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Deliberation in Post-Soviet Ukraine: Challenges and Opportunities

Abstract

The paper discusses the feasibility of deliberative democracy for fostering social cohesion in Ukraine - a divided society in transition. The analysis is based on interviews with Russian-cultured and Ukrainian-cultured groups' representatives, policy-makers and experts in 2 Ukrainian cities: Lviv and Donetsk. These respondents shared their visions of the other, their readiness to talk about the divisive issues, and their views on whether such talk is possible and needed. The paper argues that there are significant barriers to the implementation of deliberative democracy in post-Soviet Ukraine. Among them, in particular, are the linguistic divide, a drastic gap in "facts" "known" by the two sides, and a widely shared view that dialogue is useless and/or impossible. The paper discusses the challenges and opportunities for deliberation in Ukraine and suggests implications for broader contexts.

Introduction

Although Ukraine managed to avoid violent civil conflict in the post-Soviet time, the Ukrainian society is still divided and composed of Ukrainian- and Russian-cultured groups, as well as a middle group of Russian-speaking Ukrainians¹. Besides language these groups are also divided by mutually exclusive interpretations of the past and foreign policy orientations.

¹ There are numerous other cultural groups present in Ukraine, yet this project is focused on Russians and Ukrainians only as the matters of contention between them are the most politicized and widely spread in public discourse.

Against this background, this paper discusses the feasibility of deliberative democracy for fostering social cohesion in Ukraine as a case of a divided society in transition. In particular, it presents the vision of the other that is pre-dominant in both groups, their readiness to talk about the divisive issues and their views on whether such talk is needed, as well as outlines the main barriers for effective deliberation in the case. Given that intercultural tension is among the major social cleavages in Ukraine the paper focuses on the matters of cultural policy and the prospects of shared cultural space creation. Finally, it discusses how deliberation can be implemented most effectively in the given context.

The analysis is based on interviews with Russian and Ukrainian communities, as well as policy-makers and experts in inter-ethnic relations in Ukraine in two cities – Lviv and Donetsk – which represent the most eastern and most western poles of the Ukrainian social and territorial continuum.

Case presentation

Contemporary Ukraine was formed in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since then various ethnic, linguistic, religious and socio-economic identities and cleavages, and their different historical memories and political orientations, make regional diversity in Ukraine a single most important characteristic (Sasse 2002: 1). Shulman (1998: 288) paints the following picture of the Ukrainian society:

“Since independence in 1991 ethnic Ukrainians, who are concentrated in Western Ukraine and ethnic Russians and Russified Ukrainians, who are concentrated in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, have been engaged in a struggle to define the national identity of their new country and promote the advancement of their respective cultures”.

He also speaks of different mentalities of Eastern and Western Ukraine based on their historical past in different empires (Shulman 1998: 289). Similarly, Riabchuk (1992, 2003) argues that there are “two Ukraines” in a single state. In line with this Wilson (2000) calls Ukraine an “unexpected nation” due to its high levels of ethnic, linguistic and regional diversity and low level of a unified national consciousness. And Sasse (2002) names Ukraine a “state of regions”, in which political competition and societal mobilization are structured along regional lines in Ukraine (Sasse 2010, 100). Finally, many analysts regard regionalism as an obstacle for democracy in this country (Solchanyk 1994; D’Anieri 2007, 103-24).

Thus the Ukrainian society is divided into Ukrainian- and Russian-cultured groups, as well as a middle group which consists of Russian-speaking Ukrainians or bi-cultured people. Besides the language issue the groups are also divided along the lines of interpretations of the past (national heroes, major events), and foreign policy orientations (integration with the Russian or the European world). At the same time cultural identities in Ukraine are not simply multiple, but are deeply contested at all levels: societal, political and intellectual. The very notion of what is Ukraine, Ukrainians and Ukrainian is not understood in the same way across the country.

Thus when speaking of Russian-cultured and Ukrainian-cultured groups I neither refer to ethnicity, nor just the linguistic divide. Language, cultural preferences, foreign policy orientation, but mainly self-identification comprise the elements of these categories. Thus culture goes far beyond folklore all the way into political choices for the members of these groups. For simplicity the groups may be referred to as Russians and Ukrainians, yet, they need to be understood in a more complex way.

Varying popular and elite attitudes to democracy, the free market and key issues of foreign policy, that are associated with the cultural cleavage have inhibited progress or are used as smoke screens to hide specific interests and individual ambitions (BTI 2010: 25). Therefore, overcoming these

sociocultural and sociopolitical cleavages between the different regions, that stem from their different historical experiences and institutional legacies, is a central challenge for the country.

Analysis

In this section I analyze interviews with stakeholders in cultural policy issues in Ukraine. Twenty five interviews were conducted overall: thirteen in Donetsk in Eastern Ukraine and twelve in Lviv in Western Ukraine. Analyzed interviews include representatives of Ukrainian-cultured and Russian-cultures groups from both cities; as well as academics, politicians and activists from both locales.

The analysis here is focused on what are the barriers to potential deliberation on the matters of cultural policy between the two groups. In particular, I paid attention to how respondents see the other, what prevents fruitful communication and what is their general attitude to such communication.

Vision of the other

Treating the other as an equal – even if with opposite goals or attitudes - is essential for meaningful dialogue. Unfortunately, the respondents from both groups see the other in a very negative way; not as equals but as foreign, non-authentic, and underdeveloped oppressors.

Foreign other

In their treatment of the other's claims both groups' representatives mentioned that the other is foreign to the land, from which it could be inferred that the other's claims are less valid. It was also often mentioned that the agenda followed by the other has some foreign interests behind it and therefore is to be resisted.

For example, a Russian-cultured politician from Donetsk explained that *“There are very few Ukrainian-speaking people in Donetsk, maybe a couple hundred, and mostly they are not from here; ... outsiders”*. He was supported by a journalist from Donetsk who shared a deep disagreement with the fact that Ukrainian cultural policy under Kuchma was influenced by “foreign Ukrainians” from diasporas.

On the other hand, a Ukrainian community, including an activist from Donetsk considers that the Russian-cultured Minister of education was *“promoting someone else's agenda”*. Speaking of Russian community in Ukraine a Ukrainian activist from Lviv went into a history of Russians' migration into the city. And a nationalist politician from Lviv complained that intellectuals that stand for tolerance are looking at the situation through the lens of foreigners from across the ocean just because they receive grants from them.

Fake other

Referring to the claims of the other both groups mentioned that they are fabricated, paid-for or created by historical circumstances. Both groups suffer from the lack of acceptance of the authenticity of their own identity and needs. Yet they deny accepting the other's authenticity at the same time and consider their difference artificial.

A nationalist politician from Lviv explained:

“... there is a number of people in the Ukrainian community, whose identity is marginal, meaning it is damaged, it underwent serious transformation as a result of imperial domination ... I am speaking of the territories that are problematic, everything that can be metaphorically named Donetsk”.

Thus the other is seen as not authentic, damaged, and problematic. The respondent continues, speaking of the Russian-speaking Ukrainians and their rights:

“There can be natural diversity, and unnatural diversity, that resulted from terror, repressions, and genocide. This is not a real diversity, but a situation of oppression, cultural first of all”.

Respondents from the other side, similarly, see Ukrainian identity as invalid. An activist from Donetsk put it this way: *“Since the difference between Russians and Ukrainians is negligible they² have to artificially prove that we are a separate people and that we need a separate state”.* And a journalist from Donetsk added that *“‘Contemporary Ukrainian language’ exists due to the efforts of politicized linguists, it is an artificial creation”.* He goes on commenting on Ukrainian nationalists in Donetsk: *“our Ukrainian nationalists are brought from Kyiv, they gave them some sort of ideology and... [they] work for certain finances”.*

Ukrainian minority representatives from Donetsk in their turn express doubts in the authenticity of their Russian-cultured counterparts’ identity. An activist has shared that the so-called Russian community is always represented by the local administration at all the cultural festivals, while Ukrainian and ethnic minority cultures are all represented by real grass-root societies. Explaining this fact, she added:

“As for the Russian community – it just doesn’t exist here, ... the local government serves instead... But to launder money issued for the development of Russian culture, they’ve created fake organizations”.

Interestingly, Donetsk respondents were much more outspoken on this issue. In contrast, both Ukrainian and Russian communities in Lviv seemed to accept the true otherness of the other.

Underdeveloped other

Both groups see the other as such that can still develop to their own level, but is currently stuck in the past or simply lags behind in its development.

The Ukrainian community activist in Donetsk sees the problem in the fact that *“Donbas³ still lives in the Soviet Union... in the previous century, before the independence...”.* The respondent continues that *“...the problem is also in dramatic illiteracy, first of all among the authorities... Why Azarov⁴ does not know Ukrainian? And now he wants all others to be such morons as well...”.* These quotes illustrate that the other is seen as outdated and intellectually backward.

In a similar vein, a Russian-cultured journalist from Donetsk considers Ukrainians backwards:

“When I go to Western Ukraine it seems that I go from West to East, not vice versa. Here, in our region we value individualism; distant relatives rarely keep in touch. And there it’s like in Central Asia: what village are you from? Relatives, co-villagers pull each other up the carrier ladder if someone occupies a good position...”.

The respondent continues sharing his perspective that *“even in Kyiv only those speak Ukrainian who came from villages, somewhere in the suburbs, maybe some public transportation drivers ... or some radical nationalists”.* He goes on comparing the two groups further:

² Ukrainian government

³ “Donbas” is the name of Donetsk region

⁴ Russian speaking high official, originally from Donetsk

“People from Western Ukraine are ready to work as janitors in [Western] Europe, they aren’t ashamed, and our people here – are different, they have leadership traits, they want to work in top management, and it’s better for them to be a sales manager here, than to work as a janitor even for a salary that is three times higher”.

The most positive statement I heard regarding the other’s “level of development” was a reflection by a Ukrainian activist from Donetsk that the Russian-cultured Ukrainians are the way they are because *“they are so repressed”*, meaning that their current “lack of national consciousness” and competence in nationality issue are a direct result of the Soviet political repressions.

Other as Oppressor

Both groups see the other as the utmost oppressor and deny – at times even obvious – facts of oppression caused by own group towards the other. While discussing the oppression, however, respondents from the two groups referred to different period in history, with Ukrainians remembering oppression since the Russian Empire and Russians only focusing on post-Soviet times.

A politician from Lviv shares:

“We can’t accept the status quo as it came to be as a result of discrimination and cultural racism. When policy has openly marginalized everything Ukrainian to some weird, comic forms, and followed the strategy of exoticization. This was done systematically, during several centuries. There is a huge amount of classical [Russian] literature that depicts Ukrainians as the ones that should be dominated over, should be beaten up, shows them as clowns”.

Moreover, he contrasts the Russian community as oppressing to a Ukrainian community that is not oppressing, even when it has a possibility to oppress:

“In the case of Crimea we can speak of structural repression. ... Identity is being built by denying Crimea’s Ukrainianness, arrogance with respect to Ukrainianness ..., and other things that can be termed clear-cut racist ... This is with only 60 % Russians in Crimea. ... Here, in Lviv, we have inverse situation, 70 % are Ukrainians, and we see that in Ukrainian mentality ... there is no need to oppress anyone. I mean that to build our identity there is no need to destroy the others’ identities”.

Another respondent from Lviv discussed that in fact Russians occupy higher positions in society both due to past policies and more recent post-Soviet development. With respect to the recent past he shared:

“With all the Russians’ complaints let’s not disregard the economic aspect. If in early 90-s conscious Ukrainians have put all their efforts to gaining and maintaining independence – were doing politics – Russian-speaking population, having had access to resources since the Soviet times organized first businesses and became big businessmen. And those activists that were fighting for independence found themselves on the margins of life: former heads of local activist units unload trucks at supermarkets... and the so-called “offended” are driving around in luxury Mercedeses”.

At the same time the Russian-cultured community feels no less oppressed, although – unlike the Ukrainian group – it refers only to recent years, those of Ukraine’s independence in their examples of oppression.

A professor from Donetsk shares: *“Russians feel as if this is not their state; there is an opinion that if you live in Ukraine you should speak Ukrainian, study in Ukrainian”*. And a politician from Donetsk develops this idea: *“Yuschenko⁵ saw Donetsk as a second-rate city, as the one that needs to be fixed. The propaganda of their values has started right away”*. He continued: *“At the moment Ukrainian Ukraine is being created. I mean that western-Ukrainian templates are taken as a model: nationalism, glorification of their heroes”*. A Donetsk journalist shares this feeling:

“When Kuchma⁶ came he delegated all humanitarian issues to those who had expertise in that. And these experts aimed at some book ideal that they read about in emigration. They wanted to standardize everyone. If they spoke with an accent – everyone had to speak so, they brought with them their ideals”.

Interestingly groups feel oppressed in both regions, irrespective of whether they are minority or majority in the region and whether a pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian party holds power in the region or in the capital. This situation creates significant difficulties for deliberative democracy since none of the side feels guilty and apologizing is an unheard-of option for both of them.

The least negative comment came from an activist in Lviv who expressed understanding of the nature of the Ukrainians-Russians antagonism in Ukraine:

“All these year they⁷ have been instilled with the superiority complex, that they are special and that they are masters here. Both tsarist and Soviet propaganda worked for this. ... From the very beginning the feeling of superiority was instilled and it was very hard for them to go down to the aboriginals’ level”.

Such understanding of the reasons behind the opponent’s offensive behavior is a positive tendency with respect to potential deliberation, yet on its own it is unlikely to create a ground for a fruitful dialogue.

General negativism

Besides the identified problems in the vision of the other by both groups there is also a significant general strain. This is especially true in Donetsk.

A Russian-cultured respondent explained: *“Besides the fact that [Ukrainian-speakers] ... may be not understood, there is also a growing irritation in the recent years with people speaking Ukrainian”*. And a Ukrainian activist told that: *“on a Victory day [a pro-Russian NGO] ... attached our black-and-red flag⁸ to a jeep’s wheel, torn it and the jeep was driving in this way”*.

At the same time talking of Russian organizations a Ukrainian activist named them *“criminals”*, and when asked about a specific organization replied that *“these people are just inadequate”*. A respondent from the Russian-cultured community of Donetsk called Ukrainian community members with even harsher words.

⁵ ex-President of Ukraine known for pro-Ukrainian bias

⁶ President of Ukraine since 1994 till 2004

⁷ Russians

⁸ flag of Ukrainian Insurgence Army that fought for Ukraine’s independence during the WWII

Such irritation and at times aggression is very problematic from the perspective of deliberative democracy since in such circumstances it is hard to follow the principle of what should and should not be said in a deliberative forum (Warren 2006).

Readiness to talk

Besides the multiple problems in how the stakeholders see each other there is also a problem in their attitude to dialogue. Most of them either view communication as useless or ineffective given the circumstances and/or the opponents.

The problem is in them

One of the themes that came up in responses from both groups was that the other side is too radical. In fact, they blamed the other side for disabling communication. A Ukrainian activist from Donetsk responded to a question about discussions across groups: *“There were no such discussions, those pro-Russian ... organizations are so radical that one can’t even think of doing anything together with them”*. Interestingly several Russian representatives from Donetsk mentioned the respondent quoted above being way too radical, and impossible to deal with.

It is important to mention, however, that in contrast to the situation in Donetsk, respondents in Lviv did mention instances of cross-group communication and some of them even found the experience positive.

Dialogue does not fit current circumstances

Respondents from the Ukrainian community from both Lviv and Donetsk expressed strong aversion to dialogue as a method that does not fit the context of contemporary Ukraine. An activist from Donetsk responded to my question about the possibility of Canadian-type (as he called it) dialogue as:

“No, no, no... We are now going through the stage that other countries went through before. ... What was the intercultural dialogue in the US some time ago: between Indians and whites?... Therefore let them not be so refined today and demand other societies to be different when they go through such a stage.”

In agreement with this a politician from Lviv has shared:

“Certain intellectuals – I have nothing against grants but, - they are so detached from reality that they look at the situation as if from overseas. And they suggest to pretend that nothing is going on, silently endure when we are being offended, when they do things that arouse indignation, just in order to not irritate someone...”

Talk as useless, discredited, and dangerous

According to a professor from Lviv dialogue is good for some issues, but not the others like one of the central divisive issue in contemporary Ukraine related to interpretation of who were the heroes of the World War II in Ukraine:

“Yuschenko tried to talk about reconciliation between the Red Army and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army but it was not accepted. Because you cannot find compromise based on war, war is the most divisive element in Ukraine; here compromise is impossible around war.”

A Ukrainian activist from Donetsk simply finds talk unnecessary. With a reference to foreign experience he suggests that: *“Ukrainian language just has to be made dominant, and all*

discussions on this issue should just stop". He elaborates further, explaining that in his view talk is neither effective nor timely: *"We had round tables before, but all these venues for dialogue are not conclusive"*.

A Russian-cultured journalist from Donetsk when asked about the recommendations on how to enhance discussion has responded: *"We do not need discussion; each side will have its own opinion... Does the state benefit from debates? ... We just won't intersect; Galicians do not come here..."*. Thus he sees dialogue as useless and potentially dangerous as it may bring negative effects. Notably, he considers the situation of regional isolation as normal and even desirable.

A Ukrainian activist from Lviv sees discussion as redundant since everything is "clear" even without it:

"There are discussions, but not really that many since everything is obvious⁹, looking at the white wall no one discusses whether it is white or black. There are no alternative perspectives on this issue in Galicia, since these are obvious things. Same in Kyiv... no thinking person can have a different opinion".

Seeing history as obvious is problematic, especially when this history is a basis for a major social cleavage. But what is even more disturbing is the assessment of people with a different opinion as those who do not think and thus do not deserve having a dialogue with.

Finally, a Ukrainian activist from Lviv sees discussion as ineffective:

"Universities take part in national conferences, there are discussions... but no one changes their position. Because it's impossible to change one's positions, you can't get out of the mud and stay clean. People who grew up and lived in the ideas of "Russian world"¹⁰ ..., it leaves deep mark on the subconscious level... And it's impossible to prove them otherwise."

Limited readiness to talk

Among the interviewees, three respondents expressed readiness to talk and work towards consensus or at least compromise. Interestingly, all of them were from Western-Ukrainian Lviv: two from academia and one activist; two from the Ukrainian-cultured group and one from the Russian-cultured community.

This Russian-cultured respondent was the only one who asked me about the language that was most comfortable for me, and spoke Ukrainian to a coffee-shop employee either to demonstrate his knowledge of Ukrainian or just because we were in a mostly Ukrainian region of the country. He shared his perspective on the linguistic divide:

"I will never forsake my native Russian language, I will defend it, I will defend Russian-language education. But this is one part and the other part is that we have to communicate normally with people who have a different linguistic basis".

The respondent has also shared that despite focusing on Russian language and culture in his activism he also organized an anniversary of the prominent Ukrainian poet and promotes translation of Russian literary classics into Ukrainian.

⁹ To clarify, we've been talking about the issues of Ukraine's history, in particular the Ukrainian Insurgent Army – the most highly debatable issue in contemporary Ukraine.

¹⁰ The ideas of Russian World imply that Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians are parts of a single nation and culture, with Russians being the most developed of the three.

On the Ukrainian side readiness to talk was rather expressed in the form of criticizing the illiberal aspects of pro-Ukrainian politicians' policies. One respondent criticized the former president Yushenko who, while claiming liberal values, in fact followed the policy of Ukrainization. For example, a *“strange decree by the Ministry of Education that obliged teachers to speak Ukrainian during the breaks”* was criticized, as well as bringing of historical exhibition that glorifies contested heroes to all the regions of Ukraine, and *“giving the informational space to only one perspective”*. There were also problems with the theme of Holodomor¹¹: *“The issue needs to be raised, but saying that Holodomor was a Holocaust and whoever denies it will be convicted – this will rather lead to a lack of acceptance”*.

The respondents also expressed ideas on how the common ground can be found. One respondent stressed the importance of compromise as it is impossible to change any of the sides overnight:

“If we are building an all-Ukrainian identity, we need to understand our differences and each side has to sacrifice something, there has to be a compromise. ... For example, some regions declared the official status of the Russian language. Instead of fighting this decision, they could have said: OK, we give you this status and you support our NATO integration. Because you cannot prohibit such things. And this is normal: there are Ukrainian-speaking groups and Russian-speaking. What's the point in fighting something that you cannot beat?”.

The other respondent also stressed the importance of shared heroes: *“If you ask me what kind of history has to be there – along these lines: our heroes, your heroes, shared heroes”*.

The respondents have also expressed their assessment of the society's readiness for dialogue. For example, it was mentioned that in the recent years online discussion clubs started to emerge in major cities of Ukraine. These clubs *“unite young people ... looking for solutions of Ukrainian problems. ... Language and history per se are not important for them, but they want to neutralize these issues so that they don't prevent working...”*. Yet such groups are by invitation only, and only especially selected people can participate. It was also mentioned that *“there is a growing social demand for dialogue”* since people are tired, have other issues to take care of, and more people understand that *“extreme discourses solve nothing”*. And an activist from Lviv expressed an opinion, that *“not so many people have hard stereotypes: only those pseudo-scholars and communist party activists. The majority of people are tabula rasa in terms of national memory”*.

Several real positive experiences of deliberation were also mentioned. For example, a popular political TV show organized a discussion on WWII between the school children from Western city of Lviv and Southern city of Odesa. Although coming from ideologically very distant regions they came to a common vision during the discussion.

It was, however, also noted that there is a tendency for less and less possibilities for compromise due to extreme rhetoric spread by the government: *“The center wants to create a radical opponent. ... It seems that there is an attempt to oust the middle ground”*. Thus this respondent has summed up that *“there are two tendencies and we do not know which one is winning”*, and he concluded saying that finding a common ground is a *“feasible project, but a very difficult one”*.

Additional barriers to deliberation

Besides the difficulties that arise from the unwelcoming vision of the other and the lack of appreciation of dialogue as such there are also difficulties related to the language of

¹¹ Holodomor is a Ukrainian title for the famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine.

communication, differences in knowledge and interpretations among the groups, as well as their attitudes favoring formal resolution of conflicts, often times based on either legalistic or majority basis. As the length of this paper does not allow discussing all these issues in full length I will only indicate the central issues of contestation.

A crucial barrier for deliberative democracy initiatives in Ukraine is that it is unclear what **language** they should be held in. Since language itself is among the contested issues – the means of communication becomes itself political. None of the conceivable alternatives – having simultaneous translations, speaking in a native language, speaking in a state language or in the language that most people are comfortable with are not ideal and represent significant threat to building trust and open communication among the participants from different linguistic groups.

Another major complexity is that the groups have **radically distinct perspectives** on multiple issues and what is more on certain objective facts as well. Obviously, there would be no need for deliberation if they were standing on the same position, and one of the potential benefits of deliberation is exactly in introducing them to different points of view. Yet it is important to realize how deep these divisions are in order to craft the deliberation projects accordingly.

For example, there is a major disagreement on the matter of cultural policy of the **early 1990-s** national-democratic government. Russian-speakers see it as the time of violent cultural dictatorship, while Ukrainian-speakers view their leaders' action in the 1990-s as way too tolerant. In a similar vein very different opinions were expressed on how much did the former **president Yuschenko** do for the promotion of the Ukrainian culture. While the Russian community found him aggressively forcing Ukrainization, the Ukrainian community complained that despite all the expectations he did not do much for the Ukrainian cause. *"The Ukrainian Renaissance has stalled under him"* – was the Ukrainian community disappointed verdict.

The dominant **language of mass media** is also seen very differently: Russian community is talking of total Ukrainian language presence and Ukrainian community complains that Russian is everywhere. For example, a Ukrainian activist from Lviv tells: *"... turn on any channel – Russian dominates in fact"*. Russian community representatives see the situation differently: *"Everywhere on TV is Ukrainian, the main channels, news and stuff"*.

Views are similarly divergent on the matter of **church property** after the collapse of the Soviet Union when traditional Ukrainian churches started to re-emerge in addition to the Russian Orthodox Church. A member of a Russian community in Lviv complained that before 1991 they used to have multiple Russian churches in Lviv and now they have only one. Yet a Ukrainian community activist responded that: *"...They are now given more than they had in 1947. It's like I robbed your place and after some time said that it's now mine and you have no right for it"*.

An interesting difference that came up is distinct **points of comparison** based on which groups build claims about their needs. Russian-speaking community tends to compare everything to pre-independence times, that is to the state of affairs in the Soviet Union. Everything was in Russian back then, and the Russian nationality was prioritized in a number of ways. In contrast, the Ukrainian community compares the current situation with Ukrainian language and culture in Ukraine to titular cultures in other countries and in particular in contemporary Russia in comparison to how they ensure cultural rights of their minorities today.

The two groups diverge drastically on the type of **normative argumentation** that they use **in favor of their languages**. The Ukrainian community suggests that since Ukrainians are a titular nationality in Ukraine their language has a right to dominate while Russian is already dominant in Russia and therefore does not need to be protected elsewhere. The Russian community representative shares his concerns regarding these arguments: *"So what that Russian is protected*

in Russia – I live here. ... Ukraine is the only country where the majority of people don't have the language they use on the daily basis as a state language”.

A major issue of concern for both groups is the language of instruction in schools and the number of **Ukrainian schools**. This issue came up as particularly central in Donetsk with the most drastic difference in opinions between the two groups. Not only they had different opinions on what should be done in this sphere, they also referred to totally irreconcilable data in terms of what is out there. Russian group representatives were complaining that *“the majority of schools in the region are Ukrainian, and there are only a few Russian ones”*. An entirely different story is told by the Ukrainian community in Donetsk, telling that only 14% of schools were Ukrainian in Donetsk region in 2000, even though over a half of Donetsk population claims Ukrainian nationality. A Ukrainian activist also complained that *“opening every school means courts, fights, it takes 2-3 years, tons of effort, picketing, massive pressure...”*. The respondent has also complained that Ukrainian schools are closed systematically in the region: *“It's now been 8 month that 4 schools fight for the right to teach children in a state language”*.

Language of instruction in universities is another contested issue. A university professor from Donetsk shares that he is forced to teach in Ukrainian and that all the theses have to be written in the state language. In contrast, from the Ukrainian community I heard that: *“None of our universities¹² teaches in Ukrainian. At Politechnical they teach in English, in German because there is student exchange, but they don't teach in Ukrainian in any group”*. A partial explanation of this discrepancy with regards to the language of instruction is in the fact that groups use different criteria of assessment. While for a Russian-speaker formal requirements are the most problematic, Ukrainian-speakers complain on the practical impossibility to realize their right for education in the native language.

Similarly, the availability of **Ukrainian press** in Donetsk region is contested. A Russian-cultured journalist replied that there is such press. At the same time the other side claims that *“if you ask in any press kiosk - you will not find any Ukrainian language press”*.

Interestingly, a rather obvious historical fact of **Soviet repressions** is also contested. A Russian community activist mentioning the monument to the repressed doubted the very fact of these repressions. In contrast, the respondent from the Ukrainian community shared a different perspective: *“...the East of Ukraine is much more repressed than the West, it started earlier here and many more were killed ... Political repressions here were horrible”*. Importantly the latter quote was said with a lot of pity and sympathy for the other, since it was the other that was repressed, and since it is the reason why the other is so antagonistic today. To a certain extent such understanding may become the ground for sympathy and readiness to make a step forward instead of mere aggression.

The situation is similar with the assessment of the 1932-1933 **famine**. Russian community does not seem to make much of a problem of it and are unhappy with the fact that national-democratic actors raise the issue at all. For example, they complained: *“A massive propaganda started that famine was a crime”*. In contrast, the Ukrainian community is very much aware of the problem:

“We organized a conference on famine here, looked at archival data... And there were such villages in Donetsk region, that had 700 people before the famine; and when it went down to 70 people during the famine the village head wrote to someone above: stop, my people are eating each other... And it was written by someone from KGB on that letter: “shoot”.

¹² The respondent meant universities in Donetsk, except for the Donetsk National University

The issue of **russification** is also contested. Russian community denies russification either overall, or the extent to which it took place. A Ukrainian community activist shared a different assessment, while demonstrating census tables to me: *“Take year 1929, then 1932, then 1946 and 1989, these are censuses. Here we see 65 % of Ukrainians and 20 % of Russians. But as Ukrainians decrease, Russians increase in the following years”*.

These **severe discrepancies are partly explained** by one of my respondents from academia. Commenting on the fact that Yushenko’s policies were perceived differently by different groups, she explained that: *“There is a simple mechanism of stereotypes ... [E]xpectations from Yushenko’s policy were formed already during the electoral campaign. Accordingly, people were looking at his actions trying to find proof of the already existing expectations. Selective perception of information”*. Similarly, this mechanism is at work with respect to all of the discussed issues. The reality is probably somewhere in between the two narratives, or even reflects both of them simultaneously. Members of the communities, however see only partial realities influenced by the fundamental biases that they hold.

Besides this, the gap in perspectives is also explained by the different logic used by the two groups. For example, groups refer to different period of time on which they base their perspectives, they appeal to different kinds of rights with Russians more prone to speak of individual rights and Ukrainians - to speak of the nation’s rights. Moreover, Ukrainians speak of fixing past injustices while Russians stand for the rights of those who live today irrespective of their ancestors. Groups also use different points of comparison against which they measure their own situation, and they refer to different areas in which they experience oppression.

This situation is important for the deliberation potential assessment since it illustrates how big the informational rift between the stakeholders is. Providing them with alternative information will not likely lead to its fast and easy acceptance since it will be filtered through these biases and will not be automatically heard by the participants. Therefore, major preparatory work is needed to prepare handout materials and train discussion facilitators so that these specificities are controlled, and a meaningful discussion had a chance to follow.

Representatives of the Ukrainian community, especially in Donetsk, expressed a number of opinions promoting the **principle of force** – in one form or the other – which is incompatible with deliberative democracy. One of the respondents discussed the need to establish the domination of Ukrainian culture:

“First of all, we need to identify who is the master in the house? There is Dad in the family (titular nation, culture, language) and if it is doing well, fully realizes itself, then there is a good atmosphere for accepting others, but only to the extent that they do not break this dominance”.

Importantly the Ukrainian community is trying to force the others into Ukrainian culture, by pressure, often based on legalistic argumentation.

The final problem that came up in the interviews is the **majority bias**. It was especially dominant among the Russian community in Donetsk. Respondents tended to equate majority to the entire population and disregard the minority’s interests overall. They also demonstrated the lack of readiness to live in a diverse social reality where people may hold different views and exercise different needs. Thus the Russian community in Donetsk is not prone to look for the ways in which everyone’s happiness can be maximized, but is rather looking for the maximization of the happiness of the majority that it represents. Notably, this attitude was less pronounced among the Ukrainian community (even though Ukrainians are statistically the largest ethnic group in Ukraine) and among the Russian community in Lviv.

Conclusions, Suggestions, Implications

While deliberative democracy is a promising mechanism for achieving a vibrant and stable polity, and although instances of deliberation helped Ukraine to avoid ethnic violence in the past (Sasse 2002), there are significant **barriers** to the implementation of deliberative democracy in post-Soviet Ukraine.

The interviews demonstrated that there is a significant problem in the groups' attitudes to each other. In particular, both groups feel oppressed, and deny the oppression of the other; both see the other as foreign, non-authentic, and underdeveloped. Moreover, neither of the groups sees communication as a worthwhile activity, and they prefer solving issues based on the principles of legislative force or mere majority rule. In addition, potential deliberation is further complicated by the problem of language choice, and the extreme rift in terms of "known facts" and interpretations held by the groups.

Yet, several **examples** of meaningful deliberation were mentioned by the interviewees, for example the closed discussion clubs in a number of Ukrainian cities, discussions among schoolchildren from different regions, and a general feeling of some respondents that broad societal dialogue is ongoing in the city of Lviv. In addition some participants have also mentioned the promising initiative called "Crimean Policy Dialogue" which is an attempt to create a deliberative forum engaging stakeholders from diverse groups to discuss the contested issues such as language, identity, and land distribution between three major ethnic groups living in Ukraine's Crimean peninsula. This initiative is particularly promising since Crimea represents one of the most difficult regions in terms of intergroup relations in Ukraine. Yet, at the same time, this dialogue is limited to selected members of the elite and researchers, and is not yet a platform for societal deliberation.

Despite the identified challenges, ideas that might help create a **ground for future dialogue** were also expressed by some of the respondents. For example, reciprocal exchange between the groups was suggested as a way to move from the deadlock situation in matters like foreign policy strategy and language policy. It was also suggested to produce movies and other mass culture products to promote the values of diversity, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, as well as create a more acceptable image of the other. In addition, it was recommended to leave space for diverse – even contradictory- perceptions on certain issues instead of aiming to necessarily find consensus on every issue. For example, the issue of Second World War heroes is arguably one of such issues in which different heroes should be maintained in addition to common heroes that are not related to this war. In contrast to the issue of war, the perception of the 1932-33 famine is more uniform throughout the different regions and is a good basis for sympathy and mutual acceptance development in the Ukrainian society.

Respondents also reacted positively to a number of principles and elements of deliberation – even if they do not associate them with deliberative democracy per se. Thus, both groups expressed importance of respect, which might be used to encourage the development of reciprocal respect between the two groups. Second, both groups spoke of the lack of "hearing what we say" referring to the other group, which indicates their interest in getting their points across to the other side and thus a need for communication. Additional opportunities arise from the fact that, although talk is not favored, a so-called "practical dialogue", that is reconciliation through shared projects was mentioned as desirable by both groups meaning that they are ready and see the need for some common actions with members of the other group on matters that unite them rather than separate. Such common projects would definitely build a ground for further deliberations of a better quality on the divisive issues themselves. Moreover, it came up prominently in the interviews that the representatives of both Ukrainian and Russian groups in the Western city of Lviv are much less aggressive towards each other and ready for cooperation than both groups located in the Eastern Ukrainian Donetsk. In particular, respondents from Lviv

accept the otherness of the other as authentic to a greater extent and call the other underdeveloped less compared to the inhabitants of Donetsk.

Given the drastic differences in opinions between the groups, deliberation looks as complicated as it is necessary, since under the current circumstances it is hard to create a legitimate policy addressing the needs of both groups. Thus deliberative democracy may be used in Ukraine, but not for establishing who is right or what the objective historical truth is. Given the level of emotional animosity, rational argument are not likely to work, at least not by themselves. Instead deliberation may be used largely for establishing rapport and break the stereotypes about each other.

These findings, firstly, suggest that it should be more effective to either change the format of deliberation from mere talk to more action-oriented projects like common field-trips, art or humanitarian projects or needs to be preceded by such “ice-breaking” activities before the deeply emotional issues can be addressed through dialogue.

In relation to this it is worth mentioning that issues of language and national identity are not among the top priorities in everyday people’s lives as multiple opinion polls demonstrate. This does not mean that these issues are not important or not worth addressing, but this context itself provides special opportunities in terms of deliberative democracy implementation. Deadlock situations in the areas related to identity may be softened by first uniting people from different groups around the issues of their more immediate concern like socio-economic welfare, corruption, health, the future of their children etc. After establishing significant rapport with people from the other group dialogue on culture matters will proceed in a more deliberative manner.

Secondly, the findings also suggest that to start implementing the deliberative democratic model of consensus-seeking from the Western region of Ukraine, which due to distinct historical circumstances possesses comparatively more open-minded political culture irrespective of the cultural group belonging.

An additional conclusion based on the assessment of the instances of deliberation to date and the analyzed interview material is that deliberation might be effective at the elite or expert level, but not at the people’s level yet. Thus reciprocal deliberation between the capital and the Crimean peninsula government brought good results in terms of governance and maintaining territorial integrity and piece. Speaking of the experts’ level several initiatives can be named and studied more closely in future research. The first is the “Crimean Policy Dialogue”, which manages to unite ideological opponents around the same table to discuss the matters of common concern. Other instances include the closed clubs reported about by one of my respondents. At the people’s level, however, instances of true deliberation are more difficult to detect.

Moreover, on a more general scale, the analyzed material allows suggesting a dual-track approach to inter-cultural tension in post-colonial/post-imperial setting, including post-Soviet states.

The first component is **promoting the value of diversity** since it is fundamental for advancement in this area, yet this value is very much out of the traditional value spectrum in post-Soviet societies. Although façade diversity was present in the Soviet society due to the existence of 15 national republics, substantive diversity was largely stripped in favor of creating a *homo sovieticus*. The goal of this policy is to promote acceptance of a mixed social reality instead of hoping for homogenization based on the majority needs or based on legislation. This policy is thus process-based, safeguarding from the tendencies of undue unification.

The second component is satisfying **cultural needs as a human right**. This suggestion is based on the fact that both groups refer to international and especially European principles, norms, and documents in their lobbying of particular outcomes favorable for their group. Thus, even though the content of groups' demands is directly opposite, the kinds of arguments brought in support of these demands are often much more compatible with each other. In this context international actors may have an important role in influencing the way in which principles of democracy and human rights are being interpreted and applied by the groups. Promoting culture through human rights in a diverse social context means ensuring the possibility to realize one's cultural needs, such as a need for education in native language, access to media in native language, possibility to communicate and bring-up children in native language among others. This policy should be result-oriented to avoid the situation when these rights are provided by law but cannot be realized in practice in particular social settings.

These suggestions may be of use for broader contexts, for example other post-Soviet states undergoing multiple and simultaneous transformations in diverse social settings: struggling with the legacies of the imperial past and still trying to construct a modern nation.

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