

An Explosion of Interest in Ukraine

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Marcel Martončík  |  martoncik@protonmail.ch

Institute of Social Sciences of the Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Košice, Slovakia

The aggression by Russia in 2022 has suddenly made Ukraine and war-related phenomena an interesting topic for many scholars. The interest, which arose for an unwanted reason, attracted not only the public but also scientists. The number of publications in the Scopus and Web of Science databases grew enormously in 2022 and 2023. Scientists began addressing not only environmental issues (such as the oil and gas crisis and soil contamination) and economic concerns (including global food security and inflation) but also legal matters (such as the status of Crimea) and social issues (like mental health and migration). Scientists are not guided by any central planning or regulations when choosing the subject of their research. Often, they choose what is currently resonating in society, what they consider important and beneficial. However, topics of investigation (or study results) may be undesirable for some people or arouse strong emotions in them. This was also the case with COVID-19 when the anti-vaccine movement targeted some scientists. Similarly, in connection with the war in Ukraine, society began to polarize into those who support Ukraine and those who support Russia. The interest in exploring anti-vaccine attitudes has transformed into interest in, for example, anti-Ukrainian or pro-Russian attitudes. Some media have warned that there may be solidarity fatigue in society. However, there should be no fatigue among scientists. It is essential for the freedom of research and for scientists to choose topics of interest regardless of whether someone likes it or not. Research results should not be modified to avoid arousing negative emotions in supporters of one side or the other. Scientific research should be transparent and aimed at building the most precise knowledge. Knowledge that is evidence-based. In a recent article published in PNAS (Clark et al., 2023), the authors drew attention to existing censorship in science. Some topics, such as racial or gender differences, are only extremely marginally represented in research. The authors of the PNAS study warn of "growing censoriousness in science." I hope that topics related to the war in Ukraine will not be on the censored list, and I hope that scientists will continue to be free to choose what they study (e.g., what motivates people to help others or what are the challenges of integrating migrants into another country's economic ecosystem — as are the topics of the present special issue). Last but not least, I hope that the reason for which Ukraine became the number one topic will soon be over.

References

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