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Dimensions of Social Cohesion in a Transitional Society: The Case of Ukraine

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Abstract

Focusing on the local community level, this study draws on representative survey data to examine how Ukrainians perceive social cohesion on the basis of objective and subjective criteria. Building on Chan *et al.*'s operationalisation of social cohesion, we use factor analysis to identify four dimensions of social cohesion: social engagement, connectedness, civic participation and intergroup concordance. Although we find no differences in assessments between the various regions of the country, social cohesion appears stronger in voluntarily formed amalgamated territorial communities compared to other territorial units. We discuss how and why Ukraine differs from other societies as to social cohesion features.

UKRAINE, WITH ITS SLIGHTLY OVER 40 MILLION INHABITANTS AND LOCATION between Europe and Eurasia, is known for its diversity in terms of the geopolitical orientation, regional, ethnic and religious identities, language

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use and socio-economic stratification of its citizens. Statehood, established as recently as in 1991, was followed by political turmoil, and nation-building has remained incomplete and subject to contestation (Haran & Yakovlev 2017). What is, or should be, the shared idea upon which to build the new state and hold it together has been a recurrent issue amongst Ukrainian politicians and the population at large (Korostelina 2013; Kipensky *et al.* 2017). Should the nation be built on ethnic or civic characteristics? Should the regions have less independence, or more? Should the country seek stronger economic and political integration with Europe, should it re-establish stronger ties with Russia and the Eurasian Union, or should it exploit its location in-between these economic and political blocs?

Social cohesion is a concept often used to describe the glue that is necessary to hold a society or a community together. Studies of social cohesion have flourished over the past 20 years, due, *inter alia*, to increasing migration flows that affect the homogeneity of national populations, growing disparities between rich and poor, and more polarised political debate. However, much research on social cohesion has focused on Western liberal democracies: despite the obvious relevance of the topic, there are few in-depth studies of social cohesion in Ukrainian society. In their comparative study of 47 European countries based on theoretically derived indicators of social cohesion from the 2008 European Value Survey, Dickes and Valentova (2013) grouped Ukraine together with other East European countries characterised by low levels of formal (behavioural) and substantial (attitudinal/perceived) levels of social cohesion. Similarly, Bondarenko *et al.* (2017), using comparative Ukrainian data to complement comparative analyses of the European Social Survey 2012–2013, found that Ukraine generally scored low to very low on the selected indicators of social cohesion, which placed the country in a middle position amongst East and Central European countries. The exception concerned levels of interpersonal trust, where Ukraine scored higher than other countries in this region but still lower than most West European states. Further, Ukraine's Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (SCORE) provides comprehensive information about social cohesion levels in the country, using indicators that enable international comparisons.¹ However, the focus of SCORE is on identifying the drivers of conflict dynamics and peaceful social change; it is less sensitive to several other important aspects of social cohesion highlighted in the social cohesion literature. Other studies of social cohesion in Ukraine have tended to focus on the economic aspects of the concept (Poluneev 2011; Kytsak & Kyrylyuk 2013; Grynenko & Kirilyuk 2016). Our study provides new empirical data using indicators developed and applied by leading scholars. Further, as theories on social cohesion have been developed mainly through

¹ See, Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (SCORE), <https://use.scoreforpeace.org/en/ukraine/2019-Schools-0>, accessed 1 July 2021.

studies of stable Western democracies, we have chosen to focus on the characteristics of social cohesion in a transition society where nation-building is incomplete and major reform processes are underway, affecting different segments of the population in different ways.

Conditions likely to affect levels of social cohesion in Ukraine

Several specifics of Ukrainian society are likely to have an impact on levels of social cohesion in the country. One obvious source of tension, prior to the February 2022 invasion, that affected internal cohesion was Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflicts around the self-declared republics in Donbas. These resulted in hardened fronts between population groups with different geopolitical outlooks and views on the conflict and its potential resolution—in and beyond the areas subject to military hostilities or annexation. One effect was the large number of internally displaced persons dispersed across the country, held to give rise to local socio-economic instability and popular resentment (Krakhmalova 2019).

A recurring theme in academic literature and political rhetoric on Ukrainian society concerns the alleged large differences in geopolitical outlooks, political preferences and attitudes to Ukrainian nation-building between the western and central parts of the country on the one hand, and southern and eastern Ukraine on the other. After Ukraine gained independence, regional and cultural divisions became an important topic for research. The concept of 'two Ukraines' (Ryabczuk 1992, 2002), which has supporters (Kuzio 2020) as well as opponents (Zhurzhenko 2002; Fomina 2014; Grytsak 2020), has been expanded by other studies from various disciplines (Birch 2000; Wilson 2000; Sasse 2001, 2010; O'Loughlin 2001; Kubicek 2002; Barrington & Herron 2004; Shulman 2004; Taras *et al.* 2004; Malanchuk 2005; Katchanovski 2006; Rogers 2007; Hrytsak *et al.* 2007; Zhurzhenko 2010; Kulyk 2011; Riabchuk 2003, 2015). By applying diverse methodological and theoretical lenses, these researchers advanced the study of regionalism and regional diversity in Ukraine with cultural maps that divide the country not simply into east and west, but into several subcultural spaces. A recent multidisciplinary study (Shmid & Myshlovska 2019) offers a new approach. By examining the interrelation between transnational, national and regional dynamics of change, the authors challenge the dominance of the nation-state paradigm in the evaluation of Ukraine, proposing 'a dynamic and fine-grained regionally-differentiated vision of Ukraine without any stable macroregions' (Myshlovska 2019).

Regardless of the analytical language that scholars employ in their investigations and the regional and cultural landscapes they produce as results of these enquiries, the concept of a deep east–west division remains. This is exemplified by political maps showing greater electoral support for politicians and parties favouring the

Orange and Euromaidan revolutions in the central and, especially, western parts of Ukraine, whereas people in the east are likely to be sceptical towards these pro-European parties and tend to support greater integration with Russia and the Eurasian Union (KIIS 2020). Moreover, for decades people in the western part of the country have tended to promote an ethnic understanding of the nation, with greater weight on ethnic Ukrainian identity and preferential treatment for the Ukrainian language. By contrast, people in the east and southeast are more likely to support a civic concept of nationhood in which citizenship, not ethnicity, forms the basis of the nation.² A recent study shows how Euromaidan generated an ‘eventful nationalism in Ukraine’, galvanising and reinforcing perceptions of a civic Ukrainian nation, a model that includes practices of othering and ethno-cultural exclusion (Zhuravlev & Ishchenko 2020).

The unprecedented unity shown by the Ukrainian population in voting for Volodymyr Zelenskyy as president showed that political allegiances are dynamic, cross-cutting the east–west division. On the other hand, the local elections in autumn 2020 confirmed that regional political preferences have not disappeared; some authors see this as increased regionalism endangering ‘a fragile social cohesion’ (Lutsevych 2020). Do these differences in geopolitical outlooks, political preferences and attitudes towards nation-building lead people living in the different regions of Ukraine to perceive various aspects of social cohesion in different ways? Instead of applying a fine-grained cultural map of Ukraine, in this study we have divided the country into west, centre, east and south.

Scholars have developed contested theories about the causal effect of ethnocultural diversity on social cohesion, mostly arguing for a negative relationship. Residents in ethnically diverse communities are said to have less trust in each other, and formal and informal networks are seen as weaker.³ Others hold that it is ethnic concentration, rather than diversity, to harm social cohesion (Vervoort *et al.* 2010), and that disadvantage has the most detrimental impact (Laurence 2009). In this study we examine whether those who identify as ethnic Ukrainians give different assessments of social cohesion along core social cohesion indicators, compared to those who report Russian or another ethnic identity.

Another aspect to consider when studying social cohesion in Ukraine is the effect of the ongoing decentralisation reform, which since 2014 has transferred power and resources from the centre to the local level (Sydoruk & Chabanna 2017). One important component of the reform has been to reduce the large number of territorial units, from more than 11,000 at the outset of the reform to a smaller number of stronger amalgamated

² ‘Identychnist’ hromadyan Ukrainy v novykh umovakh: stan, tendentsii, regional’ni osoblyvosti’, *Natsional’na bezpeka i oborona*, Razumkov Centre, 3–4, 2016, available at: https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD161-162_2016_ukr.pdf, accessed 23 February 2021.

³ See, for example, Putnam (2007).

territorial communities (ATCs, *hromadas*). In the initial phase of the reform, such amalgamations were voluntary, encouraged by the state through strong economic incentives. Legislative changes adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (CMU) on 12 June 2020 signified a new stage, with the transformation from a voluntarily based (bottom-up) strategy to an administrative one (top-down). Until that date, 1,070 ATCs had been formed voluntarily, in line with the procedures set out in the Law of Ukraine ‘About Voluntary Amalgamation of Territorial Hromadas’ (such as public hearings, meetings and voting) [Please can you provide full reference details for this law, to include: title in original language (transliterated), date adopted, a direct weblink and date the weblink was last accessed]. On 12 June 2020, the CMU adopted 24 orders on the approval of administrative centres and ATC territories, forming 1,469 ATCs across the whole country. By focusing on social cohesion at different levels of scale and in different types of territorial units, our study examines whether perceptions of social cohesion differ between the voluntarily formed ATCs in rural areas and other types of territorial units, namely cities and administratively formed rural ATCs.

Decentralisation has been widely recognised as one of the most successful reforms after Ukraine’s 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity (Makarenko 2017; Aasland & Lyska 2020). Decentralisation has been described as an effective tool for democratisation (Oleinikova 2020) and European integration (Romanova & Umland 2019). However, scholars have also noted the potential risks associated with implementation of the reform: local elite capture (Bader 2020), differing speeds of amalgamation that trigger a deepening of social inequalities (Zhalilo *et al.* 2019), and pessimism as to whether the reform can deter Russia-sponsored separatism (Barbieri 2020), a question superseded by the 24 February 2022 invasion. Concerning the effect on social cohesion, in a recent article Olena Lennon (2021) argues, ‘decentralization is likely to prevent, not exacerbate, further fracturing along regional lines and to facilitate social cohesion and unity, critical to Ukraine’s long-term stability’. In our study it is precisely the potential effects on social cohesion *via* the amalgamation of local territories that are in focus.

Many Ukrainians have experienced continuous or periodic economic hardships during economic crises, such as after the financial crisis in 2008–2009, when real incomes plummeted. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused further strains on living standards, especially for persons in precarious work positions. Living standards are modest or low compared to most other European countries,⁴ and Ukraine is notorious for high levels of

⁴ Ukraine is currently ranked number 74 amongst all states on the Human Development Index. See, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>, accessed 10 February 2021.

corruption.⁵ It is therefore relevant to assess to which extent perceptions of social cohesion vary amongst different segments of the population, in accordance with their economic resources, but also their level of education, generational differences, and differences between men and women.

Bearing in mind Ukraine's location in the borderland between West and East, its internal and external conflicts, unfinished nation-building and the ongoing reforms affecting its territorial structure, we ask, drawing on the social cohesion literature, notably Chan *et al.*'s (2006) operationalisation of social cohesion: what dimensions of social cohesion can be discerned in Ukraine? Do these correspond to dimensions identified by scholars writing on other societal settings?

Given the exploratory nature of our research, instead of deriving and testing hypotheses about possible directions of correlations between social cohesion variables, this study seeks to find answers to a set of sub-questions: are there pronounced regional divisions in the way Ukrainians perceive social cohesion, and do ethnic identity and language use affect perceptions of social cohesion? How is social cohesion perceived in voluntarily formed territorial units (ATCs) in rural areas, compared to in the cities or in rural ATCs formed *via* administrative procedures? How do other socio-economic and socio-demographic factors (such as material living conditions, education, gender and age) affect perceived levels of social cohesion?

First, we take a closer look at theories on social cohesion and how the concept has been operationalised and measured. After presenting the survey data and the methods used for analysis, in the empirical part we offer an overview of how Ukrainians score on key social cohesion indicators. We then we conduct factor (principal component) analysis to explore whether these indicators can be reduced to a smaller number of social cohesion dimensions. This is followed by regression analysis investigating whether different perceptions and manifestations of social cohesion are associated with certain subgroups of the population. In the final part of the article, we seek explanations for our main findings, discuss how and why Ukraine differs from other societies as regards citizens' social cohesion assessments, and offer feedback to theory by examining how the specifics of the Ukrainian transition society require alertness to the operationalisation and measurement of social cohesion.

Social cohesion in a society in transition: theoretical framework and operationalisation

Despite the academic boom in social cohesion studies since the 1990s, no common view was established as to how to conceptualise and define this concept (Friedkin 2004), nor is there an agreed approach to its operationalisation

⁵ Ukraine is currently ranked number 117 (of 180) on the Corruption Perception Index. See, <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/ukraine>, accessed 10 February 2021.

and measurement (Bottoni 2018). The concept has been theorised as an aspect of quality-of-life research (Berger-Schmitt 2002; Noll 2002; Wallace & Abbot 2009), as a category of social politics (Jenson 2002), as a basis for social inclusion (Yarskaya-Smirnova & Yarskaya 2014), as a way of assessing the strength of connections (Braaten 1991), and as an ongoing process of developing a community (Jeannotte 2003). Conceptualisations tend to vary with the focuses of the research undertaken. There are also many approaches to social cohesion studies, mostly academic or policy-oriented (Chan *et al.* 2006), emphasising objective or perceived perspectives of cohesion (Bollen & Hoyle 1990) and the levels of analysis (micro, meso, macro) (Whelan & Maître 2005). In numerous studies (Chan *et al.* 2006; Dragolov *et al.* 2016; Bottoni 2018; Delhey *et al.* 2018), the definition of social cohesion is closely related to the model chosen for measuring it; however, these models vary considerably.

Whereas the academic literature on social cohesion has generally not engaged in operationalisation of the concept for its measurement, several more policy-oriented researchers have sought ways of measuring social cohesion levels (Chan *et al.* 2006). Amongst those who have developed social cohesion measurements—for example, Jenson (1998, 2011), Bernard (1999), Berger-Schmitt (2002), Chan *et al.* (2006), Dickes *et al.* (2010), Green and Janmaat (2011), Bottoni (2018), Delhey *et al.* (2018)—two main directions or approaches stand out.

The first approach is represented by the above-mentioned papers by Jenson, Berger-Schmitt and Bernard, as well as their followers Green and Janmaat, and Dickes. These studies do not draw a clear distinction between what can be considered the conditions or causes of social cohesion and what comprises its content. Further, they all view social cohesion through the prism of political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, and all are concerned with how social cohesion involves different elements of societal development and national politics. In turn, these social cohesion studies have created the basis for social cohesion definitions used by international actors. Thus, social cohesion is presented as a tool for improving ‘the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding marginalization’ (Council of Europe 2008). A society is considered ‘cohesive’ if it works towards ‘the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility’ [This quote doesn’t flow on from the first one, please rework] (OECD 2011).

The second approach is organised around ideas proposed by Chan *et al.* (2006), who were the first to emphasise the importance of distinguishing between, on the one hand, the conditions and effects of social cohesion, and its essence, on the other. They argued that economic and sociocultural elements that many of the abovementioned researchers had included as parts of the social cohesion concept represent its conditions and should not be confused with its essential components. However, Chan *et al.* recognised both the

multidimensionality of the concept and its multilevel features. Their authoritative measurement scheme is built on two dimensions (horizontal and vertical) and two components (subjective and objective), establishing a two-by-two matrix for a set of social cohesion indicators.

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TABLE 1 TWO-BY-TWO FRAMEWORK TO MEASURE SOCIAL COHESION, DEVELOPED BY CHAN *ET AL.* (2006)

	Subjective component (People's state of mind)	Objective component (Behavioural manifestations)
Horizontal dimension (cohesion within civil society)	General trust in fellow citizens	Social participation and vibrancy of civil society
	Willingness to cooperate and help others	Voluntarism and donations
	Sense of belonging or identity	Presence or absence of major intergroup alliances or cleavages
Vertical dimension (state-citizen cohesion)	Trust in public figures	Political participation (voting, membership in political parties)
	Confidence in political and other major social institutions	

The horizontal and vertical dimensions identify two aspects of social relationships on different levels. The horizontal one concentrates on the ‘relationship among different individuals and groups within society’; the vertical dimension looks at ‘the relationship between the state and its citizens’ (Chan *et al.* 2006, p. 293). The objective components include ‘people's actual participation, cooperation and helping behaviour’ and the subjective ones, ‘norms and subjective feelings of trust, a sense of belonging and willingness to help’ (Chan *et al.* 2006, p. 291). Later operationalisations of social cohesion, such as Dragolov *et al.*'s (2013) Social Cohesion Radar and the works of Bottoni (2018) and Delhey *et al.* (2018), draw largely on Chan *et al.*'s framework and also emphasise a clear distinction between the conditions and components of social cohesion.

Despite the virtues of these newer models, we have opted to follow Chan *et al.*'s original model in this study, with a slight modification, as explained below. The lack of subjective and objective social cohesion components as well as the lack of attention to the type of social bonds emphasised in Chan *et al.* model is the reason why we do not use the Social Cohesion Radar model, which has been elaborated further by Delhey *et al.* (2018) when investigating the social cohesion of Western and Asian societies. Similarly, Bottoni's model lacks a thoroughly elaborated identity component, and the focus on citizens' attitudes relates to one social group only, namely immigrants, which would not reflect the complexity of Ukrainian diversity.

In this study we therefore rely on Chan *et al.*'s model, which is suited for both the difference between attitudes and practices (subjective and objective components) as well as spheres of social interactions (horizontal and vertical dimensions). We follow Chan *et al.*'s definition of social cohesion as ‘a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterised by a set of attitudes

and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations' (Chan *et al.* 2006, p. 290). However, given certain peculiarities of the Ukrainian case as a transitional society, we have modified the model slightly.

These modifications are related to current debates about appropriate level of social cohesion measurement. All models of social cohesion measurement built into the framework of both abovementioned approaches use societal units of analysis, with a holistic emphasis on society as a whole. Advocating the position of social cohesion societal attribute, Chan *et al.* acknowledge the presence of social cohesion on the level of groups or communities, 'cities, neighbourhoods, religious groups, to name but a few' (Chan *et al.* 2006, p. 291). The local and regional level is deemed especially pertinent in the context of the transitional society with ongoing reforms affecting its territorial structure and the continuous armed conflict and war in Donbas.

Transitional society is characterised by dynamic social changes on all levels, especially on the institutional and group levels, due to the emerging new social norms and types of interactions (Babenko 2002). Here the scheme of empirical operationalisation of social cohesion must rely on all levels: micro, meso and macro. The micro-level of social cohesion is reflected in the degree of interpersonal trust, the strength of social ties within primary groups. The meso-level is characterised by the strength of relations within secondary groups and the relations between them. The macro-level of social cohesion is formed by 'tolerance of intergroup differences, structures of support in times of adversity and the legitimating of political practices' (Whelan & Maître 2005, p. 231).

Chan *et al.*'s model of social cohesion measurement includes such micro-level indicators as degree of interpersonal trust (general trust in fellow citizens) and strength of social ties within primary groups (voluntarism and donations). It also emphasises such macro-social indicators as tolerance of intergroup differences (willingness to cooperate and help; the presence or absence of major inter-group alliances or cleavages) and the legitimating of political practices (trust in public figures, confidence in political and other major social institutions, political participation). However, the meso-level indicators of social cohesion are almost absent in this scheme and only partially present as regards voluntarism and donations: social participation and vibrancy of civil society.

Chan *et al.* analyse social cohesion as a societal attribute that should be studied using the state as the primary unit of analysis. Other researchers, such as Rajulton (2007), have argued that social cohesion should ideally be measured at the local community level where people live their daily lives. In Ukraine, frequently referred to as 'a country of regions', the regional and local levels can be expected to be important for identity formation and political reference. In our analysis we have modified Chan *et al.*'s two-by-two framework to include different levels of scale, but with the main emphasis on the local community level (city or ATCs). This also facilitates

analyses of possible correlations of social cohesion indicators with geographic location and form of decentralisation (voluntary or administrative) in Ukraine.

Our modifications involve transforming most of the country-level variables to the local community level (city or ATC) without compromising Chan *et al.*'s two-by-two set-up and types of indicators. Thus, for several of the items, instead of asking about 'people in this country' we changed the wording to 'people in this local community' and so forth. Instead of asking about relations between local inhabitants and immigrants, we asked about relations with internally displaced persons (from Crimea and Donbas), an issue much higher on the political agenda. The 'belonging and identity' indicator was enlarged by adding a battery of questions related to citizens' ethnic, local community, regional, national and European identity, instead of Chan *et al.*'s sole emphasis on the national level. Introducing these various forms of identity also enables us also to analyse the importance of each and the potential interrelations between identities at different levels. A set of questions about 'trust in public figures' and 'confidence in political and other major social institutions' was adapted to the Ukrainian context by measuring level of trust in the president, the parliament, judiciary, local authorities, NGOs and mass media. As our aim is to compare variations in experiences and perceptions of social cohesion amongst different population groups and locations in Ukraine, rather than comparing Ukraine with other countries, we find these adjustments of Chan *et al.*'s model justified and better suited to capture the specifics of Ukrainian transitional society than Chan *et al.*'s original setup.

Data and methodology

The data presented in this study are based on a representative survey of individuals across Ukraine.⁶ The survey was conducted by the Ukrainian opinion poll agency Operativna Sociologia in Dnipro on behalf of Oslo Metropolitan University in December 2020.⁷ The aim of the survey was to capture social cohesion dimensions at the local level amongst ordinary Ukrainian citizens and to analyse whether and how identities, perceptions and behaviour varied amongst different segments of the population.

The survey was conducted in the form of telephone interviews. Slightly over 2,100 respondents answered in the national survey. The opinion poll agency generated a new database of phone numbers for each new all-Ukrainian survey, using a computer random number algorithm, where each phone number is a random set of

⁶ The self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as Crimea, were not included in the survey.

⁷ For details see Baliichuk (2020).

numbers and indices of mobile operators (taking into account the total share of operators that provide mobile services in the Ukrainian market).⁸ Mobile phone coverage in Ukraine is very high, with mobile phones far more common than landlines. The quality of the method was tested by comparing the results of several opinion poll agencies prior to elections, where prognoses of election results proved amongst the most accurate when using this method.

The surveyed population was largely representative in terms of geographical distribution across the country, type of settlement, gender and age. However, our results indicated a slight overrepresentation of persons with higher education, which is not uncommon in social surveys. More worryingly, we found that a considerably larger percentage said that they had voted in the previous local elections (60%) than was actually the case (37%). This might have been related to social desirability in an interview situation—not wanting to admit to not having voted—but the main reason is most probably that those who were willing to participate in a survey were also more likely to vote in elections. Our sample also yielded a certain overrepresentation of ethnic Ukrainians,⁹ although respondents were offered the option of answering in both Ukrainian and Russian.

That some groups of the population are better represented in the survey indicates the need for some degree of caution in data analysis. In particular, we cannot rule out a certain bias for univariate distributions on key dependent variables. However, although individual variables may be noticeably biased due to low response rates for some population groups, their relationships with each other tend not to be biased (Dey 1997). According to Rindfuss *et al.* (2015), low response rates are much less of an issue when examining relationships in multivariate analyses in which various background variables are controlled for. As the main purpose of our study was to explore relationships between different variables, we feel confident that the findings from the multivariate analyses are meaningful and reflect actual patterns amongst Ukrainian citizens.

A note is in order as regards the responses in terms of settlement types. Our survey was conducted after the local elections of 25 October 2020 and thus took place in a decentralised Ukraine with 1,438 ATCs. However,

⁸ There are about 110 million potential mobile telephone numbers in Ukraine, of which about 55 million are in use. For the national survey, the opinion poll agency first generated 104,000 telephone numbers. However, only about 21,000 answered the phone, of whom 2,106 were willing to participate and completed the survey.

⁹ As there had been no census since 2001 and a larger share of Ukrainian citizens are now more likely to identify as ethnic Ukrainians (Arel 2018) (also, the survey did not include Crimea and the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, where the share of ethnic Ukrainians is lower than elsewhere), it is hard to estimate the size of this overrepresentation. We therefore decided not to use weighting for the different ethnic groups. The self-reported ethnic distribution in the sample was as follows: Ukrainians 87%, Russians 6%, other ethnicity 4%, mixed ethnicity 3%.

not all respondents were aware of the decentralisation reform and the fact that, at the time of the survey, they were living in an ATC (8% of the respondents reported they lived in a rural community not part of an ATC). In the following we assumed that these respondents lived in ATCs that had been formed recently and in an administrative manner, without public participation (public hearings, meetings, voting). However, we cannot rule out that some of these respondents lived in voluntarily formed ATCs, as responses were based on respondents' own classification and could not be confirmed by objective criteria.

We analysed the survey data using factor (principal component) analysis and multilinear regression analysis, employing SPSS 27 statistical software.

Empirical findings

Here we present the survey results according to the framework proposed by Chan *et al.*, adapted to the Ukrainian setting and to the local level. We used factor (principal component) analysis to explore whether these social cohesion indicators could be reduced to a smaller number of factors or dimensions. These factors were then used as dependent variables in regression models to investigate how different segments of the population perceived local social cohesion in line with their socio-economic and socio-demographic characteristics.

Social cohesion indicators

In presenting data that give an indication of what Chan *et al.* describe as a horizontal dimension, we start with the subjective component (people's state of mind). Here Chan and co-authors listed such components as general trust in fellow citizens, willingness to cooperate and help fellow citizens, and a sense of belonging or identity.

Our survey included a battery of questions on trust in fellow citizens, as shown in **Feil! Fant ikke referansekilden.2**. The highest trust levels were reported towards neighbours and the most scepticism towards persons encountered for the first time.

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TABLE 2 UKRAINIANS' TRUST IN FELLOW CITIZENS. REPORTED LEVELS OF TRUST IN VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE (%)*

	Do not trust at all	Generally do not trust	Neutral	Generally trust	Fully trust	% total [N]
People you meet for the first time	34	22	31	11	3	100 [1,999]
People in your community	5	8	46	29	13	100 [1,950]
Neighbours	6	6	28	27	33	100 [1,999]
Representatives of other ethnicities	19	14	40	19	9	100 [1,896]

Note: * 'Don't know' and 'No answer' have been removed.

Asked how much they agreed with a statement about willingness to spend part of their free time in volunteering and helping others, 35% of the respondents fully agreed, another 25% partly agreed and 16% were in a neutral position [Rephrase as ‘neutral’?], while 7% disagreed somewhat and 18% disagreed completely with the statement.

Belonging and identity were measured by a battery of questions related to the sense of being representative of one’s ethnicity and place of living at different scales (from the local community to the region), being a citizen of Ukraine, and being European. As shown in **Feil! Fant ikke referanse** kildene.able 3 [Table 2? Table 3?], strongest attachments were felt towards Ukraine and the local community. However, considerable attachment was also reported for all other items, except feeling ‘European’, for which four in ten responded ‘not at all’. Moreover, although stronger attachment was felt towards the local community than the newly established ATCs, the fact that seven in ten reported that they saw themselves as representatives of these new formations indicates that ATCs were not regarded merely as artificial constructions: for the majority of those living there, the ATCs provided a sense of belonging.

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TABLE 3 UKRAINIANS’ SENSE OF BELONGING: RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION ‘TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE ...’ (%)*

	Not at all	To a small extent	To a large extent	Fully	Total [N]
– representative of your ethnicity	4	4	17	74	100 [2,010]
– representative of the community (village, town, city) in which you live	3	3	9	85	100 [2,048]
– representative of the amalgamated territorial community in which you live	8	7	16	70	100 [738]
– representative of the region (<i>oblast</i>) in which you live	5	5	14	77	100 [1,998]
– a citizen of Ukraine	3	3	10	85	100 [2,065]
– European	40	18	18	24	100 [1,964]

Note: * ‘Don’t know’ and ‘No answer’ have been removed.

The objective component (behavioural manifestations) of the horizontal dimension of Chan *et al.*’s framework consists of indicators relating to social participation and the vibrancy of civil society, as well as voluntarism and donations. Despite the many manifestations of a strong civil society in Ukraine, with Euromaidan as a prime example, only 9% of those surveyed reported that they belonged to a civil society organisation, and only slightly over half of these said that they participated actively (5%). However, a somewhat larger percentage of respondents reported being active in their local community: 10% said that they participated in such activities (such as signing petitions and taking part in local actions and public hearings) ‘very often’; 11%, ‘rather often’; 21%, ‘sometimes’ and 8%, ‘only rarely’, while 50% said that they never participated.

Voluntarism and donations were measured by two indicators, as presented in Table 4.

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TABLE 4 VOLUNTARISM AND DONATIONS. RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION 'HOW OFTEN DO YOU TAKE PART IN THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES?' (%)*

	Very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Quite often	Very often	Total [N]
Help other people (except your family) with tasks in the house or at work, or through emotional support	8	5	31	29	26	100 [2,041]
Charity (provide material and/or financial support to people in need)	31	10	36	14	9	100 [1,954]

Note: * 'Do not know' and 'No answer' have been removed.

Moving on to the vertical dimensions in Chan *et al.*'s framework, which stands for state-citizen cohesion (in our case also involving the local level), the dimension's subjective component includes trust and confidence in political and other major social institutions and public figures. Our survey data, presented in Table 5, confirms Ukrainians' low level of trust in state institutions, as previously established by other scholars (Rojansky & Minakov 2018), but also that authorities at the local level enjoy more trust than those at the national level (Aasland & Lyska 2016).

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TABLE 5 TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC FIGURES. REPORTED LEVELS OF TRUST (%)*

	Distrust completely	Generally distrust	Neutral	Generally trust	Fully trust	Total [N]
The president of Ukraine	31	13	27	15	14	100 [2,039]
The parliament of Ukraine	46	21	25	7	2	100 [2,041]
Judges	52	17	23	6	3	100 [1,933]
Local authorities	22	12	34	21	11	100 [1,995]
NGOs	13	10	36	20	12	100 [1,857]
Mass media	28	16	35	15	6	100 [2,037]

Note: * 'Don't know' and 'No answer' have been removed.

The final objective component within Chan *et al.*'s vertical dimension concerns political participation and the presence/absence of major intergroup alliances or cleavages. Political participation was measured in terms of voting in elections—where 60% claimed they had done so—and by membership in political parties, reported by 3%, of whom only half said they were active members. The presence or absence of major intergroup alliances and cleavages at the local level is harder to measure through subjective indicators. Asked about the absence or presence of disunity amongst potentially divided groups of the population, the majority of respondents considered relations between different ethnic groups and speakers of various languages to be 'rather harmonious' (see Table 6). Here, relations between the rich and the poor emerged as the potentially most divisive relationship in the local setting.

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TABLE 6 PERCEPTIONS OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN UKRAINE. LEVEL OF AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ON WHETHER THERE IS DISUNITY AT LOCAL LEVEL BETWEEN ... (%)*

	Fully disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Fully agree	Total [N]
Representatives of different ethnic groups	40	18	22	11	9	100 [1,913]
Between locals and IDPs	49	14	18	11	8	100 [2,069]
Between different language groups	51	15	16	10	9	100 [2,045]
Between rich and poor	11	8	24	18	39	100 [1,953]

Note: * 'Don't know' and 'No answer' have been removed.

Social cohesion dimensions: factor analysis

The previous section presented an overview of Ukrainian citizens' perceptions and self-reported behaviour in regard to social cohesion in terms of Chan *et al.*'s model. However, this gives little information about the interrelations between the indicators (to be explored in this section), or about what groups of the population are more or less likely to experience different levels of cohesion (to be explored in the next section). To see whether the items could be reduced to a smaller number of factors or dimensions, we conducted a factor analysis (principal component analysis) with all of the listed social cohesion indicators. Some indicators were merged into indices after controlling for internal consistency *via* reliability analysis.¹⁰ We then transformed all into standardised variables and applied Oblimin rotation, which allows for correlations between the variables. Components with an eigenvalue of 1.0 and above were identified as separate factors. The analysis resulted in four components or dimensions. The pattern matrix is presented in **Feil! Fant ikke referansekinden.7**; for simplicity, only factor loadings of 0.4 and higher are listed.

¹⁰ Four indices were computed, all with a Chronbach's alpha of 0.6 or higher. 'Trust in institutions': Chronbach's alpha 0.76; 'Identification with place of living': Chronbach's alpha 0.71 ('European identity' did not correlate with the other items in the battery and was therefore removed); 'Interpersonal trust': Chronbach's alpha 0.70; and 'Low conflict between groups' (ethnic groups, language groups, IDPs): Chronbach's alpha 0.80. Including 'between rich and poor' would have reduced the Chronbach's alpha, and it was retained as a separate variable.

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TABLE 7 DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL COHESION: PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS ANALYSIS (PCA) WITH OBLIMIN ROTATION; PATTERN MATRIX WITH FACTORS AND FACTOR SCORES

	Social engagement	Connectedness	Civic participation	Intergroup concordance
Engaged in helping others	0.71			
Engaged in charity	0.77			
Ready to do voluntary work	0.60			
Trust in institutions		0.77		
Interpersonal trust		0.57		
Identification with place of living		0.63		
Party membership and activity			0.79	
Participation in civil society organisation(s)			0.71	
Voted in previous elections			0.41	
Active in local problem-solving			0.44	
Low conflict between rich and poor				0.58
Low conflict between other groups				0.87

The first dimension, for which three of the items had a high factor score, and which accounted for 18% of the variance, we interpreted as representing social engagement. High factor loadings (the relation of each variable to the underlying factor) on this dimension were obtained for items associated with the provision of help, support and charity to others, and the readiness to do voluntary work. The second dimension, which accounted for 10% of the variation, had a high factor score on three items: trust in institutions, interpersonal trust and positive identification with place of living. We named this dimension ‘connectedness’, as it concerns the levels of attachment to place, people and institutions. The third dimension—‘civic participation’—accounted for 10% of the variance across the variables. The four items with a high factor loading on this dimension were membership and active involvement in political parties and civil society organisations, active participation in solving local problems, and voting in elections. The fourth and final dimension accounted for 9% of the variance. High factor loadings were obtained for reporting low levels of conflict between respectively rich and poor, and between different societal groups (ethnicity, language use, internal displacement status) in the community. We interpreted this dimension as representing intergroup concordance.

As could be expected, the social cohesion factors were positively correlated, with a correlation (Pearson’s R) varying between 0.01 and 0.18.

It should be noted that the four dimensions correspond only partly to Chan *et al.*’s model, with cross-cutting elements between the horizontal and vertical dimensions, and between the subjective and objective component.

Social cohesion as reported by different population groups: regression analysis

Social cohesion is an attribute of a society or local community, but it can, as noted, be perceived differently by different people. Having identified four dimensions of social cohesion by [Add ‘by’ here?] adapting Chan *et al.*’s model to the Ukrainian local community setting, we next examined how different groups of the population scored on each of the four dimensions. We applied multiple linear regression analysis, using the factor scores as dependent variables, which enabled us to control for respondents’ scores on the independent variables. In the four models we examined the association between each of the factors and socio-demographic and socio-economic (age, gender, ethnicity, regional location, type of settlement, educational level, and self-reported living standard).

The results, shown in **Feil! Fant ikke referansekilden.8**, reveal that little of the variation along each of the four dimensions could be attributed to the scores on the independent variables, with the Adjusted R squared varying between 0.04 and 0.06. However, several statistically significant associations are worth noticing. In Model 1 (social engagement), persons with higher education and a high standard of living [The highlighted text is unclear. Rephrase as ‘a good income’ or ‘a high standard of living’?] tended to report greater social engagement than did less-educated and low-income respondents; further, women were somewhat more socially engaged than men. Further, social engagement seemed more common in rural ATCs and smaller cities than in regional centres.

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TABLE 8 MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS. SOCIAL COHESION FACTOR SCORES FROM PCA USED AS DEPENDENT VARIABLES. STANDARD COEFFICIENTS AND SIGNIFICANCE (N = 1,419)

	Model 1 Social engagement		Model 2 Connectedness		Model 3 Civic participation		Model 4 Intergroup concordance	
	Stand. coeff.	Signif.	Stand. coeff.	Signif.	Stand. coeff.	Signif.	Stand. coeff.	Signif.
Constant		0.00**		0.00**		0.00**		0.00**
Age group (five categories)	-0.01	0.76	0.14	0.00**	0.15	0.00**	0.17	0.00**
Men (vs women)	-0.07	0.01*	-0.06	0.02*	0.06	0.02*	0.07	0.01*
Western Ukraine (vs Eastern)	0.01	0.78	0.06	0.11	0.04	0.27	-0.05	0.23
Central Ukraine (vs Eastern)	0.05	0.22	0.02	0.67	0.03	0.51	-0.05	0.22
Southern Ukraine (vs Eastern)	0.02	0.59	0.05	0.17	0.04	0.27	-0.05	0.23
Living standard (five categories)	0.16	0.00**	0.18	0.00**	0.09	0.00**	0.08	0.01**
Education (six categories)	0.11	0.00**	-0.03	0.34	0.16	0.00**	0.06	0.03*
Ethnic Russian (vs Ukrainian)	-0.01	0.60	-0.10	0.00**	-0.00	0.93	0.01	0.60
Other ethnic group (vs Ukrainian)	-0.01	0.77	-0.07	0.01**	0.00	0.93	0.00	0.94
Mixed ethnicity (vs Ukrainian)	0.02	0.51	0.01	0.60	0.00	0.87	0.02	0.41
Other city/town (vs oblast’ centre)	0.06	0.03*	0.06	0.04*	0.03	0.29	0.04	0.17
Voluntary ATC (vs oblast’ centre)	0.15	0.00**	0.09	0.00**	0.10	0.00*	0.11	0.00**
Admin ATC (vs oblast’ centre)	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.17	-0.01	0.63	0.13	0.00**
Adjusted R Square	0.05		0.06		0.05		0.04	

Notes: **Significant at 0.01 level; * significant at 0.05 level.

On the belonging dimension, people with a high standard of living [The highlighted text is unclear. Rephrase as ‘a good income’ or ‘a high standard of living’?] reported the highest levels. Belonging was also

associated with higher age. Ethnic Russians and members of other ethnic minorities reported somewhat lower levels of belonging than ethnic Ukrainians. Settlement was also of some relevance, as respondents in rural ATCs and smaller towns were the most likely to report strong levels of belonging, when other variables in the model were controlled. Again, women had a statistically (albeit moderate) higher score on the belonging dimension. Further analysis (not presented here) showed that those who reported most pride in their local community were far more likely to have a high score on the belonging dimension.

The third dimension, civic participation, went together with higher levels of education and older age, as well as a high standard of living. Further, men reported moderately more participation than women; as regards settlement, voluntarily formed rural ATCs again came at the top. Finally, reporting low group conflict in one's own community was primarily associated with older age. Respondents from rural areas reported less local conflict than those in cities, and men less conflict than women.

Summing up, although respondents with different socio-economic and socio-demographic characteristics had different scores on the social cohesion dimensions, these characteristics were not very prominent in explaining individual differences in how this phenomenon is perceived. We found no statistically significant effects of regional location in Ukraine on social cohesion scores. Ethnicity affected only one of the dimensions: the sense of belonging. Higher living standards had a positive effect on all four dimensions of social cohesion, and older age on all except social engagement. Further, living in a voluntarily formed ATC seemed to have a positive effect on social cohesion, increasing the likelihood of a high score on all four dimensions.¹¹

Discussion: dimensions, regions and reforms

Several of the findings of our research should be viewed in relation to specifics of today's transitional Ukrainian society. This also became apparent when we compared the results of our factor analyses with Chan's theoretically derived model. Our factor analysis shows a strong connection between items in the subjective and objective components of social cohesion that are strictly divided in Chan *et al.*'s model. The same is true for the horizontal and vertical social cohesion dimensions. Thus, the factor 'connectedness' in our analysis includes both interpersonal trust (part of the horizontal dimension in Chan *et al.*'s model) and trust in institutions (part of the vertical one); the factor 'social engagement' consists of engaging in helping others and charity (an objective component in Chan's model) as well as readiness to do voluntary work (a subjective one); and the factor 'civic

¹¹ Further regression analysis (not shown here) showed a positive effect on the belonging dimension of supporting the recent decentralisation reform where the establishment of ATCs was the main element.

participation' deals with party membership and activity (part of the vertical dimension) and participation in civil society (part of the horizontal one).

We interpret our findings in relation to the specifics of Ukraine's transitional society, with the major ongoing reform processes and vibrant social changes on all levels. This is in line with what Ukrainian sociologist Sergii Makeev (1999) describes as the 'mobility of the structure', which is relevant for such a transitional society. In societies characterised by stable democracy, the clarity of social norms and expectations is guaranteed by the 'uniformity' and clarity of the social structure, and by fairly stable connections between the positions and statuses offered, and their requirements. In a transitional society, this connection becomes problematic, at times broken, because the structure and values change: a 'permanent change of values becomes a clear characteristic of the new state of society' (Makeev 1999, p.189). In a transitional society with ongoing system reforms, the inner coherence between structures and values (implicit for stable democracies) may become vague and fragile. One possible indicator here is the absence of a distinction between components and dimensions of social cohesion in Ukrainian society, which contrasts with the seemingly stricter divisions in Chan *et al.*'s model.

Our factor analysis reveals internal correlation between Chan *et al.*'s indicators of social cohesion, which enables us to identify social cohesion dimensions that cross-cut Chan's setup of dimensions and categories and provides an alternative perspective on how social cohesion is perceived and acted upon at the local level. Although we do not contest the validity of Chan's categories and dimensions from a theoretical point of view, our empirical findings show that how social cohesion indicators are grouped in Chan's framework does not correspond to Ukrainian realities. Our analysis has identified four crucial dimensions of social cohesion in the Ukrainian setting: political participation—social participation and the vibrancy of civil society (factor: civic participation); voluntarism and donations—willingness to cooperate and help (factor: social engagement); general trust in fellow citizens—trust in public figures—sense of belonging or identity (factor: connectedness); and the presence or absence of group conflict (factor: intergroup concordance). It remains to be tested whether these findings can be replicated in other Central and East European settings and could thus be viewed as an addition to theories on social cohesion in transitional societies, in contrast to those developed through studies on stable democracies.

Also, when comparing with how social cohesion has been measured by Bottoni (2018) and the Bertelsmann Social Cohesion Radar (Dragolov *et al.* 2013), we note some important differences. One is our finding that interpersonal trust and trust in institutions are combined into one dimension, which we have labelled connectedness. In Bottoni's model, interpersonal and institutional trust form two different dimensions of social cohesion, attached to different levels. Similarly, in the Social Cohesion Radar, trust in other people forms part of

the dimension ‘social relations’, whereas trust in institutions is seen as belonging to the ‘connectedness’ dimension. Why has the strong link between interpersonal and institutional trust in Ukraine not been found elsewhere? In-depth analysis is required to investigate this phenomenon further. Whether this is a permanent or a transient feature of social cohesion is also an open question. One possibility might be that the context around the COVID-19 pandemic could have a strong influence on the reproduction of trust, [Please explain], altering the meanings of social relations under conditions of social distancing. Or perhaps this is a more long-term feature of transitional society, where the high level of social uncertainty blurs the boundaries between different types of trust, as perceived by the public.

Regardless of the number of dimensions identified in the models and schemes of Chan *et al.*, Bottoni and the Social Cohesion Radar, there is one unique feature found only in our empirically derived setup. This is the fourth dimension, intergroup concordance, which in our model stands out as a separate dimension and not as an element in other dimensions, as presented in the other models. Since Euromaidan, society has been deeply polarised due to Ukrainians’ divided attitudes towards this event, as well as their perspectives on the possible future reintegration of Donbas. The divisions in geopolitical outlooks and attitudes to the ongoing Donbas conflict form a social context that serves as a frame for intergroup concordance as a visible dimension of social cohesion in Ukrainian society.

Although such attitudinal differences and the ongoing Donbas conflict that have made the topic of conflicts in Ukrainian society a central and visible one, our survey data show that Ukrainians do not report particularly high levels of intergroup disunity in their local communities. Moreover, our factor analysis has shown that perceptions of intergroup relations are not strongly associated with other social cohesion features, such as connectedness, participation or social engagement. These results might indicate that the Ukrainian nation has developed resilience towards the protracted conflict in Donbas and that differences in geopolitical outlooks, attitudes towards language policy and variations in ethnic and national identity do not pose a serious threat to intergroup relations at local level. This interpretation is supported by the fact that survey respondents in different parts of Ukraine, with very different geographical distance to the conflict, all give rather similar assessments of intergroup concordance: factor scores are not related to ethnicity nor to regional location. Our survey data show that the most prominent group conflicts are related not to ethnicity, language use or IDP integration, but to the gap between the rich and the poor. Economic inequality stands out as the perhaps greatest potential risk as regards a further weakening of intergroup concordance in local communities.

Though not dealing with all aspects of the ongoing decentralisation reform, our results give further support to studies that have highlighted the role of decentralisation not only as a reform that furthers democratisation and European integration of Ukrainian society, but also one which strengthens local social cohesion (Aasland *et al.* 2021; Lennon 2021; Deineko 2021). Regression analysis has revealed statistically significant associations between living in voluntarily formed rural ATCs—units formed as a result of the first phase of the decentralisation reform—and factor scores for all dimensions of social cohesion. Ukrainians living in voluntarily formed rural ATCs are more likely to report high levels of connectedness, civic participation, social engagement and lower levels of conflict in their local communities. We explain this by the peculiarities of social bonds formed in such smaller communities and as a result of the amalgamation process itself. The procedure of voluntary ATC amalgamation has necessarily involved a series of local interpersonal and intergroup interactions (public hearings, campaigns, voting) that have strengthened social cohesion on the local level. Moreover, additional resources and greater independence regarding how to use them have been allocated to the newly voluntarily formed ATCs. As noted by Oleksandra Deineko, an amalgamation process realised by a bottom-up strategy leads to a strengthening of social cohesion, both ‘on the level of social action as well as transformation of locals’ paternalist expectations up to participatory orientations on the level of value orientations’ (Deineko 2021, p. 136). Our study confirms this tendency for a higher potential for social cohesion in the voluntarily amalgamated ATCs compared to those that were administratively formed, a tendency that can be explained by greater local participation in the amalgamation processes of the former.

However, there is no reason for greater optimism about the long-term effects. Only a minor proportion of the variation along each of the four dimensions can be attributed to the scores on the independent variables. Other qualitative studies of the effect of the decentralisation reform on local social cohesion have stressed that such cohesion in the newly formed ATCs may be fragile and could be challenged by internal conflicts or events external to the local community (Aasland *et al.* 2021).

Our results are in line with previous research on the positive impact of economic wellbeing on social cohesion (Janmaat 2011; Dragolov *et al.* 2016; Delhey *et al.* 2018). Delhey *et al.* highlighted this finding as ‘the most striking similarity between the West and Asia’ and concluded that ‘economic resources generate cohesion’ in both parts of the world (Delhey *et al.* 2018, p. 447). Our study confirms this also in a transition society located between the West and Asia: for all social cohesion dimensions, Ukrainians with a high standard of living [Rephrase as ‘a good income’ or ‘a high standard of living’?] report the highest social cohesion levels [Please explain]. This link between social cohesion and economic wellbeing might serve as extra motivation to policymakers for

promoting economic prosperity in contemporary societies. Amongst other socio-economic and socio-demographic indicators that showed statistically significant associations with one or more of the social cohesion dimensions we would like to highlight the correlation between age and the connectedness, civic participation and intergroup concordance dimensions, as well as between education and the dimensions of social engagement, civic participation and intergroup concordance. These associations are not unexpected: education contributes to knowledge about practices of social engagement and civic participation as well as forming tolerance that affects perceptions of intergroup conflict and concordance. Older age is conducive to deeper reflection on these issues.

Special attention should be paid to how social cohesion is perceived and experienced in different parts of Ukraine and by different ethnocultural groups in the country. One of our main reasons for adapting the Chan *et al.* model to the regional level was the opportunity to identify any noticeable regional divisions in how Ukrainians perceive social cohesion; further, whether ethnic identity and language use affect perceptions and manifestations of social cohesion. Our regression analysis has shown that, with only one exception, none of the factors—ethnicity, language use or regional location in Ukraine—have statistically significant effects on any of the four dimensions. This finding is indeed remarkable, given the emphasis in the research literature on divisions between the eastern and western parts of the country, and in outlooks and attitudes between ethnic and language groups.

The only exception revealed by our regression analysis concerns the effect of Russian or mixed ethnic identity on the intergroup concordance dimension. This finding can be explained by the recently unstable status of ethnic Russians and persons with mixed ethnic identities. Russian aggression in Donbas has produced a discourse of the enemy that affects ethnic Russians in Ukraine in several ways (Filippova & Deineko 2021). Moreover, some organisations, politicians and opinion-leaders have turned towards a more extremist ethnocentric rhetoric that does not leave space for proper recognition of Ukraine's ethnocultural diversity, especially in ethnoculturally heterogeneous regions. Our survey results do not provide evidence of a regional division or strong ethnocultural fragmentation of Ukraine in terms of how its citizens perceive and manifest social cohesion. However, there are some indications in the survey data suggesting that the state authorities should pay greater attention to reducing the potential for tensions in ethno-culturally diverse regions of the country.

Conclusion

Previous analyses of levels of social cohesion in Ukraine have placed the country firmly amongst other East and Central European countries, with low or intermediate levels of social cohesion. Ukraine displays lower levels for most indicators than in most West European countries but ranks considerably higher than those at the lowest end

of the scale (Bondarenko *et al.* 2017). Although our methodology differs from those previously applied to Ukraine, our survey results, highlighting social cohesion predominantly at the local community level, confirm such intermediate levels of social cohesion for many of the indicators employed elsewhere in the research literature. The picture is admittedly complex: extremely low levels of institutional trust but remarkably high levels of identification with place of living at different levels of scale, from the local to the national. Further, despite the high intensity of conflict in Ukrainian society, including armed conflict in Donbas, social relations at the local community level appear less discordant. Indeed, it is relations between the rich and the poor, rather than between different ethnocultural or language groups, that citizens consider to be the most divisive.

Our central aim here has been to examine whether the complex set of indicators used for measuring social cohesion can be reduced to a smaller number of dimensions, and how these dimensions relate to findings from the research literature on social cohesion in other societal settings. Using factor analysis, we identified four such dimensions: social engagement (willingness and actual help provided to persons outside the family); civic participation (various informal and formal forms of local participation); connectedness (trust in institutions, interpersonal trust and identification with place of living); and intergroup concordance (perceptions of relations between different groups in the local community). These dimensions partly overlap with, but also partly differ from, models offered by leading scholars of social cohesion, and must be seen in relation to Ukraine and its specific transitional society, characterised by unfinished nation-building, ongoing local-level reforms and major socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Importantly, we find no regional divisions as to how Ukrainians perceive social cohesion, including in terms of their behavioural manifestations. Based on objective and subjective criteria, and at different levels of scale, our research demonstrates that the divisions identified do not have a regional character: we found divisions between the rich and the poor and, for some indicators, between rural and urban dwellers. Moreover, ethnic identity is not a main attribute as regards differences in assessments of local social cohesion.

The findings have important policy implications. If the aim is to strengthen local social cohesion—a likely policy goal of the Ukrainian authorities at all levels—a major task will be to improve socio-economic conditions for the population at large. It is important to reduce income disparities, especially between the majority of those with low or moderate incomes and those at the top of the income pyramid; this includes reducing the political powers associated with control over economic resources. Much remains to be done to enhance public trust in institutions and political leaders, with high-level corruption as a major challenge. Regardless of changes in political leadership, there remains a sizeable gap between political statements and programmes and what is achieved in real

life. On a more optimistic note, we note that the very high level of identity with the local community, the region, and the nation, amongst virtually all Ukrainians, regardless of their regional or ethnocultural attributes, can serve as a strong foundation for a considerable strengthening of local social cohesion, especially if the authorities can succeed with the ongoing economic and social reforms.

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[Please ensure all Ukrainian titles are transliterated according to journal style]

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