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# Perceptions of Cultural Differences Between Scots and Ukrainians: The Perspective of Ukrainian Forced Migrants

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This article explores the cultural and social differences between Ukrainian forced migrants and their Scottish hosts under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. By employing a qualitative methodology and drawing on interviews with both groups, we analyse the complex relationships that developed during this homestay experience. Despite the initial focus on the practical aspects of hosting, the participants frequently raised issues related to cultural differences. These included diverging perceptions of work-life balance, parenting practices, personal boundaries, and communication styles. Both guests and hosts noted the diligence and cleanliness of Ukrainians. Ukrainian participants also pointed to different attitudes to food as a value, creativity and at the same time, conservatism of the Scots. In turn, the hosts pointed out the blurred personal boundaries of the guests, a more straightforward manner of communication. However, many of them sought cultural exchange in the current situation. However, such experiences were not always positive – a couple of hosts mentioned cases of racism, xenophobia or ageism in the behaviour and statements of their Ukrainian guests, as well as the increased interest of women in men compared to the local population. The findings reveal how these cultural distinctions shaped interactions and created both challenges and opportunities for fostering deeper connections, ranging from formal hospitality to strong friendships and family-like relationships.

**Key words:** cultural differences, homestay, hospitality, forced migrants, homesharing, Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

**Олійник Оксана, Олійник Анна. Сприйняття культурних відмінностей між шотландцями та українцями: погляд українських вимушених мігрантів.** У цій статті досліджено культурні та соціальні відмінності між українськими вимушеними переселенцями і їхніми шотландськими господарями за програмою «Домівки для України». Використовуючи якісну методологію та спираючись на інтерв'ю з обома групами, ми аналізуємо складні відносини, які склалися під час цього досвіду проживання в сім'ї. Незважаючи на початковий акцент на практичних аспектах прийому гостей, учасники часто порушували питання, пов'язані з культурними відмінностями. Вони включали розбіжності в уявленнях про баланс між роботою й особистим життям, практики виховання, особисті кордони та стилі спілкування. Як гості, так і господарі відзначали

працелюбство й охайність українців. Також українські учасники вказували на різне ставлення до їжі як цінності, на креативність і водночас консерватизм шотландців. Своєю чергою, господарі вказували на розмиті особисті кордони гостей, більш прямолінійну манеру спілкування. Проте багато хто з них прагнув культурного обміну у ситуації, що склалася. Однак не завжди такий досвід був позитивним – кілька господарів згадували про випадки расизму, ксенофобії або ейджизму в поведінці та висловлюваннях своїх українських гостей, а також про підвищений інтерес жінок до чоловіків у порівнянні з місцевим населенням. Результати свідчать, як ці культурні відмінності формували взаємодію та створювали як виклики, так і можливості для розвитку глибших зв'язків − від офіційної гостинності до міцної дружби та майже сімейних стосунків.

**Ключові слова:** культурні відмінності, проживання в родині, гостинність, вимушені мігранти, спільне проживання в сім'ї, програма «Домівки для України».

## INTRODUCTION

In February 2022, Russia's military invasion of Ukraine led to a massive influx of forced immigrants from Ukraine to the EU and other countries, which opened borders, and granted Ukrainians temporary protection, including the right to work, study, housing, financial assistance and medical assistance (Haase et al., 2023). After arrival, Ukrainians were usually accommodated in localised places such as hotels; local housing providers and hotel owners in some European countries provided accommodation.

The British Government has decided to maintain visa requirements for Ukrainians, applying a different approach from the EU countries compared to its previous refugee policy. They implemented two schemes to allow Ukrainian refugees to enter the United Kingdom and live for three years (GOV.UK, 2024). One of them was the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (HFUS), also known as the Ukrainian Sponsorship Programme, which was launched on 18 March 2022. The programme provided Ukrainians with the opportunity to flee to the United Kingdom with the support of a sponsor, whether they were British residents, community groups, local authorities or businesses (Walsh, 2022, p. 5). Ukrainians have the right to access the labour market and health services, education opportunities and benefits and other support. Sponsors provide accommodation for the first six months, with the possibility of an extension of this period. According to Parliamentarian Michael Gove, the program was originally designed for people who knew each other (Turner, 2022). However, it spread relatively quickly and attracted British residents who had no links with Ukrainians, charities, community groups and churches that offered assistance in settling Ukrainians.

Thus, 263,900 Ukrainians arrived in the UK under the HFUS, as of 24th September 2024 (GOV.UK, 2024). At the moment (26 Nov 2024), 28,137 Ukrainians who fled the war are currently residing in Scotland. Of these, 21,459 are sponsored by the Scottish Government, while 6,678 live with sponsors in the same housing.

In this paper, we will first provide a literature review of the concepts of hospitality and homestay, highlighting their significance as a background for the perception of cultural differences by Ukrainian guests and hosts. We will particularly focus on how cultural differences influence these interactions, shaping the guests' experiences. By shedding light on these aspects, we aim to contribute to the broader discourse on forced migration and the role of homestay practices in fostering social integration.

### 1. Literature Review

For many Ukrainians who relocated to the UK through the Homes for Ukraine (HFU) initiative and now reside with host families, as well as for the majority of those hosts who volunteered to accommodate them, living alongside individuals from a different cultural background represented an entirely new experience. This section delves into the notion of hospitality, offering a lens through which to interpret the lived experiences of Ukrainian forced migrants as "guests" and their interactions with Scottish "hosts."

Hospitality can be categorized into three domains: individual, institutional (or governmental), and commercial (O'Gorman, 2007; Derrida, 2000a). Personal hospitality is often described as more sincere and emotionally driven (Lashley, 2007, p. 215), whereas hospitality administered by the state involves official measures aimed at receiving, adapting, and integrating newcomers such as refugees and migrants (O'Gorman, 2007). While personal hospitality emerges from the host's own willingness to welcome someone into their space, governmental hospitality is typically formal and stems from legal obligations, such as those outlined in the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees (UNHCR, 2010). Monforte et al. (2021) illustrated the complex interplay between public and private hospitality. They found that many individual hosts were driven by a moral impulse to support displaced persons, often in silent protest or as a corrective

to insufficient state-level measures (public hospitality), particularly regarding selective narratives around "acceptable" versus "unwelcome" migrants (Ibid: 675). As a result, hospitality as a societal practice is marked by internal contradictions and tensions.

Within migration research, the concept of homestay (alternatively known as home-sharing, hosting, or family hosting) refers to a type of private hospitality in which residents – usually members of the host society – offer shelter to incoming foreigners, such as refugees or migrants, within their own homes (Hebbani et al., 2016; Bassoli, & Luccioni, 2023). Despite having no prior relationship, hosts and guests engage in shared living arrangements that involve common routines, physical space, and daily interaction during the hosting period (Bassoli, & Luccioni, 2023, p. 6). These arrangements may be facilitated by grassroots volunteer groups, NGOs, local governments, or even national authorities, and can vary widely in terms of how long they last (Ibid: 6).

A key distinction between homestay and other forms of refugee accommodation (such as settlement in camps or sponsorship schemes that provide separate housing or hotel stays for refugees, etc.) is that cohabitation with local residents allows refugees to adapt more quickly to the host society due to the ongoing communication with their hosts, fostering closer emotional bonds (Ibid). Furthermore, homestay potentially challenges refugees with new affective boundaries, as the shared use of domestic space brings with it certain expectations regarding the intimacy of relationships and behaviour (Monforte et al., 2021). At the same time, researchers view homestay as "an ambivalent, fraught practice, which delegates the moral and practical responsibility to 'welcome' migrants to everyday citizens, as opposed to institutions tasked with providing social safety nets" (Sperandio, & Lampredi, 2024, p. 2).

When discussing hospitality, Jacques Derrida's philosophical insights are of considerable importance. He characterises hospitality as a relational act, involving "welcoming the other; the invitation to the stranger" (Derrida, 1997, p. 110). When two unfamiliar individuals enter each other's living spaces (crossing a symbolic threshold), they shed their prior identities and take on the respective roles of guest and host. This interaction brings with it a redefinition of acceptable behaviours and expectations. Upon entering the host's domain, the guest inherently submits to the authority of the host. At the same time, the host sets the terms of the invitation with an implicit message: 'Please feel at home, act as if you were at home, but, remember, this is not true, this is not your home but mine, and you are expected to respect my property' (Derrida, 1997, p. 111). This highlights the inherent limitations in how far hospitality may extend. Derrida (2000a) also introduces the notion that hospitality is never free of tension, coining the term "hostipitality" to express how acts of welcome often contain elements of subtle hostility. In the context of migration studies, hostipitality is also associated with the tension between moral imperatives to help vulnerable refugees and the narrative of them being a threat to public safety (the idea of the "undesirable guest").

Moreover, on the one hand, hospitality is a moral and ethical principle (the Derridean "law of unlimited hospitality"), and on the other hand, it is a political challenge reflected in state laws ("laws of hospitality") (Derrida, 2000b: 77; Genard, 2018 as cited in Monforte et al., 2021). This creates the problematic nature of hospitality as the ethical ideals of personal and collective responsibility inevitably become conditional when confronted with laws and policies that aim to ensure the right to hospitality (Baker, 2013).

According to Derrida (2000a), hospitality can never be unconditional, that is, absolute and demanding nothing in return (Westmoreland, 2008). It cannot be offered as a gift without expecting anything in return from a guest. If the host were to offer unconditional, absolute hospitality, the guest would be completely free to behave however they want without any pressure. Consequently, guests cannot be their true selves and must alter their 'otherness', which can be challenging (O'Gorman, 2007, p. 200). As Derrida (1999, p. 113) expounds, an act of private hospitality is an ethical obligation to create a 'place of encounter' and a 'compromise' between the host and the guest, who have different languages, cultures and habits (Monforte et al., 2021, p. 675).

In general, Derrida's works on the concept of hospitality are extremely valuable and serve as a basis for studying the practices of host-guest relationships and homestay as a practice of refugee settlement. Still (2006) defines hospitality as a material structure that regulates relations between private and public, and as a practice with social, political, and affective qualities, seen through examples of reciprocity. Arrington (2017, p. 35) highlights the Christian practice of hospitality and offers a broader perspective on hospitality, which involves the repositioning of the Other, where the power relationship is deformed through communication

between the guest and the host, turning the Other into an expert to learn from. In this way, both the host and the guest benefit or suffer equally, and the host's role is to "be with" rather than "do for" (Ibid).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research Aims

Our study aimed to examine and analyse the experiences of Ukrainian forced migrants who arrived in Scotland under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, focusing on the cultural differences and the migrants' adaptation to Scottish society.

In our research, we opted for a qualitative approach in order to 1) capture a wide range of challenges and 2) delve deeply into the experiences and difficulties encountered by the participants.

This article is based on a series of in-depth interviews from two of our projects:

1) 20 semi-structured face-to-face interviews with Ukrainian forced migrants in Scotland, conducted from October 2022 to March 2023, aimed at identifying the issues and challenges they encountered in Scotland (conducted by Dr Oksana Oliinyk);

2) 6 interviews with Ukrainian forced migrants and 4 interviews with sponsors as part of the Master's dissertation project aimed to explore the long-term dynamics of relationships between Ukrainian forced migrants and their sponsors living together in Edinburgh (conducted by Anna Oliinyk). Data collection took place in June-July 2023; 8 interviews were conducted face-to-face, while 2 were conducted online.

Both interview series included questions concerning HFUS, encompassing discussions of its benefits and drawbacks, as well as suggestions for potential changes to the scheme.

We also incorporated the findings from 12 interviews with hosts who accommodated Ukrainians, conducted by Dr Fiona McQueen. Given the interconnected nature of our projects, we closely collaborated in ongoing discussions regarding the results. We wish to express our sincere gratitude to Fiona for her significant contribution to this research. Furthermore, with the authors' kind permission, we have included select quotations from her interviews with hosts in our analysis.

### 2.2. Participants

When recruiting Ukrainian respondents, an attempt was made to cover different categories of Ukrainian forced migrants coming to the UK, which served as a kind of selection criteria. Firstly, most Ukrainian refugees are women and children (GOV.UK, 2024). Although, in general, military-age men cannot leave Ukraine during wartime, this is possible under certain circumstances (disability, a large family, etc.). Secondly, Ukrainian refugees can come in families or alone. Therefore, during recruiting, we tried to reach different groups of Ukrainian forced migrants (of different ages and genders, who came to Edinburgh on their own or with partners/families). Interviews were conducted with the following ***Ukrainian participants*** (in total for two projects):

- 7 Men
- 13 Women
- Regions (Oblasts): Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Donetsk, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Zaporizhia, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Ternopil, Lviv
- Age: 18 (2), 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38 (2), 39, 42, 45, 47, 50, 52, 57, 60, 65, 66 (2), 70 (2).

It was challenging to determine the essential traits of sponsors for Ukrainian forced migrants. Additionally, the process of recruiting sponsors was complicated, and there were no specific criteria for selecting this group. As a result, ***the sponsoring participants*** possessed the following characteristics:

- 1 Man
- 3 Women
- Age: 47, 61, 65 (2)
- Experience in receiving Ukrainian guests: from 4.5 months to 18 months.

The majority of host interviewees are women, the same as in Fiona McQueen's series of interviews with hosts. According to Farahani (2021, p. 666), women have historically been seen as having a greater responsibility for hospitality.

### 2.3. Data Collection

The recruiting of Ukrainian forced migrants for both projects took place during events organised by *the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB)* in Edinburgh. Another source of participants was the

free English classes provided by an independent charity *The Welcoming Association*, which supports refugees and migrants in Edinburgh. Additionally, the snowball method was used.

Interviews with Ukrainian forced migrants were conducted in Ukrainian or Russian, at the respondents' choice. Interviews with sponsors were conducted in English. Interviews, both with Ukrainians and with sponsors, lasted 50–80 minutes.

**2.4. Ethical Considerations**

Research projects were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh. Before scheduling interviews, respondents were informed about the details of projects, guaranteed confidentiality, and gave consent for audio recording. We obtained verbal consent to use their names/pseudonyms in the text and quotes. We avoided discussing sensitive topics of relocation and war and prepared a list of free psychological help services for Ukrainians in case they needed support during the interview.

**2.5. Positionality**

It is important to determine our position regarding the problem under study since it directly determines the course of the study and its results. We are Ukrainians and were forced to flee Russian aggression to the UK in 2022. On the one hand, this created a situation of better understanding of the cultural context of Ukrainians than UK residents who decided to be sponsors. On the other hand, it helped us to build trusting relationships with Ukrainian respondents, as well as create more comfortable conditions for them by conducting interviews in their native language. While it's evident that respondents may not always be completely sincere about negative experiences with hosts, we believe they are more inclined to share such experiences with a Ukrainian researcher than with a foreign one. Much like Fiona McQueen, who managed to establish greater trust with hosts and gather more sensitive information about negative host experiences than we did. This allowed us to better comprehend and interpret the perspectives of both parties in light of their behavioural and cultural differences.

**2.6. Data Analysis**

In the course of the interviews, we used an audio recording with subsequent writing of transcripts. Then the audio recordings were used, and then transcribed into text and deleted. The first stage included reading and coding transcripts. Then, in the process of detailed description, we prepared extracts and quotation books. After we had completed analysing our data and read Fiona’s interview transcripts we discussed together with her all of the data we had collected across the three projects and how our analysis of the data intersects. Cultural differences particularly were discussed to gain a better understanding of what was being said by participants and as well as discussion of how we each understood each other’s data from our own cultural positions.

## 3. FINDINGS

### 3.1. Cultural Differences

Although our research projects did not aim to explore the impact of cultural differences between Ukrainian forced migrants and their sponsors, or between Ukrainian and Scottish societies in general, and accordingly, the interview guides did not include questions on cultural differences, our participants nonetheless highlighted these differences in their responses to various questions. This applied to both Ukrainian and Scottish participants, which is why we believe this issue deserves specific attention in our analysis. Moreover, it enabled us to draw several important conclusions regarding the role of cultural differences in the relationships between Ukrainians and their hosts, as well as in their integration into Scottish society.

Firstly, we concluded that the hosts' expectations of the hosting process, as well as their awareness of potential cultural differences with their Ukrainian guests, played a significant role in shaping their relationships. During interviews with the hosts, when asked how they decided to become sponsors and apply to the HFU scheme, they noted that they made the decision quite quickly, as soon as they saw the news about the horrors unfolding in Ukraine and the launch of the HFUS. Some recalled that their decisions were not fully thought through, admitting they did not have specific expectations or an understanding of Ukrainian cultural nuances. It is worth noting that due to the abruptness and brutality of the full-scale invasion, coupled with the mass exodus of Ukrainians seeking to escape and save their families, media coverage was often accompanied by a so-called “romanticised discourse” (Luczaj, 2023).

Secondly, participants shared with us that they engaged with enthusiasm in exchanging cultural experiences with their hosts/guests and learned from each other:

*When I said 'my hosts' in conversation, they said: 'We're not hosts, we're your friends, we're your second family.' [...] In the beginning, they were so eager to learn more about Ukraine that they even suggested we take turns cooking dinner—one day us, one day them—so we could talk and learn more, a kind of cultural exchange. [...] Not only that, they even got themselves a notebook where they wrote down some Ukrainian words, like 'good night,' 'thank you,' and so on. Even now, we still do this: just yesterday, I cooked them dinner. They said to me, 'Thank you, you're welcome' [in Ukrainian].*

Ukrainians also spoke very positively about local Scottish communities, comparing them to Ukrainian villages, where it's customary to greet everyone (usually, everyone knows each other due to the small population of the village, and greeting has become a tradition, even with strangers):

*I would also like to point out that when you walk in the park, strangers greet you and smile. It's very pleasant. They smile and greet you, just like in a village.*

Many have observed cultural similarities between Scots and Ukrainians, noting their shared value of freedom and similar experiences in fighting for independence from empires.

However, a few hosts have reported cases of racism, xenophobia, or ageism in the behaviour and remarks of their Ukrainian guests, as well as heightened interest from women towards men compared to the local population.

*The racism did bother me because I took them shopping to a big shopping centre, and they started whispering, and I said 'Is everything okay?' and the [guest] said to me 'Well, I'm okay, but I can't understand why there were so many black people here'. […] And I said, 'Do you not see black people in Kherson?' she said 'Oh yes you might see black people in Kyiv but nowhere else in Ukraine' and I said 'But why would it bother you anyway, why does it matter?', they just said 'oh let's forget it' so I didn't like that.*

Of course, such manifestations indicate the political and ideological consequences of the Soviet past, which did not contribute to strengthening the relationships between hosts and guests.

**3.2. Work/Life Balance**

One unexpected observation was the cultural disparities in work-life balance reported by the participants, both guests and hosts. Ukrainians conveyed a perception of the Scottish pace of life as more leisurely, observing that Scots allocated more time to leisure and travel compared to their experiences in Ukraine. This observation also extended to household responsibilities:

*It's my opinion, and not just mine, that they are not very tidy, but they don't stress about it. Even my hosts: they don't care, whereas we in Ukraine think, 'Oh, there's dust, oh, we need to clean or vacuum.' But they are different; they are free people. They don't worry about what is lying on the floor, they just live how they want. At first, it annoyed me because I come from a family where my mother was a nurse. We had order at home, but now I wonder if I should pay that much attention and spend so much of my time on it instead of doing what they do— going out for beer or coffee, watching the TV, or going somewhere for the weekend. […] In other words, they enjoy life, and they don't have a word like 'must,' as we do. Perhaps we should learn from them? […] They live better, both materially and morally and spiritually.*

In our interviews, it was evident that Ukrainians view themselves as more diligent in their approach to work, willing to take on more responsibilities and often juggling multiple jobs simultaneously. Some Ukrainian respondents shared their creative ideas with their sponsors for developing and expanding their businesses in Scotland.

Ukrainian participants also commented on the social engagement of Scots, particularly among the older generation:

*Here, older people have plenty to keep them occupied. They aren't just sitting around sewing or knitting socks [meaning they don't excessively engage in household chores]; they lead very active social lives, volunteering, travelling, attending concerts, going out for coffee, and having beers...*

Such an environment also motivates Ukrainians to be more socially active. One 66-year-old respondent, who did not speak English, remarked:

*I want to change my role and be a socially active person […] For now, I am a consumer, but I hope to become more active and valuable to Scottish society.*

At the same time, hosts often noted the cleanliness and hard work of Ukrainian women, as well as their culinary skills, but also noticed their reluctance or inability to relax:

*We have a very, very good relationship, but I also think that he's very closed and [...] he doesn't give himself permission to enjoy himself, feels like shouldn't do that.*

We attribute this characteristic to manifestations of the well-known "survivor guilt", which is expressed as a feeling of guilt towards those Ukrainians who stayed in Ukraine. We will delve into the issue of the emotional closedness of Ukrainian forced migrants in more detail later, in the section titled "Blurred Borders".

It is important to emphasise ***the person-centred approach*** highlighted by some respondents, who compared their experiences in Ukraine and Scotland. The difference lies in the significantly greater attention to individual needs – particularly dietary and medical needs – than they felt in Ukraine. Ukrainians also report experiencing more respectful treatment when interacting with various institutions (such as workplaces, medical facilities, and government agencies). Some even realised that their self-esteem had increased:

*When I arrived here, I noticed for the first time in my life how much I started to respect myself.*

In response to questions about self-identification, most Ukrainians leaned towards broader definitions: *'Just a person,' 'a woman,' 'a guest.'* Some expressed feeling a greater sense of freedom and a lack of judgement from those around them:

*The impression Scotland made on me is extraordinary – for the first time, I felt that I could simply be a person, just a woman, and look the way I want. Here, I feel that I have no expectations to live up to. I just live, look the way I want, do what I want, and eat what I want. No one judges me here. I am used to being assessed wherever I went in Ukraine.*

**3.3. "Creative but Conservative"**

Ukrainians' perceptions of Scots are somewhat contradictory regarding their readiness for change. Some respondents pointed to the creativity they believe is evident in the freedom of self-expression through appearance, hobbies, and more:

*There are many vibrant people on the streets, dressed boldly, with interesting hairstyles of all colours of the rainbow, representing various sexual orientations. They organize fascinating events and festivals.*

At the same time, most participants who expressed their views on the national characteristics of Scots noted their deep conservatism and reluctance to change the established order, not only in work but also in daily life and the preservation of traditions:

*It's prohibited for them to change windows in old houses. That's why it's very cold in our home. Even in new houses, according to the project, sinks are installed with two separate taps for hot and cold water, without a mixer. Because that's how it's done. But it's very inconvenient.*

**3.4. Differences in Child Rearing**

It is worth noting the situations in which Scottish sponsors hosted Ukrainians with children or young people. Many hosts unexpectedly encountered a situation of 'sudden parenting,' feeling a sense of parental responsibility for the children or youths living with them in the same house. In certain cases, when young Ukrainians arrived without their parents and were hosted by individuals of a similar age to their parents, unique relationships developed, giving both parties with a sense of family (Monforte et al., 2021). For instance, a 47-year-old male participant, who acted as a sponsor for a 23-year-old Ukrainian, stated that he took on the role of her father, linking this to his personality and her passive nature.

According to Mueller-Hirth et al. (2023, p. 16), who analysed the experiences of sponsors in HFUS in Aberdeenshire, some sponsors of Ukrainian mothers with children reported that they felt a responsibility and the need to intervene if their approaches to raising children differed. Ukrainian participants also commented on the differences in child-rearing practices.

On a legislative level, third parties are not allowed to reprimand others' minor children. Two respondents described similar situations they observed on a bus when teenagers behaved inappropriately. Both were surprised that no adults reprimanded the children and that only the driver had the authority to ask the teenagers to leave the bus.

*In Ukraine, there would definitely be an 'educator'. Or maybe more than one.*

Perhaps we can argue that Ukrainians have more blurred personal boundaries compared to Scots. One host described the differences in child-rearing:

*They are probably quite similar to a lot of Polish values, so education is very, very important to them, parenting is very different. […] They don't have that same 'letting your kids grow up and setting them free', it's a more nuclear family. They have got a strong work ethic.*

In the context of discussions about school and new subjects, some Ukrainian mothers expressed surprise and dissatisfaction regarding the emphasis placed on sex education, particularly concerning LGBT families:

*I told the teacher that we are a traditional religious family, and I would like the children to learn about the interaction between a man and a woman in a family. The teacher responded that I could transfer the children to a private school.*

Ukrainians with school-aged children pointed out the differences between the Ukrainian and Scottish educational systems. Some considered the school education in Scotland weaker compared to Ukraine, while others saw the reduced workload as an advantage:

*It would be beneficial for our schools to adopt the approach here, where students are not overloaded as they are in our schools. Here, children have the opportunity not only to study and 'gnaw at the granite of science', as we say but also to dream and play. There are subjects like drama, art, and cooking. This helps the child integrate into society and brings joy. What our education lacks is creativity.*

**3.5. Blurred Borders**

A greater blurring of boundaries can also be noted in the understanding of physical boundaries. Ukrainians are more comfortable with shared living spaces compared to Scots, who typically value privacy (for example with each family member having their own bedroom). Many Ukrainians have historically lived in small apartments or dormitories, sharing a room with 3-4 people, and are accustomed to sharing space with their children.

The experience of war and the initial weeks after fleeing the country, where some had to live in refugee camps and share school gymnasiums with hundreds of others, has further diminished their sense of personal space. Survival was the primary concern, and finding a safe place to live was more important than having ample space. Now that they are safe, they appreciate solitude and value the private space provided by their hosts. Scots are often surprised by the Ukrainians' willingness to accept close living arrangements; one host was astonished that a woman could share a bed with her 7-year-old child:

*One of the things British people I saw going on and on about – 'Oh, why is the child sleeping with mum?' - it's normal life in Ukraine. They don't have spare bedrooms and children are lucky to have their own bedrooms. So, children up to quite an age often do share with mum.*

However, the relationships with sponsors are primarily defined by respect for their personal boundaries. Therefore, Ukrainians sometimes felt afraid of doing something wrong or offending the sponsors upon whom they already felt dependent. A 60-year-old Ukrainian participant, who was used to doing everything herself and not depending on anyone, and therefore used to working alone as a scientist, shared:

*I never asked anyone for anything. And now it turns out we are again going to the people and again 'on their heads'* [phraseological unit, explanation by the authors: "causing someone hassle, inconvenience or unnecessary trouble"]. *For me it was very serious, [hosts] even made comments to me all the time, because I was always afraid to 'make a step', I was afraid to use something so as not to add expenses to them. It was very stressful for me.*

One of the most frequently mentioned topics was the hosts' confusion about why their guests often shut themselves in their rooms and do not come out into shared spaces such as the living room or kitchen. This also became one of the most discussed topics on social media: for instance, on Facebook pages, where sponsors shared their hosting experiences with each other.

*We took them out, we took them around the UK, showing them places. But what they wanted most of all was to stay in their bedrooms nearly all the time, and although we didn't tell them it upset us, we would rather want them to feel comfortable being with us sometimes, but they didn't want to encroach on our life. So they would go out for one hour or 3 hours a day, […] but then, apart from when they were eating downstairs, they just stayed in the bedrooms, and that was something that we didn't expect – and this is happening to most sponsors. They are saying the same thing – that they're in their bedrooms all the time. And I felt that we were failing them and making them not feel that they could be with us.*

*We never saw her upset, but she completely could have hidden that in her bedroom where she stayed most of the time.*

Hosts perceived this behaviour as a sign of the Ukrainians' introversion and closed-off nature, taking it personally and feeling upset that they could not provide psychological support to their guests. However, analysing the perspectives of the Ukrainians reveals at least two clear explanations.

Firstly, they avoid bothering their hosts unnecessarily or disrupting their usual daily routines. Secondly, many Ukrainians who arrived as evidenced by quantitative survey results from The Scottish Government (2023) did not have sufficient English proficiency to communicate freely, opting instead to connect with other Ukrainians and make calls to relatives and friends, which they typically did from their closed rooms. Moreover, it was easier for them to discuss their problems and feelings related to the war with their Ukrainian friends and family – people who could understand them because they were in similar situations.

At the same time, Ukrainians shared that the sponsors had significantly helped in restoring their mental health – simply by providing an example of how to live, helping them see that 'life goes on.'

*I came here completely... maybe it's a big word, but broken, and in my head and physically I had a cold. And we arrived – two old men, we felt like old men, useless, abandoned, broken. […] What we have lived here with our FRIENDS [sponsors], I can say without exaggeration that we have lived another life…*

Furthermore, Ukrainians tend to avoid inviting their friends into their hosts' homes. Instead, they prefer to meet in public spaces such as parks, museums, and restaurants. Therefore, public spaces play a crucial role in communication, socialization, and facilitating quicker adaptation and assimilation.

At the beginning of their stay, most Ukrainians were convinced that it would be temporary, lasting only a few months, as they believed the war would soon end. As a result, they were not in a hurry to learn the language or integrate into their new society. Similar expectations were observed among internally displaced persons in Ukraine during 2014–2015 when residents of eastern Ukraine fled from military actions in Donbas. They believed that the military conflict would soon be resolved, allowing them to return home. However, this was followed by the realisation that their situation was, in fact, more prolonged, leading to feelings of disappointment, a sense of loss, and efforts to adapt to their new environment.

**3.6. Sharing a Fridge**

As previously mentioned, Ukrainians place a lot of attention and significance on cooking, expressing their care and gratitude through it. At the same time, they perceive the importance of food for Scots as *'just food that one can buy anywhere without spending time preparing it.'* Traditionally, Ukrainians cook a lot; during holidays, they serve many dishes simultaneously and tend to stockpile, preserve vegetables, fruits, and meat. The authors of this article believe that the reason for this lies in the historical memory of Ukrainians regarding the Holodomor genocide of 1932–1933 (Bezo, & Maggi, 2015), which caused millions of deaths through forced famine. The Holodomor significantly influenced the behavioural practices of Ukrainians, being passed down from generation to generation. Such practices included food accumulation, reverence for food, excessive focus on food, overeating, and an inability to throw away leftovers and unnecessary items. Remembering the Holodomor, Ukrainian women always stocked up on flour, cereals, and sugar, made plenty of jam, and salted fat. Ukrainians do not throw away dishes prepared today if they can be safely stored until tomorrow. Thus, Ukrainians sometimes joke that the refrigerator is a family meeting place, not just furniture.

Participants in our research projects also occasionally noted misunderstandings with their sponsors related to food. For instance, one Ukrainian respondent recalled feeling upset when her hosts threw away the leftovers of a dish she had prepared the previous evening for dinner. Another respondent, who lived with her son in a female host's home, shared that her sponsor had allocated only one shelf in the refrigerator for the two of them. Overall, many respondents indicated that their sponsors rarely ate at home (for example, only having dinner), whereas Ukrainians are accustomed to eating primarily at home, gathering with their families.

In summarising the distinctive features of Ukrainian families, we can highlight that the values of home, the house itself, its contents, food, and the land surrounding it are extremely important to Ukrainian families. As a result, household chores hold great significance, leading Ukrainians to spend a lot of time at home cooking and cleaning.

**3.7. The Balance Between Gratitude and the Desire for Independence**

Mauss (2002, p. 50) argues that the universal logic of the gift is "to give, to receive and to reciprocate". Ukrainian participants expressed their gratitude to their Scottish hosts; both hosts and guests acknowledged

that Ukrainians attempted to reciprocate by cooking meals, completing chores, caring for children and pets, as well as through gifts or souvenirs (which were not always accepted by the sponsors).

At the same time, Ukrainian guests strive for autonomy and independence. This process can be seen as a way to restore self-respect and regain control over their own lives.

*My friends accommodated me, and I can live [there] for as long as I need. However, the other issue is that after a while, as an adult and a full-fledged person, it becomes uncomfortable to live like this permanently.*

*A lot of things are decided for us. I don't like that. It's an unpleasant and uncomfortable feeling to be a refugee, especially for an independent adult.*

The desire for separation is also evident in quantitative research: "The nature of relationships with hosts and the support they provide can significantly influence guests' experiences in Scotland. While most interviews reflect positive experiences, some indicate a risk of over-reliance on hosts" (The Scottish Government, 2023). Among UK hosts whose guests plan to move out, "69 % aim to transition to independent accommodation, while 11 % intend to return to Ukraine. Furthermore, 64 % cited affordability as a major obstacle to securing housing, a concern frequently raised by both guests and hosts" (Ibid).

**3.8. Directness vs. "Code" Communication**

Ukrainians, like other Slavs, tend to express themselves quite directly: "I need this. I want that." Hosts, however, often perceive this directness as somewhat rude, as they are accustomed to communicating in a more "coded" or veiled manner. While hosts generally interpret this indirect communication as politeness, Ukrainians may view the constant smiles of locals as insincere or superficial. It's common for residents of the former Soviet Union's countries to be recognised by their gloomy facial expressions. That is, Ukrainians believe that if you do not hide your mood behind a mask of a smile, then you are sincere and genuine. In Western culture, it is customary to always be friendly and polite to others.

This communication style difference has been noted by both Ukrainian and Scottish participants, occasionally leading to misunderstandings. For example, one host recalls:

*There's a sort of directness. And if anyone says to us "how are you?", we [in the UK] would always say "I'm fine". [...] in Ukraine you would say "I'm fine", or you would say, "I'm not fine". It's okay. You don't always say, "I'm fine". So she went in one day and [was asked] "Hi, how are you?" And she said, "I'm not fine". And they all kind of went, "Oh, no, what's the matter? What's happened?" Because here, even if you're feeling absolutely dreadful, you will say "I'm fine". Something's happened and you say, "hi, how are you doing?" I go, "oh, I'm good, thanks". But, unless it was your best friends, and then you go, "oh, it's all really rubbish".*

**3.9. Nature of Relationships**

The relationship between hosts and their Ukrainian guests is unique and cannot be easily compared to others. Unlike tenants paying rent, the gift of hospitality (Mauss, 2002) involves offering accommodation without expecting an equivalent in return. Friendships often form, but they differ from typical friendships due to the emotional toll of forced displacement and separation from family:

*She [guest] is our friend now. I suppose because of the nature of why she is here, it's not like… with a friend you might laugh and joke about something, and I feel more conscious in my relationship with her. I don't want to ask things too much. Like, why should she be happy, she's not here on holiday, her family is in other places, [...] and I think it makes her a bit sad.*

The development of these relationships is highly individual. A 23-year-old Ukrainian participant did not form a close bond with her sponsor, due to the age difference and their shared introversion. Yet, they still feel comfortable around each other:

*I've never had family dinners... I'd really hate to end up with a family that bores me with joint meals.*

In some cases, participants described their relationships as family-like. 18-year-old Ukrainian young man viewed his sponsor as "almost like a father," and another Ukrainian participant (60 y. o.) expressed a similar sentiment:

*We lived like family members. We were surrounded by such care, that was so tactful, you know? It felt like they were reading my mind. […]This kindness cannot grow instantly, it cannot grow in one generation, it must be fed with mother's milk*

Not all experiences were positive. One sponsor described how racism and unexpected behaviour from her guest led to a breakdown in the relationship. This highlights how hospitality can sometimes lead to hostility.

Overall, these experiences show that relationships between hosts and guests are shaped by various factors such as personal qualities, trauma, and mental health. While they don't always fit neatly into categories like "friend" or "family", they go beyond mere acquaintanceship. Deep, family-like connections often arise from the long-term cohabitation and emotional reciprocity involved (Monforte et al., 2021). As Telfer (2001) suggests, hospitality is an invitation to intimacy, where guests can become almost like part of the family (O'Gorman, 2007, p. 192).

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This research employed a collaborative methodological approach, integrating perspectives from both Ukrainian and Scottish scholars. Such a framework was instrumental in deepening our understanding of the cultural and social contexts that influence the behaviour and perceptions of both Ukrainian migrants and their Scottish hosts. This collaboration enabled us to conduct a more nuanced analysis of the lived experiences of these groups, particularly in light of the socio-cultural factors shaping their interactions.

Although the original scope of our projects did not specifically focus on the cultural distinctions between Ukrainians and Scots, the participants themselves frequently raised this topic during interviews. The depth of their responses compelled us to explore these cultural differences more thoroughly. Notably, respondents offered insights into how such distinctions affected their relationships, thus leading to several key findings.

One striking observation is that the decision of Scottish hosts to sponsor Ukrainian migrants often stemmed from personal or familial experiences of displacement due to conflict. Many sponsors were driven by media portrayals that romanticised the plight of Ukrainian refugees, prompting swift decisions without a full understanding of what hosting would entail. These factors contributed to the unique and varied dynamics that developed between hosts and guests, particularly where expectations were unformed or unrealistic.

Another area of divergence was the perception of work-life balance. Ukrainian respondents noted that Scots appeared to enjoy more leisure time, engaging in travel and social activities, in contrast to what they perceived as a more work-focused lifestyle in Ukraine. Interestingly, hosts often described Ukrainians as hardworking and diligent. While Ukrainians admired the creativity of Scots, they also considered them somewhat conservative, particularly in their adherence to traditions.

Parenting practices were another point of cultural divergence, with sponsors occasionally experiencing 'sudden parenting' responsibilities when hosting Ukrainian children. This sometimes led to misunderstandings due to differing approaches to child-rearing, yet it also fostered deep, family-like bonds between hosts and young Ukrainian guests. For Ukrainians, the experience of Scottish parenting and their children's integration into local schools prompted reflections on the contrast between the Ukrainian and Scottish education systems.

Furthermore, our research revealed varying attitudes toward personal boundaries. Ukrainians appeared more comfortable with communal living, reflecting their experiences of shared spaces, both during the war and historically. Conversely, Scottish hosts often valued privacy, which sometimes led to tension. Interestingly, despite these differing expectations, Ukrainian guests were highly respectful of their hosts' boundaries, though this occasionally resulted in misunderstandings. For instance, Ukrainian guests would often retreat to their rooms, attempting not to intrude, which hosts misinterpreted as aloofness or unwillingness to socialise.

Cultural differences regarding food also emerged as a source of misunderstanding. For Ukrainians, food carries deep historical and emotional significance, shaped by collective memories of the Holodomor. This contrasted with the more casual approach to food taken by many Scottish hosts, and at times led to tensions, particularly when leftover food was discarded.

Despite the significant gratitude expressed by Ukrainians towards their hosts, many participants also expressed a strong desire for independence. This reflects a tension between the guests' need to reciprocate the hospitality they received and their drive to regain autonomy after being displaced.

The nature of communication between Ukrainians and Scots was another key area of difference. Ukrainian respondents often communicated more directly, which sometimes conflicted with the more indirect and polite forms of communication typical in Scotland. These differences in communication styles occasionally led to misunderstandings, further complicating the dynamics of host-guest relationships.

Finally, the relationships between hosts and guests varied widely, ranging from formal to deeply familial bonds. Some hosts and guests formed enduring friendships, while others developed relationships akin to familial ties. These varied relationships underscore the importance of cultural understanding and flexibility in fostering successful homestay experiences.

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