

The Role of Activity of Ukrainian Youth – War Refugees in the Development of their Cultural Identity. Experiences of Ukrainian

Rola aktywności młodzieży ukraińskiej – uchodźców wojennych w rozwoju ich tożsamości kulturowej. Doświadczenia ukraińskich uczniów szkoły średniej

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Abstract: The article focuses on describing the role of the activity of Ukrainian refugees – youth aged 17-19 aimed at sustaining Ukrainian cultural identity. Materials gathered in the course of individual interviews allowed to divide into categories the projects undertaken by the respondents at school, home and in peer groups, supporting dissemination of awareness of the Ukrainian cultural community, identifying students' expectations regarding the development of their identity. As a result of the research, it was found that the activities presented by the respondents are among the main determinants influencing the development of the cultural identity of young Ukrainian war refugees.

Keywords: Ukrainian minority, secondary school, cultural identity,

Abstrakt: W artykule skupiono się na określeniu roli działalności uchodźców ukraińskich – młodzieży w wieku 17-19 lat – na rzecz ukraińskiej tożsamości kulturowej. Za pośrednictwem wywiadów indywidualnych zebrano materiał, który pozwolił na: skategoryzowanie przedsięwzięć podejmowanych przez badanych w środowisku szkolnym, domowym i w grupie rówieśniczej, sprzyjających rozpowszechnianiu świadomości ukraińskiej wspólnoty kulturowej; określenie ich oczekiwań w zakresie rozwoju ich tożsamości. W wyniku badań stwierdzono, że aktywności reprezentowane przez badanych są jednym z głównych determinantów rozwoju tożsamości kulturowej młodych wojennych uchodźców ukraińskich.

Słowa kluczowe: mniejszość ukraińska, szkoła ponadpodstawowa, tożsamość kulturowa, tożsamość zbiorowa, uchodźcy wojenni



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INTRODUCTION

Russia's attack on Ukraine triggered a number of changes on the international arena. On the one hand, it marked a turning point as regards both the world's security and economy, and the architecture of global energy. On the other hand, it initiated one of the largest processes of population mobility in the history of modern Europe, thus leading to the reorganization of the number and structure of national and religious minorities. In this way, the war determined a new approach to the perception of identity both on an individual and a collective/social level. Those changes affected both national culture and tradition and its relation to other cultures. As regards local communities, the war led to the encounter of individuals and communities representing various cultural symbols and codes. Those are social groups that will maintain what in their consciousness is related to the history and tradition of their ancestors, what is unique and exceptional. Groups that were forced to adapt to new living conditions, will seek understanding, cooperation, and the possibility of coexistence.

In this context, war refugees as a new Ukrainian minority – immigrants who have been forced out of their territory, constitute a community striving to maintain Ukrainian cultural identity at the times of change when they have to defend their country against the Russian policy of the 21st century.

The aim of the present research is to determine the role of activities aimed at developing Ukrainian cultural identity based on the experiences of secondary school students – Ukrainian war refugees who found themselves in Poland after February 24, 2022.

1. RESEARCH METHOD

The research was based on a collective case study using individual, semi-structured, problem-centred interviews (Rubacha 2016). The research aimed at providing the answer to the question of the role of the activities undertaken by war refugees from Ukraine/secondary school students in maintaining and developing Ukrainian cultural identity.

The research group consisted of 12 students aged 17-19 from one of the secondary schools in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodship – 8 girls and 4 boys. Some of them came to Poland just before the outbreak of the war due to their families' living and working here, but others arrived in Poland immediately after Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Although having various refugee and war experiences as they come from different, remote areas of Ukraine, they all feel like a community in Poland.

Table 1. Characteristics of the researched group

No.	Name	Age	Oblast	City	Reason for choosing Poland	Grade/Level of education
1.	Yelyzaveta	17	Dnipropetrovsk	Kryvyi Rih	parent's work	2
2.	Maksym	17	Vinnytsia	Vinnytsia	parent's work	2
3.	Karyna	18	Mykolaiv	Mykolaiv	parent's work	3
4.	Sabrina	18	Mykolaiv	Mykolaiv	parent's work	3
5.	Oleksandra	18	Kherson	Kherson	war circumstances	2
6.	Yevhenii	19	Mykolaiv	Mykolaiv	war circumstances	2 extramural secondary school
7.	Alina	17	Kharkiv	Kharkiv	war circumstances	3
8.	Aliona	17	Moldova	Camenca	distant relatives	2
9.	Veronika	17	Kharkiv	Kharkiv	war circumstances	3
10.	Yelyzaveta	18	Dnipropetrovsk	Pavlohrad	parent's work	3
11.	Vladyslav	17	Kyiv	Irpin	war circumstances	2
12.	Illia	18	Luhansk	Sievierodonetsk	war circumstances	2

Source: own study.

Selection of the research sample was based on the methodological assumptions of K. Rubacha (2016, 116), it was non-random purposeful, and it consisted in selecting those from the population of respondents who meet the criterion included in the research question. The researched group consists of students from the same educational institution, its authorities expressed their consent to the research and acted as an intermediary in contacts with parents who facilitated conducting interviews with young people. It was assumed that the answer to the research question should be based on the experience of young refugees attending the same school.

The research was carried out from January to March 2023 in Olsztyn in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. The interviews were conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (WNS UWM) in a room specially prepared to prevent any interference. Instructions were prepared for the interviews, focusing on the activities undertaken by the respondents that were conducive to disseminating the awareness of the Ukrainian cultural community in the school, home and peer groups environment, as well as students' expectations regarding the development of their cultural identity.

A code system was adopted for data collection and analysis based on the following key: respondent's number/gender/name abbreviation, e.g., 1/F/Y. The raw text created during the research, was abbreviated. A stratified sampling of units was adopted according to the variables contained in each of these units. These, in turn, after identification, were analysed, which made it possible to extract information contained

in the collected texts, which make up the context of the data. The data was verified using the analytical induction method, focusing on confronting the selected hypothetical statement with each element identified in the area of study (Rubacha 2016, 279).

2. UKRAINIAN WAR REFUGEES IN POLAND

Based on Article 1 of the Geneva Convention and the New York Protocol of 1967, a refugee is: a person who is outside his/her own country; fearing persecution due to race, religion, nationality, belonging to a social group or political views. Persecution must indicate a serious violation of human rights through the accumulation of various behaviours, actions in the form of physical and psychological violence, the lack of fair judgment or discrimination (Wierzbicki 2003, 9).

From February 24, 2022 to March 6, 2023, 10.2 million Ukrainians crossed the Polish border (Statystyki Straży Granicznej 2023). Refugees who came to Poland were mainly educated women with children, who are middle class representatives inhabiting urban agglomerations in Ukraine. They chose Poland because of the similar language and culture or due to having friends or family here. Most refugees came to the Masovian Voivodeship – 20%; much fewer to Lower Silesian Voivodeship – 11%; Lesser Poland and Silesia Voivodeships – 10%; Greater Poland Voivodeship – 9%; Pomeranian Voivodeship – 7%; Łódź Voivodeship – 6% and West Pomeranian Voivodeship – 5% (Żółciak and Osiecki 2022). The number of Ukrainian citizens in Poland is gradually decreasing. Some of them moved on to other European countries, and some returned to their homes (Długosz, Izdebska-Długosz and Kryvachuk 2022, 6). The total number of refugees returning from Poland to Ukraine by March 6, 2023 amounted to 8.191 million people (Statystyki Straży Granicznej 2023). Data from the Ministry of the Interior indicate that in 2022 the number of refugees registered in the PESEL system amounted to 1.1 million, including over 500,000. children (Żółciak and Osiecki 2022). By the end of February 2023, over 1.5 million people applied for a PESEL number. It is assumed that there are currently about 1.3 million Ukrainian refugees in Poland (Dobrowicz 2023).

According to the Central Statistical Office (as of June 24, 2022), at the end of the 2021/2022 school year, there were 182.5 thousand students in the Polish education system. Ukrainian war refugees (GUS 2022). Based on the report of the Educational Information System, made available by the prawo.pl website (as of February 14, 2023), it was established that 187.9 thousand children and youth from Ukraine are included in the Polish education system. Most students attend schools in the following voivodeships: Masovian – 33.6 thousand, Silesian – 21 thousand, Lower Silesian – nearly 21 thousand. As regards individual stages of education, the largest group of children attends primary schools – approx. 116.8 thousand, followed by kindergartens – 43.8 thousand. The smallest number of youths attend secondary schools, i.e., approx. 27.2 thousand students: approx. 10 thousand attend general secondary schools; approx. 8 thousand attend technical

secondary schools; approx. 3 thousand attend stage 1 and 2 sectoral vocational schools, and approx. 5.9 thousand attend post-secondary schools. (Małacz 2023).

3. CULTURAL IDENTITY

The issue of identity in the etymological sense is understood as: a characteristic sameness that allows to compare or replace one element with another; a set of features and properties that enable identification of a given person or object, taking into account the activities and relations taking place between the subject and the object. This concept can be considered in the psychological aspect related to the consciousness and self-awareness of an individual as well as in the metaphysical aspect, i.e., related to the immutability of an individual's nature and essence (Jeszka 2022).

Identity is constructed at both an individual and collective level. In the personal sphere, the structure of the Self is formed – one's own sets of judgments, ideas and beliefs (Zellma 2002, 420). An individual creates a sense of uniqueness, separateness in the process of getting to know oneself and by determining the differences between the Self and Others (Piechaczek-Ogierman 2019, 158).

Collective structure – We is characterized by a common system of norms, values, customs, habits, language and a specific territory of a given group; by experiencing and accepting tradition, the present and by determining the future (Lisowska 2022, 173). It is a set of self-definitions thanks to which an individual differentiates in terms of We-not-We, i.e. They (Reber and Reber 2002, 376). It is associated with the awareness of belonging to a specific group and social category.

Self-perception occurs through interpretation in relation to Others, while searching for separateness embedded in each individual's biography and experiences (Jeszka 2022). A person with a fixed identity is given the opportunity to reflectively relate to the course of their own life and the ability to relate it to others (Giddens 2002, 41). The basis of identity remains unchanged, but its peripheries undergo transformations. Therefore, it is partly given, but also constructed, and its modification emerges in the course of (un)intentional communication with the environment. Each individual expresses the need to remain in the community – to be settled in it (Jeszka 2022).

One of the basic forms of collective identity is cultural identity, which allows an individual to answer the fundamental existential questions: "Who am I?"; "Where do I come from" (Melchior 1990, 30). The fact of belonging to a specific structure (cultural community) gives people a sense of pride (Szczepański 1999, 10).

According to T. Lewowicki's identity behaviour theory in the view of intercultural education, culture is one of the pillars on which people build their identity behaviours. Among such fundamental areas of cultural identity as the historical fate of a group; identification with a territory and a group; historical genealogy; the economic and social sphere, Lewowicki distinguishes also culture, language and religion. The first substitute for culture is language – a symbolic form that constitutes both an instrument and an intrinsic value. Religion and art contribute

to anchoring an individual in an identity through significant attributes. People are included in a symbolic universe, and by accepting the behaviours specific to a given group, they emphasize their belonging to a given community (Lewowicki 1995, 53).

J. Nikitorowicz distinguishes four stages in the process of identity formation under the conditions of cultural borderland. The first formative stage involves family interactions, identification with one's family, the language they represent and the accepted culture. In the second, an individual turns towards the local community. In this way, in multicultural environments, a person selects the right group of reference ("significant others") and attributes values to local elements of culture. In the third stage, the identity of the minority group is formed. The basic values of the subculture as well as the forms of life in which an individual grows are reflected. An individual develops positive and negative attitudes towards the functioning social structure (Nikitorowicz 1995, 83). The author points to the final achievement of personal autonomy, i.e., "entering split autonomous identity." At the beginning, the so-called "isolated identity" is formed – an individual closes himself/herself in his/her own ethnic group by assimilating a system of values that is related only to that group. This results in the feelings of distrust, antagonism and prejudice in relation to others. The next stage involves the formation of "accommodative identity", where a person becomes open to Others – a characteristic majority group. It gives rise to cooperation among specific spheres of I-We-They, which allows for mutual cognition, recognition and certain concessions. This stage ends with the "reorienting identity", which is conditioned by a dissonance between the values and aspirations of an individual and the rules adopted in the minority group to which that individual belongs. Various variants of identity may emerge in result: the weakening of bonds with one's own group and lack of interest with the majority group; isolating oneself; integrating with the majority group simultaneously developing an unwilling or indifferent attitude towards the group of origin; assimilation with the majority group (Nikitorowicz 1995, 84).

Borderline, bicultural communities create a specific type of identity that is focused, on the one hand, on the place of residence and, on the other hand, on the area of origin. In culturally diverse societies, an individual feels "at home" and at the same time experiences a sense of "alienation". He/she remains in constant confrontation with Others, their traditions and cultures; behaviours, activities and lifestyles. Identity is shaped through identification with Others as well as the ability to understand and evaluate oneself, through criticism towards diverse situations, conditions, groups and people (Nikitorowicz 2005, 34).

The process of maintaining and forming the cultural identity of Ukrainian youth who found themselves in Poland as a result of warfare should be considered taking into account the impact of multicultural factors, as in the case of societies functioning in borderline areas.

4. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE RESPONDENTS IN THE SCHOOL, HOME AND PEER-GROUP ENVIRONMENT AIMED AT DEVELOPING THE UKRAINIAN CULTURAL COMMUNITY

Schools are places where both the education process and the formation of individual and collective identity take place. They enable implementation of activities in a closed space, in a culturally diverse community of students, their parents, as well as teachers and other employees.

According to the respondents, the school creates many opportunities to emphasize the distinctiveness and uniqueness of cultural groups, at the same time showing respect towards Others and focusing on cooperation among given communities. However, as Ukrainian students point out, it all depends on a given institution: the people involved in its management, the adopted direction of educational work and the issuing awareness and tolerance towards otherness of the school youth. Their experience regarding education in Poland also includes schools where cultural differences gave rise to many problems in everyday contacts with other students. This induced them to change their previous educational institutions to the current one, choosing it foremostly because of its cultural openness. “I was at a different high school at the beginning. It was impossible to function there. Nobody wanted to talk to me” – 5/F/Ch. They also noted that in other schools they experienced dislike on the part of their peers, especially when:

- they achieved better results in learning despite not knowing the language
- “I had to change classes, because when I was successful in computer classes and other colleagues were not, my colleagues felt resentful towards me” – 2/M/M.

- they could boast of sports, artistic or dancing skills – “friends claimed that I took away their place in the school performance and I can dance only because I attended a dance school in Ukraine” – 7/F/A.

The respondents come from different parts of Ukraine, and they did not know one another before coming to Poland. The teachers of the school attended by young refugees, guide students towards integration – they organize additional outings and meetings with representatives of, among others, scientific institutions – the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (WNS UWM), the Northern Institute in Olsztyn; administration offices – the Olsztyn City Hall, the Marshal’s Office; NGO organizations and foundations, i.e. Caritas in Olsztyn, Federation of Social Organizations (FOSA), Foundation for the Development of Warmia and Mazury. In the course of those meetings, young people learn about various possibilities of acting in the sphere of the voivodeship for the benefit of their cultural community. Young people establish cooperation with representatives of the above-mentioned institutions and actively participate in social projects implemented by them, e.g., in multicultural meetings at Caritas in Olsztyn; in the professional activity and social integration zone for foreigners and at the FOSA volunteer centre; social actions of the Foundation for the Development of Warmia and Mazury; workshops and intercultural seminars of the Marshal’s Office in Olsztyn.

Such projects are of great importance to the surveyed youth who need support and opportunities to form their identity and express themselves. They facilitate their adaptation to the Polish education system and the peer environment, while at the same time preserving their own distinctive cultural identity and a sense of community. According to the respondents, integration of Ukrainian students is necessary. “We come from different parts of Ukraine and sometimes we notice differences in the words we use to refer to some things or in pronunciation of certain words” – 2/M/M. “We have different roots, some of us have ancestors from China, Moldova or Russia. Our home cultures differ” – 9/F/V. “Joint activities organized out of school allowed us to get closer to each other, we created a kind of family, a Ukrainian family in Poland. It’s like finding relatives we didn’t know about.” – 10/F/Y. The teachers’ actions led to the creation of a cultural community in the school environment, which allows to intensify works on supporting Ukrainian identity of young refugees.

The place where the respondents meet regularly is the school library, which after the opening hours becomes a space for:

- development of a group/community/young refugees – creating specific cultural codes; types of behaviour; building shared experiences, strategies for perceiving reality and solving problems;
- working out projects promoting Ukrainian culture in Poland, its preservation and dissemination, in particular among young people who identify themselves as Ukrainians.

As regards the first analysed scope of activities, young people talk about everyday problems, about history and tradition embedded in their families and regions of origin. It is in the library that the respondents often organize photo shows about interesting places related to Ukraine – its tradition, heroes, important places and events for young people in the 21st century. They exchange their impressions from film shows. In their opinion, they form a group that is not closed to others and willingly invites all interested. Through these meetings, they acquire a sense of belonging to a specific community whose members are characterized by the same symbols and cultural codes. “Sometimes when we do something together, it seems to me that we are in Ukraine” – 12/M/I. “We tell each other about our cities. We show photos. It’s good because it feels a bit like being back home.” – 1/F/Y. “We can feel at home, although we know that it will be difficult to go back. But we’re here together, we are not alone. There are other people of the same age as we are who feel and think the same, speak the same language” – 10/F/Y. For them, the library is a space where they can feel at home, where the outside world ceases to matter and where all problems disappear or are solved.

In the second analysed aspect, the library “is the centre of our meetings, here we prepare for workshops and projects in which we participate in various institutions and organizations” – 7/F/A. “This is a place where we can talk or rehearse in peace before a dance, music or other performance in which we are involved with the repertoire about Ukraine” – 2/M/M. Without organizational support, young people would not be able to develop activities promoting the Ukrainian cultural community.

Another form of activity of young refugees involves a music and art group, in which the respondents sing in Ukrainian and perform dances. “At school, we always stage performances during ceremonial assemblies, and on two occasions, we performed just to present ourselves. It was an amazing moment because we were finally able to share our experiences with our colleagues” – 7/F/A. “The feedback that we received was very good and students at our school congratulated us and even sang with us pieces of our songs in Ukrainian” – 10/F/Y. For young refugees those school performances provide a form of communication and allow them to express themselves in the peer environment. What they fail to express in words to the school community, they can show through artistic performances. Additionally, they can preserve their tradition and culture in the educational environment.

With their repertoire, the respondents attracted the interest of representatives of educational institutions in the Warmian–Masurian Voivodeship. Recordings of these performances have been published online. Currently, Ukrainian students have started cooperation with the WNS UWM and the Intergenerational University at the Faculty of Social Sciences (UM at the WNS) in “European Intergenerational Days” project. It is a new initiative that brings together representatives of national and ethnic minorities of all ages associated with such institutions as: Catholic Kindergarten of the Saint Family in Olsztyn; the Primary School No. 30 in Olsztyn; day care homes in Olsztyn; the aforementioned Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn and the Intergenerational University at the Faculty of Social Sciences. The researched group will also present their repertoire at two scientific conferences: 10th National Scientific Conference “Aging and Late Adulthood in the Intergenerational Discourse” and the National Scientific Conference “The National Education Commission and Its Legacy”. “It is a very big event for us, but we are also happy that we can show our culture to people who will come from other areas of Poland” – 11/M/V. “Of course, we feel a bit nervous. However, at the same time it is an honour, and we can’t wait to perform. The more so that among the invited guests and speakers there will be people of Ukrainian origin” – 7/F/A. On the one hand, it is a huge challenge for young people, and on the other, an opportunity to show their roots and establish intercultural dialogue.

Working together on the preparation of specific performances and choreography requires seeking inspiration in Ukrainian traditional music and folk dance. It leads young people to reflect on the adaptation of cultural artistic expression to the contemporary audience. At the same time, it links it with artistic creation, which becomes a carrier of knowledge about the history of their ancestors. Students integrate, focus on a common goal and thus consciously form a unique identity structure in the collective sense (I-We-You). At the same time, they do not limit themselves to the peripheries of their identity, but rather build the basis for its functioning. “Setting up a band was the best idea. We enjoy showing our culture. We want to share it, we feel noticed then, but we also feel that we are together” – 9/F/V. “The band helps us to express what cannot be said in words, to talk about our culture and the history of our country” – 2/M/M.

Appropriate costumes and decorations that refer to traditional folk clothes or are related to popular culture constituting a specific trend in the environment of young Ukrainian refugees are prepared for each such event. As regards the latter, the respondents refer primarily to contemporary Ukrainian bands and artists. “We want to support our idols from Ukraine. We still listen to them, and we share their great music as much as possible” – 10/F/Y. “We are also interested in folk music and folk costumes, and we are seeking possibilities to prepare them in Poland. It’s good that we can find a lot of old recordings on the Internet. Thanks to this, we have something to follow” – 7/F/A. The respondents’ statements demonstrate that Ukrainian students are inspired by traditional music, which they try to adapt to contemporary artistic forms of expression. Particular elements of the prepared performances help students discover their own cultural roots. Each of the respondents has an assigned role in the described artistic undertakings. “One could say that we all have our tasks. This is great because we do everything on time. We act together and we are with our Ukraine” – 4/F/S. Among the respondents there are those responsible for promotion, i.e., posters and information on the school’s website, for performance, dance, and scenery.

In their experiences, the respondents point to the sense of stability provided by the family with whom they came to Poland. “We ran away leaving everything behind. We miss it. But we probably won’t be back.” – 11/M/V. “At first, it was very hard for us, but thanks to our parents and siblings and because we are together, it started to get better and better” – 2/M/M. The family as the basic cultural community helps to preserve Ukrainian tradition and history. For them, it is a source of awareness of their own identity and an added value in activities undertaken for the benefit of Ukrainian culture in school and peer environment. At home, young refugees speak Ukrainian, tell stories from the lives of previous generations. Outside, they try to speak Polish to learn the language faster. “The family is our little Ukraine here in Poland” – 2/M/M. Basically, they live in the same way as before the Russian attack: they cook the same dishes at home, they maintain the habitual routine of everyday life, they stick to their beliefs and organize festivals in a similar way. The awareness of family members of young refugees is focused on the cultural heritage of their ancestors, and as regards their efforts at its preservation it is only the place of living that has changed. Students transfer all activities carried out at school to their home environment. They seek parents’ advice on how to present particular elements of culture and involve them in the preparation of costumes and scenography. They share the family stories they hear at home with the school and peer group. “We ask mom and dad how it used to be. About the fate of our grandparents, about their favourite dishes, clothes, but also whether they took part in any military operations or where they worked” – 4/F/S.

The respondents also initiate meetings between their families, involving them in school and extracurricular projects. Thanks to this, the cultural community created in the educational environment has a chance to develop also outside of the educational institution. The more so that in the course of everyday duties, the respondents’ parents often lack time for contacts with the Ukrainian minority gathered in associations in Poland. “We like these outings together. It’s like we’ve

enlarged our family or regained a lost one” – 2/M/M. “We came to Poland, and it is difficult for us to keep in touch with aunts, uncles, etc., and through these meetings we gain new family members with whom we can share our thoughts” – 11/M/V.

Outside of school, the respondents meet, like most young people, in the place of their residence: on sports fields, playgrounds and other green areas. Most often, however, they seek contact with young people of Ukrainian origin. In the peer group, they live enclosed in their own distinctiveness – they are afraid of being noticed by Others. “On some occasions, when we spoke Ukrainian in a public place, passers-by paid attention to us” – 3/F/K. “We feel best in our own company, most at ease, but we do not close ourselves off to others” – 2/M/M. During the meetings, young refugees talk mainly about everyday events, anxiety related to the fate of their country, but also about their feelings related to their adaptation to living in the Polish culture and community. What binds them together is popular culture, they share their feelings and opinions while listening to music or watching movies. They try to take advantage of the fact that they do not have to live in a war zone. They get to know the area in which they currently live, organizing bicycle and walking trips to interesting urban and green spaces in Olsztyn. “We are fortunate to live in a beautiful place with many lakes and forests. It reminds us a bit of the beautiful landscapes in Ukraine” – 11/M/V.

The peer group provides them with support in everyday worries and helps them solve problems. Being together is the most important thing for them as, in their opinion, it prevents them from feeling lonely, alienated, different, because not from here. It helps them overcome the feelings of inferiority resulting from the fact that they do not speak the language, that they are not in their own country, that they do not live in their own culture. It also allows them to cope with difficult moments of self-doubt related to school failures resulting from language barriers.

5. EXPECTATIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS REGARDING FORMATION OF THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY

The respondents indicate the need for integration with the Ukrainian minority in Poland. Currently, they do not feel part of this community, do not participate in projects carried out by organizations related to Ukrainian culture in Poland. However, they would especially like to meet young people whose ancestors came from Ukraine in other periods of European history. In their opinion, this would strengthen the Ukrainian community and enable communication among individual generations of the minority. “We have no contact with other Ukrainians. And getting to know them could help us in functioning in Poland” – 11/M/V. “It is a pity that the Ukrainian minority does not organize meetings with refugees. We would like to be part of this community. It is important for us to be with the rest of people from Ukraine” – 6/M/Y. Young refugees express the need to be part of the Ukrainian national community in a foreign country, i.e., to preserve their own cultural space. It does not mean that they want to close themselves off to

Others, but that they wish to secure their own sense of distinctiveness while being open to coexistence. Active participation in the life of the Ukrainian minority is their chance to develop their own identity in the perspective of their cultural roots, while at the same time opening up to elements from other cultural areas. This is the way to intercultural dialogue – to coexistence on the periphery of various elements of identity structures – to adaptation. “We know that we will not return, we will live, study and then work here in Poland, but we do not want to give up our roots” – 8/F/A.

The second issue that resounds in the respondents’ statements is the fear associated with the question of social acceptance of their cultural expression by which they do not mean to impose their own values and norms, but only to maintain their tradition. Young refugees emphasize that outside the school where they were well received, they do not always have the courage to reveal their origin. “We always wonder about people’s reaction to our being Ukrainian. We don’t want to impose anything on anyone, although our culture is beautiful, and we are always happy to present it” – 7/F/A. The respondents would like to be perceived through the prism of establishing intercultural dialogue and ways of coexistence. They hope for more openness on the part of their peers and adults that they meet in their daily lives. They believe that they can contribute to this by acquainting their environment with Ukrainian culture, which will simultaneously help them to form their own identity. “We have a constant need to talk about our country, to gain new information and thus learn our history. We want to share it with others” – 10/F/Y.

The respondents express their willingness to become part of the multicultural community of Warmia and Mazury, members of the Ukrainian minority in Poland. They want to be able to develop their own identity, rooted in what is traditional, valuable, and derived from the history of their ancestors. At the same time, they are open to what is different/new/contemporary striving towards multidimensionality of individuals and social groups, identifying themselves with different origins, but living in the same territory and caring for it together. “I already feel from here, I’ve got used to it. I feel safe and basically, I’m fine here” – 2/M/M. Belonging to a local community is a way to fully adapt and settle into a new living environment. Young refugees realize that being part of a multicultural group related to a given territory, they can shape their own living space, and also the native culture and transcultural identity structures of all its members.

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural identity of the respondents – young Ukrainian war refugees provides grounds for their stable functioning in the space of unfavourable living conditions in which they found themselves together with their families. Forced migration, leaving the place where they formed the sense of their own and collective belonging to a specific structure of a social – territorial – national group, deprived the respondents of a sense of stability in terms of I-We-They.

The initiative to stimulate and organize activities aimed at supporting Ukrainian cultural identity in the school environment sets a common goal for students, enables them to develop similar beliefs and ways of solving problems accompanying their education. It liberates, constitutes values and norms of conduct derived from tradition and contemporary political events. Implementation of artistic projects, film meetings and workshops in the field of Ukrainian culture creates a kind of safe haven within the school walls, where young people can move towards the awareness of their own culture, but also open up in the periphery to multiculturalism.

An important element in shaping the cultural identity of students of Ukrainian origin are meetings with representatives of institutions and non-governmental organizations. Establishing cooperation, participation in extracurricular projects, on the one hand, integrates young people as a community/group, and on the other, sets them a goal in activities aimed at supporting Ukrainian culture, their own expectations and views, and ways of solving problems. This leads to the opening of students to cooperation and intergenerational, interinstitutional and intercultural dialogue. The integration of young people that takes place in the school space enables young refugees to work out tasks that determine the development of their cultural identity.

The family environment provides young refugees with knowledge about their ancestors and determines the formation of views related to the dynamically changing political situation in Ukraine. Their activity in the home and peer environment perpetuates the tradition of Ukrainian culture in the minds of young people, which provides them with a sense of stability, uniqueness, distinctiveness and results in discovering the need to show their otherness and learn from other cultural groups. It facilitates young refugees' adaption to new living conditions. It leads to family reunification, creation of a new Ukrainian community – people who came to Poland after February 24, 2022. A community whose identity structures are open on the periphery to what is different, but valuable, while maintaining their own native traditions.

The respondents are eager to undertake activities aimed at presenting their culture and history, but also to take over from Others what is significant, i.e., dynamic co-creation of a multicultural community. They postulate a willingness to contact and cooperate with organizations of the Ukrainian minority in Poland. They do not want to impose their culture on others. They only look for a space providing them with new opportunities to form their own Ukrainian cultural identity, which can become part of the transcultural structure of the local environment of Warmia and Mazury. It gives them an opportunity to take an active part in co-creating their own identity, which is influenced by the experiences and views of people having different fates. At the same time, it is a path towards full adaptation and responsibility for the environment in which they live.

The research contributes to the issue of the identity of ethnic and cultural minorities in Poland and the prospects of creating transcultural societies in the era of political, economic, and social changes of the 21st century. It should

be extended to include a larger research group of Ukrainian youth studying in secondary schools in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship (and subsequently in other areas of Poland) and for a comparative analysis of the functioning of these students within the institutions, taking into account their specific character.

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