

## Peer Review

# Review of: "Ukrainian Theatre in Exile: A Case Study, Poland"

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## Summary

This article explores Ukrainian theatre in Poland after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, focusing on cultural diplomacy, national identity, and anthropological defense amidst hybrid warfare. Poland, with its shared history of Russian aggression, provided significant support to Ukrainian artists, enabling them to preserve cultural identity and counter Russian narratives. Polish institutions like the Staromiejski Dom Kultury and Adam Mickiewicz Institute offered scholarships and residencies, allowing Ukrainian refugees, particularly women, to create works reflecting wartime experiences. Productions such as *Life in Case of War* demonstrate this partnership, fostering cultural exchange and resilience. The article highlights Russia's anthropological aggression—manipulating culture to destabilize nations—and theatre's role as anthropological defense. Ukrainian theatre in Poland serves as a tool for cultural preservation and collective identity while navigating the challenges of integration into Poland's theatre scene and addressing historical tensions. Despite gaining attention, Ukrainian theatre remains marginal in Poland's mainstream, as some directors hesitate to embrace Ukrainian works while continuing to stage the Russian repertoire. The article questions whether Ukrainian theatre will integrate, remain a diaspora phenomenon, or develop as a hybrid cultural space.

## Contributions

The main contribution of this article lies in its successful attempt to showcase the diverse activities of Ukrainian theatre activists in Poland. The article highlights both the successes and challenges of promoting Ukrainian culture and theatre in Poland, particularly following the full-scale Russian invasion. By documenting specific individuals and their initiatives, the article provides a valuable foundation for future researchers interested in this rich and layered period of mutual influence. The concepts of anthropological aggression and defense introduced in the article are especially significant and timely, as they shed light on strategies used by Russia to undermine cultural and social stability—techniques that some Western countries are only beginning to understand.

Another key aspect discussed in the article's conclusion is the categorization of different forms of collaboration and involvement between Ukrainian theatre professionals and Polish theatre institutions. This framework is critical for making sense of the complex and evolving theatre production scene, offering insights into how these partnerships have shaped cultural exchange and resilience during a time of crisis. This categorization not only helps clarify the dynamics at play but also serves as a valuable tool for examining future developments in Ukrainian-Polish theatrical cooperation.

## Areas of Improvement

Occasionally, the authors veer away from the main focus of the article. While the discussion of NATO's hybrid aggression—specifically its omission of cultural considerations—is significant, it appears less directly connected to the presence and work of Ukrainian theatre in Poland. The primary strength of the article lies in its exploration of the interplay between established and activist theatre and how these efforts are integrating into the Polish theatre scene. Cultural diplomacy and anthropological defense are valuable frameworks for explaining and analyzing these dynamics. However, a deeper focus on the relationship between Poland and Ukraine, particularly their differing understandings of history shaped by Russian and Soviet “divide and conquer” policies, might better serve the discussion if paired with a detailed exploration of the theatrical traditions of both countries and their similarities and differences.

Another important point that warrants further examination is the performance of Russian historical repertoire, such as Chekhov, by Polish theatres. A more nuanced approach to this topic, or a reflection on how staging Russian plays relates to the presence of Ukrainian activist and contemporary theatre in Poland, could add depth to the analysis. Additionally, cultural diplomacy, while mentioned, deserves greater emphasis earlier in the article to frame the discussion effectively. Elaborating on this concept and its role in facilitating the integration and promotion of Ukrainian theatre in Poland would strengthen the article’s argument and provide a clearer foundation for subsequent analysis.

## **Declarations**

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.