

Engagement from afar: A multi-sited ethnography of the Ukrainian diaspora's responses to war (Engage)

The Russian invasion on Ukraine has inflicted a major humanitarian catastrophe on the Ukrainian nation - taking innocent lives, injuring civilians, destroying their livelihoods, and forcing as many as 14 million Ukrainian citizens to flee. It has also come as a severe shock to Ukrainians and people of Ukrainian descent living abroad.

The goal of the research will be to understand how the Russian invasion of 2022 affects the Ukrainian diaspora's relationship with their ancestral homeland and with the countries of their current residence. The project will map different responses to the war, paying particular attention to various acts of political and social engagement understood in the broadest possible way. As such, the research will explore symbolic solidarity acts such as putting the Ukrainian flag on Facebook profiles, various material forms of support such as donations, participation in protests and support rallies, and more direct actions related to volunteering to support refugees or even taking part in the combat.

The Ukrainian diaspora is large (about 15 million) and diverse. The research will be carried out in three research locations which all have a significant Ukrainian diaspora, yet of a very different migrational character - in the United States of America, home to one of the oldest Ukrainian diaspora, in Israel, home to hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian Jews who arrived after the fall of the Soviet empire and in Poland, a recent destination point for Ukrainians, which constitutes the case of diaspora in the making. In each of the research locations, the research will involve the first generation of migrants, who left Ukraine at different points of time depending on the destination, and the second generation, born in the 'host country', for whom Ukraine is a country of parental origin.

Taking into account the sensitivity of the topic, the project will be based on an innovative multi-sensory study designed to get to know the embodied and affective experiences, which often remain outside of the spotlight of the social sciences. The life-history interviews, designed to prioritise participant's narrative and active listening will be followed by visual ethnographies focused on the political and civic practices, and multisensory participant observation of diasporic social events. An important part of the research will be to understand the role of online social connections, which emerged in response to war.

The project is situated in the scholarship on diaspora and in particular diaspora's engagement in the developments of the country of origin referred to as 'long-distance nationalism', 'long-distance solidarity' and 'political transnationalism'. Drawing on these concepts, the research will offer a systematic typology of different types of long-distance engagement taking into account the role of 'host countries' in diaspora mobilisation and the role of the generational differences, paying particular attention to the less researched experiences of second-generation. The scholarship on diaspora has placed a lot of attention on the role of past conflicts in the formation and maintenance of diasporic identities. This research will bring a significant contribution by exploring how new and recurring conflicts inform and, possibly reinvigorate, diasporic engagement with the ancestral homeland, which will be relevant to migration and diaspora studies and political sociology.