Four Dimensions of Societal Transformation
An Introduction to the Problematique of Ukraine

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Abstract
Four years after the Revolution of Dignity, the Ukrainian society is passing through multiple parallel transitions. More often than not, the problematique of Ukraine is framed as a discussion of the speed and extent of reforms’ adoption. This article highlights the need to look in a more organic, interrelated manner, with attention to the sociospatial context that embeds all of the potential institutional change targeted by reforms. Using interviews and group discussions with public servants and civil society actors actively involved in the ongoing reform processes, this article zooms out from the rather fragmented reforms discussion to embed it in a broader societal context. It highlights crucial developments in the four quadrants of the social quality debate: the socioeconomic, the sociopolitical, the sociocultural/welfare, and the socioenvironmental dimension of societal life in postrevolution Ukraine.

Keywords: reforms, “the social,” social quality, societal embedding, transition, Ukraine

Background: The Society “Under Reform”
Four years ago, mass protests were in full range in Ukraine, with demonstrators demanding a better society. Beyond the call for dignified conditions of life and a shared distaste for the regime represented by President Viktor Yanukovych, there was little consensus on what constitutes a better society. The president’s flight from the country marked a symbolic change at the tip of the iceberg of a regime: an opening for a process of restructuring the state-market-society relations. Reforms that follow are an inherently political process of structural change, creating winners and losers and shaping the well-being of individuals and the societal conditions in Ukraine. This naturally brings to the forefront a range of salient questions about the impact on the lives of ordinary people—on the quality of their everyday experience within the changing society as well as their agency vis-à-vis the unfolding structural changes.

Since 2014, more areas of life in Ukraine have been influenced by reform than had been in the previous twenty years (Ash et al. 2017), and the Ukrainian society is
passing through multiple parallel transitions in which the old is dying and the new is not yet born.² The analysis of this overall societal transition is, perhaps far too frequently, limited to assessing the (state of) implementation of the reforms in various sectors. In other words, the study of changes remains centered on the speed, progresses, or regresses of institution building and the institutional consolidation in line with practices of “good governance” and market liberalization. Much less attention is devoted to the embeddedness of the changes ongoing at policy level in the various segments of society and the interaction of individual and collective agency with these changing structures. Meanwhile, recent developments in other contexts (within EU member states and the United States) very much highlight that those who populate the welfare terrains of the state and market often do feel left behind, resulting in anti-systemic sentiments and backslashes to democratic development. Asking how any developments are embedded in (or detached from) the (various segments of) society is a crucial question, because lack of attention to these results in a rise of populism and popular resent in the long run.

More often than not, the problematique of Ukraine is framed as a discussion of the speed and extent of reforms, with a sole focus on the formal institutional reforms undertaken (or bashing the lack of them) and the technocratic (policy) elements, the political obstacles, or enablers of reform in each sector. Yet, a fragmented look at sectors or fields with parallel policy reform initiatives deprives us from seeing a wider societal context within which the regime transition unfolds and is embedded, and in turn obscures the ways in which ongoing policy changes interplay with the quality of “the social” in a given sociotemporal reality. From a comprehensive-based economic, juridical, sociological, and political science perspective, however, the problematique refers to the embedding of these reforms in a given sociospatial context, which includes “the outcomes of the reciprocity of interrelated problems” (see Van der Maesen 2017: 22). The application of the social quality approach to the problematique of Ukraine in this broader comprehensive understanding would provide tools for moving beyond the presentation of relatively fragmented sectors toward a more comprehensive understanding of the overall societal context, including the attention to the complex interrelations between the various sectors and fields—that is, bearing in mind the dialectic between the agency (of the individual and the collective, with an inherent dialectic between processes of self-realization and the formation of collectivities) and the (changing ideational and material) structures. The bottom line is that the policy change needs to be explored with attention to the space within which, or the extent to which, “people are able to participate in societal based relationships under conditions which enhance their well-being, capacities and potential” (Van der Maesen and Walker 2012: 68). Capacity here is connected with the “form of participation in which people are able to shape their own circumstances and contribute to the societal development in such a way that it furthers social justice, solidarity, equal value and human dignity” (69).³ The reference to “social relationships”⁴ embraces a variety economic, political, cultural, legal, welfare, and environmental aspects.
As a background review for an upcoming pilot study of “social quality” in Ukraine, this article provides a contextual exploration into the problematique in the country and sketches out some of the major trends as the societal transformation unfolds. In other words, the following pages lay out a situational overview of the empirical terrain in which the problematique in Ukraine unfolds—as a necessary point of departure for further study. The article builds on the social quality debate to apply a distinction between four dimensions that through their interrelations define the different contexts for processes that constitute “the social”: (1) the socioeconomic/financial, (2) the sociopolitical/legal, (3) the sociocultural/welfare, and (4) the socioenvironmental dimensions. The development of societal complexities (trends and contradictions) can be traced along these dimensions (Van der Maesen 2017), which together influence the quality of everyday life experience amid the changing society.

The following section provides a short conventional overview of Ukrainian transition as a set of reforms, reviewing the major developments within this debate over the past year. As the next step, these are located within four constitutive dimensions of societal life. The overall context of each quadrant is then developed, zooming out from the snapshot of fragmented reforms to a broader picture of a variety of trends defining the societal context in which these unfold (such as war, socioeconomic deprivation, external dependence, aggressive nation building, among others). In so doing, these sections also justify the need to look at the problematique of Ukraine in a more organic, interrelated manner, moving beyond the particularities and jargon of the respective sectors of reform. The main data sources are interviews and group discussions with public servants and civil society actors actively involved in the ongoing reform processes conducted in Kiev between mid-2016 and mid-2017.5

A “Conventional Overview”: Ukrainian Transition as a Set of Reforms

This section aims to provide a short conventional overview of Ukrainian transition as a set of reforms, reviewing the major developments within this debate over the past year. It builds on selected review documents—in particular, by the European Commission (EC 2016; EC and HR 2017) (i.e., the most influential source of external pressure) and by the Reanimation Package of Reforms (RPR 2017) (i.e., the major platform of domestic pressure). While keeping the core focus highlighted in these reports, some parts have been supplemented with explanations from expert interviews for the sake of clarity.

Following the overarching call from the Revolution of Dignity to curb the endemic corruption of a kleptocratic regime, a vast body of reforms has aimed at building and consolidating institutions in line with “good governance” practices to, on the one hand, enhance efficiency and transparency of the state apparatus (i.e., to move away from the preexisting situation of state capture, where a limited group of economic
elites exercise excessive situation over the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the state) and to, on the other hand, consolidate a rule-based market economy, where rules apply in the same manner to all players. The design of major reforms in this area over the past four years follows the traditional dichotomization of the "economic" and "social" in policy design, with an overall focus on the crude macroeconomic indicators that characterize neoliberal economic thought.

The policy initiatives coined as areas with major progress focused on macroeconomic stabilization include the consolidation of public finance, reduction of budget deficit, cooperation with the IMF, and stabilization of currency (the National Bank switched mandate from banking supervision to price stability, centering on inflation targeting as a measure good for growth). Specialized anti-corruption bodies were set up, foremost the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAPO) to investigate illicit rent seeking. The e-declaration of public senior officials’ assets was introduced; the intrusive system relying on individuals’ declaration about the cash and assets held was celebrated as a milestone in bringing more transparency. The fact that officials declared large assets in cash, to public outrage, but that no comprehensive investigative action has so far taken place points to the shortcomings of the piecemeal approach to reform. Creating transparency for the sake of being able to access information but not to act on it is simply not enough. Plans for the near future include establishing specialized anti-corruption courts, reforming the court system at all levels, and prosecution reform (the prosecutor’s office is currently part of the presidential branch of power, linked with president’s office, and not immune to political pressures). The judiciary system and law enforcement overall remain the weak spots of the anti-corruption endeavor. While some constitutional amendments on justice have been adopted, the judiciary remains an area of protracted, if any, progress. Piecemeal elements are crafted to improve law enforcement, such as hiring a new patrol police (popular trust rapidly rose in the year after its establishment but was later affected by a realization that patrol police improves first contact with citizens but then leaves the case amid the unreformed elements of all other police units) or reforming the system of executors. Many systemic forces have no interest in having an independent judiciary system or effective law enforcement.

An important element in both contributing to the macroeconomic stabilization and responding to the public quest to fight corruption was to limit the diversion of funds from the state budget into private pockets. Such a focus, often rhetorically coined as the “deoligarchization of economy,” brought tangible initiatives, particularly on those fields that contributed the most substantially to the budget deficit—that is, public procurement, the energy sector, and the banking sector.

Banking support accounted for a large proportion of the budget deficit, largely because of frequent related-party lending (i.e., lending to businesses related to/owned by bank shareholders). A scheme in which financial holding owns a blend of businesses, industrial plants, and banks—resorting to the latest for loans to sustain other
inefficient businesses—was a relatively common model. The negative externalities of such a system were internalized by the state budget through frequent bailouts of major players in the banking system. More than 80 out of 180 banks were closed, and a major bank was nationalized. And the cleaning of the banking sector was deemed a successful showcase.

State procurement as one of the major areas of illicit rent seeking was reformed, and all public procurement was transferred to the ProZorro system, an “online marketplace” winning international recognition for targeting both transparency and the lowest price offer. But it quickly became evident that the new system’s problem is that it still operates in an old institutional and normative system, and opening the data for public scrutiny is not enough.

The energy reform was another showcase and included “cleaning” state-owned companies in the field (in the case of Naftogaz, the major state-owned company alone regularly accounted for a substantial share of the state budget deficit), removing intermediaries from the gas distribution, and abolishing state subsidized tariffs of commodities. Abolishing subsidized gas tariffs, a move from a system of general subsidized prices toward market prices plus targeted household subsidies based on household income, was among the reforms praised by external actors (including the IMF, World Bank, EU). The prices for utilities increased elevenfold for final consumers.

The next immediate challenge remains the area of state-owned enterprises, where progress is envisaged through the privatization of many among the 3,500 state-owned enterprises. Fiscal decentralization was coupled with initial steps toward creating amalgamated communities for local self-government, aiming to delegate powers and resources to local self-government and open citizen participation in local decision making.6

In areas that in direct and tangible ways influence citizen welfare, the announced reforms have been among the most protracted. In particular, reforms of the pension system, health care, and education remain much disputed with little progress achieved so far. Pensions and welfare have been in the spotlight given the lack of resources and need for systemic redesign. Among the major long-term challenges is to design a sustainable pension system given the negative population growth and shifting age structure. Partial legislative steps were taken in reforming health care and education, sectors traditionally associated with inefficiency and ever-present (culturally accepted) petty bribery.

An extensive land reform is expected. A moratorium on land sales has been in force since 2001, creating a situation in which land cannot be traded. Although land registry is not transparent, experts estimate that the state owns around one-third of the land, while the rest is owned by beneficiaries of decollectivization. Expectations for opening the land market are building up, not least because one-third of the worldwide stock of fertile black soils is located within the territory of Ukraine. No major steps were taken in the past four years, and no clear vision has yet been introduced.
Over the past four years, the context of Ukraine’s transition is also characterized by the (not so) frozen conflict in the Donbas region, a war situation that surged as a direct consequence of the 2014 revolutionary events. From an international perspective, the conflict is discussed along several lines, foremost the Minsk agreements as an internationally negotiated framework for conflict de-escalation, (several rounds of) sanctions on Russia by Ukraine’s Western partners, and the conflict as an additional pressure point on the political regime in Kiev to sustain the (EU-oriented) reform path. In this context, parallels were made to the situation in Georgia after 2008, which magnified both the Westward orientation of the ongoing political, economic, and societal transition and the speed of domestic reforms implemented in close cooperation with the EU.

Societal Transition as More Than a Mere Set of Reforms

Let us now zoom out from such fragmented imagery of Ukraine as a battlefield for reforms implementation in various sectors. While all these reform initiatives undoubtedly express and co-constitute important elements of the ongoing societal transition, the problematique of Ukraine cannot be reduced to the study of a mere set of reforms. The problematique involves the importance of the overall societal context in which these unfold, such as war, precariousness, a low level of trust, and factors of external legitimization, among others. These largely shape and co-constitute any purposeful reform initiative, setting the limits of the imaginable and the compossible. From the social quality perspective, this context refers to “the interdependency of human beings and the conditional or foundational components of their experiences” (Van der Maesen 2017: 12). In other words, it refers to the overall societal embedding of the studied reforms, blurring the conventional distinction between the political and the economic, as well as between the economic and the social. The economic and the political here are parts of the social (see Walker and Corbett 2017). Markets, politics, and regulatory frameworks cannot operate independently (of the overall character) of their societal context. While economics is often portrayed as a field distinct from the social (as a field functioning separately from society and culture), the “economic” is constituted within inherently societal relations of production and distribution—that is, relations that do not exist in an abstract idealized market but are embedded in actual local, provincial, and (trans)national networks with their political and cultural influences on the behaviors or players who ultimately populate the markets (Granovetter 1985 provides a useful baseline here).

The traditionally accepted duality between “the economic” and “the social” stipulates that the latter is a residual that is not “economic” or is everything that is not “economic,” yet such duality cannot be appreciated in a dialectical sense. Such an understanding is a result of a hegemonic common sense related to a particular ideology and as such is not power-isolated but rather an ideational expression of the increasing
power of interests in the (neoliberal-dominated) economic dimension. These interests cause a handmaiden position of all relevant processes in all three other dimensions. Alan Walker (1984) reminds us that the relationship between economic policy and a variety of policies in almost all areas of human interaction is skewed (understood by orthodox economists and often by policy makers as noneconomic), and such an asymmetric relationship constrains the development of a comprehensive approach. This duality, within which the “externalities” of the economic system are deemed “social problems,” underpins the traditional understanding of the “social” and “social policy,” characterized by the subordination of the social policies—and, by extension, of the “social” field—to the dominant economic values, foremost to the overarching aim of economic growth (see Van der Maesen and Walker 2012). In this context, it might be worthwhile to remark that the European social model and its underlying paradigm reflects this subordination of the social to the economic, and it was conceived at the encounter of the neoliberal economic worldview and the social-democratic network that prevailed in the European Commission at the time of embarking upon a European common market as a sort of a by-product or tradeoff of “economic” integration (for a discussion, see Van Apeldoorn et al. 2003; cf. Van Apeldoorn and Hager 2010). This is an important remark in light of the current transfer of transitional experience from the EU to its eastern neighbors, exemplified in the work of the EU’s Support Group for Ukraine.

This section therefore moves beyond such duality between “the economic” and “the social,” building on the conceptualization of “the social” as the “productive and reproductive relationships of social beings” and hence an “expression of the always changing totality as an open process” (Van der Maesen and Walker 2012: 272, 48). Such a move also enables us to dig deeper than a mere overview of ongoing reforms to locate them within the broader picture of trends defining the societal context in which they unfold. I apply a distinction between four essential dimensions of the social in its new understanding, which play a primary role in productive and reproductive relationships. Through their interrelations, these dimensions define the different contexts for processes that constitute “the social”: the socioeconomic/financial, referring to the social relation of production and distribution; the sociopolitical/legal, referring to the overarching regulatory framework and the politics of its contestation; the sociocultural/welfare, referring to the welfare (provision and access), culture as dynamics of shared identities, norms, and trust; and the socioenvironmental, referring to the outcomes of human/societal influences on nature. And all the dynamics of or in the four dimensions concern all conditional, constitutional, and normative factors of social quality. These four dimensions—which are relevant to the overall change of societal complexities, changes of urban contexts, and the development (or destruction) of the overall sustainability—deliver points of departure for analyzing the processes within, as well as the reciprocity and interdependencies of, these fields. While the latest dimension is not yet a traditional element in discussions of “the social,” it ought to play a crucial role, because all
elements of “the social” highlighted above develop within the context of a finite planet, and hence the various dimensions of societal transformation should also be understood in relation to overall sustainability of human existence on Earth.

The “problematique” of Ukraine then refers to the outcomes of interdependent processes in all four dimensions, constituting a comprehensive totality or whole. The condensation of interrelated problems constitutes a complex whole. Embarking on a new definition of “the social” as presented in the social quality framework can create an overarching approach in order to obtain a new understanding of the nature of the comprehensive whole—to move toward an understanding of the complexity as a whole and an understanding of its aspects that create the whole through an overarching conceptual and analytical framework. In other words, to reject the eclectic reductionist reifications of fragmented parts.

The Socioeconomic/Financial Dimension

The postrevolution euphoria quickly faded out as the majority of average citizens saw a drop in their welfare. Polls repeatedly indicate that household financial situations are worsening; in mid-2017, more than 60 percent of households indicated a worse situation compared to the previous year (RGU 2017). The share of the Ukrainian population who live below the poverty line, defined as actual substance minimum, reached about 60 percent, compared to 22 percent in 2013 (UNDP 2018). Events of late 2013 started a “perfect storm” on various fields: the old elite fled the country with stolen money, armed conflict with Russia tangibly curbed trade flows, the (formal) economy shrank, and currency depreciated. The combined effect of initial political instability, foreign occupation, and military conflict in the Donbas mixed with the accumulated internal problems in the socioeconomic, financial, and institutional sphere, leading to a profound socioeconomic crisis. A range of interrelated instabilities affected the population at large, leading to a decline in living standards of individuals and households. While macroeconomic indicators presented signs of growth in early 2017, it remains an open question as to when (and whether at all) these will translate into a much-needed improvement of the population’s living standards. Less than 3 percent of citizens indicate that the economic situation is improving, while 73 percent say it has worsened over the past twelve months (CISR 2017: 7). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the country lacks a clear vision of development that would balance macroeconomic and social aspirations (for a detailed overview, see Heyets 2017). While there seems to be a shared recognition of the need for growth and investment, there is no shared paradigm on measures that would ensure analogous improvement of living standards.

From 2013 to 2016, the population’s real disposable income dropped by 31 percent, real wages by almost 19 percent, and real gross pensions by 40 percent. The share of wages in the income structure diminished, in line with the rise in unemployment due to decline in production and investment. Overall, the economically active population declined by more than 4 million people (see Heyets 2017; Van Der
### Table 1: Major Reforms within the Four Quadrants of Societal Complexities: Core Aims of Ukraine

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<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic/Financial Dimension</th>
<th>Sociopolitical/Legal Dimension</th>
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<tr>
<td>Core aims of ongoing reforms: macroeconomic consolidation, fostering growth and investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reduce budget deficit, limit diversion of funds from state budget into private pockets (especially public procurement, energy sector, banking) [P]</td>
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<td>• Simplify business establishment, services export, and system regulatory acts; amend tax code [P]</td>
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<td>• Banking reform: new mandate for national bank and cleaning of banking system [P]</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fiscal decentralization [O]</td>
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<td>Core aims of ongoing reforms: anti-corruption, rule of law, transparent democratic institutions</td>
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<td>• Specialized anti-corruption bodies: National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAPO) [O]</td>
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<td>• Justice system reform [S]</td>
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<td>• Prosecution reform [S]</td>
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<td>• Law enforcement: new patrol police, execution reform [O]</td>
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<td>• System of democratic representation: reform of party financing, electoral reform [O]</td>
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<td>• Public service reform, e-declaration of public senior officials’ assets [O]</td>
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<td>• Decentralization, forming amalgamated communities (self-governing districts by uniting towns and villages) [O]</td>
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<th>Sociocultural/Welfare Dimension</th>
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<tr>
<td>Core aims of ongoing reforms: ?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pension system reform [O/S]</td>
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<td>• Health care reform [O]</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Response to IDP situation (all aspects, from welfare provision to social cohesion) [O/S]</td>
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<td>• Education reform [S]</td>
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<td>Core aims of ongoing reforms: energy efficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Environmental strategy of Ukraine (context of the Paris Agreement on climate change) [S]</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Energy strategy [O]</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Land reform [S]</td>
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Note: P = progressed; O = ongoing; S = in stalemate (little or no reform)
Maesen 2017). Deterioration of employment conditions ran in parallel: salaries did not rise at the speed of prices, and the employees’ bargaining power remains curbed by the absence of an effective unionization. The unions in Ukraine remain mostly formal and depoliticized, not playing any active role in the ongoing social processes in the country.

Prices of all life necessities were marked by a steep rise: in recent polling, 97 percent of Ukrainian respondents have indicated that they “have personally experienced the higher prices for consumer goods and services” (RGU 2017). Before 2013, around 13 percent of all households were deemed “unable to pay for housing, utilities and domestic fuel”; this figure grew to 51 percent of all Ukrainian households in 2017 (Heyets 2017: 3). Effects of inflation run parallel with a significant increase in the price of gas and utilities for households as part of the energy sector reform. The country’s economy is largely import-dependent, especially on energy for households and industries; hence, the depreciation of currency had a further negative impact on affordability of life’s necessities. The salaries, pensions, and welfare benefits have not grown at any scale comparable to the rise of the overall price level over the past four years, with parts of the population falling below international poverty lines, as well as domestic minimum subsistence levels as a result. The World Happiness Report 2017 measuring living standards, inequality, people’s access to opportunities, and their sense of well-being ranked Ukraine 132 out of 155 countries for 2014–2016, a decline compared to its ranking in previous periods (Helliwell et al. 2017).

Effects of conflict contribute to socioeconomic hardship, with more than 4 percent of the population being displaced because of conflict in eastern Ukraine and Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Most of these people stay within Ukraine, making it the seventh-largest internally displaced people (IDP) host community in the world (Van Metre 2017). The Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine has registered more than 1.6 million persons from the Donbas and Crimea who relocated within the country, while an additional 239,000 have applied for refugee status abroad after fleeing the country (IDMC 2017). The IDPs are an especially vulnerable group, in both socioeconomic terms (social transfers that nevertheless remain too low to secure decent life conditions, need for integration into the labor market, pressure on housing market in major cities, etc.) and from the sociocultural/welfare perspective (discrimination, social integration and cohesion, limited access to welfare as developed later in this article). Of those who stayed in the Donbas along both sides of the conflict line, 1.2 million are moderately or severely food insecure (OCHA 2017: 10).

It is worth mentioning that all of the socioeconomic crisis develops within the context of extensive budgetary cuts (lack of financial resources combined with the austerity requirements of international financial institutions). Ukrainian government is faced with an overall deterioration in the economic situation: having burned a large proportion of foreign reserves of the Ukrainian government on the initial policy of safeguarding a fixed exchange rate of the hryvnia; the loss of parts of territories; the drop in industrial production; the drop in trade with Russia as a traditional major
economic partner; and increased pressure on state resources (conflict in the Donbas, IDPs), to name just a few factors. In this situation, the country simply cannot do without international financial budget support, loans, and grants. Already in the first two years after the Maidan protests, external debt grew from 78.6 percent to 131.5 percent of the country’s GDP (WB 2017). In 2014, the Ukrainian government started cooperating with the IMF, coupled with supplementary microfinancial assistance from the European Commission and a loan from the World Bank. The negative externality of these much-needed flows is that they foster a relation of additional external accountability of government and directly contribute to the formation of related austerity measures. In Ukraine, characterized by a lack of political vision and/or societal consensus on an overarching vision for socioeconomic development, and by a context in which a minister of economy lasts on average eleven months⁹ (i.e., there is no time to push through a strategy, especially if the vision is unclear), the situation of external dependency raises additional concerns.

In the two decades of the post-Soviet transition, Ukrainian society can without much doubt be characterized as a resilient society. The range of coping strategies among the population within the current grim picture of recent socioeconomic crisis includes the growth of a “gray” economy and informal employment, a strong reliance on personal networks,¹⁰ a rise of a solidarity-oriented civil society and community organizations,¹¹ dollarization of economic transactions,¹² and an increase in labor migration. Official estimates indicate that 7 percent of workforce has left since 2015 (Krasnolutska and Verbyany 2018, following data by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine and the IOM)¹³. The past few years have marked an increased Westward trend in the labor market. Whereas most Ukrainian workers were initially working in Russia (following strong economic ties, language, and cultural proximity), the trend is shifting toward the West (with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Italy being the major hosts for longer-term labor migration communities in the EU). The UN suggests that the population in Ukraine might fall to 36.4 million from 44.2 million by 2050 (DESA 2017).

The informal sector (i.e., shadow economy) plays a very strong role in this context and is estimated to account for 35 to 40 percent of Ukraine’s GDP in 2015–2016, or 45 percent, according to the Schneider Index (Schneider and Medina 2017). The informal economy in Ukraine is not an underdeveloped and residual sphere but is highly intertwined and interdependent within the formal economic sector (Michoshynchenko 2013). The high volume of shadow economic activity should be taken into account for explaining the survival strategies of certain segments of the population amid the overall economic downturn. Employment in the informal sector is estimated at around four million workers. Simultaneously, the growing scope of the shadow economy adversely influences the availability of resources within social security and pension funds, as well as the scope of access to these resources. At the same time, the gap between formal and informal practices is important to the outcomes and interrelations in the socioeconomic/financial dimension.
The Sociopolitical/Legal Dimension

Recent opinion poll indicates that up to 85 percent of the population deems Ukraine today as being “in a state of chaos,” 75 percent believing that it is “in a state of collapse.” Only 17 percent are optimistic enough to believe that Ukraine is currently heading to a “state of consolidation” (RGU 2017). The challenges develop on two fundamentally different fronts. In terms of the internal struggle, reforms in the sociopolitical/legal dimension of societal life have centered on tackling corruption and increasing the transparency of public institutions, as to respond to the key calls of the Revolution of Dignity. The externally triggered struggle is to deal with conflict in eastern Ukraine or the undeclared war with Russia over the Donbas, a direct consequence of the 2014 events.

The separatist-held territory in the Donbas constitutes less than 3 percent of the country and used to account for approximately 8 percent of its GDP (discussion with Olena Bilan, 26 June 2017). However, the conflict impacts almost every aspect of societal life: from direct military operations and increased pressure on state resources to social capital and community mobilization. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights estimates that almost 10,000 people have been killed (including more than 2,800 civilians) and more than 23,000 injured or disabled (OHCHR 2017: 6). In addition, around 1.8 million have been displaced as a result of the conflict (1.6 million are IDPs), a factor leading to a range of socioeconomic and sociocultural/welfare challenges. Moreover, the conflict gave rise to armed militias, which effectively remain outside of the state's control. Some of these are associated with radical right-wing movements, while other volunteer battalions have financial ties with infamous names at the top of Ukraine's list of richest executives. Both the paramilitary groups with extreme ideologies and the private armies present a potential danger to future postconflict stability.

In theory, the framework for conflict de-escalation is provided by the Minsk agreements (Minsk I and II, signed in 2014 and 2015 under Franco-German mediation), although the ceasefire established therein has been repeatedly broken. Domestic experts have warned that if completely adhered to and followed in its current form, the Minsk agreements may have unintended consequences in terms of conflict-enhancing impact. In line with this reasoning, the Minsk agreements were signed by the president and representatives, but were never recognized by the Ukrainian parliament and does not enjoy public approval. Among the elements deemed problematic is the condition to hold local elections right after the ceasefire. In light of the current information war in which the population in and around the conflict territories has been exposed to strong propaganda and limited access to information, the idea of a ballot is likely to trigger further instability. Such skepticism seems frequent, as illustrated by the following excerpts from three interviews: “We were witnesses of the 'referendum' in Crimea; why should we believe in 'elections' for Donbas?” “Without full control of borders, with presence of militias and volunteer
battalions over which the state has no control, how can we ever talk about effective
demilitarization and free vote?” “Elections after years of exposure to one-sided
propaganda would help the so-called leaders of these [breakaway] republics become
legitimized. The difference between now and then is that Ukraine will be forced to
pay out of Ukrainian budget for a separatist administration, including for those who
will control the border.”

Unfamiliar readers may raise an eyebrow at the term “anti-terrorist operation,” in
which the governmental operations within conflict in eastern Ukraine have been
framed until October 2017. While the media and politicians spoke about the war with
Russia, the conflict has not been recognized as a war from the perspective of Ukrainian
law. The separatist fighters on Ukrainian territory were labeled “terrorist groups,” with
an anti-terroristic operation being run by the military (which in fact created a long-
term ambiguous situation, as the military does not have the mandate to enact anti-
terroristic operations from the perspective of Ukrainian law). This schism led to legal
and practical consequences for those working in the military operation. Recently, the
Ukrainian parliament adopted a new legal regulation for state policy on the temporarily
occupied territories,14 declaring the Russian Federation the occupier and aggressor of
certain areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, thus replacing the earlier anti-
terrorist operation and transforming the military/civilian command chain.

The conflict is further intertwined with an information war, in which Ukrainian
and Russian elites and media provide competing narratives, villainizing the other side
and often creating information bubbles, disinformation, and propaganda. The social
impact of the radicalization and overall climate of distrust have yet to be fully
comprehended in the long run. Draft laws on the issue of reintegrating the Donbas
to Ukraine tackle the breakaway regions from a perspective of reintegrating the
territory, with little focus on the sociopolitical and sociocultural/welfare reintegration15
of the population on both sides of the current conflict.

Parallel with the physical conflict is the “fight” ongoing at the domestic “front”—
the battles for structural changes in the area of rule of law and good governance. In a
recent representative poll, 65 percent of Ukrainian respondents thought that “the
main reasons for the current socioeconomic situation in the country are corruption
and incompetence of the current government” (RGU 2017). A specificity of Ukraine
is that the players who benefit from the structural deformations of political and legal
environment are very strong, as they convey their economic power into political
influence, and vice versa, often by extralegal ways. Financial and economic holdings,
habitually personified as oligarchs, exercise political influence through the nature of
their business (if too big to fail, the state will bail them out using public resources),
through the financing of direct political representation of their interests (most of
political parties in the current Parliament rely on a disproportionally large proportion
of their finances from a very small number of sources).16 Furthermore, influence via
media ownership is part of the story. Television remains the major source of
information for the public in Ukraine, and nine among the largest financial-economic
holdings own private TV channels prone to one-sided political campaigning (Pleines 2016). Conceptualized through notions such as patronal politics (Hale 2015), oligarchy (Aslund 2015; Puglisi 2008; Solonenko 2016), state capture (Konończuk et al. 2017), and patronage-based “machine politics” (D’Anieri 2011), what permeates establishing rule of law is perceived as key for curbing the privileged access of a confined group of business tycoons to state resources and decision-making processes.

Rule of law remains the field of reform that society is most unhappy about (RPR 2017), with extremely low levels of trust in judiciary among the population and an overall problematic law enforcement. In a poll conducted in 2016, 64 percent felt that the judicial reform has so far been implemented contrary to public demands, while 84 percent indicated that the judiciary needs cleansing. Trust in the judiciary remains extremely low: only 10 percent of the population trusts the courts fully or partially, noting almost no change from pre-Maidan figures (USAID 2016). The rate of court decision enforcement used to be below 10 percent (discussion with Sergiy Petukhov, 4 July 2017). When asked “to what extent … human rights [are] respected in our country today,” more than 82 percent of respondents indicated that their rights are not very respected or not respected at all (RC 2017a: 46).

The obsolete judiciary is seen as a key hindrance to the anti-corruption fight. A set of new bodies aimed at investigating corruption was created: the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAPO). While the establishment of these institutions was celebrated as a major step forward, any tangible effect remains hindered by the fact that these new institutions are implanted into an old sociolegal and sociocultural system: in twenty-seven of the forty cases filed by the NABU to courts, the court ended up not even scheduling a first hearing (RPR 2017).

Presidential consolidation of power, seemingly a repetitive trend in modern Ukrainian history, was noted in 2017 by various observers, with notable steps from President Petro Poroshenko to consolidate power ahead of 2019’s presidential and parliamentary elections (Ash et al. 2017; Jarabik and Minakov 2016).

The Sociocultural/Welfare Dimension

The most pressing and visible challenge of social inclusion nowadays is the question of integrating IDPs. The internal relocation from conflict-affected areas to the rest of the country has increased pressure on the formal and visible level (such as social welfare provision or housing stock in major cities). Beyond the immediately visible, the situation increases pressure on the level of social cohesion: prejudice (being not trusted or even seen as supporters of the enemy), discrimination (in access to political and social rights, education, employment), increased vulnerability due to family separation and related challenges of their social inclusion, and the cohesion of “host” communities on the urban level (see Van der Maesen 2017; Van Metre et al. 2017). The relatively new Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs has not yet
pursued any clear initiative in addressing these challenges, with its action limited mostly to verification and distribution of social benefits. As time progresses, many of the evacuated have realized that they are not going back home anytime soon: the end of conflict remains indefinite and, in words of a prominent IDP activist, “many already feel they would not be able to integrate back there, given the levels of social destruction and polarization” (discussion Lesya Litvinova, 5 July 2017). According to the World Bank (2017b) figures, one-third of IDPs in Ukraine plan to integrate into local communities rather than return. Yet a comprehensive and long-term strategy for the integration of these people is not yet in place.

A parallel challenge of social inclusion, although on a much smaller scale,21 is the reintegration of soldiers and volunteers returning from the frontline in eastern Ukraine to “normal” daily life. Especially vulnerable groups in this context have been young conscripts and volunteer fighters, from both the official army and the private militias—a category of citizenry who were not soldiers by vocation before the conflict. While some socioeconomic and psychological elements of reintegration are partially tackled by civil society initiatives in major cities, there is no systemic recognition of this group’s specific needs.

As highlighted in the section on the socioeconomic/financial dimension, the turmoil following 2014 has a negative impact on the overall well-being (circumstances) of the population. Vis-à-vis these developments, the welfare (provisions) to the population mirrored a shrinking state budget. Perhaps most visibly, the pension system proved unsustainable, reflected in the deterioration of pensioners’ conditions across the country. Many of the pensioners living in the uncontrolled territories of Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts lost access to the pension system to which they were contributing their entire life, as the government eliminated some of the welfare benefits and commitments in the uncontrolled territories. Stipends for students in higher education have undergone major cuts. The deterioration of access to health care has been reported in some regions (for detailed insights, see Heyets 2017). Overall, a conundrum of challenges lay ahead in elaborating welfare provisions for enhancing daily living circumstances. Some of the population’s strategies for coping with the crises are likely to further aggravate the lack of resources for redistributive policies and the overall tenability of the pension system. In this respect, the rise in informal employment and the informal economy as such, as well as the growing Westward emigration, would deserve particular attention of policy makers.

Civic mobilization, civic participation, and civil society are of high interest to the sociocultural/welfare dimension. If massive nationwide protests were to break out, 41 percent of Ukrainian citizens would personally support their immediate organization, at least according to a recent poll (RGU 2017). The general trust level in other members of Ukrainian society remains very low: more than 75 percent of respondents highlighted that it is necessary to “be very careful in dealing with people,” while only 16 percent believe that most people can be trusted (RC 2017a: 14). Trust in institutions is also limited, but given the overall context, nongovernmental organizations have a
high level of trust compared to other institutions, enjoying trust from 37 percent of citizens and mistrust from 24 percent (KIIS 2017). The last wave of civic mobilization leading to the Revolution of Dignity was strongly associated not only with a call to redefine the relation between state and citizens but also hopes about the strengthened civil society in the country. The post-Maidan period has since been characterized by a changing nature of social contract (Wilson 2014), with the ongoing reforms as a window of opportunity to participate in the formulation, implementation, and oversight of reform initiatives in Ukraine.

The Reanimation Package for Reforms was established as an umbrella organization, bringing together eighty NGOs and twenty-two expert groups and establishing a strong presence as an “organic intellectual” platform that collects various common sense notions about the needs of societal transformation in various sectors. Think tanks, based primarily in the capital, attract a young generation of analysts, very often those with an education from Western universities, to focus on assessing every possible aspect of the ongoing reforms. The civil society landscape in Kiev burgeoned with watchdog-, advice-, and lobby-type of activities by professional civil society organizations, whose input has been crucial for many policy initiatives. The integration of civil society in public politics has been visible in areas ranging from public procurement to volunteers helping with the management of change directly within some ministries.

The Ukrainian Think Tanks Liaison Office in Brussels was established to bring more domestically produced country expertise into the discussions within the “Eurobubble.” The boomerang technique of turning to international actors (primarily the EU) seems to enjoy popularity among civic actors as a method of pressuring domestic governmental actors. Yet, the overall question of informed representation of the public in the ongoing reforms should not be reduced to the level of professional(ized) civil society organization. In mid-2017, the proportion of Ukrainians who felt that the country is headed in the right direction was 18 percent (CISR 2017: 6). Civil society organizations in the capital and other major cities are still blamed for being “disconnected from local communities, and that activity on behalf of citizens rather than with citizens” (Ash et al. 2017: vii). The channels between local communities, intellectual civil society organizations, and the access to decision making remain a challenge.

According to the social quality approach, “the social” is realized with help of the constitutive “interdependency between processes of people’s self-realization and processes steering the formation of collective identities” (Van der Maesen 2017: 32). In this respect, the social cohesion in the Ukrainian context is strongly marked by the accelerated nation-building processes, which consolidate the collective acceptance of shared values and norms. Ukraine did not go through dynamics of nation-state building after independence, and identity politics in before 2014 was characterized by mobilization of ethnic or regional identity, often in a divisive manner. Revoking these differences and ethnic identity in a utilitarian manner was used to “cover class divides,
redirecting attention from pressing economic issues” (Korostelina 2013: 38). While Pamela Abbott and Claire Wallace (2010: 663) highlighted in their 2010 study that “just over half of Ukrainians expressed pride in their citizenship,” there are several reasons to believe that if their very same survey was conducted now, this number would be much higher.

In light of the conflict with Russia, the idea of Ukrainian nationhood as a bounding force against a common enemy gained momentum, and 92 percent of citizens consider themselves “ethnic Ukrainians” (RC 2017b), marking the highest figure in Ukraine’s independent history, while only 6 percent consider themselves Russians (RC 2017a). There is lack of comparable data in this respect: in the official 1989 population census, more than 22 percent of Ukraine’s population identified as ethnically Russian, dropping to 17 percent in 2001 (SSCU 2001); the next census was scheduled for 2012, then 2013, then 2016, and now for 2020. The discourse about the presence of those with Russian nationality in Ukraine gained a strong security connotation, especially as Russian passports were made available in Crimea long before the annexation.

National language is an important indicator in this process: the use of the Ukrainian language in public speeches and in everyday interactions has substantially increased since the revolution. The proportion of citizens considering Ukrainian their native language grew to 68 percent, but only around 55 percent speak Ukrainian as their main language at home, and this figure gets even lower when asked if they speak Ukrainian at work, school, and so on (RC 2017b). Use of language was coupled with a security connotation, leading to legislative changes, such as an affirmative quota for using Ukrainian in mass media or in form of upfront censorship, as was the case with blocking access to Russian websites, including widely used social networks (especially Vkontakte, a more popular alternative to Facebook in Ukraine), e-mail services, and search engines previously widely used in Ukraine. A new education law contains provisions that extends the use of Ukrainian in schools, in a controversial manner that sparked objections from representatives of national minorities.26

The very basis of a common identity—a narrative of a common past—has been the most controversial point in contemporary nation building. Every strong sense of “us” requires defining an out-group of “them,” those who are not us, so perhaps unsurprisingly, in light of the geopolitical developments of the past four years, Russia now plays the role of Ukraine’s constitutive other. The Soviet times, an inherent part of Ukrainian history, become a major issue in this respect. Impacted by the current polarization of identities vis-à-vis Russia, the narrative of history in which the USSR period is an era of Soviet imperialism over Ukraine gains ground, while contemporary Russia is the ideational inheritor of Soviet dominance. The recent de-Sovietization policy led to the renaming of streets, villages, and cities and inscribes the newly confirmed narrative into public space, erasing any signs of historical memory referring to the Soviet era of Ukraine’s history. In effect, Soviet times in the newly forming national narrative become a disruptive era rather than an inherent part of national
history, which is stressing above all the Ukrainian fight for independence from Moscow, a feature from the western Ukrainian historical narrative. No major dataset seems to offer many insights on the public view/national pride in terms of “less politicized” aspects of channeling patriotism in relation to Soviet times, such as sport, science, or art (e.g., the recent “100 Great Ukrainians” vote on TV included several personalities from Soviet times, but such insights cannot be considered representative). Rhetorical label inscriptions in public discourse contrapose the “European” and the “Soviet”; with overencompassing phrases like “European standards” or “European values” used in referring to modernization, development, improved well-being, and transparency, while “Soviet” points to the other end of the spectra (as a discursive reference to the lack of rule of law, systems of patronage and exchange of favors, nontransparency, backwardness). When asked to what extent they agree or disagree, more than 94 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “I consider myself a citizen of my country,” while only 27 percent agreed with the statement “I consider myself a citizen of the former Soviet Union” (RC 2017a: 27).

The official national memory policy prioritized a rather narrow interpretation of history based on a Galician narrative (region in western Ukraine), without open debate or deliberation between different historical “camps.” The official narrative affirmed under the current regime dominates the formal institutional consolidation of its elements, is affirmed by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory with a formal mandate of implementing state policy in the field of restoration and preservation of national memory, and is strongly supported by symbolic policies (e.g., restoring some controversial figures from history to the status of national heroes, establishing new national holidays and overall policy of de-Sovietization).

In a recent survey of expert opinions, only 7 percent of respondents believed that national identity common for all citizens has been formed in Ukrainian society, while the vast majority estimated that the formation of a unifying identity is still a long process (RC 2017a). The promotion of an unhelpfully narrow interpretation of history limits the ideational space needed to co-opt elements of competing narratives; in practical terms, it lacks the ability to “facilitate a reciprocal empathy between citizens in opposing historical ‘camps’” (Szostek 2017: 6; see also Osipian and Osipian 2012). Especially since the Orange Revolution (2004–2005), the strategy of revoking and reifying regional identities has been a characteristic feature of political competition in Ukraine, where divergences on the interpretation of the past constituted a stronger dividing line among major parties in Ukraine than their vision for the future did. Although pursuing dominance on the formal institutional terrain, the official narrative may lack the ability to become a hegemonic unifying force, and it does not provide a bottom line that could be embraced by all citizens. In general, the building of a new common narrative of shared Ukrainian history (especially in relation to the isms of the twentieth century) proceeds in a polarizing, nonconsensual manner: elements of the officially recognized narrative compete with and effectively foreclose alternative Ukrainian identity concepts. Of particular interest, and yet to be explored, is how this
inclusion/exclusion dynamics in the new Ukrainian narratives might interrelate with other social dynamics in the newly amalgamated communities under the ongoing decentralization reform.

The Socioenvironmental Dimension

The subject and objects of the “socioenvironmental dimension” concern the outcomes of societal-based influences on the geosphere and biosphere of nature (Sato et al. 2016). A common mistake is to connect the concept of “sustainability” with the earth/planet. But the planet will not fade away. The concept should refer to human existence on this planet, to present the outcomes of human/societal influences on nature. Destructive influences on both spheres concern the destruction of human living circumstances. Therefore, the concept of the “socioenvironmental dimension” is referring to human influences.

The challenge of humanity’s overall sustainability and the socioenvironmental dimension as its main pillar does not figure in major discussions of the ongoing societal transformation in Ukraine, except maybe in some marginal discourses. The topic does not appear in major policy discussions nor seems to be a subject of public inquiry or scrutiny, relatively few civil society actors are proactive in this area, and overall, it does not appear in many of the recent analyses either. In effect, this section may appear disproportionate to the context in the preceding quadrants. Overall, “Ukraine is home to some of the richest natural environments and resources in Europe while at the same time being one of the most heavily polluted countries in the region” (UNDP 2018). In terms of human relations to the environment, the Ukrainian context has been characterized by little policy attention to the ecological situation and a low level of environmental consciousness. To give a few examples, the reliance on environmentally costly energy sources; heavy industries with monumental ecological traces in some of the regions; and pollution of air, land, and water were all intertwined with a lack of strategy against environmental degradation.

Where the topic does appear, the debate often remains limited to the question of energy efficiency—or to the issue of environmental protection standards within the context of Ukraine’s major trade agreements. In particular, the framework of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement both stipulate a degree of convergence of technical regulations, standards, and conformity assessment, plus some provisions on mutual commitment to sustainable development. Nevertheless, the few environmentally aware provisions raised in the context of enhancing international trade reflect a rather narrow view of sustainability and do not tackle the broader issue of sustainability of human interaction with the environment.

Ukraine has long belonged to one of the least energy-efficient countries in the world, one with the twenty-fourth highest greenhouse gas emission intensity in the world and with energy intensity more than double than world average (Enerdata
An ambitious target was set to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60 percent (from 1990 levels) by 2030, but the Energy Strategy of Ukraine till 2030 stipulates further extraction and use of fossil fuels. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2018) estimates that any reduction of these emissions resulted mainly from a “GDP decrease and a decline in the population and social living standards.” The drop in coal production resulting from conflict in the east might play into the reduction of emissions. Energy transition is perceived of as a major challenge, and the current unavailability of previously cheap gas from Russia increases pressure in this respect. Energy sector reform so far has targeted mostly household energy efficiency though price increases (abolition of general subsidies) and establishing an Energy Efficiency Fund to support energy-efficient renovation of living quarters. Modernization of gas transportation system is foreseen with the aim of cutting energy losses in the near future.29

In the context of the socioenvironmental dimension, the impact of war and the possible coming environmental catastrophe in the Donbas should be highlighted. The environmental conditions in eastern Ukraine have been marked by a strong presence of coal mining, ferrous metallurgy, and chemical industries. As a result of the conflict, some of these sites have shut down abruptly, as they were partially damaged by shelling or became strategic targets, causing leaks of hazardous waste, water, soil and land contamination, or a high risk of accidents at enterprises or infrastructure. To give just a few examples of the scope of the situation: almost a quarter of all mines in Ukraine have been flooded (Andrushchenko 2016) following electricity cuts or abandonment by the management, including one nuclear site. At Ukraine’s major coke plant30 alone, 320 shelling incidents have been recorded. The global database of Toxic Sites Identification Program31 warns about several sites at the Donbas frontline, while risks range from damaged sewage systems and sanitation facilities, to targeting water filtration stations (containing liquefied chlorine gas in large quantities) and reservoirs of chemical waste, to pollution resulting from military activity and use of chemical weapons. These challenges often remain overlooked in light of the broader socioeconomic and sociocultural impacts of the conflict, and international actors have been pointing out grave concerns over conflict-related environmental pollution (e.g., EU et al. 2015). As Wim Zwijnenburg (2017) aptly frames it, the region is slowly turning into a “ticking toxic time bomb.”

Yet, somehow, Ukraine’s overall position in the Environmental Performance Index, which ranks countries’ performance on high-priority environmental issues, substantially improved from ninety-fifth in 2014 to forty-fourth in 2016 (Hsu et al. 2016).32 The overall focus has been developing the legislative framework to support the environmental strategy of Ukraine in the context of the Paris Agreement on climate change. A national climate policy concept33 was adopted, but a related update of the National Environmental Strategy and Action Plan remains open. The Energy Strategy of Ukraine until 2035 and legislative on energy efficiency have been adopted to bring Ukraine closer to the European standards, in line with the provisions of the
Ukraine-EU Association Agreement. Under the Energy Community and Strategic Energy Partnership between the EU and Ukraine, the question of energy efficiency figures prominently.

While stand-alone individual policy targets, such as increased energy efficiency, are worthwhile, the question of “sustainable development” encompasses a much broader question that yet has to be fully comprehended, embraced, and translated to the context in Ukraine. According to the European Commission (EC 2016b), “Sustainable Development stands for meeting the needs of present generations without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs—in other words, a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. . . . this requires profound changes in thinking, in economic and social structures and in consumption and production patterns.” As for now, the “Ukraine 2020” Strategy for Sustainable Development defines a range of goals, mostly in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical field. None addresses directly the question of overall sustainability and the role of the socioenvironmental dimension of the current development model, and very few (perhaps apart from the goal of energy independence), in fact, account for the socioenvironmental dimension as such.

Concluding Remarks

This study opens up the perspective to the importance of development in all four dimensions of the social quality approach, which play a primary role in productive and reproductive relationships in the context of Ukraine. Through their interrelations, these dimensions define the different contexts for processes that constitute “the social.” This involves, among others, the recognition of the overwhelming impact of the change of the conditional factors of social quality—such as the dynamics of social cohesion building through patriotic nationalism revived at an unprecedented scale, the armed conflict with its physical and ideational consequences for social inclusion and social empowerment, and the ongoing deprivation of the socioeconomic factor—on processes unfolding in all four dimensions. In this sense, the problematique of Ukraine refers to the outcomes of the reciprocity of interrelated problems—reciprocities relevant to the development of societal complexities.

By highlighting the embedding of ongoing reforms in a given sociospatial context, this article provides an entry point and stepping-stone for further analysis on the reciprocity of interrelated problems and the changing nature of “the social.” In particular, as public moods in the country increasingly suggest a wave of frustration with the outcomes of the Revolution of Dignity, further research should look at the individual and collective coping strategies with change and the spaces for participation in their communities to reshape the material and ideational conditions of their everyday life. In this respect, the social quality approach has the potential to yield a framework to analyze trends, contradictions, and challenges of the complexity of the
problematique in Ukraine as a whole, and to understanding its aspects that create the whole in an interrelated manner.

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Notes

1. In the early stage, labeled in the literature as the Euromaidan phase, students protested the presidential decision to withdraw from signing an association agreement with the European Union, that is, the foreign policy shift away from multidimensional foreign policy to prime orientation on Russia. In later stages, following police brutalities against protesting students, the protests turned into mass demonstrations for human dignity in how regime interacts with citizens: the masses on Kiev’s Maidan Nezalezhnosti and other squares around Ukraine gathered to protest an endemically corrupted regime that served the interest of a few privileged at the expense of all, symbolized by the president—hence, the term “Revolution of Dignity,” a term that has been more prevalent among Ukrainian-speaking audiences.

2. A play with the words of Antonio Gramsci, who described crisis as the process in which the “old is dying and the new cannot be born, [while] in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (2001: 32–33).

3. In this respect, personal/human security, social recognition, social responsiveness, and personal capacity are the core factors.

4. As such, this reflects the broad understanding of “the social” in the social quality approach.

5. Actors involved in the design, execution, or assessment of the ongoing reform initiatives. For a full list of interviewees, please refer to the references at the end of this article.

6. Concept of local self-government reform approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on 1 April 2014.
7. The social quality approach distinguishes between three sets of factors (conditional, constitutional, and normative). The constitutional factors speak to the development of “the self-referential capacities of people into a specific competence to act” (Van der Maesen and Walker 2012: 53), developing in a historically determined context as the outcome of the interplay/intertwining between two tensions. First is the tension between the system integration and the social integration of interacting individuals (i.e., relationships between individuals and systems/institutions versus relations between individuals and societal totalities such as communities). The other tension refers to the field of opportunities on axes between societal development and biological development (cf. Beck et al. 2001). The constitutional factors can be framed as personal (human) security, social recognition, social responsiveness, and personal (human) capacity. The conditional factors—namely, socioeconomic security, social cohesion, social inclusion, and social empowerment—speak to the nature of development in the configuration of human interrelationships (in particular, as focal points within the tension between systems and communities). The normative factors of social justice, solidarity, equal valuation, and human dignity provide a compass in judging the outcomes of the processes in the conditional and constitutional domain (for a discussion, see Van der Maesen and Walker 2012). The bottom line is that all three sets are relevant in each dimension of the (social) context: the socioeconomic, the sociopolitical/legal, the sociocultural/welfare, and the socioenvironmental, which all play a role in productive and reproductive relationships. The heuristic meaning of the distinction between the four dimensions delivers the subject and objects for applying the three sets to the “concrete world” of societal complexities. In the social quality architecture, it is by applying the three sets of factors for analyzing outcomes of processes that such a methodology enables us to compare the outcomes in the different dimensions with each other, thanks to the overarching application of these three sets.

8. Or the eighth-largest host country in terms of the share of IDPs in the total population (Van Metre et al. 2017).

9. Since the revolution, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine has already been headed by three consequent ministers. In the twenty-seven years of Ukraine’s independence from the Soviet Union, twenty-six ministers of economy have been in office.

10. Strong reliance on personal networks (relatives and friends), as already depicted in earlier social quality studies in the region (see Abbott and Wallace 2010).

11. Rise of solidarity-oriented civil society groups distributing material aid, especially to IDPs, to whose needs the state has been particularly slow to react.

12. In its independent history, Ukraine has never experienced any substantial appreciation of currency, only depreciation. With the hryvnia losing about 70 percent of its value in recent years, the dollarization of salaries and real estate market are part of the coping strategy. Especially problematic in this respect is the dollarization of loans, with a 40 to 45 percent share of loans being in foreign currency in Ukraine (discussion with Dmytro Sologub, 27 June 2017), bringing many creditors into despair.

13. On the inverse side, the immediate post-Maidan enthusiasm also brought small streams of returning experts and highly qualified labor, mainly to Kiev.

14. Law on State Policy Elements to Ensure Ukraine’s Sovereignty of the Temporarily Occupied Territories in Donetsk and Luhansk Regions of Ukraine, 6 October 2017. Therein, the occupation of parts of Ukrainian territory in the Donbas is acknowledged with reference to the 1907 Hague Convention (IV) and the 1949 Geneva Convention (IV).

15. The need for attention to “the social” within any vision for future reintegration of these territories is clear. The residents of the occupied territories—who have not widely shared elements of the newly consolidated Ukrainian identity before the occupation and have been exposed to one-sided, anti-Western propaganda within the conflict—are likely to find it difficult to relate to the changing dynamics of social cohesion in postrevolution Ukraine. And, similar to other postconflict situations, trust building (on both sides of the current frontline) will present a multilevel challenge.

16. In late 2016, a party financing reform was introduced to undermine the position of party “sponsors” via a model of state funding for political parties and a requirement to make their financial expenditures available to public scrutiny.

17. In the absence of an independent media regulator, even current President Petro Poroshenko retained ownership of his 5Kanal TV channel during the execution of his political mandate.
18. The new anti-corruption bodies quickly ran into conflict with the public prosecutor's office. The prosecutor general in Ukraine is part of the presidential branch of power and hence not independent of political pressures.

19. While Ukraine is a de facto presidential republic in the post-Maidan era, concerns about excessive consolidation of power point to the coupling of power in all branches in the hands of a few actors close/loyal to the president, along with concerns about the potential misuse of power to eliminate political opponents (such as in the recent case of stripping Saakashvili, Poroshenko's former ally and now political rival, of Ukrainian citizenship under the pretext of administrative mistakes in the past) (see Ash et al. 2017; Jarabik and Minakov 2016).

20. Most IDPs in Ukraine are women and children, as many men stayed to continue work in the conflict area (IDMC 2017).

21. Since the outbreak of conflict in the Donbas, more than two hundred thousand veterans are to be reintegrated (WB 2017b).

22. The social institutions enjoying the highest level of trust from the public are the church, volunteers, and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, all trusted by more than half of the population. The least trustworthy are the government and the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) of Ukraine (9 percent and 5 percent, respectively).

23. “Organic intellectuals” in the sense that they articulate interests of a specific fraction of a society, around which they seek to win general consent; Gramsci (2001: 3–22) establishes the basis of such understanding. In this sense many knowledge-producing organizations fulfill the role of organizers or mediators of ideas in particular sectors of society.

24. Around the launch of ProZorro digital interface for bringing transparency into public procurement (for more information, see Ash et al. 2017; RPR 2017).

25. An especially interesting example in this direction is the Reforms Project Office within the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, which crowd sources practical advice from civil society and through volunteer support.

26. The core of the controversy is that the new legislation effectively reduces the scope of instruction in minority communities’ mother tongues (currently under assessment of the Venice Commission).

27. For results of the public vote on the greatest figures of Ukrainian history, see http://ukrhistory.com.ua/100/100_velikih_ukraincev/index.html. Please note that while TV is the media most commonly consumed by Ukrainian citizens, this type of insight remains heavily skewed (i.e., the audience participating in the vote cannot by any means be considered a representative sample).

28. The historical particularity of western Ukraine is that the formative years of its identity are tied to when this region has been part of Austrian-Hungarian empire (later Czechoslovakia) and Poland. While this version of nationalism was adopted by some elites in the capital, a significant number of Ukrainians historically “did not identify themselves with this form of Ukrainian identity” (Brudny and Finkel 2011: 817–818; see also Wolczuk 2001).

29. A recent Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Energy Partnership between the EU and Ukraine broadened the cooperation in all areas, including energy efficiency, renewable energy, and research and cooperation.

30. Avdiivka Coke and Chemical Plant; the Organization for Security and Co-operation Europe reported an ammonium leak and related chemical incident risks as a result of repeated shelling and fires (Zwijnenburg 2017).

31. The database can be found at http://www.contaminatedsites.org/TSIP.

32. The ranking was developed by Yale University (2014) in collaboration with the World Economic Forum. The index assesses environmental health (heath impact, air quality, water, and sanitation) and ecosystem vitality (Hsu et al. 2016).

33. Law of Ukraine on the Basic Principles (Strategy) of the State Environmental Policy of Ukraine until 2020.
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