

UNET* TIMES

ISSUE #1 (2026)

*UKRAINE RESEARCH NETWORK AT ZOIS



**RESEARCH EXCELLENCE
WITH HUMAN CARE
2022–2026**



Federal Ministry
of Research, Technology
and Space



Zentrum für Osteuropa-
und internationale Studien
*Centre for East European
and International Studies*

BUILDING WHAT *LASTS*

About UNET

Russia's war against Ukraine has radically transformed Ukrainian academic life, displacing researchers, disrupting institutional ties, and jeopardising the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge. In response, ZOiS launched the Ukraine Research Network@ZOiS (UNET) in November 2022, a project funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology, and Space (BMFTR).

UNET connects and strengthens social science research on Ukraine at a time when such work has never been more essential.

The network supports Ukrainian researchers through Berlin-based fellowships, and provides non-residential stipends for those remaining in the country and continuing their research under war-time conditions. By linking Ukrainian academic institutions with international networks, UNET works to preserve the country's intellectual potential and build foundations for future recovery and reconstruction.

The network brings together expertise from Area, Conflict, and Migration Studies, fields that tended to work separately prior to 2022. Another strategic aim of UNET is to promote the transfer of knowledge accumulated within the network to policy-makers, academia, and the wider public.

CONTENTS

Editorial	5
-----------------	---

THE HUMAN MAP

Fellow profiles	8
From charity to development: Best practices in designing wartime academic collaborations	11
Mentor profiles.....	14
The mentorship.....	15

THE KNOWLEDGE HUB

Should we stay or should we go? Ambivalence of wartime choice	20
Educating in uncertainty: Between Ukrainian and German schools	21
Beyond visibility: Who gets to explain Ukraine?.....	22
What can Ukraine contribute? New perspectives on Ukraine in academia	23

THE VOICE

Rethinking slow science from the perspective of warzone academics	26
Communicating knowledge	29
Unlocking the power of visual communication in academia.....	30

NETWORKING & INNOVATION

The human being between the lines of data: Why researchers need artistic tools in times of war	32
Put on your own oxygen mask first	34
Fellows' insights	35
Building trust across borders.....	36
Bringing green life to ZOIS: A plant rescue story	37
Caring for researchers – by design.....	38

FINAL REMARKS

Lookig back, looking ahead	42
Letters from Ukraine	44
Fellows' reflections	45
Letters from Berlin	46
List of spotlights on Ukraine	49
Publication details	52



DEAR READERS,

the Ukraine Research Network@ZOiS – in short UNET – was set up shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in March 2022. As social science research on Ukraine had been one of ZOiS' priorities since its establishment in 2016, our natural response to the escalation of the war was to fundraise for a fellowship programme for Ukrainian scholars – whether displaced or based in Ukraine. The former German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF, now the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology, and Space) reacted quickly to our plea and generously funded the four-year UNET programme.

The first Ukrainian scholar arrived at ZOiS in autumn 2022; since then, we have hosted 24 UNET fellows in Ukraine and on-site. While UNET's main motivation was initially to provide at least an interim perspective for scholars whose personal and professional lives had been disrupted as a result of war, it has evolved significantly beyond that.

UNET has delivered so much more than we initially promised, thanks to: a dedicated UNET Academic Coordinator, Anastasiya Leukhina; the commitment of my ZOiS colleagues across the ZOiS research clusters; both our administration and communications teams; and in particular the willingness of our UNET fellows to engage in numerous activities, generate ideas, and build a genuine network centred on high-quality research, its translation into tangible academic publications, as well as outputs and events targeting policymakers. We are now working on developing UNET into a long-term network of alumni and (hopefully) new fellows beyond 2026. UNET has enriched ZOiS and internationally visible research on Ukraine in many different ways – and will continue to do so in the years to come!

GWENDOLYN SASSE,

Director of ZOiS and Einstein Professor for the Comparative Study of Democracy and Authoritarianism at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Head of UNET Project.



DEAR READERS,

How do we capture the reality of a world turned upside down? When documenting the impacts of the war in Ukraine, we constantly find ourselves operating between two intense polarities. On one hand, there is the critical necessity for hard data – information that is often difficult to collect and analyse under wartime conditions. On the other hand, there is an overwhelming landscape of human pain, exhaustion, and profound, life-altering stories that change absolutely everything we know about our lives.

From the beginning, we at UNET knew that we didn't want to create a standard, formal, boring project report. Instead, we wanted to take a creative risk and to experiment. This publication is the result of that leap: an experimental journal that traces our common path together, connecting empirical data to the human faces and lived experiences behind it.

Science communication is a vital element of our work within UNET, and we are using this format to explore how to talk about profoundly difficult matters in a more accessible and human-centred way without losing scholarly depth. Within these pages, you will find a collaborative archive of best practices on how to genuinely support Ukrainian scholars, implement trauma-sensitive practices, and navigate empirical research during active wartime.

We warmly invite you to step into this journal and engage with both the data and the stories presented herein. Because this publication represents an ongoing experiment in how we share our collective journey, we would love to hear back from you. Your insights are invaluable to us, and we eagerly welcome your thoughts on how these narratives and formats resonate with you. Please contact me at anastasiya.leukhina@zois-berlin.de with any feedback on this report or ideas for possible collaboration.

ANASTASIYA LEUKHINA,
UNET Academic Coordinator



24 **FELLOWS AND ALUMNI** **4 YEARS** **13** senior PhD holders **11** fellows at Master's level

7 **BERLIN-BASED**



17 **UKRAINE-BASED**

FROM **9** **UKRAINIAN REGIONS:**

KYIV Kharkiv
Lviv
Berndyansk
DONETSK
MYKOLAJIW SUMY
Chernihiv
IVANO-FRANKIVSK



FELLOWS 2022–2023



DR. YULIYA BIDENKO,
*Political Science,
“Ukrainian Civil
Society Resilience,”
Kharkiv Karazin
University*



ANASTASIYA SHURENKOVA,
*Sociology,
“Resilience
of Ukrainian
Business as a
Factor of Ukraine’s
Recovery,”
InfoSapiens*



INNA VOLOSEVYCH,
*Sociology,
“Ukrainian Labor
Market During
the Full-scale
War,” InfoSapiens/
Europa-
Universität
Viadrina
Frankfurt (Oder)*



NATALIA ZAIKA,
*Behavioral
Studies,
“Evacuation
Behavior
and Identity:
The Evidence
from Russian-
Ukrainian
War,” American
University Kyiv*

2023–2024



DR. ANDRIY FERT,
*History,
“Ukrainian
Orthodox Parishes
During the Russian
War,” Kyiv School
of Economics*



PROF. DR. OKSANA MIKHEIEVA,
*Sociology,
“Ukrainian
Refugees in
Europe: Everyday
Experiences of
Forced Migration
and Home
Infrastructure
on the Move,”
Ukrainian
Catholic
University*



DR. ALINA MOZOLEVSKA,
*Linguistics,
“Digital Popular
Culture in
Times of Crisis:
the Russo-
Ukrainian War
and its Symbolic
Representations,”
Petro Mohyla
Black Sea State
University/
Saarland
University*



HELEN PIDGORNA,
*Sociology,
“Wartime Paths to
and Experiences
of German
Education:
A Study of
Ukrainian
Refugees with
Secondary School-
aged Children
in Germany,”
Ukraine Global
Scholars*



TETIANA SKRYPCHENKO,
*Sociology, “Role
of Civil and
Neighborhood
Associations in the
Reconstruction
and Local
Development
of De-occupied
Regions in
Ukraine,” Rating
Group*



DR. OLENA ZINENKO,
*Communication
and Media
Studies,
“Mediatization
of War in the
Discourse of
Popular Culture
(Ukrainian
Context),” Karazin
Kharkiv National
University/IFHV
Ruhr-Universität
Bochum*

2024–2025



DR. NATALIIA OTRISHCHENKO,
Sociology,
“Gaining Epistemic Authority:
Ukrainian Scholars in Global Academia”,
Center for Urban History (Lviv)



NATALIIA LOMONOSOVA,
Gender Studies, Sociology, “Time Poverty of Ukrainian Women Employed in the Care Sector During the War”,
Freie Universität Berlin/Czech Academy of Sciences



DR. DARIA YASHKINA,
Sociology,
“Trends in Human Capital in Research/Academia, Including Migration and Conscription (Case of Kharkiv)”,
Karazin Kharkiv National University



DR. NATALIA TSYBULIAK,
Psychology,
“Mental Health of Ukrainian Academic Staff During Wartime”,
NGO “Innovative University”/
Berdyansk State Pedagogical University/



PROF. DR. HANNA SHVINDINA,
Organizational Management,
“A Female Leadership in Times of Crisis”,
American University Kyiv/
Sumy State University



DR. KATERYNA ZAREMBO,
“The Short Path from the Desk to the Trenches: Whole-of-society Defense in Ukraine from the Perspective of Academics-turned-military”,
New Europe Center (NEC). She interrupted her fellowship to voluntarily join the Armed Forces of Ukraine, choosing the trenches over the researcher’s desk.



DR. OLENA STRELNYK,
Gender Studies, Sociology,
“Seeing Invisible: Gendered Experiences of Family Care for the Elderly in Ukraine”,
Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine



DR. MARYNA RABINOVYCH,
European Legal Studies,
“The Ghost of Minsk in the Discursive Framing of Negotiated Outcome to Full-scale Russia-Ukraine War (2022-early 2025)”,
Kyiv School of Economics/
UiT- The Arctic University of Norway

FELLOWS 2025–2026



YULIA ABIBOK,
Journalism and History, “Local and Displaced Populations in Ukraine: Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion Over 2014–2025”, International NGO Safety Organization (INSO)/Media Initiative for Human Rights



DR. OLENA BOGDAN,
Sociology, “Orthodox Churches in Ukraine: Conflict Lines and State Policy Trajectories”, Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine



DR. OLEKSANDRA KEUDEL,
Political Science, “Governing Diversity in Polycentric Political Systems: The Case of Ukraine Before and During the Russian Fullscale Invasion”, Kyiv School of Economics



OLEKSANDRA KOKHAN,
Social Anthropology, “Wrinkles on the Face of War: Elderly Women’s Experiences of the Russo-Ukrainian War”, Invisible University for Ukraine at Central European University



TETIANA LUKERIA,
Sociology, “Decentralization and Differences in Ukraine: Impact of Decentralization Processes on Social Cohesion in War-affected Communities”, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kyiv School of Economics



DR. VOLODYMYR VAKHITOV,
Behavioral Studies, “Effect of Social Cohesion on Integration Efforts and Job Aspirations of Ukrainian Refugees in Germany”, American University Kyiv



FROM CHARITY TO DEVELOPMENT: BEST PRACTICES IN DESIGNING WARTIME ACADEMIC COLLABORATIONS

DRAWING ON HER OWN EXPERIENCE OF DISPLACEMENT, UNET'S ACADEMIC COORDINATOR, ANASTASIYA LEUKHINA, REFLECTS ON HOW FLEXIBILITY, SHARED LEADERSHIP, AND CARE BECAME ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR SUSTAINING BOTH SCHOLARLY EXCELLENCE AND COMMUNITY. SHE PROVIDES AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF HOW UNET WAS SHAPED INTO A HUMAN-CENTRED MODEL OF ACADEMIC COLLABORATION DURING WARTIME.

To build the Ukraine Research Network (UNET), we could not simply act as passive administrators of a conventional funding grant. The core question at the start of the project was: How do we invest resources in a meaningful way? And what is meaningful when it comes to academic collaboration under bombs and drones, without electricity, Internet, or freedom of movement? In this text, I will explore how my personal story shaped this project; what helped us create a community; and what lessons learned made UNET special.

TEXT BY ANASTASIYA LEUKHINA



Anastasiya Leukhina

On a personal level, my journey was influenced by two processes: first, becoming a refugee in the midst of war, and second, finding my professional place in a new context.

Because my own unplanned relocation to Berlin and experience with displacement coincided with the launch of this project, my approach to working with Ukrainian scholars was deeply personal. This shared experience of displacement gave me an intuitive understanding of the emotional toll our fellows were facing. It allowed me to move beyond purely administrative thinking and to connect on a human level, providing the insights needed to turn empathy into action.

Professionally, this path marked a transition from project administrator to facilitator. Initially, my role was structured conventionally around administration – a framework that felt restrictive, given my background in system transformation and facilitating change. I recognised a need for greater adaptive space to follow the evolving ideas and needs of the scholars, rather than sticking rigidly to a fixed plan. Once we integrated my facilitation

experience into our daily operations, I found my stride. This shift unlocked the creative energy, inspiration, and vision I needed to lead the programme effectively.

“Our goal was to design a human-centred blueprint for how an academic community can maintain scientific standards while actively caring for the individuals who produce that science.”

We stepped into the role of reflective, process-oriented architects. We navigated a landscape of operational tensions, making daily choices about how we implemented our project. Our goal was to design a human-centred blueprint for how an academic community can maintain scientific standards while actively caring for the individuals who produce that science.

I am profoundly grateful to Gwendolyn Sasse, ZOiS Director, for the trust and openness that defined our collaboration. I am equally grateful to my colleagues at ZOiS, who gracefully navigated the high degree of uncertainty surrounding this project, yet championed it nonetheless.

While immediate humanitarian relief is a vital component of wartime solidarity, treating a research network solely as a charity risks compromising long-term institutional sustainability. We (UNET) firmly anchored ourselves within a **developmental support paradigm**. We maintained a strictly merit-based approach to selection, targeting proposals demonstrating deep intellectual rigour and the potential to generate new knowledge about Ukraine’s complex societal transformations.

However, a blind meritocracy under conditions of war inherently favours those who are already advantaged. Therefore, we implemented a nuanced selection, pairing stringent selection criteria with proactive scaffolding. We rejected the trend of only supporting established scholars, instead deliberately integrating junior, mid-career, and senior researchers into the same horizontal spaces, to drive **professional exchange across disciplines**. Of our 24 fellows to date, 13 were senior PhD holders and 11 held Master’s degrees.

Photo: Taras Bezpalyi

For some of them, the UNET experience was an important stepping stone on the way to pursuing a PhD.

Faced with the friction between output requirements and severe human suffering, we chose **compassion over rigid enforcement**. We recognised that compassion is the prerequisite for sustainable productivity under chronic stress. Concretely, we replaced punitive deadlines with extreme timeline flexibility and empathetic communication. When a fellow faced a blackout, bombardment, or displacement, we adjusted individual milestones and offered the space needed to stabilise their lives, allowing them to perform when they were humanly capable of doing so. And they did!

Because psychological strain cannot be fully pre-planned, we systematically integrated self-care and **trauma-informed approaches** into the project fabric. This is most visible in our annual offline networking meetings on the “Methodological, Ethical, and Personal Challenges of Research In and About the War”; in panels on war-related mental health at Kyiv Café; and follow-up educational assets such as our dedicated podcast, *Research, Mental Health, and Traumatizing Contexts: How to Take Care?*



 *Scan to listen*

“Academic excellence and human care are not mutually exclusive – they are fundamentally interdependent.”

The following elements of our project design have been a particular source of motivation and pride. I hope they will also encourage reflection on best practices for designing academic collaboration projects.

► **Theme-Targeted Recruitment:**

Moving from general urgent calls in the early years to specialised thematic calls resulted in a much higher calibre of selection and closer peer collaboration. Fellows working in the same thematic area collaborated better, and were more motivated to learn from each other and to co-create publications or other projects together.

► **Co-Ownership and Shared Leadership:**

We moved beyond a model of allocating research grants, to a participatory design. Fellows initiated specialised software workshops, co-created events on the topics of their research and beyond, and co-moderated their own alumni meetings based on their interests and needs.

► **Non-Hierarchical Mentorship:**

Fellows worked closely with senior ZOIS mentors, leading to lasting professional connections and collaborative outputs. Several significant conference presentations and academic publications emerged from these close, horizontal collaborations across borders. We also successfully pio-

neered a double-mentorship design, pairing an international mentor with a senior local Ukrainian scholar (also an alumnus of our programme) to help a junior member grow in both international and local contexts.

► **Rhythm in Systemic Visibility:** We established an accessible publication cycle, wherein each fellow published 1–2 research ‘Spotlights’ in English and German, successfully positioning the network as a public centre of excellence. At first, a 12-month publication outlook seemed unrealistic for people whose planning horizon was a week at most, but many subsequently shared that this ability to plan gave them additional structure and support, and disciplined their work amid the extreme realities of war on the ground.

Ultimately, the path of UNET proves that academic excellence and human care are not mutually exclusive – they are fundamentally interdependent. By safeguarding the well-being of the scholars behind the data, we did not compromise scientific standards but instead protected them. Moving from a standard grant-giving model to a participatory architecture of shared leadership, horizontal support, and systemic visibility provided our fellows with something far more valuable than a checklist: it gave them agency, community, and a predictable rhythm amid the chaos of war.

As the formal timeline of this project concludes, the network we built together endures. My hope is that the lessons, frictions, and triumphs shared in this text serve as a practical blueprint for the broader academic community. When funding institutions choose to step into the role of reflective, process-oriented architects, they can build spaces in which human dignity is preserved, horizontal solidarity thrives, and science survives against all odds. ■

UNET MENTORS



PROF. DR. GWENDOLYN SASSE
*Director,
Einstein Professor
for the Comparative Study of
Democracy and
Authoritarianism
at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin,
Head of Project*



DR. NADJA DOUGLAS
Researcher



PD DR. TSYPYLMA DARIEVA
*Head of Research
Cluster "Migration
and Diversity"*



DR. LEANDRA BIAS
Research Affiliate



PD DR. SABINE VON LÖWIS
*Head of Research
Cluster "Conflict
Dynamics and
Border Regions",
Head of Project*



PROF. DR. REGINA ELSNER
Research Affiliate



DR. BEATE ESCHMENT
Researcher



DR. FÉLIX KRAWATZEK
*Head of Research
Cluster "Youth
and Generational
Change Research
Ombudsperson"*



DR. JULIA LANGBEIN
*Head of Research
Cluster "Political
Economy and
Integration"*



DR. NINA FRIESS
Researcher



DR. HAKOB MATEVOSYAN
Researcher



DR. STEFANIE ORPHAL
*Head of
Communications*

THE MENTORSHIP PART OF UNET EVOLVED INTO A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF MUTUAL LEARNING, HORIZON EXPANSIONS, AND PERSONAL AS WELL AS ACADEMIC SUPPORT. HERE, FOUR ZOIS RESEARCHERS REFLECT ON THEIR TIME AS UNET MENTORS.



*Hakob Matevosyan
(right) in conversation
with a participant*

“CONSISTENCY IS IMPORTANT”

Hakob Matevosyan is a sociologist with a research focus on migration, diaspora, and transnationalism. He was a mentor for Natalia Tsybuliak.

“Natalia Tsybuliak and I met once a month for an ‘online-coffee chat’, speaking not only about her work but also things like how we were doing and what our everyday lives were like. This social connection we built during our mentorship was, and still is, as important as the academic exchange we had. As Natalia was already an established scholar, my

task in this mentorship was on the one hand to inform and support her application for funding, and on the other hand, more content-wise, to bring methodological aspects into play – how to connect quantitative and qualitative research methods. As the idea was to publish a report about her project, I also introduced her to the ZOIS research guidelines and especially how academic publications work at ZOIS and in Germany in general. I also organised a meeting with other ZOIS researchers, where she had the chance to present her work and get feedback from them. But personally, I also gained a lot from this mentorship, because Natalia’s project introduced me to topics beyond my expertise. As her work focused on the mental health of Ukrainian academic staff during wartime, I also learned a lot about the impacts that war can have on our field, but also the resilience that scholars show even during the most challenging of times. It helped me to see that, specifically in times of war, our job as scholars matters and that consistency is important. Scholars are fighters in the sense that we have to produce good scholarship, to shed light on what is happening in society.” – Hakob Matevosyan. ■



Gwendolyn Sasse

“TURNING INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIPS INTO A REAL NETWORK”

Gwendolyn Sasse is the director of ZOIS and head of the research cluster Societies between Stability and Change. She was a mentor for Yuliya Bidenko, Oleksandra Keudel, Tetiana Lukeria, and Natalia Otrishchenko.

“I worked with many fellows over the past few years, and each relationship found its own pattern and intensity. Some were based on more regular meetings at ZOIS or online, whereas others progressed through written feedback on research designs, draft papers, and conference proposals and continued well beyond the actual fellowship. The idea of “mentorship” was never meant in a hierarchical way: some of the UNET fellows were early-career researchers, while others were established academics with professorships at Ukrainian universities. Similarly, the ZOIS mentors ranged from post-docs to more senior researchers. The main idea behind the mentoring was to create a more personal relationship to facilitate fellows’ quick integration into ZOIS structures and activities. In the meetings with my fellows, there was also always space to discuss current developments in Ukraine or personal issues. Often, I was struck by how the researchers were able to carry on with most of what they had planned at the start of their fellowship despite everything happening around them. Sometimes, I caught a glimpse of – or could simply sense –

the effects of war on individuals, their life trajectories, and mental health. I often wondered whether and how I would function under such circumstances. I have benefited enormously from having so many UNET fellows at and around ZOIS over the past four years. From my “mentees” I have gained a deeper understanding of the reality of Ukrainian academia in wartime, both in terms of the individuals and institutions. Closer to my own research interests, I have become familiar with a wider range of high-quality public opinion research institutions in Ukraine, gained a better understanding of local government dynamics in wartime, and managed to put my own research on displaced Ukrainians in dialogue with the work of UNET fellows on this topic. I hope that we can build on this in the future through intensifying our UNET alumni activities, both among the (former) fellows and in their continued interaction with ZOIS.” – Gwendolyn Sasse. ■



From left:
Gwendolyn
Sasse,
Sabine
von Lövis,
Stefanie
Orphal

“I was struck by how the researchers were able to carry on with most of what they had planned at the start of their fellowship despite everything happening around them.”



From left: Julia Langbein, Nataliia Lomonosova, Oleksandra Keudel and Maryna Rabinovych after a panel discussion at Café Kyiv in Berlin, 2026

“BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP”

Julia Langbein is head of the research cluster Political Economy and Integration. She was a mentor for Anastasiya Shurenkova, Maryna Rabinovych, and Volodymyr Vakhitov.

“Being a UNET mentor was a very rewarding experience. I do not see the relationship with the UNET fellows as a traditional mentor-mentee relationship with a hierarchical connotation. Because they are all either researchers or acknowledged experts in their field, it is more of a peer-to-peer exchange among colleagues. While I helped with things like project or grant applications or facilitated contacts to German and international researchers, most of the time we had substantive discussions about research design or policy relevance. So even when my field of expertise did not match their research themes, we were still able to discuss research directions and reflect together on their process. It was really a process of mutual learning, and I valued the exchange with people from very diverse professional backgrounds. Additionally of course, working with researchers from Ukraine gives one new perspectives and a reality check on developments within Ukraine. My work with the UNET fellows also went beyond the mentorship part, as the outcomes of the project included, for example, joint publications. Our close personal connection also allowed us to ask questions that one might not dare to in another context. For example, I published a report about resilience with two fellows, and we were able to talk about this topic in a very open way. UNET is not only about this peer review and helping with publications: we also worked on things like science communication – how to communicate research findings to political institutions. This additionally shows how UNET offered us a space for mutual learning and exchange.” – Julia Langbein. ■

Photo: ZOIS



Félix Krawatzek

“LIVED EXPERIENCES DRIVE RESEARCH”

Félix Krawatzek is head of the research cluster Youth and Generational Change at ZOIS. He was a mentor for Helen Pidgorna and Hanna Shvindina.

“I had a regular meeting schedule with both my fellows, where we talked about their next goals. My first fellow was working on her Master’s thesis that was thematically close to my own research field, so we also discussed and worked together on the literature and theory, and how to present and structure an interview and arguments. Her thesis subsequently led to a peer-reviewed journal publication, which was a really big success. The research of my second fellow was not related to my own field, so we focused more on structuring the text and how to formulate good research and interview questions. We met at their request, talking about ideas and setting new internal deadlines. Of course, due to the war, we had to learn to adjust to unstable environments, and when it was appropriate to apply pressure or set deadlines, especially for the journal publication. What was particularly striking about this mentorship programme was the interpersonal component, the contact with colleagues in Ukraine. Working with my fellows, it was interesting to see how lived experiences drive research – not solely theory or literature, as is often the case for me as an outsider. This mentorship programme really taught me and my fellows how to connect these two dimensions in order to generate the best research.” – Félix Krawatzek. ■

The interviews were conducted by Habibe Holzkamp, who completed an internship in the Communications Department at ZOIS in spring 2026.



HABIBE HOLZKAMP,
intern

WHETHER ESTABLISHED RESEARCHERS OR JUNIOR FELLOWS, UNET'S MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME OFFERED VALUABLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE. HERE, UKRAINE-BASED FELLOWS OLEKSANDRA KOKHAN AND NATALIA TSYBULIAK REFLECT ON THEIR TIME IN UNET.



Oleksandra Kokhan

“SCIENCE IS COMMUNAL”

Oleksandra Kokhan is a junior fellow with UNET. Her research examines how war and displacement have reduced older women's access to social care in Ukraine, and how they develop new strategies to maintain social connections and support one another in everyday life during the war.

You worked with two mentors, Dr. Tsy pylma Darieva, a ZOIS researcher, and Dr. Olena Strelnyk, a UNET Alumna. How did your work benefit from working with both of them?

– Having two mentors that come from different fields allowed me to have in-depth discussions about both thematic and methodological questions. Olena is thematically very close to my research because she is an expert in the

field and has been conducting care studies for a long time. So her insights and knowledge about the topic really helped. We would discuss methodological questions that were more on the level of theory – so does this theory work for my research, or is there another one that might fit better? She also invited me to some events related to care studies, and I developed closer ties to the researcher community in Ukraine.

Tsy pylma also introduced me to a few researchers involved in care work in Vienna. We met once a month and discussed questions of methodology and fieldwork, especially whether my fieldwork was going in the right direction.

Overall, having two mentors was very complementary for me. They both come from humanities, but with very different life trajectories – anthropology and gender studies, respectively – so they could share different insights on how my project might progress.

Would you say your research has benefited from being part of this mentorship?

– Oh definitely, yes. I think that science is communal. Working with mentors really helped me to see that what I might consider to be common knowledge is not necessarily the case for someone else. Having two mentors was also beneficial in the sense that if both of them highlighted the same issues in my research process or writing, then I should definitely take these into account. And although my research still faces some challenges, I would have been completely lost if there was no mentorship. Their guidance was very helpful for me, and I would definitely do such a mentorship programme again. ■



Natalia Tsybuliak

“FROM ACADEMIC RESEARCH TO POLICY IMPACT”

Natalia Tsybuliak is a senior fellow and UNET Alumna. During her time in UNET, Natalia worked on the project Mental Health of Ukrainian Academic Staff during Wartime. Her research aimed to inform the development of comprehensive mental health support programmes, thereby contributing to the well-being of the academic community and enhancing its resilience. Dr. Hakob Matevosyan was her mentor during the fellowship.

Reflecting back on your time in UNET, what stands out most to you about the mentoring programme?

– I really appreciate the human dimension of this mentorship. During the meetings with my mentor, Hakob, we firstly talked about how I was coping personally during this difficult time. For me, this sense of genuine support was

extremely important. I also valued his openness during our meetings, sharing some personal difficulties or challenges he faced during his own research path. This gave me both practical insights and a sense of encouragement. Besides our meetings, my mentor also organised meetings with other ZOIS researchers, where I could present my work. I received very valuable recommendations and feedback, and they did so in a really friendly way that felt like they genuinely wanted to help me. This was not only good for my scientific outputs but also for my professional development. This mentorship showed me that my work is important, and I value all the support I received. I would gladly do such a mentorship again.

Besides the personal aspects of this mentorship, how did you and your work benefit from it academically?

– I already had a research design and data, but my mentor helped me develop and write policy briefs. I had extensive experience in academic writing and had published widely, so I tended to regard academic articles as the most valuable form of research output. The fellowship, however, introduced me to a different way of communicating research and enabled me to develop new professional skills that I now use regularly. My mentor taught me how to translate research findings into accessible documents for policymakers and other stakeholders; identify key messages; prioritise evidence; and formulate clear, targeted recommendations. His guidance and feedback were instrumental in helping me develop these skills.

Additionally, as I come from a psychology background and my mentor was a political scientist, he helped me view my research from a different perspective. ■

Oleksandra Kokhan and Natalia Tsybuliak in conversation with Habibe Holzkamp.

SHOULD WE STAY OR SHOULD WE GO? AMBIVALENCE OF WARTIME CHOICE

SINCE THE START OF THE FULL-SCALE INVASION, THE FOCUS OF MOST RESEARCH HAS BEEN ON THE MILLIONS OF UKRAINIANS WHO HAVE LEFT THEIR HOMES. HOWEVER, BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMIST AND UNET FELLOW VOLODYMYR VAKHITOV WAS INTRIGUED BY THE OPPOSITE QUESTION: WHY DO SOME PEOPLE DECIDE TO STAY?

Vakhitov first became interested in this topic in spring 2022, after Russian troops withdrew from the Kyiv region. At that time, he observed a paradox: whilst volunteers were still able to evacuate residents of Kyiv's suburbs, many initially refused. "I'm not going anywhere; my home is my castle", Vakhitov recalls as typical responses to the offer of evacuation. But when fighting later reached their streets, some of those same people asked to be evacuated – which by then had become almost impossible.

This observation first prompted Vakhitov and his colleagues to study the process of evacuation, and then to analyse subsequent experiences of returning. The more they examined the topic of Ukrainian displacement, the more apparent the knowledge gap became. "In spring 2024, we realised that we knew a great deal about those who left and those who returned, but considerably less about those who stayed", Vakhitov recalls.

In a follow-up study, the team referred to the Aspirations-Capabilities Framework, a migration theory that considers not only an individual's desire to leave or stay, but also their ability to act on that choice. As there were virtually no quantitative studies of this kind, the researchers sought to "quantify" their approach, and in January 2025 collected data from women aged 18–60 across Ukraine.

The results revealed a clear hierarchy of factors that could influence the decisions of those who remained in the country throughout the war. The strongest predictor was the risk of occupation – not a hypothetical one, but the reality of the front line reaching one's own street. The loss of a home or income explained ap-

proximately half of the observed variance, while problems with heating, water, or electricity were less influential. Having children younger than 18 was not, in itself, a decisive factor in the decision to leave.

Vakhitov believes that this is partly due to the timing of the study. In his view, by around the turn of the third and fourth years of the full-scale war, people had adapted to some extent. Those who wanted to and were able to leave had, for the most part, already done so. Those who remained had been able to consider both the risks of remaining in Ukraine and the challenges of emigration, such as starting from scratch, learning a new language, searching for work, helping their children to settle in, and building new social connections.

However, Volodymyr Vakhitov considers the study's most interesting finding to be that up to 15 per cent of respondents express ambivalence, wishing to both leave and stay. This group was the particular

focus of his detailed analysis as part of the UNET fellowship.

"The desire to leave and the desire to stay do not lie on the same axis. On the one hand, these women have parents, children, school, work, friends, and a home – everything that shapes their lives, effectively. On the other hand, there is the need for security. In conditions of total uncertainty, a person may genuinely not know what kind of future they want", Vakhitov explains.

The study also revealed another paradox: in 2022, the ability to evacuate was closely linked to resources – such as money, access to a car, and social connections – that enabled people to leave more quickly. Subsequently, however, some of those who consciously choose to remain also have more resources: They could now leave, but do not necessarily want to.

For Vakhitov, this is also an argument against using the earlier data, collected in 2022, to explain present-day Ukraine: "Over the past few years, people's behaviour, their expectations, and the range of possible decisions have all changed."

However, he believes there is also another reason why such research needs to be conducted from within Ukraine – namely, that theories inevitably simplify reality. They fail to capture the nuances of "life in the midst of war", which remains largely unexplored. The Ukrainian experience shows that prolonged war does not bring everyday life to a halt, but instead radically alters the conditions under which people decide whether to stay, leave, or return – and may find themselves not yet knowing precisely which path to take. ■

Text by Anastasia Rodi, based on an interview with Volodymyr Vakhitov.



Volodymyr Vakhitov



WHAT DOES “QUALITY EDUCATION” MEAN WHEN A CHILD’S EDUCATION COULD TAKE PLACE IN GERMANY, UKRAINE, OR BOTH COUNTRIES SIMULTANEOUSLY? UNET FELLOW HELEN PIDGORNA EXAMINES HOW UKRAINIAN FAMILIES PERCEIVE THE QUALITY OF GERMAN SCHOOLING.

EDUCATING IN UNCERTAINTY: BETWEEN UKRAINIAN AND GERMAN SCHOOLS

From 2023 to 2024, Helen Pidgorna conducted research on the educational experiences of Ukrainian families with children of lower and upper secondary school age in Germany. During her fellowship, she conducted 32 in-depth interviews with parents and made eight one- or two-day observations of families whose children had been attending German schools in various federal states for around a year. Beginning with questions about educational strategies, Pidgorna gradually shifted her focus to subjective perceptions of the quality of education. She investigated what Ukrainian families mean by “quality education” and why certain characteristics of German schools are perceived by some as strengths and by others as weaknesses. By 2024, most families in her sample had still maintained links with the Ukrainian education system by keeping children involved in individual forms of study at a Ukrainian school. The researcher draws here on the concept of double presence, which describes how people can remain present in different geographical and social spaces simultaneously. Research on circular migration shows that this presence is typically maintained for one generation, with the next tending to move more decisively into one context or the other. “However, temporary protection

status created a situation in which families were trying to maintain links with two countries and pursue two educational strategies. This significantly impacted their perceptions of the quality of education”, argues the researcher.

Pidgorna identified one of the reasons why some Ukrainian families were dissatisfied with the quality of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education in German schools. Families who had invested considerable resources in providing their children with a strong grounding in these subjects in Ukraine often considered the German curriculum to be insufficiently challenging, potentially causing their child to lose motivation.

“Gradually, the realisation might have set in that a less intensive curriculum is not necessarily a bad thing. If pupils have more free time, they have the opportunity to develop in other areas, such as sport or the arts”, Pidgorna explains. The researcher also observed ambivalence regarding humanities subjects: while reading fewer literary works may have disappointed parents, they viewed the increased time spent discussing them and linking the curriculum to current events positively.

Another important finding of the study was the level of pupil autonomy in the

German education system. According to the families interviewed, their Ukrainian schools were largely teacher-centred, with the pre-determined course of lessons and controlling participation. In Germany, pupils were expected to show considerably more initiative and take greater responsibility for their learning. “For some teenagers, this was a revelation. They felt that their opinion mattered and that they could influence the learning process”, says Pidgorna.

At the same time, the researcher observed that the children’s reactions to this autonomy varied. Some teenagers, having experienced war and forced displacement, lacked the emotional resources to make even the simplest choice. This, Pidgorna stresses, is why it is difficult to separate the influence of the education system from a child’s mental state.

Today, many of the teenagers from this study are moving on to university or entering the labour market. Their double presence becomes concrete life trajectories: some have returned to Ukraine, whilst others have continued their education in Germany. ■

Text by Anastasia Rodi, based on an interview with Helen Pidgorna.

BEYOND VISIBILITY: WHO GETS TO EXPLAIN UKRAINE?

**THE VISIBILITY OF UKRAINIAN
ACADEMICS WITHIN
THE INTERNATIONAL
ACADEMIC COMMUNITY HAS
INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY
SINCE 2022. BUT HAS THIS
ALTERED THE FRAMEWORK
THROUGH WHICH KNOWLEDGE
ABOUT UKRAINE IS NOW BEING
SHAPED? SOCIOLOGIST AND
UNET FELLOW NATALIIA
OTRISHCHENKO HAS INVESTIGATED
HOW UKRAINIAN ACADEMICS
GAIN EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY.**



Nataliia Otrishchenko

The idea for the project emerged from Otrishchenko's experience of international academic collaboration and her observations on the evolving production of knowledge about Ukraine. During her UNET fellowship, she conducted 20 interviews with researchers from different disciplines and academic trajectories: those who continue to work in Ukraine, those forced to leave after the full-scale invasion, and those who were already established abroad.

"The interview method and the diversity of the interlocutors' experiences enabled me to explore the question of who gains the power to explain Ukraine, and how", says the sociologist. During the research, another significant characteristic of the sample group emerged: all of the respondents had already achieved a certain degree of academic visibility. This subsequently enabled Otrishchenko to pose a follow-up question: what happens once that visibility has been achieved?

Otrishchenko considers the epistemic authority of Ukrainian researchers not to be a status automatically conferred by their origins, but rather a process of gaining trust and the right to interpret reality authoritatively. She wanted to know what underpins this authority: language skills, sources, methodology, physical presence in Ukraine, or personal experience of the war? Her findings suggest that the answer lies in the concept of grounded expertise: knowledge is always produced from a particular place, time, and position – and these matter. One of the identified strategies of grounded expertise was to draw on embodied experience as an argument. At the same time, Otrishchenko notes that Ukrainian researchers are often perceived as being too deeply involved in events, and therefore potentially biased. She suggests a different approach to personal experi-

ence: it can be a source of knowledge, but only if the researcher reflects on it, process it methodologically, and maintain a constant feedback loop.

For Ukrainian researchers, this can mean a double – and, during the war, even triple – burden. Otrishchenko illustrates this with the metaphor of baggage: a Ukrainian academic arrives with their own academic "baggage"; but in order to engage in a new dialogue, they must also take on the "baggage of others". In other words, they must adapt to new concepts and academic norms while simultaneously living with the war, worrying about loved ones in Ukraine, and attempting to build a career in a highly competitive environment. Otrishchenko therefore emphasises that "it takes two to tango", meaning that international academia must also reconsider its established perceptions of the region. "It is not enough simply to add more Ukrainian voices. What is needed is the decentralisation of a field that has long been shaped around a few dominant centres." One way to achieve this could be through networking, by supporting the work of associations, communities, and centres, which together can generate knowledge and transform specific fields.

At the same time, Otrishchenko believes that it is not enough to expect others to change while remaining unchanged oneself. She is convinced that dialogue is essential in this. Findings from her UNET fellowship research therefore provided the impetus for the next stage of the project, a forthcoming book titled "Beyond Visibility". As a further contribution to strengthening dialogue between Ukrainian and international academia, it will be published in both Ukrainian and English.

The book's title simultaneously captures the research's main conclusion and outlines the next level, beyond visibility: transitioning from being present within the international academic community to influencing the production of knowledge about Ukraine. ■

Text by Anastasia Rodi, based on an interview with Nataliia Otrishchenko.

WHAT CAN UKRAINE CONTRIBUTE?: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON UKRAINE IN ACADEMIA

FOR DECADES, UKRAINE WAS OFTEN STUDIED THROUGH THE LENSES OF POST-SOVIET TRANSFORMATION, RUSSIAN STUDIES, OR REGIONAL EXPERTISE. RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION IN 2022 CHALLENGED NOT ONLY POLITICAL REALITIES, BUT ALSO HOW KNOWLEDGE ABOUT UKRAINE IS PRODUCED AND VALUED. UNET FELLOWS OKSANA MIKHEIEVA AND OLEKSANDRA KEUDEL DISCUSS CHANGING ACADEMIC NARRATIVES AND HIERARCHIES – AND THE SHIFT FROM STUDYING UKRAINE AS A CASE TO RECOGNISING IT AS A SOURCE OF NEW CONCEPTS AND THEORIES.

When you first entered international academia, where was Ukraine on its academic map?

OKSANA MIKHEIEVA: My collaboration with international academic institutions began quite early on. In 2001, I went on a fellowship to Barcelona. In the early 2000s, Ukrainian researchers were often still perceived as coming from a very distant place. There was interest, but Ukraine did not yet have real subjectivity in these discussions. That changed gradually, against considerable inertia.

OLEKSANDRA KEUDEL: My experience is different, as I joined academia after 2014, completing my Master's in Sweden and later my PhD in Germany. I started researching Ukraine in 2015 while



Oksana Mikheieva

writing my Master's thesis on the volunteer movement. It was then that I realised my observations contradicted what we had been taught at the university about civil society in Eastern Europe. In political science, post-Soviet regimes are often explained in terms of patronage and business-political networks. In Ukraine, this approach tended to explain the so-called hybrid regime – a grey zone between authoritarianism and democracy – through competition between business-political networks, while largely overlooking civil society as a political actor with a radically different kind of agency. In my view, it is precisely this agency that has largely prevented Ukraine from sliding into authoritarianism.

So the problem was not only a lack of attention paid to Ukraine, but also the categories through which it was studied – 'post-Soviet', 'Eurasian', even 'Russian studies'?

MIKHEIEVA: Yes. For me, 'post-Soviet' is now a rather historical term. It may describe the first decade after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but it is irrelevant today for former Soviet countries, which

have subsequently followed sharply divergent trajectories. There is also another limitation: When you are placed in the 'area studies' category, it is often assumed that you are producing regional expertise rather than universal knowledge or theory. This creates a certain hierarchy. That does not mean regional expertise has no value; Instead, the question is: where does Ukraine belong within area studies, and what can it contribute?

KEUDEL: I also see another problem here. If students study Ukraine within the framework of Russian and Eurasian Studies, then the boundary between

“Post-Soviet frameworks largely overlooked the radically different agency of civil society.”

Europe and Eurasia effectively runs along Ukraine's western border. Politically, Ukraine begins to be perceived as a satellite state of Russia. That has consequences when those students later become diplomats, politicians, or work in international relations. If Ukraine were studied alongside Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Czech Republic) or the Baltic states, students would develop a very different understanding of the region – and of Ukraine's place within it.

Ms Mikheieva, you're talking about the different stages in the process of transforming knowledge about Ukraine. To what extent did 2022 really mark a turning point?

MIKHEIEVA: The Russian aggression that began in 2014, and especially its full-scale invasion of 2022, became a catalyst for this transformation. This is very much felt at various levels. Back in 2019 or 2020, journalists in Germany asked me about the 'civil war in Ukraine'; Today, nobody asks me that question anymore. The way we talk about Ukraine has fundamentally changed. Compared with three to five years ago, the progress is simply incredible.

Ms Keudel, does greater visibility also mean greater agency?

KEUDEL: I would separate these issues. Since 2022, there are more opportunities for Ukrainian universities to participate in international projects, but we still need to assert our agency within them. Many foreign researchers who previously focused on Russia have now turned their attention to Ukraine. A certain partnership logic can emerge: we want to carry out a survey; you collect the data; we produce the analysis. I had a very telling experience when I was invited to join an international research project. The researchers leading it were unable to travel to Ukraine for security reasons, so I was asked to collect data – effectively under fire – and then pass it on to people who would analyse it while remaining in safety. This issue has been raised many times, and the situation is changing. Partnership means producing knowledge together, in Ukraine, as we do with colleagues from the Technical University of Berlin.

MIKHEIEVA: I would like to add another dimension. Since 2022, Europe has provided unprecedented support to Ukrainian academia. Initially, prior-



Oleksandra Keudel at the Deliberative Democracy Policy Lab, Kyiv, 2026

ity was given to supporting researchers fleeing the war, rather than to assessing the quality of their academic work. This was absolutely essential. But someone protecting their family while adapting to a new country, language, and academic environment cannot immediately demonstrate perfect academic results. Paradoxically, this could reinforce existing stereotypes about corruption and the secondary status of Ukrainian academia. So the situation is more complex. The assistance was extremely important, but support alone does not mean recognition as an equal.

But are all the barriers external? What is preventing Ukrainian scholarship from becoming part of the international academic discourse?

MIKHEIEVA: The language of publications is one such barrier. World-class scholarship has been published in Ukrainian, but remains largely inaccessible to the international academic community. Ukrainian researchers are now publishing much more actively in English, which is a very positive trend. The style of academic writing in Ukraine differs from that in the West. Therefore, integration into the Western academic environment is also a matter of time.

KEUDEL: Exactly. It's not just a matter of proficiency in English. It's about know-



ing how to communicate academically. In our tradition, we first write about the object, the subject, and the novelty, thereby indicating what we have researched. But in the dominant Anglo-Saxon tradition, the first question is different: Why is this important? Where is your research puzzle? Therefore, someone might carry out high-quality research and have a good command of English, yet still fail to get published in an international journal because they are not communicating the right things in the way the journal editor expects. This is a major adjustment required to make oneself understood here.

How should Ukrainian Studies be shaped?

KEUDEL: For a very long time, Ukrainian Studies were predominantly part of the humanities, focusing on language, culture, and history. This is understandable: during the Soviet period, Ukraine (like other Soviet Socialist Republics), in practice, was subject to Moscow's control; consequently, it became essential to preserve a distinct identity. But now, this is changing. For example, the University of Notre Dame in the US recently established a professorship in Ukrainian Studies and Global Affairs. For me, those words – and Global Affairs – mark a major shift: Ukraine is being recognised as relevant to global questions. For me, Ukraine has always been a case of ... not just a case in itself. Through Ukraine, we can ask broader questions and develop broader concepts.

MIKHEIEVA: I agree, but institutionalising this knowledge is equally important. New networks – like UNET, for example – are connecting researchers internationally, and fostering a new generation of scholars focused on Ukraine. The European University Viadrina recently launched Germany's first PhD programme in Ukrainian Studies, with twelve doctoral researchers. That's fantastic! What is especially important is



“The experience of Ukrainian society today provides an opportunity to develop new concepts.”

that Ukrainian Studies abroad should not be developed solely by Ukrainians. If we want this field to grow globally, we need researchers from many countries who see Ukraine as their academic focus.

KEUDEL: I'll be a little more cautious here. Much of what is currently being established relies on project funding. The question, therefore, is whether this institutionalisation will be sustainable. It is crucial that interest in Ukraine does not turn out to be a passing fad. We must ensure that these programmes do not simply come to an end along with their funding in a few years' time.

What, then, would real change look like?

MIKHEIEVA: For me, it's important that the experience of Ukrainian society today provides an opportunity to develop new concepts. We're talking about democracy, human rights, humanity, and resilience;

the war is forcing us to reconsider these things – that once seemed obvious and were taken for granted as universal and defining European values. Ukraine therefore plays a huge role in this rethinking process – not only domestically, but for all European countries.

KEUDEL: For me, one question that is still asked far too rarely is not only what Ukraine needs to change, but also what Ukraine can contribute to Europe. Ukrainian civil society, for example, has spent decades fighting for and successfully creating new forms of political participation. Today, as other democracies seek answers – to populism, the crisis of participation, and mistrust of institutions – perhaps they can learn something from the Ukrainian experience. Ukraine possesses knowledge that matters beyond Ukraine. ■

Prof. Oksana Mikheieva and Dr. Oleksandra Keudel in conversation with Anastasia Rodi.



ANASTASIA RODI,
*Journalist and PhD candidate,
Editor-in-Chief of UNET Times*



UNET team during a discussion at ZOIS, 2025

RETHINKING SLOW SCIENCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WARZONE ACADEMICS

WHAT DOES “SLOW SCIENCE” MEAN WHEN RESEARCH IS CONDUCTED AMID AIR RAIDS, DISPLACEMENT, AND CONSTANT UNCERTAINTY? DRAWING ON THE EXPERIENCES OF EIGHT FEMALE UNET SCHOLARS, THIS COLLECTIVE REFLECTION CONSIDERS HOW WAR ALTERS THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH KNOWLEDGE IS PRODUCED, AND WHY ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS REQUIRE MORE FLEXIBILITY.

With its “publish or perish” imperative, stiff competition for grants and positions, and focus on quantifiable output, neoliberal academia breeds fast science. Of course, the pressure to publish quickly is partly motivated by the need to find solutions to the world’s pressing problems. But let’s be honest: In today’s academia, quantity is often prioritised for its own sake – sometimes at the expense of quality.

Of course, “fast” is relative in this game. Gatekeeping procedures such as peer review and editing take time,

and no-one familiar with the academic world would be surprised by a timespan of one to two years from submitting a first draft to publication. However, even these built-in brakes do not alleviate the pressure on scholars to produce quick results.

Many academics have pointed to the need to slow down, emphasising that good-quality academic work takes time. For these authors, slowness is not limited to the pace of writing and publishing; as Mountz and her co-authors point out, slowness begins long

“In today’s academia, quantity is often prioritised for its own sake – sometimes at the expense of quality.”

before publication – “in research design, community engagement, and the pursuit of personally and politically meaningful work.”

This text attempts to expand the contextual boundaries of understanding slow science. It was born out of a conversation among eight female Ukrainian scholars, each of whom has been affected in their own way by the full-scale Russian invasion. While discussing the speed and quality of academic output, we arrived at the conclusion that the ‘fast versus slow’ science debate acquires additional nuances in a warzone.

By current academic standards, the text was prepared rather quickly, in slightly more than a month from the initial idea for the piece to agreeing on the content. As a collective effort, we could distribute tasks but also had to adjust to each other’s working paces and personal circumstances. The work on this text reflects the practices of slow science that we are advocating for: collaborative work, sensitivity to contexts – collective and personal – and experimentation with formats.

No peace to think

Personal issues affect each individual’s ability to meet their professional commitments. As Mountz and her co-authors admit: “Since starting this article, members of this collective have coped with the birth of a child, the loss of a child from miscarriage, divorce, the death of parents, caring for parents with declining health, and other life-changing experiences that have made us unplanned experts in everything from childcare policy to urban transportation and Medicare coverage.”

“Ukrainian expertise is often perceived as emotionally charged and hence biased and less valid.”

With all due respect to the various difficult experiences that people face in life, war brings additional, extraordinary challenges. Most of the authors of this piece experienced internal displacement or migration to a foreign country as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion. One author’s university is in territory now occupied by Russia, while the home institution of another remains on the frontline. One author combines her academic work with combat medic missions at the front. All of the authors who reside in Ukraine (seven out of eight) continue their work despite daily air raids, power outages, and the constant risk of missile or drone attacks. As one put it, “the living conditions in which we have to create knowledge are harsh. We can’t sleep at night, we keep worrying about the safety of our relatives – all of this defines the emotional and epistemological landscape we navigate.”

We acknowledge our privilege: unlike many former colleagues who left academia, we were at least able to continue our scholarly work; nevertheless, we feel that our challenging circumstances are not paid due regard. With the populations of 42 countries affected by violent conflict in 2024, we believe that greater awareness of such conditions would help to dismantle inequality-reinforcing power

structures in the competitive environment of neoliberal academia. We will now take a close look at the specific Ukrainian case.

Ukrainian scholars doubly disadvantaged

The full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 brought experts on and from Ukraine into the limelight: Anyone engaging professionally with Ukrainian affairs was inundated with media requests and invitations to participate in public discussions. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, Ukrainian scholars faced a double marginalisation.

Scholars of and from Ukraine were asked to deliver their input while reeling from the initial shock of the full-scale war and grappling with displacement and the conscription of their loved ones. Many felt torn between their professional and civic duties as they tried to combine research with volunteering and providing support to colleagues and friends who had joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Some felt unable to perform in either sphere because of their psychological state or – more mundane – the lack of electricity and a stable Internet connection. Years into the war, many of these conditions are still in place.

The positionality of Ukrainian scholars is another inequality filter. Ukrainian expertise is often perceived as emotionally charged and hence biased and less valid, reflecting a colonial prejudice towards Ukrainians and what Olena Komar calls epistemic injustice: “a lack of trust in the knowledge of Ukrainians, which arises from the systemic historical fallacy of interpreting colonized peoples through the perspective of the colonizer.”

The beauty of the scientific process lies in the fact that it is never complete; research findings are always open to revision or refinement in light of new findings. However, in wartime, lack of access to data, and limitations on what collection methods can be used, impinge on the quality of research. This should be reflected upon and acknowledged. Ukrainian scholars often face the dilemma of producing faster results and having their voices heard versus investing time and effort in longer studies at the expense of maintaining visibility.

Hence, warzone scholars must meet the constant demand for knowledge production and dissemination. At a time when Ukrainian academics' expertise could be particularly impactful, their disrupted life and work circumstances put them at a significant disadvantage. In this case, slow science is an unavoidable fact of life rather than an advocacy movement. The question is how one can still meaningfully participate in international academia, which does not make any concessions for extraordinary circumstances such as living through a war.

What can be done?

Reflecting on our own experiences and those of our colleagues, we propose several steps that different actors can take to support academics working in conflict-affected zones. While recognising the importance of maintaining high standards, we would like to challenge the dominant neoliberal academic culture of fast science, so that researchers forced by circumstances beyond their control to practice slow science can continue to contribute to the international academic discussion, and so that their contributions are recognised as valid.

We believe trauma-informed management is crucial on various levels – for funding and partner institutions, employers such as universities, and for teams of researchers. It includes efforts to better understand the impact of trauma

on performance, and foster empathy, clear communication, flexibility, and support.

We agree that a merit-based approach to programming that prioritises development rather than humanitarian assistance also strengthens the academic field in the long term. Here, donors can build on institutional support programmes for individuals (such as the Emma Goldman Award) and – even more importantly – collectives that show a commitment to cooperation beyond competition.

Donors and institutions should move from exclusively quantitative approaches, which reflect the growing role of the

“Donors and institutions should move from exclusively quantitative approaches, which reflect the growing role of the audit, to more flexible criteria for evaluating the work of scientists.”

audit in the “academic culture of performativity” as Maria do Mar Pereira called it, to more flexible criteria for evaluating the work of scientists. Assessment could, for example, take the form of expert discussions and less formal conversation spaces where scholars and donors can freely share their thoughts on the collaboration experience. We are convinced that creating spaces for informal communication is an important step to building more sustainable interaction between different participants in the research process.

Research findings can be presented differently to diverse audiences. We therefore encourage publishers to be open to innovative formats and urge scientists to experiment with communicating their findings in unconventional ways (e.g., via research notes, blogs, podcasts, interviews, etc.). This is also about finding mechanisms to value scholars' contributions without imposing rigid quantity requirements.

Lastly, we advocate for self-care in research practices and interactions at all levels. In an unfolding violent conflict, psychological support to maintain a resilient workforce is crucial. The same goes for fair pay and the possibility of taking a vacation or sick leave. Research is an inherently collaborative effort, and we must once again acknowledge the role of support and solidarity in advancing it. ■

Text by Anastasiya Leukhina, Nataliia Lomonosova, Natalia Otrishchenko, Maryna Rabinovych, Hanna Shvindina, Olena Strelnyk, Natalia Tsybuliak, Daria Yashkina, and Kateryna Zarembo.

This text was originally published by the Forum Transregionale Studien on 17 April 2025.



From left: Anne Boden, Yvonne Troll

HOW CAN ACADEMIC EXPERTISE BRING THE REALITIES OF WARTIME UKRAINE CLOSER TO A WIDER PUBLIC? THE EDITORS BEHIND THE SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE SERIES, ANNE BODEN AND YVONNE TROLL, REFLECT ON COLLABORATIVE WRITING, SENSITIVE TOPICS, AND THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE.

COMMUNICATING KNOWLEDGE

How and why did you come up with the idea of giving fellows the opportunity not only to publish the results of their projects, but also to comment on current and relevant issues?

YVONNE TROLL: There are still a lot of misconceptions and disinformation about Ukraine. With this Spotlight series we wanted to help bridge the gap between academic research and public debate. Rather than simply presenting research findings, fellows had the opportunity to draw on their expertise to contextualise current developments, explain their broader significance, and make complex issues understandable for a wider audience.

In the context of war, many sensitive topics become even more sensitive. How did preparing Spotlights on Ukraine differ from preparing Spotlights on other topics, and what did you find most challenging in this context?

ANNE BODEN: The Spotlights on Ukraine addressed topics that were not only complex but also emotionally and politically charged. In a few cases a sense of urgency was palpable in some of their authors' first drafts. Our role as editors was to keep the focus firmly on their strong arguments and ensure that the language was as precise and accessible as possible, without losing their original positionality and voice.

Formats such as the Spotlights are still relatively new within Ukrainian academia. Were there aspects of this process from which you and the fellows were able to learn from one another?

YVONNE TROLL: The editorial process was very much a collaborative exchange rather than a one-sided process. As editors, we were able to share our experience of communicating research findings to the wider public. We guided the fellows in 'translating' their texts for a non-expert audience, and hope this was a useful exercise for

them. At the same time, working with the fellows deepened our own understanding of the historical, political, and cultural context of current developments in Ukraine. We believe that this mutual exchange was one of the strengths of the Spotlight on Ukraine series.

How would you describe the impact and contribution of the Spotlights to discussions and public knowledge about Ukraine in Germany and internationally?

ANNE BODEN: The focus in German mainstream news tends to be on the latest military and political developments in the war. By contrast, the Spotlights look mainly at Ukrainian society and how the war is affecting different population groups such as women, the elderly, and healthcare workers. We hope that they fill a gap in reporting on Ukraine and have increased public knowledge about everyday life there during the war. ■

ZOiS Communications Manager Yvonne Troll and English-Language Publications Editor Anne Boden in conversation with Anastasia Rodi.

UNLOCKING THE POWER OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION IN ACADEMIA

**HOW CAN IMAGES MAKE
COMPLEX ACADEMIC IDEAS**

EASIER TO GRASP?

VISUAL FACILITATOR

JULIA KNYUPA TAKES US BEHIND

THE SCENES OF HER WORK

WITH UNET AND THE WORKSHOP

SERIES “GET YOUR

RESEARCH OUT THERE!”

TEXT BY JULIA KNYUPA

As a visual facilitator, I translate complex ideas into visual notes. My work helps make conversations more accessible, bridge language barriers, and reveal connections that might otherwise remain abstract. In this piece, I take you behind the scenes of creating visual metaphors for academic dialogue, drawing in particular on my work with UNET. For the “Get Your Research Out There!” series, I created a set of visual notes.

It’s a typical afternoon in the UK, where I am based, and I am preparing to immerse myself in a virtual UNET workshop on presenting academic research. This time, I am working asynchronously, which allows me to become an attentive listener, synthesise the discussion between researchers, and identify the key insights.

That process is less straightforward than it might sound. In interactive sessions, it is crucial to discern the most impactful information rather than transcribing every detail. Effective visual notes serve not merely as recollections of the workshop but as structured narratives that facilitate comprehension.

As the workshop wraps up, I meticulously review recordings and slides,



Julia Knyupa

distilling the content to its essence. And here is where the magic happens: I seek visual metaphors to convey complex ideas. Inspired by my mentor Dario Paniagua, I believe a well-crafted metaphor should prompt introspection – inviting the viewer to pause and reflect. This pursuit leads me to avoid clichéd symbols common in infographics – such as light bulbs signifying ideas – and instead strive for imagery that deepens understanding and engagement.

While I am not a part of the academic world, my “outside” perspective often proves advantageous. To visualise complex subjects, I first immerse myself in the content, to ensure clarity and accuracy in my representations. The resulting visual notes are not just valuable for those who missed the workshop; they also serve as a quick reference for attendees, highlighting pivotal concepts and uncovering connections that may have eluded them during the discussion.

One of the most challenging aspects of my role is not merely to create aesthet-

ically pleasing visuals but to isolate the truly fundamental ideas. Every visual note involves choices. Which argument is central? Which examples help explain it? Which connections need to become visible? What can be left out without distorting the discussion? By emphasising certain elements and omitting others, I inevitably shape the way the conversation is represented.

Once a draft is complete, I share it with the team, gather feedback, and revise it. For me, the highlight of this work is receiving feedback from participants on how an illustration has deepened their understanding of a topic.

Engaging with Ukrainian and international academic teams, I increasingly recognise the commonalities across cultures. Researchers worldwide share a mission of explaining intricate concepts clearly, in which a compelling visual metaphor serves as a universal language.

By giving concepts a visual form, we can open up new ways of sharing knowledge and understanding one another – across disciplines, research methods, working cultures, and languages. ■



Scan to view all visual notest



Ukraine Research Network@ZOIS, funded by the German
Federal Ministry of Education and Research

ZOIS

Zentrum für Osteuropa-
und International Studies
Center for East European
and International Studies

UNET WORKSHOP SERIES

What is academic style?

Academic writing should be:

- Precise
- Clear
- Well structured
- Credible

But also:

- Engaging
- Elegant
- Readable



**Academic doesn't mean boring.
It means thoughtful.**

In-workshop textual analysis

Participants discussed:

- Overly complex noun strings
- Passive constructions
- Hedging
- Sentence overload



Techniques that help

- ✓ Active voice
- ✓ Hooking the reader with a story/anecdote or striking example
- ✓ Vivid verbs and animate subjects instead of abstract nouns
- ✓ Clear transitions
- ✓ Read aloud to check tone and rhythm

Stylish Academic Writing

Anne Boden

**Good style is not about
decoration — it's about
precision, rhythm, and clarity.**



Clarity

simple words, minimal jargon

Conciseness

no redundancies

4 key characteristics of elegant academic prose

Rhythm

varied sentence length

Voice

more personal voice and no
overusing the passive

Not about dumbing down

Writing stylishly does not mean
simplifying your argument — it
means expressing it in a way
that invites the reader in.

**Stylish writing strengthens academic
impact by making ideas easier to
engage with and harder to ignore.**



Takeaways

1. Style is **how you guide the reader** — not how clever you sound
2. **Cut clutter**, favour clarity
3. **Write good prose**, not just good arguments
4. Think about the **rhythm/cadence** of your text
5. Let your **voice be part of your thinking**

TEXT BY ANASTASIYA LEUKHINA

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN
RESEARCHERS MOVE BEYOND
TRADITIONAL METHODS?
DRAWING ON THREE
COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS, THE
UNET SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR
EXPLORES HOW PHOTOGRAPHY,
THEATRE, AND CO-CREATED ART
CAN RECONNECT ACADEMIC
RESEARCH WITH THE HUMAN
STORIES BEHIND THE DATA.



THE HUMAN BEING BETWEEN THE LINES OF DATA: WHY RESEARCHERS NEED ARTISTIC TOOLS IN TIMES OF WAR



ZOiS Forum Playback Theater
“Seeing the Difference», 2025



When we as scholars and researchers deal with the topics of war, loss, migration, and shattered lives, we almost automatically resort to our customary academic language – the dry language of numbers, charts, facts, and analytical conclusions. This is our standard toolkit, designed to help us maintain professional distance. Yet, within this distance lies a trap: behind massive statistical datasets, it is all too easy to lose sight of the individuals. Amid tables and percentages, individual human fates – their pain, their transformations, their vulnerabilities, but also their power and resilience – often become invisible.

To bridge this gap, our team began experimenting with artistic tools. The intersection of visual arts and academic research offers a powerful way to reclaim agency, allowing migrants to move beyond being subjects of observation to becoming active authors of their own stories. Across three projects at ZOiS and with partner organisations, we explored how creative methods can disrupt traditional narratives about refuge and revive human stories where conventional words fall short.



Photo: ZOiS

Photography: Louder Than a Thousand Words

Our first experiment was conducted in collaboration with the Fulbright Program Office in Ukraine and the foreign policy think tank “Ukrainian Prism”. We hosted a photo exhibition based on a collection of images curated by Marian Luniv for Fulbright Ukraine. Most of the photographs were taken after the start of Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, yet some date from as early as 2014, when Russia first invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea.

Alongside the exhibition, we brought together three experts to discuss the power of popular visual culture in times of crisis and its potential to narrate and frame wartime experiences. This included examining the everyday lives of people in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, their representation

in the media and public discourse, and the epistemological and ethical issues of research under these conditions. The discussion also touched on the range of tonalities used in everyday narratives in Ukraine and their potential deconstruction of memory.

Displayed in our workspace for months, these photographs spoke of pain, endurance, and hope far more clearly than could thousands of words. They served as a constant, poignant reminder of who stands behind every paper we write.

Playback Theatre: From Percentages to Living Voices

The second step involved a research project accompanied by a report prepared by my colleagues at ZOiS. The project accompanies refugees from and in Ukraine – from their place of origin to their place of arrival – with

Opening of the Art Ponedilok creative laboratory exhibition at ZOiS, 2026



“Visual artefacts allow migrants to become active authors of their own stories while prompting researchers to form new hypotheses, uncover hidden layers of experience, and ask new research questions.”



the aim of investigating and visualising the experiences of displacement and arrival as well as questions of identity and the sense of belonging.

To bring this data to life, we adopted an unconventional format to launch the academic report – a playback theatre performance titled “A New Beginning” involving a local Ukrainian troupe in Berlin. Playback is a form of improvised theatre in which the audience tells their stories and the actors and musicians transform them into a work of art on-stage in real time. Attendees reflected on core questions: What is our life now? How did we get here? What keeps us going? The performance brought the report’s underlying themes – displacement, identity, belonging, and adaptation – to life, injecting emotional nuance and authentic human voices directly into the

research conversation. It was a deeply moving experience for all participants, prompting reflection on how stories can be brought to life through research and art.

Co-Creation and Animation: Visual Tools as a Source of New Hypotheses

In our third initiative, we moved from observation to joint creation. On March 10, 2026, ZOiS opened an exhibition presenting the creative laboratory, Art Ponedilok. Founded in 2022 by artists Maria and Natalia Petschatnikov, Art Ponedilok brings together more than 100 displaced Ukrainian women and Berlin-based volunteers. Meeting weekly at the Berlin Wall Foundation, these women – of different ages, varied professional backgrounds, and from diverse regions across Ukraine – created works reflecting their experiences of forced migration, loss, and empowerment.

At the opening of the exhibition, we screened the participants’ hand-drawn documentary animation, “Art Ponedilok. Arriving in Berlin”, which captured their collective narrative of arriving in a new city. In addition, we examined the mental maps created by respondents to the research



Photo: Anastasia Rodi

project “Displacement From and In Ukraine: Decisions, Trajectories, Attitudes, Perspectives”, led by ZOIS senior researcher Sabine von Löwis, as a distinct method of documenting the forced displacement experience. During the event, we held a discussion on how these visual artefacts do more than just illustrate facts: they allow migrants to become active authors of their own stories while prompting researchers to form new hypotheses, uncover hidden layers of experience, and ask new research questions.

Why Does This Matter?

Integrating art into research projects is not about ornamentation or entertainment. Rather, it is about restoring the context and nuances of the human experience. Artistic media allow researchers to:

- ▶ Reduce the distance between academic detachment and the actual context.
- ▶ Give a voice to people whose personal stories are often reduced to mere figures in statistical samples.
- ▶ Restore human agency by enabling individuals to shape their own narratives beyond the standard framework of observation.
- ▶ Enrich the scientific approach by formulating new hypotheses based directly on individuals’ experiences.

Art does not invalidate numbers and facts – instead, it restores their soul. It reminds us that behind every statistic in our research lies a human life that deserves to be seen, heard, and remembered. ■

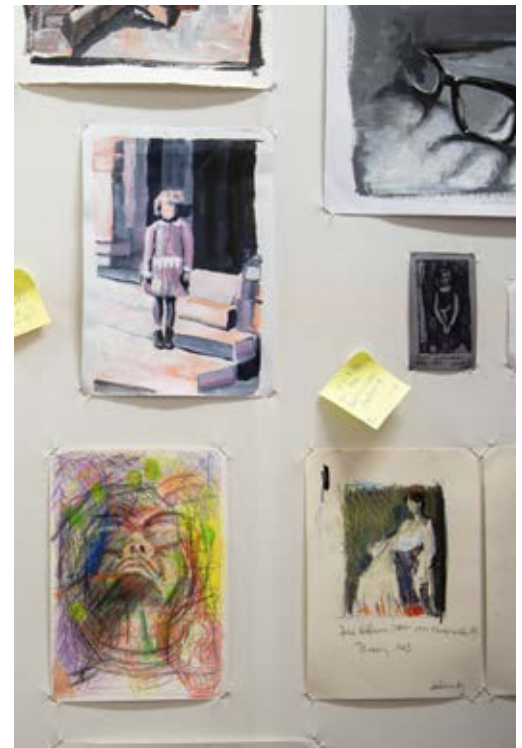


Photo: Anastasia Rodi



UNET fellows during the networking retreat

CARING FOR RESEARCHERS – BY DESIGN

WHAT DOES IT TAKE
TO RESEARCH A WAR THAT ONE
IS LIVING THROUGH ONESELF?
UNET NETWORKING RETREAT
FACILITATOR CHRISTA COCCIOLE
REFLECTS ON CREATING
SPACES FOR REST, TRUST,
AND CONNECTION; AND WHY CARE
FOR RESEARCHERS SHOULD
BE BUILT INTO RESEARCH
DESIGNS IN TIMES OF WAR.



Christa Cocciole

At typical academic gatherings, it would be unusual for participants to go off to chop wood during a complex discussion. But at one of UNET's networking retreats, that is exactly what happened. A tree had fallen near the house where the fellows were staying and, at that very moment, the group was engaged in a heated discussion about the challenges they had faced during the fellowship. The group decided to split up so that everyone could experience the moment in their own way: some stayed indoors and continued the conversation, while others went outside to help the hosts by sawing branches, carrying timber, and doing other physical labour.

Later, one fellow shared that she had lost her home and particularly missed her garden, where she loved to work. She said that this simple physical labour had suddenly brought her thoughts back to something very familiar, but also to memories she had long avoided confronting.

Photo: Anastasiya Leukhina, Lu Davidson

For Christa Cocciole, a UNET networking retreat facilitator (and, incidentally, the owner of that very same fallen tree), it is precisely moments like these that best illustrate the logic behind these gatherings. She says: “Not everything that matters can be planned as a session with exercises and specific outcomes. Sometimes, a person just needs a chat; sometimes, a walk; and sometimes, a few hours’ work in the garden.”

The idea to create this kind of time and space for UNET fellows came to Anastasiya Leukhina and Christa Cocciole from their own life- and professional experiences. During the war in Bosnia, Cocciole witnessed first-hand people’s coping strategies when their work involves dealing with others’ trauma on a daily basis. It was then that she began to reflect on approaches that would enable those individuals – who help others to cope with the effects of war – to work under conditions of prolonged stress whilst minimising its toll on them. However, working with Ukrainian researchers has added a further dimension to this challenge.

Unlike those with whom Cocciole previously worked in Bosnia, the UNET fellows are not only studying a society at war but are themselves part of it.

This means they may have interviewed people who have lost their homes, while the fellow’s own homes were occupied or under fire; or spoken with internally displaced people or refugees whilst experiencing displacement themselves; and can also involve researchers working with stories of pain, loss, fear, uncertainty, and exhaustion – having themselves experienced yet another sleepless night of air raid alerts. Although professional distance does not automatically disappear in such conditions, maintaining it requires considerably greater effort than in normal circumstances. This is precisely why UNET’s networking retreats were never intended to be just another standard academic workshop. Rather than staying in hotels or conference venues, the group of fellows spent several days living in restored cottages in



the countryside near Berlin, surrounded by nature. While the programme included scheduled theoretical sessions and research presentations, it also featured woodland walks, group activities, and evenings spent around a campfire, as well as free time to spend alone.

Cocciole recalls: “During the first retreat in 2023, one participant almost missed the first day, as she slept for 20 hours straight. The fellow later explained

“Although professional distance does not automatically disappear in such conditions, maintaining it requires considerably greater effort than in normal circumstances.”



that her body sensed it could finally relax, as she felt safe for the first time in a long while. It is precisely this creation of a safe space, where one can let go of the constant need to control the situation – if only for a short time – that has become one of the core principles of UNET retreats. Cocciole describes this format as a “loosely held container”: a space with softly defined boundaries. In practice, this means that there is a structure, but participants have the freedom to be flexible within it. There is a framework for discussion and reflection, but participants themselves determine how deeply they engage with it; There is an opportunity to raise complex questions, but also to choose not to answer them.

Therefore, several different formats were proposed, such as walks, working in pairs, or conversations around a campfire. “It was important not to force people to ‘open up’, but to offer them various ways of interacting”, recalls the facilitator.

During this process, Cocciole identified another difficulty – that of organising research itself in a war zone. She was struck by the fellows’ stories about the intensity of their work: “One participant said

she might conduct several dozen interviews on extremely sensitive topics in the course of a single day. Others said that, after conducting interviews about violence and loss, they had to move straight on to the next conversation and then immediately start analysing the data.”

She acknowledges that, on the one hand, there are the project requirements – such as deadlines and commitments – but, on the other hand, there is also the person who collects and processes this material. And it is precisely this second component of any research project, according to Cocciole’s observations, that is often omitted from the research design: “We have already learned to consider the potential impacts of our questions to interviewees”, she says; “But we must also consider that the interviewer has the same nervous system.”

For researchers, interviewees’ accounts are often more than mere data: They may empathise with interviewees, and even have similar experiences. This is why Cocciole insists on the need for a trauma-informed approach to project design, in which the ethical protection of both researchers and respondents is integral. “For me, trauma-informed research is human-centred. Research should not extract from the person being interviewed, nor from the researcher. The structure needs to be responsive to the context”, she emphasises.

“Research should not extract from the person being interviewed, nor from the researcher. The structure needs to be responsive to the context.”



Cocciole believes that a trauma-informed approach can be implemented in entirely practical ways. These include limiting the number of difficult interviews per day, taking breaks when working on sensitive topics, allowing more time to process material on traumatic events, being flexible when planning work following a night of shelling, and having the option to share one's workload with colleagues. However, she was surprised to realise that project budgets usually cover fieldwork, travel, transcription, conferences, and publications, but rarely professional support, peer exchange, or flexible working hours to allow for recovery after arduous tasks. Nevertheless, she believes that such support for researchers in wartime should be a standard part of a project structure, just like other necessary expenses.

She is therefore convinced that UNET's experience with networking retreats demonstrates that this is not merely an added bonus to the fellowship, as people might assume when they hear about spending a few days in the countryside.

Rather, it is one of the keys to conducting high-quality research in a war zone. "Generating knowledge about a society that has been under extreme strain for years requires more than just refining data collection methods. We also need to create conditions in which those who collect, analyse, and transform this data into knowledge can continue their work, and ensure they are not left to bear the burden alone. This is what a trauma-informed approach is all about." ■

Text by Anastasia Rodi, based on an interview with Christa Cocciole.

Christa Cocciole is a Body-Oriented Systems Therapist (DGSF), coach, facilitator, and trainer with 30 years of international experience working with trauma. Using a somatic, trauma-informed approach, she supports individuals, teams, and civil society organisations in building resilience and systemic social impact.



PUT ON YOUR OWN OXYGEN MASK FIRST

NOTED BY ANASTASIA RODI



Inna Vološevych

HOW DOES THE NATURE OF RESEARCH CHANGE WHEN WAR BECOMES BOTH A SUBJECT OF STUDY AND A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE? IN THIS MONOLOGUE, SOCIOLOGIST INNA VOLOSEVYCH, A FORMER BERLIN-BASED UNET FELLOW, REFLECTS ON MENTAL HEALTH DURING WAR, ON CARE, AND PROFESSIONAL RESILIENCE.

I have been conducting socio-political research for many years. Even before the full-scale invasion, our team at the Info Sapiens research agency, based in Kyiv, was working on sensitive topics such as gender inequality, violence, and the experiences of those affected by the war since 2014.

We have always given a great deal of thought to the people we study, considering how to ask the right questions and how to avoid making someone relive a traumatic experience. However, we have given far less attention to the researchers themselves.

In the months following 24 February 2022, I stayed in the suburbs of Kyiv. At one point, my husband and I genuinely thought that our home would be occupied too. However, I continued to work – from a bomb shelter, lying there with my laptop and phone. Work helped me to cope with the shock. At the same time, I felt a sense of responsibility towards the team – the company had to survive and people needed to be paid.

As early as the beginning of March, we conducted our first sociological survey since the invasion began. Even while going through all of this myself, I was shocked as a sociologist to see how drastically soci-

ety could change in literally just one week. More than 90% of respondents across all regions – including territories already under occupation at the time – expressed views that only shortly before would have been far less widespread: a shift towards preferred use of the Ukrainian language and a rejection of concessions to Russia in exchange for an end to the war. It was an extraordinary experience – to research a reality that had changed so profoundly while being part of that change myself. For the first time in my life, I felt similarly to more than 90% of Ukrainians.

A few months later, I left Ukraine because of the blackouts, and eventually came to Germany as a UNET fellow. By then, I was suffering from depression. Paradoxically, it was only after I was abroad, when the immediate pressure of living through the war had eased, that the accumulated psychological strain began to surface. This resonates with survey findings showing higher levels of self-reported mental health problems among refugees than among those Ukrainians who remained in the country. It was a difficult period for me, shaped by the accumulated stress of war and uncertainty. Therefore, it was particularly important for me to find myself in an environment where I wasn't expected to simply restart and become productive again as if nothing had happened. UNET became exactly that kind of space.

I was able to work at my own pace, and there were people around me who were ready to offer support. The intellectual environment also played a significant role, with new conversations and ideas helping to restore my

strength and interest in my work.

The mental health element of the fellowship was also a significant part of my experience. I particularly remember the networking retreat: nature, talks, community, and all this without any pressure. We participants could take part in activities, but didn't have to be present everywhere. Simply realising that one had the freedom to choose made it possible to listen to oneself.

Treating respondents ethically has always been obvious to me. However, the idea that I should treat myself as a researcher with the same care was a new concept to me – and came at just the right time. It was one of the key insights that I took from the retreat – and one that later shaped the way we started operating in our company, by raising awareness of colleagues' mental health and understanding mental health problems.

For one of our projects, we collected a thousand stories from internally displaced people. We considered not only the safety of the respondents, but also that of the interviewers and moderators. If someone finds it difficult to work on a particular topic, they can ask for a break or switch to another project. That's perfectly normal.

In other words, the 'do no harm' principle must apply to everyone. I suppose this is the main lesson I've learned from this experience. In particular, I have understood that looking after the mental health of researchers during a war is not separate from the research itself. It is a prerequisite for being able to continue this work responsibly.

It's like the safety instructions on a plane: you must put your own oxygen mask on first; Only then can you help others. ■

Photo: Dirk Skiba



Olena Strelnyk:

"In our everyday academic routines, it is often difficult to find time for slow, collective thinking. Within the programme, however, these conversations led to tangible outcomes, including a jointly developed text on time and pace in the work of Ukrainian researchers. For me, this experience demonstrated how important dedicated spaces are for intellectual exchange, especially for scholars working in and on Ukraine today."

Natalia Tsybuliak:

"For me, one of the most meaningful stories from the fellowship is about people and connections. I still remember the evening when we gathered around the fire, each of us carrying our own story, our own hopes, and a shared wish to do something meaningful during the programme. We talked, exchanged ideas, reflected together, and listened to one another with real openness. It reminded me of a time before communication became so strongly shaped by online formats, and it made me realise how special such moments are. There is something deeply valuable in bringing together people who are open, thoughtful, and truly excellent in their own fields. It creates a special kind of depth, where different experiences and perspectives meet and enrich one another. For me, this is one of the most beautiful things the fellowship gave: not only academic results, but a genuine human community where new ideas, collaborations, and friendships could grow naturally."

Maryna Rabinovych:

"I struggled for a while to understand why it was much easier for me, psychologically, to work on project applications and yet deal with subsequent rejections (which is a natural part of the game) when I lived in Ukraine. During the retreat, our mentor said in some context: "Curiosity is the opposite of trauma". And this phase answered my question: back in Ukraine, I felt so grounded and well-established that winning was not an imperative for me. No much was dependent on that, so I was just experimenting – often successfully so. But now – as I realised during the retreat – all the uncertainties of displacement make me really motivated to win projects and secure my and my family's lives abroad. Basically, I got to speak to my trauma, and now try to consciously leave myself some room for curiosity – and for failing."

Daria Yashkina:

"We partially explored a trauma-informed approach in research and professional practice. This raised important questions for me about how such approaches can be meaningfully implemented in frontline regions, especially when we speak about academic staff working under conditions of prolonged stress and uncertainty. I am still reflecting on how to translate these insights into practical and context-sensitive strategies. For me, this ongoing process of rethinking and adaptation is one of the most meaningful outcomes of the fellowship."

Natalia Otrishchenko:

"I greatly appreciated the community of fellows and the wonderful informal exchanges we had during our in-person meetings in Berlin and Stolzenhagen. Sitting under the peach trees in the garden helped me recover from a difficult summer and, for the first time in a long while, simply feel present in the moment."



BUILDING TRUST ACROSS BORDERS

WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES TURNED DISTANT
PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS INTO MEANINGFUL PERSONAL
CONNECTIONS – AND REVEALED WHAT IT TRULY MEANS
TO CONDUCT RESEARCH DURING WARTIME.

TEXT BY ALINA S.

When I just started at UNET as a student assistant, I had neither much experience nor a good understanding of what exactly I had signed up for. After some time, it became clear I had signed up not just for a part-time job but for deep and precious personal connections, hundreds of interesting and often difficult conversations, and a proportionally growing interest in Ukraine and engagement with Ukrainians.

In my almost three years at UNET, I grew immensely as a professional, including through dozens of co-organised events, thousands of answered emails, several written reports, and one or two unplanned situations that required quick thinking and problem-solving. More importantly, I learned a lot about human kindness, support, and care – first of all from our project coordinator Anastasiya Leukhina, my colleagues at ZOIS, and our fellows. I am forever thankful for those experiences and opportunities.

What influenced me most were the moments when we all came together – the team, fellows, and alumni. These included several public meetings and

discussions in Berlin, as well as two more informal networking events at Stolzenhagen, a quiet, green village in Brandenburg, which featured workshops on a trauma-informed approach to research, hosted and facilitated by Christa Cocciole.

Those few days we spent together each year in the peaceful countryside, surrounded by lakes, woods, meadows, and fields, will remain with me for a long time. Those meetings were a unique opportunity for me – not only to organise that kind of event, but also to learn more about the challenges of

**“If anyone
ever asks me
what the UNET
programme
is about,
I will say:
People.”**

doing research under the conditions of an ongoing war. Those conversations were chances to get to know our fellows and alumni – beyond being experts in their fields and smart academics whose articles I would upload to our website and whose discussions and lectures I would co-organise. I got to know them as people, with their own stories, personalities, and even meal preferences. Meeting the fellows in person was deeply important to me – fellows who would otherwise have remained just faces on my laptop screen, 1,500 km away from our Berlin office.

If anyone ever asks me what the UNET programme is about, I will say: People. For years, all of us worked together on creating a project that is much more than its measurable outputs. It is about people, and I wish it to continue in this way and become an example for future projects. ■

Following Russia’s declaration of ZOIS as an “undesirable organisation”, the author chose to publish under a pseudonym for security reasons. Alina S. was a project assistant.

PHOTO: ANASTASIA RODI



From left: Adrian Fiedler, Anastasiya Leukhina, Yuliya Shtaltovna

BRINGING GREEN LIFE TO ZOIS: A PLANT RESCUE STORY

TEXT BY ANASTASIYA LEUKHINA

At ZOIS, we've been harbouring a shared dream for a while: making our office space a little greener and cosier. As it turns out, the universe (and our incredible community) listened.

When Yuliya Shtaltovna, a Ukrainian scholar from Dnipro (currently at Kyiv School of Economics and Hochschule Fresenius), was preparing for her move, she sought a new home for her beloved house plants. We jumped at the chance! The only remaining question was logistics: how to transport an entire urban jungle across central Berlin?

Enter our trusty office catering trolley. Since Yuliya lived just a short walk away from the office, Adrian Fiedler, our Finance Manager, Sebastian Hoppe, our colleague-researcher from the Po-

litical Economy Cluster, and Anastasiya Leukhina, the UNET Coordinator, grabbed the trolley and took to the streets on a mission. It was a sight to behold – our catering cart turned plant-mobile, rolling along the sidewalk piled high with greenery.

We brought the plants safely to the office, and they are now happily settling into their new spots, breathing fresh life into our workspace.

We are grateful to Yuliya for her wonderful gift. It's a beautiful reminder of the community we share: while ZOIS works every day to deliver academic life and opportunities to our Ukrainian scholars, it's special when Ukrainian academics bring a little bit of that life right back into our home base. ■



Anastasiya Leukhina and Gwendolyn Sasse

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

TEXT BY GWENDOLYN SASSE

WHAT BEGAN AS AN URGENT RESPONSE TO RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE IS EVOLVING INTO A LONG-TERM FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC COOPERATION. GWENDOLYN SASSE, DIRECTOR OF ZOIS, REFLECTS ON WHY SUPPORTING UKRAINIAN SCHOLARSHIP MEANS BUILDING LASTING RESEARCH NETWORKS, EMBEDDING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT UKRAINE MORE FIRMLY IN EUROPEAN ACADEMIA AND POLICYMAKING, AND CREATING THE STRUCTURES NEEDED FOR THE COUNTRY'S RECOVERY.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukrainian scholars have faced an impossible task: to keep doing research while their country is at war and many pressing daily issues take precedence, while their universities are under immense strain, and while many of them have been displaced.

At its core, UNET is a bridge-building project. It connects Ukrainian scholars – whether they are still in Ukraine, have relocated to Germany, or are part of the broader diaspora – with German, European, and global research networks. The goal isn't charity or simply crisis management; it is about enabling and maintaining social science research on Ukraine and embedding it within fields such as the study of war and reconstruction, migration and displacement, and gender studies, to name but a few. It is also about translating that knowledge into formats that are useful for policymakers, civil society, the media, and the wider public.

The academic challenge is twofold: we need more social science research on Ukraine, especially on the effects

of war on Ukrainian society and the Ukrainian state; and this knowledge about Ukraine has to take its rightful place in the disciplinary curricula and research agendas of political science, sociology, economics, anthropology, and many other disciplines. Both challenges have become more acute through Russia's war against Ukraine, but it takes hard and persistent work to translate such challenges into tangible

“We need more social science research on Ukraine. And this must take its rightful place in disciplinary curricula and research agendas.”

Photo: ZOIS

changes in perspectives and academic practices, which tend to pigeonhole area studies as different or even inferior to “general” disciplinary debates. The collective task faced by Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian scholars of Ukraine is to prove these misperceptions wrong. This is best done on the basis of strong and lasting networks and high-quality research.

With no end to the war in sight, the need for support and targeted initiatives hasn’t faded – it has evolved. Over time, the focus of UNET has shifted from crisis response towards a sustainable network that is both flexible and durable, and builds strong links between ZOIS and a growing number of Ukrainian academics and their institutions. While we are still in the process of securing follow-up funding, we are cautiously optimistic that our current work on a UNET-2 phase of the programme will prove successful.

Together with our former and current UNET fellows and ZOIS researchers, communicators, and administrators, we have identified the following priorities for the next chapter:

- Keep the fellowships running:

The flagship fellowship programme hopes to continue supporting Ukrainian researchers wherever they happen to be – Germany, Ukraine, or somewhere in between.

- Build networks that last:

Rather than reinventing the wheel with each funding cycle, UNET wants to consolidate its network into something more permanent, with a vibrant alumni network. This community of scholars will not only enable regular



“Scholarship on Ukraine needs to be more firmly integrated within the European research mainstream.”

exchange, joint events, and projects, but also open doors to institutional partnerships across Europe and Ukraine, for example through joint applications for funding and capacity building. These hubs will be among the starting points for academic reconstruction at both the individual and institutional level. With a particular focus on junior researchers mentored directly by UNET alumni and ZOIS researchers, we aim to invest in early-career scholars and extend existing institutional partnerships.

- Embed UNET more deeply within German, Ukrainian, and European research structures:

UNET aims to become a platform and resource for competitive applications for project funding, while

engaging in regular exchange about research methods and ethics, training needs, re-conceptualisations, and science communication. Scholarship on Ukraine needs to be more firmly integrated within the European research mainstream.

Without a doubt, UNET has been the most challenging and emotionally charged project we have implemented at ZOIS to date. Listening to outgoing fellows talk about the difference the project funding made to their work, how UNET encouraged and enabled them to attend certain international conferences for the first time, or how they aimed high with their publication plans based on peer support has repeatedly been both a humbling and joyful experience. If we succeed in making UNET a long-term network and resource, ZOIS won’t just have supported Ukrainian scholars during the war; it will have built one of the knowledge hubs on Ukraine, specialising in documenting the effects of war and contributing to a better understanding of the needs for recovery. Let’s jointly work towards this and connect with other like-minded initiatives! ■

LETTER FROM KHARKIV



When people ask what it's like to be a researcher in Kharkiv, I usually smile and say, "We're managing." Not because there is nothing more to say, but because our reality rarely fits familiar categories.

I work at a university in a city that has lived under constant shelling for four years. We rarely know how a day will unfold, but we have learned to continue our work and duties anyway.

Academic life is often associated with quiet offices, long hours of concentration, and carefully planned research. Our reality looks different. We write between interruptions, prepare classes after nights full of explosions, and adapt our work to circumstances we cannot control. Inevitably, the questions we ask as researchers have changed as well. I now study how universi-

"Air raid alerts are part of our daily routine, just as lectures, meetings, and deadlines are."

ties and the people within them continue to function under the conditions of war.

What often surprises colleagues abroad is not that we face these challenges, but that academic life continues. We teach, publish, supervise students, build international partnerships, and apply for grants. Not because we ignore the circumstances, but because universities are more than institutions – they are communities that preserve knowledge, connection, sense of continuity, and sense of belonging.

With the support of ZOIS, I recently studied academic staff at my frontline university. Again and again, participants spoke about responsibility, solidarity, and belonging. Those conversations reminded me that academic work in wartime is not simply about resilience. It is about maintaining relationships (with colleagues, students, and institutions) and protecting the spaces where knowledge can still be created.

From abroad, Ukraine is often seen through numbers: attacks, damaged buildings, displaced people. These numbers matter, but they cannot fully capture everyday academic life – the lecturer who continues teaching despite another interrupted night, the student searching for a stable Internet connection to join their classes, or the colleague abroad who helps sustain their university from a distance.

If there is one thing I hope you take from this letter, it is that supporting Ukrainian science is also about supporting the people who continue to teach, research, and collaborate despite the uncertainties they face. In doing so, they are helping preserve not only knowledge, but the future that it makes possible.

*Daria Yashkina
Kharkiv, July 2026*



From left: Nataliia Lomonosova,
Irina Mützelburg, Olena Strelnyk

FELLOWS' REFLECTIONS

Olena Strelnyk:

"The fellowship helped me return to a research topic that had once been central to my academic work but that I had been unable to pursue for at least six years. What began as a modest first phase of a research project on family care for the elderly in Ukraine gradually developed into a second phase of the research agenda, including my current work on caring masculinity in the context of war-affected Ukraine."

Tetiana Lukeria:

"This was my first international year-long programme, and it has been extremely valuable for me. First, these exchanges significantly broadened my academic perspective and helped me feel part of an international scholarly community. Second, working with my mentor has been especially important. Our conversations helped me structure many of the "puzzles" in my research. I started the programme feeling somewhat overwhelmed: I had a lot of ideas and information, but was unsure how to organise them coherently. Through our discussions, I was able to clarify my focus and approach my project in a more structured and confident way. I was also very happy to have the opportunity to publish in English through the Spotlight publication. I greatly appreciated the feedback and guidance on writing and presenting my research clearly and effectively. The programme also strengthened my motivation to pursue a PhD. My experience at ZOIS proved extremely helpful for my subsequent PhD interview at the University of St Gallen. It gave me confidence, clarity in presenting my research, and a stronger academic profile. Overall, the programme has played a significant role in my professional life, encouraging me to think more ambitiously about my future."

Nataliia Lomonosova:

"Because much of my experience comes from policy and applied research, I sometimes feel that I am not fully part of academia in the formal sense. I remember that Volodymyr Vakhitov approached me after one discussion and said something along the lines of: "Why do you keep saying that you are not part of academia? Of course, you are part of academia" :) This experience is one of the reasons why I also really appreciate that UNET provided opportunities for researchers who do not yet hold a PhD to participate in the programme. In the Ukrainian context of knowledge production, there are many researchers who have significant practical research experience but do not yet have a formal PhD degree. At the same time, they often have much to contribute intellectually. I think UNET gave us the opportunity both to share our knowledge and to feel part of a broader academic community."

Natalia Otrishchenko:

"I am proud that, despite the uncertainty of life in Ukraine, I managed to accomplish everything I had planned from the very beginning of my fellowship. My ZOIS project became the basis for a book project, "Beyond Visibility", and I have signed a contract with Academic Studies Press to publish it. The Ukrainian version of the manuscript is complete, and the publisher has submitted a grant application to make the book available as an open-access bilingual edition. With ZOIS's support, I also completed the English translation in spring 2026."

BERLIN, BERLIN: ACADEMIC NOTES AT A CROSSROADS

For me, Berlin has always been a conceptual city. I first encountered it five years before joining the UNET fellowship programme at ZOiS. Its intellectual energy and density of ideas immediately resonated with me, perhaps because I grew up in Kharkiv, a vibrant Ukrainian city with a population of over one million.

When I was selected for the fellowship, I was living in Frankfurt (Oder), completing a research stay at the European University Viadrina. My first visit to the ZOiS office in September 2023 felt like a milestone. You are given a key, a mailbox, a laptop, and a desk, but what matters most is something less tangible: a sense of belonging.

After the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic and during that second year of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, academic life was returning to face-to-face interaction.



“ZOiS enriched me by creating an inspiring intellectual environment that helps me to navigate uncertainty, discover new research questions, and stay motivated in my search for answers.”

Here, I have discovered how a German research institute fosters collaboration through openness and dialogue. ZOiS has strengthened my belief that research can be both rigorous and creative. During my fellowship, I developed an idea for a book on media in Ukraine, inspired by my mentor, Nina Frieß. I also appreciated the opportunity to publish “The Role of Popular Culture in Ukraine’s War Effort”, with editorial support from Stefanie Orphal and Yvonne Troll.

Being part of the UNET community has had a profound impact on my academic perspective. I am grateful to Gwendolyn Sasse, Sabine von Löwis, Christian Schaich, and the entire ZOiS team – especially UNET coordinator Anastasiya Leukhina – for their encouragement.

Above all, ZOiS has broadened my academic horizons and reinforced my commitment to fostering enduring scholarly connections between Germany and Ukraine.

*Olena Zinenko
Bochum, August 2026*

FROM BERLIN TO KHARKIV AND BACK



I arrived at ZOiS at the very end of 2022, when the UNET programme was just starting and demand for Ukrainian expertise in Germany was high. As in many Western countries, Ukrainian studies here were not widespread but instead mostly centred around history and Slavic literature. Therefore, during that period, ZOiS was one of the few analytical and academic centres focusing on contemporary Ukrainian politics and society, which determined my desire to apply to the institute. I was also attracted by its strong social-science profile, and by the fact that it did not view the region through the Russocentric lens that was still widespread in the West at the time.

A significant part of my fellowship was devoted to giving lectures, presentations, interviews, and consultations. Sometimes, this required very nuanced expertise – at universities, or in discussions with institutions such as the George C. Marshall European Center

“I became much better at presenting, communicating with very different audiences, and finding the right narrative for each of them.”

for Security Studies and the German Foreign Office. At other times, audiences simply needed an accessible, at-a-glance explanation of Ukrainian society and its resistance. This experience had a significant impact on me: I became much better at presenting, communicating with very different audiences, and finding the right narrative for each of them.

ZOiS also expanded my academic opportunities, allowing me to attend conferences in Austria, Canada, Finland, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Through the mentorship of Prof. Gwendolyn Sasse, I also reframed my research to focus more closely on the role of civic and professional communities in Ukraine’s resilience and recovery during the war. That research continues today and includes the experiences of frontline cities such as my hometown of Kharkiv, from where I am writing this piece – periodically running to the shelter during air-raid alerts and explosions.

Back then, in 2023, I tried to say yes to almost every request for expertise, attend public and political events and demonstrations, build connections with the Ukrainian diaspora, teach students at Karazin University, and work on articles. At the same time, my very young nephew voluntarily joined the army, and I invested a lot in his support. My parents and loved ones remained in Kharkiv, so I also tracked information on exactly where Russian missiles were heading or had struck. However, what I can say with certainty is that at ZOiS I found great support across the entire team. It was sincere, both in actions and in words. Back in Ukraine, I still remember my time in Berlin with warmth. And whenever I meet someone from the team again, somewhere in a different corner of the world, I still greet them with a hug.

*Yuliya Bidenko
Kharkiv, August 2026*

LETTER FROM BERLIN TO THE NEXT UNET FELLOWS



One of the unique features of UNET@ZOiS is that both senior and junior scholars may receive funding for data collection. For my research topic – “Orthodox Churches in Ukraine and State Policy at Times of War” – it was important to collect representative survey data. At the time of writing this letter, I have already presented parts of my findings through guest lectures, workshops, and conferences, where audiences particularly appreciated the new perspective that was offered compared with earlier datasets.

As a senior scholar, I also received support in designing an expert event at ZOiS on my research. It brought together experts from different countries and interested colleagues for candid discussion of a complex and sensitive topic – the kind of conversation that is difficult to create in many other settings.

“After a year outside the war zone one’s thinking may begin to recover. After several months, you may find yourself positively surprised by changes in your cognitive and emotional condition.”

UNET also gave me the opportunity to experiment with new formats. My topic is highly nuanced, and initially I was not sure it could be successfully presented as a ZOiS Spotlight – an 800-word text written for a broad audience. With the support of the ZOiS editors, however, we shaped my draft into a concise, accessible piece that was well received. I particularly appreciated how attentive the editors were to nuances and potential risks, while firmly encouraging me to let go of methodological footnotes and other details. It became a valuable experience in creating a text that could be short, readable, yet at the same time meaningful. Our teamwork achieved the seemingly impossible.

And last but not least: this matters particularly because scholars in Ukraine tend to downplay the distress accumulated during wartime. Quite a few of us have been trying to ‘walk the extra mile’ since 2014, motivating ourselves through the thought: “What I am doing is much easier than being at the frontline, so it is embarrassing to admit that I am tired and need rest.”

However, the full-scale invasion inevitably has broader consequences. Whether we want to admit it or not, constantly interrupted sleep caused by air-raid alerts and explosions, persistent anxiety about loved ones, and even doubts about the nature of humanity affect how we think, feel, communicate, make decisions, and explore something new.

I believe that after a year outside the war zone, despite continuing concern about the war and everyone back home, one’s thinking may begin to recover. After several months, you may find yourself positively surprised by changes in your cognitive and emotional condition.

These changes matter not only for you. They also shape how you interact with others, the questions you ask, and how you will design your future projects.

*Olena Bogdan
Berlin, July 2026*

LIST OF SPOTLIGHTS ON UKRAINE



Scan to read

SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 26

Survey Insights on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Policy Preferences

by Olena Bogdan 28/07/2026

SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 25

The Choice to Stay:

Women in Wartime Ukraine

by Natalia Zaika, Volodymyr Vakhitov,
Hanna Vakhitova 24/06/2026

SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 24

Older Women's Experiences of Social Care in Ukraine

by Oleksandra Kokhan 27/05/2026

SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 23

Resistance Under Occupation in Ukraine

by Yulia Abibok 13/05/2026

SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 22

War in Ukraine Breaks More Than Buildings

by Volodymyr Vakhitov, Natalia Tsybuliak, Natalia Zaika 29/04/2026

SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 21

Ukraine's Displaced Must Not Be Ignored in Peace Talks

by Yulia Abibok 19/02/2026

SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 20

Decentralisation and Social Cohesion in Ukraine

by Tetiana Lukeria,
Oleksandra Keudel 21/01/2026

SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 19

Ukraine's Resilience:

From Buzzword to Useful Concept

by Oleksandra Keudel, Oksana Huss
12/12/2025

SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 18

Ukrainian Decentralisation under Martial Law: A Balancing Act

by Andrii Darkovich,
Maryna Rabinovych 17/09/2025

- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 17**
How Nursing is Overlooked in Ukraine's Healthcare Crisis
by Nataliia Lomonosova 11/06/2025
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 16**
Universities in Kharkiv: Working Conditions on the Front Line
by Daria Yashkina 14/05/2025
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 15**
Bridging the Gaps in Knowledge about Ukraine
by Nataliia Otrishchenko 02/04/2025
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 14**
Female Leadership in Times of Crisis: A Force for Resilience and Recovery
by Hanna Shvindina 17/03/2025
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 13**
The Feminist Movement in War-Torn Ukraine: Challenges and Opportunities
by Olena Strelnyk 06/02/2025
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 12**
Mental Health and Migration: Wartime Challenges for Ukrainian Academics
by Natalia Tsybuliak 17/12/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 11**
'Open for Business': Surveying the State and Prospects of Ukrainian Business
by Anastasiya Shurenkova 29/10/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 10**
Warmth, Laughter, and the Smell of Buns: Perceptions of Home among Forced Migrants from Ukraine
by Oksana Mikheieva 18/07/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 9**
Rebuilding Amid Uncertainty: Reconstruction in Ukrainian Cities
by Tetiana Skrypchenko 03/07/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 8**
Is There a Russian Church in Ukraine?
by Andriy Fert 27/05/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 7**
The Role of Popular Culture in Ukraine's War Effort
by Olena Zinenko 07/05/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 6**
Exploring the Uncertainty of Ukrainian Refugees
by Natalia Zaika 24/04/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 5**
Education Across Borders: Ukrainian Refugees' Perceptions of German Schools
by Helen Pidgorna 22/03/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 4**
Dealing with the Russian Aggression against Ukraine through Art
by Alina Mozolevska 22/02/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 3**
Geographic Differences in Ukrainian Refugees' European Experiences
by Tetiana Skrypchenko 17/01/2024
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 2**
Evacuation Decisions: Lessons from Russia's War against Ukraine
by Natalia Zaika 19/12/2023
- SPOTLIGHT ON UKRAINE 1**
The Uncertain Education of Ukrainian Refugee Children
by Helen Pidgorna 22/11/2023
- ZOIS SPOTLIGHT 15/2023**
The Economic Effects of Russia's War on Ukraine's Internally Displaced Women
by Inna Volosevych 26/07/2023
- ZOIS SPOTLIGHT 4/2023**
The Puzzle of Ukrainian Resilience: Hidden Factors and Potential Risks
by Yuliya Bidenko 22/02/2023
- REPORTS:**
- ZOIS REPORT 1/2026**
Resilience Reconsidered: Lessons from Ukraine's Response to War
by Julia Langbein, Nataliia Lomonosova, Maryna Rabinovych, Gwendolyn Sasse 12/02/2026
- ZOIS REPORT 6/2024**
War and Religion: Views from Within Ukraine's 'Russian' Church
by Andriy Fert 10/12/2024
- ZOIS REPORT 3/2024**
Displaced Ukrainian Youth: Displaced Futures?
by Sabine von Löwis, Gwendolyn Sasse, Inna Volosevych 14/08/2024



Published by
Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) gGmbH
Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Str. 60
10117 Berlin

www.zois-berlin.de
+49 (30) 2005949-17
info@zois-berlin.de

Directors:
Gwendolyn Sasse,
Christian Schaich

Concept: Anastasiya Leukhina
Editor-in-Chief: Anastasia Rodi
Graphic Design: Oksana Mayzhara (*oksana.mayzhara@gmail.com*)

Texts:

Anne Boden
Yuliya Bidenko
Olena Bogdan
Habibe Holzkamp
Julia Knyupa
Anastasiya Leukhina
Nataliia Lomonosova

Tetiana Lukeria
Natalia Otrishchenko
Maryna Rabinovych
Anastasia Rodi
Alina S.
Gwendolyn Sasse
Hanna Shvindina

Olena Strelnyk
Yvonne Troll
Natalia Tsybuliak
Daria Yashkina
Kateryna Zarembo
Olena Zinenko

Cover photo by Anastasia Rodi, edited with AI assistance.

Language editing and proofreading:
Dave Morris (*lingo.editor@gmail.com*)

Printed by
X-Press Grafik & Druck GmbH, www.x-press.de

RESEARCH CONTINUES. NETWORKS GROW. KNOWLEDGE CROSSES BORDERS.



CURIOUS ABOUT UKRAINE?
STAY WITH UNET AT ZOIS



EXPLORE

*Research projects
and expertise*



FOLLOW

*Events, news and
new publications*



LISTEN

*Podcast: Roundtable
Osteuropa*





Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) gGmbH
Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Str. 60
10117 Berlin

www.zois-berlin.de
+49 (30) 2005949-17
info@zois-berlin.de