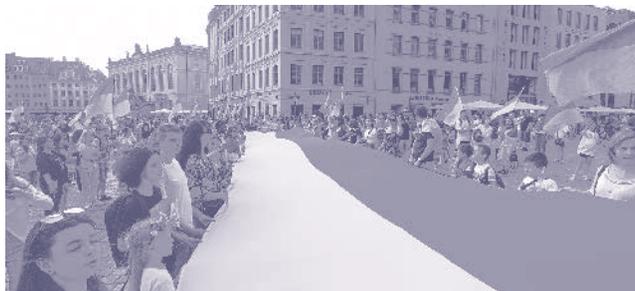
Murals by Banksy in Ukrainian cities and towns affected by Russian attacks. Photos from social networks

7,867,219 Individual refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe

4,751,065 Refugees from Ukraine registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe

UNHCR data as of 22 November 2022 (12)

The presence of Ukrainians and Ukraine – as a symbol of resistance and striving for freedom – in the cities in Europe and many other parts of the world is getting more and more visible. Ukrainian flags are nearly everywhere – on government buildings, apartments, museums, bicycles, cars, restaurants, etc.



Pictures 12 – 15

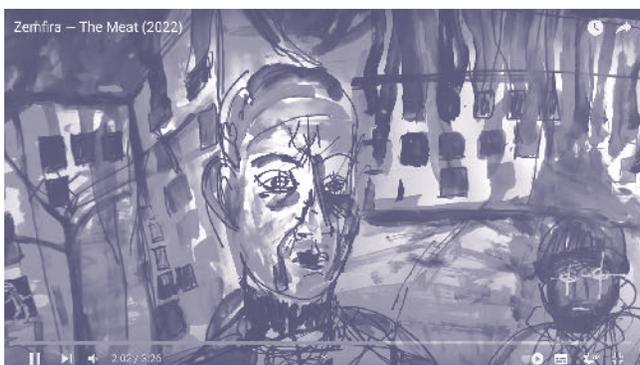
Ukrainian flags are everywhere in Brussels. Photos 12 and 13 by the author  
Flash mob of Ukrainians in Dresden Dresden. Photos 14 and 15 by I. Guziy

The author's assertion that the war is not (so much) between Ukrainians and Russians as between people with different visions of desired models of human development can be well supported by international collaborations of musicians, curators, artists, etc., including participation of Ukrainian and Russian creators.

Dave Stewart (UK), Boris Grebenshikov (RUS) and Serhii Babkin (UA)<sup>3</sup>, with harmonies by Stevie Nicks (USA) recently wrote and released "Face to Face" – an original song for Ukraine. They launched this way Collaborate For Peace initiative to raise awareness and funds for the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy's global UNITED24 initiative (10).

The total impacting of the war is obviously reaching Russia and Russian art and culture. Later in the article the issue of cancelling of the Russian culture and cultural actors will be particularly addressed.

After the beginning of the full-scale war, at the legislative level in Russia it is forbidden to call a war "a war". Any cultural and artistic projects and initiatives even remotely like the anti-war protest and cultural actors related to them are repressed. Most creators understand that they can openly express an anti-war stance or support for Ukraine outside their own country or under the threat of fines, imprisonment or other forms of oppression from the Putin regime. Bright and honest artistic expressions of individual creators are highly appreciated under such circumstances.



Pictures 16.1 – 16.6

The Meat – anti-war song by Zemfira released in May 2022. Print screen of the video

An impressive anti-war statement provided by Zemfira (Zemfira Ramazanova), a Russian rock musician currently residing in France. She has been performing since 1998 and has been popular in Russia and other post-Soviet countries including Ukraine. After the beginning of Russian invasion to Ukraine on 21 March 2022, she released an anti-war music video to her 2017 song "Don't Shoot" (8), while also removing

all of her other songs from her [YouTube](#) channel which for some time contained only one statement “No war”. The video contained footage of Russia’s military assault on Ukraine and of anti-war protests in Moscow. On 19 May 2022 another protesting song was released – “The Meat” (16) unambiguously referring to the war in Ukraine. It contains, for example, the following lines: “Spring is on the calendar, but in reality, there are trenches and high-precision long-range missiles. Midnight in Mariupol. The video clip for the composition consists of drawings on a military theme, created by Renata Litvinova, Russian actress, film director, and screenwriter and partner of Zemfira in her work and personal life.

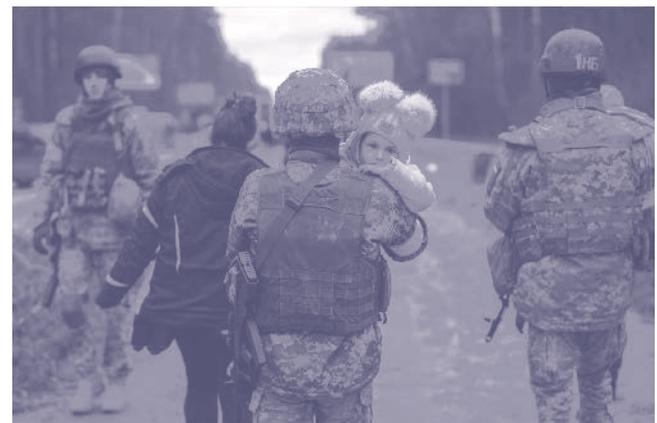
**International Cultural Relations: “Dialogue and reconciliation” or (and?) “Practices of survival and resistance”**

The “Western/EU-centrism” or “meta colonialism” of cultural actors from the countries of Western Europe is often manifested in the semi-hidden compulsion of their colleagues from Ukraine to dialogue and reconciliation with creators and cultural managers from Russia. This is about invitations to participate in joint discussions, conferences, workshops, exhibitions, collections of art studies or festivals. Unfortunately, according to Kateryna Botanova, a cultural critic from Ukraine who currently lives and works in Switzerland, “the absolute majority of these gestures of goodwill are “an invitation to dialogue with Russian cultural actors, while the absolute minority — with actors from countries and contexts with similar experience of long-term aggression, resistance, struggle for one’s identity, voice, survival: from Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, Bosnia, the list should be continued” (6). All that is not about solidarity or co-experiencing a traumatic feelings and memories, but about the conviction that dialogue and reconciliation between representatives of the aggressor society and the defending society should take place exactly in the cultural field.

Ukrainian artist Nikita Kadan clearly formulated his position on this issue when refused to meet with a Russian artist at another regular round table: “I don’t need words that don’t save lives. At this point, I prefer my own experience, gathering knowledge about the crimes that are committed every day in front of my own eyes. My thoughts are not about the return of the “dialogue territory”, my thoughts are about the return of the occupied territories” (quoted by 6).

To the author’s opinion, at the stage of an active war, projects of reconciliation between the representatives of the aggressor country and the country that is forced to repel the attack are unacceptable. It makes no sense to offer a cultural and artistic field for dialogue while Russian missiles hit schools, kindergartens, museums, hospitals, and homes of residents of Ukrainian cities, towns and villages, well planned attacks deliberately destroy Ukraine’s energy system. Civilians who regularly experience blackouts because of the unprovoked by Ukraine war of the Putin regime and bury friends and relatives which died in the war, women artists with children who were forced to flee the territory of hostilities seeking shelter abroad – all these people are incapable and not ready for reconciliation now. They need time to forgive. First, the war must end, an analogue of the Munich process must take place, war criminals must be punished, and Russian cultural actors must admit collective guilt.

Massacres and war crimes committed by the Russian occupiers in Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel and other cities and villages of Ukraine, made reconciliation format of ICR projects impossible for a long time. However, other types of interaction are quite possible, which will provide an opportunity for expressing solidarity or co-experiencing a traumatic experience. Precisely in such projects the artists from Ukraine and Russia can potentially participate together.



Picture 17  
A Ukrainian soldier carries a small girl to safety from Irpin, she is one of the few lucky ones to be evacuated from the city as Russian aggression continues. Photo: Aris Messinis. Available at: ht-

[tps://war.ukraine.ua/crimes/the-timeline-of-tragedy-bucha-massacre-nightmares-of-irpin-and-hostomel/](https://war.ukraine.ua/crimes/the-timeline-of-tragedy-bucha-massacre-nightmares-of-irpin-and-hostomel/)

Elena Pagel, an artist from Dresden of Russian origin presents a series of interviews with war refugees from Ukraine currently living in Germany in her documentary project “Just before Sunrise” (“Kurz vor dem Sonnenaufgang”). In one of these touching life stories Ukrainian young woman Anna Anikeieva, who left her homeland soon after 24 February 2022, tells us her story of the war and evacuation. Since that day “the time just before sunrise” for millions of Ukrainians began to be associated with the horror of anticipation of missile attacks. The background video sequence consists of shots of news releases and videos of eyewitnesses who captured pictures of attacks on the territory of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in the first days of a full-scale invasion – missile attacks, powerful explosions, people hiding in basements and underground stations. Trains, refugee reception centres in gyms and schools, temporary shelter in apartments and houses of caring residents of European cities is a new reality for Ukrainians fleeing the war.



Picture 18  
Print screen of the documentary “Just before Sunrise. Anna” by Elena Pagel

Trains, refugee reception centres in gyms and schools, temporary shelter in apartments and houses of caring residents of European cities is a new reality for Ukrainians fleeing the war

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These Anna’s words help us understand why “simple dialogue and reconciliation” are not

an option for the representatives of the aggressor country and defending country for the moment: “In Irpin, those who died during the shelling of the invaders are buried right in the courtyard of a residential building. We will never forgive you for this. Mother Marina born on 14.02.1980 and son Ivan born on 04.12.2009” Then Anna continues addressing people in Russia: “Russians came to my country with a war. I don’t know how it happened, who provoked whom, what political things are happening there. But I know for sure that specifically Russian occupiers are walking on my land and shooting at people. I saw it, I was there. It’s them. [Russian] Propaganda will, of course, say something else, but I am a living witness of what is happening ... There are those who attack, and those to whom the attackers came... So, not Americans, not NATO, but Russians, Putin’s regime came to Ukraine. Exactly as that!”



Picture 19  
Print screen of the documentary “Just before Sunrise. Anna” by Elena Pagel

“In Irpin, those who died during the shelling of the invaders are buried right in the courtyard of a residential building. We will never forgive you for this. Mother Marina born on 14.02.1980 and son Ivan born on 04.12.2009”

At the same time, Anna clearly distinct people from the aggressor country who are deeply sorry about what’s happening in Ukraine and obviously disagree with militaristic position of their government: “My friends in Moscow are going to demonstrations to oppose the war of the Putin’s regime in Ukraine... I am amazed at the courage of those who are coming to demonstrations. I am very grateful to you.

Maybe this will be some kind of impetus for other people to see that there are caring citizens in Russia, there are people who are not afraid to express their position despite Putin's gulag methods used against "his" people who dared to express their own opinion"



Picture 20  
Print screen of the documentary "Just before Sunrise. Anna" by Elena Pagel  
"...there are caring citizens in Russia, there are people who are not afraid to express their position despite Putin's gulag methods used against "his" people who dared to express their own opinion"

Anna's thoughts resonate with the statements of Ukrainian art managers, curators and producers, expressed in the introduction to the ArtsLink Assembly 2022 named "Bravery of thinking, bravery of imagination, bravery of culture" (5). Instead of supporting Russian cultural actors in their attempts to recover their feelings within a dialogue with Ukrainian actors, we should let them do "their job" of reimagining their own country. Nobody can do that instead of them. Without the artistic reflection on the past, present and projecting of the future of Russia, the perspective of the country looks gloomy, uncertain and hopeless.

A very relevant and sensitive issue today is the cancelling of Russian culture and creators. The author of the article proposes to distinguish between two fundamentally different situations. It is not acceptable to support the "official" culture of the aggressor country, e.g. inviting official representatives of the Russian Federation, who actually share the position of the government of their country, to festivals,

conferences, educational and other cultural and artistic events. Such actions mean indirect or explicit support for aggression and war. This also applies to cultural professionals of Russian origin, who live outside their country of origin, but express support for the aggressive course of the Putin regime. The situation is quite different in the case of the support of Russian / Russian-born artists, curators, producers, managers, cultural experts, etc., who openly express their disagreement with the policies of aggression of the Russian Federation both against Ukraine and against any of the countries, which previously belonged to the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, or any other country in general.

It is important that usually citizens of Russia and people coming from this country, who do not support Putin's war, moreover, are very painfully experiencing the fact of Russia's transformation into an aggressor country. According to the author's observations, most of such people also feel guilty for the impossibility or inability to stop the madness of war. Therefore, one can only welcome cooperation projects that provide an opportunity to express the solidarity with the people of Ukraine and go together through the traumatic experience of both those who became victims of aggression and those who suffer because of the impossibility of stopping the horrors of bloodshed. Certainly, it would be appropriate to invite, for example, residents of the Balkan or Arab countries, as well as Russians and Ukrainians, to participate in such projects.

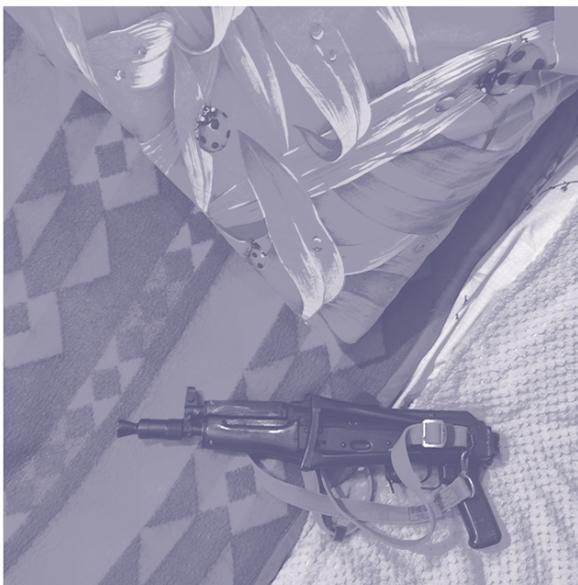
(See picture 21 in next page)

Supporting cultural practices that help to overcome trauma and reflect on what is happening in the country and in the world is another thing that can be done now for Ukraine and its people. "[War. Patterns and Scars](#)" project organized by KulturAktiv from Dresden and sponsored by Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media *combines an exhibition of contemporary photography from Ukraine with community integration events for refugees. The project curated by Irina Guziy (Ukraine/Germany) and Elena Pagel (Russia/Germany) provides opportunities for Ukrainians and citizens of Dresden to better understand each other and situation in Ukraine.*

"The brutal war broke into the homes of Ukrainians with shelling from heavy weapons, destroyed houses, maimed and killed people.

UA Sergey Zholonko

## WAR. Patterns and Scars



UA Liubov Bespala

## ВІЙНА. Візерунки та шрами

Picture 21

Poster by S. Zholonko for “War. Patterns and Scars” project organized in Dresden as an exhibition of contemporary photography from Ukraine accompanied by community integration events for refugees

These are incurable scars on the heart, on the body and on the native land. Nevertheless, Ukrainians believe in victory and wait for bright colours of warmth and love to return to their homes”

Curators of the exhibition Irina Guziy (Ukraine/Germany) and Elena Pagel (Russia/Germany)

The photo series by Liubov Bespala (Sumy, Ukraine) documents the traces of the temporary Russian occupation in the eastern Ukrainian town Trostianets and the city of Sumy. The photo series “Easter Barracks” by Sergey Zholonko (Kropyvnytskiy, Ukraine) was taken during the Orthodox Easter celebrated in 2022 exactly two months after the start of the

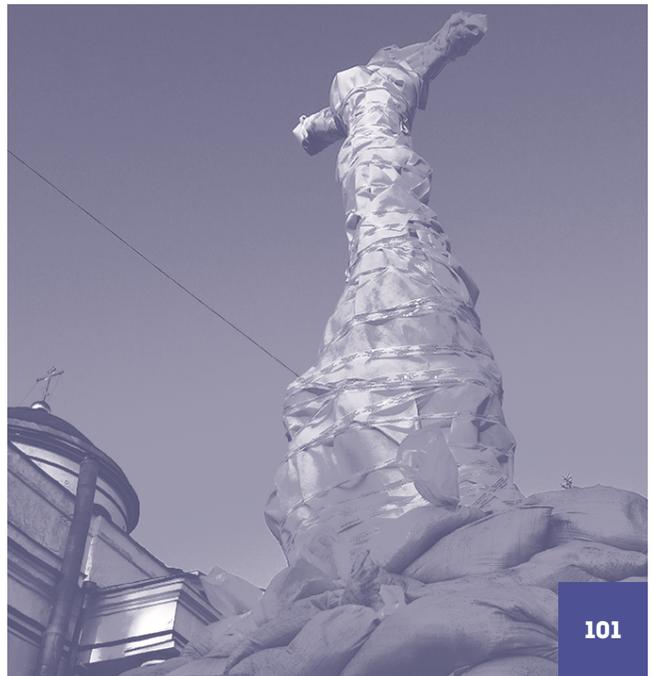
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war. These photos help to go through the desperation and believe in upcoming peace. Parallel events helped the “War. Patterns and Scars” become not only an exhibition but also *kind of an art-therapy and cultural integration at the same time*. It was so nice to come to the opening and see artworks recording the horrors of war and at the same time helping to believe in the return of peaceful colours to the cities and villages of Ukraine. Then to come to the gallery again and, together with people who also fled from the shootings and bombings, listen to music and sing songs familiar from childhood.



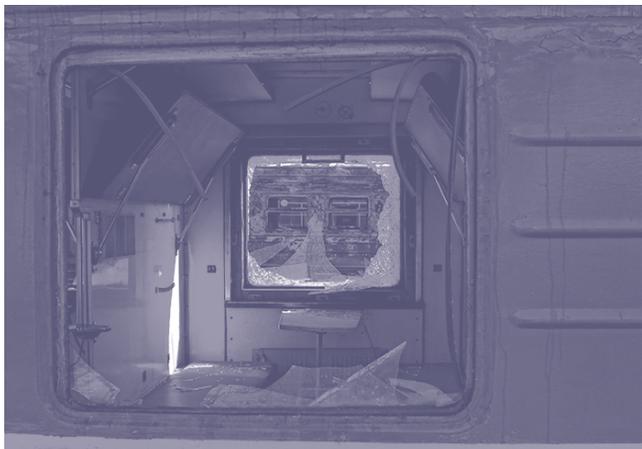


Elena Pagel, co-curator of the project, is from Russia but loves Ukraine and its people. Since 2014, Elena has been working with artistic projects about Ukraine. And now she helps Ukrainian refugees. People like Elena help to prevent slipping into fierce hatred of “all Russians”. Her creative projects are an important part of this support to people fleeing the war.



Pictures 22 – 25

Photo by S. Zholonko, “War. Patterns and Scars”. Contemporary photography from Ukraine



Pictures 26 – 31

Photo by L. Bepala, “War. Patterns and Scars”. Contemporary photography from Ukraine

Kateryna Botanova believes that practically from the first days of the Russian aggression, the Ukrainian cultural community has been “actively looking for a universal answer to the “coercion to reconciliation”, trying to balance on a thin and sometimes dangerous line between defending one’s own dignity and the need not to lose the interest and attention of Western cultural institutions, the media and discussion platforms where you can talk about the war in Ukraine” (6).

The researcher singles out several approaches that seem very important in the context of the conversation

about the relationship between art and reconciliation. This is the borrowing of feminist rhetoric and participation in events without “by definition” giving a consent to dialogue or understanding, but with the aim of consistently defending one’s own position. According to Botanova, Ukrainian cultural actors turn to the tools of emancipatory discourse to defend their own right to have a position different from the position not only of the aggressor, but also of a third party - a mediator and a concerned observer, whose role is performed by representatives of the Western countries. “Emancipatory rhetoric and the embodiment of the experience of war” (6) have an effective impact precisely in the international artistic environment, which is sensitive to injustice, desubjectivation, and segregation. Kateryna Botanova puts the radical decolonization intentions of Ukrainian cultural professionals, which have been taking place since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine, on a par with such factors of reducing the power and influence of the Global West / North, as #metoo and BLM.

Art in conditions of war and other acute conflicts, including caused by the non-coincidence of the vision of the civilizational development of society, can and should be not only the territory of dialogue and reconciliation.

Development aid from Western countries presupposes the prevailing view of culture as a tool of economic and social development. The role of culture in conflict resolution and reconciliation is considered part of the same “instrumentalization-of-culture” package. In the 1990s, this approach was “tested” in the countries of the “third world” and then quite mechanically transferred to aid for the countries of the “second world” (in the terminology of the Cold War era) - former republics of the Soviet Union and socialist countries - members of the Warsaw Pact. But even then, the differences of the socio-cultural context of the countries of the “second world” from the countries of both other “worlds”, that is, the Global West / North and Global South (following current terminology), were not sufficiently analysed and considered.

The role of culture as a philosophical category and its potential for understanding reality and ways of civilizational development is very relevant for all countries of the post-Soviet space. Dreaming and projecting the future since Ukraine gained independence in 1991 has been and continues to be one of the major tasks of Ukrainian culture and art.

The report on the Culture Sector and Cultural Policy of Ukraine, produced in 2012 within the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership Culture Programme 1 (2011 – 2015) states that the “culture itself has been seen as central to the efforts at nation-building which have taken place in the two decades since independence” (13, page 10). Later in 2015 under the Cultural Code of Eastern Partnership project the visioning for Ukraine through the “cultural lens” was formulated: “The need of new societal values ... is crucial to the country’s development ... cultural policy would create a common framework for the transformation of society at the national, regional and local levels. During the radical transformation of society – socio-cultural, political, economic – culture is an important tool of development, reconciliation and consolidation of efforts of all social groups and all communities. Adequate to the task, cultural policy will pay a due attention to overcoming the postcolonial syndrome ... Formation of a national identity, based not only on ethnicity, is one of the major problems in terms of the society consolidation” (4, page 24). Both questions are relevant for current Ukraine as well.

Today, resisting externally imposed pacification and forcing reconciliation, Ukrainian artists return to art its power to testify and contain reality. “Art is about the complex process of constant, daily re-learning how to be together, how to be a society, for which there are no ready-made templates or scripts, because we are the ones who create them every day” (6). These words of Kateryna Botanova perfectly illustrate the idea that today the main role of art now is not to achieve understanding, especially understanding between the aggressor and the one who defends his own right to life and existence while the war continues.

Undoubtedly, the question of the specifics of the decolonization of the culture of the post-Soviet countries and the decolonization of this region in general requires specially dedicated research.

Even the conventional region of “Eastern Europe” cannot be considered homogeneous in terms of the context and tasks of cultural decolonization.

In the case of former countries of the socialist camp, for example, Poland or the Balkan countries, researchers pay attention to the definition of the place of Eastern Europe in postcolonial and decolonial debates within the larger colonial

project. For example, social theorist and researcher Jan Sowa and curator Joanna Warsza in their dialogue-piece of the place of Central and Eastern Europe in discussions of colonialism, postcolonialism, and decolonisation based on examples of recent art and curatorial projects, come to the following statement: “Thus Eastern Europe shares the condition of being complicit in the system of imperialism and colonization, while at the same time serving as a first training ground for its implementation; in effect, it has been both racializing and racialized” (15).

For Ukraine and to a large extent other countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, cultural decolonization has two diverse vectors. On the one hand, it is necessary to define one’s own authentic identity as opposed to the aggressive identity of the modern “Russian World” created by Putin’s propagandistic machine, which is ready to kill for not wanting to belong to it. This identity is the successor of the USSR with the idea of “one nation – Soviet people”. And that, in turn, is the successor of the Russian Empire, which for centuries enslaved the peoples of Eastern Europe and Northern and Central Asia. On the other hand, one must consistently defend one’s own vision of the role(s) of culture for social development against the position of the carriers of the canonical understanding of democracy, that is, the countries of the Global West / North. The latter provide essential and much-needed assistance to the development projects of the cultural sphere of Ukraine in terms of building civil society, promoting democracy, and thereby help in the implementation of the first decolonization vector - anti-Soviet/Russian. At the same time, the parameters of Western development aid often decide mostly everything for those to whom it is provided sometimes without asking and fully considering their opinion.

### Recommendations and open questions

As a conclusion the topics and practical issues that could be addressed by future research and cooperation projects and initiatives are summarised below.

Today, the issues of security and survival of the whole of humanity belong to the most pressing challenges in current International Cultural Relations. The influence of the war in Europe on ICR is comparable to the impacts of the COVID pandemic and the climate change.

Identification of common interests of the EU and its partner countries should be the central point of cultural relations based on a comprehensive strategy and an in-depth multicultural approach. Attention to national culture as a key element of overcoming post-colonial syndrome and importance of national identity formation in the context of societal transformation of the Eastern Partnership countries should be properly understood and interpreted including by the cultural actors of the Global West / North.

The projects exploring and formulating common values and addressing the theme of reunification of Greater Europe could be in the focus of cooperation.

At the stage of an active war, projects of reconciliation between the representatives of the aggressor country and the defending country are not appropriate. Instead of providing cultural ground for dialogue and reconciliation, now is the time for cooperation projects that provide an opportunity to express the solidarity with the people of defending country and go together through the traumatic experience. Residents of the Balkan or Arab countries, or any other countries recently experienced the horrors of war and long-term aggression could be invited along with Ukrainians to participate. Russian and Ukrainian cultural actors can co-exist in common projects and initiatives only those who became victims of aggression and those who suffer because of the impossibility of stopping the horrors of bloodshed come together.

Regarding the issues of cancelling of Russian culture and creators, it is proposed to distinguish the two options: on one hand, unacceptable support to “official” culture of the aggressor country including cultural professionals of Russian origin, who live outside Russian Federation, but express support for the aggressive course of the Putin’s regime (which mean indirect or explicit support for aggression and war) and, on the other hand, support of Russian / Russian-born artists, curators, producers, managers, cultural experts, etc., who openly express their disagreement with the policies of aggression against Ukraine or any other country.

Furthermore, the author invites to maintain contact with the cultural community and civil society of Russia as much as possible under conditions of war and repressive regime in the Russian Federation. The opportunities supporting artistic reflection of Russian cultural actors on the past, the present and projecting of the future of Russia are especially welcome.

There is a range of open questions. What could be the focus of after-war projects in support of Russians to help them to admit the guilt, get rid of imperialistic attitudes and finally “convert” to the values shared by other European countries and the world? Is all listed before possible at all and worth spending resource and effort? How can the arts and creative and cultural industries contribute to overcome the challenges of preventing Europe and the world from sliding into the abyss of a new world war?

And a practical advice for people of Europe cordially providing support and shelter to Ukrainian citizens fleeing from hostilities and horrors of war. The unprecedentedly intensive wave of Ukrainian migrants in Europe now causes not only a humanitarian crisis unique in its scope. These over 7 million individual refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe are mostly (highly educated) women, children, and youth. The limited information currently available on the level of education of Ukrainian refugees suggests not only that a higher share of them is tertiary educated than among other refugee groups, but that they are also more highly educated than the general Ukrainian active population (20). Ukrainians in Europe should be considered more as a human resource than a reason for economic and demographic problems. According to estimates of Migration Research Centre of the University of Warsaw, since the beginning of the war, refugees from Ukraine have paid €2 billion taxes in Poland which is three times more than the country has spent on costs associated with displaced Ukrainians (21). These people came from a country of immensely growing civil society. Ukrainians are capable to learn, master, fine-tune and quickly develop existing approaches and technologies. Many residents of the EU countries, who visited Ukraine in the last year or two before the war, were astonished to see how quickly e-services have been developing in the country and becoming a regular part of everyday life. Ukrainians are people with a strong European identity ready to fight and – many of them – even die for it.

There are many arts and culture professionals among the Ukrainians in Europe today. They are the people to be those who can help cultural actors from all over Europe and the world to rethink the role and potential of culture and art in preventing wars and preserving peace. Let’s dream together on Greater Europe without the EU – non-EU division, diverse, peaceful and prospering.

## Notes

1. Temporary occupied separate territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.
2. All titles and quotations translated from Ukrainian / Russian / German to English by the author of this article.
3. Serhii Babkin, Ukrainian artist, musician, actor, composer, author and performer of his own songs, a member of the 5’Nizza group. Boris Grebenshchikov is a prominent member of the generation which is widely considered to be the “founding fathers” of Russian rock music, the founder and lead singer of the band Aquarium which has been active from 1972 until today, frequently referred to as BG. Dave Stewart is an English musician, songwriter, and record producer, best known for Eurythmics, his successful professional partnership with Annie Lennox.

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