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Rebuilding Houses, Rebuilding Ukraine: Peacebuilding through Youth Service-Learning

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Abstract

In order to successfully transform conflict in a complex situation such as Ukraine, it is critical to examine projects designed by Ukrainians themselves that support and reflect Ukrainian attitudes towards conflict and peace. Lviv Education Foundation is one such Ukrainian-run organization developing and implementing peacebuilding projects between the east and west of Ukraine. From interviews with Lviv Education Foundation personnel, this paper examines the feasibility of two important peacebuilding interventions through the lenses of positive and negative peace, basic human needs, and conflict transformation through ritual. This project finds that Lviv Education Foundation's programs encourage peacebuilding in all three of these areas, although such endeavors still need to operate in a sphere with other interventions in order to have maximum impact. It is hoped that this study will provide a starting point for other organizations seeking to develop culturally-appropriate projects to help stabilize the situation in Ukraine and prevent future conflict.

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Introduction

The conflict in Ukraine is a relatively new phenomenon, only starting to occur in earnest after the EuroMaidan revolution successfully drove out former president Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014. The unexpectedness of Russia's invasion and the conflict occurring in Europe's backyard has left international peacebuilding organizations and think tanks scrambling to meet these new demands for conflict transformation. Ukraine has become a lesson for peacebuilders: conflict can spring up anywhere where peace only exists as a precarious balance between stakeholders, rather than a positive, supportive interwoven network of factors that stabilize people's lives and provide freedom from oppression. The conflict in Ukraine has been a game-changer for the international community, as it is a different kind of conflict than any seen in decades, and it flared up unexpectedly. It has taken the international community awhile to get in gear with providing support, especially the large international NGOs, and this has opened a window of opportunity for Ukrainian NGOs and grassroots initiatives to plan and implement their own interventions. One of these Ukrainian-run, grassroots interventions is facilitated by the Lviv Education Foundation (LEF), a non-governmental organization (NGO) operating out of the western city of Lviv that is affiliated with Lviv Catholic University. Through interviews and independent research conducted on LEF, this paper will examine the feasibility of two of their programs with the greatest potential for peacebuilding between eastern and western Ukraine through the lenses of the violence triangle, positive and negative peace, basic human needs theory, and using ritual to transform conflicts.

Background on the Conflict in Ukraine

The cultural conflict between Russia and Ukraine has a long and complex history through the centuries which has also affected relations between different regions of Ukraine itself. Since independence in 1991, the Ukrainian population has been primarily split into three socio-cultural regions: a Ukrainian-speaking west, a Russian-speaking south and east, and a central region in which the two languages are mixed into "surzhik". These regions have clashed politically in the past, causing protests (i.e., the Orange Revolution in 2004), and tensions began to escalate once more after the election of

president Victor Yanukovych, a pro-Russian businessman and politician from Donetsk, in the east, in 2010.

The most recent conflict commenced when Ukraine was in the process of signing an Associate's Agreement with the European Union (EU) in 2013. President Yanukovych allowed the idea to get all the way to a projected signing date before he abruptly decided that it was not the best course of action for Ukraine after all, in November 2013, due to extensive pressure from the Russian government to join their Eurasian Customs Union instead. This change of heart sparked protests in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) at the end of November, which began to be known as "EuroMaidan". Despite increasingly violent attempts at suppression, the protests grew larger and involved Ukrainians from all walks of life, although mostly from the center and west of the country. In February 2014, after months of protest in the bitter cold, one hundred Ukrainian protesters were killed (the "heavenly hundred"), allegedly by heavily armed government police forces called Berkut forces, and the ensuing fury eventually drove Yanukovych to flee to Russia, prompting new parliamentary elections after an unsuccessful vote for impeachment. This has created some murkiness around the legality of the change in government that followed EuroMaidan, a fact which Russia has used to justify their reaction.

Days after the "successful" Ukrainian revolution, Russia invaded the autonomous territory of Crimea, and under Russian military pressure, a referendum was held in March 2014 where Crimeans voted to leave Ukraine and become part of Russia once more (Crimea had been gifted to Ukraine back in 1954). The free and fair quality of these elections was greatly contested by both the Ukrainian government and Western governments due to the fact that Russian troops were already occupying the territory. After the Crimean referendum, "little green men" began creeping into the far eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, also known as the Donbas region from the Donetsk basin. These troops combined forces with locals who were unhappy with the pro-Europe direction their country had taken, and this turned quickly into an insurgency which took over large swaths of both provinces, fighting against Ukrainian government forces. To this day, Russia still claims to have no connection to the separatists operating out of these territories, despite evidence linking Russian soldiers to military actions

in this part of Ukraine using investigative journalism (NPR, 2015). An unexpected result of the Russian occupation of Crimea and the eastern regions has been that Ukrainians in the rest of the country have polarized in an anti-Russian direction, although Ukrainians in the south and east of the country are still skeptical of both the new Ukrainian government and the intentions of the EU. While Ukrainians in these ethnically Russian areas of the country are distrustful of the government, polling has shown that they are less interested in joining the Russian customs union (or Russia itself) than the EU, and many residents of the region are still undecided or do not feel comfortable stating their opinion (Adomanis, 2015).

A final factor in Ukraine's current conflict environment is the role of far-right Ukrainian nationalist militias, which have grown in power during the fight against the pro-Russian insurgents in the east and have been pushing an anti-foreigner pro-Ukrainian agenda which includes hate and fear of Ukraine's fledgling LBGTQ+ community, Jewish population, Poles, Russian-speakers, and anyone else deemed not Ukrainian enough. The biggest of these groups is "Right Sector", who fly the flag of Stepan Bandera, a Ukrainian nationalist leader during World War II who allied himself with the Nazis and allegedly participated in the mass killings of Ukrainian Jews in order to drive out the Soviets before being imprisoned in a concentration camp himself until 1944 (Ames, 2010). Bandera is controversial due to his allegiance with the Nazi forces and possible involvement in the Holocaust, although this fact is mostly ignored by Ukrainians using him as a rallying figure. Recently, Right Sector clashed with local police forces in the southwest city of Mukacheva, in the Carpathian mountains and far from the eastern fighting, as well as in Kyiv in September 2015 during a parliamentary vote on providing more autonomy to the eastern regions. It is unknown at this time if this violence will continue or spread. All of these factors play a huge role in the current state of peacebuilding in Ukraine and the organizations that are operating there.

Lviv Education Foundation

Lviv Education Foundation is an NGO operating out of the western region of Lviv in Ukraine that primarily runs and develops programs for Ukrainian youth, providing opportunities for growth and development with the aim of strengthening civil society. Their organization has three goals according to their website (LEF, 2015): to improve youth education level, increase the socio-economic situation for

Ukrainians, and promote tolerance for people of all physical abilities, social statuses, and religions. Their primary objectives are to provide assistance to orphanages and with healthcare, support innovative individuals and organizations to help them realize their potential, and nurture youth leadership, creativity, and talent. Some of the projects that Lviv Education Foundation has implemented include providing small grants to Ukrainians students who wish to help the underprivileged through project development, sponsoring libraries and youth clubs, educating Ukrainians from villages about volunteerism and community development, assisting women in difficult situations and/or expectant mothers, and developing projects that encourage environmental preservation. They have worked in partnership with several organizations, including the Ukrainian Catholic Education Foundation, the Ginger Fund's orphan program from the U.S., the Henri Nouwen Fund in the Netherlands, and locally-based Peace Corps volunteers from the United States.

This paper will be focusing on a specific category of projects implemented by LEF that encourage east-west cultural exchange in Ukraine, primarily two projects overseen by Yuriy Didula. One program is called "Building Ukraine Together", involving service-learning with both eastern and western Ukrainians, and the other builds on the first with the subsequent founding and running of youth cultural centers in eastern Ukrainian cities. In addition to these specific projects, Lviv Education Foundation also has provided platforms for east-west dialogue through united youth summer camps held in neutral territory (called "Space of Ideas"), a cultural exchange program for eastern Ukrainians to come to the west and explore Lviv, and a series of meetings held in Lviv by activists from the east that provided education and answered questions regarding eastern Ukrainians. All of these efforts are intended to normalize and encourage east-west Ukrainian friendships and relationships and fight the fear and stereotypes that have become heightened between the two vastly different regions of the country since the onset of violence.

Lviv Education Foundation is a prime example of the strength of Ukrainian-run initiatives to implement projects that have the potential to transform the conflict and build peace in eastern Ukraine without needing substantial support or guidance from the international community. Examining their

projects can provide insight into culturally-appropriate methods of conflict transformation for Ukraine and where Ukrainians feel that the areas of greatest need are in their communities, an important aspect for any intervention that hopes to be successful in transforming conflict and building peace.

Literature Review

In order to take an in-depth look at Lviv Education Foundation's peacebuilding work in Ukraine, it must first be placed into the context of the greater Ukrainian crisis, other interventions being attempted in Ukraine to mitigate the conflict, and previous uses of service-learning in a peacebuilding context.

War in Ukraine

The circumstances surrounding the war in Ukraine have only recently begun to be documented by trustworthy sources, and the majority of the research available has been generated not through peer-reviewed studies but instead via reports from think tanks and foreign NGOs. Despite this, a clear look at the Ukrainian situation can be gleaned from this literature, although there may be a pro-Western bias due to the fact that most of the sources are in English and come from think tanks and NGOs primarily in the United States and Europe. It should be noted that a broad survey of Ukraine-based literature in Russia and/or from Russian language sources would most likely provide a quite different view of events.

Many of the biggest U.S. think tanks focused around conflict have placed the blame for the current crisis occurring in the east of the country onto Putin and his government, including the Brookings Institute and the Atlantic Council (Daader et al., 2015) and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) (Van Metre, Gienger, & Kuehnast, 2015). Russia itself denies involvement and insists that the fighting is being conducted by unaffiliated pro-Russian separatists. Despite the fact that several ceasefires have been declared, violence still continues in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine to this day, and by all indications, the conflict appears to be freezing similarly to the situation in Georgia in 2008. Circumstances in Ukraine have been further complicated by Russia's unwillingness to admit their role in the conflict despite ample evidence documenting the Russian military presence in eastern Ukraine (NPR, 2010). According to USIP (Van Metre, Gieger, & Kuehnast, 2015), there are four main drivers of the

conflict in eastern Ukraine: the extent of instability in the region in question, Russia's own regime stability and internal support for Putin, the Western response to Putin's actions, and Putin's own goal and objectives (p. 2). These all play into Putin's strategy of creating a larger pattern of instability in order to maintain Russian hegemony (p. 11).

As with most conflict situations, the presence of fighting in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea have led to serious human rights concerns and violations. In Crimea, Andriy Klymenko (2015) has documented civic, political, and human rights violations, especially against the native Crimean Tatars, as well as activists and journalists (p. 3). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2015) has also documented human rights violations spanning from the violence during EuroMaidan, which resulted in the deaths of one hundred protestors at the hands of Berkut police, to the deaths of 7,883 people killed in the fighting in the Donbas region from the period between April 2014 and August 15, 2015, as well as 17,610 injured from the same fighting (p. 3-4). At least 625 of those casualties have been women and girls (OSCE, 2015, p. 4). Additionally, those still living in the areas controlled by the armed separatist groups have "continued to face obstacles in exercising any type of rights: civil, political or economic, social and cultural" (OHCHR, 2015, p. 5)(OSCE, 2015b, p. 3), and have had their freedom of movement restricted both by the armed groups and the Ukrainian government (OSCE, 2015b, p. 4).

In addition to the armed fighting, the time since EuroMaidan has also been marked by significant threats to internal stability within Ukraine not directly related to Russia or the Russian-backed separatists. As stated by USIP, "it is easier for Russia to destabilize Ukraine than it is for the Ukrainian government, even with Western help, to build a more stable and secure state" (Van Metre, Gieger, & Kuehnast, 2015, p. 4). The World Bank (Bilan, Duane, Gorodnichenko, & Sologoub, 2015) in partnership with VoxUkraine, has identified five main areas in most pressing need of reforms in order to assist with stabilizing Ukraine: corruption within government, judiciary, and law enforcement; inefficiency in the energy sector; deregulation to make it easier to do business; removal of excessive bureaucracy; and stabilization of the financial sector (p. 1-2). In addition to these needed reforms, another force of

destabilization is lack of media freedom and Russia's disinformation and propaganda campaign, which the Atlantic Council (2015) recommends combating with good journalism and breaking the oligarchical monopoly on the Ukrainian media (p. 11-12). The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)'s Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE, 2015c) has also delineated five key areas specifically affecting stability in western Ukraine: rise of "self-defense groups" such as Right Sector, reactions to the eastern mobilization, rise of patriotism, engagement of civil society, and the significant influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (p. 2).

The large amount of IDPs that have fled the fighting in eastern Ukraine and Crimea are the final challenge facing Ukraine in the face of this conflict. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency's Factsheet (UNHCR, 2015), Ukraine had 1,505,600 IDPs as of October 2015, 52% located in Donetsk and Luhansk. There are also large numbers of Ukrainians who have fled for Russia or Belarus (Ferris, Mamutov, Moroz, & Vynogradova, 2015 p. 10). Children and the elderly have been particularly impacted by fleeing the conflict zones, including issues with pensions, vaccinations, and schooling (p. 10). Further issues have stemmed from the Ukrainian government denying the scope of the problem and its massively disorganized response, which has stemmed from corruption, disconnection between regional and central authorities, and lack of coordination with NGOs and UN agencies handling IDPs (Ferris, Mamutov, Moroz, & Vynogradova, 2015). There are also issues of suspicion towards IDPs from other parts of Ukraine, as "there is widespread belief that people from Donbass…welcomed Russia's invasion, that they supported ex-President Yanukovych and are guilty of contributing to the armed conflict in the east" (Ferris, Mamutov, Moroz, & Vynogradova, 2015, p. 13-14). There has been a sense of resentment towards male IDPs of fighting age as well due to the belief that those IDPs fled the conflict while young Ukrainian men from other parts of the country were conscripted into the military and died for their country (OSCE, 2015c, p. 11-12). These factors, combined with the actual conflict in the east itself, have all contributed to the current climate of instability within Ukraine.

Current Interventions in Ukraine

A large number of both international and grassroots Ukrainian organizations are currently attempting to make recommendations and implement projects with the aim of mitigating the conflict in the east and decreasing overall internal instability within Ukraine. To generally discuss these interventions and their accomplishments, it is easiest to divide them into two categories: work done by international organizations within Ukraine and Ukrainian-led efforts.

Some of the biggest names in the conflict prevention and security fields have become involved in the Ukraine situation, including the United Nations, the World Bank, and USIP. This involvement ranges from simple recommendations to active projects in Ukraine itself. Daader et al. (2015), with the backing of the Atlantic Council, the Brookings Institute, and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, has recommended that the situation in eastern Ukraine requires U.S. military assistance and the support of NATO (p. 2-3), while Van Metre, Geiger, and Kuehnast (2015) with USIP have suggested potential opportunities for the international community to aid Ukraine in restoring stability, including financial and technical assistance, business development, support of civil society, and again, military assistance (p. 6-7). From the European side, Natalia Miramanova (2014), working with the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), has recommended that interventions in Ukraine focus on operational and structural peacebuilding, such as termination of war and 'negative peace' and addressing deep root causes of cultural and structural violence (p. 7). The OSCE (2015) has also made some recommendations to assist with women's rights, including collecting data on sexual violence in conflict with help of the UNHCR and promoting women's participation in civil society (p. 16). The World Bank (2015) has conducted a needs assessment where they examined how best to address reconstruction, economic recovery, and peacebuilding needs, estimating that the cost of such interventions would be US$1.52 billion (p. 3-5). Finally, the Berghof Foundation is using Ukraine as a case study test to examine ways to improve the EU's peacebuilding effectiveness in a new program called Whole-Of-Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding (WOSCAP). The program began in June 2015 and will collect data through 2017 (WOSCAP, 2015).

Along with making recommendations, international organizations have also been involved in the implementation of projects and programs in Ukraine to help address the conflict and create stability. One of the organizations that has been the most involved physically on the ground in Ukraine is the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, which has served as an impartial observer for Ukrainian elections and provided support in conflict areas. One of their main projects has involved weapons withdrawal in eastern Ukraine from all sides of the conflict, an important step in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) (OSCE, 2015d). UNHCR has also funded and implemented a variety of projects within Ukraine to assist with IDPs, including providing legal assistance, attempting to influence policy changes, and distribution of shelter materials and non-food items (UNHCR, 2015b). There have been many internationally-driven dialogue efforts in Ukraine as well. Several examples include a youth dialogue program sponsored by the OSCE for ages 18+ in Kyiv (Kyiv Youth Contact Group, 2015), an up-and-coming internet dialogue platform being developed by MediatEUr, a Brussels-run peacebuilding organization (Dialogue Support Platform, 2015), and several projects involving dialogue sponsored by the British Embassy in Kyiv, including a multi-stakeholder dialogue effort (Kyiv British Embassy, 2014). This is just a small sampling of the many projects currently in progress within Ukraine at the behest of international organizations.

The other category of interventions is those being operated by Ukrainian-run NGOs. The International Centre for Policy Studies (ICPS), a Ukrainian think tank, published a map of all of the dialogue initiatives occurring to resolve the conflict in Ukraine as of January 2015. These initiatives include public round-table events and dialogues, summits, locally-driven peacebuilding dialogues after times of regional instability, and women-led dialogue efforts with people from the Donbas region (ICPS, 2015, p. 17-26). There are also a variety of Ukrainian NGOs working with IDPs; two of the largest are called Pereselennya and Crimea SOS. Crimea SOS was founded initially to assist IDPs from the Crimean peninsula after the annexation of Crimea by Russia and has since expanded to help IDPs from all over Ukraine. They operate projects with a variety of functions, including connecting IDPs with local communities, providing legal assistance, and psychological counseling (Krym SOS, 2015). Pereselennya

is a similar organization created as a collaborative effort with help from a bunch of NGOs, including the aforementioned Crimea SOS. Pereselennya specifically has created a 'resource center' to assist IDPs, especially providing food and material goods such as clothes, and they offer legal assistance to IDPs as well (Pereselennya, 2015). This is just a small sampling of the active Ukrainian organizations as of October 2015, but it still provides important context for the sphere in which Lviv Education Foundation's projects are operating.

Service-Learning & Peacebuilding

The final important area of knowledge for background context to this project revolves around the idea of service-learning and how it can be used as a vehicle for peacebuilding. To begin, what is service-learning and what sorts of activities does it entail? T. Stewart (2011) defines service-learning as "an educational method which engages participants in volunteer service that addresses genuine community needs" (p. 306), linking it specifically to learning objectives and reflective practice. Service-learning has been found to have quite a list of benefits to participants in addition to providing volunteer service to host communities. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) (2007) has found that service-learning has impact on academic achievement, civic engagement, and social and personal skills – for example, students who participated in service-learning projects were found to have improved problem-solving capacities, increased their connection to the communities, gained leadership skills, and increased their political and social engagement, as well as providing a sense of educational competence (p. 1-2). In addition to these impacts, Stewart (2011) also lists more respectful attitudes towards diverse groups, decline of cynicism, and increase of tolerance to out-groups as possible outcomes of service-learning education (p. 306-307). Service-learning can teach youth their own potential for change, as well as that within their communities (p. 312). L. Ardizzone (2003) found that youth involved with community organizations in work similar to service-learning had a better understanding of their own rights, felt more empowered, and began to find their own voice and a sense of agency (p. 433-434, 438).

The positive impacts of service-learning education speak for themselves, and many of the results match desired outcomes of peacebuilding projects, especially projects that focus on building 'positive

peace', as discussed in the theory section below. A significant study that relates service-learning to peacebuilding is Stewart's (2011) study on Palestinian youth involved in service-learning projects in order to increase their peacebuilding capacity. Stewart explains that service-learning was used because "an empowerment approach can mobilise young people for pro-social rather than anti-social behavior", in addition to all of the benefits listed above (p. 313). Stewart found that training and service activities also served to create an open space for idea exchange and creativity, producing an informal venue for discussing issues while also having a sense of empowerment to find ways to translate those ideas into action and building empathy with others (p. 310-311). Ardizzone (2003) also looked at how service-learning could be used as a vehicle for peace education, citing that understanding social issues and how to take action for social change are important components of such learning (p. 422). Involvement in local organizations and groups can give youth a chance to be part of the solution to problems rather than feeling powerless to do anything about them (p. 436). K.M. Weigert (1999) links service-learning to peace studies as well, explaining that by combining action with the idea of reciprocity and concrete reflection, service-learning can further the goals of peace studies curricula (p.16-18). In the same collection of essays, M.B. Kimsey (1999) explains that service-learning can also be used to expose participants to other cultures, especially minority cultures, to increase understanding and tolerance (p. 162-164). Indicators of increased tolerance and openness were also found in a study by M. Yates and J. Youniss (1996) on the impact of community service on adolescents (p.280). Finally, J. Ungerleider (2001) illustrates a concept for conflict transformation that can also be linked to service-learning when discussing peacebuilding camps for youths from Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities. He explains that the method used in such camps encourages conflict transformation through building relationships with the "enemy" and encouraging a reframing of assumptions and thoughts about the conflict (p. 584). Though the camps are slightly different, working on a service-learning project would provide a similar atmosphere to allow for transformation.

From the literature, it is clear that there is a prerogative for using service-learning in peacebuilding, even though in actual practice it does not seem to be a common choice of intervention. An

examination of the projects being implemented by Lviv Education Foundation will help emphasize ways in which service-learning can strengthen peacebuilding in Ukraine and suggest future paths for the development of peace in that country and others.

Theoretical Frameworks

Due to the recent nature of the Ukraine crisis, theoretical work relating specifically to Ukraine does not really exist at the present, but in order to understand the context for the work being done by the Lviv Education Foundation, it is still critical to examine it through the lens of important theories to peacebuilding and conflict transformation work. The three main theories that most support the work being done by LEF are Johan Galtung's theories of the violence triangle (1990) combined with positive and negative peace (1967), as well as basic human needs (Galtung, 1999), and Lisa Schirch's (2005) theory on the role of ritual in peacebuilding, especially with regards to youth camps.

The most critical conceptual framework to understand the importance of the work outlined in this study is Johan Galtung's idea of a violence triangle which contributes to positive and negative peace. Galtung posits that unlike common conceptions of violence, there are actually three categories of violence; one is visible physical violence and the other two are more subtle: cultural and structural violence. Galtung defines violence as "avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more general to life" (Galtung, 1990, p. 292), and cultural and structural violence are the traits built into the social structures and cultural values of a society that create those insults. Galtung also claims that there is a time relation to these three major forms of violence: "direct violence is an *event*, structural violence is a *process* with ups and downs; cultural violence is an *invariant*, a 'permanence'" (p. 294). Using these concepts of violence can help us understand the creation of negative peace and positive peace, another of Galtung's theories (1967). Negative peace can be considered as only the absence of direct violence, while positive peace refers to the creation of a culture of cooperation and integration by using methods that create positive relations between groups and promote stability, order, and justice – in other words, working to mitigate structural and cultural violence. Galtung outlines ten examples of factors that contribute to positive peace:

"presence of cooperation, freedom from fear, freedom from want, economic growth and development, absence of exploitation, equality, justice, freedom of action, pluralism, and dynamism" (Galtung, 1967, p.14). In a country like Ukraine, where most of the violence occurring is on the cultural and structural levels, interventions that create positive peace are just as important as stopping the direct conflict in the east of the country.

Additionally, this project operates within the context of the theory of basic human needs, of which there are several variants. For the purpose of this research, this paper will refer to Galtung's theory (1999), which claims that conflict comes about when basic needs are not met, causing a type of social disintegration. These needs can take the form of both material and non-material needs, and Galtung explains that most times, but not always, these tend to be hierarchical, with material needs coming first for physical survival (p. 310-311). Galtung identifies four main categories of basic human needs: security needs, welfare needs, identity needs, and freedom needs (p. 309). From these broad categories, the individual needs that are most critical in Ukraine can be isolated, as Galtung also warns of making Western assumptions when assessing human needs, and each cultural context can have a different set of factors that can play into conflict. Any intervention in Ukraine must address at least some of the basic human needs of the population, so it is important to examine projects in this context.

A final important theory to consider in this particular context is Lisa Schirch's examination of the role of ritual in transforming conflict (2005). Schirch identifies three areas that can be transformed by ritual: worldview, identity, and relationships. With regards to worldview, ritual has the power to create a prism through which ideas and views can be looked at in a new light (p. 117), but it can also affirm already existing worldviews (p. 99). When discussing identity, Schirch specifically deals with projects bringing together people on opposite 'sides' of the conflict or from different identity groups. She examines how ritual can be used to break down the separate group identities of the participants and then bring them to form a collective, common group identity and heal any threatened or wounded identities from the conflict. This idea draws primarily on the idea that during times of conflict, groups who feel that their identities are under threat will hyper-focus on that one aspect of identity (p.124-125). As a way to

counteract that narrowing of identity, ritual offers a humanizing space to bring groups together, break down the old identities, and help groups form new identities together via rites of passage. This theory is important to the circumstances in Ukraine due to the splintering of identities between the east and the west of the country, and how important it is to remake those identities together to assist with stabilizing the country. Finally, ritual has the effect of delineating group boundaries and defining in- and out-groups, which demonstrates how it impacts relationships. By using ritual, groups can be formed that are related to one another by positive factors rather than negative. By transforming relationships, ritual can also affect larger systems by maintaining and changing them, rather than relying on the complete destruction of such systems for social change to occur. According to Schirch, ritual can come in a variety of forms, but youth camps are one of the ones that she specifically discusses.

By using these theories, this project seeks to shine a light on the ways in which Lviv Education Foundation is effectively helping create positive peace in Ukraine.

Methodology

This project was originally conceived on a much larger scale than the resulting data would suggest. Initially, this project intended to collect interviews from 3-5 Ukrainian NGOs to examine Ukrainian grassroots peacebuilding initiatives on a greater scale. However, significant challenges to data collection arose in Ukraine itself, severely limiting the amount of actual interview data collected. The first challenge to the original project plan was the lack of available, up-to-date information on the internet about Ukrainian NGOs and their operations. This project had intended to find target organizations through internet research in the city of Lviv and then, through snowball sampling, find other organizations until enough had been found that matched the research parameters. A Lviv government website that listed many of the "community organizations" in the region, including websites and email addresses, seemed to be the ideal source, but after attempting to actually use the contact information, it became clear that this website had been out of date by almost eight years. Because of this out of date information, it took longer than expected to actually get in contact with appropriate organizations and

branch out from there. Had there been two months of research instead of one, the project could have been completed as planned, because snowball sampling actually proved to be incredibly effective upon making contact with an initial organization. However, there was no opportunity to meet with that first organization until three days before leaving Lviv, severely limiting the ability to build a network of contacts and then conduct interviews.

During the data collection process, twelve Ukrainian NGOs in Lviv were selected from the website of NGOs and emailed in Ukrainian via their listed contact information. These NGOs dealt with a variety of issues relating to the strengthening of civil society and building peace, from youth development to support for veterans to volunteerism abroad. Unfortunately, due to the out of date nature of the website, two of those twelve emails bounced, four were answered, and the rest were unresponsive. Of the four that replied, one agreed to meet – we exchanged phone numbers, and then he never replied to emails or phone calls again; two actually met with me; and the last was located in Kyiv and unable to meet during the small window of time available. Of the two organizations that met with me in person, one turned out to be an educational facility affiliated with one of the universities in Lviv that also ran an NGO dealing with the Ukrainian diaspora, but did not implement any projects that actively related to peacebuilding or conflict transformation. After meeting the director and one of the young teachers, they were thanked for their time and told no interview would be necessary. The final person that agreed to meet was a young woman named Valentyna Zalevska from a youth exchange organization called "Mosaic" which worked with EU volunteer programs to provide volunteer opportunities for Ukrainians abroad. The work of Mosaic also did not quite fall into the scope of this project, but an interview from Valentyna was collected due to the fact that the allotted month of research was almost complete without tangible results. While Mosaic was not an appropriate NGO for this research, however, Valentyna was a treasure trove of contacts and information, and she quickly wrote a list of ten more NGOs to contact at the end of the session, connecting me on Facebook with two of the ones that fit the parameters of the investigation the best. Those two organizations were Lviv Education Foundation and Crimea SOS.

Attempting to contact Crimea SOS proved unsuccessful, but Lviv Education Foundation's director, Marianna, was excited about my research and connected me with her colleague, Yuriy Didula, who was happy to conduct an interview. This process was almost entirely conducted in Ukrainian. It turned out that Yuriy would be traveling to the U.S. a day before my flight to Washington, so we agreed to meet in Kyiv rather than Lviv. Two days before leaving Ukraine to return to the United States, Yuriy and I sat down in a coffee shop at, of all places, Maidan Nezalezhnosti, and conducted an hour-long interview in English on the projects that he was implementing in Ukraine. His work fit all of the parameters of this project, and it was decided that a case study of Lviv Education Foundation's endeavors would be the best way to move forward.

Data for this project was collected through a combination of formal interviews and analysis of web materials, and analyzed for context using existing conflict theories. The interview in question was conducted in a semi-structured format using standard interview protocols. Questions were centered around the work the organization was doing, their goals and objectives, challenges to that work, traditional cultural ideas of building peace in Ukraine, and the results of those projects thus far. The interview was conducted in English, although Ukrainian was occasionally used to clarify answers. The interview was recorded after gaining appropriate consent in Ukrainian through a signed consent form.

By using interviews, this research was able to gather direct data from a critical participant operating firsthand in the field and assisting with project development in Ukraine. Interview data was coded using the grounded theory model of hypothesis and theory generation, guided by the initial data collection and further deepened by defining the main themes and patterns. The basic grounded theory model was as follows: data collection, coding, concepts, categorization, and reverse engineered hypothesis and theory generation.

Results

After transcribing and analyzing the interview data taken from Yuriy Didula at Lviv Education Foundation, the work being done there can be examined through the lenses of the conflict transformation theories reviewed in the previous sections.

Lviv Education Foundation's Program

Despite the conflict transformation potential in many of Lviv Education Foundation's projects, especially related to the east-west exchange, this paper specifically is focusing on the service trips between western Ukraine and the eastern regions and the subsequent founding of youth centers in those areas after the service trips were complete. The groundwork for these service trips was actually laid around the time of the Orange Revolution in 2004, when Lviv Education Foundation began to perform cultural exchanges between the east and the west of the country. They brought students from the far eastern regions to Lviv in the west for Ukrainian holidays such as Easter and Christmas and facilitated a cultural exchange. The exchanges were originally designed to unite Ukraine's youth and create a space where, according to Yuriy, they could engage in "face-to-face dialogue, face-to-face communication, sharing ideas, [and] sharing experiences", creating a "small but strong network of people based on common values…common principles, [and] ideas…formed around this vision of a common, economically-strong, and culturally-united Ukraine" (Y. Didula, personal interview, September 28, 2015). According to Yuriy, in the ten years between the Orange Revolution and EuroMaidan, his organization brought over 2,000 students from eastern Ukraine to western Ukraine. Thus, when the conflict broke out after EuroMaidan in 2014, Lviv Education Foundation already had the infrastructure ready to create new cultural exchange projects between the two sides of the country to address the changing needs for building peace in Ukraine.

After the conflict broke out in eastern Ukraine, Lviv Education Foundation shifted their focus to assisting communities in the east with rebuilding. Initially, only Yuriy and a couple of his coworkers traveled to eastern Ukraine to help their friends and contacts rebuild their houses, but they found that after they did so, the local communities were very receptive. This led Yuriy and his organization to realize that

the process of rebuilding provided an excellent opportunity to bring Ukrainians from both sides of the country together and also help out communities touched by war. They decided to scale up their activities and began gathering volunteers from western and central Ukraine, bringing them to damaged cities in the Donetsk region for week-long service camps, where the volunteers stayed with local families while they helped eastern Ukrainians repair houses and buildings damaged by the war. The theory behind these camps was that volunteers from the east and the west would come together with a physical task, rebuilding homes, while also building connections with one another, forming friendships, and ultimately breaking down stereotypes. Although there were no formally conducted dialogues or reconciliation sessions, Yuriy believed that participants would be much more comfortable discussing difficult topics once they were friends and had spent time together on unrelated projects. This level of comfort ties in with some Ukrainian cultural qualities relating to trust and safety during dialogue, which will be discussed further on in this paper.

From the bridges formed by these construction projects, eastern Ukrainians found themselves plugged into Lviv Education Foundation's advocacy network, which led to the second phase of the projects in the east – the development of youth centers that served as a space for professional and personal development, in addition to providing a place where people could come to discuss issues and concerns. Three such centers have been founded at this time in the eastern Ukrainian cities of Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, and Druzhkivka, all in the Donetsk region. Similar centers already existed in many cities in the western and central parts of Ukraine, so Lviv Education Foundation has worked to bring interested volunteers from the east to those existing centers, allowing them to observe how they run, what sorts of activities they conduct, and so forth. One thing that Yuriy stressed about this process was that LEF did not want to come in and tell the eastern Ukrainians how to conduct their youth centers; instead, they simply provided access to models and different options and allowed eastern Ukrainians to draw their own conclusions and go back to implement their youth centers based on the needs of their own communities.

Once the youth centers were established, they facilitated further cultural exchange between the east and the west of the country, bringing in educational and cultural activities to enrich peoples' lives.

Some examples of these have included sharing western Ukrainian holiday traditions (such as a festival with painting eggs for Easter); bringing in Ukrainian pop musicians, modern artists, and writers/poets; conducting poetry evenings; and facilitating exchanges between schools in the east and the west. In addition to bringing western Ukrainian culture to the east, the platform has also created a space where eastern Ukrainians can share their culture with western volunteers. Yuriy shared an example of a time when LEF brought musicians from western Ukraine to one of the centers and they all sat around a bonfire singing. This turned into a show where everyone took turns singing different variants of traditional Ukrainian songs and examining the differences between the eastern and western versions, appreciating the variations between the two cultures while also highlighting the deep roots that they share. The centers also have had the added benefit of providing a space for activism, especially with regards to reforms, combating government corruption, and holding local leaders accountable, providing a space for youth in the area to feel as though they are empowered to guide the direction of their cities, if not their country as a whole.

While at present, LEF only works with three such youth centers in eastern Ukraine, there are plans in the works to dramatically scale up the operation in the coming year in order to create a network of Ukrainian youth from all over the country that are plugged into these centers and engaged. These youth would come to eastern Ukraine to share culture and connections not just from western Ukraine but also southern and central. The scaled-up vision of these projects involves 25 volunteers from 25 different regions participating in these service trips, but not just in eastern Ukraine. Instead, to fight the stereotype that the west is a prosperous and healthy part of the country while the east is constantly in trouble, LEF envisions doing service projects in many different provinces, especially in Lviv and the west, in addition to the east, in order to facilitate travel for Ukrainians all over the country. These new volunteers will be connected with the already-existing network of youth centers and thus be able to further share culture and create friendships with other Ukrainians from many other regions.

Some major themes emerged during the interview with Yuriy revolving around the work that Lviv Education Foundation is doing and the further direction they wish to see their projects move in. The

greatest of these themes is uniting the country, followed by empowerment, cultural exchange, the importance of positive stories, shifting identities, and creating a safe space. Yuriy put a lot of stress on the idea of bringing Ukrainians together from all over the country to meet one another, complete projects, and open a space for dialogue, creating a network where Ukrainians from all the different regions could communicate, trade and share ideas, and offer encouragement and support for one another. One important aspect of LEF's program, however, is that while they strive for unification, there does not seem to be a lot of emphasis placed on assimilation. Cultural differences in the program are shared and celebrated, not avoided or ignored. This ties very closely in with the theme of cultural exchange – while the majority of it at the moment seems to be going west to east, Yuriy expressed a desire to create such exchanges countrywide, and LEF would like for an east to west exchange also to occur. The projects implemented by LEF serve to empower Ukrainians in several ways: they provide an open space to meet Ukrainians from other parts of the country, they allow for informal dialogue, and they support activist efforts to hold government accountable and ensure that reforms are being enacted, as well as encouraging positive change in local communities. These are all activities that give participants a stake in their community, involve them in decision-making, and encourage them to think for themselves, critical elements in empowerment.

The importance of positive storytelling was stressed several times by Yuriy over the course of the interview, especially to counter the negative news that normally comes out of eastern Ukraine. LEF has conducted interviews with journalists and TV crews and held themselves up as a positive example of "how a community can mobilize and create something they lacked for a long time…a formula for how democracy should operate", according to Yuriy (Y. Didula, personal interview, September 28, 2015). Shifting identities also came out frequently, mostly in the context of eastern Ukrainians, who Yuriy claims have lost a lot of their ties to Ukrainian culture due to the hundreds of years of Russian rule and more recently, the deaths during the Holodomor (the famine manufactured by the Soviet Union in the 1930s), the forced deportation in the years after, and the general Russification of the population. Because of these circumstances, Yuriy claims there was no strong sense of shared identity in eastern Ukraine, just

a feeling that people were victims. By giving eastern Ukrainians a space and a template for empowerment and community-building, as well as by sharing culture from the other parts of Ukraine, LEF's project facilitates a shift in identities for eastern Ukrainians, providing a chance to feel more integrated into the rest of the country. Finally, these centers provide a safe space where people feel comfortable, a hugely important thing in Ukraine, a country where freedom of speech, and even of thought, has been repressed for decades, if not centuries. Ukrainians do not trust easily or often and tend to be suspicious of anything 'official', so by creating an informal space where they can engage in community-building activities without being in the official eye, this allows Ukrainians to feel more comfortable getting involved and discussing difficult topics.

The work being done by Yuriy and LEF can also be looked at in far more depth through the theoretical lenses of creating positive peace, fulfilling basic human needs, and using ritual. This can provide more insight into how effective these projects have been at creating sustainable peace in Ukraine.

Positive Peace and the Violence Triangle

One of the most important requirements of any significant intervention in Ukraine is to mitigate the rampant forces of different types of violence that are currently at work in the country. The instability in Ukraine, like most conflicts, is being driven by all three forces of violence defined by Galtung (1967) – physical, structural, and cultural, working together to create the perfect storm. This analysis will examine how LEF's projects work against the violence in Ukraine in each of the three areas and how this leads to supporting the creation of positive peace.

The most visible and obvious source of violence in Ukraine is the physical violence occurring from the fighting in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Although LEF's projects are not involved in ending the fighting itself, they are working to address some of the aftereffects of the violence in areas previously affected. The three cities in eastern Ukraine where LEF currently maintains youth centers, Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, and Druzhkivka, are all areas previously occupied by separatist forces and reclaimed by Ukrainian government forces in the last year. Because of this, many of the homes and buildings in the cities have been damaged by the fighting, and people in these areas have suffered

incredible losses. The service-oriented camps that LEF facilitates are extremely helpful in this regard, as they have brought support from other parts of Ukraine to help those affected to rebuild and reclaim some of what was lost. While this kind of rebuilding cannot stop the fighting in other areas, it still does much to help with the healing process for those who have been impacted by physical violence, and it also helps fulfill the basic human needs of these Ukrainians, as explained in the next section.

In addition to physical violence, LEF's projects also have an impact on some of the many forces of structural violence that are currently plaguing Ukraine: monitoring and keeping an eye on the government and acting as watchdogs against corruption. Corruption and the domination of politics by rich oligarchs and their like are two major forces of structural violence in Ukraine, and by providing a space for activism to encourage government accountability, these projects could have an impact on such processes. However, this is a small drop in the bucket compared to the sheer scope of the structural violence that Ukraine is wrestling with; such activism at the scale of the current projects would only have a small impact on local government and would have more difficulty influencing anything outside of the region; perhaps even Donetsk-wide, they might not have much influence. However, if this can be scaled up as imagined, there is a chance that a network of such centers, especially in the major regional capitals, could indeed be used to hold the various parts of the Ukrainian government more accountable to the people they should be governing. In addition to government accountability, there are also a whole host of structural problems in Ukraine that these projects do not have the resources to address, such as corruption in the police/justice system, the wealth gap, failing economy, health care and legal advocacy for IDPs, election fraud, and upkeep of infrastructure and the energy sector. While LEF's projects do not ignore structural violence completely, they definitely would need to work in tandem with other projects in order to completely alleviate structural violence.

The greatest area of impact that these projects have on violence in Ukraine, therefore, is on cultural violence, which is much harder to see and define than structural violence and tends to be the most difficult to address. In Ukraine, cultural violence has contributed to instability in many ways, primarily through the rise of nationalism and xenophobic attitudes in the west coupled with a deep distrust for

Russians and people from the east of Ukraine. This is coupled with the lingering connection with Russia and nostalgia for the Soviet Union in the east, where many Ukrainians are of Russian heritage. These aspects of cultural violence have also fed the direct violence due to the existence of nationalist self-defense groups and the cult of personality forming around Stepan Bandera, who himself participated in historical physical violence. LEF's projects directly work against the xenophobia and distrust of eastern Ukrainians by facilitating an exchange between eastern Ukraine and the most nationalistic part of western Ukraine, the Lviv region. Since Ukrainians do not get many opportunities to travel from one side of the country to another, this is one of the few ways in which they can be exposed to other viewpoints. This is an important way to counter cultural violence because it humanizes the people in eastern Ukraine for the western Ukrainians and vice versa, making it difficult to support the more extreme forms of nationalism that have sprung up in light of the war. These projects also work against lesser forms of cultural violence that are present in Ukraine at the moment, such as the general apathy and lack of engagement among Ukrainians, especially in the east. While the west has become fired up and empowered in the aftermath of EuroMaidan, the east of Ukraine has not followed suit, and this has created a tangible cultural gap in involvement with civil society and general engagement within the community between the two sides of the country. These projects work to close that gap by providing a space where civil society can flourish in the east of the country as well, giving eastern Ukrainian blueprints and tools by which they can construct youth centers in a form and function that suits their needs.

This all leads to the creation of positive peace, which Galtung (1967) defines as being influenced by ten factors. Of those ten factors, LEF's projects have influence on seven of them as they stand now, with potential to impact more in the future. Each factor is numbered with its place on Galtung's list. Starting at the beginning, LEF actively encourages the presence of cooperation (1) and Ukraine's natural pluralism (9) by bringing together Ukrainians from different parts of the country and sharing culture, ideas, work, and even best practices with regards to youth centers. The centers also provide a space where Ukrainians can feel comfortable discussing relevant issues and getting involved in the community, providing a degree of freedom from fear (2). Although it cannot fulfill many of the basic human needs

discussed in the next section, the centers and the exchanges also satisfy some of the freedom needs of the population, falling under the freedom from want (3) category. By allowing for activism and emphasizing government accountability, these spaces provide a way to work towards a future with the absence of exploitation (5), and offer a collaborative platform for freedom of action (8). Finally, the centers are flexibly run and can accommodate a wide variety of projects, performances, meetings, and other activities, demonstrating an ability to change with the community's needs and desires, also known as dynamism (10). While seven out of ten factors is not bad, there are three areas in which these projects do not improve the positive peace in Ukraine: through economic growth and development, improving equality, or justice. However, due to the open-ended nature of the centers, it seems as though future projects could easily be implemented that would address these factors as well, such as economic development forums, networking conferences, activism focusing on Ukraine's corrupt justice system, or dialogues about how to improve the level of general equality in Ukraine.

Basic Human Needs

The impacts of these projects can also be examined via Galtung's (1999) basic human needs theory, looking at the four sub-categories of security needs, welfare needs, identity needs, and freedom needs. In order to begin looking at the projects through this lens, basic human needs in the Ukrainian cultural context must first be understood and examined. As Galtung explains, basic human needs occur on a cultural spectrum and we must be careful not to shape expectations of needs in a Western direction (p. 313). This analysis has done its best to examine Ukrainian needs through the perspective of Ukrainian culture, and all of the needs reflected have been expressed by various Ukrainians either during time spent living in the country or more recently when conducting research. Many of these needs were even expressed by Yuriy himself.

Galtung's categories of human needs begin with security needs, which are fulfilled on a spectrum across Ukraine. Most Ukrainians in the country are safe from collective violence despite the fighting going on in the east, since it is constrained to two provinces, but many are still vulnerable to individual violence, especially women, minorities such as the Roma, and the poor. In the east, the situation is dire,

with many civilians at risk due to the collective violence from the separatists and Ukrainian government forces. This has created a situation where many Ukrainians do not have their security needs completely satisfied. With regards to welfare needs, the most important in Ukraine would have to be shelter, food, health care, and education. Again, in the east, shelter is a huge need as many homes and apartment buildings have been damaged or destroyed by the fighting. Country-wide, food has also become more difficult to acquire after the currency dropped in value in 2014, resulting in rampant inflation and increase in prices compared to Ukrainian salaries. However, many Ukrainians still grow their own food in gardens or at *dachas*, or country homes, so this is not as dire a problem as it would be in countries that rely solely on purchasing food. School and health care exist in Ukraine and are pretty readily available, but both suffer from similar problems – corruption within the system and low quality – so these needs are only somewhat fulfilled to the extent that they could be in the general population. Ukrainians in the conflict zone are obviously suffering from an even greater lack of welfare needs than the rest of the country, as are IDPs – many children in both the war zones and who have been relocated to other parts of the country do not have access to schooling, the health care is severely limited compared to the demand from both conflict and ordinary health issues common in Ukraine, and receiving supplies such as food has been difficult in the conflict zones as well. There is a huge disparity across the country with regards to how satisfied basic human needs are in these two critical categories.

With regards to identity needs, Ukrainians seem to construct their identities through five major areas of life – family and community, religion, nature and travel, purpose, and work. Family is probably the most important cornerstone to Ukrainian life, and Ukrainians are very close with their extended families, often living in small apartments with many family members all under the same roof. Ukrainian grown children do not tend to move out from their parents' homes until they get married, and even then sometimes newlyweds will live with one of their parents for a time. Because of this closeness, family is an important way that Ukrainians construct their identities and relate to one another. Community is similar in this category because Ukrainians tend to grow up in the same place and not leave, resulting in many close-knit villages, towns, and smaller communities even in the big cities. Religion is also

important, although less commonly discussed. Most Ukrainians are either Russian or Ukrainian orthodox, although there are small populations of Jewish Ukrainians and Catholic Ukrainians, and the Tartars of Crimea are predominantly Muslim. There are also a number of agnostic and atheist Ukrainians. In addition to this, nature and travel are important to Ukrainians, even if this just involves going out to the local forest and making *shashlik* (similar to barbequed meat). Even Ukrainians with not a lot of money or resources will try to take a yearly trip to the sea, and many of them used to go to Crimea before the annexation. Finally, there are needs of purpose and employment, which do not always go hand in hand. These are probably the needs that go most unfulfilled in the majority of the country – unemployment is a big problem, especially among men, and many Ukrainians have expressed a lack of drive or sense of purpose that seems to spread through the entire country. Moving to look at eastern Ukraine, many of these identity needs have been disrupted and are no longer satisfied due to the war. Families have been torn apart by the violence, children have been orphaned, opportunities to travel are severely limited, and unemployment is even higher from all of the chaos occurring in the conflict zones. Thus, again, we see a huge disparity in the fulfillment of basic human needs between the conflict areas and the rest of the country.

The final category of human needs, freedom needs, are the most difficult to define with regards to Ukrainian culture, as many of the lingering effects of the former Soviet Union have created a closed society where there does not always seem to be much freedom at all. This makes Ukrainian cultural needs for freedom difficult to elucidate. Thanks to EuroMaidan and the ensuing demand for reforms, however, some of these needs have more recently become apparent. The first is for politics free of corruption and cronyism, which is the loudest demand being made by average Ukrainians at this time. In addition to this, freedom of speech and the ability to express one's opinion is important, and Ukrainians have been learning to exercise this freedom in the past few years. Freedom of information from independent media sources is important as well – most of the Ukrainian media landscape is owned by the oligarchs and filled with the same corruption as every other structural aspect of Ukrainian life. Finally, freedom of movement and choice of occupation are the two other obvious freedom needs that have been expressed by

Ukrainians. There are many issues that stand in the way of freedom of movement for Ukrainians – although they have fantastic public transportation to even the most remote villages, money is often a problem. Additionally, for IDPs and people trying to flee Donetsk and Luhansk, there have been a series of changes in the law to restrict or allow travel for refugees, making mobility sometimes more difficult. Obviously, the fighting makes freedom of movement a problem in those areas as well. With regards to choice of occupation, Ukrainians have a more pragmatic attitude to employment than Americans, and extremely qualified Ukrainians are sometimes unable to switch jobs or find something better because of lack of opportunities, even in the more prosperous western part of the country. Freedom needs within Ukraine are probably the least fulfilled across the country and show the least disparity between east and west.

The work done by Lviv Education Foundation's projects helps to fulfill basic human needs and decrease the disparities between the east and the west in several key areas. In terms of welfare needs, the projects are helping to build shelter for the eastern Ukrainians who have lost theirs, directly impacting their quality of life. Other than building shelters, however, the primary needs-based impacts of LEF's projects are on identity needs and freedom needs. Through the development of the youth centers, LEF is able to provide a place where young people in the east of the country can find purpose and build community, both important parts of Ukrainian identity construction. The cultural exchanges that LEF facilitates also provide opportunities to travel and meet new people, which, while different than going to the sea for leisure, can play the same role. With regards to freedom needs, LEF is creating a space where Ukrainians can feel safe and free to express their opinions. This is unusual in Ukrainian culture since there is such a widespread distrust of authority and a history of being repressed or killed from expressing opinions other than the ones in vogue at the state level. LEF has created a place where Ukrainians can express their political will and keep an eye on the government and be exposed to new ideas, people from other parts of the country, and opportunities that they might not otherwise have discovered. Thus, these youth centers in particular are instrumental in helping fulfill the spiritual needs of eastern Ukrainians and even some of those for western Ukrainians as well. Overall, many Ukrainian needs are still not being

addressed, but like the factors that create positive peace, sometimes it takes a wide variety of projects mitigating issues all along the spectrum in order to create true, lasting stability in a country.

The Role of Ritual

This final lens will look specifically at the service camp aspect of Lviv Education Foundation's projects and the informal dialogue that has resulted from these camps between eastern Ukrainians and Ukrainians from other parts of the country. It will specifically examine impacts on worldview, identity, and relationships, as the ritualistic qualities of LEF's Building Ukraine Together project have an impact in all of these arenas. First, this analysis will look at how the project counts as ritual according to Schirch's (2005) definition. Although there are many varieties of what constitutes a ritual, Schirch defines ritual as 'acts that have symbolic meaning' that 'take place in unique spaces' (p.16-17). There are five different spectrums that ritual can fall under: religious vs secular, traditional vs improvised, formal vs informal, socializing vs transforming, and constructive vs destructive. Ritual creates a space where worldviews, identities, and relationships can be changed and formed. This is done by creating a *liminal space*, an in-between place, where there are new rules and using the power of symbolic actions to open the mind to new ideas (p.68). By this definition, Building Ukraine Together qualifies as a ritual in several ways. First, it brings eastern and western Ukrainian participants out of their normal, everyday spaces to come together as one group, in a new liminal space. Second of all, it involves the symbolic act of rebuilding and improving physical parts of their country, which can be seen as a metaphor for rebuilding and strengthening the *idea* of Ukraine as well as the bonds between one another. As rebuilding is a constructive act, it follows that it also allows eastern and western Ukrainians to construct connections to one another and become humanized. The fact that this process relies heavily on the power of actions rather than formal dialogue also speaks to its power as ritual. Along the five spectrums, this would be categorized as a mostly secular, improvised, informal, transforming, and constructive ritual that challenges the general status quo of distrusting Ukrainians from opposite sides of the country.

With regards to worldview, this symbolic process of rebuilding creates a method through which Ukrainian participants can challenge the worldviews they arrive with and come to different

understandings through the process of rebuilding homes and buildings. One way in which ritual helps to build worldview is by helping people make sense of the world around them, according to Schirch (p. 99). Ritual can provide a window into other viewpoints and provide more context to a conflict besides the one that participants have been receiving in their normal surroundings. Ritual also provides a means by which clashing worldviews can be reconciled and woven together specifically because of the way that it affects the brain – several neurobiological studies have shown the potential that ritual has for changing the way that the brain processes information, giving it greater capacity to solve complex problems and deal with paradoxical situations (p. 105). It stands to reason that this expanded capacity would also help participants reconcile contradictory worldviews and process more information about the conflict in question. With regards to LEF's project in eastern Ukraine specifically, by creating a liminal space where eastern and western Ukrainians can come together and build something, LEF has also provided an informal platform where they can share their worldviews and challenge their own assumptions. By engaging in ritual while they build these relationships and discuss the problems their country faces, this helps open the participants up to other points of view and increases the potential for transformation. It is similar to looking at the conflict through a new lens and seeing things in a way that they had not before.

In addition to transforming and sharing worldviews, the ritualistic aspects of LEF's work also serve to transform identities and allow these Ukrainians to leave behind their large group identities of "eastern" and "western", or "Ukrainian-speaking" and "Russian-speaking", and instead become part of this new group of volunteers assisting with the important task of rebuilding their country. Schirch explains that ritual can allow participants to break down the threatened group identity that they often bring from conflict situations and establish a common identity as part of the group (p. 123-128). An example of this type of identity shifting can be found in rites of passage, types of rituals that tend to traditionally mark shifts in life status. Rites of passage work to change identities by first breaking down the old identity through stressors, such as isolation, harassment, or physical discomfort, producing uncertainty in the participants. After the participant is sufficiently stressed, it can open their mind up to transformation, which can then lead to a sort of rebirth in a new identity. In anthropology, rites of passage

tend to be defined, traditional, and supported by the community in question, but Schirch translates the general psychological process over to modern usage in peacebuilding – by making participants uncomfortable and forcing them to deal with uncertainty, it can allow for breaking down of barriers between identities and the formation of a new identity as a group (p. 128). While not as intentional as some of the rites of passage studied by anthropologists, the process of rebuilding homes definitely would seem to qualify as the kind of work that would be physically challenging and create a certain amount of discomfort. By engaging in physical labor together, especially constructive physical labor, it creates a space where participants are pushed to new limits and possibly tired, and thus creates the opening for shifting identities. The rebirth and reformation of identities comes at the end of the camps, when volunteers return to their homes and are plugged in to the LEF network, forever a part of this experience. They left their homes as eastern and western Ukrainians and returned as one part of a network of people from all over the country, dedicated to making their country a better place. In addition, Schirch explains that peacebuilders can stress 'positive identities' that do not denigrate other groups (p.129). Building Ukraine Together serves this same purpose; rather than fighting separatists or uniting in the face of a common enemy, their volunteer network has united with positive goals and through the action of physically reconstructing destroyed parts of their society. They are part of an in-group that does not need to take down an out-group in order to define themselves, an important factor for peace.

Finally, LEF's Building Ukraine Together project also has the capacity to transform relationships through its ritualistic aspects. Schirch identifies several roles that ritual can play in maintaining and transforming relationships: preserving boundaries that define a group, creating internal solidarity, and removing a sense of self and encouraging a sense of union through common actions (p.139). She also identifies that through this transforming of relationships, ritual allows systems to be changed without first needing to destroy them (p. 147) – EuroMaidan would be a large scale example of the ritual of protest being used to bring people together, change relationships, and drive social change without needing to break the original system down first. This ability to change and transform larger social structures is an important part of ritual and why it is an effective peacebuilding tool. While transforming relationships is

the least-used arena for the particular ritual involved in Building Ukraine Together, it still provides a space where participants are taken out of the general social sphere and build and define a group with new boundaries through the work that they are participating in. If performed on a large enough level, such as Yuriy's hope for scaling the project up, it is possible that it would be influential enough to affect real change throughout the system without needing to destroy what is already present. With regards to the youth centers, a product of the ritual, that social change is already springing forth in the form of keeping an eye on the government and creating a space to empower youth. There is great potential to do more to transform relationships through ritual in this project, but it has a good start and definitely could be influential in the future.

<p style="text-align:center">Limitations of LEF's Program</p>

From this analysis, it is clear that LEF's endeavors to unite eastern and western Ukrainians in projects have the potential to create a serious impact and through their design, have the power to mitigate cultural and some structural violence, fulfill some basic human needs, and provide a ritualistic space where people can transform their viewpoints. However, there are also some limitations on the scope of the projects as they stand now and areas in which the design could be improved. These main areas have already been addressed by LEF staff, including Yuriy, and will be worked into the next round of project design as the scope of the program is scaled up. However, it is important to acknowledge them and examine what affect they have on the ability of these projects to create change.

The first area of limitation for LEF's projects is lack of data collected to measure outcomes and results of the project. While LEF does encourage feedback from participants via Facebook or email, there is no formal tool for assessing the impact of the project on participants or encouraging reflection after the projects are complete. Because of this, it is difficult to assess exactly how effective these projects have been at changing attitudes and encouraging cooperation between eastern and western Ukraine. This is definitely a limitation that LEF is aware of and working on addressing, especially as they are in the process of reaching out to Western donors, many of whom like to see some sort of measureable outcome for projects. LEF has been tracking how many volunteers have been exchanged, how many youth centers

have been established, etc., but these purely quantifiable metrics alone cannot illustrate shifts in attitude and show how effective this program has been at generating positive peace in the region.

A second area of limitation in LEF's programming most likely comes from a cultural clash between Western styles of peacebuilding and the Ukrainian discomfort with discussing anything serious in a formal setting, but it must be addressed all the same. Although one of the strengths of Yuriy's program is that it does not have any formal, structured dialogue, it is also one of the weaknesses, as there is no way for facilitators to direct discussion, encourage talking about certain topics, or take part in any sort of reflective practice after the service camps have ended. There is still a lot of potential for transformation without directed discussion, but perhaps in the future, there could be a way to encourage the direction of dialogue to ensure that difficult issues are actually being discussed and that the conflict is being addressed, not glossed over or avoided depending on how willing participants are to discuss uncomfortable topics. A happy medium would have to be struck between the Ukrainian desire for privacy and comfort when discussing issues that could potentially get them in trouble and the need to constructively conduct peacebuilding dialogue, as culturally appropriate peacebuilding methods are extremely important for effectiveness of interventions. The biggest limitation from this present lack of direction of dialogue is the lack of self-reflection, which is an important part of solidifying learning and transformation. Without this reflective component, it is hard to say whether participants simply return to their normal lives without weaving in the new knowledge gained from this experience or if they actually integrate their new knowledge into their lives. Yuriy has explained that they do encourage reflection but they do it informally via the internet, much like feedback, and it is a voluntary component. LEF is interested in changing it to be a bigger part of the project in the future as it is scaled up, but for now, it is still lacking.

Although these two limitations do make it difficult to assess the impact of the projects as they stand now, it is clear that LEF's program design incorporates many aspects of peacebuilding and conflict transformation theory and definitely has the potential to be incredibly transformative. Incorporating directed discussions (or even just providing participants with a list of sample discussion topics) and

encouraging reflective practice after the fact can only serve to strengthen the power of such a program and ensure that the work being put into this transformative experience continues to have effect elsewhere, increasing its sustainability and scale. As LEF implements new design components, hopefully it will be able to more successfully measure the impact of its programs and communicate to the Ukrainian public the value of its projects.

Conclusions

The Lviv Education Foundation's projects are only the tip of the iceberg for designing culturally-appropriate, impactful interventions in countries in conflict such as Ukraine. However, they demonstrate the usefulness of Ukrainian-designed grassroots-level initiatives that do not always match the same types of programs that are sponsored by Western donors or planned by large, multinational organizations. These projects also highlight the potential that service-learning has to facilitate peacebuilding between different identity groups, primarily due to its ritualistic nature. This is not a type of peacebuilding program that is commonly discussed or planned by many of the big organizations, but there is incredible potential for transformation within the framework of service-learning, especially involving physical labor or hands-on projects that would have a positive impact within host communities. Finally, while Ukraine has many challenges facing it as a post-revolution country in the midst of conflict and reforms, this interview with Yuriy also demonstrated that Ukrainians are aware of these problems and ready to devise clever solutions to them.

Importance of Culturally Appropriate Interventions

There are several aspects of Lviv Education Foundation's program design that highlight the importance of culturally-appropriate interventions to increase the efficacy of programs. The biggest example of this would have to be the informality of the entire process, from the lack of structured dialogue to the creation of a comfortable, informal safe space through the youth cultural centers. Ukrainian culture places much emphasis on appearance and formality; power is negotiated and communicated through level of formality and quality of appearance, in addition to other ways. For

example, Ukrainians will sometimes buy one very nice, expensive suit to wear professionally and then wear it every day, willing to spend a large sum of money on one particularly effective status symbol rather than spending less on cheaper suits that they can then switch in and out of their wardrobe. There are many other examples of this, such as Ukrainian schools falling apart via internal politics or even lack of funding, but still maintaining beautiful buildings, or the fact that Ukrainians iron every item of clothing before they wear them, and carry shoe polish with them to shine any blemishes out of their shoes immediately. Ukrainian business is also almost always conducted very formally – schools and local government offices are old, impressive buildings, tea is always offered, and everyone is aware of hierarchy. It is unclear whether this is a holdover from the Soviet era, although from what I know, it is also a common attitude in Russia and many of the other former Soviet republics. It is also possible that this attitude came about after the fall of the Soviet Union, when those with the appearance of wealth and power seized control of most of the major industries and later became the oligarchs. Whatever the root cause, this emphasis on appearance reflects the general stoicism of Ukrainian culture and uses its own rituals to re-affirm the cultural and social rules in place. This façade is only really broken when Ukrainians become close to other people and trust them.

There are many reasons why the youth of the Maidan era would be dissatisfied with these attitudes that stress formal façades, most importantly because they have seen around them to the empty promises and lack of real, structural improvement that has occurred in their country. Ukrainian politicians are the ultimate embodiment of this false façade, and while people have never trusted them, there is a deep frustration with that lack of trust that has sprung up over the past few years. This highlights why peacebuilding in an informal setting, without ceremony or cameras or nice jackets, as Yuriy explained, is so important. It is a direct subversion of the general Ukrainian trend of showing what people want to see, and by keeping things informal, it provides greater potential for delving beneath 'what people want to hear' to actually tackle real, critical issues that lie beneath the surface. Ukrainians have spent decades, if not centuries, scared to speak their minds and suffering repression at the hands of the various occupying forces who have been in power in their homeland, and the legacy of that repression is a deep

unwillingness to discuss anything controversial or of substance without first establishing trust that it will

not be used against them. This lack of trust and the performative nature of Ukrainian politics means that

any formal dialogue process is going to be difficult to implement, and furthermore, that Western

organizations may not be able to notice its ineffectiveness, as Ukrainians are very good at saying what

they think people want to hear in order to protect themselves. Only by encouraging informal

peacebuilding venues can organizations truly have the chance to get people to speak their minds, and as

honest discourse is such a hugely important factor in long-lasting, sustainable peacebuilding, this is

critical.

Service-learning as a Peacebuilding Method

The projects implemented by Lviv Education Foundation furthermore highlight the incredible

potential for transformational change through service-learning. From researching service-learning and

peacebuilding, there were some links between the two with regards to peace education in the United

States, such as teaching college students how to confront privilege by working with poor communities.

However, there was only one example of service-learning being used to do peacebuilding and

empowerment abroad, and that was Stewart's (2011) work with Palestinian youth. There were no

examples in the literature of service-learning being used to bring two groups in conflict together in

common projects, although a service-learning component is often added to peacebuilding summer camps

such as those put on by World Learning, and additionally through the Washington Ireland Program in

Washington, DC. However, the theory behind this service-learning does not seem to have been fully

fleshed out and linked to actual peacebuilding, and it was never the complete focus of the program. This

is an area in which peacebuilding can move forward, both in the United States and also abroad.

From this investigation, it is clear that service-learning provides several advantages to

peacebuilding work. First, it is a symbolic act that has implications beyond the actual task at hand – it is

also helping people, and in the case of Building Ukraine Together, the actual act of rebuilding a country

while coming together to discuss how to symbolically rebuild that country. This ties in to the potential

that it has as ritual to bring participants to a place where they are able to discuss difficult topics, explore

new identities, and entertain new worldviews. Second, it provides a common, *positive* cause to rally

behind, far more sustainable than the approach of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' which can also

sometimes bring opposing sides together. By working together to create rather than destroy, this produces

a powerful symbolic counterforce to violent conflict. Service-learning is also often difficult work, so it

still provides challenges to overcome and requires cooperation and collaboration in order to succeed.

Finally, service-learning produces something tangible or quantifiable much of the time, especially with

hands-on projects. Since so much of peacebuilding work is difficult to measure with regards to

accomplishment, the tangible results of service-learning projects can provide a visible representation of

the work being done, and demonstrate that sides in conflict *can* work together to accomplish something,

even if it is simply the building of a house. A sense of accomplishment can be very inspiring and allow

participants to feel as though change is possible, encouraging them to continue their work outside of the

program and thus increasing both the scope and sustainability of said program. Overall, service-learning

serves as a great possibility for providing new avenues of conflict transformation in the future.

Facing Ukraine's Uncertain Future

Finally, the interview with Yuriy regarding his work with Lviv Education Foundation also shed

some light on some of the coming future challenges that Ukraine will be facing if the conflict continues at

the current pace or alternately freezes. The number one challenge that Yuriy named in his interview was

the problem with demilitarizing and reintegrating those people who have been fighting at the front, and he

believes that revitalizing the Ukrainian economy and continuing the fight against corruption are two

important ways to help with reintegration. According to Yuriy, if those who went off to war return to find

that nothing has improved in the country they fought for, it will lead to demoralization and

disillusionment, anger, and possibly radicalism. Fortunately, many Ukrainian NGOs are already aware of

the problem and working to help alleviate this problem, including offering psychological services to those

who have served, but they are not operating at a scale that can match the number of veterans who will

eventually be returning. This also ties in with the work being done by the OSCE (2015d) in disarmament,

demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), and hopefully in the future, the OSCE can support scaling up of the process to meet the demand of Ukrainian soldiers returning from war.

In addition to DDR, Yuriy also identified the current large number of IDPs as a huge challenge needing to be addressed by the Ukrainian people, similar to the discussion in the literature review. He believes that extensive government and economic reforms would help to assist these IDPs, as they will need to be integrated into new communities similarly to veterans returning from war, and the best way to integrate people is to provide them with employment and a livelihood. He also makes an excellent point that the people who are leaving the current conflict zone tend to be the types of people who take initiative, with many of them highly educated and entrepreneurship-minded. They could be a huge asset to Ukraine as a whole and the rebuilding of its economy if proper plans could be put into place to give these people the tools they need to start new businesses or find employment in their new homes. According to Yuriy, the EU and the UN have already provided assistance with this through small grants programs, but these are not widely known about and could be further promoted to assist IDPs and reintegrate veterans successfully.

The final takeaway from the challenges that Ukraine is facing in the future is that the country is looking at an overhaul of the entire system as it has been constructed in the post-Soviet era. Ukrainians are demanding reforms in all areas of government and life, from education to healthcare to judicial and government. Some reforms have already been enacted, such as new "patrol police" forces slowly being introduced in cities across Ukraine (Gessen, 2015), but others have yet to be implemented or are simply all talk at the moment. Ukraine is definitely a country at a tipping point, and many of the needed changes are outside the scope of peacebuilding operations by the Lviv Education Foundation. However, all of these moving parts go into the same system, and LEF is providing a powerful stimulus for the creation of positive peace in the lives of the Ukrainians that it touches. It will definitely be interesting to see what they can accomplish operating at a greater scale, with a higher number of volunteers and a larger number of projects, and it is clear that projects such as Lviv Education Foundation's are an important piece of the puzzle that is creating stability and peace for Ukraine's future.

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Appendix A – Interview Transcript (Yuriy Didula)

Kate: Today is September 28, 2015 and it is 2:30 PM. I am interviewing Yuriy from the organization…

Yuriy: Lviv Education Foundation.

K: Lviv Education Foundation! Thank you. Okay, so I'm very interested in the work that your organization is doing, specifically around the East and the conflict there. Can you tell me a little bit more about the work that you're doing?

Y: Sure, so Lviv Education Foundation has been established for about ten years now, but it's been more focused in dealing with orphans and socially vulnerable families and children in Western Ukraine, but when, nearly when the Orange Revolution started and the whole country realized that there's lots of gaps that need to be filled by the non-profit sector and civil organizations, to kind of unite the country, to make them feel part of one intellectual, cultural civic space.

That's when the foundation started conducting those east-west exchange programs, bringing students from eastern Ukraine to western Ukraine for Easter, for Christmas, and it's been a long, long tough work that has only showed results now, because when the recent Maidan started, we kind of felt once again that Ukrainian youth is different from other generations, from older generations. They think in terms of common future rather than in terms of hard, difficult, and dividing past. So, we see Maidan and we see post-Maidan activities as a direct and indirect result of what we've been doing for the past ten years, basically.

So I would say that together, the foundation and the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv – we are kind of partnering in these exchange programs – together we brought, I would say over 2,000 students from eastern Ukraine to western Ukraine for ten years. And it's resulted in kind of a face to face dialogue, face to face communication, sharing ideas, sharing experiences, and it kind of built small but strong network of people based on common values, based on common principles, ideas and those were kind of formed around this vision of common Ukraine, this vision of strong, economically strong and culturally united Ukraine.

When the conflict broke out after the Maidan in the spring, we had a lot of friends from eastern Ukraine who suffered damage of their houses, who suffered family losses, so it touched us personally although we lived in Lviv, which is a comfortable economically-strong city. But because we had personal connections to the east, we felt on our skin how the war touched Ukraine, we started thinking about how to logically continue our programs. And instead of bringing the students to western Ukraine, we ourselves went to eastern Ukraine. Initially it was me, my coworker Andriy, and my director Vitaliy Kokorov; we just sat on the train, we took some building materials, some instruments, some tools, and we went there to fix a couple of houses, just to see what—it was basically our first trip to eastern Ukraine. We'd never been there. We always brought people, we always spoke with them, we had connections, but we never went there ourselves.

So, after going there and fixing a couple of houses, and getting like a very sincere, friendly feedback from the locals, we realized that this is something that is very timely right now, because eastern Ukraine suffered a lot of damage right now, people are in need of not only technical support but in need of this feeling of solidarity, that people from the west feel, I mean, express their friendship and solidarity with the people from the east. Because this is the common problem, the war is not just the problem of the east,

it's the problem of the whole country. So we decided to scale up our activity, and not just to do those small one-time trips but to do it on a national level, basically.

Since then, we conducted almost ten weeks of those labor – oh labor is a bad word, of those service trips, basically.

K: Ok.

Y: If you heard, in the US, there's an Appalachia service trip, so that's basically what we did in Ukraine. We gathered volunteers from western, from central Ukraine, we brought them to eastern Ukraine for a week-long camp, basically, where they stayed in the city, they stayed with locals, and every day they went to one of the units and helped to fix the houses, basically. So for a week, they had an organized cultural program, well-organized service project, basically. I will just shortly describe what our agenda was.

K: Ok.

Y: Just to understand why we did it and why it is important. Because it wasn't really about building those walls that were destroyed, it was more about building bridges among people, building communication. For years, Ukraine suffered from our society's immobility. We don't travel. It's very rare that young kids, young people leave their cities, their villages. They stay there for a long time, and that's the main problem of Ukraine because our lack of knowledge about Ukraine, about other regions of Ukraine, about our multiculturalism, it gives politicians a good reason to manipulate us. They always use those differences to play their political games. They always emphasize that the west is this nationalistic Ukrainian-speaking kind of minority and the east is Russian-speaking Russian-leaning population, and we always fight about this. We always – this is the hot topic for discussion. To put it politely, I don't want to use the b-word…

K: (laughs) Maybe it's more complex than that?

Y: It's far more complex – it's not just complex, maybe it's less complex if you try to understand it, if you try to comprehend it and learn something.

K: Yeah.

Y: So we were trying, those camps were aimed to foster communication between different regions, to build regional networks, to build national networks and basically we were doing this for the last year, we brought almost 200 students from western Ukraine to eastern Ukraine now. And we made them speakers of change. We made them, so we used our cultural education program as an instrument, as a tool for people to communicate, for people to break those stereotypes, to lose those prejudices basically. And it's been very successful, since last year, as a result of those building camps, those service trips, we opened three youth centers in eastern Ukraine, three, basically, so our formula that we developed recently on our experience in eastern Ukraine is that, Ukraine is a country with economic hardships. People cannot be creative, people cannot think about building communities, volunteering because they are struggling economically.

So, in order for people to be more active, to think on this, outside of their ecosystem, we need to give them a sense of security, we need to give them a sense that, a sense or atmosphere of trust– because when people feel safe, when people feel that there's somebody to support them, there's somebody to understand them, they can create – they can be more artistic, they can be more creative.

Though, because we are not competent in giving them economic security – we are an education foundation, we deal with youth, we deal with culture, education – we decided to give them this spiritual security, this kind of sense that will give them motivation to create, to step outside of this pragmatic kind of atmosphere, so we started creating those youth centers which are called, in eastern Ukraine, they're Freedom Home, that's the first one was called Freedom Home, and the name actually aims to reflect the atmosphere that we have there.

It's a huge apartment which is organized in the way that people feel that's like home. We have great design, we have very warm atmosphere so people can feel comfortable there, basically. In the long term, we want those centers to serve as kind of civic activism centers, we want them to be our base, we have volunteer moments, we have social projects to serve people in need, we have educational activities to promote informal education, and promote professional development, we have art clubs, we have art workshops. Basically, we have everything that fills this gap in terms of informal education in our society.

And this formula, it became so successful that neighboring cities of Sloviansk, for example, you probably even know those towns—

K: I know Sloviansk.

Y: Okay, so you know Sloviansk. So the first city where we established this platform was Kramatorsk, so Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, those were first towns that were occupied and again they were the first towns that were liberated by Ukrainian army, so that's where a lot of damage was done, that's where a lot of post-war intense feelings were preserved, I mean, because occupation, liberation, a lot of fighting, a lot of killings, people were kind of scared, people were living in constant fear, so this kind of platform that was giving people a chance to distance themselves from war, to think about how to act after the war, how to build a new society, how to avoid war in the future. Because the situation we have in eastern Ukraine now is a direct result of lack of strong policies, direct outcome of lack of cultural integration, of Donbas into the whole Ukrainian national space.

I mean, you can put it in a different way, you can put it as a peace-promoting platform, people use different names in order to adjust our platform to their agendas, basically, but our director usually puts it, we do not talk about reconciliation and dialogue promotion. We conduct it by holding those practical service projects, by bringing people together, by making them step out of this ecosystem, we basically build bridges. We are not bringing people together around the table and making them talk. We do it by helping the other, basically. So we get twenty volunteers, we go to the neighboring city, we help to fix the house, and doing that, doing this service project, we talk, we communicate. And when you build friendship with somebody who has different political views, it's easier to discuss those differences while you're friends, not when you're sitting around the table with the ties and the jackets and having cameras surrounding you filming what you're saying.

So basically we're promoting dialogue, we're promoting peace by bringing people together and by creating the atmosphere of trust, of love and friendship. And it would be great if you were in Kramatorsk and I could show you what, exactly, I'm talking about—

K: I wish!

Y: Because this is very hard to pass the feeling of what we do. And I'll maybe send you later the videos of—

K: I'd love to see them. It sounds really—

Y: It's very, it's very important.

K: Amazing, yeah.

Y: And in your study it'll be important to see what this results in and how it helps to build those bridges. And as a result, actually, we had volunteers from eastern Ukraine, from Kramatorsk, coming to Lviv, western Ukraine, to help us fix the houses, so we are trying to break stereotypes, basically. So people from the city that suffered the most damage from the war coming to Lviv, the most business-oriented economically sustainable city, to fix somebody's house. It's a paradox, but it's a great, a great media, it's a great propaganda. So we are trying to create precedence, we are trying to make positive news, because today we are only talking about deaths, about lack of reforms, about Russia's goals to intervene, to continue the war, so we are trying to bring positive news, we are trying to make people think positively.

And so today, we have three of those platforms, we opened one in Sloviansk, and we opened one in Druzhkivka, which is also a neighboring city, and now are working on a couple of other cities, so we learned that this formula of having this building camp first, this helps us to mobilize people, helps us to build this atmosphere of trust, of friendship. On this base, we have basically a group of people who are united because they have similar ideas, similar principles, and taking, because they can step out and feel they are secure, they can create something, something different. And what they are creating is those centers. And for somebody, this center serves as a platform, as a space to develop artistically, for somebody this serves as a center to develop professionally, for somebody, this is a center where they can form a government transparency kind of institution that will keep government accountable.

In Kramatorsk, for example, our activists are already acting as watchdogs, as people who know the local budget and they can demand, and because there is a strong network of people, government is afraid. Now they always, they keep in touch with us. They always ask, oh guys what's your plan, what do you think about this, they ask advice. So once you create this network, the government is not free in their actions anymore because they know there is a power. There is a power that's built not on money, that's built on values, that's built on the vision.

K: Maybe they feel accountable?

Y: They feel more accountable, for sure. So that's the formula that we want to replicate in other towns, other oblasts, other regions because we see this as a very successful formula. And so now we are collaborating a huge project on the national level that will engage ten times more volunteers, that will engage ten times more cities/towns, and this is basically the way we promote peace, dialogue, and participation, basically.

So I feel like if there is a strong, we believe that if there is a strong community, if there is a strong identity in the community, there can't be conflict, because the east, eastern Ukraine became kind of, жертво, basically eastern Ukraine became a name, not a name.

K: Можлево Українською? [Maybe in Ukrainain?]

Y: жертва. [Victim]

K: жертва? I don't know.

Y: Well they suffered because there was no identity in eastern Ukraine.

K: Oh, they became a victim?

Y: Yup, exactly, they became a victim, thank you. Because there was no strong identity in eastern Ukraine because of hundreds of years of Russian rule, the Ukrainian identity was almost diminished. The famine, the Russification, the deportation, the collectivization, it all made people live in constant fear, they just—there is a principle, there is a kind of a tendency that people are scared of changes. They would just rather, just you know, leave us alone. Give us a small but stable salary, we will deal with it.

So once you build a strong community, once you build something that has identity, you can't infiltrate with strange idea of Russian, what you do you call it, Русский мир [Russian world] basically. That, the idea of Russian space, became the popular idea in Donbas because they had no identity, there's been no – Ukraine has failed to integrate them, there's been lack of policies. So that's kind of in short, maybe very general but, what we do in eastern Ukraine.

K: Actually I think you answered three of my questions just from that, which is great! I want to make sure that I understood right exactly how your program works. So you have volunteers from western Ukraine and they come to eastern Ukraine and help build these youth centers? Or just build houses, rebuild?

Y: Okay, so yeah, the formula is to bring people from western Ukraine to eastern Ukraine and help rebuild houses. So this is step number first.

K: So this is separate from youth centers.

Y: We can't separate. It's all into.

K: All one thing?

Y: All one thing. Although officially those are different projects, but it's a logical continuation, so why we do those service trips – to unite people, to mobilize local communities.

K: Increase understanding?

Y: Increase understanding, share success stories. So in western Ukraine, we have those youth centers already. So we specifically bring people who are successful in this field to share, not as a training, not as a lecture, but they share their stories while conducting those uh, while doing service for others. And it's easier to perceive while having an informal environment rather than just sitting in a classroom, for example. So, first step to bring those volunteers, the active society, civic society activists, to bring them here and for them to share with locals, what is it to have a strong community? What is it to have an accountable government? What is it to have a youth center that you can yourself plan activities in, you can yourself invite guests to, you can yourself organize uh, leisure. So as a result, we inspire locals, we pick local leaders, potential leaders who have some strengths, we do some follow up meetings, we bring them to Lviv, Kyiv, Chernihiv, for them to actually live in those centers and see how it works from inside, how it operates. We give them specific skills, we supervise them, and we make them local leaders, basically. And then they create those youth centers, basically.

So we don't want to make it seem like, you know, those geniuses from western Ukraine, they come and they preach and they teach them how to live righteous lives, etc. So we want to give them understanding of what is good, what is bad, what are the good practices, what are the bad practices. I want them to make conclusions by themselves. We don't want to give them right formulas, basically.

K: Yeah, you don't want to tell them what to do.

Y: Exactly. We just give them different options, basically. Alternatives. And then those, those leaders, they create those centers and they unite around themselves like-minded people, they create team, and it's been a year since our platform in Kramatorsk exists, it's been one of the most successful social initiatives in Ukraine.

A lot of journalists are coming, we've been on a lot of TV. I mean, it's been now showed as an example of how a community can mobilize and create something that they lacked for a long time. So this is basically a formula for how democracy should operate. There is something that we missed – there is no center where young people can link and communicate – we mobilize, we get resources, we create it. I mean, just do it, basically. "Just do it" way of activism.

So we created one success story that's been communicated to other communities, and now we are approached by different cities, different villages, to come and share, to come and teach, to come and help them organize the platform. So basically, it serves now as an educational, cultural civic center for youth, for kids, for elderly people. It's a platform. It's a space which can be used in different ways. So that's something that a lot of communities in Ukraine lack: just a space, informal space – not a school, not a university, not a city council, just, you know, an informal space for activism.

K: I understand. It sounds great. I guess I want to go back to your idea of where you were talking about how you don't directly talk about the issues that are going on, but more in an informal sense, like you kind of encourage that kind of discussion once people trust each other? I'm really interested to find out the Ukrainian culturally appropriate ways of peacebuilding in Ukraine. Because I know, we in the west, especially Americans, like to come in and think we know everything, try to implement projects the same in every country, and it doesn't work because each country has different ways of doing things. I was just wondering if you could think of any, like, does it draw on traditional Ukrainian cultural ways of doing things that you think are particularly different?

Y: So…I think, I think it really depends on the circumstances. We are not again teaching what is good, what is bad, but we are at the same time bringing Ukrainian traditions back by the, in the way of, making it popular, making it cool, making it modern. So of course the best way of promoting peace is education. It can be, and, for us, for example, how we bring the, how we foster love towards Ukrainians, is by conducting poetry evenings, by bringing 'cool' Ukrainian poets to the platform where they read, where they talk, where they sing. We are bringing pop Ukrainian modern artists, musicians, who are just cool, you know? We make Ukrainian, everything Ukrainian popular, we make everything Ukrainian…basically, I just want to give you one example.

So in western Ukraine there is a huge festivity for Easter where people have an outside folk games, folk singing, Easter eggs painting. This is a tradition that used to be very popular in eastern Ukraine before the Bolsheviks came, but because of those strong processes of Russification and a lot of deportations, this was forbidden for a long time and it's been forgotten. So we organized this in Kramatorsk, this past spring, and it's became so popular we got almost thousand people who came for our festival, and they were so impressed, they just fell in love with it. So basically by bringing 'cool' Ukrainian traditions back, by introducing – re-introducing them to the locals, we are fostering this feeling of attractiveness towards Ukrainian, if that's what you asked.

But also, there are other initiatives that we are partnering with in eastern Ukraine, and they usually work in the field of formal education. So they go to schools, they take school kids from their schools and they do exchanges, they also promote modern cool Ukrainian culture in the schools. Because our education also sucked for awhile. There's been no motivation for teachers to give students a good education. So those, this NGO that works in the field of education, the field of art, they are also bringing cool

musicians, cool artists, cool poets to Kramatorsk, to eastern Ukraine in general, and they make it popular but not by, kind of imposing on them, but by just giving them an alternative.

K: Exposing it to them, maybe?

Y: Exposing them to those kind of things. Because Ukrainian, the radio here is also Russified, the web space is also Russified, so there's no – if there was an alternative, there would have been a different situation, but there was never an alternative. Because a lot of businesses, a lot of oligarchs are not interested in this. They want this region to be totally under their influence, basically, so we are now kind of filling this gap, filling this--helping people to see an alternative. I mean, before our freedom home space was open in Kramatorsk, the most cultural center in the city was a pizzeria.

K: Really?

Y: Like the only place we could go and sit down and have a chat with a girl or with the friends was at a pizzeria.

K: They didn't even have like the palace of culture or anything?

Y: They did, but it's a huge Stalinist-looking building but no interactive activities there. The only things they would have is the factory orchestra coming and playing, something that kids are not interested, something that youth are not interested in at all. So there was no motivation to transform this cultural center, basically.

And if you would see it, you would know, you would not want to go there, and we created this place which you would see and you want to go there.

K: So it's a very different feeling.

Y: Very different feeling. Very different. I mean, we created something that's open to you, that you feel like it's calling you, and this huge Soviet-looking palace, it's not something that youth is even repelled against, something very formal, something very bureaucratic, basically.

K: With this cultural sharing, is there any opportunity or are there any programs where the east shares anything with the west as well? Or is it mostly just bringing Ukrainian traditions there?

Y: No, it's both, but I guess most sharing of eastern culture with the western culture is the way of, the way of sharing art traditions, music culture, because although Ukraine used to be very similar in terms of traditions, there indeed are local dialects, local traditions everywhere, basically. So once we brought some musicians, some singers from western Ukraine to eastern Ukraine, and we sat around the bonfire and we were singing. And it kind of naturally happened to be kind of a stand up show, so the Ukrainians from western Ukraine would sing the same song, like they would kind of, they would take shifts basically, so one, the western Ukrainians would sing first paragraph, and the eastern Ukrainian girls would sing the second one and we would see the differences.

K: Oh I bet that was interesting.

Y: It was amazing. And that's the way that we share and we kind of understand that the differences are indeed, there are differences but they're cool differences, this is not like kind of dividing differences, those are uniting differences. It's like, Ukraine is so multicultural, multiethnic, that it gives us better

understanding that what we can build in the future, what we can build upon. So those are the kind of minor examples of how we exchange, how we share.

And of course there are differences in art, so for example, the embroidered shirt, you know, the Ukrainian embroidered shirt? The ones we have in Galicia, in western Ukraine, differs from the ones we have in eastern Ukraine. Because they're different ornaments, different colors, different patterns, so –

K: Don't they even differ by oblast? Or something?

Y: Sometimes they even differ by oblast, yeah. But usually they have, they are different in terms of ethnic, not ethnic, but—

K: Regional?

Y: Yeah, regional, so there's western Ukraine, central Ukraine, eastern, southern, etc. So yeah there are those kind of exchanges that we conduct. But those are not really planned, they're natural. They happen naturally while, during other events.

K: That's really interesting. So right now, it's almost 3:00. I have a couple more questions. I'm going to ask my two most important ones so that we can get them out of the way, and then if we have some time we can—

Y: Okay.

K: But I don't want to keep you, I know you're busy today. Okay so, I guess now I'm going more, not focusing on your project but because you've been working in this field, what your opinions are on creating peace in Ukraine as a whole. So what do you think are the biggest challenges to create peace in Ukraine right now? Obviously there are lots of them, I'm sure.

Y: Biggest challenge…I think that we will face, in the next year or two, is dealing and integrating the militarized people. This is number one, and the number two is integrating or reintegrating people who are internally displaced, people who left the military zone and came to Ukraine, and there are a lot of challenges connected to those because, I think the best integration, the best way of dealing with them, is giving them jobs.

If you come back from the war and you have a good job, basically you come back to your routine life, you kind of reintegrate yourself naturally, but if you come back to the peaceful life and you see that nothing changed, that nothing that you fought for is in place, that corruption is still going on, the school system is still terrible, that the social care system is not functional, when you see that you were basically ready to give your life for a better Ukraine and it's not there, that's the feeling that will cause a lot of anger, a lot of radicalism, and might cause a lot of bloodshed.

And this is something that a lot of NGOs, a lot of government institutions are trying to deal with right now. I'm not confident enough to see and to understand if it works or not. I know a lot of my friends, my personal friends, are psychologists and they work with the demilitarized people, and there's a lot of energy spent on that, but I think there's so much more to be done, and everybody should be part of this process because every city, every town, every village has these number of soldiers who are fighting right now, and once the war is finished, and it will be finished at some point – maybe not soon but it will be – there will be a lot of people who are dissatisfied, they're not understanding what they were fighting for.

So this is the biggest challenge, I think this is indeed the biggest challenge, and the way of solving this and dealing with this challenge is to either, or maybe not either or, it should be both – it should be comprehensive reforms in the government, which are kind of taking place but not exactly how we should be – people should see that the country is changing, that the system is changing – and second, there should be an economy that will be able to integrate both the demilitarized people and the internally displaced people, because indeed this displacement, we have nearly 1 and a half million people that are displaced, although it's a problem, it's an opportunity.

This people who are leaving – if to be exact, it's 1.2 [correcting my note on number of IDPs] – people who are leaving the area, they are usually people who are against occupation, who are entrepreneurship-minded, who are educated, who are hard-working. It's a great economic potential. It's very important to form a policy that will integrate them, that will give them jobs, and that's what partially UN and EU are trying to deal with, they're providing different grants program, different kind of a small assistances for small businesses, for, etc. And this is good but this should be promoted and information disseminated more widely.

I think those are two ways of dealing with those challenges. They can be all united in one thesis: the system should be reformed. I mean, the corruption should be fought, it's system, basically, we have to reform the system. If this is changed, there will be no war, because we could have finished this war but I feel like there are a lot of traitors within the army, a lot of traitors within the government, who are not interested in finishing this war. The problem is a lot of people don't understand what this war is about – it's been awhile and it's been so unclear what is going on. So…today Obama and Putin are meeting, so maybe we'll hear some news.

K: Yeah, something interesting might come out of that. We'll see. Okay, so I guess this is my final question unless we decide to go back. If you had all the money and all the resources that you could possibly want, what would you do to create peace in Ukraine?

Y: (laughs) I can send you a proposal or a project that I drafted, I was drafting for last two weeks, and actually it's exactly how I see the problem can be solved. And this is replicating our formula of helping and traveling. I see the problem that Ukrainian society is immobile, they do not, their country, they do not know their culture, they do not know their history, they do not know global experiences. We don't think widely, we don't think globally, that's the problem. That's the problem of Ukrainians and other people's too, we are kind of close-minded. So what our project aims to do is to make people travel, make people leave their towns, their villages, and go somewhere. When you're going somewhere, when you're speaking, when you're communicating, it changes you, it transforms you, it gives you the ability to see other stories, to see how other people are living, to get experiences.

So if I had all the money and all the resources and all the admin resources from the government, I would spend them all to invest in our youth in, not my generation, but the younger generations, to make them travel, not only in Ukraine but outside. I would scale up the programs that foster international exchange, that foster international communication, that foster experience-sharing. Here, Ukrainian side is very traditional. We're all scared of changes. And it's clear on Georgian experience when Sakashvilli was implementing his reforms and he basically lost his second elections because people are not ready to take risks, and maybe to sacrifice something, money for the better future. We do not think long term. And because we do not think long term, corruption is fine for us. I mean, you can give hundred hryvnias and you can solve the problem, right now. That's lack of seeing the ten years in the future. And all this comes to this lack of security, when people are not feeling secure, they cannot act, they cannot trade, they cannot think outside of their frame, basically, outside of their square.

So what we are trying to do is this year, to involve not two hundred volunteers, but to involve five hundred, a thousand volunteers, who will travel from, not only from west to east but from east to west, from central to south, from south to west, to create a new network of Ukrainian youth that will be based not on the school system, or not on something formal but will be based on a common principle: to go and help somebody. So the idea is to get on the bus, so 25 people from 25 different oblasts get together, they get on the bus, they spend a week together, this week they help 2-3 families fix their house, families they shouldn't have a house that suffered from the war – they can be a family that just needs help, a family with lots of kids or a family that just doesn't have money to fix the house. So while helping the other, they communicate, so 25 different regions communicate between each other, they form a network that's based on a common principle of helping each other, of serving the other.

And, I think, new Ukrainian leaders should be the ones who can serve, who are not 'cool' English speaking kids who went to study but those should be people who know how to serve, who know how to sacrifice, who know how to think long term, how to see ten years in advance. And giving this, and making those trips that will unite, that will network Ukrainian youth, we are creating in a year, in a 5 year term, we are creating a new, totally new, network of Ukrainian youth. It can be 10,000, it can be 100,000 in a ten year term, and this will be kind of a movement, solidarity in Poland, for example. This will be a movement that's united, it's a base, it's a strong base that has influence in Ukraine, that will have influence. And maybe eventually it will form into a political party or into a political movement or into anything that can change Ukraine, because we realize that the system is so strong, the system is so inside of us, it's kind of an ideology. Corruption is not anymore, it's not a one-time thing, it's ideology that Ukraine lives, unfortunately.

K: Yeah, you're used to it.

Y: We're used to it, exactly. So we want to create a new generation that just, that sees corruption as something unacceptable, something that cannot happen anymore. So basically we are aiming to involve more and more volunteers, and those volunteers are not just going and traveling and helping each other, they come back inspired, they come back seeing and getting those experiences, success stories from other volunteers, and they come back and create those youth centers in their cities, their oblasts, so eventually this will be a network of civic centers in different oblasts. Ideally we will have 24 civic centers in 24 Ukrainian oblasts that will serve as a platform, basically, a national platform of youth people who can implement ideas, who can press the government, who can make them more accountable, who can present Ukraine abroad, who can have a common vision, basically.

There's no strong Ukrainian youth movement right now. There're different regional ones, different volunteer organizations, different political organizations, but there's no single strong Ukrainian youth movement. So that's what we're thinking in long term. Basically, yeah.

K: So it sounds like you're already working to implement your dream project.

Y: Oh yeah, no, I'm definitely – I'm actually going to the US partly because of that, also, we are going to speak with some donors, I'm actually meeting with some tonight, so I mean it's not an idea that I dream about, it's an idea that I'm sure that we'll implement.

K: That's fantastic.

Y: Yeah, I mean, we are implementing it already, we just want to scale it up. And we see that it works and we believe in what we do, it's not my job, it's my hobby, it's our mission in life.

K: We say it's our calling, in my field.

Y: It's the calling, yeah.

K: Well that's great. I think that actually you gave me everything, then. The last part was just the purpose, goals, and objectives and I think you mostly touched on that in the rest of it, and I know you have limited time today, so I'm not going to make you talk too much about that. I think we went through like 50 minutes anyway, so that's great, thank you so much!

END OF INTERVIEW