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IDENTITY IN MULTI-ETHNIC STATES: THE COLLECTIVE IMAGINARIES THAT UNITE

The transformation of the Ukrainian National Identity and the impacts of threats

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Abstract

This thesis has studied how nation-building and identity formation better can be understood in settings where the conditions for these phenomena are not seen as self-evident. Identity is linked to how individuals understand themselves and their surroundings. In this research, the investigation has focused on the collective understanding of one's identity, namely, the Ukrainian national identity.

Ukraine is a multi-ethnic country that has faced several challenges when it comes to asserting its national identity and existence. As other macro-and regional discourses have been more prevailing, it has undoubtedly shifted the focus away from Ukraine. More recently, the attention has been turned back on Ukraine and its struggle to withstand Russia's aggression war facing the nation. Therefore, Ukraine can be seen as a critical case to approach.

By inductively applying an in-depth thematic analysis, the research has aimed to understand how Ukraine has been able to incorporate this variety of identity narratives into a more coherent and salient understanding of its national identity, substantially, where the thickening of civic boundaries and the trust in the people has proven to be vital in creating unity among the Ukrainians.

Some concluding remarks that have been made out of the findings are that exposure to an external threat blurs particular identity layers and causes changes in attitudes. This has become particularly apparent as Ukrainians distanced themselves from the perceived threat. Instead, they have explicitly positioned themselves where the national identity is more in line with what the Ukrainian nation represents, a future distanced from its historical past and closer to Europe.

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Lastly, my thoughts are with the Ukrainian people and my Ukrainian friends who are still in Ukraine or were forced to flee their home country.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DIF = Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation

EU = European Union

KIIS = Kyiv International Institute of Sociology

LAP = Lord Ashcroft Polls

MS = Member States

NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO = Non-Governmental Organisation

RSG = Rating Sociological Group

RQ = Research Question(s)

SIT = Social Identity Theory

USA = United States of America

USSR = Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)

1. Introduction

"Ukraine is becoming more Ukrainian, while identity boundaries are hardening."

(Arel, 2018:188)

"Identity requires differences to be, and it converts difference into otherness to secure its own self-certainty."

(Connolly, 2002:64)

"A weak national ethos can jeopardise the territorial integrity of a state, lead to security instability, and even result in its demise."

(Basiuk, 2000:42)

The need for categorising, comparing and competing has for a long time been seen as social human behaviour to find meaning, orient oneself, and make sense of the surroundings in which we live and interact. Also, they have been considered strategies for exercising power over others in order to distinguish between individuals and groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Seegel, 2006; Schenk, 2017; Trencsényi, 2017; Mannila, 2021).

The quest for sovereignty and territorial integrity has become the norm of contemporary nation-building, where drawing boundaries between nations has come to categorise the modern globalised world. However, it has been argued that, before a nation exists, it has to be imagined. Therefore, the imagery of a nation is said to be connected to an individual's understanding of belonging to a group (Anderson, 2006:113f). When groups are getting more clearly defined, it can also give a deeper understanding of oneself and one's identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The collective sense of how identities are perceived can enhance the meaning of who we are and how we understand ourselves and the world. However, providing meaning to identity categories is not easy, especially not when many competing identity narratives are interplaying (Arel, 2006:25; Barrington, 2021:155).

Ukraine's path to nation-building and identity formation has not been as straightforward. This is partly due to its historical past, where various narratives have contributed to difficulties in emphasising clear identity boundaries of what could be understood as Ukrainian (Magocsi, 2010:10f; Kuzio, 2020). However, this is a trend that Ukraine has gradually reversed, where the Ukrainian identity has become increasingly more salient. By introducing more inclusive rhetoric, where diversity has come to be understood as one of the foundations in the nation-building of Ukraine, more people self-identify and feel proud to belong to the Ukrainian nation. Strengthened bonds between individuals and a deepened emotional attachment to the country have led to a more coherent and civic understanding of the Ukrainian national identity (Onuch, Hale & Sasse, 2018; Barrington, 2021).

Since these concepts are based on social interactions, they must also be maintained and consumed. Although identity boundaries are becoming increasingly apparent in Ukraine (Arel, 2018), the existence of nations is constantly being questioned, both internally and externally. Since becoming independent, Ukraine has aimed to unite the country. However, its sovereignty and national identity have been challenged extra clearly externally. Since 2014, a threat image has been formed against the Ukrainian nation, which has come to escalate into a full-scale invasion of the country by Russia on the 24th of February 2022, where the Ukrainian national identity can be seen as threatened to its existence.

1.1 Research Aim & Research Questions

The overarching aim of the thesis is to cumulatively contribute to the research field of Central- and Eastern European studies. This will be done theoretically and empirically by examining identity and nation-building-related topics in a region where those subjects are of great relevance but also thoroughly contested. Following what Greenfeld and Eastwood (2009:272) argue, "*all regions in the world are not fully understood*", which is something this thesis is willing to agree on.

This study is inquisitive about understanding how nation-building and identity formation can be understood in settings where the conditions are not seen as self-evident for these phenomena to operate. Significantly, in environments where multiple identity narratives both interact and are constantly struggling with each other over their relevance. Therefore, the specific research

aim of this thesis is to contribute to the growing literature on Ukrainian national identity by conducting a qualitative study. The thesis employs a thematic analysis using data from Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) and Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) to get a closer insight into the Ukrainian context. Based on the findings, the research sets out to see whether the theoretical framework bridges the empirical outcomes or not, attempting to contribute with an enhanced understanding of identity formation and nation-building in Ukraine.

I argue that approaching the notion of identity in Ukraine is highly relevant for the future and continued existence of any sovereign state and society. The current situation in Ukraine has led to a crossroads in which national boundaries are being re-imagined and the meaning of collective identities transforming—showing that identity is not only one thing but a dynamic concept that adapts depending on the circumstances. By sensitising the importance of identity and national affiliation, this research can help provide more in-depth knowledge based on the Ukrainian context studied in extraordinary circumstances, where the Ukrainian national identity is being highly tested.

The following two research questions (RQ) will be addressed to guide this investigation:

RQ1: What has a more inclusive and civic understanding of one's identity entailed when incorporating multi-ethnic identity narratives in Ukraine?

RQ2: How has an external threat to the national identity reflected Ukraine's attitude regarding its positionality?

1.2 Disposition

The disposition of the thesis consists of six sections, with the first one being an introductory chapter. The second chapter will facilitate the positioning of this study by providing an insight into previous research, where it will discuss relevant concepts concerning the topic of interest. The third section will guide the reader through the theoretical framework used in the thesis. The fourth chapter will describe the application of the methodological tools, research design, and data collection, followed by the fifth section discussing the empirical results from the thematic analysis. Lastly, some concluding remarks will be made in the sixth chapter regarding the findings and the research questions, including a proposal for future research.

2. Previous Research

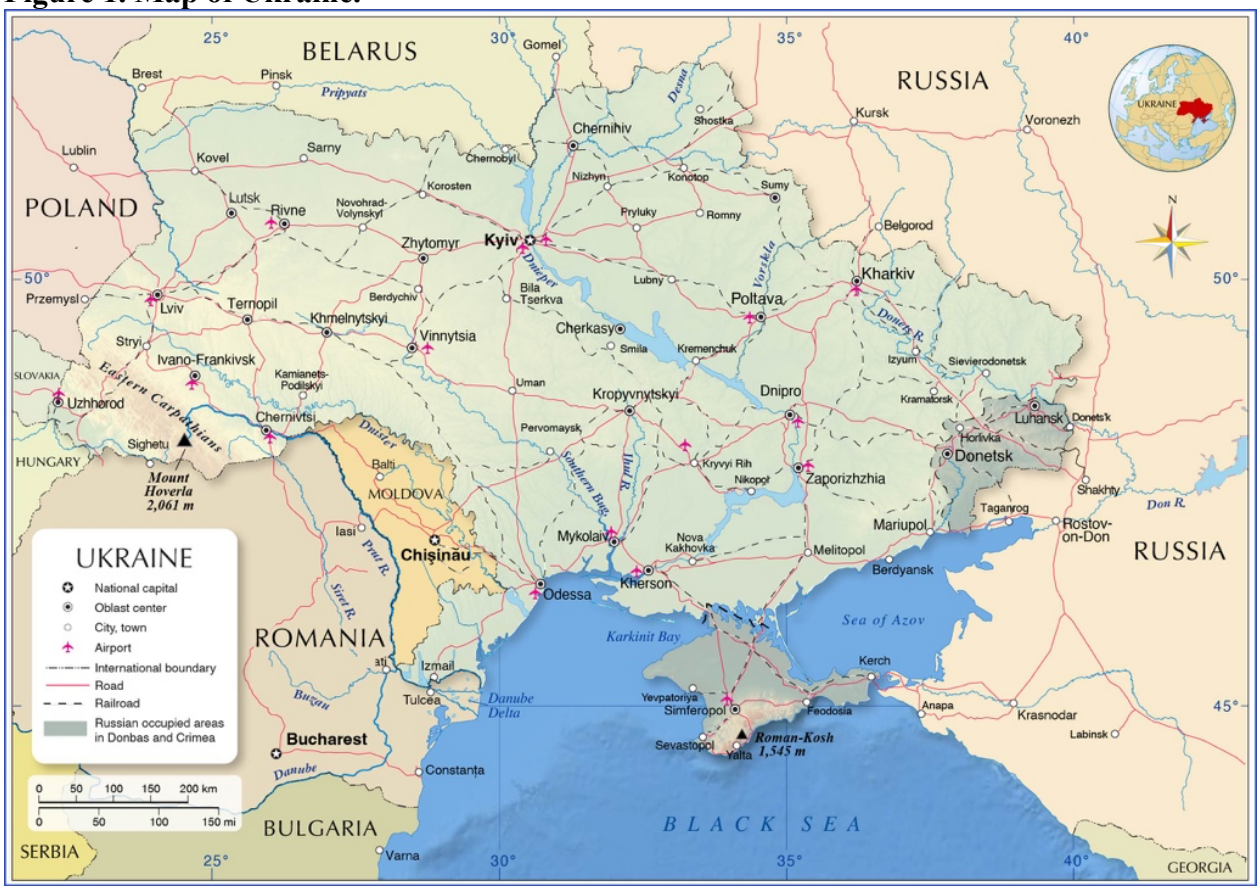
This chapter consists of a literature review of the thesis's relevant theoretical premises and concepts. It begins with a description of the contextual background and then moves toward more recent studies on the Ukrainian national identity and the current context. Lastly, the chapter discusses the identified research gap and highlights the contribution of this study.

2.1 Contextual Background

Ukraine means borderland (Subtelny, 2000:1), but the literal meaning of being Ukrainian is a more complex issue, something this thesis further wants to explore. Ukraine's geographical position has been referred to as a region where the "*borders have never truly been settled*" and has proven to be of high geopolitical and strategic importance to external actors (Freedman, 2014:14).

Ukraine has been receptive to various influences emerging from its surroundings, where the country often has been subjected to being ruled by others. Being one of Europe's largest countries, Ukraine's territorial boundaries are explained to be inhabited by many different ethnic groups. Old legends and myths about tribes coming together and settling down as the very first Slavic state —in an area which today is made up by the Ukrainian territory— where the Kyivan Rus came to be described as the ancient ethnic ancestors of these overlapping relationships, have gradually slipped out of the realm of Europe's historiography. Recent attempts have been made to reintegrate the ethnic Kyivan Rus into the history of Europe. Still, they are claimed to fall short in doing so since that would imply a redrawing of the more modern understanding of Europe as a whole, argues Kovalev (2015:158ff). Alongside most ethnic Ukrainians, Ukraine's largest minority group consists of ethnic Russians. In addition, various indigenous groups are also to be encountered. This wide range of diversity has similarly contributed to different ethnolinguistics, cultural, religious and historical legacies continuing to interplay with one another, which are asserted to exist within and extend beyond the Ukrainian territorial borders (Rothschild & Wingfield, 2008:242f; Magocsi, 2010:7, 9f; Aasland, 2021).

Figure 1. Map of Ukraine.



Source: Nations Online (2022a)

Ukraine's overlapping relationship with most countries in its vicinity has led to that historical research has tended to study the country from a vertical point of view, making use of colonial- or imperialistic perspectives, where Ukraine has been subsumed into the history writing of other nations or empires, denying Ukraine a separate history (Arel, 2006:14f; Trencsényi, 2017; Schenk, 2017). Reviewing perspectives presented in the Russian discourse as an example, Ukraine has often been addressed in terms of its fraternity relationship or even been referred to as "*Little Russia*" (Anderson, 2006:65, 74; Magocsi, 2010:10f; Mannila, 2021). Post-labels such as post-Soviet or post-Socialist have similarly contributed to a relatively modest focus on Ukraine as an independent and sovereign state. Even in more recent publications on Ukraine, it is being argued that this terminology has continued to be used (ibid).

Furthermore, historical legacies inherited from former empires, such as the Austro-Hungarian and the Tsarist Russian, as well as the years during which Ukraine formed part of the Soviet Union (USSR - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), have been pointed out as elements

resulting in that the national sense of belonging has been missing in Ukraine, or at least prolonged the process of reformulating one (Basiuk, 2000:44). The arguments of the uneven balance and the continued historical referencing by the literature have faced criticism. The criticism has stated that especially foreign scholars, when studying this region[1], have tended to reproduce patterns of imperialism and the use of post-labelling (Kuzio, 2020:18, 28ff). Something that is claimed as yet one more reason why Ukraine has continued to be mentioned as a country "*in relation to others*" or as "*inferior*" where the Ukrainian agency and particular the Ukrainian national identity has been less prominent (Trencsényi, 2017:181f; Onuch, Hale & Sasse, 2018:81f).

Therefore, the recognition of Ukraine as a sovereign state is argued to have shifted in intensity as other discourses have tended to overshadow the Ukrainian one (Prizel, 2000:15; Goble, 2000:110; Kuzio, 2020:33ff; Cornell, 2021:4ff). Ukraine's proximity to both Russia and several Member States (MS) of both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is recurrently recalling Ukraine's borderline position in this particular region of the world. In addition, it has put pressure on the positionality and the orientation of the country vis-à-vis its neighbours, which has intensified the debate further regarding which role Ukraine should possess both nationally and internationally (Arel, 2018; Kakachia, Lebanidze & Dubovyk, 2019). Due to its geographical position and historical roots, it has been argued that Ukraine most likely benefits from engaging in dialogue with all its neighbours (Globalis, 2021). Subsequently, Ukraine's attempts to distance itself from any external labelling or post-stamps have been equally challenging (Mannila, 2021).

2.2 Positionality in "old" and "new" Europe

To understand Ukraine's nation-building and journey of identity formation, from being ruled to ruling over itself, it is essential to approach the past and the present. Also, it is crucial to bear in mind the interplay between the micro-and macro-dynamics that are being played out (Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009; Trencsényi, 2017). From the ashes of the World Wars rose a rediscovering of Europe and its identity. One of the counter-stones in the rebuilding of Europe was to find common denominators that were linking Europe together. However, in the aftermath

[1]A thorough discussion of the terminology used to refer to this region and examples from different countries can be found in section 2.2.

of the wars, the progress of rebuilding occurred at a different pace all over Europe, which led to noticeable differences between some states and intensified similarities between others when the political- and economic transitions developed unevenly among them (Lindstrom, 2003:326f; Rothschild & Wingfield, 2008:211f).

Figure 2. Map of East-Central Europe.

Source: Nations Online (2022b)

The ideological divide the Iron Curtain came to introduce, and the fall of the same has made the conceptualising of boundaries and demarcation in Europe tricky, mainly as more modern nation-states emerged. Boundaries tend to include some and exclude others, creating a paradox of who should be seen as a part of the in-group and who should not (Trencsényi, 2017:166, 178, 181f). The risk of exclusion is that it might create undesired marginalisations and conflicting perceptions between the ones being included and excluded. Something that might enhance the willingness of the marginalised ones to strive for a redefinition of their position (Kakachia, Lebanidze & Dubovyk, 2019:451ff). This is a pattern that has been observed within several states, where the typical divide between former states of the East and the West blocs has become more blurred as the phenomenon of the "*return to Europe*" made itself present (Prizel, 2000:20-24).

Hungary and Poland have had relatively fast economic- and institutional transitions when becoming independent compared to their neighbouring countries. Both cases are explained as having benefitted from shifts on both the micro-and macro-level. It is claimed that the local self-determination played a crucial role in reformulating the new paths of their nations (Trencsényi, 2017:175, 180). In parallel with those local developments, larger regional frameworks started at the same time to emerge. The concepts of Central- and Eastern Europe[2] are explained to have grown as counter-concepts, mainly applied by and in comparison with the progress seen in the Western parts of Europe. Something that enabled the nation-building projects in both Hungary and Poland to ride on the same wave. In other words, it created opportunities for re-positioning themselves into a broader discourse that simultaneously gave them the possibility to distance themselves from what was perceived as Eastern Europe, and instead self-branding themselves to belong to Central Europe (Trencsényi, 2017:168-171, 181f; Schenk, 2017:192f).

Counter-concepts and finding contrasts that distinguish oneself from others are explained to reinforce boundaries and the understanding of oneself. In other words, also more frequently

[2] Eastern Europe is a concept argued to have appeared already for the first time in the 18th century. Still, its application area has depended on the different perspectives applied by the research. In some historical and geographical contexts, Ukraine has been described to form part of Eastern Europe (Magocsi, 2010:13). In contrast, in more ideological and political terms, it has been neglected that Ukraine should be seen as an Eastern European country and that the demarcation should instead be drawn elsewhere (Schenk, 2017:189).

used as a way of "*othering*"[3]. Eastern Europe is a concept referred to more condescendingly than, for instance, Central Europe. The former has both been portrayed as being more distinct when it comes to its peripheral status and has come to be used in the way of expressing dissimilarities, building on stereotypes of backwardness and slow development (Trencsényi, 2017:169, 173; Schenk, 2017:189, 192f, 200f). In comparison to both Poland and Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia, in their reinforcement of self-determination and formulation of their national identities, it is being said that they took advantage of detecting differences between themselves and others to reinforce the "*self*", establishing scenarios that we are not like "*them, the others*" (Lindstrom, 2003:314ff).

Whereas the European civilisation as a whole was being seen as something good, something that countries associated with prosperity, development and community feeling; Eastern Europe continued to be seen as something less attractive, which started to get incorporated into the thinking of how new nation-states wanted to formulate their national identities onwards (Lindstrom, 2003:317, 319; Mahda & Khvostova, 2021:136f). This yet paradoxical relationship between the micro-and macro-level was not as easy to balance in some states, especially not if the rest of the community portrayed you as the "*other*". These tendencies have specifically affected the Balkan countries and Ukraine (Rothschild & Wingfield, 2008:212).

For instance, this pattern has been observed in Serbia. The country's identity formation and relationship to Europe are described to build on a parallel understanding of its identity, explained as ethnic-culturally attached or a more civic-institutional character. Even though Serbia has sought to incorporate Europe and the EU into its nation-building and identity formation, it has struggled with this duality of understanding Europe and how it should relate to it (Kostovicova, 2004:24f).

[3]*Othering* is a concept that is said to have developed from performances of prejudices and stereotypes to distinguish between and categorise people, which has come to entail connotations of inferiority and backwardness—in more coarse meanings, even associated with barbarianism (Anderson, 2006:141ff; Schenk, 2017:196; Trencsényi, 2017:169). Edward Said (2003 [1978]) has further elaborated the definition in his book '*Orientalism*' as a critical reinforcement of dichotomies. Western scholars are argued to have similarly constructed the *Orient* as a counter-concept to the *Occident*, imposing images of othering the East and viewing the West as superior. Hence, Said's argument has also faced criticism for overlooking certain discourses and for excluding, for instance, variations of orientalism patterns also encountered within *Occident* contexts.

The ambiguity that the emergence of the "*new*" Europe came to entail is yet a way of labelling and a way to categorise some from the others. External pressures such as the uneven transitions and growing in-group feelings created doubts about the states' national identity among those left out. Eastern European-labelled nations appear to be still portrayed as the "*other*" and remain struggling with their reintegration into the sphere of Europe (Lindstrom, 2003:313f; Kostovicova, 2004:23f; Seegel, 2006:177f; Schenk, 2017:202f; Mahda & Khvostova, 2021:136f). Thus, recent trends of so-called backsliding have been observed in both Poland and Hungary, where certain common principles are not being followed and accepted by the other nations of the community. This has created speculations regarding the thresholds and yet made the issue of demarcation of boundaries a quested one (Rothschild & Wingfield, 2008:211f; Mälksoo, 2019:365-369).

The recognition issue needs to coincide with the image held by the rest of the states in Europe. However, all components above have proven the difficulties in settling in among the rest, something that further confirms how testing the "*return to Europe*" has been and how challenging the upholding of that image continues to be (Lindstrom, 2003:314-319; Arel, 2006:14f; Rothschild & Wingfield, 2008:212, 242f).

2.3 Ukrainian National Identity

Young and recently independent states are more prone to encounter difficulties formulating their national identity, where embedded cleavages and internal disputes among groups can slow down the process. However, to overcome such obstacles, it is stressed that states should enhance finding meaning in what unites and builds bridges between the people (Bugajski, 2000:165).

Weak national ethos and weak national identities are asserted to potentially prolong the sequencing of internal sub-divisions and competing identity narratives. On the other hand, the presence of solid national ethos, as in shared values, acceptance and group consciousness, can be used as an integrative tool to minimise internal frictions and, instead, operate to enhance greater social cohesion. This demonstrates why uniformity of a state's national identity is essential for nation-building and people's understanding of belonging to a nation (Basiuk, 2000:31f; Zhurzhenko, 2014:249ff; Barrington, 2021:155).

Ukraine has been facing similar challenges as those observed in Serbia. Namely, where an ongoing discussion on whether the civic-political or the ethnic-cultural understanding of the Ukrainian identity should be the one permeating its national discourse. Ukraine, which often has been characterised by its peripheral position, has been torn between the national and international comprehension of its own identity, which in turn has been affecting its nation-building (Magocsi, 2010; Kakachia, Lebanidze & Dubovyk, 2019; Mahda & Khvostova, 2021).

Despite existing internal ethnic- and linguistic diversities (Kulyk, 2016:603-607; Kulyk, 2019; Aasland, 2021), a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the Ukrainian national identity is being emphasised, favouring a civic sense of its identity (Sasse & Lackner, 2019; Beliaeva & Seals, 2020; Mahda & Khvostova, 2021; Nedozhogina, 2021; Barrington, 2021). However, what it means to be Ukrainian is undoubtedly an issue that has continued to create confusion when boundaries between identities are not being that precise. In-between positioning can result in contradictory identity narratives, which has been the case in Ukraine (Arel, 2006:25).

The nation-building process in Ukraine is claimed to have started long before the nation even became a state. Kasianov (2015:149) expresses that "*Ukraine followed the classic pattern of 19th-century revivalist nationalism characteristic of stateless nations*", where the historical narrative has been pointed out as awakening the sense of national identity by being considered something one is not willing to categorise oneself with (ibid). In 1991 when the Soviet Union ceased to exist, waves of Ukrainian nationalism started to fill the gap more explicitly. Formulating a national identity has since been described as an ongoing but challenging process in defining what such identity should represent, especially when other parallel discourses make it challenging to align oneself with the past (Zhurzhenko, 2014:249). Some Russian polls in 2000 indicated that people agreed that "*Ukraine could not be independent since Ukraine is not a separate nation*" (Goble, 2000:110), even if the country already had been an independent state for about a ten-year-period. Similar neglections have been made regarding the Ukrainian language, stating that it should be considered a dialect rather than an actual language (Arel, 2006:14f).

In 1991, the Ukrainian constitution emphasised the official understanding concerning who is to be regarded as a Ukrainian and the demarcation of Ukraine's boundaries. It confirmed that "*all people living in Ukraine to be nationals*" (Bugajski, 2000:170) and stated that there is only "*a single citizenship existing in Ukraine*" (Basiuk, 2000:42). This falls in line with the argument that dual citizenship can weaken the understanding of national boundaries (Shevel, 2004:9). To enhance the official formulation further, the citizenship law was introduced in 1991. It was declared that "*those born on the territory of Ukraine, or at least one of whose parents or grandparents were born in Ukraine*" should be entitled to Ukrainian citizenship (ibid:2f). Although the definition of the concept targeted broad features of individuals in its categorisation, it has been criticised. The existing and revised version of the law came out in 2001, adding to the official understanding of belonging to the Ukrainian nation:

> "Those who were born or permanently resided on the territory of Ukraine, or at least one of whose parents, grandparents, a full-blood brother or a sister, was born or permanently resided on the territory of Ukraine" (Shevel, 2004:2).

Nevertheless, the territorial demarcation of Ukraine remained the official understanding even in the updated version and was claimed to run short in counting for the yet multiple ethnic parameters (ibid:5ff).

Identity formation in former socialist republics is problematic due to the heterogeneity of intersecting identities, where the remaining old legacies risk conflict with the new formulations of identity traits (Ruble, 2006:345f). In accordance, when the former dichotomies of the East and the West began to circulate among countries that formerly had belonged to the Eastern sphere of the divide but instead identified with the Western bloc, Ukraine seems to have fallen into the margins of that discussion (Lindstrom, 2003; Rothschild & Wingfield, 2008; Mälksoo, 2019). While the discourse of the Eastern bloc had been more permeated by the idea of an ethnic-cultural understanding of its identity, the new states that emerged started to gradually distance themselves from this idea (Mahda & Khvostova, 2021:138). This pattern has also characterised the Ukrainian transition, even if it took a considerably longer time for it to develop within the Ukrainian context (Kuzio, 2022).

Whereas some states started their journey of integration into the sphere of emerging democracies in Europe, the transition for Ukraine has not been as straightforward and easy-going. Independence meant that the Ukrainian state per se was born. Thus, it still had to deal with the multi-ethnic nature of intersected identities without a coherent understanding of its statehood (Basiuk, 2000:31ff; Bugajski, 2000:171ff). Throughout Ukraine's thirty-year period as an independent state, difficulties in reformulating who are "*we*" according to "*them*" have particularly proven to be a complex issue (Beliaeva & Seals, 2020; Barrington, 2021; Sabatovych & Heinrichs, 2021). Problems in defining the "*out-group*" compared to being a Ukrainian and distancing itself from the USSR's understanding of identity might have created further doubts about Ukraine's self-image (Prizel, 2000:11f; Cornell, 2021:18, 21). Due to the multifaceted nature of identity formation in Ukraine, it has been argued that the explanatory factors to understand these phenomena cannot be reduced to only one single factor (Pop-Eleches & Robertson, 2018:107).

Figure 3. Ethnolinguistic map.

Source: UCIPR (2017)

To steer people's attitudes and create national ethos have come to being politicised by the political elite in Ukraine when trying to impose uniformity among the population from above. Identity has been pointed out as an essential component that underlies people's emotional attachment to their homeland and a way to reflect individuals' attitudes. Further, it has been argued that shifts in attitudes are being generated as a response to reflecting one's identity, then

the other way around (Pop-Eleches & Robertson, 2018:107; Onuch, Hale & Sasse, 2018:81). Unfortunately, national identity formation has not been as successful as the politicians aimed it to be. A reasonable explanation for this could be that there has not been any existing consensus about the self-branding of the state among the political parties in power. Instead, there has been a relatively weak and scarce formulation, where perspectives have differed (Shevel, 2004:10f; Zhurzhenko, 2014).

Regardless of the governing body in the country, tendencies have shown that there is a solid internal willingness in Ukraine to redefine its peripheral position and to be recognised with the same status as any other European country (Schenk, 2017:202f; Kakachia, Lebanidze & Dubovyk, 2019:453, 459). The eagerness to seek "*recognition from others in a context where you do not belong*" is a challenging task (Lindstrom, 2003:314ff). Ukraine's positioning has been caught between two different worlds, the one of Europe and Russia, intertwined and dependent on both, making the relationship even more complex (Goble, 2000:107, 111f). Some Ukrainian leaders have indicated that they have wanted to enhance a closer relationship with Europe. In contrast, some other leaders have wanted to build closer ties with Russia, hence, sending ambivalent messages to the population regarding Ukraine's direction and positionality (Prizel, 2000:20-24; Anderson, 2006:161; Cornell, 2021; Popova & Shevel, 2022). The desire to be considered a part of Europe has intensified the distancing from Russia (Payne Royce, 2021; Barrington, 2021; Popova & Shevel, 2022). This has made itself noticeable through various social mobilisations seen during the last decades, where the Ukrainian population has been stating that they are the ones deciding over their destiny (Thomson-DeVeaux & Yi, 2022), "*than having to hold an inherited identity*" (Cornell, 2021:21).

2.3.1 Current Events & Developments

Between 2012 and 2014, the country was close to signing a rapprochement agreement with the EU, following the motive that Ukraine was facing a hard time economically. The former Russian-loyal president, Viktor Yanukovych, refused to sign, which led to civil unrest in the capital Kyiv. The Euro-Maidan movement, as the uprising came to be called, is described as an awakening where an apparent change in attitude took place among the Ukrainians, leaning toward a more pro-European mindset (Musiyezdov, 2022; Thomson-DeVeaux & Yi, 2022; Norris & Kizlova, 2022).

Tendencies have since then shown that a cultural shift has been taking place in Ukraine, where the replacement of road names and symbols from the Soviet era is constantly being changed into Ukrainian signs (Gnatiuk, 2018; Musiyezdov, 2022). Similarly to that, magazines and public media sources are making more use of the Ukrainian language in their publications and broadcastings, which in turn is reducing the amount of Russian-language media (Marson, 2022). This, alongside other ongoing mobilisations of so-called '*Ukrainianess*', could be explained as instruments enhancing thicker boundaries of the Ukrainian nation (Anderson, 2006:74, 133f; Cosentino, 2015; Averianova & Voropaieva, 2020).

This, in turn, has created counter-reactions from Russia. Since 2014, ongoing cleavages in the Eastern parts of Ukraine, alongside the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula the same year, have posed a direct hostile threat to the Ukrainian national identity and nation-state. Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, made himself clear already in the initial phases of the annexation that the actions taken were carried out to protect fellow Russian citizens and Russian speakers in Ukraine, a country that, according to him, does not even exist. Yet again, this was some of the same rhetoric that got used behind the Russian aggression and waging of war that, in early 2022, rapidly escalated into a full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Kuzio, 2019; Kuzio, 2020; Popova & Shevel, 2022).

In 2019, the Russian native-speaking president, Volodymyr Zelensky, won the presidential election in Ukraine and has since held a challenging position vis-à-vis Russia (Sasse & Lackner, 2019; Popova & Shevel, 2022). The Russian national identity is still claimed to be of a yet more ethnic nature, inspired by the former USSR. Given the Russian discourse resting on a more ethnic, historical and mythical understanding, Russia's denial of the existence of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people becomes more clearly anchored. Therefore, the conflict is argued to be solved depending on how the Russian leadership, Russia and Ukraine understand their national identities (Kuzio, 2022).

2.4 Research Gap

Identity is highlighted as an essential component in understanding the ongoing conflict and the cultural shift that is taking place in Ukraine (Globalis, 2021). The existence of nations is recurrently contested, and identities constantly transform to reflect attitudes and the context in

which they operate. More recent and updated knowledge about collective perceptions of identity and national belonging are needed to better understand how these phenomena can be approached and how they develop.

Scholars have highlighted that identity matters when examining social phenomena. Still, they stress that more research is needed within these fields (Arel, 2006; Onuch, Hale & Sasse, 2018). National identity is vital in nation-states' formation and crucial for understanding our modern societies (Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009:272). Thus, it took some time before these subjects came up for discussion within the area of social sciences, which has resulted in a rather inadequate quantity of research, especially possessing a qualitative character.

To realise a study within the contextual frame of Ukraine and on the topics of nation-building and identity formation is indeed a complex task. The collective understanding of the Ukrainian national identity has been expressed differently and transformed over time (Kulyk, 2016). Several quantitative studies on national identity and surveys on popular opinion have been conducted where one can see that the rhetoric has changed in Ukraine, providing a more inclusive and salient understanding of the national identity (Arel, 2018; Beliaeva & Seals, 2020; Barrington, 2021:155f; Nedozhogina, 2021). Yet more in-depth knowledge is needed on this topic. Suppose this topic had been addressed a few years ago. In that case, one might have been able to question its relevance more critically, but as proven, identity is an ever-changing phenomenon that requires updated research.

For that reason, the initial idea was to conduct interviews, to come closer to the personal understanding of the collective identity and the national belonging to Ukraine. However, the ongoing situation in Ukraine has resulted in the initial purpose of this investigation having to be reconsidered and adapted to the impending conditions. Also, concerning the recent developments seen in the country, I argue that the issue of gaining new insights about the Ukrainian national identity has not become less relevant but rather, the opposite, a highly topical one.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the study presents the theoretical framework that will form the basis for the forthcoming analysis. This section will also give an insight into the author's view on the predicted outcomes, followed by stating the theoretical limitations of this investigation.

3.1 Identity

Before the thesis approach the concepts of national identity and nationalism, it is crucial to pinpoint what this text comprehends as identity.

Within ethnography, sociology and psychology, the concept of identity has been applied and used extensively for a long time. Studying identity has, throughout the years, increased in popularity among a broader field of academic research, and within social- and political sciences, there is no exception. The more intensified focus on humans as study subjects and to approach these complex relationships that identities have over social phenomena have contributed to the rapidly growing literature on these topics (see examples: Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Arel, 2006; Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009; Arel, 2018; Gnatiuk, 2018; Onuch, Hale & Sasse, 2018; Beliaeva & Seals, 2020; Kullasepp, 2021; Sabatovych & Heinrichs, 2021; Nedozhogina, 2021, among others).

Conceptualising identity has not been an easy task, where scholars from all different research fields seem to have had divergent views. The use of distinct definitions to explain the concept has created a somewhat theoretical debate, even if they all aim to describe the same variable (Cornell, 2021:2). Its application area has been criticised for ending up being relatively mainstream and, therefore, also argued to be too broad and overstretching (Arel, 2006). Despite this ambiguity and criticism, scholars claim that identity does matter and stress the importance of the concept's qualities in facilitating the understanding of individuals and the environment in which they operate (Kulyk, 2016; Onuch, Hale & Sasse, 2018).

Therefore, identity can be seen as the glue that binds the social world together. The concept's origins derive from individuals' cognitive abilities in imagining, interpreting, and understanding their experiences through interaction with others (Greenfeld & Eastwood,

2009:257). Identity is described to enable us to approach people's perceived selves relative to others, where individuals create meaning from the information that comes from these exchanges. Thus, entailing the paradox of relational existence, where one's identity needs to be put about something else (Connolly 2002:64). Some identity features are explained as traits that one cannot control, such as one's biological roots or in which country one is born (Anderson, 2006:143f).

In contrast, other characteristics of one's identity are shaped through social interaction with others. Identity formation has no manual to be followed, which might have led to the inevitable confusion regarding identity boundaries, and where to draw the line between different identity traits (Arel, 2006:25). Identities operate on various levels in the social world, where it permeates the individual micro-level and the broader collective macro-levels. Similarly, when different layers of one's identity are interplaying with the macro-level is when and where the collective identities are becoming active via the social interactions that give rise to group consciousness. An even further step in enhancing the collective identity is when it is getting incorporated into the state apparatuses and the national institutions (Petrovska, 2019:65), creating a sense of unity and belonging to the nation-state.

Identity traits are explained as adaptable to the contexts in which they aspire to be as relevant as possible, which gives them the capacity to both develop and transform over time, and are therefore claimed to be non-static in their nature (Tajfel & Turner, 2004:278; Averianova & Voropaieva, 2020; Beliaeva & Seals, 2020). Some layers of one's identity are arguably more visible in some circumstances, whereas, in other contexts, some identity traits might be trumped by other identity features (Petrovska, 2019:65). The interplay between layers of one's identity is necessary since they all build on each other and constitute who we are and experience ourselves, both individually and collectively. One individual could at the same time identify herself with a particular nationality, ethnicity and religion, and so on. Several intersected layers of one's identity are therefore present simultaneously, without them having to compete. However, some layers might be more visible than others, depending on the context, giving the impression that they are competing.

Namely, previously overshadowed layers of one's identity could if triggered somehow, appear and even reinforce specific layers of one's identity, compared to how they were experienced and perceived before. Since identities are formable and not static, they are constantly questioned to enhance meaning and appear relevant. A potential change in the social world can bring about elements of complexity as new depictions of identity traits are being put about former ones, resulting in tensions, and could create concerns among individuals when constellations are changing, and new ones appear (Tajfel & Turner, 2004:278; Ruble, 2006:336, 345f).

To understand how collective identities are socially getting shaped and categorise "*us*" from "*them*", Henri Tajfel's (1974) contribution to social identity theory (SIT) comes in handy. His argument aligns with the idea that the more an individual feels attached to a group, the stronger that sense of belonging to that social categorisation will be, further enhancing the meaning of "*us*". The awareness of "*us*", which is also referred to as the in-group, builds on finding similarities and building blocks that all the individuals in that group have in common, but more importantly, according to Tajfel, gets shaped when being compared and seeking for traces that distinguishes the in-group from the out-group, the latter also understood as "*them*". The understanding of collective identities could be traced back to what the author stresses as in-group bias, where the in-group's self is portrayed as superior and linked to positive emotions of good self-esteem, which could have implications on how the behaviours and attitudes towards the out-group, later on, will be played out. In their findings, after having observed intergroup relations, Tajfel & Turner (2004) state that there does not necessarily have to be an explicit distinction between in-groups and out-groups:

> "[…] the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups —that is, social categorisation per se— is sufficient to trigger intergroup discrimination favouring the in-group. In other words, the mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the in-group" (Tajfel & Turner, 2004:281).

Since identities, as the text has stated, appear in many different forms and constantly are being redefined and questioned to give meaning, it is essential to bear in mind that there is not only one uniform understanding of identity as a concept, nor only one existing layer of one's identity.

Identities build on intersected traits and consciousness. Therefore, for clarification purposes, this thesis will focus on the collective sense of identity to understand why some individuals identify themselves as a group; and see how this layer is being canalised concerning the sense of belonging to the nation-state. The study understands the concept of identity as shaping in-groups relative to out-groups, which cannot exist without each other since they both build on interaction and coexistence.

3.2 Nation-Building & Nationalism

"Pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed" (Anderson, 2006:154).

Collective identities are claimed to get shaped when enough people imagine them to be and are said to appear where there is no previously existing sense of collective affinity (Anderson, 2006:12). In line with what the previous section has pointed out, it is essential to remember that even collective identities do not appear in a vacuum or isolated from the social world. This could also explain why many different kinds of imaginaries exist in parallel to each other, due to the dynamic environment in which they operate (ibid:25).

National imagination is particularly described as enhancing the sense of belonging to a specific collective community, namely, in this case, a nation. The national imaginary can become concretised in the forms of certain shared norms, values, practices, and symbols (Basiuk, 2000). These are explained to be embedded in the societies and further permeate the social interactions between people, creating a sense of national consciousness and connection between individuals. This, in turn, is asserted to create boundaries between different nation-building projects since national ideas distinguish themselves when it comes to how individuals perceive the collective group, the national identity, and attachment to linking symbols (Anderson, 2006:19, 25, 32; Mahda & Khvostova, 2021:138).

Before the thesis discusses the various understandings of national identity and its roots, the concepts of nation, nationality and nationalism will be clarified.

Benedict Anderson's work on '*Imagined communities*' (2006) is one scholar whose scientific contribution has frequently been referred to by other scholars, which theoretically discusses the concepts of nation, nationality, and nationalism. The author does himself, similarly to other colleagues (Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009:263), acknowledges the difficulties in defining these concepts as there seems to have been a race between different discourses. The concepts have tended to be used either interchangeably or more exclusively and, in other scenarios, even politicised by some actors. This has led to the concepts being applied to many different contextual settings and, at times, being incorporated into certain political-ideological discourses.

Anderson's understanding of the nation is something we all imagine. He builds his argument on three pillars. The nation is argued to be "*an imagined political community; where the word imagined is understood as both inherited, limited and sovereign*" (Anderson, 2006:4fff). Therefore, a nation is something that must come from people's imagination in order for it to exist and has to be constantly reproduced to assert its existence. Even if Anderson's definition builds on an imaginary character, where boundaries seem to develop and change over time, his argument is not entirely limitless. A nation is not a concept to capture the whole world or all imaginaries into one solely nation. Limitations to the concept exist, even if the idea remains non-static. In line with those certain limitations, the meaning of sovereignty becomes more approachable, where every nation is said to strive to be seen and considered peculiar (ibid:7).

Nationality is the tie an individual develops to the sovereign state, either by birth or other legal procedures, such as naturalisation. The principle of nationality is said to come accompanied by the claim of one's identity (Arel, 2006:4f). For instance, a Ukrainian national constitutes the foundation of the idea of the Ukrainian nation. Something claimed to also consist of a conscious choice of the individual, being able to choose and self-identify with a specific nationality (Mahda & Khvostova, 2021:138). As Shevel (2004:250) and Ruble (2006:336, 345f) discuss, the state and the political elite can enhance this comprehension further by strengthening individuals' ties to the nation if manoeuvring their role correctly. This could be done by applying a broad policy framework. The risk of using a too narrow framework is that it could rather create diverse interpretations and instead result in undesired outcomes than the understanding the state wants to convey (Ruble 2006:339). However, nationality should not be interpreted as citizenship, which will be described later.

Scholars usually refer to nationalism as when individuals' understanding of their social surroundings is set into motion, where people feel an attachment to each other, and the nation's collective consciousness is perceived as vital. National symbols (such as flags, national anthems, media, printed sources etc.) are elements that can spur nationalism and patriotic feelings for a nation (Anderson, 2006:134-140, 146; Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009:260, 265f). In addition, the nation's language is also highlighted to more clearly mark the boundaries of the state, even if countries can be understood without a linguistic component if individuals' understandings instead rest upon other elements (Anderson, 2006:109, 113f, 133f). However, not all imaginaries are claimed to create sufficiently strong ties to convey enough attachment or to clearly define one community from another (Anderson, 2006:53f, 146; Arel, 2006:7, 19). One element claimed to have been overlooked in the discourses on nationalism is the emotional ties that individuals develop for a nation. Therefore, emotions should be taken into account to better understand people's attachment and sense of belonging to a country (ibid). Nationalism and national identities are thus claimed to manifest themselves in many different ways, depending on how the individuals create those ties with each other.

In line with what has been mentioned above, this brings us back to the different understandings of one's national identity. National bonds between people are described to be built either on an ethnic-cultural awareness (more people-based) or a civic-political understanding (more state-based) (Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009:270ff; Petrovska, 2019). The parallel between the ethnic account being cultural and the civic being political is the most frequently used by scholarly literature. However, the division has been commented not to be wholly interpreted with a strict division between the two, as both the civic and the ethnic understanding can promote overlapping features (Barrington, 2021).

An ethnic understanding of identity aligns with the idea that individuals seek the denominators for what they all have in common (Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009:271). Ethnic identities do not necessarily have to be related to a specific language, nor a language to a particular nationality (Ruble, 2006:341; Anderson, 2006:134-139; Kuzio, 2020), but are instead often claimed to be based on cultural traditions, shared values and collective consciousness (Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009:271). Some schools seem to be interpreting the ethnic identity as something inherited and

therefore out of reach for the individual herself to influence this choice of belonging. Others mean that ethnicity is linked to individuals' self-identification with a social group, hence providing two contradictory arguments on which the ethnic understanding of membership is rooted. Something that, in turn, has contributed to the complexity of measuring the concept (ibid). Even if ethnic nationalism has been claimed to be the most prevalent, it should not be confused with political ideologies. Notwithstanding, Giuliano (2006) stresses that:

> "It is possible for individuals to genuinely and intensely identify with their ethnic group yet to neither automatically support a nationalist program nor respond to nationalist elites' appeals for statehood or the subjugation of the ethnic "other" […] Ethnic groups respond to nationalist appeals less frequently than is generally assumed (p. 55f)."

An argument that claims the journey from the ethnic understanding of national identity and ethnic nationalism to being a nationalist supporter is more extended and nuanced than usually presented. So ethnicity should not be seen as interchangeable with a nationalist ideology or discourse.

Compared to ethnically rooted identities, civic-based identities are instead described to refer to the nation in an associational manner, linked to the political build-up, where the state and its institutions mirror the national identity. Membership in the community is here explained to take the form of citizenship, where individuals engage in both the nation's political and civic interplay (Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009:271). Citizenship can be seen as an extended arm of the civic understanding of one's identity, where its territorial ties to the sovereign state are emphasised as an essential element (Barrington, 2021). Petrovska (2019) compares being a member of the nation to being a member of an organisation, where the member here is the individual deciding to participate in that organisation or not. The author further discusses that the sense of belonging possesses a dual relationship. Both the state has a responsibility towards its citizens and the people back to the state, and between themselves. In this case, the collectively shared sense of community belonging between the members and being citizens of the state can shape conditions for an enhanced civic understanding of one's identity from two

different directions. A strong sense of civic identity is also argued to have the benefits of guaranteeing state security and making societies more resilient (Petrovska, 2019:62ff).

3.3 Internal & External Threats

By building onto the concept of imagined communities, nations and collective identities must constantly be re-imagined since they are claimed not to exist naturally (Anderson, 2006:204). This also implies that identity formation has to be an ongoing and continuous process for a nation to be. Because if it is not being imagined, a nation's existence runs the risk of disappearing. An internal threat may then be that if not enough people collectively identify with the in-group that constitutes the nation, it ceases to exist (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Anderson, 2006; Ruble, 2006).

Today, modern nations tend to be more heterogeneous than homogenous in their national build-up. Even though one might assume that homogenous societies find it easier to agree, as they may have more things in common, it has been shown that heterogeneous groups tend to be better at cooperating and keeping together, despite the asserted differences (Colley, 1992:373ff). This is something that not at least have been observed in times of uncertainty and crisis, where people are claimed to act according to what they consider best for themselves and the group. This could, for example, entail making sacrifices that result in fading the lines of internal dissimilarities (Colley, 1992:1, 5ff; Gehring, 2021:5f).

Even if in-groups can get shaped only by the consciousness that there is an existing out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), it makes one think about what happens when there is an apparent and more severe conflict of interest between in- and out-groups. Identity boundaries are strengthened where they fulfil their function and meaning the most, which is described as resolving internal problems between groups. This has been noticeable in settings where the status of more hierarchical structures has tended to appear as they did in the cases where colonial- and imperialist discourses were prominent (Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009:266, 271). However, cleavages between different identity narratives, when not coinciding with the self-understood positioning or the collective identification, could trigger hierarchical structures to appear yet again and result in conflict and turbulence.

Similarly, hierarchical structures can allow external threats to emerge and constrain a nation's identity and existence. National identities are more vulnerable when exposed to a threat to their existence from either an out-group or when ambiguities in group constellations emerge. Also, experiencing shifts in the understanding of the territorial integrity of its boundaries may put the national sense of identity to the test (Sasse & Lackner, 2019). External threats are explained as one way to trigger yet undiscovered layers of one's identity to become visible. Still, they are also said to strengthen the presence of already visible ones when tested (Aasland, 2021). Gehring (2021:5) stresses that perceived threats or any drastic change in the environment could trigger identity transformations; such changes are explained as external shocks to the system or threats to one's existence (Arel, 2018). Findings have also shown that any crisis or uncertainty inflicting on the current —status quo— situations can comparably result in implications and affect the perceptions of one's identity (Sabatovych & Heinrichs, 2021:324ff).

"*External threats should reduce perceptions of intergroup dissimilarities when threatened individuals will identify more with groups they perceive as valuable to restore the sense of control*" (Gehring, 2021:7). Something that might result in that internal differences between in-groups is being minimised, thus indicating a more clear distancing from the out-groups, especially if the threat is depicted as external rather than internal. People are usually described as most at ease and comfortable with status quo situations than having them changed or forced into situations of uncertainty (Sasse & Lackner, 2019:77). When faced with an external hostile threat, emotions and actions such as defence mechanisms can be triggered, making people willing to fight and protect what gives them meaning. The willingness and capacity of dedication to protecting one's in-group are connected to either a solid or weak sense of belonging and identification with the elements exposed to the threats (Colley, 1992:1). In the case of protecting one's idea of a nation, the national belonging and the national ethos become yet again a crucial marker as it is being said that people, after all, do not allow themselves to be sacrificed just for any organisation or imagined community. The sacrifice is claimed to convey more significant meaning than the total cost of letting go of one's imaginaries (Basiuk, 2000; Anderson, 2006:7, 50-54, 144; Zhurzhenko, 2014).

In her book '*Britons: Forging the Nation*' (1992), Linda Colley has used the British context to apply her theorising in tune with similar topics. The phenomenon depicted in her findings was

how the culturally and historically distinct English, Scottish and Welsh identities in the 18th and 19th centuries came to unite in the collective identity of what today is more known as the British nation. In her argument, the British national identity was being forced as a response to the perceived external threat these identities were facing at that time, resulting in the previous prevailing regional and local boundaries of identities becoming less prominent. The collective awakening that appeared between the English, Scottish and Welsh identities to resist and fight as one, to protect oneself from the hostile "*other*", which in this case was portrayed as continental Europe, is claimed to have spurred the national idea of the British identity (Colley, 1992:1, 5ff).

Internal divisions within an in-group may continue to exist even after exposure to an external threat. Still, depending on the contextual situation, they can change in intensity and coexist with other identity characteristics, as previously discussed regarding more visible identity traits. In post-war times, the British identity was questioned for what it should represent, as the British identity was being shaped under circumstances of distinguishing between the in-group and a hostile out-group (Colley, 1992:364ff, 374). Substantially, constantly imagining the national identity is vital, especially since awareness of the nation is argued not enough. Instead, the participation and consumption of the national imaginary, where both top-down and bottom-up approaches enhance group consciousness and social coherence, are seen as contributing components in the struggle for self-survival and resistance when exposed to external threats (Colley, 1992:373ff; Anderson, 2006:74, 204).

3.4 Expected outcomes

The following assumptions regarding expected outcomes can be made from the previous literature review and the theoretical background. The more interaction between individuals and the more common denominators they share could shape stronger attachment and a sense of belonging to that in-group. One of the more obvious expected outcomes that can be drawn is that external threats negatively impact the in-group and identity, negatively in a way where it can even be seen as threatening one's existence, destroying what creates meaning and uniting the people. As for the case of Ukraine, since the threat has been ongoing already for some time, Ukrainians seem to be more aware of who is portrayed as the out-group, which can also enhance a clearer understanding of themselves. Therefore, to assume that when exposed to an external

threat, you also form a negative perception of the out-group, which can be reflected in both the attitude and whom you turn to when one's identity is being questioned.

Furthermore, I assume that some internal divisions do still prevail in Ukraine. This is primarily linked to the situation in the Eastern parts of Ukraine has looked like it has for a long time without any solution in sight. This suggests that there may still be some ambiguities regarding the Ukrainian identity and belonging. However, considering the escalation in intensity and the consequences that the Russian invasion now is contributing to, it could yet be seen as another shock to the system and, in that manner, result in strengthening the bonds between the Ukrainian people, as an external threat can spur collective consciousness and fade internal divisions.

3.5 Limitations

As this is a qualitative study that focuses on better understanding phenomena that arise from social interaction between people, it cannot be "*trying to understand social groups other than in which the theory applies*" (Bryman, 2012:401). Therefore, the scope conditions for this thesis are that the contextual understanding is limited to the Ukrainian case and the Ukrainian national identity. Since identities and especially national imaginations differ between settings, the study can be seen as context-dependent.

Accordingly, this study does not claim any significant generalisation beyond the stated limitations of this particular study, which implies difficulties in making comparisons to other cases and populations. However, the thesis sets out to broaden the understanding of nation-building and identity formation. The investigation aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the notion of identity within the Ukrainian context.

The theme of interest in this thesis, identity formation, and mainly focusing on Ukraine, was decided upon before the current ongoing situation in Ukraine. Mentioning this, the ongoing crisis cannot be overlooked, and therefore this study cannot stand in total isolation from what is going on. The Eastern parts of the country have been undergoing turbulences over the last eight years, which makes up for one of the motivations why the thesis was already taking the theoretical resonances about threats to one's identity into account. Therefore, the research

process has had to adapt accordingly to conduct a suitable ethical study due to the circumstances and the ongoing situation in Ukraine (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012).

4. Methodological Framework

The following section will present the collection of data and the methodological framework used for further analysis. A description of the choices made regarding the qualitative research design and other considerations that have been made along the way will also be discussed in this chapter.

4.1 Research Design

This thesis's outlined research design uses a qualitative approach, concentrating on a small number of units for analysis. Using few units for analysis is an approach that allows for more in-depth and comprehensive knowledge of a specific phenomenon. This coincides with the purpose of better understanding a context that is not as clearly defined or understood, aiming to generate new insights and ideas.

The study combines both deductive and inductive influences. The deductive approach implies that one first starts with the existing theories and literature on what we already know about the phenomenon in order to apply relevant concepts that can further be analysed in detail when studying the particular selected case (Bryman, 2012:418fff). For that reason, the collection of data has been theory-driven. However, to detect trends and patterns among the findings in the empirical data, a thematic analysis is applied to approach the secondary material inductively (Bryman, 2012:578fff; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012:9f). The benefits of realising a small-n study are to enhance a greater contextual understanding. Reusing data sources can help bring about new themes that have not previously emerged. The empirical findings and analysis will onwards in chapter 5 be discussed and presented.

Using a certain kind of research design comes with certain limitations. In this case, it makes it challenging to make more extensive assumptions about the studied phenomenon beyond the stated scope of the study. The chosen research design is suited for this investigation to understand the selected case in-depth. Therefore, to maximise rich comprehension of this case, the research is content-driven, enabling both deductive premises to develop in combination with inductive influences resulting from the empirical findings.

4.2 Case Selection: Ukraine

Ukraine has formed part of the European puzzle with its complex pre-conditions for a long time. As stated at the beginning of the thesis, Ukraine has and continues to make an interesting case within the European context. It is also considered a feasible case to study within European Studies. Ukraine was elected as a case since it possesses qualities relevant from both a societal- and a scientifical point of view when studying phenomena related to nation-building and identity formation.

Young and newly acquired independent states face a challenging time formulating their national identity. This could partly be linked to external factors if other discourses still possess significant influence over the country becoming an independent state (Magocsi, 2010:10f; Trencsényi, 2017:181f). In addition, some internal challenges can be connected to the relatively short timeframe that the state has had to create a coherent understanding of its national identity. Another explanation is that newly independent states have to deal with the composition of existing sub-national identities, which should suddenly be agreed upon in a coherent understanding of a collective national identity (Arel, 2006:25; Ruble, 2006:345f).

Ukraine is a case that very well applies to these elements seen above. Ukraine became independent in 1991, suggesting a relatively short period since it was considered a sovereign state. With its history of being incused by foreign occupation and cultural traits, the Ukrainian discourse has been overshadowed by other more dominant identity narratives, even before, but more significantly even after becoming independent (Kuzio, 2020). Something that, in turn, has been described as prolonging the identity formation and nation-building in Ukraine (Basiuk, 2000: 31ff, 44; Bugajski, 2000:171ff). Ukraine's territorial position has not made the European puzzling less straightforward, as encountered between two former geopolitical blocs with different strategic interests. Ukraine has struggled to develop a coherent understanding of its identity while simultaneously dealing with these external inflicting discourses.

However, Ukraine has attracted more scholarly attention from within and beyond its borders in more recent years, contributing to a rapidly increasing amount of literature on Ukraine. Yet, the Ukrainian identity tends to both excite and confuse scholars. Previous research has shown that the rhetoric within Ukraine regarding its national identity has changed, something that suggests

a more inclusive approach to uniting different identity narratives within the comprehension of the nation's identity. The constantly changing climate when it comes to identity-formation, and the ongoing process of claiming one's subsistence to exist, are contributing factors to why Ukraine further will be subjected to analysis, to take a closer step in understanding how these dynamics develop. Therefore, selecting Ukraine to study can be considered a critical and strategically based decision.

4.3 Data Collection & Material

A purposive sampling strategy drove the collection of material for the thesis to approach the research questions and phenomenon of interest, a methodology commonly used within the political- and social sciences when conducting qualitative research. Previous research and the theoretical framework have influenced the purposive strategy as the main drivers for inspiration on where to start looking for data and exploring what kind of material would be suitable for this particular study. The deductive elements in the data collection have enabled the study to look for, collect, and organise the data systematically. However, the sampling procedure has not been wholly fixed nor decided upon before the data collection by any strict established categories or specific criteria. This is mainly due to the language barrier and the available secondary data, which will be discussed below. Bryman (2012:418fff) stresses that using a purposive sampling approach generates a more broad opportunity for reflecting upon whether the collection of material will yet have to continue or not, based on the theories. This way of collecting data is argued appropriate to fit well with the outlined research design having a qualitative character since it does not require the material to fulfil any statistical benchmarks or aim at a broad sample of units for analysis, as the purpose of this thesis is instead of a more meaning-making and knowledge-generating nature (ibid).

The collected material consists of secondary data from two sources, Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) and Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS). They have a long experience, approximately 35 years each, of expertise in conducting and carrying out research, particularly in Ukraine. They are private and independent entities that, among others, collaborate with universities in Ukraine and other NGOs (non-governmental organisations). In addition, they provide suggestions to the state level while simultaneously having close contact with the civil society in the country. KIIS and DIF have both roots within the sociological field

of research. Still, they have since developed and broadened somewhat their research, where they are expressing themselves to be the connecting link between the Ukrainian population and other actors in society. Since they conduct research in Ukraine, the sources are claimed to fulfil the proximity criteria, being close to the study subjects. Due to their long expertise in combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods and their extensive resources enabling them to conduct both face-to-face interviews, phone- and email interviews, internet surveys, opinion polls, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and desk research, to mention some examples; they can be viewed as both highly qualified sources (DIF, 2022; KIIS, 2022).

DIF and KIIS collaborate to a large extent in their research projects. Since the material collected for this thesis possesses a secondary status, source criticism is something that should be applied. The study has decided to use an additional method to avoid certain shortcomings regarding undesired bias or potential flaws influenced by the interviewer effect. Therefore, two other sources of information have been added as an approach for triangulation purposes to enhance the quality and objectiveness of this investigation even more (Bryman, 2012:392ff).

The two information sources added are the Rating Sociological Group (RSG), which is a Ukrainian non-governmental and independent polling organisation; and Lord Ashcroft Polls (LAP), which is a British private entity, both experienced in the field of conducting and carrying out polling work as well as survey-based and public opinion research. However, they are holding less long experience compared to the other two sources of data (RSG, 2022; LAP, 2022). Triangulation can be considered a method to get a hold of more material to develop an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, as more sources are being added to the investigation. But also, and more importantly, in this case, fulfilling the purpose of enhancing the validity and trustworthiness of the collected material. Triangulation is here used to improve the overall quality of the research (Bryman, 2012:392).

The raw data constitutes 12 documents collected from DIF, 15 documents from KIIS, eight documents from RSG, and finally, two documents from LAP, resulting in 37 documents revised and used as empirical material in this thesis[4]. All documents have in common that they are secondary, resting upon either public opinion polling or survey-based research, and are

[4] All 37 documents are listed in a specific reference list that can be encountered on page 65.

presented in English. Some of the documents are presented as word documents, with extensive information. Other documents are outlined in reports or press releases, and some documents are exclusively available online. All material has been accessed online in the first place from the sources' original platforms and web pages. The material collected is referred to as *Documents*, then followed by a number from 1-37.

The length and details provided by each document differ, which is essential to bear in mind since some information might have been excluded and not provided in the shorter documents. Also, another critical issue to bear in mind is that even if there is much material to be found in English, the information provided by the document could run the risk of being lost in translation too. The language barrier was a fact when trying to access databases since the language used was Ukrainian. This was the case for both KIIS and DIF; the first information source (that was not in Ukrainian and that was of theoretical relevance for this particular thesis) was presented by KIIS for the first time in 2008, as a press release in English. From 2012 onwards, the platform has provided more comprehensive material accessible in English every year. DIF shows similar patterns. Notwithstanding, the more extensive research is still yet only available in Ukrainian.

RSG and LAP have been used for triangulation purposes because of the limited access to the vast amount of data, as in the case of LAP, or the availability of reading the material in English, where mostly summaries and shorter reports provided by RSG are available. So both function as a complementary element partly to each other but also to the other two primary sources. Both sources have been helpful for triangulation to ensure that the results proved are transparent and credible while approaching the collected material critically (Bryman, 2012:392ff).

All documents were published quickly after the stated research was conducted, and the raw data was collected. All documents, except for the two revised papers from LAP (2022a, 2022b), have been undertaken before the invasion on the 24th of February 2022. These two documents are based on answers from March 2022, making the overall timeframe covered by the material from 2008 to 2022. Data from before 2008 is either only accessible in Ukrainian, not portrayed to contain the desired level of quality, or has no relevance for this particular study. The collected material is claimed to make up for representative samples of the Ukrainian adult population.

Nevertheless, the material excludes research in the areas where the Ukrainian authorities do not control the territories, such as Crimea and some places in the Donetsk- and Luhansk regions. Both DIF and KIIS, in their research, do divide the Ukrainian territory and existing regions (oblasts) into macro-regions. Although some areas distinguish between them, they apply almost a similar division between them[5]. When comparing the different collection methods, both KIIS and DIF have used similar methods and often the similar seizes of participants, around 2000 people, scattered among the various geographical regions, ethnicities and ages. Also, considering some ethics, all sources have been conducting their research with participants over the age of 18 (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012).

4.4 Analytical Structure

Researchers and participants invest their time and resources when using humans as study subjects. To cultivate and give the collected material further appreciation, it has been argued that secondary material can be used to approach the data from a new light and with a nuanced perspective. Since both the individual- and collective levels have proven essential for one's identity and understanding of belonging to a nation, the analysis of the study has aimed at targeting both these levels (Bryman, 2012:315, 543f, 561).

The analysis has been content-driven, meaning that the themes and categories have emerged from the material. Categories are somewhat explained to operate on a higher abstract level than, for instance, concepts, but this brings about a more reflective interpretation of the material. Since the aim is to convey a better understanding of the set of events regarding the phenomenon of identity formation and nation-building in Ukraine, the material has been assessed by following some general steps when carrying out a thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012:5, 9f; Bryman, 2012:388, 557, 578fff). For a visual presentation of the analytical steps taken, please see the coding scheme attached in Appendix I.

The first step of carrying out a thematic analysis implies that the researcher gets familiarised with the data, which is considered an essential initial step since the material is secondary. Applying the first step, the material was read through several times without taking notes. Since the purpose was to get a broader overlook of the material, all 37 documents were revised in the

[5] See the division of macro-regions in Appendix II.

initial step of the analysis. Secondly, coding was being applied where the segments of material got some preliminary labels; this was done to summarize the larger pieces of the material that had been processed (Bryman, 2012:315, 568). These codes came to differ to a certain degree when the data was being re-read a second time, as the material also became more and more familiar. In the third step, categories started to take a more concretised form, where I began to see some trends emerging across the different codes, linking the raw data together. Some of the codes had to change categories as the process was being done several times to ensure that no pattern had happened to be overlooked during the process. With that said, many nuances from each trend did also overlap with several categories (Bryman, 2012:578fff; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012:9f).

Table 1. Thematic Analysis

	General Steps
1.	Familiarisation with data
2.	Coding
3.	Creating Categories
4.	Comparing Themes
5.	Defining Themes
6.	Report Findings

Since an inductive approach was being applied, where the material guided how the categories got formed, it is seen as beneficial that all the former steps got repeated some extra times. This is also what step 4 stresses, to review the themes again, something that was applied and carried out while systematically comparing the categories before proceeding to the last steps (Bryman, 2012:557, 568, 571). The two final stages, the fifth and the sixth contain interpretation on behalf of the researcher to give names to the themes, and the last move to write up the findings that have emerged from the material. Following these steps, four themes emerged and are discussed and analysed in separate sub-headings in chapter 5 (Bryman, 2012:578fff; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012:9f). As this type of thematic analysis is very much based on interpretations made by the researcher, replicability could be seen as a threshold (Bryman, 2012:405f).

4.5 Quality & Considerations

First of all, in the start-up phase of this research, the study was facing some practical issues concerning the current ongoing situation in Ukraine. On the 12th of February 2022, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced a dissuasion to forgo travels to Ukraine due to the escalated changes in the security status in Ukraine and the surroundings. Further, on the 24th of February 2022, a military invasion of Ukraine was a fact. These are considerations that have been taken into account when writing this paper, which was also why conducting interviews where no longer an option nor carrying out the data collection on-sight in Ukraine.

The study has also been careful to act self-critically, especially concerning the ongoing situation where personal emotions can get triggered. Of course, ultimately, being an impartial researcher is difficult, as we are all human beings. However, the paper has constantly strived to contain a formal character, which has helped keep the research objective and precise to the very findings of the investigation. Also, as an external observer, I do believe that it can have an instrumental and favourable impact since the distance to the study subjects, in this case, can be seen as a more ethical way of conducting the research. Still, to build up new insights, the researcher has to make interpretations of the material. These interpretations could be seen as adding certain objectiveness to the picture. Still, as long as one is aware of why and how these interpretations have come about, it allows for a critical stance toward the material and a transparent perspective toward the results (Bryman, 2012:390ff).

Some of the limitations in using already collected data are that the initial purpose for why the material was being collected most often distinguishes itself from the very aim of the forthcoming study (Bryman, 2012:543f). In addition, the researcher using secondary material is also limited from influencing and participating in the data collection procedure and can not control how this is being carried out. On the other hand, using secondary material that already has been collected is beneficial in saving both time and resources if one would have carried it out oneself. These considerations have been made since they are seen as the most feasible solution concerning the outer circumstances and the timeframe for writing the thesis. In this case, the secondary material is also asserted to be of good quality, representative and carried out by experienced researchers with good conditions to conduct research close to the phenomenon of interest, without any restricting cultural- or language barriers (ibid:312f; 315f).

5. Analysis & Findings

Chapter five summarises the results obtained from the empirical material and discusses four main themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. The two first sub-headings aim to approach the first research question, whereas the third and fourth themes concentrate on the second question. The material used for the empirical research and analysis is referred to as Documents 1-37.

The first sub-heading elaborates on the idea that more people feel proud about belonging to the Ukrainian nation, indicating that despite internal diversities, people self-identify with the in-group and do more clearly define boundaries towards out-groups. Secondly, the theme emphasises the salient sense of civic membership in Ukraine and stresses the trust Ukrainians feel for each other. The third sub-heading relates to the responses concerning the ongoing threat to the nation, highlighting the noticeable resistance and engagement prevailing among the Ukrainians. Lastly, the fourth theme points to how the attitudes have changed to reflect the Ukrainian national identity, resulting in a shifting positionality and calling for a brighter future.

5.1 Formulating unity in the diversity

The sense of belonging to Ukraine, where people feel proud and more self-confident about their identity, is a trend that has grown strong within the country (Documents 1, 2, 4, 9, 15, 30, 32, 34, 36, 37). Ukrainians have successively developed emotional bonds to Ukraine (Document 4), a place they are not willing to abandon in the first place (Documents 2, 30). Many refer to Ukraine with a positive self-image and great empathy (Documents 4, 15). An increasing clarity is prevailing regarding the self-identification of who am I compared to the out-group (Documents 19, 20). This coincides with the idea presented by Anderson (2006) and Basiuk (2000) about enhanced national consciousness and national ethos. If enough people share the same understanding and imaginaries, it could work to strengthen the feeling of unity among the people.

Uniformity among an in-group creates more explicit boundaries and makes it easier to distinguish between the in- and the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Arel, 2018; Barrington, 2021), which is a pattern that applies to the Ukrainian case. Between Ukrainians speaking

Ukrainian and closely followed by the Ukrainians speaking Russian, barely any social distance is claimed to exist (Documents 19, 28). In line with the empirical investigation, it becomes clear that the general Ukrainian feels great social closeness with individuals of the same nationality, regardless of the different existing ethnolinguistics in the country. In contrast, the findings suggest that Ukrainians more often perceive foreign descent groups as the out-group and the most socially distant from themselves. This out-group also receives more prejudices and stereotypical assumptions than ethnic minority groups closely intertwined with the Ukrainian in-group (Documents 9, 19, 20). This can further be aligned with the assertion that the in-group possesses a particular bias, resulting in discriminatory behaviour towards the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Defining out-groups and distinguishing them from the Ukrainian in-group is thus not a common occurrence that previously has come to characterise Ukrainian nation-building. However, this trend seems to have changed to create more explicit boundaries.

Even if a majority of the Ukrainian population does not think that discrimination is being applied within the Ukrainian context, some people do yet acknowledge that discrimination occurs depending on the situation (Documents 5, 9, 12, 21, 22, 35). This reflects what the theoretical framework has been pointing at as the social need to categorise to enhance meaning (Connolly, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Seegel, 2006: 177f; Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009). People living in the Eastern parts (macro-region) of Ukraine claim that they are experiencing discrimination, which exceeds perceived discrimination in other parts of the country (Documents 9, 21). Eastern Ukraine is where most ethnic Russians are residents and constitute the most significant ethnic minority, and where the Russian language is being spoken the most. As previously stated, discrimination could create social distance rather than building up unity. The findings do not provide any information regarding the ethnic dimension here within the Eastern macro-region. Ethnic Ukrainians in the Eastern regions might perceive that they are likewise being discriminated against, making such a parallel incalculable to be drawn to ethnicity in this observation.

However, the findings showed apparent differences in what kind of discrimination is being experienced in Ukraine at large and what the Donbas region[6] is stating (Documents 21, 35).

[6] Donbas refers to an area of where the two regions Donetsk and Luhansk are located, in the Eastern parts of Ukraine.

The Donbas region (still the parts controlled by the Ukrainian authorities) expresses higher levels of discrimination regarding language, nationality, and regions of origin than the rest of Ukraine (ibid). This makes it possible to assume that traits that appear distinct from the majority could result in perceptions of being more socially distant from the in-group.

Throughout the study, it has become clear that Ukraine is a state that possesses a wide diversity of intersecting identity narratives, not least a significant ethnic variety. Even if the literature highlights heterogeneity as a potential obstacle to a coherent understanding of one's identity, it can correspondingly have unexpected advantages in acting for uniting a state even more (Colley, 1992). This seems to be the case in Ukraine, enabling the people to see beyond the internal differences and distinct identity traits to instead create bonds via the similarities that generate a sense of belonging (Documents 2, 15, 19). Ethnic Russians in Ukraine seem to believe that Ukraine is a more united state than the ethnic Ukrainians tend to think it is (Documents 36, 37).

That Ukrainians feel a strong sense of belonging to the nation and self-identify with the in-group gets strengthened after triangulating the findings. The results show that 65% of the respondents agree with the statement that *"despite our differences, there is more that unites ethnic Russians living in Ukraine and Ukrainians than divides us"* (Document 36). When consulting the ethnic division of the respondents agreeing or not with this argument, it reveals that ethnic Russians are the ones concurring the most with the statement; that more elements are uniting than dividing the Ukrainian population (88% agree, 12% disagree), compared to the ethnic Ukrainians (64% approve with the statement and 25% disagree) (Document 37). Ukrainians tend to express their affiliation with their fellow nationals, which sheds light on the increasingly more uniform picture of the Ukrainian identity (Documents 4, 9, 11, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21). Comparing these findings with what the previous research literature has been pointing at coincides with the idea that Ukraine as a nation is getting more united, and more Ukrainian (Arel, 2018:188).

It is challenging to erase layers of one's identity since they are all claimed to interact and build on each other, as well as it is to determine when a particular layer of that identity is considered to be more relevant and when not (Tajfel & Turner, 2004:278; Ruble, 2006:336, 345f). Ukraine has come to experience various ethnic groups and narratives interacting with each other for an

extended period, something that has turned into constituting the idea of what the nation's identity today is and should be representing. Being a multi-ethnic state, more than half of the Ukrainians believe that increasing the level of ethnic diversity in Ukraine, even more, would not have any particular impact or make any difference for Ukraine as a country (Document 9). Instead, an eventual increase in diversity is perceived as having no specific effect but rather a neutral one regarding potential benefits and disadvantages. This implies that the country has become accustomed to co-existing narratives operating within its borders, which is not being seen as something unfamiliar or longer as an obstacle to identity formation.

However, the findings do not yield that heterogeneity and the existence of different ethnic groups are immune to encountering difficulties. There is still a significant part of the population, one-third, that considers increased diversity could negatively affect the country (Document 9). Judging by the empirical findings, Ukrainians are generally open-minded in their understanding and acceptance of the existing diversities in the country (Documents 19, 20). Even if some disparities still exist, the steadily growing sense of nationalism and patriotic feelings for the nation are components enhancing social glueing among the Ukrainian population (Document 4).

Furthermore, the theoretical framework has highlighted national symbols as another element of creating attachment to the nation (Anderson, 2006:19, 25, 32; Mahda & Khvostova, 2021:138). Even if there seems to be no coherent answer to what people associate with national symbols of the state (Documents 1, 4), 83% of the Ukrainian population considers themselves patriots, a trend that is stated to reach above 75% in all macro-regions in Ukraine (Document 30). This implies that objects and symbols per se can not be considered the main elements of uniting Ukrainians. Instead, what can be described as creating stronger bonds are people's feelings of pride for their nation (Document 34). Something that emphasises what Arel (2006:7) has been pointing to, that emotions and their impact on people's experiences of belonging should not be overlooked when understanding how nationalism is getting widespread in Ukraine (Documents 1, 4, 36, 37).

The comprehension Ukrainians have developed for their nation matches with what previous research has been underlining as a more deep territorial understanding and belonging to Ukraine

as a nation—translated into people's feelings for Ukraine as their homeland (Pop-Eleches & Robertson, 2018; Barrington, 2021). This territorial understanding is a trend that has gotten strengthened over the years (Documents 32, 34). Only 3% stated that they would move abroad or leave the country if they had the choice or opportunity (Document 2), indicating a relatively low percentage of the larger population. Triangulating these patterns under the prevailing circumstances, a similar question was asked, *"if you could leave Ukraine safely tomorrow for another country, you would"*. About 90% of the Ukrainians disagreed with the argument and would rather stay in Ukraine, whereas 10% stated they would leave (Documents 36, 37). These findings can further be interpreted as Ukrainians having created a significant and emotional rooted attachment to their nation, a Ukraine they are proud of.

5.2 Deepened understanding of the Ukrainian membership

The enhanced emotional and territorial understanding of belonging to Ukraine has also been reinforced with a deepening sense of who should be seen as a Ukrainian. Several documents have highlighted that Ukraine is applying a much more inclusive and political-based understanding of its collective identity (Documents 4, 8, 19, 30, 36, 37), something that falls in line with what the previous research has stated about the inclusive rhetoric regarding the comprehension of the Ukrainian national identity (Sasse & Lackner, 2019; Beliaeva & Seals, 2020; Nedozhogina, 2021; Barrington, 2021).

Over the last decades, more Ukrainians are primarily identifying themselves as citizens of Ukraine, where the importance of the membership-based civic understanding has been vital (Documents 4, 8). Identifying oneself as a citizen of Ukraine is claimed to be the most common and dominant categorisation in all Ukrainian macro-regions (Document 30), where both ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians, similarly to young and older people in Ukraine, seem all to be consistent with identifying themselves as Ukrainian citizens (Documents 36, 37). This indicates a uniformity that the Ukrainian citizenship is seen as something attractive and that the people willingly consider themselves to obtain this membership.

The empirics suggest that Ukrainians are more accepting of residents that are appurtenant of Ukrainian origin (Document 19), which could further support why most Ukrainians today see themselves as citizens who identify with Ukraine in a civic manner. Correspondingly,

Ukrainian citizenship has proven essential for a more coherent civic understanding of the Ukrainian identity. The inclusive version shines through, making itself accessible to all Ukrainians, favouring the increasing number of people feeling affiliated with the Ukrainian identity (Documents 4, 36, 37). Around half of the Ukrainian population does not support the idea of any dual- or multiple existing citizenships (Document 8), which further meets the argument stressed by Shevel (2004:9), that more than one citizenship can instead imperil the national understanding of where to draw the lines between different identities.

The comprehension of the more salient civic identity cannot be understood without considering the level of trust Ukrainians feel for each other (Documents 10, 11, 26). Trust is an aspect that has not previously emerged from the literature review or that the theoretical framework explicitly has been pointed out, but that instead has come into view when going through the empirical material. The trust Ukrainians have and feel for each other, the ordinary people, are asserted as strong compared to the levels of trust the population possesses for its national authorities and other societal actors (Documents 4, 6, 11, 26). Since civic identities are asserted to be more aligned with a political understanding of being, this becomes a crucial factor in further examining the country's national identity comprehension.

Low trust can create instability and bring forth feelings of insecurity. When the Ukrainians were asked to describe their understanding of the political situation in the country, a vast majority considered it to be troublesome (77,5%), where words such as *"tense"* and "*explosive"* were used to refer to the situation (Document 10). This could also better explain why a large part of the population yet claims that their interest in politics is relatively low (Documents 4, 6, 10, 11). This, in turn, could be linked back to the somewhat volatile party politics Ukraine has had since becoming independent, where both parties and leaders have had different visions of which direction Ukraine is heading, what kind of policies should be applied to the country, and to whom (Kakachia, Lebanidze & Dubovyk, 2019; Mahda & Khvostova, 2021).

Ambiguousness makes people seek clarity elsewhere unless these criteria can be met by the ones held responsible, which appears to be the Ukrainian case (Documents 4, 6). Especially when the trust for the national authorities is portrayed as low, Ukrainians are today feeling more confident relying on each other than on the state. So hence the low levels of confidence in the

national institutions, and the short interest and participation in politics in general, the understanding of the collective identity in Ukraine is still yet more civic-political based. Thus creating inevitable confusion when interpreting the results (Documents 10, 11, 15, 26).

The theoretical assumptions discussed by Petovska (2019) regarding civic-based identities being more aligned with the political set-up of a state, the empirical findings in Ukraine do not altogether comply with the argument (Document 4). However, the outcome shows the same result, that the collectively shared sense of being members, and citizens of Ukraine, has come about creating a more coherent and inclusive sense of the national identity.

Namely, following the debate on identity being either state-centred (more civic) or people-based (more ethnic) (Greenfeld & Eastwood, 2009), the Ukrainian case provides a two-fold version when revising the findings. In Germany, for instance, the national feeling was claimed to have developed before the very nation-state, it is argued not to be politically or civic triggered, but rather to contain a people-based comprehension of its national identity. Whereas, in France, the understanding of the national identity is more state-based, where the institutions and the civic participation play a crucial role (ibid). Contrarily, Ukrainian nationalism is agued to have started even before its national institutions stood firm (Kasianov, 2015), and where the empirical findings of trust in the people transcend the trust and interest Ukrainians possess for the state (Documents 11, 26).

Even though Ukrainians tend to hold a lower level of trust for the national institutions, the civic approach, where the strong emphasis on citizenship has gained a foothold, is the dominating understanding of the Ukrainian identity. Therefore, the interpretation of the findings holds a specific ambivalent questioning whether low trust and low interest in politics can support a civic-based understanding of one's identity. The conceptualisation and the previous theoretical assumptions contradict the findings from the thematic analysis. This by being relatively narrow in grasping the development that has taken place in Ukraine. Instead, these findings show that Ukrainians' collective understanding of its identity could be based on an even broader understanding than presented by theory. Ukrainian national identity could be understood as both state-centred and people-based than only one of them exclusively, making the dichotomies less strict, as pointed out by Barrington (2021). When more expansive knowledge counts for

the high levels of trust the Ukrainian people feel for each other and the civic awareness they have built up, it would enable the study to approach these developments and patterns with a broader view than previously presented by the literature as either-or; enhancing a deepened understanding of Ukrainian identity formation and nation-building.

5.3 Reaction and actions to preserve the nation

The civic identity in Ukraine has managed to bring about social coherence among the Ukrainian population, which has proven to create a solid willingness to stand up for the idea of the Ukrainian nation (Documents 2, 3, 9, 25, 36, 37). Following Petrovska's (2019:62) reasoning, a strong sense of civic identity is argued to have the benefits of guaranteeing state security and making societies more resilient in times of external threats. People are said to be extra willing to protect things that make sense and convey meaning to them (Anderson, 2006:53f, 146). The inclusive understanding of what the Ukrainian nation represents has led to the Ukrainians showing increased confidence in acting in line with what they consider worthy of protection. This further coincides with the idea that Ukraine has built up some collective resistance by reflecting the unity among themselves.

Threats can thus be understood differently, even among the very same in-group. Before 2014, neither a military attack nor ethnic conflicts were making it high up on the list of elements Ukrainians at this point were worried about. Instead, economic issues bothered the population the most (Documents 4, 6, 27). But internal and external conditions can change quickly, leading up to circumstances where people need to reconsider what they perceive as a threat. As economic issues do not directly pose a threat to the Ukrainian identity or nation, the escalated unrest that emerged in the Eastern parts of Ukraine after 2014 contributed undeniably to a shift in focus where the idea of the nation suddenly was put under pressure (Documents 1, 2, 7, 17, 24). However, these findings show how deviating the understanding and perceptions of a threat was at the time, even though the Ukrainians are asserted to belong to the same in-group.

Threats appear differently, and actions and responses to them are equally so. Much like a natural reaction to changes in the environment, when facing a threat, some reactions can almost be taken for granted to get triggered when a threat is being directed towards one's existence (Colley, 1992:1). Over the years, it has been shown that Ukrainians have developed a strong

will to resist, both when carrying out civil actions and military actions (Documents 2, 36, 37). More than half of the Ukrainian population stresses that they are ready to react to a threat to their nation (Documents 3, 25). The increase in willingness has reflected the collective actions of responsiveness in Ukraine. Compared to the findings on Ukrainians' interest in participating in political-related activities, there is a stronger will that is more evident when defending one's nation. This is something that similarly has mirrored the strengthened trust in the military. The Armed Forces of Ukraine is one of the most trusted institutions in Ukraine, alongside the confidence and trust of the Ukrainian people (Documents 11, 26).

The willingness to take up arms to withstand an external threat is vital in all macro-regions, even if the will is very high for committing to any action to protect Ukraine. However, the West-, North-, and Center- macro-regions are the readiest to defend using weapons (Document 2). Compared to the rest of the macro-regions, the Eastern-macro region is the group stressing that they are the most inclined to assist the Ukrainian military by civil actions (Documents 36, 37). Regarding the ethnic variable, ethnic Russians are less willing to take up arms to defend Ukraine. However, ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians are equally ready to help and assist in civil actions (ibid).

Interpreting the material, as the depiction of threat towards Ukraine has gotten more concretised, Ukrainians seemed to more coherently have been able to mobilise themselves, as the understanding of what is perceived as a threat has become more apparent. This aligns with the argument that internal dissimilarities can become less relevant when specific actions are considered to benefit the larger group more, in this case, the Ukrainian population (Colley, 1992:1, 5ff; Gehring, 2021:5f). All Ukrainians seem eager to defend their collective imaginary of the nation, something that signals that if not the Ukrainians themselves believe in protecting their country, who else will (Anderson, 2006:74).

The contemplating perceived aggressor, threatening the Ukrainian nation and identity, has been repeatedly singled out as Russia (Documents 2, 3, 14, 15, 29). However, the opinions differ regarding who is seen as guilty and should be held responsible for the escalated threat. Ukrainians seem to be convinced that Russia is the aggressor country and primarily blame the escalated turbulences on President Putin and the Russian military (Documents 29, 36, 37).

When revising the ethnic and regional divide in Ukraine, more ethnic Ukrainians and the Western macro-region believe that so is the case. In the Eastern macro-region, the tendency to blame President Zelensky and the Ukrainian government is more noticeable (Documents 2, 36, 37).

Leadership, in general, is not associated with something positive in Ukraine. Especially not strong leadership, which paradoxically could be associated with authoritarianism and dictatorship, associations which Ukraine has intended to leave in its past. But strong leadership could also be understood as bringing about stability (Documents 4, 6). Thus, stability is something the Ukrainian political elite has not been able to uphold, which can be interpreted as a letdown, and further explain why the Ukrainian authorities are facing criticism from parts of the Ukrainian population. Despite this, and even though there were significant doubts about President Zelensky when he came to power, regarding the efficiency in carrying out the role as supreme commander; his popularity has grown significantly about taking on the role of resisting the offensive against Ukraine. A trend that applies to all macro-regions (Documents 17, 36, 37). However, apparent differences distinguish between Ukrainian's attitudes toward the people, the citizens of a country, compared to its leaders (Documents 2, 14, 18, 36, 37).

In line with the argument that attitudes are being used as a way of reflecting one's identity (Pop-Eleches & Robertson, 2018:107; Onuch, Hale & Sasse, 2018:81), being exposed to threats has led to apparent changes in attitude among the Ukrainian population (Documents 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 22, 24, 36, 37). Ukrainians have generally had a favourable view and attitude towards the Russian people than Russians are described to have had about Ukrainians (Documents 14, 16). This is a pattern that has continued to persist after 2014, bearing in mind the annexation of Crimea and the conflict outbreak in the Eastern parts of Ukraine. Ukrainians' overall attitude towards Russians consisted in 2012 of a positive view, where eight out of ten considered themselves to have a favourable attitude (Document 13). In 2022, the positive attitude reflects 34% of the population (Document 18), which undoubtedly can be linked to the ongoing intensified threat to the Ukrainian nation.

Around half of the Ukrainian population is said to have family living in Russia. Ukrainians with close relatives tend to have a more positive attitude towards Russia than Ukrainians who do not

have family ties (Document 16). This could also be assumed as one of the reasons why not everyone is as willing to take up arms to combat the perceived threat since the very same individual might have interconnected and closely related identity traits, leading back to the Russian nation and identity.

5.4 Not willing to compromise the identity

As well as a perceived threat can generate a defensive position and changes in attitude, it can similarly contribute to a re-prioritization in positionality. Ukraine's alienation from Russia has come to play an even more central role in formulating its national identity. This trend has become more apparent as the threat to the nation has become more clearly defined (Documents 2, 6, 7, 16, 23, 24, 33, 36, 37). Following that the Ukrainian identity gradually has transformed into establishing a more evident narrative; it has become clear that Ukraine does not want to be seen as inferior or subsumed into other discourses than its own (Arel, 2006:14f; Trencsényi, 2017; Schenk, 2017). Demonstrably consistent with the national identity is that Ukrainians want to decide over their agency, where a positioning closer to Europe is more in line with the future the Ukrainian population is imagining.

However, this change in positionality has not come entirely unprovoked. Before the threat image of Ukraine was as tangible as it is now, in 2012, Ukrainians viewed the future of Ukraine as more beneficial if the country should enter an alliance with Russia. The support for further integration, where Ukrainians could see potential deepened cross-border cooperation with Russia, was supported by around half the population (44%), compared to the less support for enhancing similar agreements with other actors, for instance, with the EU (29%) (Document 23). A decade later, 9 out of 10 Ukrainians would rather see a Ukraine with closer ties to Europe than Russia. Regarding the ethnic divisions, both a great majority of ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians agreed with the statement that they see Ukraine's future as strengthening its ties with Europe (Documents 31, 33, 36, 37).

Yet, the understanding of Europe and the EU here must be considered, as they do not equal one another. But what is noticeable here is that Ukrainians' attitudes and positionality have shifted over the last decade to reflect their identity. It is an identity that is more aligned with what the Ukrainians value; understood as its sovereignty, rights and freedom. Because what could be

seen as an initial opportunity to boost the Ukrainian economy and strengthen the neighbouring ties with Russia has thus been driving the country into a distancing position, where less dependency permeates the agenda. Nevertheless, some remaining potential obstacles to similar agreements with, for instance, the EU, are pointed out as the yet still high levels of corruption in the country, insufficient economic development (Document 6), and more recently, the inevitable effects of the invasion have caused (Documents 36, 37). However, the Ukrainians have expressed a strong desire to be considered a part of the in-group community and more affiliated with the neighbouring countries in Europe.

Having been exposed to a threat to one's identity for a long time, Ukrainians have built up a clearer understanding of their identity boundaries and shaped a clearer idea of the out-groups. This can also be applied when looking at the attitudes towards third parties. Ukrainians' attitudes toward the EU and the USA (United States of America) are considered favourable. Even though the general attitude toward foreign actors' presence and foreign support before the invasion of 2022 was not as recognised as it has come to be (Document 7). For instance, the Ukrainian population do not consider that the diplomatic efforts observed in response to the conflict in the Eastern parts of Ukraine have been enough to comply with the image they possess of their nation (Documents 3, 24). Despite this, diplomatic means remain to be seen as one of the solutions to how the problems need to be tackled and to put pressure on the perceived out-group, rather than having it solved on the battlefield.

Almost 6 out of 10 Ukrainians believe that the participation of a third party —preferably a Western country and diplomats— is beneficial to achieving peace. In contrast, one out of three considers talks between the two presidents, Zelensky and Putin, to deal with the negotiations is to be preferred (Documents 17, 24). The majority of the Ukrainian population stresses that they are ready to help and assist the government in solving the situation. On the other hand, the Eastern macro-region is yet the one that is more moderate in expressing its support for the Ukrainian authorities. Respondents in this region do instead consider that the government of Ukraine should refuse to enter any external alliance with Western actors in order not to provoke any of its neighbouring countries (Document 2). This indicates increased confidence in external actors, especially Western ones, to appeal for peace in Ukraine. However, the opinions still

differ slightly on who should primarily represent the Ukrainian voice in bringing back stability to the country.

Even if the involvement of a third party is being seen as something positive that could potentially help solve or at least improve the situation, the Ukrainian people have made it clear that they do not want to negotiate peace at any price (Documents 3, 36, 37). Something that needs to be comprehended by any actor trying to involve in negotiations. Half the population stress that to achieve a peaceful outcome, they are prepared to agree on compromises, but not any kind of compromise. Mainly, Ukrainians prefer an outcome where the imagination of their nation is being fulfilled, namely, a complete restoration of the Ukrainian landmass, and therefore are assessed not to be willing to compromise any inch of the territory.

Revising the whole sample of answers, 42,6% of the Ukrainians stress that they will not agree nor support any decision-taking to enhance a closer relationship with Russa. One-third think that this is a tricky question to answer. But out of the answers stated in the findings, Ukrainians are more open to taking distance from entering any organisation or alliance with external parties than giving up on occupied areas or compromising when it comes to the Ukrainian territory (Document 2). Triangulation findings demonstrate that 98% of the Ukrainians do not consider that Russia is justified or has the right to any part of the Ukrainian territory (Documents 36, 37). This aligns with the enhanced territorial and civic understanding of Ukraine as a whole (Sasse & Lackner, 2019; Beliaeva & Seals, 2020; Mahda & Khvostova, 2021; Nedozhogina, 2021; Barrington, 2021).

6. Conclusions

This thesis sets out to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What has a more inclusive and civic understanding of one's identity entailed when incorporating multi-ethnic identity narratives in Ukraine?

RQ2: How has an external threat to the national identity reflected Ukraine's attitude regarding its positionality?

The Ukrainians knew what their conditions were before becoming an independent state, that diversity will have to be incorporated in one way or another into formulating their national identity to make it work. The journey of uniting different identity narratives in Ukraine into one coherent one has certainly neither been straightforward nor given. Albeit this, Ukrainians have developed an increasingly uniform affiliation with the country, a place many people do not like to see themselves leave but rather have developed emotional bonds to. Instead, the reinforcement of the image of diversity has been used as a social glue, making people feel proud over wanting to belong and identify with the Ukrainian nation. In line with that, certain identity traits have become more salient. The perception of the "*self*" and the in-group, in this case being a Ukrainian, has also created a strengthened unity and understanding of the collective national identity.

Many indications point at the more inclusive rhetoric in Ukraine, and the civic understanding of one's identity as a guide to creating a more uniform comprehension. To identify oneself as a citizen of Ukraine, above other existing categorisation, is a trend that is seen as something attractive among all the Ukrainians. The inclusiveness that everyone is welcomed into the community via membership-based reasoning seems to have contributed to the Ukrainians having developed closer ties and bonds with each other. In addition, Ukrainians express a great deal of trust and acceptance towards each other, which can also be seen as a building block in creating a more coherent and unified comprehension of one's identity, despite certain contradictions. This appears to bridge the otherwise rather turbulent transition the country has had since it became independent, with internal political and economic issues, and where the country externally has ended up in the margins of other more prevailing discourses. People seem to turn to each other to overcome such barriers. The deepened civic understanding

Ukrainians have developed could be argued to have created more clear ideas regarding identity boundaries and strengthened the territorial emotional relationship they have with their nation.

At the same time, as the Ukrainians gradually have been able to build up a more united and more precise image of their identity and nation, the threat from the outside has become increasingly more apparent. Both considered questioning the Ukrainian nationhood to even threaten the Ukrainian identity to its existence. The concept of identity has been expressed to reflect and adapt to social interactions in people's surroundings; this has become extra clear when exposed to a threat. Russia's desire to protect Russian-speaking and ethnic Russians in Ukraine has led to the opposite effect. Internal divisions that may previously have been seen as worrying elements about who feels that they belong to the Ukrainian nation have instead contributed to a strong sense of willingness to protect what gives them meaning, namely, Ukraine as a nation. The desire to engage in collective action in order to resist an external threat has proven that the Ukrainians built up resistance to the external threat, instead of having to see their identity once again being overshadowed by a discourse that does not represent them or is not aligned with the idea about their national identity.

That internal divisions are fading due to being exposed to an external threat has proven to also be the case in Ukraine, but what is more apparent is the shifts in attitude among the Ukrainian population. What the Ukrainians have for long sought to build up after becoming independent has always been in line with the idea of the growing sense of Ukraine as a sovereign state, where freedom, rights and territorial integrity are being valued and protected. These principles are seen as part of the Ukrainian identity and have created an image of what kind of future the Ukrainians want to see. In addition, being recognised as one in the European community seem no longer to be considered an impossibility but rather an opportunity. The country's positionality has shifted markedly and finds strong support among the Ukrainians. Ukraine wants to take control over its agency and narrative. Despite that Ukraine's past and present are now being fragmented due to the invasion, its nationhood is intensely imagined by the Ukrainian citizens. As well as a future within Europe, which is the positioning that coincides the most with the Ukrainian national identity.

This study has several times emphasised that identity is something that, to a large extent relates to the individual, but where individuals in social interactions with each other can create a feeling of both belonging and enhance the greater meaning of what that identity entails. Since the concept is closely connected with social phenomena and human beings, understanding how these interactions and bonds emerge must be studied more in-depth. In line with what other studies have highlighted, emotions matter when talking about identities, and so do attitudes. Therefore, which was the original idea for this study, conducting more extensive and nuanced interviews with Ukrainians on these topics can be asserted as a gap in the literature that would need to be filled with more knowledge.

Simultaneously, the ongoing situation in Ukraine is also contributing to new dynamics and changes in the environment, which, already in its early stages, has given the appearance of highly topical phenomena that needs to be researched further. As well, as it can contribute to more knowledge about how identities and particular nations react to external threats, it can similarly create new question marks and open for more compelling science on both a societal and a scientific level. Due to the non-static nature of identities, there are always new pieces of the puzzle to be put together.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I.

Coding Scheme

Theme 1	Categories (step 3)	Codes (step 2)	Summarizing the content
Formulating unity in the diversity	Social glue vs Social distancing	language	Ukrainian, bilingualism, foreign languages
		homeland	Recognising Russian as the second state language, shift in status, language law
		unity	Nativeness not translated into a language
		diversity	More people feel attached to Ukraine as a country; being born, staying, living, not willing to leave the country
		discrimination	Forming collective identity out of diversity
		xenophobia	Belonging to the nation, stronger bonds
		prejudices	Perceptions of the self, the in-group
		symbols	Ethnicity in a heterogeneous state
		emotions	Creation and development of the national ethos and symbols
		nationalism	Shifted feelings about the nation
		patriotism	Anxiety, fear, confusion; hope
		pride	
		identification	
		belonging	

Theme 2	Categories (step 3)	Codes (step 2)	Summarizing the content
Deepened understanding of the Ukrainian membership	Civic membership as convincingly existing Politically based identity with or without trust Dual understanding	trust	Low trust for the Ukrainian government, authorities and institutions
		politics	Democracy; dysfunctioning, no interest in politics, participation low
		participation	Inclusiveness in the collectiveness
		civic	The whole population, the people, civic understanding of membership of the state
		citizenship	Controversies regarding identity roots
		cateogrization	Political/civic vs ethnic/cultural
		territory	Competing identity narratives
		membership	Hybrid understanding, the new fusion
		corruption	Internal challenges, turbulences
		people	Perceptions of the in-group not as homogenous, residents in Ukraine, open
		criticism	Understanding of the nation
		residents	
		duties	
		modernization	

Theme 3	Categories (step 3)	Codes (step 2)	Summarizing the content
Reaction and actions to preserve the nation	Reconceptualising the depiction of threats Shifts in attitude – externally and internally National resistance and collective responsiveness	economy union obstacles threats war conflict fear resistance military aggressor collective action cohesion leaders unification land attitude border	Wages, loss of employment, health, personal issues as primary concerns Customs Union, visa-free borders with neighbouring countries Ukrainainans positive attitude towards its neighbours; unification ideas changed Taking up arms to protect and militarily defend, civil actions, responding to threats Mobilising forces, coming together and acting like one A significant distinction between attitudes towards leaders/the heads of state, in comparison to the population/the people Perceptions about the principal aggressor Comparisons with the other; dissimilarities Competing out-groups, collaborations and support; provocations and threatening

Theme 4	Categories (step 3)	Codes (step 2)	Summarizing the content
Not willing to compromise the identity	Thickening of values and boundaries Not peace at any cost Full restoration of Ukraine	sovereignty independent integrity future peace positionality direction 3rd parties compromises values strategy security dependency boundaries freedom rights	Looking forward and beyond, the role and existence of Ukraine as a sovereign state Russia, the EU, NATO – pushed to rethink or change their positioning; voluntarily Considering and taking into account what the Ukrainian population want, agency Relationships with its neighbours in the past, in the present and the future Diplomatic solutions are not enough; negotiations, potential outcomes External influences in solving the issue Realising what is worth when it can no longer be taken for granted No compromises, linked to the territory One single independent state Not willing to negotiate borders

APPENDIX II.

Division of macro-regions

How (DIF) divide the regions (oblasts): Composition of macro-regions
West: Volyn, Zakarpattya, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil and Chernivtsi
Center: Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Sumy, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, Chernihiv and Kyiv city
South: Mykolayiv, Odesa, and Kherson
East: Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhya, Luhansk and Kharkiv

How (KIIS) divide the regions (oblasts): Compositions of macro-regions
West: Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi and Chernivtsi
Center: Kyiv city, Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Sumy, Cherkasy and Chernihiv
South: Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Odesa and Kherson
East: Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk (districts controlled by Ukraine)