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ABSTRACT
Since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014, new memory actors in Ukraine (veterans, families of the fallen soldiers, and other activists) seek to commemorate those Ukrainians who lost their lives on the frontline. By examining the construction of memorials in the Poltava oblast (Central Ukraine), the article demonstrates that in the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict the commemorative activity of ordinary people is impacted by the continued human losses, ordinary people's perception of the future (grounded in their present-day experiences), and their desire to ensure that their memories are preserved for future generations.

Introduction
The onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014 saw several initiatives to commemorate the fallen Ukrainian soldiers. As of early 2021, the conflict led to more than four thousand combat and non-combat military deaths among the Ukrainian military and its affiliated units.[1] New memory actors (veterans, families of the fallen soldiers, and other activists) now seek to commemorate those citizens who lost their lives on the frontline. These memory actors are ordinary people[2] who were not

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[1]'Book of Memory of Those Who Died for Ukraine'
http://memorybook.org.ua/index.htm. Accessed 1 May 2021.
[2]The term 'ordinary people' is used here to describe those memory actors who are not public officials (in other words, not part of the state agencies) and not members of political parties. Ordinary people have no direct access to public funds or funds of political parties, and when seeking to construct memorials they need to either use their own funds and resources or acquire them elsewhere (from example, from the local authorities). Considering that the construction of many memorials to the Russia-

involved in the area of commemoration before the conflict. At the time of writing, the conflict is still ongoing, and there is little understanding of how and when it will end. This article explores how three key factors, associated with the ongoing conflict, impact the commemorative activity of ordinary people in the Poltava oblast (Central Ukraine).[3] For this purpose, the article analyses several commemorative projects and demonstrates that in the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict the commemorative activity of ordinary people is impacted by the continued human losses, ordinary people's perception of the future (grounded in their present-day experiences), and their desire to ensure that their memories are preserved for future generations.

Academic literature on violent conflicts explores different factors that impact commemoration. The politics of memory of the state is researched by many scholars, who demonstrate that in the aftermath of a conflict, commemoration can be instrumentalised by the state in order to forge a national identity,[4] create a sense of unity among the citizens,[5] strengthen the state and endorse those in power.[6] At the same time, the state can also seek to silence the memory of certain wars that are not seen as heroic (as in the case of the Soviet-Afghan war), and give preference to some memories while repressing others.[7] As for the political memory actors in general (including political parties), it is expected that when dealing with different memory issues, they make "context-dependent strategic choices."[8] Social agents, for their part,

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Ukraine conflict is initiated specifically by ordinary people, their activity requires attention.

[3]In Ukraine, the term 'oblast' denotes a primary administrative division. Ukraine has 24 oblasts, and its 25th administrative unit is the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

[4]Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, 'Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet–Era Monuments and Post–Soviet National Identity in Moscow', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 92, 3 (2002), pp. 524–47 (p. 524).

[5]Michael Ignatieff, 'Soviet War Memorials', *History Workshop Journal*, 17,1 (1984), pp. 157–63; John Stephens, 'Concepts of Sacrifice and Trauma in Australian War Commemoration', *Commemoration and Public Space*, 15, 2 (2015), pp. 19-31 (p. 23).

[6]Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 1.

[7]Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 6–39, p. 30; Sara McDowell and Máire Braniff, *Commemoration as Conflict: Space, Memory and Identity in Peace Processes (Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies),* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[8]Jan Kubik and Michael Bernhard, 'A Theory of the Politics of Memory', in Jan Kubik and Michael Bernhard (eds), *Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 7–36, p. 17.

also make their voices heard, acting either alongside the official or dominant commemorative narratives, or against them;[9] and oppositional memory is deemed to be in immediate disadvantage.[10]

Academic literature predominantly examines commemoration that takes place after the end of a violent conflict, when it is possible to establish which sides won or lost, or at least to assess the general outcome of the conflict in question. In such cases, it is rather common for both state and non-state memory actors to reflect on the outcome of the conflict while constructing war memorials, and to narrate such outcome in a particular way.[11] This, however, raises the question of how a violent conflict is commemorated when it is still ongoing and its outcome is unknown and difficult to predict. Currently this topic is under researched, and the existing research tends to suggest points for consideration rather than providing a detailed analysis. Thus, one of such points is highlighted by Alex King who notes that in the course of a conflict, official commemoration of the dead may be used "to keep up home-front morale and to focus attention on servicemen at the front in a personal way."[12] Commemorative activity of ordinary people (as non-state memory actors) during an ongoing violent conflict is researched to even lesser degree, and the present article will seek to address this gap.

When examining the impact of an ongoing conflict on ordinary people's perception of the future and their understanding of the need to preserve their memories, is it helpful to utilise Reinhart Koselleck's conceptualisation of historical times. Thus, according to Koselleck, through investigating people's experiences of the past and their consequent expectations regarding the future, one will be able to better understand their actions

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[9]Winter and Sivan, p. 30.

[10]Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory,* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1994), p. 139.

[11]T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, 'The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration: Contexts, Structures and Dynamics', in T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper (eds), *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3–86, p. 266; Nataliya Danilova, *The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 7; Jan-Werner Müller, 'Introduction: The Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory', in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1–38, p. 4; Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, 'The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 97, 2 (1991), pp. 376–420, p. 376.

[12]Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance,* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1998), p. 60.

in the present.[13] In relation to this, it is also important to discuss commemorative work as a struggle against forgetting, as conceptualised by Iwona Irwin-Zarecka.[14] Furthermore, as Alex King notes, the political circumstances of different societies is an important factor behind the emergence of different commemorative practices.[15] In case of Ukraine, it is essential to take into account the socio-political aspects associated with the post-Euromaidan period and the ongoing armed conflict in the country. The present article will utilise the works of these scholars.

The data were collected during fieldwork in the Poltava oblast in 2018-2020. They include interviews with local ordinary people (veterans and families of the fallen servicemen who became memory actors after the onset of the conflict and are now involved in the construction of new war memorials). Although its is acknowledged that local authorities play an important role in commemoration of the conflict (in particular, through issuing official permissions and, in some cases, providing funding), the article will focus on the interviews with ordinary people as the main interested party (striving for recognition of their experience through commemoration) and the main driving force behind the construction of new war memorials.

Regional differences in historical memory in Ukraine is a topic that drives heated debates in academic literature. Thus, some scholars compare the historical memories in geographically "polar" Lviv and Donetsk.[16] Others insist on the importance of studying individual cultural-historical regions in order to break the widespread stereotype of "two Ukraines" (the nationalistic west and the pro-Russian east or

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[13]Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts,* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 127.
[14]Irwin-Zarecka.
[15]King, p. 8.
[16]Mykola Riabchuk, *Dvi Ukrainy: Real'ni Mezhi, Virtualni Viiny* (Krytyka, 2003); Viktoria Sereda, 'Regional Historical Identities and Memory', *Ukraina Moderna*, Lviv-Donetsk: sotsialni identychnosti v suchasnii Ukraini, 2007, 160–209; Yaroslav Hrytsak, 'National Identities in Post-Soviet Ukraine: The Case of Lviv and Donetsk', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies, Cultures and Nations of Central and Eastern Europe*, 22 (1998), 263–81.

southeast).[17] In this regard, Central Ukraine deserves particular attention.[18] Although some important research has been done on various aspects of the historical memory of Central Ukraine, to a large degree this region is still significantly understudied.[19]

Many soldiers who took part in the Russia-Ukraine conflict as part of the Ukrainian military and its affiliated units were from the Poltava oblast (including those who died in the conflict and those who returned to their home cities and towns as veterans). However, in this regard the Poltava oblast does not differ from other Ukraine's oblasts, as the pro-Ukrainian soldiers come from all different oblasts of the country. Moreover, just like across Ukraine, the residents of the Poltava oblast have a whole range of opinions about the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. A survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre in 2019 showed that 40% of the respondents believed that the Donbas conflict is a war between Ukraine and Russia; 20% thought that it was a separatist revolt; 15% stated that it is a civil war between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian citizens of Ukraine; 7% saw it as a war between Russia and the US, and another 7% believed that it is a struggle for the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics.[20] It would be safe to say that these diverse views of the Ukrainian society (observed in the Poltava oblast too) will impact on how this page in Ukraine's history will be commemorated.

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[17]Ihor Symonenko, 'Osoblyvosti Struktury Istorychnoi Pamiati Ukrainskoho Narodu Ta Shliakhy Formuvannia Natsionalnoho Istorychnoho Naratyvu', *Strategic Priorities*, 1, 10 (2009), pp. 51–61; Serhy Yekelchyk, 'Regional Identities in the Time of War', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 46 (2019), pp. 239–44; Oxana Shevel, 'No Way Out? Post-Soviet Ukraine's Memory Wars in Comparative Perspective', in Henry E. Hale and Robert W. Orttung (eds), *Beyond the Euromaidan: Comparative Perspectives on Advancing Reform in Ukraine*, (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), pp. 21–40.

[18]Central Ukraine includes the oblasts of Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Sumy, Cherkasy and Chernihiv

[19]Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Oleksandra Gaidai, *Kam'yanyi Hist: Lenin u Tsentralnii Ukraini*, (Kyiv: K.I.C., 2018); Serhii Plokhii, 'Goodbye Lenin: A Memory Shift in Revolutionary Ukraine', *Harvard University, Ukrainian Research Institute*, 2018 https://gis.huri.harvard.edu/files/leninfallpaper.pdf; Oleksandr Hrytsenko, *Pamiat Mistsevoho Vyrobnytstva. Transformatsiia Symvolichnoho Prostoru Ta Istorychnoi Pamiati v Malykh Mistakh Ukrainy*, (Kyiv: K.I.C., 2014).

[20]*Public Opinion about the Situation in the Donbas and the Ways of Re-Establishing Ukraine's Sovereignty over the Occupied Territories* (Razumkov Centre, 11 October 2019) http://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/gromadska-dumka-pro-sytuatsiiu-na-donbasi-ta-shliakhy-vidnovlennia-suverenitetu-ukrainy-nad-okupovanymy-terytoriiamy Accessed 1 June 2021.

At the same time, one of the specificities of the Poltava oblast is that although it is relatively close to the front line (in approximately an eight-hour drive), its residents have not experienced the conflict directly on its territory (thus, they have not experienced the shelling and broken infrastructure, or the need to flee the combat area). Although the Poltava oblast is seen as representative of Central Ukraine, confining the analysis to a single administrative oblast offers the opportunity to compare the practices observed in towns and cities that are situated close to each other and have a similar historical background.

Continued losses in the ongoing conflict

The majority of the memorials to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Poltava oblast were proposed by ordinary people (war veterans and families of the fallen servicemen), who also often played a key role in deciding the final design and location of these memorials. The new memorials are funded either by these ordinary people themselves (Hadiach, Kremenchuk), or by the local authorities (Kotelva, Lokhvytsia, Lubny, Poltava). Most of them are of moderate size (standing 2-3 meters high). Although the memorials to the Russia-Ukraine conflict commonly express the narrative of mourning, the images and inscriptions on them also tell of the heroism of the Ukrainian soldiers and their sacrifice in the name of the nation. For example, some of the inscriptions read "Eternal glory to Heroes who gave their lives for Ukraine" (Zinkiv), "Heroes do not die" (Kremenchuk), "Glory to the defenders of Ukraine" (Lokhvytsia). Frequently used images of swords and references to Cossacks (for example in Myrhorod, Kremenchuk, Lubny, Kobeliaky) link the present-day conflict to Ukraine's historical struggles for independence, while also presenting Ukrainian soldiers as brave and noble warriors.

One of the challenges faced in the carrying out of this commemorative work during the ongoing conflict, is the inability to finalise the list of the fallen soldiers. As of the May 2021, the number of casualties keeps growing, and this has a clear impact on the commemorative projects in the Poltava oblast. Some practices, used by the local authorities, are necessitated by very pragmatic reasons. Thus, in Kremenchuk (population 225,000), when the local authorities decided to build a military cemetery, they planned its layout in such a way so that it would accommodate graves of the future victims (whose number had to be guessed). Currently the large memorial in the middle of the cemetery commemorates dozens of local soldiers.[21] However, it also ready to commemorate more soldiers 'in advance': right next to it there is a spacious paved section with the allocated slots for more than twenty graves, serving as a grim reminder that the conflict is not over yet. In Poltava (population 280,000), the military cemetery includes a large wall with the names of the dead: it has plenty of empty space which is used on the ongoing basis to add new names. In Kobeliaky (population 9700),

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[21]Author's observations, Kremenchuk, July 2019

the authorities made a somewhat rushed decision to carve six portraits of the local fallen soldiers on a granite memorial. Even by the time of the opening of the memorial in 2016, more locals lost their lives in the conflict.[22] A decision was made to add a smaller plate with the additional portraits. However, it is unclear what will happen with this commemorative object if more soldiers from the Kobeliaky district will lose their lives in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

For ordinary people, this issue is very topical too. This, for example, can be seen in the case of a memorial in Poltava that was constructed in 2018 on the initiative of a local group of mothers whose sons lost their lives in the conflict.[23] It is located in the middle of a small park and features a medium-size granite structure with an in-built electronic screen. The screen shows slowly changing slides, and each slide is dedicated to a different local soldier. Specifically, the audience can see the soldier's black-and-white picture (most of the soldiers are shown in their military uniform), his years of life, the circumstances of his death, and his military awards. The information on the screen can be updated. As the initiators of the memorial explained during an interview,[24] their original idea was to create a memorial sign that would be big enough to carve all names of the local fallen soldiers. They all strongly believed that people must know the names of the soldiers who gave their lives, and that a joint 'nameless' object was not an option. The main issue with this idea was that the conflict was still ongoing: "we came to realisation that since the war is still going on, we would need to keep adding new names, and this would require more space."[25]

Their final solution (the use of an electronic screen) is associated with some very practical issues faced by ordinary people. With the military cemeteries in Kremenchuk and Poltava, it was in the power of the authorities to create such project that could be extended in the future, and to include the funds required for such extensions into the annual budgets. In the discussed case of the activity of ordinary people in Poltava, from the very beginning they faced numerous obstacles: it took a lot of effort to

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[22]'U Kobeliakakh Na Pamiatnyku Voinam ATO Ne Vystachylo Mistsia Dlia Portretiv Usikh Zahyblykh', *TV Ltava*, 13 April 2016 https://youtu.be/kD4HveDBdz0. Accessed 1 November 2020.

[23]Viktoria Baberia, 'U Poltavi Stvoryly Aleiu Pamiati Zakhysnykiv Ukrainy', *Zmist*, 6 March 2018 https://zmist.pl.ua/news/u-poltavi-stvorili-aleyu-pamyati-zahisnikiv-ukrajini-foto. Accessed 15 June 2018.

[24]Author's interview 1. Two mothers of the killed soldiers in Poltava (a retired medic in her 60s and an entrepreneur in her later 40s), who represent a local civic organisation named 'Poltava families of the killed defenders of Ukraine' and were actively involved in the construction of the memorial sign to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Poltava. Poltava, 7 August 2019.

[25]Author's interview 1.

receive an official permission to use the site, and to convince the authorities to allocate the funds for this project.[26] For these memory actors, the realisation of their project was seen as a struggle, which was also an indication that any future additions of names would require further interactions with the authorities. In a way, such ongoing struggle soon became a reality: according to the interviewed mothers, they continued to put pressure on the officials in order to include the maintenance of the memorial sign into the annual city budget.[27] In other words, these ordinary people tried to design a project over which they would have more control, and which would also satisfy their need to commemorate soldiers individually in the context of the ongoing conflict. The idea to use an electronic screen seemed to fulfil these needs. This local group of mothers are still actively collecting information about all the new soldiers who lost their lives and add their information to the electronic screen.

Future-proofing the memories: response to the volatile environment in the country

The conflict in Eastern Ukraine is still ongoing, and there is no clear understanding of when and how it will end. Ordinary people's concerns about the future are a factor that can affect their design choices, and it requires a careful consideration. This, for example, can be observed in Zinkiv (population 9000), where in 2018 a memorial to the Russia-Ukraine conflict was constructed by the local authorities in response to the initiative of a local veteran.[28] According to the veteran (a male in his late 30s), he himself created the design of the memorial sign, which includes an image of soldiers walking up a staircase to Heaven, and two more sections for inscriptions.[29] The inscription on the right-hand side was selected by the authorities and consists of a quote from Taras Shevchenko's poem 'Both Archimedes and Galileo' (1860):

> And on the reborn earth
> There will be no enemy, no tyrant
> There will be a son, and there will be a mother,
> And there will be people on the earth.[30]

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[26]Author's interview 1.

[27]Author's interview 1.

[28]'U Zinkovi Osviatyly Pamiatnyi Znak Zahyblym Voinam', *Novyny Poltavshchyny*, 16 October 2018 https://np.pl.ua/2018/10/u-zin-kovi-osviatyly-pam-iatny-znak-zahyblym-voinam/. Accessed 10 December 2019.

[29]Author's interview 2. Veteran of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Zinkiv (a male in his late 30s, an entrepreneur who was actively involved in the construction of the memorial to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in this city). Online, 17 December 2019.

[30]Danylo Husar Struk, *Encyclopedia of Ukraine, Volume IV Ph-Sr*, 1993. (the source of the translation)

Although this text presents a hope for Ukraine's peaceful future, it does not make any statements about the commemorated conflict. The inscription in the middle section was selected by the veteran and unambiguously characterises the commemorated soldiers: "In eternal memory of the heroes who gave their lives for Ukraine". In an interview, he shared that for him this short phrase required a lot of effort and considerations.[31] In his original draft, the wording was "To the fallen participants of the ATO [anti-terrorist operation]." However, he was concerned that it will cause issues in the future: "The national authorities could change, their views about the ATO could change also. Who knows what could annoy them about the wording? I tried to make the wording neutral, but also to let people know who is commemorated here."[32] In order to make sure that the wording is future-proof, he contacted some analysts in Kyiv, who also advised him against mentioning the ATO. Although the local authorities did not appear to have any strong opinions about his choice of wording, he still wanted to make sure that the memorial would say exactly what he wanted: "I was still recovering after my war injury, but I kept walking on my crutches to their offices and asking them to not change the wording in any way."[33] His concerns are clearly linked to the issue of naming the armed conflict in Ukraine, and it requires attention.

From April 2014 to April 2018 the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine was officially referred to as the "Anti-Terrorist Operation"[34] (ATO). One of the official reasons given for not introducing martial law (and, consequently, naming the conflict "a war") was the inability to carry out elections under martial law.[35] In the aftermath of the Euromaidan protests (2013-2014) that resulted in the ousting of the President Viktor Yanukovych and significant power shifts, the elections were crucially needed. In April 2018, the name ATO was replaced with the "Joint Forces Operation", which introduced certain new legal aspects of Ukraine's activity in the occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine.[36] However, the abbreviation "ATO" and its derivatives

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[31]Author's interview 2.

[32]Author's interview 2.

[33]Author's interview 2.

[34]"Decree of the President of Ukraine On the Decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine of April 13, 2014 "On Urgent Measures to Overcome the Terrorist Threat and Preserve the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine"", 2014 https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/405/2014#Text. Accessed 10 April 2020.

[35]Sviatoslav Khomenko, 'Voiennyi Stan Chy ATO: Yak Nazvaty Sytuatsiiu Na Donbasi?', 2 July 2014 https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2014/07/140702_ato_martial_law_sx. Accessed 10 May 2020.

[36]"Zmina ATO Na OOS: Yaki Novovvedennia Ochikuiutsia Na Donbasi', *Slovo i Dilo*, 4 May 2018 https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2018/05/04/infografika/bezpeka/zmina-ato-oos-yaki-novovvedennya-ochikuyutsya-donbasi. Accessed 15 May 2020.

"atoshnyky" and "atovtsi" (referring to the Ukrainian soldiers participating in the ATO) continue to be commonly used by the public. [37] The existence of several terms used to describe the same conflict led to some ambiguity, uncertainly and even frustration: in the interviews conducted for this research, ordinary people commonly emphasised that Ukraine is at war with Russia, and that the term "war" should be used openly. However, when constructing their commemorative object, the very same people either do not write anything at all (the electronic screen in Poltava, and the memorial in Opishnia, among others), or write "ATO" (for example, the memorial sign in Kremenchuk, unveiled in 2016[38]). Out of the identified memorials constructed in the Poltava oblast on the initiative of ordinary people, only the memorial in Lubny (population 45,000) openly referred to the Russia-Ukraine conflict as "the armed aggression of the Russian Federation" (it was unveiled in 2018[39]). In all other cases the name of the commemorated event is either absent or rather ambiguous: for example, in Kotelva (population 12,000), the memorial initiated by the local veterans (2017) says that the soldiers protected Ukraine from "invaders from the East."[40]

When examining this issue, it is helpful to use the concepts of the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation", suggested by Reinhart Koselleck for analysing the relationship between the past, present and future. [41] According to Koselleck, "the past and the future are joined together in the presence of both experience and expectation," and these two categories "guide concrete agents in their actions relating to social and political movement."[42] In a similar way, Irwin-Zarecka notes that "… there are times when a very specific vision of the future frames the utilization of the past."[43] When it comes to the definition of what the armed conflict

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[37]Oleksandr Ponomariv, 'Bloh Ponomareva: Atoshnyky Chy Atishnyky?', *BBC News Ukraine*, 18 December 2017 https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/blog-olexandr-ponomariv-42398686. Accessed 1 June 2020.

[38]Aliona Dushenko, 'U Kremenchutsi Vidkryly Memorialnyi Znak Heroiam ATO Ta Zahyblym v Ilovaiskomu Kotli', *Telegraf*, 29 August 2016 https://www.telegraf.in.ua/kremenchug/10056174-illovaysk.html. Accessed 1 June 2018.

[39]'U Lubnakh Vidkryly Pamiatnyi Znak Voinam ATO', *Novyny Poltavshchyny*, 18 October 2018 https://np.pl.ua/2018/10/u-lubnakh-vidkryly-pam-iatny-znak-voinam-ato/. Accessed 15 May 2020.

[40]Anatolii Dzhereleiko, 'U Kovpakivskomu Skveri Vidkryto Pamiatnyi Znak Uchasnykam ATO', *Zoria Poltavshchyny*, 18 November 2017 http://www.old.zorya.poltava.ua/2017/11/18/у-ковпаківському-сквері-відкрито-пам/. Accessed 10 April 2020.

[41]Koselleck, p. 126.

[42]Koselleck, p. 127.

[43]Irwin-Zarecka, p. 101.

in Eastern Ukraine actually is, ordinary people (memory actors) experienced a clear mismatch between how they personally saw the conflict and how it was officially defined. It could, arguably, explain the reason behind their reluctance to write the word "war" on the commemorative objects: after all, sticking to the official name or avoiding any names at all is a much safer strategy. As the case in Zinkiv shows, the decision of the initiator of the memorial sign to avoid naming the conflict was guided by his expectation that in the future the conflict and the actions of the Ukrainian soldiers may be interpreted differently. It is difficult to pinpoint what exactly was the source of his concerns, but it is possible to suggest that the observed mismatch and ambiguity in the naming of the conflict played a role. Furthermore, it is necessary to note that in post-Euromaidan Ukraine the perceived 'timelessness'[44] of memorials has been strongly questioned: the 'Leninopad' of 2013-2014 and the 'de-communisation laws' of 2015 clearly showed that the interpretation of the past can drastically change, and that the meaning of memorials is not guaranteed.[45] Moreover, within three decades of its independence, Ukraine experienced three revolutionary moments, which demonstrates that significant political changes in the country are not an unusual occurrence.[46] In other words, the wider environment in the country can fuel concerns of ordinary people about the future of their memories.

However, considerations of ordinary people about the future are not always negative. Moreover, in some cases such considerations do not always have an easily traceable impact on the design selection, but they are still often present in the decision-making process. Thus, one of the initiators of the memorial in Opishnia (population 5000) shared that: "We decided to construct this memorial, but we do not know what will happen in the future. Will these people be seen as heroes or …? Our history can have a very sharp turn, and then they will be considered not as heroes, but as some kind of militia [opolchentsi]."[47] This memorial to the Russia-Ukraine conflict was unveiled in 2019, and it was constructed by the initiative of the local veterans and activists

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[44]Lisa Maya Knauer and Daniel J. Walkowitz, 'Introduction', in Daniel J. Walkowitz (ed.), *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 1–20, p. 5.

[45]Andriy Liubarets, 'The Politics of Memory in Ukraine in 2014: Removal of the Soviet Cultural Legacy and Euromaidan Commemorations', *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal*, 3 (2016). pp. 197-214; Plokhii.

[46]Olga Onuch, 'Maidans Past and Present: Comparing the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan', in David R. Marples and Frederick V. Mills (eds), *Ukraine's Euromaidan: Analyses of a Civil Revolution*, (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2015), pp. 27–56.

[47]Author's interview 3. Activist in Opishnia (a female college teacher in her mid-40s, who was actively involved in the construction of the memorial to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in this town). Opishnia, 8 August 2019.

(ordinary people).[48] Although the memorial does not have any inscriptions and only shows a cut-out figure of an armed soldier, it does feature a marble structure resembling a red-and-black flag – a design choice that can raise questions even in the present, not only in the future. Thus, currently in Ukraine the red-and-black colours are associated with the Ukrainian nationalist political party Right Sector (formed in 2013, in the early stages of the Euromaidan protests) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (a Ukrainian nationalist paramilitary formation that operated during and after the Second World War).

While the red-and-black symbols can be commonly observed in Western Ukraine, in Central Ukraine people are much less comfortable with their use. When analysing the geopolitics of the UPA memory in Ukraine, Serhii Plokhii notes that "The Center, which had no direct exposure to living memory of the UPA, has been slow to accept the relevant historical mythology as part of its own narrative."[49] In this regard, it is helpful to refer to Andrii Portnov[50] and Serhy Yekelchyk,[51] who argue in their works that during the Euromaidan the symbol of UPA undergone a process of transformation and acquired new set of meanings. According to Portnov, two factors played a role in this: first, a rejection of Russia's portrayal of Ukrainians as 'fascists' and "banderovites',[52] and a lack of knowledge about the activity of UPA.[53] Yekelchyk explains that "in the course of the EuroMaidan Revolution, the image of Bandera

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[48]Vasyl Neizhmak, 'Koshty Na Pamiatnyk v Opishni Zbyraly Vsiieiu Hromadoiu', *Holos Ukrainy*, 25 October 2019 http://www.golos.com.ua/article/323172. Accessed 10 April 2021

[49]Plokhii.

[50]Andrii Portnov, 'Bandera Mythologies and Their Traps for Ukraine', *Open Democracy*, 22 June 2016 https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/bandera-mythologies-and-their-traps-for-ukraine/. Accessed 14 June 2021.

[51]Serhy Yekelchyk, *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 107.

[52]Stepan Bandera was one of the leaders of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) – a Ukrainian political organisation that was established in 1929. In 1940 this organisation split into two parts: the OUM-M (headed by Andriy Melnyk) and OUN-B (headed by Stepan Bandera). Nowadays the media, the public and some scholars commonly refer to the OUN-B simply as the OUN. During World War II, the OUN's armed branch the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) fought against the Soviet troops and the German troops, and it is commonly seen as the primary perpetrator of the ethnic cleansing of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia. At the same time, some Ukrainians honour the OUN and the UPA for their fight for independence of Ukraine. These organisations and Stepan Bandera in particular are very divisive symbols in modern Ukraine.

[53]Portnov.

acquired new meaning as a symbol of resistance to the corrupt, Russian-sponsored regime, quite apart from the historical Bandera's role as a purveyor of exclusivist ethno-nationalism."[54] After the Euromaidan, when the Right Sector formed military units that fought on the front line in Eastern Ukraine, the symbolism of a red-and-black flag as a symbol of resistance became even stronger. This is also observed in the analysed case in Opishnia: when asked about the symbolism of these colours, one of the main initiators (a woman in her 40s) limited her answer to "this is a symbol of the defenders of Ukraine."

In the context of the ongoing conflict, it is unclear how this newly shaped symbolism of red-and-black flags will be used in the future. However, the main initiator of the memorial tries to stay optimistic: "I believe that Ukraine now has a small (but significant) percentage of people who will not let the history turn backwards... Together, we will not let that happen – after all, we paid a very high price to get us here."[55] In the case of this memory actor, she focused on the positive experience – that the recent events in Ukraine demonstrated that there are people in the society who are ready to protect their views and memories, no matter what political changes Ukraine might face in the future. Both Zinkiv and Opishnia show that ordinary people's expectations about the future, grounded in their experiences, have an impact on their commemorative activity.

Didactic function: seeking to educate the present and future generations
Construction of memorials to violent conflicts by ordinary people can be associated with different inter-connected needs: to process the traumatic experiences and mourn over the loss of life, to ensure that their memories are recognised, and to search for the meaning of the commemorated conflicts. For the purposes of this article, it is important to consider the need to educate future generations through memorials – one of the re-current themes observed in the interviews with ordinary people in the Poltava oblast. Expression of this need is not associated with a particular visual language; moreover, it is often observed in the projects that have not been realised yet, which also requires attention, because in many cases this need is still unfulfilled. The next section will examine this aspect of the commemorative activity of ordinary people, while taking into account the impact of the ongoing violent conflict.

In 2019 in Novi Sanzhary (population 8000), a local veteran (a male in his 30s, an engineer by education) created a detailed design of a memorial to the soldiers of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. According to the veteran, the main elements of the design are

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[54]Yekelchyk, *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs to Know*, p. 107.
[55]Author's interview 3.

full of symbolism and tell a story.[56] A metal sword is woven by tree branches that hold individual metal plates: they are curved as a body armour and shaped as the 25 Ukrainian administrative regions. From the front view, the metal plates show a map of Ukraine. On this map, the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhanks oblasts are shown in red ("as if on fire"), and Crimea is grey ("because it was not defended, it was simply given away").[57] The tree branches also include chevrons of different military brigades. During the interview, the veteran shared that "For me personally this tree symbolises all of us [Ukrainians] as a family; before the war we were estranged, but the war made us mobilise and create one united family, as demonstrated by the map of Ukraine as one 'shield'."[58] As of 2021, this memorial exists only as a 3D visualisation in the creator's computer. Although he discussed his idea with the local authorities of Novi Sanzhary and asked them to organise a design competition in which he could take part, currently the authorities do not actively try to construct a memorial to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This case provides important insights into different aspects of the commemorative work of ordinary people: from the intergroup relations of the veterans to their interactions with the authorities and the tensions between competing officials. For the purposes of this chapter, the educational and future-oriented aspects of commemorative work will be discussed in more detail.

In the case of the Novi Sanzhary, the designer of this conceptual memorial explained in an interview why he believes that a local memorial to the fallen soldiers of the Russia-Ukraine conflict should be future-oriented. Although he himself is young (in early 30s), he is focusing on the people in Ukraine who are younger than him: "Today's young people are very active, they have broader skills than me: they travel abroad faster, they use low-cost airlines, they communicate with people in different countries. However, the war is a very distant thing for them. When the war started, they were only teenagers; now they are thinking about education and their plans for the future. I would want them to at least understand what this war is about, to not see it as a distant thing, and to not ruin the memorial."[59] The veteran is concerned that this part of Ukraine's history will be forgotten or remembered as a trivial episode: "People still remember that there was a year when the price of the dollar jumped from 5 to 8 hryvnia. If we do not tell about the war through memorials, then it will register in people's memory on the same level as the fluctuation of the dollar."[60] His design of a memorial has a strong potential to fulfil the required task – to tell such story about

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[56]Author's interview 4. Veteran of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Novi Sanzhary (a male in his early 30s, an engineer by education, currently working in an NGO). Online, 15 April 2020
[57]Author's interview 4
[58]Author's interview 4
[59]Author's interview 4
[60]Author's interview 4

the war that goes beyond the mourning over the loss of life. However, to tell a complex story, this project uses a range of creative design techniques that may require more work and funding than some more conventional memorials used in the Poltava oblast (such as granite or marble plates or bronze statues). Thus, this case also raises the question of whether highly conceptual memorials with complex narrative-focused designs have any potential to be realised, especially when they are proposed by ordinary people.

As of April 2020, Novi Sanzhary has no memorials to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The interviewed veteran reported that the local veterans were offered two options by the authorities: either to 'add' their memory to the already-existing memorial to the Soviet-Afghan war (a period infantry fighting vehicle raised on a concrete platform) or to produce a separate simple memorial sign (an equivalent of a large stone with a plaque on it).[61] According to the interviewed veteran, he, and many other veterans did not agree with either of those ideas. First, they do not want the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Soviet-Afghan war to be mixed together because they see them as ideologically different. Second, they do not want a "cemetery-like stone" because it does not tell a substantial story about the war. From their side, the veterans asked the authorities to organise an official competition in which different designs could fairly compete. The interviewed veteran shared that he finds it very frustrating that the authorities have not tried to organise a competition: "In order to say that they do not have funds for a serious memorial they first need to ascertain how much exactly such project could cost; however, they have not even done any calculations."[62] Although he appreciates that money could be a serious issue, he is very disappointed that the authorities do not think about a wider picture and about the need to tell future generations about this war.

A similar discussion of the need for future-oriented commemoration is observed in Kremenchuk, where in 2016-2018 the local authorities held a design competition for a memorial to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The winning design titled 'DNA of memory' was created by an established Ukrainian architect and produces a historical narrative: it features a solemn angel on top of a spiralled column, decorated with three-dimensional images picturing Ukraine's history from the Cossack era to the current conflict.[63] Although this design delivers a story about the commemorated conflict, it was not supported by one group of local veterans because (in their opinion) "it is too

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[61]Author's interview 4

[62]Author's interview 4

[63]Aliona Dushenko, '«DNK Pamiati» Peremih u Konkursi Eskiziv Pamiatnykiv Heroiam ATO u Kremenchutsi', *Telegraf*, 17 May 2018 https://www.telegraf.in.ua/kremenchug/10069931-dnk-pamyati-peremg-u-konkurs-eskzv-pamyatnikv-geroyam-ato-u-kremenchuc.html. Accessed 14 June 2021.

difficult for children to understand."[64] In the design competition, they supported a highly artistic memorial proposed by a local artist. This memorial is rich in folklore images: it includes three stained glass panels featuring a girl in traditional Ukrainian embroidered clothes, a semi-mythical Cossack Mamay (with a shot-through heart), the archangel Michael,[65] as well as red poppies, guelder rose, and a metal 'tree of the nation' (derevo rodu) with the names of the killed soldiers on its leaves.[66] According to the artist, this project would impact the viewers on the emotional level, and the veterans who supported her agreed with that.[67]

Although the analysed projects in Novi Sanzhary and Kremenchuk have not been realised, the memory actors in these two cases still seek to educate younger generations through different means. Thus, the veterans in Kremenchuk take part in the work of a grassroot museum of the Russia-Ukraine (opened in 2015), and they have been giving free of charge guided tours to school children: "Kremenchuk is only 500 kilometres away from the front line … but the city is drinking, partying, and dancing, no one remembers about the war. However, when the children come here and touch the rockets and shells, I can see that their eyes are changing… They begin to understand that the war is indeed taking place."[68] The veteran in Novi Sanzhary believes that he is fulfilling his task of educating younger generations by having joined a civil society project aimed at young people.[69]

According to James Young, "If societies remember, it is only insofar as their institutions and rituals organize, shape, even inspire their constituents' memories. For a society's memory cannot exist outside of those people who do the remembering – even if such

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[64]Author's interview 5. Veteran of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Kremenchuk (a man in his mid-40s, a private entrepreneur and a member of a local veterans' union who was actively involved in the construction of the memorial sign to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in this city). Kremenchuk, 28 July 2019

[65]Archangel Michael is traditionally seen in Ukraine as the protector of soldiers

[66]"U Kremenchutsi Prezentuvaly Eskizy Novykh Pamiatnykiv Zahyblym Heroiam ATO', *Poltava Depo*, 24 January 2017 https://poltava.depo.ua/ukr/poltava/u-kremenchutsi-prezentuvali-eskizi-novih-pam-yatnikiv-zagiblim-24012017141700. Accessed 14 June 2021.

[67]Author's interview 6. Artist, the head of the Kremenchuk City Art Gallery (a woman in her 40s, who submitted her design for the design competition organised in order to construct a joint memorial to the Heavenly Hundred and the soldiers killed in the Russia-Ukraine conflict). Kremenchuk, 28 August 2018; Author's interview 5

[68]Author's interview 7. The head of a local veterans' union in Kremenchuk (a retired male colonel in his 60s, who was actively involved in the construction of the memorial sign to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in this city). Kremenchuk, 27 July 2019

[69]Author's interview 4

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memory happens to be at the society's bidding, in its name."[70] Ultimately, the ordinary people in the two analysed cases believe in the same idea: that the members of the Ukrainian society (especially the younger and future generations) should be provided with an 'organised' and 'shaped' information package, because they are the people who will 'do the remembering' in the future. As Iwona Irwin-Zarecka notes, efforts to secure remembrance "often framed as the work to prevent forgetting."[71] This is exactly the aim of the two commemorative projects that are discussed here: to ensure that the next generations will not forget about the war. Since currently only few memorials to the Russia-Ukraine exist in the Poltava oblast, and there is no confidence that in the future the local authorities will construct more memorials, concerns about whether this conflict will be remembered are definitely justified. It is important to note that in these two cases the memory is shaped in a particular way. If in Novi Sanzhary the author of the memorial wanted to tell the next generations that the war brings deaths but also leads to unity of the nation, the interviewed veterans in Kremenchuk want to send a different message. Thus, they hoped that the folklore images would be better understood by children and would depict Ukrainians as a separate nation: "[the project] produces a historical narrative that will be easier for children to understand; the children will know for certain that in Ukraine's history there have been time when its neighbour, a so-called 'brotherly nation', turned out to be Cain. We must educate about such things."[72] Although the stories that the two projects are seeking to deliver are different, they both aim to prevent the Russia-Ukraine conflict from being forgotten, being driven by the lack of confidence about how this ongoing conflict will be interpreted in the future.

Conclusion
The present article discussed the factors that impact the commemorative activity of ordinary people in the context of an ongoing armed conflict. First, the continued human losses in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict produce the need to utilise solutions that would enable commemoration of individual soldiers. The need for individualised remembrance is driven by the complex, conflicting perceptions of the conflict by the society, and the memory actor's desire to remind the public that the fallen soldiers gave their lives for the country. Second, the yet unknown outcome of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the perceived possibility of misinterpretation of this conflict in the future impact the design choices made by ordinary people when constructing memorials. Thus, ordinary people tend to avoid any wording and naming of the conflict that could put their memorial at risk in the future. However, in some instances, ordinary people interpret the results of the present-day struggle in a positive

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[70]James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. xi.
[71]Irwin-Zarecka, p. 115.
[72]Author's interview 5.

way and hope that even in the unpredictable future they will be able to defend their memories and their interpretation.

Third, the lack of commemorative initiatives on the part of the authorities and the public's conflicting views about the conflict are significant factors that shape the design of the memorials that ordinary people seek to construct. Thus, they want to make sure that the commemorated events are explained to the future generations, and that the future generation not only remember those who died, but also interpret the events in a particular way. Specifically, the analysed cases demonstrate that ordinary people want their memorials to produce such narratives that talk about the Ukrainian national identity and the unity of the Ukrainian nation, and which also warn about the potential threat from the neighbouring Russia. Notably, such highly conceptual projects are rather difficult to realise, which again demonstrates the importance of funding, the responsiveness of the local authorities, and the readiness of the ordinary people to put pressure on the authorities.