

FIELDNOTES FROM A UKRAINIAN CULTURE AND GASTRONOMY FESTIVAL, 5 MAY 2022, PRAGUE

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Abstract: *These ethnographic fieldnotes focus on the place, sounds, and people of the Festival of Ukrainian Culture and Gastronomy at Prague Market (Pražská tržnice), in Prague, Czech Republic, on 5 May 2022, during the full-scale war in Ukraine. The observation reveals how the topic of war impacts the cultural representation and self-identification of Ukrainians abroad, and how it affects social interactions inside and outside the group. The fieldnotes provide a panorama of multiple interpretations and productions of the Prague Market space and provides an opportunity to observe the ongoing process of the collective memory being generated through music.*

Keywords: *Ukraine; war; memory; refugees; music festival; ethnographic fieldnotes*

The Festival of Ukrainian Culture and Gastronomy, UKAUKRAJINU!, which was held on 5 May 2022, in Prague at the Prague Market (Pražská Tržnice), is the main focus of my ethnographic fieldnotes. The festival was organized, for the first time, in response to the full-blown Russian invasion of Ukraine. I found it randomly on Facebook (under the “Local events” tab). As a Ukrainian, originally from Kharkiv, I lived and worked in the communication field in Kyiv for six years before moving to Prague, where, since October 2021, I have been a student of the master’s program in social and cultural anthropology at the

Faculty of Humanities, Charles University. Before starting my studies in Prague, I received a degree in Journalism in Kharkiv. I chose to study this festival for an ethnographic fieldwork assignment, as a part of the course Music and Place/Space: Music Venues, Geographies, and Imaginary Spaces at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague.

While I exit the tram on the street outside the Prague Market, I can easily identify passengers, who are likely going to the same event as me. Two women are standing at the tram stop – an older mother, around 65 years old, with a daughter, around 40. The first woman has a shopping bag with a logo of a Ukrainian bank. Another has a handbag with two ribbons, blue and yellow, which symbolize the Ukrainian flag.

Since the beginning of the military escalation in Ukraine, this is how people mark, identify themselves among others. They bring to the forefront the place of their birth, residence, and home, which they had to leave forcibly, signalling their social role as a citizen of Ukraine, or as a citizen of another state in solidarity with Ukraine. The former citizens seem to say: “I am not at home, but my home is with me, I represent my home”. And the second one: “Ukraine is not my home, but I sympathize with Ukraine”; they address Ukrainians on the streets: “You are not at home, but we support you here, in your temporary home”.

I arrive at the festival on Thursday, 5 May, around 15:45, 15 minutes before the official start of the program. A crowd of about 20 passengers gets off at the Prague Market tram stop. One person is waiting for the passing tram, another starts to cross the road – the street is still under construction.

“Where are we going? I want to eat!” a boy asks his mother.

“Somewhere, let’s see what will happen”. (They both speak Russian.)

According to the Facebook event description in Czech, the purpose of the event is to introduce Ukrainians to Czechs:

Hundreds of thousands of fellow citizens of Ukrainian nationality have lived with us in the Czech Republic for a long time and form one of the largest national minorities in our country. But we’re not very knowledgeable about their culture, food, singing, dancing. We want to change that.¹

¹ See UKAUKRAJINU! 2022.

In the Ukrainian translation of the event description, I read about a second reason for the festival, which refers to another large group of Ukrainians who were forced to leave Ukraine because of the war: “Let’s help our neighbours forget about worries for a while, get to know them, and bring them joy” (ibid.).

A procession forms from the tram stop to the festival, as a crowd starts moving and following the people who speak in Ukrainian and Russian, or who wear some Ukrainian national emblems. They enter through the gates of Prague Market. Above the main entrance hang several banners with announcements, including the one representing UKAUKRAJINU! festival. This sign is rather visible from the opposite side of the road, from the river embankment next to the tram stop.

The next festival sign appears at the festival spot, which is positioned at the main square of the Prague Market. Usually, this place is used as a car park. On their way from the gate to the square (around 50 m distance), guests pass by white and orange buildings hosting a Vietnamese cafe, a business centre, a coffee shop, and a bar. At the entrance to one of the restaurants with Southeast Asian cuisine, there is a large grey statue in the form of a Buddha head. The Prague Market as a place demonstrates its expansiveness and multidimensionality through numerous economic, cultural, and leisure activities happening there every day.

Festivalgoers are greeted at the main square by a small blue stand painted with a yellow sun and two white doves. On the top of the stand, there is a sign asking for a “voluntary donation” (*Dobrovolné vstupné*). In the middle of it, there is a large QR code, and underneath it, a text: “Support the Ukrainian community in the Czech Republic by giving a voluntary donation of any amount” (Figure 1). On the bottom, there are logos of the sponsors of the festival: Prague Market, and Organizace pro pomoc uprhlikum (Organization for Aid to Refugees).

Ukrainian cultural events have begun to appear more often on posters in Prague since the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine at the end of February 2022. Most of them share the stated goal of solidarity and support for people who are forced to leave their homes because of the war. At the beginning of June, more than 366,000 Ukrainian refugees had registered in the Czech Republic (UNHCR). Compared to the end of 2021, the number of Ukrainians in the Czech Republic almost tripled (Czech Statistical Office n.d.).

Only a few people stop near the festival stand (Figure 1) and next to a tent of the Organization for Aid to Refugees, both marking the entrance to the



Figure 1. Guests are greeted by a blue stand with a yellow sun and white doves, a large headline about the voluntary entry fee, and a QR code to support Ukrainian refugees. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

festival within the marketplace. The stage is ahead. From the entrance on the way to the stage, there is a kind of passage – with tents mostly on the left side and a bigger zone with sitting places. The tents sell street food: Bistro Vltava, Vína a destiláty z Ukrajiny (Wines and Distillates from Ukraine) (Figure 4), Pivovar Ládví Cobolis (Brewery Ládví Cobolis), and Ethnocathering. In front of these food tents, in the central area of the square, there are wooden tables with benches for families or large groups. Behind them – small black folding tables and chairs (from the #Pražskéžidle [#Praguechairs] brand), which can be found in various public places around Prague, on squares, and near fountains and libraries (Figure 2). There are also several food tents near the entrance, such as Chef Parade and mamacoffee. They are located far from the stage, on the opposite side. All seats are already taken when I arrive, even though the event starts at 16:00.

“When I heard the word *borscht*,² I could not control myself!” a woman exclaims. People line up in front of the food tents, sometimes asking if food is free or for sale (Figure 3).

² Ukrainian dish, which is cooked from chopped beetroots, cabbage, potatoes, with the addition of meat, usually beef, or beans. The most famous variant is red borscht.



Figure 2. The main audience – women with kids, teenagers, and older people – are resting, eating, or waiting in the line to the food tent. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

“Look, there’s borscht and *varenyky*³ here! One hundred rubles⁴ each, or whatever they are called – korunas!⁵” a woman says to a friend.

³ Ukrainian dumplings, typically filled with potatoes or cherries.

⁴ Russian currency.

⁵ Czech currency.



Figure 3. An image of national Ukrainian dishes – *borscht* and *tvarožky* (in Czech) or *syrynyky* (in Ukrainian)⁶ – which are sold at the food vendor. Most hot dishes sold out quickly during the first hours of the festival. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

Those who were born in the Soviet Union and live in the east of Ukraine often refer to rubles in casual conversation as a habit, instead using the word *hryvnia* for Ukrainian currency (or in this case, for Czech korunas). Both women are probably from eastern Ukraine, judging by their accent.

“Come hang out at the Ukrainian festival”, another woman says on the phone. “Here are *varenychky* [*stretches out sounds of the word gently and quietly*] and there’s a concert. Let’s hang out at least a little ... [*a sigh of sadness*]”.

This is one of many conversations happening during the music festival, in which it is possible to notice among Ukrainian refugees in Prague the awkwardness of giving themselves permission to relax, enjoy the music, and steal some moments of fun against the backdrop of the war in their country. Music is often perceived as an attribute of a peaceful and safe life, and everyday leisure, all of which was for the Ukrainian people undermined by the war. Music was pushed to the background as a factor that could interfere with the mobilization of the

⁶ A type of pancakes made from quark, flour, and eggs – popular in Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarussian cuisine.



Figure 4. Food vendor sellers wearing vyshyvankas (Ukrainian national embroidered shirts). They are selling Ukrainian products, cognac, wine, and candies. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

body's resources and prevent a quick switch to a mode of readiness to respond to a threat.

However, music still plays a role in the lives of Ukrainian people during the war. I was not in Ukraine when hostilities started. In media and digital space, however, I observed how music has appeared in various ways during the war. Music seems to be used to counter war and death. Musicians appear in unusual environments, music instruments and sounds contrasting the visual

background of places affected by war, juxtaposing art and creativity in response to violence and destruction. A cellist plays in front of a destroyed building at Kharkiv National University. An orchestra plays at one of Kharkiv's metro stations, which has turned into a bomb shelter for residents. Young people clear rubble after shell explosions and rebuild houses during a rave in villages in the Chernihiv region in the north of Ukraine.

Music at the festival can play a therapeutic role for guests who have survived the war. Listening to music can represent a short, relaxing break from reading stressful newsfeeds on social media about the war in Ukraine. Different styles of music help relieve stress and lower cortisol levels.⁷ Music can work as a source of inspiration for resistance, or shape the collective memory of war-related events.

On the festival stage, highlighted with yellow-blue lights, musicians and technicians bustle as they set up instruments. There is no music yet. It appears odd because at any such social and cultural event, there is usually music in the background. At this festival, background music will also not be played on loudspeakers in between performances. This can be partly explained by the fact that there was no sound check before the start of the program. The musicians will be arriving at the time of their performance, and quickly setting up their musical equipment before they start playing. Moreover, food tents do not greet guests with their own music.

When I wait for the start of the festival program, there is no music; instead, I hear the sounds of children climbing the metal fences next to the stage, which are gently swaying with a screech. In the absence of background music, this creates an awkward emptiness in front of the stage. Instead of background music, there are noises from the environment. The sound of the closing of the plastic doors of toilets, which are located to the left of the stage. Water jets from an outdoor washstand. Wheels of kids' wagons and scooters riding on asphalt. Barking dogs. The sound of oil in a pan. The ringing of the microwave timer warming the borscht (Figure 3).

Closer to the tents with food, I observe more conversations and interactions between Ukrainians. They chat about life in Prague, about friends living temporarily abroad, and about the situation in Ukraine. I hear two women from the Luhansk region conversing (I find out where they are from during our small talk afterwards):

⁷ See Burns 1999; Thoma 2013.

“The house of our relatives who stayed [in Ukraine] was bombed. There is nowhere to hide. They can’t leave; they don’t want to leave their grandmother. We have moved. There is no end to the bombings. They are not people – [but] beasts!”

“How many of your friends are here?”

“Like everyone’s friends – [they are] everywhere in Europe. We live in a dormitory. Friends in different countries: Germany, France, Barcelona. If it is possible to live with relatives, it is better. There is a feeling of home”.

“Would you like to return to Ukraine?”

“Of course, when it gets quieter. A good outcome for Ukraine will happen if foreign intelligence services work well”.

The telling of personal stories in conversations between Ukrainians creates a canvas of collective memories that can be reproduced easier in the future as they are transmitted into the memory of the individual’s closest social group.⁸

At the beginning of the festival program, 90% of the audience are women, grandmothers, and mothers with children – the biggest group of refugees – because they often have permission to leave the country instead of men, according to Ukraine’s martial law. Occasionally Czechs male adults appear; Ukrainian males are either schoolchildren, performers, or food sellers – most of them have been living in the Czech Republic since before the start of the military aggression. This festival mostly represented prewar Ukrainian migrants as performers, but there were fewer Ukrainian, prewar, working-class migrants as audiences present there. The latter are probably the biggest group of Ukrainians in the Czech Republic. The festivalgoers were therefore mostly Ukrainian war refugees.

Ukrainian women at the festival are mostly dressed in casual, comfortable clothes with hoodies, or tracksuits for walks with children. Some of them are adorned with vyshyvankas (Ukrainian national embroidered shirts). They are making photos of themselves: in front of the stage or food tents (Figure 5). I noticed around 20 people in vyshyvankas among guests and sellers of the festival. In Ukraine, a vyshyvanka is usually worn on special holidays, for example, Independence Day (24 August), Constitution Day (28 June), Vyshyvanka Day (18 May). The dress has been a symbol of pro-Ukrainian mass demonstrations since 2014.

⁸ See Halbwachs 2011.



Figure 5. A Ukrainian woman takes a photo in a vyshyvanka (a national embroidered shirt). On the bottom right of the photo, there is a shopping bag with a sign: “The environment worries us” – a slogan of one of the biggest supermarket chains in Ukraine. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhan.

Among the Czechs and other attendees of the festival, I see some guests who wear clothes and accessories that demonstrate their support of Ukrainians. One woman came in a T-shirt with a print *Respekt Ukrajině* (“Respect for Ukraine”). One Czech male wears a bracelet with Ukrainian flag colours. A young girl, probably a student, sports blue and yellow socks.

It can hardly be said that this festival is comfortable for women and children. There are not enough places around to sit and rest. Most families sit at tables, with several strollers next to them. Those who did not find a space at the



Figure 6. Women sitting on a wooden platform on the side of the festival square. There are not enough chairs and tables at the festival. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

tables sit down on a wooden platform at the end of the festival square (Figure 6). Elderly women who came with their grandchildren often lean on fences.

School-age children gather in groups, dance, and run around – between the stage and their parents. Small kids sit in strollers, in the arms of their parents, or play with stones on the ground (Figure 7). By the middle of the event, around 18:30, children are given coloured crayons (Figure 8). In the space between the queue for food (about 30 m long), the sound technician’s tent, and some folding tables and chairs, a “protected” triangular space has been formed as a children’s playground. Asphalt here becomes a canvas for drawings.



Figure 7. The kid plays with stones. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.



Figure 8. Children drawings with coloured crayons: Ukrainian flags and the national salute "Glory to Ukraine". Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.



Figure 9. An elderly woman sitting in between empty baby strollers. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

The first drawings with crayons are Ukrainian flags and the patriotic phrase “Glory to Ukraine” (Слава Україні) written in Russian (Figure 8). Children in this “triangle” are left to their own creativity. Parents and grandparents are probably taking their time to relax, waiting in lines for food, occasionally observing their children from afar (Figure 9). At one moment, I notice the only interaction between adults and children in the playground space: one man from the Palestinian dancing group takes a crayon, draws a hopscotch, and starts jumping it with the children, cheering them on and applauding. Judging by the

reaction of the children, who start to laugh, jump, and clap their hands, they lack such interactions.

Before the official start of the festival, I hear the first musical instrument, a sopilka, a Ukrainian folk woodwind instrument made, for example, from viburnum or elderberry bushes, known since the time of Kievan Rus, an ancient state in modern-day Ukraine. The first band is preparing for the performance. As a Ukrainian with a philological education, I immediately come up with several associations with the sound of the sopilka.

From literature: a folk tale about a girl who turned into a viburnum bush after being murdered by her sister; what also comes to mind is the sopilka of Lukash – the character from the play *The Forest Song* (Лісова пісня), by Ukrainian writer Lesya Ukrainka. Film associations: sopilka sounds included in a film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (Тіні забутих предків) directed by Sergei Parajanov. Among modern Ukrainian musical groups, folk music, including sopilka sounds and electronic music, blend in the style of the band Onuka.

The second musical instrument I hear at the festival is a percussion instrument: a darbuka goblet drum from the Middle East. It accompanies a group of young men practicing a dance near the stage behind the fence that separates the service area and the audience area in front of the stage. Members of the band are dressed in black satin folklore costumes, with Palestinian keffiyeh scarfs over their shoulders or heads. This intrigues and arouses interest, not only in me, but also in other festivalgoers.

“Well, let’s try”, an uncertain voice says in Czech into a microphone.

“Today we will please you with Ukrainian songs. You can also try Ukrainian borscht. I haven’t tried it yet”, a member of the first band in the festival program addresses the audience.

The greeting of the first band in Czech is shorter than in the Ukrainian language. One of the musicians adds more details about the war. After performing several songs, musician return to the war topic, explaining – in the Czech language too – how to support Ukrainians refugees and the Ukrainian army.

The festival program begins with the group OL Capella, which consists of Ukrainians living in Prague since before February 2022. Later, during their performance, members of the collective admit that they met recently and decided to perform in this line-up right before the event. They are also looking for more

musicians. Festivalgoers hear the sopilka during this performance. As one of the members explained later, his collection of sopilka instruments from the Carpathians Mountains is supposedly one of the biggest collections in Europe.

Most of the performers of the festival program are actually immigrants from prewar Ukraine. They represent the art community of the Ukrainian minority in the Czech Republic, rather than recent Ukrainian refugees. Notably, before the war, excluding state holidays like Independence Day, the Ukrainian community had a low interest in representing their culture and in positioning themselves as Ukrainians in the Czech Republic. This unification among migrants was rather occurring around work purposes. In terms of the target audience, this festival is directed more toward the Ukrainians, unlike, for example, a rally and concert Together for Ukraine (*Společně pro Ukrajinu*), organized in support of Ukraine on April 3, 2022, in Letná Park, in Prague, where most of the performers sang in Czech.

OL Capella's music style is pop rock, and their repertoire includes both their own original songs and covers. They are reminiscent of such Ukrainian musical rock bands from the late 1990s and early 2000s as Skai (Скай), Druha Rika (Друга ріка), and Okean Elzy (Океан Ельзи). They begin to play and, in addition to children, adults slowly come to the stage. During the performance, adults clap, some sway slightly from side to side. Children do not restrain their energy – they perform some gymnastic tricks in front of the stage. By the end of the performance, the band gathers around 50 festivalgoers around the stage. Some of them will even give up their seats at the tables to watch the band close up.

OL Capella introduces each song, mainly in Ukrainian. One of the songs they perform is “Everest”, which was written by one of the band members, and which Ukrainian soldiers have been singing since 2014 – the start of the Russian invasion of the Donbas and the annexation of Crimea.

OL Capella finally earns a larger interest of the audience thanks to a cover of the song “I Have No Home” (“У мене немає дому”), originally composed by the Ukrainian indie rock band Alone in a Canoe (Один в каное).⁹

⁹ Translation of the song taken from lyricstranslate.com (Lyrics Translate 2011).

In all honesty,
I just don't have a home,
And out of my courteous manner,
Just as from the fear of the belt,
I will remember my tribe,
Remember my city,
I am just waiting for my Grammy,
I just don't have a place to sit down,
To write down my speech:
I just don't have a home ...

Справа в тому,
Що в мене немає дому
І за правилом доброго тону,
Як за правилом доброго ременя,
Я згадаю з якого я племені,
Пригадаю з якого міста,
Я чекаю на своє Греммі,
В мене просто нема де сісти
Написати свою промову:
У мене немає дому ...

The song has been in the top ranking of Ukrainian songs since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, for example in Apple Music playlist's Top 100 Ukraine and Top 25 Kyiv. This song was written in 2019. However, it gained relevance in 2022 for Ukrainians whose houses were destroyed during military aggression or who were forced to leave their homes due to the hostilities. The lyrics have a specific significance for them, as it captures the memory of the largest migration wave of Ukrainians due to this war. At the festival, this song mainly touches Ukrainians, but for Czechs and other festival attendees, without explanation or translation, it would rather be just another sad indie rock song.

During the performance of the song, almost nobody from the audiences near the stage is checking the news on their phones – a practice that has become a habit for Ukrainians since the beginning of the war. The focus is on the band. Some eat and drink while listening, some film the performance on their phones. “I just have nowhere to sit”. With these words, an old lady nods, and echoes a line from the lyrics (“I just don't have a home”) – implicitly alluding to her situation, being away from home – and sits near the sound tent, almost on the ground, next to her bags of groceries (Figure 10). Young girls near the stage sing along with the band. A pregnant woman takes a deep breath and moves slowly to the music with her eyes closed.

The OL Capella band ends the performance and says goodbye to the audience with the slogan “Glory to Ukraine” (Слава Україні), an audience answer “Glory to the Heroes” (Героям слава) is loud. After OL Capella's performance, the square again falls into moments without music. During a break, guests leave the stage area and line up for food at the vendors. For Ukrainians, the choice for food is the tent with a longest queue, run by Olha Martynovska, one of the participants of the popular Ukrainian television program *Master Chef* – a Ukrainian



Figure 10. An elderly lady sits on the ground and listens to OL Capella performing the cover of the famous song “I Have No Home”, originally written by a Ukrainian indie band Alone in a Canoe (Один в каное). Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

refugee herself. She and some members of her team wear vyshyvankas and cook *varenyky* for guests. Czechs and other festivalgoers are more likely to choose the queue where there are still hot dishes left, and not just desserts.

As I wait for the next performer, I am thinking that a concert presenter could more precisely announce the long breaks. As an alternative to the idle break time, a place for activities and networking for Czechs and Ukrainians could have been arranged. During the festival, Czechs and Ukrainians socialize in separate groups. According to one of the organizers, who is a responsible for

the music program of the festival, and whom I managed to interview after the event, the language barrier and shyness on the part of Czechs prevents them from interacting with Ukrainians:

Czechs and Ukrainians who came to the event are ready to talk to each other. Czechs, with a different way of thinking, would never visit this event. They came to support Ukrainians. But they cannot talk due to the language barrier. Generally, Czechs are a bit shy in personal interactions. Our nation is a little closed. But there were some natural interactions between Czechs and Ukrainians [at the festival], for example, between moms with kids, and among people with dogs (personal communication, 16 May 2022).

The presenter announces the next band in Czech. This is Al-Sarres Dabkeh, a Palestinian folklore dance group from Israel, visiting Prague for several days, which will present the dances of the Middle East. The announcer adds additional clarification about the first dance: it will be a *dabq* (from Arabic “foot stomping”), a dance which is performed during wedding ceremonies.

Young men in black satin suits with red embroidery on their chests come to the stage one by one. They line up, hold each other’s shoulders, stamp out the rhythm with their feet, step, and jump. The group leader twirls the cane. They are accompanied by instruments: a darbuka, a tabla, and a mizmar (Figure 11). The reaction of the public is excited but ambivalent: after the sad songs of the previous band, smiles appear on their faces. One person standing near the stage awkwardly giggles: “Why are Arabs at the festival of Ukrainian culture?”

Many people in the audience like this quick and joyous atmosphere that the Al-Sarres Dabkeh group creates with their music and dance. Two women in the audience comment that Ukrainian culture is *hopak*, referring to Ukrainian energetic folk dances with acrobatic jumps and spins. It seemed to me that the choreographer of the Al-Sarres Dabkeh band Omar has acknowledged this miscommunication. During the break, I overheard him talking to the concert host: “It is critical to tell the guests we are from Palestine. Palestine supports the Ukrainians; we have also suffered from war for many years”.

As the organizers later told me in an interview, this band was included in the program by the band’s initiative. The band members said to the organizers that they wanted to bring joy to the Ukrainian people because they love them. As a dance band, they had travelled to Ukraine several times, thanks to an exchange program. Now, they felt sorry about the current situation.



Figure 11. The performance of the Al-Sarres Dabkeh, a Palestinian folklore dance group from Israel. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

In the initial announcement, the host clarified that the Al-Sarres Dabkeh dance group was from Palestine. She spoke in Czech, so this was not thoroughly understood by many Ukrainians in the audience. By some Czechs too. “Look, son, these are Iranian dances”, one mom explained in Czech during the group’s performance.

Again a break and emptiness without sounds. Artists change. Sound engineers do a sound check for drums. Because of the echo in the square, drum sounds are unpleasant to listen to – they cause stress after the relaxed atmosphere of the previous performance. People are leaving the stage area.

Those people who continue to stand near the stage take initiative and fill the gap with singing songs by themselves. The family entertains a small boy, the youngest member of his family, and sings a song that has become a symbol of resistance during the war. The origin of the song called “Oh, In the Meadow a Red Kalyna” (“Ой у лузі червона калина”) probably goes back to Cossack times, and in the 20th century, it was turned into a military march of Sich Riflemen, a military unit of the army of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, a country declared in 1917.¹⁰

Oh, in the meadow a red kalyna has bent down low.
For some reason, our glorious Ukraine is in sorrow.
And we’ll take that red kalyna and we will raise it up.
And we shall cheer up our glorious Ukraine, hey – hey.

Ой у лузі червона калина похилилася,
Чогось наша славна Україна зажурилася.
А ми тую червону калину підіймемо,
А ми нашу славу Україну, гей-гей, розвеселимо!

This song became more popular after the 2022 performance of Andriy Khlyvniuk, a soloist of Boombox (Бумбокс), a Ukrainian pop rock band. He is one of the artists who was forced to change his profession and to defend the country. In a YouTube video, published on 4 March 2022, a week after the start of the full-scale war, we see him in a military uniform, a cap with a New York Yankees baseball cap symbol (“NY”), and with a weapon around his chest. Andriy Khlyvniuk sings a cappella in the city centre of Kyiv, which is without its usual noise of the street, cars, and crowds of people. Behind the singer, we see St. Michael’s Golden-Domed Monastery, one of the historical buildings connected to the Kievan Rus state period of Ukrainian history. The place of singing is significant, as it emphasizes the long history of Ukraine in response to the Russian authorities’ narrative that Ukraine is more of a quasi-state and that Ukrainians and Russians are the same nation. We cannot see this in the video, but a monument of Ukrainian military commander and Hetman of the Zaporozhian Host Bohdan Khmelnytskyi stands on the square near the cathedral. He was a Hetman of the Ukrainian Cossacks state, so it is symbolic to hear a stanza of the Cossacks’ song in this place in modern war times.

¹⁰ Translation of the song taken from lyricstranslate.com (Lyrics Translate 2022).



Figure 12. A woman in the centre of the photo was shopping at one of the Prague Market stores and has mops and shopping boxes in the pram. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

Thunder rumbles, and it starts getting cold around 18:30. The forecast app on my phone shows a high chance of rain. I am checking places where people could go to hide during the rain. A small part of them hides under large festival umbrellas, while many others scatter to the indoor market areas surrounding the festival square. Many guests already visited the market and hardware stores before the beginning of the festival: there are bags with vegetables next to them. Someone has two cleaning mops and some additional shopping boxes placed in a pram (Figure 12).

For many families, the colder weather was the reason to leave the festival. By 19:00 there are much fewer Ukrainian women with children and grandmothers with grandchildren. Younger people, students, and couples – in particular Czechs – are gradually replacing this audience.

Ukrainian musician Anna Kovtun appears on the stage with her band around 18:30. After the Middle Eastern dances, the dynamic mood changes to calmness generated by acoustic guitar sounds. As the organizer mentioned to me in an interview, the festival program dramaturgy proceeds from less known to more popular performers. It includes the understanding that the audience changes throughout the festival.

Anna performs her own original songs, mostly in Russian, as well as covers of Ukrainian pop hits. She came to the Czech Republic to study eight years ago. During her performance, one of the guests of the festival near the stage asks why she sings in Russian. She answers that it is also her native language. After the beginning of hostilities in Ukraine in February, for some Ukrainians, the language issue became the subject of heated discussions regarding Russia's influence on modern Ukraine and its culture. The Russian language began to be perceived as the language of the occupiers, even though a significant part of the Ukrainian population speaks Russian.

The program has an unannounced guest who comes on stage after Anna Kovtun's performance. A Ukrainian woman, who fled from Mykolaiv, recites her poem in Ukrainian about the war, which stole springtime from the children. At the end, the applauding audience standing by the stage approvingly encourages her.

The next performer is Birdsy, a singer, sound producer, and songwriter who calls herself an "R&B princess". Due to the beginning of the missiles attack on the morning of 24 February, Birdsy was forced to leave Kyiv at the end of February. She was born in Transnistria and later moved to Ukraine. Some Ukrainians still remember her as a participant of the television program *Holos krainy* (Голос країни), a Ukrainian version of the American reality TV program *The Voice*. Her performance starts around 19:00 and strongly resembles a performance at a television show. The green sequins of her outfit reflect the stage lights. Her repertoire includes pop and R&B songs in English.

Many performers present new original songs that they wrote during the war after 24 February and concerning this topic, for example, OL Capella band, Anna Kovtun, Birdsy. Notably, all of the festival performers are trying to make references, with their songs and stage talks, to the current situation in Ukraine.

Some phrases from a song performed by Birdsy can be interpreted as referring to the war, although the text is, in fact, about spending time with friends in a bar, as the performer explains during the stage talk: “I feel like a hostage of my illusions”.

Ukrainian teenage girls take selfies with Birdsy after her performance, or their mothers take photos of them. They ask her about her YouTube and Instagram profiles. One schoolboy says he is a long-time subscriber. Many are happy to know she also lived in Odesa, like them.

Popular music changes to classical around 19:40. The Hardy Orchestra takes the stage. This project was established in 2013 in Odesa as a symphonic orchestra performing classical, rock, and film music hits. The bandmaster, Oleksiy Andriichuk, addresses the audience. In response to “Glory to Ukraine”, “Glory to the Heroes” is hardly heard from the audience, compared to the beginning of the festival. The number of Ukrainians among the festival visitors has decreased, replaced partly by adult Czechs. The bandmaster announces that the program includes not only classics but also covers of contemporary pop and rock songs. He adds that there are also Czech musicians in the orchestra; this is the first time they perform in this line-up. While the orchestra is playing, a woman in the audience sways with a glass of white wine, then passes it to her friend and continues to move more freely.

Observing the festivalgoers’ activities and interactions, I notice that the social creation of the festival place invites multiple interpretations. During the event, due to the allusions to the experience of Ukrainians, an imaginary space is created inside an actual space: a place geographically far from home in a Czech city creates a feeling of home and awakens memories of specific cultural events in Ukrainian cities.

A specific configuration of spatial characteristics and cultural symbols (music, food, dress, language) at the Ukrainian festival space creates a nostalgic effect for Ukrainians and activates the memory of their prewar experiences. According to conversations among Ukrainian guests that I overheard at the festival, they recall picnic activities during the May holidays or City Day (День міста) celebrated annually in different Ukrainian cities; usually this date coincides with the founding of the city or historical event. One of my interlocutors recalls the Mariupol City Day celebrations, when different ethnicities presented their national cuisines and created mobile kitchens along a crowded avenue.

For a Ukrainian woman and her teenage son whom I meet in a queue for the food tent, this festival represents a connection with home, of which they are



Figure 13. Photo from another music event held on the same day at the Prague Market. Young people sit in a beer garden playing chess, with electronic music playing in the background. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhan.

reminded by different Ukrainian cultural attributes concentrated in the festival place, fancifully collected as in a kaleidoscope: borscht, *holubtsi*,¹¹ vyshyvanka, and products from Ukrainian companies such as ROSHEN candies, Shabo wine, and cognac (Figure 4). According to my conversations with Czech guests, it reminds them of events on Prague's *náplavka* ("riverbank"), where the cuisines of different cultures are presented, or cultural festivals on squares in different districts of Prague, usually supported by embassies.

In the middle of the Hardy Orchestra's performance, I decide to leave the festival place and go to explore other places inside the Prague Market area. Other

¹¹ The Ukrainian national dish: rolls consisting of cooked cabbage leaves wrapped around the filling in the form of meat, and either rice, buckwheat, corn, or wheat porridge, depending on the region of the country.



Figure 14. A security guard stops a Vietnamese boy and tells him not to ride a bicycle on the festival grounds. Vietnamese shops form a big part of the Prague Market. Photo by Anastasiia Krasnozhon.

music events are taking place in other areas of the marketplace simultaneously with the Ukrainian culture festival. A block behind the building separating the square from the other areas of the market space, there is a food truck with burgers and background jazz music. A block further away, young people hang out in a beer garden, where an electronic dance music is accompanying a live female vocal performer. At one of the tables, guys are playing chess (Figure 13). Both of these market sites are smaller and cosier, better suited for socializing and networking.

From the beginning of its history in 1895, the Prague Market has been transformed from a central slaughterhouse and meat market to a multifunctional public space, which it is today. The Prague Market identifies itself as a place offering an “optimal mix” of economic, cultural, and leisure activities for “residents and guests of Prague from all age groups and levels of income” (Pražská tržnice 2020). It invites people to experience cultural difference (Figure 14),

novelty, familiarity, and belonging, while also providing shopping facilities as well as humanitarian aid.¹²

In another area of the market, where some workshop studios are located on the way to a hardware store Mountfield and the electronics shop Alza, there are newly opened points for Ukrainian refugees inside these buildings. The branch of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic (Úřad Práce České Republiky) helps with job searches, job requalification, language courses, applications for humanitarian aid, and offers consultations about social services. Another charitable organization stationed there, Šatník, assists Ukrainian refugees with clothing, footwear, and household appliances. On the whole marketplace territory, copies of A4 sheet signs are distributed around, in the colours of the Ukrainian flag, with information about these points for refugees. Now the passages between the buildings are empty and quiet. Passing there, I imagine what I saw a few days ago in the afternoon hours of a weekday. Several hundred Ukrainians stand in long queues here. At the front of the line, most women huddle close together in an uncomfortable position, and behind the fence, mostly elderly relatives are waiting for them with strollers, as well as their children. At the entrance of the building after their waiting in queue, a young volunteer – with a badge round the neck, a special vest, and a list with a pen in hand – greets them.

On my way back from the festival, on the tram, I am thinking of the war in my home country. I remember when the military conflict began, in 2014, when I met dozens of refugees from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions at the Kharkiv Railway Station, while I was filming a documentary series about volunteers in my hometown. Now, in the space of the Prague Market, I see many more Ukrainians from different regions and from different social groups forced to leave their homes. Attending an event like the UKAUKRAJINU! festival and its venue at the Prague Market, I can observe cultural representation as a living process that constantly creates and re-creates familiar cultural attributes and connotations to express Ukrainian culture and identity abroad. At the same time, this process is limited by the internal cultural and political positionality of the people creating them, as well as by the external impact of place, time, and circumstance, and therefore it represents a filter upon which different people select and project a variety of broad cultural and historical sediments.

¹² See Anderton 2022.

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