Travelling abroad and geopolitical preferences – case of Kharkiv, Dnipro and Mariupol, Ukraine

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The paper investigates the relationship between travel abroad experience and individual geopolitical preferences in three geopolitical fault-line cities in the eastern part of Ukraine. Employing binary logistic regression as a principal research method, we show that travel experience to European countries positively correlates with pro-European attitudes and corresponds to weaker pro-Soviet sentiments. On the contrary, travel experience to Russia is associated with somewhat weaker support for European geopolitical and cultural integration but stronger pro-Soviet sentiments. Travel experience to Russia is less important predictor of geopolitical preferences than visiting European countries. Pro-European attitudes, compared with pro-Soviet sentiments, are much more interlinked with international travel experience. The data on bilateral travellers evidences that possible effect of visiting European countries basically neutralises the effect of visiting Russia in terms of impact on geopolitical preferences. Although the relationship between travel abroad experience and geopolitical preferences is similar in all three cities under investigation, certain variations between them may be explained by different economic, socio-cultural and institutional background. The revealed correlations seem to cover both direct causal effect of travel abroad on geopolitical preferences and a reverse causality, namely self-selection of destination country according to personal pre-existing geopolitical views. The importance of discovered relationships for the integration of Ukrainian society into European civilization project is apparent not only considering visa-free regime between Ukraine and the European Union (EU), but also in view of the Russian military invasion in 2022 as a cause of flows of refugees from Ukraine to Europe.

Keywords: travelling abroad, geopolitical preferences, geopolitical fault-line cities, Ukraine

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Introduction

After the approval of visa-free travel regime between Ukraine and the European Union (EU) in May 2017, politicians and experts stressed that this event will increase the number and duration of trips by Ukrainians to the EU countries, promoting their integration into the European community and dispelling in their minds certain myths about the west, instilled already by Soviet propaganda and disseminated in Ukraine by pro-Russian political actors. In particular, the then President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko called the signing of visa-free travel an absolutely historic day for Ukraine and the EU: "Ukraine is returning to the European family. Ukraine is saying goodbye to the Soviet and Russian empires" (Radio Svoboda 2017). Dmytro Ostroushko, a Director of Gorshenin Institute in Kyiv, pointed out that visa-free travel paves a way "for the spiritual integration of Ukrainians into the European community… It even indirectly affects the quality of life of Ukrainians, because the more they know, the more they will strive to achieve a better standard of living here in Ukraine." (LB.UA 2017). Similarly, Iryna Sushko, Executive Director and leading expert on migration and border management in CO Europe Without Barriers (Kyiv), believed that "…for us, Ukrainians, visa-free travel has not only a practical value, so that we will be able to make various trips more often and more regularly. It will give us a sense of closeness to the EU. It seems to me that the forthcoming civilisation change is very important for our self-awareness." (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, even after the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian hybrid warfare in 2014, many Ukrainians were still visiting Russia. In particular, despite the constantly diminishing popularity of Russia as a destination for labour migrants from Ukraine, it still remained one of the main suppliers of work migrants and students to Russia. Moreover, a lot of Ukrainians have close family ties in Russia and thus were more or less regularly visiting them (Pozniak 2021). Another recent wave of migrants from Ukraine to Russia took place in 2014–2015 due to war in Donbas, and many of these people decided to return over time (Mukomel 2017). In addition to the standard cultural influences and experiences, these visitors are potentially affected by both 'hard' (e.g. messages translated via the media) and 'soft' (e.g. social media, movies, etc.) Russian propaganda, aimed at cultivating negative image of the west, demonising Western military alliances, notably the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), stigmatising certain aspects of Western culture, and eroding trust in western democratic institutions (Helmus *et al*. 2018; U.S. Department of State 2020). Moreover, in 2018, Vasyl Hrytsak, the then Head of the Ukrainian Security Service, warned darkly that Russia's security services attempted to recruit 90% of Ukrainian labour migrants (Milakovsky 2018).

The visa-free regime between Russia and Ukraine, established in 1997, continued to operate even after the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the military conflict in Donbas. For the first time, the idea of cancelling the visa-free regime with Russia appeared in the Ukrainian parliament in 2016. It was criticised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs mainly due to the risks for Ukrainian migrant workers: the introduction of visas would have complicated the procedure for Ukrainian citizens to travel to the Russian Federation, which in turn would have led to an increase in social tension. As a result, Ukraine cancelled the visa-free regime with Russia only on July 1, 2022, that is, almost six months after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion (BBC Russian 2022).

In view of this, a question of relationship between travelling abroad and geopolitical preferences of Ukrainians certainly deserves scientific scrutiny. In this paper, in line with Berlinschi (2019) and Minakov (2019), we understand individual geopolitical preferences primarily as positive or negative attitudes to the idea of joining (or aligning with) certain foreign entity (i.e. geopolitical block, international organization, or another individual country). Scientific literature, based on empirical investigation, has already explained mechanisms through which visiting other country may change individual (geo)political preferences (e.g. Berlinschi 2019). Thus, it is possible that Ukrainian citizens with the experience of travelling abroad are potentially among the most ardent advocates of controversial pro-Western or anti-Western geopolitical ideas, narratives and alliances. In that case, they should not be underestimated as a power that may turn the scales to certain political regime, in a crucial moment, in the own city, region, or even the whole country. The latter consideration is especially important in the era of regional and global geopolitical turbulence that the world has entered with the outbreak of a full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022.

The aim of this paper is to reveal the relationship between the individual geopolitical preferences of Ukrainians and their background of travel abroad. In order to capture correlations between the travelling abroad experience and geopolitical preferences, we rely on survey data in three Ukrainian cities employing binary logistic regression models. Since the calculated correlations may reflect both direct (travelling abroad impacts the geopolitical preferences) and reversal (geopolitical preferences predefine the pattern of abroad travels) causal effects, the empirical results are further discussed in view of the existing scientific literature on the topic in order to find the most likely interpretation of them.

Our research focuses on three cities located in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Ukraine: Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Mariupol. The choice of case studies is based on the following considerations. Ukraine is characterised by tangible regional differences of voting behaviour and related geopolitical attitudes (see Birch 2000; Barrington 2002; Barrington & Herron 2004; Osipian & Osipian 2012; Kulyk 2016). The main feature of this geopolitical regionalisation is polarisation and oscillation between the two main geopolitical vectors: pro-Western and pro-Russian. The main dividing line between the more pro-Western and more pro-Russian regions has gradually shifted eastwards since 1991, and in mid-2010s it was lying between the Donbas and the adjacent east-southern regions (Kulyk 2016). Three cities, selected for the study, are located just nearby this dividing line. Their inhabitants, living together in the same neighbourhoods, streets, and buildings, espouse controversial and conflicting geopolitical attitudes and narratives. This semi-hidden fault-line, being almost imperceptible in periods of relative geopolitical stability, activates in times of geopolitical cataclysms, in particular after the Orange Revolution in 2005 (Zhurzhenko 2011) and the Revolution of Dignity and beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian hybrid warfare in 2014 (Gentile 2017; Stebelsky 2018; Buckholz 2019; Kutsenko 2020; Nitsova 2021). Socio-political trajectories of such cities, being places of heightened political confrontation and tensions between coexisting irreconcilable narratives, are of pivotal importance not only for the modern Ukrainian national project and opposing Russia-supported projects of 'Donbas' and 'Novorossiya' (Minakov 2017; Kuzio 2019), but also for the entire European and the global geopolitical order (Gentile 2017). This consideration became even more evident with the outburst of the full-scale Russian military invasion into Ukraine in 2022, which has already led to the almost complete destruction of Mariupol, finally captured by Russian troops, and significant damage to urban structures in Kharkiv and Dnipro.

The rest of the article is organised as follows. The next section presents a review of relevant scientific literature and conceptualises the relationships between travelling abroad experience and geopolitical preferences. After that, we reveal national context of geopolitics and international mobility in Ukraine. The following section contains a description of three selected cities as case studies. Then the research methodology and data are presented, followed by the empirical analysis and discussion of the findings. The final section draws key concluding remarks.

Travelling abroad experience and geopolitical attitudes

Visiting another country can change a person's perspective in many ways. At the same time, the travel experiences themselves are different in terms of purpose and duration. The literature addressing the impact of international mobilities to the travellers (geo)political orientation basically distinguishes between short-term tourist trips, regular visits for family or business reasons, and longer migration, including labour and study migration. There is a lot of empirical evidence of the impact of long-term or regular migrations on (geo)political preferences. Based on expanded literature review, Berlinschi (2019) points out that long-term mobility abroad can change an individual's political preferences for two main reasons.

The first reason implies exposure to new information acquired abroad. Migrants have access to other media channels being exposed to alternative ideas, values and world views (Wood 2019). They often encounter political, social and cultural norms, attitudes, and institutions that are very different from, or even in outright conflict with, those prevailing in their home countries (Fidrmuc & Doyle 2007; Wood 2019). The new information may change migrants' perceptions, push them to dispel some of their prejudices shaped by the media and communication in home country, re-evaluate the benefits

resulting from certain policies or institutions, and, in result, change own (geo)political beliefs, including the desirability of certain policy regimes.

The second reason is a migration-induced change in the benefits resulting from some policies or institutions. Migrants economically benefit from close ties with their destination countries; they acquire information on job prospects and prices in destination countries, develop social networks and improve language skills. Consequently, they may attach a higher value to free mobility to their destination countries and, if the geopolitical choices of origin countries affect mobility constraints, migration may affect geopolitical preferences (Berlinschi 2019). In this way, reputation of (former) host country benefits from migration through the mechanism of so called all geopolitical remittances, constituting de-facto a kind of soft power for countries receiving the migrants. Furthermore, benefits of return migrants from an enriching experience abroad may also translate into improvements in the quality of domestic political institutions by increasing direct participation in the political system and by raising awareness and demand for political accountability (Batista & Vicente 2011; Barsbai *et al*. 2017). Not only democratic host countries benefit from geopolitical remittances, but authoritarian regimes as well, as revealed by the studies on the experiences of Kyrgyz and Ukrainian labour migrants in Russia (Gerber & Zavisca 2019; Ruget & Usmanalieva 2021).

Thus, it is not surprising that long-term migration experience is significantly associated with critical assessment of governance and civic activism (Perez-Armendariz & Crow 2010; Batista & Vicente 2011; Nikolova *et al*. 2017). Returnees come back with new ideas and are likely to promote specific political objectives (Li & McHale 2006). Experience of migration may affect citizens' opinions of conditions in their home country (Whyte 2010) and often cause increase in accountability and improvement of political institutions (Li & McHale 2006; Spilimbergo 2009; Batista & Vicente 2011; Beine & Sekkat 2013; Docquier *et al*. 2016; Karadja & Prawitz 2016; Mercier 2016). Electoral outcomes in origin countries may be affected through return migration or diaspora voting in foreign polling stations (Fidrmuc & Doyle 2007; Pfutze 2012; Chauvet & Mercier 2014; Barsbai *et al*. 2017).

Foreign education acquired in democratic destinations seems to promote democracy in home countries (Spilimbergo 2009). Lodigiani and Salomone (2012) reveal that international migration to countries with higher female political empowerment significantly increases the parliamentary share of females in the origin countries. Carlson and Widaman (2002) found students who studied abroad for a year to be significantly more interested in international politics upon their return compared to a control group who did not study abroad. At the same time, there is evidence that international travel in some geographic context generates political skepticism (e.g. Decker 2017 on Middle Eastern conflicts). Long-term trips abroad make impact on people's identity formation. Interacting with a foreign culture may question or degrade the identity of the home country (Savicki & Cooley 2011) or strengthen supranational identity as opposed to a national one (King & Ruiz-Gelices 2003). Regarding behavioural issues not directly linked to the question of (geo)politics but nevertheless important for domestic policy, migration experience may change, for instance, fertility behaviour in women returning to their native countries (Lindstrom & Saucedo 2002; Bertoli & Marchetta 2012).

The effects of short-term trips on (geo)political preferences are far more vague. It is unlikely for someone who spent a few days in a foreign country to experience local social security standards or quality of political institutions. However, even short-term travellers to another country are exposed to different cultural environments, ways of living, and quotidian practices in destination countries. Encountering people of different backgrounds increases tolerance and intercultural awareness (Stitsworth 1989; Yu & Lee 2014).

Nevertheless, empirical evidence in favour of the impact of travelling abroad on cultural behaviours and general political awareness, as well as civic and (geo)political demands and preferences in home countries, is controversial. On the one hand, individuals with recent international travel experience are more interested, knowledgeable, and participatory in politics than individuals with no international experience and have different views on foreign policy (Wood 2019). Even after a short time abroad students had a greater intercultural awareness, better communication multicultural skills, and more personal development (Chieffo & Griffiths 2004; Kitsantas 2004). Tourism travels enhances cross-cultural understanding, leading to enhanced tolerance, understanding, and a reduction of negative

stereotypes (Aleshinloye *et al*. 2020). Quite old but relevant study (Pool 1958) asserts that international travel influences people, making them more open-minded and liberal in their views.

On the other hand, some authors came to less strong or ambiguous conclusions. Var and Ap (1998) argued that mass tourism seldom generates strong intercultural relationships and reinforces stereotypic images between peoples of different nations, while Nyaupane, Teye, and Paris (2008) found a lack of evidence supporting the notion that travel positively changes one's attitudes. Litvin and Smith (2021) point out that those who travel internationally have strongly differentiated views from those who do not, but that these are neither necessarily more liberal nor conservative than those who have not travelled abroad. Similarly, one more old but relevant seminal research revealed that foreign travel counteracts self-interest, thus leading to a convergence among different points of view (Pool *et al*. 1956).

Nevertheless, recently, a growing body of literature focuses on tourism as a geopolitical framing, in particular, a role of tourism encounters in the production of geopolitical discourse and practice (Mostafanezhad & Norum 2016; Gillen & Mostafanezhad 2019). International tourism operates literally on the leading edge of globalisation by continually transferring consumer tastes, cultural practices, business people and capital across the globe (Hazburn 2004). Tourism, as a fluid event, has actively participated in the (re)production of spatial knowledge at various scales (Sheller & Urry 2006; King 2015). To a notable extent, it can provide embodied evidence to intensify or challenge the pre-existing geographical imaginations of certain places or people (Crouch *et al*. 2001). This conceptual approach is also very concerned about tourists as an independent agency that participates in or challenges existing geopolitical contexts via their own tourism and cultural experiences, including inside and outside the official government policymaking (Agnew 2003; Hannam 2013; An *et al*. 2020).

With regard to our research topic, An and others (2020) performed an interesting discourse analysis of Chinese tourist writings about Africa on the popular Chinese online tourist forum. The research founded that Chinese tourists' conceptions of Africa are mainly built through five discursive perceptual frames. Noteworthy, much tourist writing corresponds with the official Chinese geopolitical narrative of China-Africa relations; however, the authors found that some Chinese tourists' descriptions of Africa fit uneasily into the official Chinese geopolitical conceptions. Such tourism-related geopolitical discourses are powerful instruments as they divide up the world and can lead to wars and conflicts over space and resources (O'Tuathail 2002). Consequently, governments have long used tourism as a means of spreading 'propaganda' directed at tourists, with such exposure likely to result in altered political attitudes of the traveller towards their own nation's political system (e.g. Richter 1983). And vice versa: authoritarian political regimes often practice restrictions of tourist trips to undesired destinations. For example, Chinese outbound tourism has been relatively limited until recently by the Chinese government explicitly because of geopolitical concerns (Arlt 2006); the similar function was performed earlier by the Iron Wall between the Western and Socialist geopolitical blocks.

Regardless of the type of travel, substantial changes in geopolitical views and attitudes of the travellers are more expected when the origin and destination countries differ in terms of institutions, policies, or world views, *id est* when the informational shock is sufficiently important (Berlinschi 2019). The impact of migration on the demand for political accountability in Cape Verde is higher for migrants to the United States (US) than for migrants to Portugal (Batista & Vicente 2011); the effect of return migration on political participation in Mali is higher for migration to non-African countries (Chauvet & Mercier 2014); the effect of migration on civic engagement in Romania and Bulgaria is higher for migration to the most civically engaged countries (Nikolova *et al*. 2017); the correlation between political leaders' migration experience and the evolution of democracy during their leadership is higher for migration from developing countries to high income OECD countries (Mercier 2016). Evidence that the effects of migration on home country politics are contingent upon the characteristics of destination countries can be found also in Fidrmuc and Doyle (2007), Spilimbergo (2009), and Barsbai and colleagues (2017). In view of this, it can be expected that visits to developed European countries will have a more noticeable effect on the geopolitical views of Ukrainians than trips to former Soviet countries, since the institutions, economic systems and world views present in Ukraine are still relatively closer to those present in other former Soviet countries although in the recent years are rapidly converging the European ones.

Geopolitics and international mobility of Ukrainians

Visa liberalization was undeniable advantage that virtually every citizen of Ukraine could feel from deepening cooperation with the EU. According to the results of the national annual monitoring surveys, after the launch of the visa-free regime in 2017, only 25% of respondents took advantage of this opportunity, including 11% travelling for tourist purposes, 7% visiting relatives or friends, and 6% looking for work, while 76% of respondents did not take the opportunity to travel to Europe without a visa (Shulha 2020). The survey by the Rating Group Ukraine (2021) reports similar figures: 9% of the respondents have travelled to Europe many times, 21% several times, and 70% have never visited the EU. Thus, it turns out that the vast majority of Ukrainians, even after three years of visa liberalization with the EU, has no direct experience of being there. Among those who used the visa-free regime, the vast majority visited the EU no more than once or twice in the last three years; a relatively small proportion of respondents visited the EU more than five times. According to the above data, the citizens of Ukraine still mostly get an idea of the EU countries not from their own experience but rather from the media and personal communication (Shulha 2020). People from the eastern regions of Ukraine, bordering Russia, are the least likely to visit the EU. As of February 2017, almost 20% of residents of the western part of Ukraine had visited EU countries, while in the eastern part this figure reached only 2% (LB.UA 2017).

At the same time, 2% of the respondents have travelled to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)[1] countries many times, 11% several times, while 87% have never been there (Rating Group Ukraine 2021). In particular, prior to 2014, Russia was the primary destination for Ukrainian labour migrants. In 2012, Russia was by far the most popular destination for labour migrants from Ukraine (43% of all Ukrainians working abroad) but the Kremlin's seizure of Crimea and its dealings in the Donbas produced a sudden shift in Ukrainian migration patterns toward the EU, especially Poland (Chukhnova 2020). Thus, Ukraine is no longer the main supplier of labour migrants to Russia and dropped to third place after Tajikistan and Kazakhstan (Pozniak 2021). In 2017, Russia was the second most important destination for labour migrants from Ukraine after Poland (25% and 40% respectively) (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2017). As of mid-year 2020, 6.1 million migrants from Ukraine resided abroad, and more than 53% of them resided in Russia (International Labour Office 2017).

The absolute volume of migration flows to Russia remains impressive, for instance, in the first half of 2019, approximately 164,600 labour migrants and 13,700 students from Ukraine entered Russia (Ukrajinska Pravda 2019), which together constitutes 0.4% from the total population of Ukraine. The same year, 21,609 students of Ukrainian origin studied in Russia (Migration Data Portal 2022). In 2021, Ukrainian labour migrants in Russia accounted for 5.1% of total remittance inflow to Ukraine (for comparison: Poland 38.7%) (*ibid*.). Russia and other CIS countries remain the main travel destination for Ukrainians from the east and south of the country, especially from the regions bordering Russia (Rating Group Ukraine 2021).

Over the past 20 years, the nature of international mobility of Ukrainians has been essentially changed with growing role of circular and education migration, and Ukrainian migrants have became more flexible and mobile (Mezentsev & Pidgrushnyi 2014). Most Ukrainians still have low spatial mobility both inside and outside the country. In particular, according to the 2021 survey, 16% of Ukrainians have never left their community in the last five years, while *circa* 30% have visited another city or village in Ukraine one or more times (Rating Group Ukraine 2021).

There are indications of a correlation between the international mobility and geopolitical attitudes of Ukrainians. The 2005 survey provided evidence that experience of labour migration may change the geopolitical priorities of Ukrainians. In particular, Ukrainians with labour experience abroad, comparing with those earned at home, were more inclined to support relations with developed countries of the west (29.2% *vs*. 16.9%) and less inclined to develop primarily relations with Russia (4.9% *vs*. 8.5%) or the CIS countries (9.7 vs. 11.0%) (Pribytkova 2006). The labour migrants, visited the foreign countries in search of earnings more than two times, appraise the establishment of relations with developed countries of the West more positive than other Ukrainians (46.7% *vs*. 16.9%), support more often the Ukraine joining the EU (66.7% *vs*. 46.1%), the perspectives of collaboration between Ukraine and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (46.7%–50.0% *vs*. 33.9%) and the entry into NATO

(20.0%–27.8% *vs*. 15.0%) (*ibid*.). Unfortunately, these are aggregated data without distinction of separate migrant destinations. According to the recent 2021 survey, self-identifications of Ukrainians correlate with their international mobility, in particular, visiting the EU or the CIS countries. Visits to EU positively correlate with feeling European: 5.5% of respondents who have visited the EU many times, 4.7% of respondents who have visited the EU several times, and 3.0% of respondents who have never visited the EU. A similar, although less significant correlation, was found for visiting CIS countries and feeling Soviet: 4.0% of respondents who have travelled to the CIS countries many times, 3.3% of respondents who have visited the CIS countries several times, and 2.9% of respondents who have never visited the CIS countries (Rating Group Ukraine 2021).

Case studies as geopolitical fault-line cities

Our case studies are three Ukrainian cities: Kharkiv (eastern part of the country, pop. *ca*. 1.4 million), Dnipro (central-eastern part of the country, pop. *ca*. 1.0 million) and Mariupol (south-eastern part of the country, pop. *ca*. 450,000). All population numbers are given for 2021, *id est* before the full-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine in 2022. The first two cities belong to the largest Ukrainian metropolises and rank among the most significant industrial and cultural centres of the country. Mariupol, before been destroyed by the Russian army during the Russo-Ukrainian warfare in 2022, was the second largest city in the Donetsk region. Before 2022, all three cities clearly met the criteria of geopolitical fault-line cities (see Gentile 2017). In particular, two of them (Kharkiv and Mariupol) are located in proximity of the Russian border with all the ensuing consequences like intense cross-border ties, exposure to the informational space of the neighbouring country, relatively weak connections to the national centre of power, identity blurring, and, finally, absorbing the flows of internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees generated by the military actions during the Russo-Ukrainian hybrid warfare (Gentile 2017).

All three cities have significant ethnic Russian minorities (app. 25% in Kharkiv and Dnipro and 45% in Mariupol) and predominance of Russian speakers (from app. 50% in Dnipro up to app. 80% in Mariupol) (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001). In terms of geopolitical preferences, before 2022, all these cities hosted significant non-pro-Western contingents, if not outright pro-Russian, that hold views incompatible with European vision for Ukraine (Gentile 2020a, 2020b). Even in conditions of the continuing hybrid Russo-Ukrainian warfare in 2014–2022, pro-Russian forces stably had majorities in the local councils, except for Dnipro. Furthermore, pro-Western and pro-Russian contingents were exposed to different truths portrayed within the Russian and non-Russian informational spaces (Gentile 2017), as well as to multiple contested geopolitical and ethno-national narratives (Zhurzhenko 2011; Portnov & Portnova 2015; Zhurzhenko 2015; Stebelsky 2018).

All these factors contributed to the periodical activation of the fault-line between opposing population fractions, which was evidenced by the protests and rallies that took place in these cities after the Revolution of Dignity (Gentile 2017; Buckholz 2019; Kutsenko 2020; Nitsova 2021). At the same time, this fault line is formulated rather in political than in language- or ethnicity-based categories, although the factors of language and ethnicity are important for geopolitical preferences (Kulyk 2011; Portnov 2015a; Kulyk 2019; Kuzio 2019).

Logistic regression to analyse the survey data

We use individual-level survey data on political opinions and migration experience. The survey (personal interviews) was held in Dnipro and Kharkiv in 2018, and in Mariupol in 2020 (n=1254, 1258 and 1251, respectively, aged 18 years or older). The sample evenly covers all districts of the three cities and relies on a household-based sampling frame, when only one person was selected within each household. The response rates are 28% in Dnipro, 36% in Kharkiv and 30% in Mariupol, taking into account all forms of non-response. The variables used in this particular study are identical across all three databases except for one question absent in the Mariupol database but present in the two others.

First, we give a brief statistical description of the intensity of visits by residents of the studied cities to certain destinations. This is important for understanding the significance of the potential travelling abroad effects on geopolitical preferences for the urban community as a whole. After that, we report

separate binary logistic regressions for each city to investigate whether travel abroad experience correlates with individual geopolitical preferences, controlling for relevant confounding factors. The use of logistic regression is widespread in studies of geopolitical preferences, in particular with a focus on Ukraine (Gentile 2015; Sasse & Lackner 2018; Torres-Adán 2021a).

Our dependent variables (DV) were designed to assess various aspects of pro-European (variables 1–5) and pro-Soviet/pro-Russian (variables 6–7) sentiments. The variables, together with respective survey questions and coding are presented in Table 1. Most of the variables are calculated both for natural cutting point (NCP) between agreement and disagreement and for confident agreement (CA) to single out respondents with the strongest geopolitical views. Based on the extended literature (Hrytsak 1998; Wilson 2002; Belitser 2003; Kuzio 2022), we presumed a certain commonality between the pro-Soviet and pro-Russian sentiments. Dependent variables 3 and 4, which reflect cultural attitudes, are nevertheless important for evaluation of the geopolitical preferences and were employed with a direct intent to explore the geopolitical attitudes rather than the cultural ones. Russian propaganda, following the best traditions of the Soviet propagandists, claims that 'rotting' western culture negatively influences the autochthonous culture and way of life of Russian, Ukrainian, and other Slavic peoples, destroying their spiritual bonds. Thus, attitudes to the Western (in particular, European) cultural influences are indicative for individual geopolitical preferences.

Our independent (explanatory) variable is travel abroad status since 1991. The idea was to explore correlations between the respondents' geopolitical preferences and background of visiting (1) European countries, (2) Russia, and (3) both European countries and Russia, comparing each time to the control group of respondents who have visited neither European countries nor Russia, hereinafter referred also as non-travellers for brevity (see Table 1). The visits were accounted without lower limit of duration: it could be both long-term mobility (e.g. work migration) and short-term travels (e.g. tourist trips).

Also, the logistic regression models include demographic, socioeconomic, and sociocultural controls based on the previous research on the determinants of foreign policy and geopolitical preferences. Demographic variables comprise gender and age in three groups. While gender is supposed to have no significant influence on geopolitical preferences, the support for a Western geopolitical orientation is expected to be lower among older age cohorts (O'Loughlin 2001; Munro 2007; Armandon 2013; Gentile 2015; Rating Group Ukraine 2021). Socioeconomic variables include level of education, material standard of living, and occupation status. High socio-economic status and higher education is known to correlate with pro-Western preferences on post-Soviet space including Ukraine (Munro 2007; Gentile 2015; Torres-Adán 2021a), Russia (O'Loughlin & Talbot 2005) and Moldova (Torres-Adán 2021b). Our socio-cultural control is self-reported knowledge of the English language, being an indicator of the respondents' potential direct exposure to the Western information spaces, which is supported by the recent studies (Gentile 2015; Kovalska 2021).

Since geopolitical preferences before travelling abroad are not known from the survey, and the survey does not differentiate between the specific categories of migrants, the most important limitation of the research methodology lies in the fact that estimated regression coefficients are likely to capture two effects: (1) causal effect of travel abroad on political attitudes, and (2) reverse causality, whereby political attitudes determine travel abroad choices. It is known from the literature that political attitudes may impact the tourist destination preferences (Kalmić 2014). Facing the same problem, Berlinschi (2019) employed identification strategy consisting in instrumenting individual migration with district-level migrant networks in eastern and western destinations eight years before the survey data was collected. Focusing on three cities as case studies, we are deprived of the opportunity to carry out such a strategy.

The literature indicates that destination choices of at least labour migrants from Ukraine are motivated rather economically than politically (Bidak 2011; Bilan 2017; Kabay 2019; Nikolaiets *et al*. 2020), and the similar observation was made for migrants from Moldova, Czechia and Poland (Fidrmuc & Doyle 2007; Lücke *et al*. 2007) – an argument suggesting that at least for economic migrants the regression coefficients would reflect the effect of travel rather than the reverse causality. Moreover, Fidrmuc and Doyle (2007) found little evidence that political attitudes of labour migrants are defined by self-selection with regard to either their pre-migration political attitudes. However, this consideration

Table 1. Variables for logistic regression: survey questions and coding. NCP = natural cutting point; CA = confident agreement.

Variable	Question(s)	Coding of answers
Dependent variables (DV)		
DV 1.1: Feeling European (NCP)	Do you feel European?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 1; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 1.2: Feeling European (CA)	Do you feel European?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 0; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 2.1: Belief that that Ukraine should defend European values (NCP)	Do you agree that Ukraine should defend European values?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 1; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 2.1: Belief that that Ukraine should defend European values (CA)	Do you agree that Ukraine should defend European values?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 0; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 3.1: Belief that Europe positively influences the way of life in Ukraine (NCP)	Do you agree that Europe positively influences the way of life in Ukraine?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 1; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 3.1: Belief that Europe positively influences the way of life in Ukraine (CA)	Do you agree that Europe positively influences the way of life in Ukraine?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 0; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 4.1: Belief that Western Europe negatively influences the culture in Ukraine (NCP)	Do you agree that Western Europe negatively influences the culture in Ukraine?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 1; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 4.2: Belief that Western Europe negatively influences the culture in Ukraine (CA)	Do you agree that Western Europe negatively influences the culture in Ukraine?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 0; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 5: Support for hypothetical EU/NATO accession	Do you support Ukraine's ascension to NATO and/or the EU?	NATO only = 1; EU only = 1; Both NATO and EU =1; No = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 6.1: Feeling Soviet (NCP)	Do you feel Soviet?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 1; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 6.2: Feeling Soviet (CA)	Do you feel Soviet?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 0; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 7.1: Belief that the Soviet period was positive for Ukraine (NCP)	Do you agree that the Soviet period was positive for Ukraine?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 0; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
DV 7.2: Belief that the Soviet period was positive for Ukraine (CA)	Do you agree that the Soviet period was positive for Ukraine?	completely agree = 1; rather agree = 0; rather disagree = 0; completely disagree = 0; hard to say = 0; refusal to answer = 0
Independent (exploratory) variable		
Travel abroad status	Have you ever visited the following countries or regions after 1991 (for any reason): European countries?	- visited neither European countries nor Russian Federation = 0 (reference group); - not visited European countries but visited Russian Federation = 1;
	Have you ever visited the following countries or regions after 1991 (for any reason): Russian Federation?	- visited European countries but not visited Russian Federation = 2; - visited both European countries and Russian Federation = 3
Control variables		
CV 1. Gender	Gender of the respondent	male = 1; female = 0
CV 2. Age	How old are you?	18-39 = 0; 40-59 = 1; 60+ = 2
CV 3. Education status	What kind of completed education do you have?	completed or uncompleted higher education = 1; otherwise = 0
CV 4. Material standard of living	How do you assess the financial situation of your household today?	good or excellent = 1; otherwise = 0 (five-step Likert scale)
CV 5. Occupation status	What is your main occupation?	managers, professionals and supervisors = 1; otherwise = 0
CV 6. Self-reported knowledge of English	How well do you speak English?	can at least communicate or better knowledge = 1; otherwise = 0

cannot be employed for other categories of travellers. Also, labour migrants typically spend more time in countries of destination, and they belong to different socio-economic groups than leisure travellers. Thus, it is not possible to draw conclusions about travellers in general based on research on labour migrants. In view of this, while presenting and discussing the research results, we basically talk about correlations between certain geopolitical attitudes and certain travel backgrounds, allowing the possibility of both direct and reverse causalities.

Framing correlations between travel abroad experiences and geopolitical attitudes

Scale and patterns of travelling abroad in case study cities

Table 2 displays the distribution of respondents in Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Mariupol by their travel abroad status. Surprisingly, Kharkiv, being the largest of the three cities, has the largest share of non-travellers, while Mariupol, the smallest of the three cities and the only of them without a status of a regional centre, has the smallest share of non-travellers. Nevertheless, in all three cities, the share of non-travellers is quite big – from almost half in Mariupol to three quarters in Kharkiv. The rest of the population, constituting a fairly solid stratum (from almost 30% in Kharkiv to more than 50% in Mariupol), have experience of travelling to the countries of our interest.

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents by their travel abroad status. Source: elaboration by the authors based on the survey results.

Travel status	Dnipro	Kharkiv	Mariupol
Neither European countries nor Russia	61.0	73.5	48.8
Only Russia	19.2	16.6	29.6
Only European countries	7.6	5.3	4.9
Both European countries and Russia	12.2	4.6	16.7

In all three cities, Russia is more popular travel destination than European countries. The share of inhabitants with an experience of visiting Russia (from 21.2 in Kharkiv to 46.3 in Mariupol) is significantly higher in comparison with the national average (cf. Rating Group Ukraine 2021). The share of inhabitants with an experience of visiting European countries in Dnipro (19.8%) and Mariupol (21.6%) generally corresponds to the national average (cf. Shulha 2020; Rating Group Ukraine 2021), but in Kharkiv it is somewhat lagging behind (9.9%).

   Another observation is that most of travellers to European countries have Russia in their travel history as well. To summarise: (1) the effect of travel abroad on geopolitical preferences, if exists, should impact a large part of the population and should be more powerful, in the scale of the whole urban community, in Dnipro and Mariupol than in Kharkiv; (2) final effect of travel to Russia, compared to effect of travel to European countries, on the urban community, may be more important due to the numerical prevalence of the respective group of travellers.

Background of travelling abroad and pro-European attitudes

Baseline regression coefficients, presented in Tables 3–7, despite some individual intercity variations, in general indicate that visiting European countries together with non-visiting Russia is a good predictor of pro-European attitudes. In particular, statistically significant positive correlation is observed for visiting European countries and support for Ukraine's the EU/NATO accession (odds coefficients ≈ 2.0–3.0). Similar significant positive correlations are observed for self-identification with Europe, belief that Ukraine should defend European values (odds coefficients ≈ 1.5–3.3), assessment of the European influence on way of life in Ukraine (odds coefficients ≈ 2.5–6.0). The attitude to the Russian propaganda statement that Western Europe negatively influences the culture in Ukraine has no statistically significant relationship with visiting European countries only.

Positive correlation between the experience of visiting European countries and support for geopolitical and cultural Ukraine's integration to the EU may be explained by the direct exposure of the long-term travellers (e.g. labour migrants and students) to political, social, and cultural norms of the European countries (cf. Fidrmuc & Doyle 2007; Beine & Sekkat 2013; Wood 2019). Such travellers may compare quality of life, social security standards, and quality of political institutions in destination countries and in Ukraine. As for short-term migrants (first of all, tourists), they are less likely to experience differences in the quality of social and political institutions of Ukraine and the EU. Nevertheless, during a few days or weeks of stay in the EU they with very own eyes may become convinced that the horrors of the 'pernicious influences of European culture' are just fabrications of Russian propaganda. Similar to the other global contexts, tourist trips to the EU may stipulate Ukrainians to be more open-minded, to be more tolerant to the Western culture in general or a specific European national culture in particular, to enhance cross-cultural understanding and to dispel pre-shaped stereotypes (Yu & Lee 2014; Aleshinloye *et al*. 2020; Litvin & Smith 2021).

The rethinking of geopolitical and cultural attitudes by the Ukrainians with travel experience to the EU may consequently impact their electoral behaviour and political demands, for example a course to the EU/NATO membership (cf. Batista & Vicente 2011). Notably, similar effect was found for labour return migrants in Moldova, a country geographically close to Ukraine with similar dichotomy of geopolitical vectors (Berlinschi 2019).

Visiting Russia, providing no travel experience to European countries, in general, has negative correlation with pro-European geopolitical preferences. This correlation is weaker compared to the outlined above correlation with visiting European countries. In this point, our research generally reproduces the findings by Berlinschi (2019) for Moldova, where the effect on geopolitical attitudes of labour migration to the CIS countries was significantly lower compared to the effect of labour migration to the EU countries. Thus, on the one hand, our research supports the point that more

Table 3. Binary logistic regression results (odds ratios). DV 1: Feeling European. Source: calculations by the authors based on the survey results. Notes: odds coef. = Exp(B); NCP = natural cutting point (agree); CA = confident agreement; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001. Source: calculations by the authors based on the survey results.

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	NCP	CA	NCP	CA	NCP	CA
Male (ref. female)	1.256	1.046	1.260	1.603	0.991	1.060
Age 40–59 (ref. 18–39)	0.682*	0.692	0.526**	0.530	0.961	1.241
Age 60+ (ref. 18–39)	0.378***	0.874	0.442***	0.492	0.528	1.234
Higher education (ref. other)	1.128	1.789*	0.634**	2.210*	1.527*	2.325**
English skills: can at least communicate (ref. other)	2.038***	1.280	1.858**	2.061	2.053**	3.068**
Economy status: excellent or good (ref. other)	1.703**	1.135	1.898***	0.343*	1.306	0.370
Occupation: professional, manager or supervisor (ref. other)	0.931	1.239	0.878	0.513	1.402	0.802
Foreign travel status: only Russia (ref. non-travellers)	0.899	0.629	0.477*	0.775	0.414***	0.265**
Foreign travel status: only European countries (ref. non-travellers)	2.016**	2.740**	2.410**	1.858	2.675**	2.929*
Foreign travel status: both Russia and European countries (ref. non-travellers)	2.172***	2.130**	2.494**	4.890***	1.281	0.750
Constant	0.365***	0.058***	0.370***	0.038***	0.196***	0.030***
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.407	0.805	0.142	0.845	0.761	0.321
Nagelkerke R Square	0.148	0.086	0.135	0.113	0.148	0.122

Table 4. Binary logistic regression results (odds ratios). DV 2: Belief that that Ukraine should defend European values. Notes and source: same as in Table 3 (see p. 11).

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	NCP	CA	NCP	CA	NCP	CA
Male (ref. female)	0.951	1.143	0.998	1.085	1.216	1.091
Age 40–59 (ref. 18–39)	0.804	0.898	1.022	1.184	0.902	0.844
Age 60+ (ref. 18–39)	0.521***	0.968	0.692	0.751	0.559**	0.788
Higher education (ref. other)	1.012	1.461*	1.035	1.193	1.120	1.723*
English skills: can at least communicate (ref. other)	1.763**	1.276	1.378	1.552	1.556*	1.219
Economy status: excellent or good (ref. other)	1.755**	1.276	2.068***	1.156	1.415	1.457
Occupation: professional, manager or supervisor (ref. other)	0.722*	0.755	0.688*	0.514**	0.715*	0.899
Foreign travel status: only Russia (ref. non-travellers)	0.897	0.774	0.773	0.976	0.617**	0.397**
Foreign travel status: only European countries (ref. non-travellers)	1.723*	2.285**	3.349***	2.570**	1.534	2.683**
Foreign travel status: both Russia and European countries (ref. non-travellers)	1.597*	1.307	2.588**	4.573***	0.835	0.886
Constant	0.961	0.186***	0.357***	0.131***	0.788	0.070***
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.318	0.156	0.752	0.939	0.727	0.926
Nagelkerke R Square	0.080	0.048	0.088	0.068	0.057	0.066

Table 5. Binary logistic regression results (odds ratios). DV 3: Belief that Europe positively influences the way of life in Ukraine. Notes and sources: same as in Table 3 (see p. 11).

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	NCP	CA	NCP	CA	NCP	CA
Male (ref. female)	0.943	0.943	0.785	0.902	-	-
Age 40–59 (ref. 18–39)	0.803	0.997	0.792	0.706	-	-
Age 60+ (ref. 18–39)	0.552**	0.885	0.757	0.647	-	-
Higher education (ref. other)	1.247	1.548*	1.314*	1.475*	-	-
English skills: can at least communicate (ref. other)	1.571*	1.826**	2.022***	1.924**	-	-
Economy status: excellent or good (ref. other)	1.539*	1.197	1.998***	0.750	-	-
Occupation: professional, manager or supervisor (ref. other)	0.963	0.631*	0.886	0.674	-	-
Foreign travel status: only Russia (ref. non-travellers)	1.134	0.727	1.054	2.181**	-	-
Foreign travel status: only European countries (ref. non-travellers)	2.551***	1.828*	5.958***	5.642***	-	-
Foreign travel status: both Russia and European countries (ref. non-travellers)	1.940**	1.400	3.370***	5.482***	-	-
Constant	0.659*	0.157***	0.342***	0.111***	-	-
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.323	0.840	0.914	0.825	-	-
Nagelkerke R Square	0.100	0.060	0.142	0.123	-	-

Table 6. Binary logistic regression results (odds ratios). DV 4: Belief that Western Europe negatively influences the culture in Ukraine Notes and sources: same as in Table 3 (see p. 11).

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	NCP	CA	NCP	CA	NCP	CA
Male (ref. female)	0.868	0.762	1.033	0.838	1.067	0.733
Age 40–59 (ref. 18–39)	1.650**	1.182	1.458*	1.725**	1.628**	1.917*
Age 60+ (ref. 18–39)	2.221***	1.832*	1.351	2.151**	3.035***	3.287***
Higher education (ref. other)	0.685**	0.680*	1.100	0.841	0.803	0.990
English skills: can at least communicate (ref. other)	0.822	0.668	1.303	1.038	0.478**	0.734
Economy status: excellent or good (ref. other)	0.955	0.803	0.290***	0.295***	1.163	0.671
Occupation: professional, manager or supervisor (ref. other)	1.428*	1.288	1.387*	1.237	0.114	1.171
Foreign travel status: only Russia (ref. non-travellers)	1.147	1.751**	1.781***	3.744***	1.442*	1.706**
Foreign travel status: only European countries (ref. non-travellers)	0.668	0.827	0.930	1.219	0.752	1.335
Foreign travel status: both Russia and European countries (ref. non-travellers)	0.613*	1.285	0.779	1.247	0.906	0.922
Constant	0.490***	0.135***	0.613*	0.169***	0.705	0.083***
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.829	0.886	0.095	0.115	0.145	0.189
Nagelkerke R Square	0.065	0.046	0.100	0.152	0.111	0.070

Table 7. Binary logistic regression results (odds ratios). DV 5: Support for Ukraine's EU/ NATO accession. Notes: odds coef. = Exp(B); * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Source: calculations by the authors based on the survey results.

	Dnipro	Kharkiv	Mariupol
Male (ref. female)	1.168	1.291	1.144
Age 40–59 (ref. 18–39)	0.663**	0.660*	0.681
Age 60+ (ref. 18–39)	0.378***	0.561**	0.346***
Higher education (ref. other)	1.198	1.237	1.230
English skills: can at least communicate (ref. other)	1.418	2.292***	2.642***
Economy status: excellent or good (ref. other)	1.750**	3.924***	1.281
Occupation: professional, manager or supervisor (ref. other)	0.648**	1.028	1.024
Foreign travel status: only Russia (ref. non-travellers)	1.016	0.490**	0.673
Foreign travel status: only European countries (ref. non-travellers)	1.905**	3.798***	2.075*
Foreign travel status: both Russia and European countries (ref. non-travellers)	2.078***	1.985*	2.758***
Constant	0.971	0.271***	0.267***
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.705	0.011	0.053
Nagelkerke R Square	0.112	0.243	0.208

differences in terms of institutions, policies or world views between the origin and destination countries corresponds to more substantial impact changes in geopolitical views (cf. Batista & Vicente 2011; Chauvet & Mercier 2014; Nikolova *et al*. 2017).

Also, in case of travel experience to Russia, there are significant intercity differences in the correlation coefficients for the same variables. Background of visiting Russia significantly reduces the odds of being in favour of the EU/NATO accession only in Kharkiv (odds coefficient 0.49). The odds of feeling European are significantly reduced in Kharkiv and Mariupol (odds coefficients ≈ 0.4–0.5), but not in Dnipro. Travelling to Russia only seems to reduce support for the statement that Ukraine should defend European values, but this correlation is statistically significant only in Mariupol. Similarly, visiting Russia apparently has no correlation with the assessment of the European impact of way of life in Ukraine (except for confident agreement in Kharkiv). At the same time, background of visiting Russia seems to be a good predictor for agreement with a statement about the negative European influence on the culture in Ukraine (with average odds coefficient ≈ 1.4–0.7, except for natural cutting point in Dnipro, where the effect is statistically insignificant).

It should be emphasised that Russia has not been a popular tourist destination for Ukrainians in recent decades. We can confidently assume that the majority of respondents visited Russia as either labour migrants or due to family ties. Thus, these should be people who spent in Russia long time periods or at least visited Russia many times. It is known that for most labour migrants from post-Soviet countries to Russia, including Ukraine, appreciating their income earned in Russia is the most salient aspect outweighing negative experiences, and their views of Russia are generally positive (Gerber & Zavisca 2020). At the same time, the example of Kyrgyz labour migrants shows that labour migrants to Russia have nuanced, pragmatic pro-Russian views: highly evaluating their earnings in Russia, they disapprove its high levels of corruption and disregard for individual rights (Ruget & Usmanalieva 2021). Nevertheless, Russia definitely benefits from geopolitical remittances due to labour migration from the post-Soviet space (Gerber & Zavisca 2020; Ruget & Usmanalieva 2021).

Furthermore, Ukrainians spending long time periods in Russia may be exposed to both 'hard' (media) and 'soft' (films, social media) Russian propaganda disseminating negative image of the West. Notably, Russian anti-Western propaganda targets primarily the Western geopolitical alliances and Western non-material culture, but leaves aside the brackets the material aspects of culture, including way of life. Notably, the benefits of the Western way of life seem to be quite acceptable for many people expressing nostalgia for Soviet times, as well as the 'Russian World' (for the discussion of the concept see Laruelle 2015; Suslov 2018) adherents. While most Russians do dislike the West, many of them do practice Western pragmatism in their everyday economic lives (Guriev *et al*. 2008).

The effect of bilateral travel experience on pro-European attitudes is similar to that of the travel experience to European countries only. This means that direct and/or reversal causal relationships between the geopolitical preferences and travelling to European countries in Ukraine are more powerful compared with those between geopolitical preferences and travelling to Russia. In some cases, these respondents with bilateral travel experience, who had the opportunity to directly compare the life in Ukraine with both European countries and Russia, show even greater commitment to Ukraine's integration into the European political and cultural space compared to the respondents having visited European countries only. In particular, such respondents expressed the highest level of support for Ukraine's accession to the EU/NATO in Dnipro and Mariupol (odds coefficients ≈ 2.1–2.8), as well as have the highest level of feeling European in Dnipro and Kharkiv (odds coefficients ≈ 2.2–2.5).

However, this is not a general trend, and in many cases this category of respondents shows less strong pro-European attitudes than respondents having visited European countries only. In Mariupol, unlike Dnirpo and Kharkiv, we found no positive correlation between bilateral travel experience and feeling European, as well as support for the statement that Ukraine should defend European values. Our findings substantially differ from the results for Moldova, where no significant difference with non-migrants was found for return migrants who have worked in both Eastern and Western destinations (Berlinschi 2019). The likely reason for that is that we consider all types of mobility, including short-term travels. For example, for tourists, the difference in the quality of life in Russia and

the EU could be striking, while for travel migrants the opportunity to maximise their earnings is the most important factor. Anyway, the issue of double travel experience needs further empirical clarification for different categories of travelers.

As for the control variables, the most powerful predictor of pro-European preferences is English language proficiency (cf. Gentile 2015; Kovalska 2021). First of all, this refers to the feeling European (odds coefficients ≈ 1.8–2.0), assessment of the European influence on the way of life (odds coefficients ≈ 1.6–2.0), support of the EU/NATO accession, except for Dnipro (odds coefficients ≈ 2.3–2.6), and belief that Ukraine should defend European values, except for Kharkiv (odds coefficients ≈ 1.6–1.8). Excellent/good financial status of the household is also a good predictor of pro-European preferences in Dnipro and Kharkiv, but turned out to be irrelevant in Mariupol. Belonging to the younger age cohorts appears to be a strong predictor of pro-European attitudes, especially with regard to the support of the EU/NATO accession, European self-identification, and attitudes to European cultural influences (cf. O'Loughlin 2001; Munro 2007; Armandon 2013; Gentile 2015).

The correlation between higher education and pro-European preferences is rather positive than negative, but, according to the regression results, mostly insignificant, except for belief in Europe's positively influence on way of life in Ukraine (odds coefficients ≈ 1.2–1.3). High social status (a role of manager or supervisor), in general, seems to be a weak predictor of pro-European attitudes, with certain inclination to be more negative predictor that a positive one. In particular, it has statistically significant negative correlation with belief that Ukraine should defend European values (odds coefficients ≈ 0.7), as well as the support of the EU/NATO accession in Dnipro (odds coefficient = 0.6), but shows statistically significant positive correlation with belief that Europe negatively influences culture in Ukraine, except for Mariupol (odds coefficients ≈ 1.4). Sex/gender is expectably irrelevant for pro-European attitudes. Thus, according to the employed analytical model, visiting European countries appears to be a powerful predictor of pro-European preferences along with English language proficiency, good financial status, and belonging to younger age groups.

Background of travelling abroad and pro-Soviet sentiments

The results of log-regression for indicators of pro-Soviet sentiments are presented in Tables 8–9. In Kharkiv, background of visiting Russia has statistically significant positive relationship with both indicators of pro-Soviet sentiments: feeling Soviet and considering the Soviet period positive for Ukraine (odds coefficients = 2.9 and 2.3 for NCP). In Mariupol, positive correlation between visiting Russia and pro-Soviet sentiments is not so strong; moreover, we found statistically significant negative influence of travelling to Russia on pro-Soviet sentiments in case of confident agreement for both indicators. In Dnipro, visiting Russia is irrelevant for pro-Soviet sentiments. These findings do not directly contradict to the results of national survey (Rating Group Ukraine 2021), according to which the odds of feeling Soviet are increased approximately 1.5 times for the CIS countries visitors, but indicate that relationship between visiting Russia and pro-Soviet attitudes may depend on a specific city even within the south-eastern part of Ukraine. In Mariupol and Dnipro, background of travel to European countries negatively correlates with feeling Soviet, as well as with a belief that Soviet period was positive for Ukraine. In Kharkiv, visiting European countries is not a reliable predictor for pro-Soviet sentiments.

The relationship between bilateral travel experience and individual pro-Soviet sentiments is ambiguous and depends on a specific city or variable. In Mariupol, there is no significant correlation for both indicators of pro-Soviet attitudes for natural cutting point, but statistically significant negative correlations (odds coefficients ≈ 1.4) for confident agreement. At the same time, in Kharkiv, bilateral travel experience is reliable predictor of feeling Soviet and, with low statistical significance, predictor for belief that the Soviet era was positive for Ukraine. In Dnipro, there are neither positive nor negative statistically significant correlations for both variables.

According to regression models, the most powerful predictor of pro-Soviet sentiments is belonging to the older age cohorts, especially for 60+ cohort (odds for natural cutting point in range from 9.3. to 25.1 for feeling Soviet and from 4.2 to 12.0 for assessment of the Soviet period), which corresponds to a large body of scholar literature (e.g. Gentile 2015; Zhuleniova 2020). Other, but

Table 8. Binary logistic regression results (odds ratios). DV 6: Feeling Soviet. Notes and source: same as in Table 3 (see p. 11).

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	NCP	CA	NCP	CA	NCP	CA
Male (ref. female)	0.870	1.051	0.766	0.670*	1.115	1.407*
Age 40–59 (ref. 18–39)	3.993***	3.349***	3.902***	4.272***	8.615***	14.832***
Age 60+ (ref. 18–39)	11.075***	7.934***	9.343***	5.419***	25.174***	33.548***
Higher education (ref. other)	0.928	1.350	0.528***	0.901	0.905	0.954
English skills: can at least communicate (ref. other)	0.826	0.938	1.224	0.869	0.400***	0.282***
Economy status: excellent or good (ref. other)	0.644*	0.542*	0.801	0.474*	0.782	0.838
Occupation: professional, manager or supervisor (ref. other)	0.956	0.520**	0.508***	0.345***	0.874	0.836
Foreign travel status: only Russia (ref. non-travellers)	1.241	1.142	2.780***	1.889**	1.240	0.633**
Foreign travel status: only European countries (ref. non-travellers)	0.590	0.744	1.332	0.609	0.471*	0.552
Foreign travel status: both Russia and European countries (ref. non-travellers)	0.966	0.680	1.715	2.573*	0.852	0.407***
Constant	0.185***	0.067***	0.338***	0.097***	0.234***	0.071***
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.142	0.941	0.731	0.555	0.779	0.587
Nagelkerke R Square	0.272	0.210	0.367	0.232	0.394	0.345

Table 9. Binary logistic regression results (odds ratios). DV 7: Belief that the Soviet period was positive for Ukraine. Notes and sources: same as in Table 3 (see p. 11).

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	NCP	CA	NCP	CA	NCP	CA
Male (ref. female)	0.940	1.043	0.942	0.781	1.202	1.079
Age 40–59 (ref. 18–39)	2.362***	2.232***	3.026***	2.314***	4.657***	9.587***
Age 60+ (ref. 18–39)	5.792***	6.549***	4.241***	2.685***	11.968***	17.034***
Higher education (ref. other)	0.908	0.833	0.966	0.745*	0.952	0.998
English skills: can at least communicate (ref. other)	1.190	0.939	1.129	0.778	0.781	0.719
Economy status: excellent or good (ref. other)	0.512***	0.413***	0.167***	0.329***	1.075	0.903
Occupation: professional, manager or supervisor (ref. other)	1.112	0.899	1.158	0.675*	0.662	0.902
Foreign travel status: only Russia (ref. non-travellers)	0.954	0.946	2.304***	1.930***	1.536*	0.698**
Foreign travel status: only European countries (ref. non-travellers)	0.428***	0.405**	1.582	1.345	0.863	0.479
Foreign travel status: both Russia and European countries (ref. non-travellers)	0.915	1.132	1.555	1.235	0.953	0.415***
Constant	0.838	0.222***	1.235	0.393***	0.790	0.154
Hosmer-Lemeshow Test (Sig.)	0.383	0.238	0.159	0.249	0.505	0.672
Nagelkerke R Square	0.184	0.224	0.284	0.184	0.276	0.269

much weaker, predictors of pro-Soviet sentiments are bad economy status of the household (Dnipro and Kharkiv), prestige profession (for feeling Soviet, in Dnipro and Kharkiv), lack of higher education (in Kharkiv only), and low English skills (in Mariupol only). Nevertheless, we may add to conclusions by Gentile (2015) that pro-Soviet/pro-Russian geopolitically oriented people in south-eastern Ukraine are, on average, not only older, low educated and less fluent in English, but also more used to visit Russia compared to European countries. Taking into account the whole model, including control variables, we found that travel history has not so clear relationship with pro-Soviet sentiments as it has with pro-European attitudes. As we can observe from the logistic regression model, age is the most powerful predictor of pro-Soviet sentiments, and Ukrainians with 'Soviet identity' seem to keep attachment to certain Soviet myths and symbols until their death (cf. Wilson 2002 for so called soft Soviets in Ukraine). The practical implication of this finding is that although creating or breaking down barriers to international mobility of Ukrainians (like visa-free travel EU-Ukraine regime since 2017) is a powerful factor facilitating or complicating the mental rapprochement of Ukrainians with other European nations, it cannot substantially change the proportion of the 'soft Soviets' in Ukraine.

(Dis)similarities between the case study cities

The positive correlation between background of travelling to European countries and pro-European attitudes is similar in all three studied cities. At the same time, the negative correlation between experience of travelling to Russia and pro-European attitudes is more expressed in Kharkiv and Mariupol, but almost invisible in Dnipro. The positive correlation between travelling to Russia and pro-Soviet sentiments is most strong in Kharkiv, somewhat weaker in Mariupol, and almost imperceptible in Dnipro. The negative relationship between travelling to European countries and pro-Soviet sentiments is most evident in Dnipro, less evident in Mariupol and almost imperceptible in Kharkiv.

These differences of travelling abroad effects on geopolitical preferences may be explained by different economic and cultural background that defined different development trajectories of the cities with regard to ethnic identities and geopolitical attitudes. In particular, Kharkiv, the first Soviet capital of Ukraine (L'Heureux 2010), remained international and cosmopolitan city without the predominance of any national culture other than the widespread Russian language (Musiyezdov 2009). During the events of 2014 it stands "neither with Europe nor with Russia" (Filippova & Giuliano 2017, 274), the phenomenon evidences, *inter alia*, by unsuccessful attempt of establishing 'Kharkiv People's Republic'. On the contrary, Dnipro, located far from the Russian border compared to Kharkiv, have rediscovered its 'Ukrainianness' after the start of the Russo-Ukrainian hybrid warfare in 2014, and became known as an 'outpost of Ukraine' (Kupensky & Andriushchenko 2022) and 'the heart of Ukraine' (Portnov 2015b). Mariupol, temporarily controlled by the 'Donetsk People's Republic' during the late spring months of 2014, and whose economy until the Russian invasion in 2022 was dominated by the two large steelworks, was a typical company town of red directorship much dependent on the Soviet industrial legacy (Matsuzato 2018) – the circumstances that expectably put it closer to Kharkiv than to Dnipro in terms of dominating geopolitical preferences.

Notably, during 2014–2018, in Kharkiv, among the people with Soviet self-identification, there was a sharp decline of the share of people who identify themselves as rather Soviet (so called 'soft Soviets') with a simultaneous sluggish growth in share of people who uniquely identify themselves as Soviet (so called 'hard Soviets'), while in Dnipro, the situation is exactly the opposite. In other words, during the recent years of hybrid Russo-Ukrainian warfare, there was a structural 'unsoftening' and 'unhardening' of Soviet identity in Kharkiv and Dnipro respectively (Havryliuk & Gnatiuk 2023). Consequently, supposing at least partial direct causal effect of travelling abroad on geopolitical preferences, growing number of 'hard Soviet' residents of Kharkiv could have been more stable in their pro-Soviet attitudes, which are easily nourished via visiting Russia and difficult to shake via visiting the EU. On the other hand, geopolitical attitudes of the growing stratum of 'soft Soviets' in Dnipro could have been practically insensitive to visiting Russia but easily affected by travelling to the West. Mariupol stands somewhere halfway between these polar cases.

Conclusions

In geopolitical fault-line cities of the south-eastern Ukraine, travel experience to European countries is a statistically significant predictor of pro-European geopolitical attitudes and, simultaneously, of weaker pro-Soviet (and, consequently, pro-Russian) sentiments. On the contrary, travel experience to Russia correlates with lower support for European geopolitical and cultural integration, except for the assessment of the European way of life, and stronger pro-Soviet sentiments, although the situation varies depending on a specific Ukrainian city.

These findings seem to capture two possible effects: (1) a causal effect of travel abroad, when Ukrainians chose their geopolitical attitudes being exposed to foreign information flows, experiencing the foreign way of life and quality of institutions, and/or benefing from economic and social remittances, and (2) a reverse causality, when Ukrainians more open towards the West are more likely to travel to Europe and Ukrainians more nostalgic of Soviet times are more likely to travel to Russia. Based on the research literature and sociological surveys addressing international mobilities both in Ukraine and in other global contexts (Pribytkova 2006; Whyte 2010; Decker 2017; Berlinschi 2019), we may suggest the direct causal effect at least for long-term international mobility. The question whether short-term travellers are exposed to the similar direct causal effect remains open and needs further empirical clarification. Based on the research literature addressing including short-term international mobilities (Yu & Lee 2014; Wood 2019; Aleshinoye et al. 2020; Litvin & Smith 2021), we may assume that Ukrainian tourists travelling abroad are more open-minded and tolerant to the other cultures, and thus they may change their geopolitical attitudes under their tourist impressions, including dispelling of certain negative stereotypes about the certain country, cultural region or geopolitical block.

Of course, we cannot dismiss the possibility that a significant share of those long-term migrants chose their destination countries according to their pre-travel geopolitical preferences. The same may be true for short-term tourist trips (Kalmić 2014), and there is evidence that tourists may reproduce their domestic cultural and geopolitical narratives about the certain destination places (An et al. 2020). Nevertheless, first, there are indications from the literature (e.g. Fidrmuc & Doyle 2007; Lücke et al. 2007; Berlinschi 2019) that such a self-selection is not a relevant factor for labour migration from the post-socialist Europe. Second, the similarity between the geopolitical attitudes of our respondents who visited Europe and those who visited both Europe and Russia may be explained exactly by the direct causal effect. Namely, those Ukrainians, who had a possibility to directly compare quality of life and institutions in Europe, Russia, and their homeland, could consciously make a choice for Europe and, consequently, Western geopolitical and cultural vector for Ukraine.

If we assume the simultaneous and more or less equal action of two causal mechanisms – both direct and reversal – then the result of the international travels will be the strengthening of both contradictory geopolitical opinions in the Ukrainian society. In this way, elimination of the barriers for international mobility may paradoxically lead to strengthening of the existing societal divisions in geopolitically divided societies, similar to those of the geopolitical fault-line Ukrainian cities. Leaving a chance for such a scenario, we would like to note that the results of our and previous studies indicate, rather, a reverse trend, which is one more argument in favour of the advantage of the direct causal mechanism over the destination pre-selection.

For Ukrainian travellers from geopolitical fault-line cities, visiting Russia is less important predictor of geopolitical preferences than visiting Europe. This phenomenon may be explained by the larger difference of institutions, policies and standards of life between Ukraine and the European countries than between Ukraine and Russia (cf. Batista & Vicente 2011; Chauvet & Mercier 2014; Nikolova et al. 2017; Berlinschi 2019). Also, pro-Russian views of labour migrants to Russia are nuanced and pragmatic, reflecting both benefits and negative experiences (Gerber & Zavisca 2020; Ruget & Usmanalieva 2021). At the same time, visiting Russia seems to be much more important predictor of geopolitical attitudes in Ukraine compared to Moldova (cf. Berlinschi 2019), probably because the Russian propaganda machine focuses primarily on Ukrainians.

While experience of travel abroad was found to be among the key predictors of the strength of pro-European attitudes, it plays relatively modest role in shaping pro-Soviet sentiments. For the latter, the factor of respondent's age is much more important. It means that pro-European/pro-Western attitudes

represent mostly pro-active, pressing, and conscious choice for Ukrainians, while pro-Soviet sentiments and Soviet self-identification are more rigid elements of mental representations, which could be considered more as a spiritual habit, or just a statement of the fact that Ukraine was a part of the Soviet Union. Wilson (2002) conceptualised so called 'soft Soviets' in Ukraine as people that possess a residual attachment to many of the key myths and symbols of the Soviet state and society; the Soviet legacy has some ambiguous relation to their identity, but cannot be said to constitute it in full.

The relationship between travel abroad experience and geopolitical preferences is similar in all three studied cities of south-eastern Ukraine. Certain differences are observed indicating that each city follows somewhat specific trajectory that may be explained by different institutional, economic and cultural background. That means that probable effects of travel abroad are not necessarily uniform in their nature and strength across the country.

The empirical findings of this paper suggest that travel experience is substantially interrelated with geopolitical and cultural preferences of Ukrainians, and direct causality here should be supposed at least to the certain extent. In view of this, migration policy should be considered as an effective tool for the EU to improve attitudes towards the European project in Ukraine, as well as the other neighbouring countries, including those recently taking course on the integration with EU. In particular, visa-free regime between Ukraine and the EU, adopted in 2017, plays extremely important role for Ukraine's geopolitical and cultural integration with EU and, speaking broadly, the West. Consequently, recent massive run-out of Ukrainians to the EU in the result of the Russian invasion, being undoubtedly a tragic event, creates a powerful base for dispelling propaganda-driven myths related to geopolitics and culture and, in this way, contributes to institutional and cultural integration of Ukrainian society into European civilisation project in the upcoming years.

Notes

[1] CIS, a Commonwealth of Independent States, established in 1991, includes all post-Soviet states except for the Baltic states, Georgia (withdrew membership in 2008), and Ukraine (formally ended its participation in CIS statutory bodies in 2018).

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