

# The Nature of Culture: Rites of Interaction Between Ukrainian Refugees and Latvian Society (2022)

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the challenge in migration studies to find a solution to the problem of how to analyse the rapidly emerging and increasing immigration of Ukraine war refugees, which started in 2022 in Latvia as well as in other European Union countries. This topic is important in migration studies to provide national and municipal decision-makers with a scientific perspective and rationale for informed decisions.

In Latvia, the humanities, including philosophy, have not yet been used to understand migration processes, although they do supply a wider context, which is necessary to understand the culture, attitudes, values, and peculiarities of an immigration group. The task of integrating and including the immigrant group presupposes knowledge and recognition of its uniqueness, which is best researched with the methods of the humanities, and significantly complements the approaches of economics, sociology and human geography.

Thus, the research presented in this article uses a wide range of social science research findings, ritual phenomenology, topological hermeneutics, and solutions from micro-group sociology as data sources to complement the understanding of migration as an object with a perspective that also includes human experience and the intersubjective space in which people meet to create community.

The objective of the study is to explore the research hypothesis, based on previous studies and daily observations, that a new social reality is emerging that can be called the newly emerged community of Ukraine in Latvia. This means that communication and reciprocity between most of Latvian society and refugees from the Ukrainian war has been, and is being, established.

The article analyses to what extent Latvian society was ready for the reception and inclusion of refugees from the Ukrainian war; how the inclusion of the concept of place can help to address the issue of the formation of new communities; how rituals reveal a new step towards the creation of communion on both sides of the newly formed community; and how rituals and interactivity interact in rituals involving micro-groups and micro-group forming rituals.

Thus, factors affecting the genesis of the Ukraine in Latvia community were discovered in the analysis of the interactive rituals that confirm the existence of a social reality aimed at integration and inclusion.

Thus, the study reveals the perspectives on the use of resources rooted in culture at the national and municipal levels.

**Keywords:** war refugees, rituals, newly emerged community “Ukraine in Latvia”, place.

## Introduction

The state research program implemented by the Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences at the University of Latvia in the DemoMigPro project (New Research Solutions on Demographic and Migration Processes for the Development of the Latvian and European Knowledge Society. VPP-Letonika-2021/3-0002) aims to supply new knowledge on and solutions to studies of demographic change and migration processes in order to foster the sustainable development of society in Latvia. It presupposes the evaluation of newcomers into various areas, their integration into Latvia, and how inclusive European society is. For the first time in Latvia in the study of human geography, religious science and the philosophy of religion researchers are also involved, together with lawyers, sociologists, demographers and migration specialists. This research program highlights the academically widely discussed connection between existential wellbeing, integration, and social cohesion (Dahlin et al. 2021).

The article deals with the challenge in migration studies which unexpectedly arose with the flow of Ukraine war refugees into European Union countries, including Latvia, after the Russian Federation invasion on February 24, 2022.

As of March 2022 their number was estimated at around 40,000 (37,000 were officially registered), and the flow has increased as war activities have moved to eastern Ukraine.

Therefore the intention, which is relevant to the project's aims, is to create a scientific basis for the understanding of the interaction between the newcomers' community arising from forced emigration to Latvia, and Latvian society. This review is necessary to provide recommendations to state and local government institutions in order to assist their informed decision-making.

The objective of the study is to explore a research hypothesis, based on previous studies and daily observations, that a new social reality is emerging, which could be called the newly emerged community of Ukraine in Latvia. This means that communication and reciprocity between the Latvian society and refugees from the Ukrainian war has been established and continues to be established. To demonstrate this, it is necessary to analyse the genesis of this community in its beginnings in 2022 by coding it as participation in interactive ritual performance, perception, and response processes between Latvian society and Ukrainian war refugees.

The research uses the methodology of philosophy, that is, the phenomenology of inner experience and topological hermeneutics, as well as the interdisciplinary use of other humanitarian and social science approaches. Thus, this article has the following structure, according to the tasks that contribute to the achievement of the objective.

The first section, "Latvia society before the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in 2022", discusses Latvia's societal character from the perspective of social cohesion, which is important to reveal the extent to which society was ready to receive Ukrainian refugees.

More programs were devoted to the study of the Covid-19 pandemic than to any previous crisis in order to understand wellbeing in Latvia. The studies, from the fields of sociology, medicine and human geography, not only revealed the current state of society but also various problems related to people's communication skills, cooperation, solidarity, relationship building in the family and mental health. These studies say a lot about types of social ties and conclude that in Latvia there is weak social cohesion or cooperation outside the personal or group bubble aimed at promoting the common good. Thus, the question arises, can we claim that, and to what extent was, Latvian society ready for the reception and inclusion of refugees from the Ukrainian war?

The second section, “Ukraine in Latvia: the concept of place in migration studies”, deals with the concept of place developed by the Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas. He synthesises human geography and philosophy in the concept of place as a methodological tool to show that migration is not only moving from place to place, but also that migrants take their places with them. That is, one’s own culture, attitude, values, peculiarities, etc., which become the basis for the dynamic cognition of the migrant community in the new place. Through culture, the nature of these people, ethnic groups, and regional peculiarities, in other words, the nature of Ukraine itself, is revealed. How can the involvement of the concept of place help in solving the question of the formation of a new community?

The third section, “Place, ritual, interaction”, begins with a reference to the definition of the ritual. Within philosophy of religion, Jack Williams has used phenomenology to develop the concept of embodied world construction. The rituals highlighted here in the context of interaction between two parts of the newly emerged community occurred during the Easter celebration, a divine liturgy for Ukrainian war refugees, Vyshyvanka Day, war refugees children’s drawings exhibition, and Sunflower Road. In what way do these rituals reveal a new step on the way to generating commonality?

In the fourth section, “Interaction ritual chains in small groups”, I use Randall Collins’ radical microsociology concept of interaction ritual chains to help demonstrate how rituals create interactive ties between Latvia society and Ukrainian war refugees. Interaction between representatives of the Latvian and Ukrainian communities in a micro-group is formed through existing ritual as well through the creation of as new rituals, which connect the intentionality of representatives of both communities in a common field of understanding. Analysed here are the Latvian Midsummer festival, the exchange of culinary traditions in small groups in various locations in Latvia, groups organised to weave camouflage nets and trench candles, art therapy groups, and groups at the House of the Holy Family in Riga. How do rituals and interaction form bonds in micro-groups and through rituals generate community?

The principal results of the research are the application of innovative methodology in migration studies. I also aim to identify the genesis of dialogue between Latvian society and Ukrainian refugees as well as the inception of their integration by analysing interactivity rituals. I am to justify designation of the newly emerged community of Ukraine in Latvia, providing a scientific

foundation for policy-makers to make informed decisions on culture-based inclusiveness experiences.

## **Latvian society before the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in 2022**

Even a cursory glance at social networks is enough to discern phenomena associated with the time of the pandemic lockdown: personal anxiety due to the alarming and frightening manner of information in the mass media; societal divisions over vaccination; lack of communication skills in small groups such as family members; fear of dialogue with oneself in silence.

Looking for ways to improve human well-being in a lockdown situation, researchers focused on human communication practices that do not require a large investment, but only a change in attitude and behaviour. It's noteworthy that the concept of subjective well-being is not considered a homogeneous concept among researchers: "Also in Latvia, subjective well-being is most often identified with life satisfaction, happiness, success, and achievements, at the same time it is just one of the components of life quality" (Apsite-Berina et al. 2021: 29). Surveys show that the main concerns of employees during lockdown were: 1) balance between work duties and personal life (32%); 2) "whether the Covid-19 crisis will affect my company" (31%); 3) how to find the motivation to work (15%) (Aptauja 2021). These results led experts to the understanding that there should be more use of intangible stimuli such as emotional support, personal interest on the part of the employer in employees, and mutual understanding. The importance of outdoor activities in gardens, parks, and other natural areas increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic and was associated with a positive effect on the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals. During lockdown this kind of indisputably beneficial experience allowed one to engage with oneself and to return home to generate, in place of close co-existence with other people, a better home experience in terms of mutual communication and newly discovered values.

Apart from individual struggles to maintain a good work-life balance, there were also intrafamily and distant learning challenges in Latvia, which may have contributed to the increased levels of parental burnout and family violence (Krisjane et al. 2020: 56). There were increased numbers of marriage

conflict and even divorce due to permanent co-habitation during lockdown, as well as a rise in violence at home. (There are no reliable quantitative data in this area.) Improving communication skills and respecting the private space of others were strongly recommended solutions.

It became obvious that the root cause of ill-being is shortcomings in communicative strategies, both in the public sphere and in the field of interpersonal relations, as the emergency adversely affected the populations' well-being: "It affected behaviour and communication with other people within family and society" (Krisjane et al. 2020: 54). Another important indicator of ill-being during the pandemic was mental health. In the experts' evaluation, the mental health of young people is at a critical level, as 63% of young people in Latvia admit that their mental health deteriorated during the pandemic (LETA 2020). In addition, half of the general population considers that the pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health (Leta 2022). Consequently, we can observe an inability to properly share values when communicating.

The results of sociological studies allow us to look at these manifestations of individual ill-being in a wider context as a weakness of "cohesive social capital" based on solidarity in society. Specifically, "Solidarity means that the well-being of one person or of a group is positively related to the welfare of another individual or group.... The concept of solidarity is used to describe emotionally and normatively motivated readiness for mutual support illustrated by the call *One for all, all for one*.... Today, solidarity is understood as the action and set of beliefs which, by supplying mutual support, are focused on society consolidation" (Rungule et al. 2021: 50–51). Based on a study conducted by Riga Stradins University on life during the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers have concluded what the nature of "cohesive social capital" is in Latvia. Specifically, the respondents agreed that they can rely only on the circle of people closest to them, i.e. relatives, friends, associates. However, as social distance increases, trust in other people decreases. The closeness of people in their place of residence decreases, but the trustworthiness of "people in general" becomes even lower. (RSU 2021: 83). In a later analysis of the study, sociologists show how, based on Shalom Schwartz's value research methodology (Schwartz 2013), they have found differences in the values of helpers and non-helpers on a personal level to other people during the Covid pandemic. Comparing the values of helpers and non-helpers, the value of benevolence is more characteristic of help givers, while the value of conformity and power is more characteristic

of nongivers. So then aid providers are characterised by a smaller orientation towards the realisation of one's personal interests, readiness to limit one's interests, caring for the welfare of others, care for their social superiority, status, prestige, or power over other people, less conformity in observing social norms. (Rungule et al. 2021: 54). The level of social solidarity in the survey was measured by the quantitative expression of such factors as capability (a term created by Amartya Sen), mutual trust and reliance. The researchers conclude that "the population's assessment of changes in mutual solidarity/helpfulness during the pandemic does not provide much clarity, as more than half of the surveyed people believe that it has not changed. There are more who believe that solidarity has increased than those who say that it has diminished during the pandemic" (Rungule et al. 2021: 59).

Rungule et al., concluding their review of the study, write: "He/she becomes detached, unsupported, and weak. Therefore, we must go to the opposite end and come to common consciousness. And not only in a narrow sense, what we call bubbles, not just in a circle of like-minded people, but in something that can be based on a wider unity. It is necessary to find or restore the mechanism of how individuals, working together, can feel as something greater than each other separately." (Madris 2021)" (Rungule et al. 2021: 59–60)

At the same time, no studies have been conducted in Latvia on changes in values in society, which would be important to determine what values have changed when faced with the task of accepting refugees from the Ukrainian war after the pandemic.

In studies of other countries at least the general conclusions could be projected onto Latvian society. For instance, in Poland, which is geographically close to Latvia, sociologists concluded that:

our findings are the first to document that a global health concern is likely to produce a rapid reorganisation of what people consider important in life. For instance, people seemed more eager to abandon hedonistic pursuits during lockdown.... The increase of conservative pursuits (valuing security and conformity) corresponds well with previous findings that individuals are more prone to shift towards increasingly conservative values when the social or political context becomes less secure (Bojanowska et al. 2021).

With respect to values, the same sociologists suggested there was a direct link to well-being, i.e., individuals who value openness to change reacted to the Covid-19 pandemic more favourably. This might suggest that individuals who are open to change might had different interpretations of upcoming new events, seeing them as an opportunity for self-exploration and self-expression, even if these events were as severe as a worldwide pandemic (Bojanowska et al. 2021). Here “self-exploration” and “self-expression” could be rephrased in philosophical terms as a person’s search for authenticity in life, for a way to be, instead of just to function, in a certain social role.

Undoubtedly, the conclusions of the Polish study cannot be applied directly to the situation in Latvia. The assumption that could be made when reviewing media reports about victims of the pandemic and the public’s reaction to it, especially when it comes to people known to the public, such as the journalist Rolands Tjarve or the composer Mārtiņš Brauns, is that people in Latvia also feel threatened and pay more attention to values that were not so much in the foreground before.

Here it would be necessary to explain in what sense the concept of value is used in this article. Amid academic debate about the character and nature of value, the concept of value as understood here comes from Latin or medieval philosophy where value is a good (*bonum*), or good is a value (Rintelen 1972: 202). However, the term ‘value’ alone is not used in these texts. The modern term ‘value’ comes from Immanuel Kant’s transcendental philosophy, where he replaced *bonum* with the German *Wert* i.e., ‘value’. Value or good is of an ideal nature and characterises the activity of the human intellect, which inevitably assigns a value or good to everything that it meets in cognition. Values in a person’s inner world form a dynamic hierarchical structure that can change under the influence of various factors. Within ethics there is the question of what is good in subjective perception and what is good objectively. Sociological surveys rely more on so-called common sense, or the accepted idea in society that some concept relates to value, for example safety.

Among the values in Latvian society could be the value of life, although academically this has been discussed in only a few articles (Ijabs 2020). The rise in deaths from Covid-19, and personal contact with the deaths of family members, friends or co-workers have led to a reassessment of what had previously been lost in the everyday rush – the crucial importance of the presence of these close personal contacts. The value of truth proved to be very important both



for information on the treatment of Covid-19 and for orientation in a mixture of information and conspiracy theories, as well as for issues of social justice, such as the use of state funds in the pandemic, access to medical services, job retention and economic support of small businesses. Lockdown also caused people to rediscover the value of communication, as face-to-face meetings, including between family members and friends, were limited. In this way the lockdown forced a rediscovery of the value of human freedom and thus led to a rethinking of how human freedom could be better exploited, particularly in the search for an authentic way of life through self-exploration.

Consequently, when trying to outline the situation of Latvian society's values under the influence of the pandemic, and before the arrival of refugees from the Ukrainian war, and taking into account the studies described above, it is possible to make two judgments: 1) there is a lack of solidarity in society in terms of understanding and action in promoting the common good; 2) the world of the subject's values has been significantly affected by feelings of vulnerability posed by the dangers of the pandemic, although there is a lack of data to explore exactly how values changed. However, if we extrapolate the research conducted in Poland, also a country in the Baltic Sea region, we can assume that the threat of the pandemic has also affected the value system of people in Latvia; at least a large part of society has become aware of their own values related to life, health, safety, quality of human presence in the family, communication, etc.

Russia's full-scale invasion Of Ukraine and the start of the war were perceived by Latvian society as a huge threat as people realised that all former Soviet bloc countries and republics were potentially in danger. As Latvian ex-president Valdis Zatlers said in an interview on national television: "The war in Ukraine has opened the historical scars of the Latvian people" (Zatlers, 2022). In social media, in public discussions, and in private conversations, people expressed their concern about the possibility of a repetition of the occupation, deportations and persecution of the Soviet regime if the Ukrainian state did not stand up to the invaders. This would obviously be one of the factors that further deepened the understanding of other important values of the common good, such as statehood, sovereignty, freedom, etc. The actualisation of collective historical memory of the many wars that took place in the territory of Latvia, including the recent Second World War, also contributed to the greater openness of society and therefore to the acceptance of refugees from Ukraine. Such

a transformation of the nature of social cohesion was necessary in order that Latvian society would become much more open to the reception of refugees from the Ukraine war and to the activity of providing assistance and support.

Meanwhile, migration researchers faced a new challenge, for example how to describe and analyse the rapidly growing community of war refugees?

## Ukraine in Latvia: the concept of place in migration studies

The ‘Ukraine in Latvia’ concept is appropriate when describing the process of interaction between Latvian society and the community of newcomers in 2022. In this interaction, migration reveals not only the movement of people from one place in the world to another, as per *the classical definition of migration, migration also entails the appearance of a certain place – in this case Ukraine – in the host society, starting with values and attitudes, ending with the regional culinary diversity of the home nation. In other words, Ukrainian migration brings to Latvia the very place, Ukraine itself, with its regional differences, way of living, identity, attitudes, interactions, and values.* What is decisive here is the idea of keeping one’s place from the home country. Professor of Philosophy from Tasmania University (Australia) Jeff Malpas explains more precisely the importance of place, writing, that “it is, indeed, only in and through a place that the world presents itself – it is in place, and our own being-in-place, that the world begins” (Malpas 2018: 12). In terms of migration studies, this means that migrants should be seen as people who do not change places, but rather as people who bring place with them. Malpas’s methodological developments allow us to start research on the Ukrainian war refugee community in exactly this way.

‘Place’ is one of the most essential concepts in geography, which also deals with processes of migration. In the 1970s, the positivist paradigm in the science of geography, which ruled from the 1950s, changed and place in human geography began to be viewed more in human terms as a location, a clearly defined point in space, and a meeting place of meaning where human emotions, beliefs – in a word, experience – are important: “to be human is to be in a place” (Creswell 2008: 134–135). Diverse ways of knowing and practicing geography are acceptable today, just as in the relationship between human geography and philosophy.

Jeff Malpas offers an alternative to the postmodernist and poststructuralist theories of place that have prevailed for a long time in the academic world. The original triangular structure, in which place, people and human relations with the place were interconnected, was later expanded by Malpas through phenomenology and hermeneutics, associating place with openness, as described in Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology in which existence and the activity of human existence are realised ( Malpas 2012).

Malpas also focuses on the interpretation of the concept of place, because the explanation of the relationship between man and place and human activity requires the inclusion of an epistemological dimension, which becomes possible with the concept of space characteristic of transcendental philosophy (Malpas 2008: 50). Currently, in the synthesis of philosophy and geography achieved by Malpas, he describes what it means to think topographically, using place, space, and other geographical concepts (Malpas 2017). Malpas applies the principles of topological hermeneutics (Malpas 2022) in the study of individual places, for example, to the historical and modern significance of the countryside, the city of Jerusalem, etc., integrating the findings of religious studies, the history of ideas, migration, urban planning, historical memory, and identity studies, thus encouraging philosophy specialists to use this approach in research on migration.

The pre-existing community of Ukrainian immigrants in Latvia had not merged with Latvian society but had created their own community, in which they practice the values and attitudes that were common before they were forced to leave Ukraine. War refugees from Ukraine are a completely different community and are different in their desire to return home rather than make efforts to take root in their temporary home.

The demographic landscape of Latvia shows that the Ukrainian ethnic minority in Latvia formed and grew after the Second World War when Soviet policy artificially promoted increasing numbers of Soviet citizens to relocate to the Latvia SSR. In the early 1990s, after the restoration of independence, the number of Ukrainians decreased rapidly due to both emigration and a decline in natural growth. The number of Ukrainians in Latvia in 1989 was 92,100, in 2000 63,600, and in 2016 44,600. Thus, the reduction from 1989 to 2016 was 47,500 (Zvidriņš 2022). It is difficult to talk about the visibility of Ukrainians in the overall activities of Latvian minorities until 2022. During this year, the Ukrainian Congress of Latvia became an active organisation in diverse types

of humanitarian aid and political support campaigns for Ukraine. Thus, thanks to joint action in support of Ukraine, we can certainly talk about a rapprochement between the existing Ukrainian ethnic minority and the community of war refugees, as well as the formation of a much greater understanding between Latvian Ukrainians and Latvians.

War refugees are people who have fled war and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. On July 12, 2022, United Nations figures showed that at least 12 million people have fled their homes since Russia's invasion. Meanwhile, Ukrainian war refugees, as observed in Latvia and in other countries, stand out because of their wish to return to Ukraine. In November 2022, the national news portal reported that more and more refugees who came to Latvia from Ukraine and spent several months here are returning to their homeland. Latvian media has written continuously about this trend since the spring of 2022. Others return to spend the difficult winter here, in a familiar place. Meanwhile, responsible officials do not have accurate data on the movement of refugees from Latvia to Ukraine and back, while a slight decrease in the number of refugees can be seen by the number of refugee attending the support centre in Riga and the amount of aid paid out (LSM 2022).

Because of the refugees coming from Ukraine Latvian perception of Ukraine changed rapidly. Previously, stereotypes about Ukraine were determined by the legacy of the Soviet era, as well as by gaps in information about what had happened in Ukraine over the last 30 years.

In the context of the war launched by Russia against Ukraine, analysts conclude that it is necessary to consider the significant social changes since the declaration of Ukraine's independence in 1991. The events of Euromaidan in 2013–2014 have been an important reference point for the Revolution of Respect and Freedom in Ukraine:

The desire of Ukrainians to become part of the European Union is based on common values and a sense of belonging to one space of civilisation. Young people who first came to Maidan defended democratic values: human dignity, freedom, human rights, voting rights, independence, freedom of speech, independence of the state, homeland, family, and much more. It is with these values that Ukrainians associate the European Union. (Institute Respublika 2018)

A 2021 sociological survey showed that, when asked what their main values were, 45% of Ukrainians answered freedom of speech, 36% answered family, 31% answered prosperity, 31% answered the opportunity to criticise the government, and 30% answered Ukraine's independence. In answers to questions about Ukrainian symbols, the researchers wrote with a smile, "borscht with pampochka" is not the main thing, but rather statehood and ethnicity: 60% of the answers were about the flag, 52% about the anthem, 46% pointed to the language, 36% to the coat of arms and 29% to vyshyvanka (Ukrainian traditional embroidery). Other answers, with significantly fewer votes, were dumplings, borscht, Ukrainian nature, and songs. Choices like these, as the researchers conclude, are the first step towards realising the existence of a state, rather than just a territory inhabited by Ukrainians (Andriy Kotenskyi 2021).

Evaluating changes in public opinion over the past decade, researchers assume that the election campaigns of recent years have raised the confidence of Ukrainian citizens. They have started to believe that elections at various levels in Ukraine are run fairly: in this case the majority – 55% – are convinced of this (Yurydychna Hazeta 2020).

At the same time, the 2018 study found that 84% of young people name freedom as the main value (in comparison the figure for the middle generation is 80% and for the older generation 77%) (TUESWU 2016).

However, this is not only the result of the change of opinion after 2014 but also the success of the work on updating values at the national level. The national Values – Our Wall campaign promotes the actualisation of values, especially among school-age youth. For example, a team of animators connected with the Active Citizens Community held an event in a Dnipro secondary school that highlighted what values have been defended in the history of Ukraine, what values Ukrainians joined the Orange Revolution to promote, and what values are so important that everyone should defend them. The conversation they initiated was also about self-sacrifice, the spirit of the people, spiritual strength, and heroism. Another example comes from Khmilnytsia, a regional coordination centre of the Active Citizens Community, where a meeting was held with school-age youth in local libraries. At the end of the campaign, the students built a 'protective wall' from specially prepared bridges on which they wrote the values they were ready to defend. These values were: family, love, national independence, friendship, peace, unity, mercy, freedom, justice, trust, and honesty (Institute Respublica 2019).

Interaction between Ukrainian war refugees and the majority of Latvian society can be characterised as the formation of a new community in Latvia, i.e., drawing on the above, *place*. A meeting of two cultures that seek mutual understanding. The community of ‘Ukraine in Latvia’.

## Place, ritual, interaction

The urgent need for the mutual acquaintance and coexistence of two communities in one space creates the need for cognitive rituals (Boyer 2020), which could describe the newly emerged Ukraine in Latvia community.

In the field of ritual studies, there are many definitions of the term cognitive ritual, although the general idea can be expressed as a sequence of actions that include gestures, words, symbolic actions and revered objects. Within philosophy of religion, Jack Williams has developed the concept of embodied world construction, based on phenomenology (Williams 2023: 1–20). He argues that rituals can shape and reshape the structure of an individual’s perceptual world. Embodiment in rituals has already been discussed in psychology before, understanding a situation through using bodily senses in a sort of sensory engagement that is linked with inter-subjectivity (Uland 2012). The embodiment concept also includes the interaction of verbal and nonverbal semantic levels in the performance which generate the richness of meaning in ritual performance (Wiseman 2022). Embodiment refers to a human person as an embodied spirit, which allows one to grasp the inner spiritual and cultural world of a person and point to various forms of expression in the ritual, including understanding the various functions of the ritual. The phrase ‘world construction’ describes the ritual formation or restoration of one’s culture and society, and one’s place in it in response to significant, challenging life situations.

In some studies of the relationship between place and rituals, special attention has been paid to the connection with the political background. Thus, for instance, in Israel/Palestine the dynamic of sacred places is central and becomes a path to claim land (Stadler 2020: 105–136). Adapting this to Ukraine in Latvia rituals, it could be said that their political background is important, and that the rituals also contain a fundamental demand for the existence and independence of the Ukrainian state.

In formulating the “radical microsociology” approach to society, Randall Collins presents the concept of “Interaction Ritual Chains” (Collins 2005). The very different social phenomena in our social lives are driven by the common force of rituals of interaction. Each person flows from situation to situation, attracted by this interaction. Avoiding further specific application of this theory in social life, here it is possible to establish that the most important aspect of interaction rituals is that they promote the cohesion of sociality, in this case the mutual acquaintance and cooperation of two communities, Latvian and Ukrainian.

Summarising the heuristic possibilities in the construction of a unified knowledge approach to synthesising these structural elements, we get the view that war refugees or forced migration participants in Latvia bring with them their place, i.e. Ukraine, their specific place of life in it, and their attitude towards it. Ritual performances are related to their world, their place, and the construction of their attitudes towards it, embodying this place, their cultural world, in the new place, Latvia. In addition, refugees’ rituals are cognitive, as they focus on their rapid and dynamic introduction to the new place of residence and their interaction with the community of that place. In turn, the *local place* community starts the path of interaction rites by participating in the performance of these rites. Interaction between both parts of this community takes place by being included in the events of the Ukrainian ritual calendar, which are not museum-like shows but are living rituals as in Ukraine itself, with an emotional value that is heightened by the reality of war.

Meanwhile, “ritual is not being together in conversation but a being together of a group in action” (Palmer 2000: 384). Ritual shapes the common life, and from this community with the Other and non-verbal interaction later proceeds language activity (Grondin 2001: 46). From the perspective of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics of play-festival-ritual, we have a case of continuing critical, meaningful conversation in society, with society, and about society.

The first mutual communication experience took place in the Easter Celebration.

Hundreds of Ukrainian refugees streamed through Old Riga on a cold and rainy day on Sunday, April 24, 2022, for the Greek Catholic Easter service. It was held in the Greek Catholic chapel of the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Riga and was overcrowded, as until that time the Ukrainian congregation was very small.

Unlike in Latvia, where Latin Rite Catholicism prevails, in Ukraine, the largest number of Catholics belong to the Byzantine Rite. A survey found that 71.7% of the population of Ukraine declared themselves believers. About 67.3% of the population declared adherence to one of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, 7.7% were Christian with no declared denominational affiliation, 9.4% Ukrainian Byzantine Rite Catholics, 2.2% Protestants, 0.8% Latin Rite Catholics, 1–2% Muslim (Razumkov Center 2016).

Therefore, so-called Greek or Eastern Catholics make a great number of believers in Ukraine, and thus also among the refugees. The divine service was led by Father Roman Sapuzhak, a Ukrainian priest who has been serving in Latvia for several years. After the service Ukrainian people in Latvia celebrated Easter at the House of the Holy Family. Citizens from Kyiv, Poltava, and Chernihiv gathered for the event, but a new influx of refugees was expected when people who had managed to escape from Mariupol arrived.

The meeting was initially confusing, as if people were afraid to accidentally spoil the first communication experience. The Latvians were restrained and the refugees stood quietly along the walls, waiting for the arrival of the clergy who would bless the agape festival. Then one of the refugee women dared to ask for hot tea because the day was cold and rainy, and believers were patiently standing outside the small chapel of the Ukrainian congregation, which is in the wing of the Church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Riga. It was like a revitalising signal, because an active movement on the part of the Latvians immediately began, and everyone was invited in for a hot drink in a caring and encouraging fashion. A dynamic society of people communicating with each other was formed in front of our eyes. The event was blessed by Father Roman Sapuzhak and the Archbishop of Riga Zbignevs Stankevics, who said that according to the Holy Scriptures, by welcoming the people of Ukraine, we had shown hospitality to Christ himself. He was visiting us in the form of Ukrainian people, bringing a blessing. The event was organised by Caritas Latvija, a Catholic charity organisation.

Discussing this episode with the aid of the hermeneutic communication theory of Hans Georg Gadamer, the problem is of generating mutual understanding in a dialogical way. The will to understand meets the resistance of the Other, which forces a critical look at one's previous views and stereotypes, creating sensitivity to the Other, which is a prerequisite of dialogism. It is necessary to suspend previous expectations of meaning, as Gadamer says, and to be open



to what is happening, allowing the truth to manifest itself (Gadamer 1999: 257). The hermeneutic situation of silence, during which the intentionality of the persons of both communication sides was focused on not allowing previous expectation to show themselves, was solved by a woman simply asking for hot tea. Further, the internationalities of the mutual wish to be open to each other and to communicate led to Gadamer's terms of mutual understanding.

Usually, preconceived notions, even stereotypes, as Gadamer points out, are deeply rooted and interfere with the dialogism of communication. However, in this case, what determined the mutual openness and the cessation of disturbances arising from previous assumptions, or the suspension of expectations of meaning, were the upheavals that took place in personal experience after the start of the war in Ukraine. From the phenomenological point of view, experience:

marks our singular, irreplaceable, and unique vantage point onto our worlds. It highlights our fragility, precarity, vulnerability, and finitude. It delimits regions of possibility and constraint, of acting and suffering, that coalesce, transform, and dissipate in the shifting moments that are undergone in the arc of any given life.... Edmund Husserl's famous call to return 'back to the things themselves!' (*zurück zu den Sachen selbst!*) was a commitment to examine all phenomena as they show themselves. (Zigon 2021)

Therefore, spontaneous weeping after the beginning of the war was a common phenomenon, by both Ukrainian and Latvian women. This was seen both in TV interviews and in various publications, as well as in everyday communication. Sure, Latvian women encountered the war only internally, reading the news, watching the Ukrainian TV channel Freedom, and meeting Ukrainian war refugees. In terms of human textual articulation, it was a complete *atopon*, or dead-end situation, as described by hermeneutics, because our society still lacks epistemological power to deal with the collective historical post-traumatic situation arising from the war, deportations, and Soviet occupation regime.

However, the new war brought it up to date and created a new layer. Issues of identity and memory in post-Soviet societies are often characterised in the context of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Post-traumatic stress as an existential condition still affects human life. For example, some psychologists

believe that the very high suicide rate in Russia and the Baltic countries is a consequence of Stalinism (Tracevskis 2004). Culture can soften the blow of the consequences of a collective trauma if it has the tools and practices to provide people with the ability to reproduce the meaning of what happened and to explain it. Otherwise, there is epistemological insufficiency, or people are insufficiently armed with the necessary knowledge (epistemic disempowerment) (Young de 1998).

Therefore spontaneous weeping as a response to this inner silence and the impossibility to express the experience of war and refugees' presence is transformative. In accordance with phenomenological content analysis it includes a holding together of the apparent polarities of human existence, apprehension of the "tragic dimension of human existence" seen as universal rather than uniquely personal, a sense of being startled, awakened, and triggered into an expanded awareness of reality, and an inward sense of freedom, vastness, or pure consciousness from which all activities begin (Anderson 1996). The weeping arises from the heart and signifies an open and softened position. Religious traditions honour the gift of tears and have found ways to ritualise it. These transcendent moments go beyond what the mind can understand: "This response draws out our deep feelings of connection with others. Sometimes in their suffering, pain, and isolation, and at other times in their joy and celebration. Practicing the gift of tears not only draws us closer to others, it also signals our gratitude to God for giving us the primal emotions that come from the heart" (Brussat 2020). Weeping expressed and continues to express the participation of the people of Latvia in the suffering of the people of Ukraine, an interaction with these people that creates a unity that is deeply lived in the heart and demands active participation through acts of help and support.

The Greek Catholic congregation in Riga has become the centre of divine liturgy rituals for Ukrainian war refugees.

Liturgical celebrations also serve to connect refugees with their homeland, as, for example, the Head of the Pastoral Migration Department of the UGCC, Bishop Stepan Sus, led the Liturgy for Ukrainians in Riga, on May 29, on the 30th anniversary of the Ukrainian parish of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ – the official title of the congregation.

The archbishop thanks God for 30 years of our parish here in Riga.

This place is special to many of our faithful, added His Excellency. In

the times of the underground, when in Ukraine it was difficult to pray and educate our future pastoral care, many of our priests studied in the Riga seminary. In the late 70s in Ukraine, there were no samples, no icons, and no UGCC church calendars. In fact, all the first religious Ukrainian literature was born here in Riga, and it was transmitted to Ukraine: “Thus, our faithful had the opportunity to live a church life and pray” (UGCC, 2022).

Archbishop Stepan Sus refers to the deep spiritual ties that united Ukraine and Latvia when, thanks to the efforts of Julian Cardinal Vaivods, permission was obtained from the Soviet authorities for representatives of Ukraine to study at the Riga Theological Seminary. Unity at the spiritual level, which was formed historically and is now implemented in pastoral care, is important. The lay support system allowed students to sign up in Riga, live and work in Riga, and study at the seminary. Now six of them are bishops in the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

A genuine liturgical ritual of interaction was the Latin rite service in the church of St Francis, on July 31. The Dudaryk National Academic Choir Chapel from Lviv gave concerts in Latvia, collecting donations for the support of Ukraine. The choir’s participation in the Holy Mass of the Latin Rite, celebrated by Father Roman Sapuzhak in Ukrainian, proved to be a special event.

On August 15 the Greek Catholic congregation also organised a pilgrimage for refugees during most important holiday for Latvian Catholics, the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, to Aglona sanctuary, where they participated in the Stations of the Cross service, praying for Ukraine.

The first Ukrainian ritual performed openly in public was Vyshyvanka Day celebrated on May 19, in Riga. “For the first time, Ukrainians have so acutely felt the meaning of the well-known expression about the embroidered code of the nation” (Bauskas Dzīve 2022). Each Ukrainian county had its own way of embroidering this shirt, so that the pattern would determine the area and traditions specific to each county. Someone got that shirt by miraculously surviving in a closet in a destroyed house. And someone lost it along with the house. Someone is looking for it in another country, where the war drove him out. Some are under occupation, risking their lives, while others celebrated this holiday for the first time because they felt such a need for the first time, wrote the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelensky in her Instagram account.

In Riga Vyshyvanka was celebrated outside the National Opera with a concert of Ukrainian songs and an impromptu show of folk costumes from different regions. As a reminder of wartime, one of the ladies in national costume had put on a bulletproof vest and a helmet. The event was also attended by representatives of Latvian regions in folk costumes. This is the point from which Ukraine war refugees' rituals started to interact with the Latvian ones, as members of Latvian folklore groups participated in their national costumes, performing songs and dances alongside Ukrainian Vyshyvanka performers. In this way this became a ritual belonging to two communities performed in one place.

Another element of the interaction comes from traditional folk art masters, for example weaving belts and blankets and knitting gloves and socks using Latvian ornaments in social networks. These crafters shared their surprise at how similar, even identical, Ukrainian embroidery patterns are to Latvian symbols, for example the 'morning star' ornament (Auseklītis). Such a comparison of Latvian and Ukrainian ornaments had already been performed by a Ukrainian gymnasium student in Riga (Bazanova 2009), where the commonalities and differences in Latvian and Ukrainian ornaments were discussed based on geometric patterns and decoratively simplified plant and zoomorphic forms.

The exhibition of war refugee children's drawings, May 9 to June 17 2022, became a ritual of interaction between Latvian society and the Ukrainian refugee community. It is a ritual because people in very large numbers felt it necessary to attend this exhibition, which was also widely advertised in the national media. It embodied inner openness to refugees and to Ukraine's heroic fight. People bodily moved to the exhibition, used sensory perception to touch the destiny of Ukrainians as seen by the eyes of children. Visiting the exhibition became a confirmation of the construction of a world that is free and lives in peace but requires sacrifice to be protected.

The exhibition featured around 200 drawings created by young Ukrainian artists in the children's room of the refugee aid centre in Riga, established with the help of the Caritas organisation. But the original idea came from the art historian Gabriela Cabiere, a prominent Moscow art scholar and exhibition producer who left Russia eight years ago for political reasons and moved to Riga:

The children are initially very closed, they wanted to be left alone, but when the artist carefully works with them, shows them different colours and techniques, then the child opens, and their creativity is fully ex-

pressed. There are so many colours and themes here! There are homes, journeys, but of course a lot of war themes. A lot of pets, especially cats, which many of them have left in Ukraine (LSM 2022 a).

There are both similarities and differences when compared to previous research on drawings by war refugee children. In their drawings, Ukrainian children depict everything related to home: pets, houses, family, sea, ships, vehicles, flags, and their native towns. This is in line with the results obtained in studies by various researchers on various occasions, including drawings by Balkans and Syrian war refugees, which showed that depiction of houses were represented in 60% of children's free drawings (Farokhi & Hashemi 2011). The researchers suggested that it was probably that home was something refugee children longed for the most and that depictions of home symbolised the "emotions and stability that are achieved by living in the home, a place where basic needs are pursued" (Sokić et al. 2019: 256).

An immediately noticeable and characteristic feature of Ukrainian children's works is the dominance of the sun in most of the drawings. In an analysis of Palestinian and Syrian children's drawings in Turkey, a researcher explains the Sun as a symbol of the mother: "A child cannot exist without his/her mother just like the Earth cannot exist without the Sun. Sunny weather, clouds with light colours, and birds represent the happiness and joy of life, therefore the child seems to have positive feelings and mood (happiness, joy, etc.), which are reflected in his/her drawing" (Oztabak 2020: 489).

Ukrainian war refugees in Latvia are women with children, and teenagers, because the men of the family are subject to military service and so have remained in Ukraine. Therefore, many drawings use light and sunny colours to depict Ukrainian soldiers positively as defenders. Often these are members of the children's families.

The drawings can be used as a triage tool to assess the emotional state of refugee children, and as art therapy. A mother of one of the Ukrainian artists, Lydia, observed that drawing serves as therapy for the child and as an opportunity to survive the horrors: "She even took pencils to the bomb shelter and drew there, because it helped distract her thoughts. And even now it helps, but she has not yet fully recovered. Now she has become much shyer, she wasn't like that before" (LSM 2022a).

The exhibition of children's drawings aroused great interest, as it was an opportunity to get acquainted with the children's emotional worlds through their own eyes, without burdening them with unnecessary curiosity. The quiet interaction, on the one hand, allowed Ukrainians to discover their world in a childishly pure way, while on the other hand, Latvian society could heal its experience of the current war, which reopened the wounds of historical memory.

However, to be clear, the drawings shown in the exhibition in Latvia are different from the works of children who experienced devastating and cruel warfare in Ukraine. In October 2022 an exhibition by the Polish–Ukrainian Archives Project opened in front of the Russian Embassy in Riga, titled “Mum, I Don't Want War!”. The project includes more than 10,000 children's drawings about war and peace in Ukraine and aims to capture what children experience during wartime in their own country. In turn, Poland's National Archives holds more than 7,000 children's drawings from 1946, produced as part of a post-war initiative to enable young Poles to process their trauma from the Nazi occupation. By putting images and words together in thematic groups: fighting, occupation, family, repression, resistance, destruction, victory, hope, “the creators of the exhibition want to emphasise how similar the scenarios of invading wars are” (Republic of Poland Website 2022).

The common interactive ritual of Sunflower Road became the embodiment of meanings that the sunflower has in Ukraine's culture, and thus in the Ukrainian world. It takes place against the backdrop of hostilities and solidarity with Ukraine from Latvia's side as well.

Sunflowers are a visible part of Ukrainian culture, representing the country's spirit and identity. They have become an important symbol in Ukraine, appearing in many places such as flags, coins, stamps, postcards, etc. Ukrainians view the vibrant flower as a symbol of peace and resilience. Sunflowers represent adoration, loyalty and longevity. Known as happy flowers, sunflowers are the perfect gift to bring joy to someone's day or as a treat for yourself. After the Chornobyl nuclear power plant disaster in 1986, Ukrainians planted sunflowers in the devastated area. The flowers not only represented renewal and hope, they also helped extract toxins from the soil. Globally,

awareness of the association between sunflowers and Ukraine has grown since February 24, the first day of the invasion, when the news outlet *Ukraine World* shared a video on Twitter showing a Ukrainian

woman in Henychesk giving sunflower seeds to Russian soldiers, with the striking instruction to put the seeds in their pockets so the flowers will grow where they die. The video has racked up 8.6 million views on Twitter since it was uploaded on February 24 (Waxman 2022).

In 2022, the sunflower became the main symbol of nature in Latvia, used to show support for Ukraine. As early as March 24, the campaign to plant sunflowers began, initially covering the cultivation of seedlings. In May, the time came to put the carefully nurtured seedlings in the ground to take root: “Sunflower beds and fields are also a way that we can symbolically tell the Ukrainian refugees that we care about what is happening and are ready to help”, say the initiators of the campaign (LV 2022). The campaign was widespread in Latvia, with people planting sunflowers in municipalities, in individual gardens and near apartment blocks. Often, in big cities, the plantations were destroyed overnight. But by the end of summer, many people were happy to display their sunflowers; some had even grown taller than the person who planted them. In many local municipalities, people organised their own Sunflower Way, referring to the experience of the Baltic Way. So, for example, the leader of Ķekava district declared:

In 1989, the Baltic Way wound through here very close, when Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia literally joined hands, demonstrating unity in the fight for independence. Today, the whole world joins hands with the Ukrainian people. We are also part of it, providing support to Ukrainians, and we are not going to stop. We all know here that together we are a loud voice that resonates in so many ways. We have sunflower seeds. I invite you to sow them, because at first a small seed is just a whisper, but in the fall there will already be a chorus of sunflowers. Let’s build the first meters of Sunflower Way together! (Kekavas Novads 2022).

Everyone was welcome to take part in the Sunflower Road flash event in Riga on August 24, Ukraine’s Independence Day, in support of Ukraine, by lining up along the route from the refugee support centre to the Ukrainian embassy.

“We sat with our friends and talked about how we want to celebrate Ukraine’s Independence Day with a straight back, with some beautiful gesture, despite the difficult time. We understood that we should send a salute to the courage of Ukraine. We do that by sending this bouquet of sunflowers”, says the author

of the idea Laura Čaupale, a member of the Ukraine Friends' Association (Butkevičs 2022).

The people passed the bouquet of the national flower of Ukraine from hand to hand, shouting 'Glory to Ukraine' to each other. After that, in the centre of Riga, already with sunflowers in their hands, the people continue their journey to the Ukrainian embassy. Along the way, more and more Ukrainian Independence Day celebrants gathered to participate in the campaign with their own sunflowers in their hands and dressed in appropriate symbols. The event attracted many people because it recalled The Baltic Road, a peaceful political demonstration that took place on 23 August 1989 when approximately two million people joined hands forming a 600 km human chain through the Baltic countries, thus showing their unity in their efforts to move towards freedom.

Analysis shows that it was the Baltic Way in the collective historical memory in Latvia that was the constituent element of the rituality of that event. Specifically, it was the repetition of an activity that had crucial significance in the Baltic States pushing for the restoration of independence; at least this was the event with the loudest echo around the world, convincing other nations of the seriousness and peacefulness of Baltic nations' intentions. Therefore, the Sunflower Way was the embodiment of support and hope for Ukraine.

## **“It is something that unites us”: interaction ritual chains in small groups**

The next step was taken on the path to a two-fold community of interactive rites, along with the prevalence of rituals in micro-groups. Borrowing the concept from the foundations of Collins' micro-sociology, at the same time more emphasis is placed here on the two-fold connection between ritual and micro-group. First, interaction between representatives of the two communities in a micro-group is formed due to rituals. Second, new rituals are conducted in micro-groups, which connects the intentionality of representatives of both communities in a common field of understanding.

One example of the first was the Latvian Midsummer festival. The Summer Solstice is undoubtedly one of the main holidays of the year and should be celebrated in nature. In many places, preparations for the celebration are made by repeating traditions and learning songs with the special sing-song cry “līgo!”.



The activities include gathering herbs, watching the sun rise and set, drinking beer by a bonfire, grilling meat, eating traditional Midsummer cheese (with lots of caraway seeds), singing and dancing, jumping over the bonfire, lighting a special bonfire at the end of a pole, and rolling a burning wheel down a hill to see if it will be a good year. Women wear wreaths of meadow flowers, and men with the name Jānis are crowned with a wreath of oak leaves because the oak symbolises strength and power.

However, in 2022, in many *places*, Midsummer festivities were prepared in such a way as to be appealing to Ukrainian war refugees. War refugees in Latvia were accommodated not only in Riga but also in rural tourism hotels, holiday homes on farms, the public buildings of local communities, etc., at the request of the owners. Cares, difficulties and work stress stopped for a moment during the Midsummer festival, in fact it was almost the first moment when representatives of both communities could freely devote themselves to celebrations, communication, and communion in the very favourable summer conditions in nature, with ritual activities that loosened and relaxed those present. Every culture manifests its nature (*physis, natura*, being) in this interaction, which includes connection with nature as a shared value.

Thus, in the Saulkrasti region, the Kalniņi family introduced their celebration traditions to Ukrainian war refugees who live in Latvia: four Ukrainian women live and work on the family farm, but the owner himself still regularly takes cars to Ukraine. To cheer up her employees, owner Klaida decided to show how Latvians celebrate St. John's Day. In the family, four integral parts of the holiday are important at Midsummer: cheese tying, the bonfire, the sun gates, and, when the sun sets, offerings to the fire. Ukrainian volunteers from the association in Riga also participated.

Summarising the opinions of Ukrainians about the holiday, one prevalent opinion is how wonderful the holiday is in nature. There is an exchange of information about how the same holiday – Ivan Kupala Day – is celebrated in Ukraine, how the day of welcoming the Cuckoo is celebrated and what is eaten and drunk (Sidoroviča 2022). In Ukraine, as Violeta Nikolayenko, leader of Berendejka, a Ukrainian folklore group, says, “in the morning, they bring drinks, make wreaths, guys cut wood and make a fire, it takes all night. There is a feast of eggs, oatmeal, pancakes and beer. If it is a rich village, then there is also meat. Otherwise, such a village, such a table.” (TV3 2022).

Elsewhere, Latvian singer of Ukrainian descent Katrīna Gupalo took part in the festivities, bringing with her a Ukrainian doll Bereginya, who symbolically protects the family and the house. Her father, a famous archaeologist, has often talked about similarities in Latvian and Ukrainian culture, even in language. Katrīna says: “It is something that unites us, which is why we support Ukraine so well and warmly now... This closeness comes from deep down, although the temperament of Latvians is northern and for Ukrainians southern, that power is felt, and at the solstice, there are many similar things” (TV3 2022).

New rituals were conducted in newly emerging micro-groups involved in the support of Ukraine, appearing in all of Latvia. At the beginning of March 2022 a Latvian newspaper reported:

When the mind refuses to accept Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine, the heart itself goes to war against the occupiers. In a brief time, several initiatives of active Latvian people have gained unfathomable popularity, and hundreds of other people have been involved in the production of useful goods for the defenders of Ukraine: they are sewn, woven, and welded. This production is sent to Ukraine through carefully tested routes, where it is directly at the disposal of the local national guard (Ēvalde 2022).

Many people were involved: municipalities, schools, groups of enthusiasts, artists, handicraftsmen, and volunteers after work in their free time. Students at a secondary school said that “preparing a camouflage net could be compared to making a dream catcher, only this dream is for peace in the world” (Ēvalde 2022).

As winter approached, people began to knit woollen socks with gorgeous Latvian patterns for the defenders of Ukraine: five tonnes, or more than 51,000 pairs, was the generous contribution of Latvian knitters to Ukrainians in the harsh winter of 2022. In autumn we started to find announcements like this on the websites of so many municipalities, organisations, and volunteer groups: “The cultural centre will hold a workshop for making trench candles. Those interested are invited to participate by bringing candles, candle tips, and other paraffin residues, as well as metal cans.”

Many such micro-groups were formed spontaneously when people read advertisements inviting them to participate in, for example, weaving camou-

flage nets or making trench candles, but when they arrived at the indicated place, they met representatives of many other demographic, professional, and social groups, both from Latvia and Ukraine and formed strong subsequent personal bonds. Thus, this cooperation generated various micro-group rituals such as drinking tea together, watching movies together, and other joint events depending on professional affiliation, for example, artists and museum workers in Jūrmala organised art therapy workshops for Ukrainian children to help them cope with the psychological trauma inflicted by the war.

Mutual exchange of culinary traditions is of great importance among the rituals of community acquaintance. Refugees from the Ukrainian war shared their impressions of the products available in Latvia, highlighting the large range of dairy products, especially the Kārums curd confectionary. However, they admitted proudly that there are only a few types of bacon here, compared to the rich offering available in Ukraine, which Latvian people gladly bought. Ukrainian refugees shared their surprise on Facebook that Latvians everywhere eat so much beetroot. However, since many Latvian citizens also gladly supported this website by following and liking it, and providing and distributing information, they explained that this is only the case at the beginning of summer when everyone prepares the so-called cold soups using beetroot and kefir.

One café owner offered *space* and work opportunities to Ukrainian cooks from among the refugees. This place became a place of real ritual visits, visited by several notable people including the current and former presidents of countries supporting Ukraine. People visit this place to embody their desire to help Ukraine financially, because the dishes prepared here from different regions of Ukraine, the variety and taste of which was unknown in Latvia. The food is generally available for donations collected for the Ukrainian army, but visitors give according to their means as much money as possible. Often families spend a long time preparing for this visit, saving money for the donation.

In many *places* in Latvia, women in rural communities organise homemaking courses for Ukrainian refugee women who have settled in Latvia. They learn from Ukrainian women how to make dumplings in the Ukrainian style and teach them how to make traditional Latvian cottage cheese.

By monitoring social networks, especially the Ukrainians in Latvia Facebook group, which is the main site for mutual information and assistance in finding necessary social links, the refugees of the Ukrainian war have ritualised their attitude towards the hospitality of the people of Latvia in a ritual of gratitude.

Ukrainian refugees get to know Latvian society and are moved by this “small nation with a big heart”. Refugees are grateful for everything they receive and grateful for support even after they have returned to their homeland. Many families who took refugees into their homes will have to go to Ukraine after the war to enjoy Ukrainian hospitality as a thanksgiving for their support in a difficult time.

A significant home place for refugees is the House of the Holy Family in Old Riga, where various activities are organised for them by Catholic charity organisation Caritas in cooperation with the Society Integration Foundation. The House provides social mentors for refugees as well as preparing volunteers to work with war refugees. Refugees can take part in Latvian language courses, excursions, and diverse other cultural events such as the Baltica international folklore festival, which took place in summer 2022. The activities continue to increase, looking for ever new ways of support the refugees, for example, at the end of the summer, it was possible to start a psychological assistance program under the leadership of a Ukrainian specialist who had already gained experience of such work coping with trauma caused by the war. People who get involved here do not focus only on classes, they also meet in a micro-group and connect among themselves, with personnel from the House and with members of other micro-groups in the House. The initial discord between the Ukrainian war refugees and political refugees from Russia and Belarus determined was significant. However, over time and with the help of staff at the House, it turned into a mutual reconciliation and the formation of new mixed micro-groups. They also developed their own rituals, such as personal meetings, joint visits to different places in Latvia, etc.

Thus, both at the public level and within micro-groups, ritual activities are established as important in interaction between Latvian society and the community of refugees from the war in Ukraine. Initially, there was a ritual performance with mutual participation which grew into community rituals, which then formed, and continue to form, the Ukraine in Latvia community.

If the meaning of these rituals should be expressed with the definition used here, then it should only be supplemented with a word that, unfortunately, is very often no longer meant implicitly, that is, rituals embody the *human* world construction again and again, helping us to become fully human in an *inhuman* world.

## Conclusions

New unpredictable challenges are emerging in migration studies, and in addition to the approaches of human geography, economics, sociology, jurisprudence, and education science, new research perspectives are created by the wider use of humanities. This paper has demonstrated the resource potential of philosophy in the study of migration, inclusion, and integration, focusing on the influx of Ukrainian war refugees to Latvia in 2022 and looking for answers to the question of how to specifically describe this newly arrived community in interaction with Latvian society. From previous studies and everyday observations this article puts forward the thesis that a new social reality is emerging that can be called the community of Ukraine in Latvia. It was necessary to find the methodological equipment to show the genesis of such a community. It is its discovery that convinces us of the scientific validity of talking about a community made up of the majority of Latvian society and refugees from the Ukrainian war. This, in turn, gives the key to understanding exactly the nature of the forced movement of refugees from the Ukrainian war to Latvia. The parallels of historical geopolitical experience and the mutual understanding of the importance of freedom and independence is only an abstract, albeit active, factor in the creation of community. The genesis of communion was demonstrated through description and analysis of rituals of interactivity.

Firstly, the article determines to what extent Latvia society was ready to receive and include refugees from the Ukrainian war. The large number of research sources about well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic was used to determine the level of Latvian society's concern for the common good, concluding how society's social cohesion capital is quite poor. However, no studies have been conducted in Latvia on changes in social values, which would be important to figure out what values changed in society when it was faced with the task of accepting refugees from the Ukrainian war after the pandemic. However, the adaptive transfer of the results of studies of the values of other countries of the Baltic Sea region to the situation of Latvia allows us to conclude that the world of the subject's values has been significantly affected by feelings of vulnerability and threat that arose from the dangers of the pandemic. The start of the war in Ukraine deepened this sense of danger for people in Latvia and became one of the factors that further deepened the understanding of values of the common

good, such as statehood, sovereignty, freedom, etc. Such a transformation of the peculiarities of social cohesion was necessary in order for Latvian society to become much more open to the reception of refugees from the Ukraine war and to start actively helping and supporting.

Secondly, using the principles of topological hermeneutics developed by Jeff Malpas in the study allowed us to engage with the concept of place synthesising human geography and philosophical approaches to show community formation based on culture, which is absent from the migration studies conducted by other disciplines.

Thirdly, the mechanism of community formation was revealed in descriptions of rituals and their analysis. We started with the first communication during the celebration of Easter and moved on to the actualisation of Latvia's intertwined historical memory of the Baltic Way and the experience of Ukraine's hopes in the common ritual of the Sunflower Way. This definition of the ritual, in the article by phenomenologist Jack William published in 2023, is innovative and heuristically fruitful. William's concept of embodied world construction, which, due to characteristic universalism of the philosophical definition, covers various, even contradictory, aspects of the ritual definitions, combines them into a united understanding of human existential reality, i.e. that a person bodily realises the (re)construction of his/her spiritual and the cultural world in ritual.

Fourthly, by applying Randall Collins' sociology of micro-groups, it was possible to show that by participating in rituals, relations between Latvian hosts and Ukrainian refugees are formed in micro-groups, which have always been considered the closest type of human association. The cooperation of different micro-groups also creates its own rituals that strengthen both sides of the community.

Therefore, factors leading to the genesis of the newly emerging Ukraine in Latvia community were discovered by analysis of interactive rituals, confirming the existence of such a social reality, which is focused on integration and inclusion.

In the field of policy, this study reveals the importance of cultural resources in migration management. On the other hand, the field of migration studies encounters the possibilities of the humanities, as well as broadening perspectives on the integration of ritual research in the study of different forms of community.

The experience of this research provides new tools for better migration management, creating much wider possibilities for activities that could be carried out in the cultural field, organising rituals in state and other public celebrations where the formation of micro-groups could be guided and promoted. Likewise, micro-groups in municipal libraries, museums, public events, traditional cleaning of the environment, and individual public centres, etc., would create community rituals along with a sense of home for the refugees. As the Ukrainian proverb says: “*Ljudina stvorena dlja schastja, jak ptah dlja pol’oty*” (A person is created for happiness the way a bird is made for flying).

## Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the National Research Program Project, DemoMig-Pro grant (New Research Solutions on Demographic and Migration Processes for the Development of the Latvian and European Knowledge Society), number VPP-Letonika-2021/4-0002.

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