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A conceptual model of national resilience: from colonial violence to cultural resistance

Introduction

The theoretical construct “national resilience”, which has become an increasingly important tool for modelling how individuals and social systems respond to crises, has various interpretations in contemporary literature. Existing research on Ukrainian resilience emphasizes civic mobilization and social activism, identity, values,

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institutional and structural dimensions (Kudlenko, 2023; Rabinovych et al., 2024; Zlobina, 2024; Kutsenko, 2025). In general, national, or societal resilience is understood as “a multifaceted concept that reflects a society’s ability to manage, adapt, and transform when faced with challenges” (Gajauskaitė, 2026, p. 3).

Recent studies on societies exposed to military conflict and war, including the growing body of research on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have highlighted that resilience “is not a static quality of society but is a dynamic process of redefining identity, institutional functionality, and everyday social practices in response to extraordinary challenges” (Kutsenko, 2025, p. 2).

Many authors tend to offer “a comprehensive” approach to national resilience focusing on “the cumulative effect of the interaction between society’s resilience components... through the prism of the resilience of complex social system’s elements” (Reznikova & Korniiievskiy, 2024, pp. 113, 115). Dembitskyi (2025) constructs a model of national resilience across societal configurations as patterns of response to challenges and threats of national scale (reactive, interactive, proactive) at three levels: individual, institutional self-organization, and state institutionalization. Kutsenko (2025), drawing on Bouchard, Bourbeau, Lührmann, Merkel and other scholars, identifies three fundamental dimensions of resilience, namely institutional, socio-cultural and civic mobilization. Gajauskaitė (2026) distinguishes between designed (state-driven) resilience and learned (community-based) resilience. On the other hand, Kimhi et al. (2023) measure societal, community and individual resilience separately.

These and other contributions clearly indicate that national (societal) resilience is a multilayered phenomenon which comprises institutional, cultural, and psychological aspects and has various attributes such as decentralized governance, polycentric and horizontal cooperation, self-organization, volunteering and civic engagement, collective identity, social networks and social cohesion, symbolic and digital practices. Despite these advances, there is still a question: how does societal resilience actually emerge from these heterogeneous factors and practices? Existing research has identified numerous components and manifestations of resilience. Yet, they are often examined within different theoretical traditions and explained ad hoc. Therefore, we know considerably more about those components and manifestations of resilience than about the processes through which they become mutually reinforcing and generate resilient outcomes.

This problem is particularly evident in the case of Ukraine. Research has convincingly demonstrated that Ukrainian society has a substantial capacity for resilience, coordination, and collective action. However, the literature provides a less credible explanation of the origin of such a capacity and how it can be activated and maintained under conditions of prolonged violence. For example, the existence of a strong national identity does not by itself explain when identity produces collective action; decentralized institutions do not automatically generate cooperation; and cultural or digital resistance does not necessarily produce durable social cohesion.

Notably, scholarship which is focused on the case of Ukraine inclines to consider national resilience as a *capacity* whether this is an institutional capacity “to function despite extreme disruptions”, “the capacity of society to preserve” identity and social cohesion, or individual and group capacity “to self-organize, adapt, and innovate” (Kutsenko, 2025, p. 2). Moreover, this capacity is somehow predetermined. For

example, it is often postulated that “capacity for self-organization, self-help, and self-management is traditionally inherent in the Ukrainian society, it is characterized by social cohesion and demonstrates the potential for strengthening societal resilience” (Reznikova & Korniiievskiy, 2024, p. 128). Likewise, another widespread claim is that “Ukraine’s resilience is rooted in its long struggle for sovereignty and identity... Ukraine’s history has fostered a societal capacity for adaptation, resistance, and transformation” (Kutsenko, 2025, p. 2).

While these assumptions may be valid, a generative mechanism through which resilience is produced is not presented explicitly. However, scholarship suggests that resilience cannot be adequately explained as a property of individuals, institutions, or communities in isolation. Rather, it emerges from interactions among social actors, institutions, meanings and cultural practices (Dembitskyi, 2025). The literature remains fragmented across these different components and lacks specific analysis of the latter. In particular, there is limited attention to the possibility that cultural resistance may constitute not merely an expression of resilience, but a generative mechanism through which resilience is produced.

This gap also raises a broader conceptual question extending beyond the case of Ukraine. Cultural practices may enable individuals and groups to interpret adversity and dominant meanings, maintain collective identities and solidarity as well as mobilize collective action. Yet, there is limited systematic conceptualization of whether and through what mechanisms cultural resistance can transform experiences of violence and domination into forms of collective agency and adaptive capacity.

Thus, the article **aims** at a systematic review of the various approaches towards the resilience of Ukrainian society during a full-scale Russian invasion and at proposing an integrated conceptual model of national resilience.

Research Questions and Methods

Since there are different theoretical and empirical definitions of resilience, the existing conceptualizations, ostensibly, have limits in their application focusing on a certain aspect of the phenomenon. However, instead of criticizing these definitions by simply pointing out their limitations and proposing an alternative definition of resilience, we pursue the goal of establish links between them. Finding connections between different approaches not just broadens a theoretical horizon in general but also allows us to sketch the emergence of resilience in the context of multiple factors.

The paper therefore addresses two interrelated **research questions**.

First, what links between different approaches to societal resilience can be identified within recent scholarship in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

Second, through what generative mechanisms can cultural resistance contribute to the emergence of societal resilience, particularly in societies which experience violence and war?

In order to achieve the aim, we apply a method of systematic review and conceptual modelling to map links of societal resilience with agency, cultural resistance and violence. On this basis, the paper develops a preliminary conceptual model of resilience as a response and outcome of cultural and symbolic violence.

Our contribution is therefore twofold:

- bringing together parts of existing scholarship on societal resilience, agency, cultural resistance and violence which predominately have evolved within separate strands;

- developing a novel conceptual model which demonstrates a role of violence and cultural resistance in a generative mechanism through which societies can transform experiences of domination and adversity into collective agency and societal resilience.

The proposed model is preliminary and intended to provide a basis for further theoretical development and empirical testing across different contexts, with Ukraine serving as a particularly important case of resilience under prolonged and extreme violence due to Russian aggression and imperial policy.

Conceptualizations and sources of societal resilience: Systematic review

A key question that lies at the bottom of different conceptualizations of societal resilience is: what actually makes a particular society resilient? According to the perceived sources of resilience in Ukrainian society there are three main approaches in the literature.

From the perspective of the ***institutional approach***, the primary origin of resilience is seen in the ability of institutions to function and coordinate responses under pressure (Alshamy et al., 2024; Keudel & Huss, 2024; Rabinovych et al., 2024; Kudlenko, 2023). The ***social-psychological approach*** emphasizes the capacity to adapt, cope with trauma and maintain social relationships, trust, hope and cohesion (Kimhi et al., 2023; Zlobina, 2024; Gajauskaitė, 2026). The ***cultural-values approach*** locates resilience in shared values, national identity, and cultural practices (Kudlenko, 2023; Kurnyshova, 2023; Kipnis et al., 2025; Monastyrskia et al., 2026; Leitlande, 2026).

While these approaches are not mutually exclusive, they illuminate specific aspects of resilience.

Admittedly, the ***institutional approach*** underlines the importance of institutions. Hence, resilience depends on whether institutions can maintain essential services, mobilize resources, coordinate and adapt organizational arrangements when conventional modes of governance are disrupted.

Ukrainian experience has provided particularly strong evidence for this argument. Scholars examine the resilience of Ukrainian territorial communities (hromadas) during Russian full-scale invasion and explicitly conceptualize resilience in terms of their “ability... to withstand the threats to institutional stability stemming from the invasion” (Rabinovych et al., 2024, p. 1121). Their analysis finds significant relationships between hromadas’ resilience and geographical, politico-administrative, and economic characteristics associated with decentralization reform in Ukraine. Importantly, the authors argue that the reform strengthened hromadas’ competences as well as their financial and technical capacities, thereby creating institutional resources that could be mobilized during wartime; decentralization enhanced local communities’ capacity and contributed to national consolidation (Salnikova et al., 2022).

Keudel and Huss (2024) develop a related argument through the concept of polycentric governance. Rather than viewing resilience as the capacity of a centralized

state to impose a coordinated response, they emphasize the ability of multiple centres of decision-making to operate simultaneously and coordinate horizontally. They maintain that Ukraine's decentralized response to the crisis illustrates how local governments, civil society, businesses, and other actors can contribute to crisis management. Institutional resilience therefore derives not only from the strength of institutions but also from polycentric mechanisms while "interpersonal communication in a crisis" plays a critical role (Keudel & Huss, 2024, p. 32).

Alshamy et al. (2024) extend this argument from governance to defence. Their analysis of Ukrainian resistance identifies four benefits of polycentric defence: local knowledge, experimentation and flexibility, reduced vulnerability to single points of failure, and broader participation in the war effort. The significance of this argument extends beyond military organization. Polycentricity creates opportunities for decentralized actors to respond to rapidly changing circumstances without waiting for direction from a single centre. Hence, institutional resilience rests not just on the strength of institutions but flexibility, experimentation, and autonomous actions.

Institutional resilience at the local level has also been sustained from outside, although the direction of initiative matters for how such support should be understood. N. Matiaszczyk finds that almost 90% of Ukrainian cities receive support from foreign partners and, more tellingly, that two-thirds are engaged in forging new partnerships, which highlights "the noteworthy role of cities in international relations as actors in times of war" (Matiaszczyk, 2025, p. 108). Over half of these new partnerships already include plans for post-war reconstruction, so that cities appear not as the objects of such planning but as bodies which "actively aspire to assume crucial roles as actors in the reconstruction process" (Matiaszczyk, 2025, p. 112). Polycentricity therefore extends beyond the national arena, with hromadas and cities acting as nodes of transnational cooperation in their own right. As O. Kutsenko observes, the capacity of societies to endure and rebuild "depends on transnational networks of assistance, knowledge-sharing, and adaptive strategies, but also on the agency of communities to take ownership of their recovery" (Kutsenko, 2025, p. 7).

Although the institutional approach emphasizes the role of institutions, communication, decentralization and polycentricity in Ukraine's resilience, it still doesn't fully explain how institutional capacity is transforming into collective resilience and why and by which means actors mobilize that capacity.

In contrast, the **social-psychological approach** highlights actors' motivations, identities, group interrelations and other psychological and interactive characteristics. These particular characteristics enable individuals and communities to cope with adversity and maintain collective functioning. The emergence of resilience is associated with adaptation to trauma, social support, collective identity, trust, social ties, solidarity, and cohesion.

Based on a representative sample of 1,001 Ukrainian residents during a full-scale invasion Kimhi et al. (2023) examine resilience together with other psychological factors, including hope, wellbeing, distress, perceived threats, and sense of danger. Their findings are particularly significant because they suggest that severe adversity does not necessarily translate into declining resilience. The authors conclude that "a

war that threatens the independence and sovereignty of a country may... enhance the societal resilience and hope of the population under risk, despite a lower sense of wellbeing and higher levels of distress, sense of danger, and perceived threats” (Kimhi et al., 2023, p. 7). This finding suggests that resilience can actually coexist with trauma and distress.

Notably, Zlobina (2024) making the collective dimension more explicit came to the same conclusion: a threat to the independence and sovereignty of the country raised the collective resilience of the population (p. 158). She, however, went further and identified its principal source, for “the main factor supporting collective resilience was the intensification of experiencing the national-civic identity, which is based on a sense of belonging to the community” (Zlobina, 2024, p. 164). Thus, resilience in this perspective is not reducible to individual psychological endurance. It depends on relationships and shared sentiments that enable individuals to remain connected to a wider collective during prolonged adversity.

This relational understanding is also reflected in the broader resilience scholarship. Korosteleva and Petrova (2022), drawing on complexity theory, suggest that resilience should be considered through relationships between communities and their environments rather than treating communities as isolated units. Their approach emphasizes local interaction and the capacity of communities to respond to complex change and overcome difficulties (see also (Korosteleva, 2025)).

Similarly in a more recent publication Gajauskaitė (2026) distinguishes a form of “learned” resilience which is based on community trust, memory, and adaptability. Horizontal cooperation, volunteerism, and autonomous self-organization are identified as key indicators of societal resilience, particularly under existential threat.

The social-psychological approach, therefore, shifts attention from institutions to the capability of collective adaptation, in particular on the community level. Its principal insight is that the resilience of Ukrainian society heavily depends on identity, trust and mutual support. Yet, this approach is less explicit about why exactly some threats such as the one to a country’s independence can produce resilient outcomes.

The **cultural-values approach** seems to be better equipped to address such a question, for within this strand of scholarship researchers directly aim to explain motivation, purpose and normative meaning of resilience. Unlike previous approaches, it is generally assumed that resilience cannot be reduced to institutional capacity, versatility of communities and psychological endurance because societies also require collectively meaningful reasons to endure adversity, mobilize resources and resist existential threats.

Kudlenko (2023) provides an important example in the Ukrainian context. Instead of attributing Ukraine’s resilience to political leadership, she highlights the value of freedom, the decentralized nature of Ukrainian society and vision of a democratic future and membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions (Kudlenko, 2023, p. 515). Resilience is, therefore, connected to the capacity of society to define what is worth defending and maintain a collective sense of national agency.

Kurnyshova (2023) attempts to bridge different approaches considering practices of resilience in various spheres – societal, institutional, communicational and local. Her argument is centered around the concept of normative agency which is discursively

built through translating practices of resilience “into specific policies aimed at prospective integration with European and Euro-Atlantic normative spaces” (Kurnyshova, 2023, p. 82). Consequently, she argues that resilience is grounded in “communicative domain” as well as in normative commitments that require certain institutional practices (democratic governance, the rule of law, local self-government).

Adding an important perspective, Bossuyt et al. (2024) bring postcolonial lens to the conceptualization of Ukraine’s resilience. They demonstrate how Ukrainian actors actively contest subordinate positions regarding Russia and the European Union. This perspective moves the analysis from resilience as endurance and efficiency toward resilience as assertion and generation of meanings.

Cultural practices and symbolic resistance in particular have gained significant attention in recent scholarship on Ukraine’s resilience. Kipnis et al. (2025) study of war-related marketing activism in Ukraine finds “three categories of meanings conveyed” through cultural practices which are “(1) mitigating symbolic threat; (2) affirming connectedness and common identity; and (3) facilitating collective resistance” (p. 61). They subsequently connect these meanings to community resilience trajectories of survival, creativity, growth and recovery. This is especially important, for this research provides solid empirical evidence that symbolic practices may be associated with resilience not simply by reflecting collective solidarity but rather by generating meanings through which communities interpret and respond to war.

On the other hand, as Leitlande (2026) points out, national identity remains at the centre of the resilience of Ukrainian society. However, her argument moves the cultural-values approach beyond treating identity merely as a latent resource. National identity provides an interpretive framework through which individuals understand the meaning of the threat and their relationship to the state. Thus, this contribution suggests that cultural values and shared meanings can potentially convert into collective action.

Similarly, Monastyrska et al. (2026) examine symbolic resistance as an active practice rather than merely a pre-existing cultural resource. Their analysis of memes during the war in Ukraine shows that symbolic resistance can debunk propaganda, expose false narratives and mobilize civic activism. Therefore, the production and circulation of cultural meanings become a form of action rather than simply being a part of national identity.

As a result, our analysis indicates that, although three approaches identify different sources and components of resilience, they all share the common ground and converge around social **agency**. Institutional capacity, social-psychological resources and cultural values do not produce resilient outcomes automatically. They become consequential when individuals and collective actors are able and willing to act upon them. We share the notion that national resilience is rooted in the agency of the Subject especially under conditions of existential threat. As Bossuyt et al. (2024) put it, [Ukrainian] “agency has emerged from a state of ontological anxiety... the need to fight for the survival of the Self... uniting the country around a new asserted Self” (p. 644).

Importantly, agency may be a potential link between the resources detected by all three approaches and the emergence of resilience as a collective outcome. This

primarily happens at a local level as “vernacular resilience” (Huber et al., 2025, p. 32) and as an evolving, non-linear sequence of societal interactions (figurations) that shift rapidly during crises (Dembitskyi, 2025).

However, the existing three approaches to study the resilience of Ukrainian society commonly treat this phenomenon as a capacity and an antecedent resource while paying less attention to recursion of the process and a resilient outcome. This results in a missing generative mechanism which can explain how a society exposed to extreme and prolonged violence transforms institutional capacity, collective identity and social agency into sustained resilience. All approaches identify important sources of resilience, but none adequately captures the interplay between capacity, process and outcome. We are going to address this issue in the next sections of the paper.

Violence, legitimacy and misrecognition: why cultural resistance mediates

The three approaches converge around agency; yet agency does not explain itself. Before the model can be presented, a prior question has to be answered: why should cultural resistance, rather than institutional adaptation or psychological endurance, occupy the mediating position between the resources identified by the three approaches and resilient outcomes? Our answer does not rest on the empirical prominence of cultural practices in Ukraine. It follows from the structure of the violence to which those practices respond.

Galtung (1990) distinguishes three forms of violence (direct, structural and cultural) and assigns to the last of them a specific function. Cultural violence is defined as “any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form” (Galtung, p. 291), and its work is to make “direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong” (Galtung, p. 291). Cultural violence, in other words, does not itself injure. It renders injury acceptable, and in so doing sustains the other two forms.

Importantly, J. Galtung also specifies a direction. “Generally, a causal flow from cultural via structural to direct violence can be identified. The culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them... at all” (Galtung, 1990, p. 295). Structural violence is meanwhile the least visible of the three, for it “is silent, it does not show – it is essentially static, it is the tranquil waters” (Galtung, 1969, p. 173), and it is maintained by four mechanisms operating in pairs: “penetration... combined with segmentation” obstructs the formation of group consciousness, while “marginalization... combined with fragmentation” obstructs mobilization (Galtung, 1990, p. 294). This applies directly to the pre-war policies of russification in language, education and historical memory, which operated not through discrete acts of coercion but through the normalized erosion of the conditions under which Ukrainian identity could be reproduced.

P. Bourdieu specifies the micro-foundation that J. Galtung leaves implicit. If the social world “tends to be perceived as evident”, this is because “the dispositions of agents, their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the

social world, are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world”, so that “agents, even the most disadvantaged ones, tend to perceive the world as natural and to accept it much more readily than one might imagine” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18). Symbolic domination is effective precisely because the dominated share the categories of perception by which they are dominated. Moreover, it induces misrecognition, when the oppressed believe that the dominant order acts in their best interests.

In the colonial case this takes the form of what we refer to as a colonial habitus: a system of dispositions formed under, and adjusted to, a symbolic order in which the language, culture and narratives of the metropole occupy the position of the legitimate standard. The term is ours rather than Bourdieu’s, but it follows from his account, and it indicates why formal independence does not by itself dissolve such a habitus: the symbolic order which produced those dispositions outlived the political structure of the empire. So understood, a colonial habitus is not a deficiency of particular individuals but a property of that order, reproduced pre-reflectively in the unremarkable choices of language, media and cultural consumption. Because it operates below the level of declared position, it is observable where declarations are least monitored, in default rather than deliberated choices, which addresses the difficulty Burdin and Salnikova (2026) identify in distinguishing administrative compliance from deliberate choice. The same account also indicates where such domination is vulnerable, for symbolic power is “the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society” (Burdin & Salnikova, 2026, p. 23) and is contested wherever the legitimate vision of social divisions is contested.

The Russian imperial case gives this configuration a specific form. As Mälksoo (2023) observes, mainstream postcolonial studies have addressed “the political construction of racial hierarchies along the colour lines, not among the white-skinned people themselves” (p. 474). In Moore’s classification, which she discusses, Ukraine belongs to a “dynastic” type of colonization in which local elites were assimilated into the imperial project and colonial relations were ethnicized, so that “local language and culture became a stigma, a sign of backwardness... and inferiority vis-à-vis the superior Russophones” (Mälksoo, 2023, pp. 474–475). Where domination operated through cultural assimilation rather than a visible racial boundary, the symbolic sphere is not one arena of resistance among several. It is the arena in which the domination was constituted.

Taken together, these two accounts specify what resistance has to undo. What must be defeated first is not the violence itself but its legitimacy, and legitimacy resides in the symbolic sphere. If the causal flow runs from cultural through structural to direct violence, its reversal has to begin at the cultural level. Hence the central proposition of our model: cultural resistance is logically prior to institutional and behavioural forms of resistance, because domination which is perceived as natural cannot be mobilized against. Delegitimation is not one expression of resilience among others; it is the condition under which the other expressions become possible. This is also why the mediator is cultural rather than institutional: institutions capable of sustaining collective action can be built only by actors who already recognize themselves as entitled to build them. In terms of Galtung’s four mechanisms, cultural resistance is

their reversal: practices which restore group consciousness undo penetration and segmentation, while practices which render collective action thinkable and coordinated undo marginalization and fragmentation.

Understood in this way, cultural resistance is not a declared political position but a shift in what counts as culturally legitimate. Burdin and Salnikova (2026) define it as a socially conditioned way of reinterpreting cultural hierarchies – visible not in individual acts, but in shifts in what is seen as acceptable and normative (p. 94). Skvirskaja (2025) describes the same operation as generative, since decolonization involves “not only the replacement of colonial symbols... but, more fundamentally, the creation of one’s own models, freed from colonial knowledge” (p. 128).

In the case of Ukraine, prolonged violence has a colonial origin. When in the process of claiming agency, a political nation achieves full awareness of the true nature of imperial pressure, then this nation gets rid of misrecognition and “colonial habitus”, which embraces imperial narratives, practices of domination, discrimination and asymmetry as an established norm.

Hence, Ukraine’s resilience is rooted in decolonization practices, which, in turn, constitute responses to distinct levels of violence. The argument can therefore be set out level by level, as summarized in Table.

Table

Levels of violence, decolonial practice
and manifestations of societal resilience

Level of violence (Galtung)	Colonial manifestation	Decolonial practice (path towards “positive peace”)	Everyday practice of decolonization (cultural resistance)	Manifestation of societal resilience
Cultural	Symbolic violence: the language, culture and narratives of the empire are perceived as the standard and the prestigious (colonial habitus). Narratives of inferiority; imperial markers in public space; consumption of imperial cultural production.	Deconstruction of imperial myths: legitimization and recovery of one’s own historical memory, language, and culture as self-sufficient parts of the global world.	Collective memory of oppression; recognition of imperial domination; identity work; deliberate change of language habits; consumption of sovereign cultural production; refusal of media imports from the metropole; media literacy.	Cognitive resilience: immunity to propaganda; maintenance of identity; clear distinction between one’s own interests and those imposed from outside.
Structural	Institutional dependence: vertical ties; absence of agency and of symbolic capital (“nothing depends on me”).	Building sovereign fields (autonomy): formation of independent institutions; development of horizontal ties and self-government in communities.	Trust in national and local institutions, in those around one and in local small business; participation in grassroots civic initiatives; local activism.	Institutional autonomy: the ability of the system to function when central authority is disrupted.

Level of violence (Galtung)	Colonial manifestation	Decolonial practice (path towards “positive peace”)	Everyday practice of decolonization (cultural resistance)	Manifestation of societal resilience
Direct	Aggression, repression, and terror: direct use of force to suppress subjectivity; physical destruction and intimidation; destruction of infrastructure; deportation.	Behavioural defence and solidarity; active physical, material, and intellectual resistance to the aggressor; defence of freedom and human rights.	Systematic volunteering and regular donations; routines of mutual aid; training in first aid and civil defence.	Behavioural resilience: readiness for prolonged resistance and for the defence of one’s values; rapid recovery; refusal to capitulate.

Two qualifications follow. The levels distinguished in Table are analytically separate but empirically entangled, and the reversal of a mechanism at one level does not guarantee its reversal at another. Nor is the process consensual: Skvirskaja (2025) shows that decisions on monuments and cultural heritage in Odesa produce polarized interpretations within the community itself, so that cultural resistance is also an arena of contestation over meaning and not solely a response to an external adversary. These considerations specify conditions on the operation of the mechanism rather than objections to it.

Societal resilience: a dynamic and recursive conceptual model

As demonstrated above, beyond the problem of identifying resilience capacity and its resources a major theoretical difficulty is explaining how they become consequential when a society encounters a disruption or challenge.

We conceptualize national resilience as an emergent property of a complex adaptive system to maintain integrity through structural reconfiguration in response to existential threats. A preliminary conceptual model that we propose represents resilience not simply as a capacity of a society, communities, groups or individuals but as a manifold of capacities, agency and emerging outcomes generated through the interaction between *existing characteristics* of institutions, culture and social agents, the *nature of the challenge* (input disruption) and *collective response* of those *agents to the challenge* (output resilience).

This proposition is consistent with an important and very recent development in scholarship. Halekotte et al. (2025) distinguish three understandings of resilience as capacity, process, and outcome and highlight the importance of the relationship between “capacities and processes, and on how they affect the outcome of a disruptive event” (p. 2). Although they ultimately argue that resilience is most usefully understood as a capacity, their framework demonstrates analytically that capacity, process, and outcome are distinct elements of resilience. Drawing on this insight, our model focuses specifically on *how input disruptions are transformed via cultural resistance into resilient outcomes when a society is exposed to violence*:

Challenge → Resilient collective response (including cultural resistance) → Societal resilience as an outcome → Challenge mitigation and transformation.

The sequence above states the relation between a disruption and a resilient outcome, but not what is recursive about it. The recursion lies within the mediating term. Cultural resistance delegitimizes the dominant order; delegitimation makes collective action conceivable and lowers its cost; action, where it succeeds, supplies further evidence against that order; the habitus adjusted to it is displaced to that extent; and the threshold for the next action falls again:

*Delegitimation of the dominant order → collective action becomes
conceivable → action and its outcomes → displacement of the habitus
adjusted to that order → lower threshold for further action →
delegitimation ...*

Resilience is therefore not the terminus of the sequence but a property which the loop generates and regenerates. This distinguishes the model from accounts in which resilience is a stock of capacity drawn down under stress, which prolonged and intensifying adversity should deplete. The findings reported above point the other way: Kimhi et al. (2023) find that a war threatening independence and sovereignty may “enhance the societal resilience” even as distress and perceived threat rise (p. 7), and Zlobina (2024) independently reports a rise in collective resilience driven by intensified national identity. The co-occurrence of rising resilience with rising distress is anomalous under a stock account and expected under a generative one.

A generative loop of this kind is not self-sustaining without limit, and the model does not claim that adversity strengthens societies indefinitely. The loop is open: it draws on material and institutional resources, including the external support discussed above, and it can stall or reverse where action fails repeatedly, where losses outrun the capacity to absorb them, or where the meanings which sustain it cease to be shared. The claim is narrower: where the loop operates, resilience is produced rather than expended.

The *complex adaptive systems* perspective also helps explain how resilience at the societal level can emerge from activities occurring at much lower levels.

Conflict-affected communities can be understood as complex adaptive systems in which numerous actors – citizens, families, local governments, civil-society organizations, businesses, volunteer groups, informal networks, and other organizations – interact and adapt to changing conditions. In such systems, resilience is not necessarily produced by a single institution directing the response. Rather, it can emerge through self-organization, whereby actors independently initiate, coordinate, and modify their activities in response to changing circumstances.

Carl (2019) and de Coning et al. (2023) argue that there is a relationship loop in self-organization and adaptation. The capacity of a community to reorganize relationships, roles, and resources in response to disruption can itself strengthen social cohesion and adaptive capacity. The critical implication is that resilience can be generated through interaction, rather than simply delivered by pre-existing institutions or identities.

Besides, Juncos and Joseph (2020) and Mac Ginty (2014) emphasize the importance of distributed agency and local practices for resilience. Where responsibilities and roles are distributed among a wide range of participants rather than concentrated in

political or institutional elites, the system can draw upon a greater diversity of knowledge, resources, and adaptive responses. This suggests that societal resilience may be bottom-up and emergent.

This leaves the question of how resilience at the level of communities becomes resilience at the level of a society. Cultural resistance is the mediator here as well, for a reason specific to it: its products circulate. A local act of self-organization does not travel, but the meanings through which it is expressed do, and they supply dispersed actors with a common frame in which their separate actions read as instances of a single effort. Monastyrskaya et al. (2026) describe this function precisely when they characterize the meme communities of the war as a “social glue”, fostering “trust, hope, and reciprocity among those confronting a shared threat” (p. 238); Kipnis et al. (2025) document the same operation in the reappropriation of shared symbols as signifiers of a civic, pan-Ukrainian belonging. Aggregation of this kind requires no coordinating centre, which is what the complex adaptive systems perspective predicts. Nor is it one-directional: state institutions codify what grassroots practice has produced and return it as a norm, as Olzacka (2024) shows for the reformed cultural institutions which “facilitated forming a greater self-awareness of Ukrainians as a political community” (p. 141), and as Terentyeva (2025) shows for the state-driven institutionalization of decolonization through memory politics after 2022.

Dembitskyi (2025) approaches the same question figuratively: national resilience aggregates individual “decision-actions”, and emergent processes “encourage some individual strategies” more than others (p. 31), without specifying what encourages. The loop above is a candidate answer – delegitimation through cultural resistance makes a strategy thinkable, and circulating cultural products shift collective action.

Conclusions, Future Directions, and Limitations

In this paper we systematically reviewed scholarship on the resilience of Ukrainian society during the full-scale war and distinguished three conceptual approaches which emphasize different sources of resilience. Institutional approach, which accentuates capacity of institutions to function under pressure, social-psychological approach, which is concerned with capability of individual and collective adaptation as well as community cohesion and versatility, and cultural-values approach, which locates resilience in cultural practices and meaningful reasons to endure adversity and resist existential threats, are among these theoretical frameworks.

Despite their differences we have established the links between the existing approaches, for all of them converge around social agency which can transmute all types of resources and capabilities into societal resilience. Simultaneously, we also detected that the current literature on Ukraine’s resilience disproportionately regards it as a prior capacity while doesn’t fully capture the interplay between capacity, process and resilient outcomes.

Having brought together parts of existing scholarship on societal resilience, agency, cultural resistance and violence, we propose a dynamic and recursive conceptual

model which demonstrates a role of violence and cultural resistance in a generative mechanism of societal resilience. Through this specific mechanism societies can transform their capacity, experiences of oppression and adversity into collective agency and resilient outcomes.

Although a broader scholarship comprises these three resilience understandings as capacity, process, and outcome, which were distinguished explicitly only in a recent paper (Halekotte et al., 2025), these dimensions have usually been conceptualized and applied separately and not within a unified framework.

As there remains limited theoretical integration of all three dimensions into a single generative model, no attempt at combining them has been made in the context of the resilience of Ukrainian society either before or during the full-scale Russian invasion. Hence, our main contribution is to integrate Galtung's multidimensional conceptualization of violence with theories of cultural resistance, agency, and complex adaptive systems in a generative model that reveals how cultural resistance can transform experiences of violence into collective agency and lead to societal resilience.

The proposed model opens several directions for empirical research and is formulated in a way that makes it fully falsifiable. First, if cultural resistance mediates in the way proposed here, its effect should depend on whether practices are experienced by participants as chosen rather than administratively required. Where a language or naming practice reflects compliance alone, no resilient outcome should follow. This is precisely the distinction which Burdin and Salnikova (2026) identify as the central methodological difficulty in this field, and the model makes it consequential rather than merely inconvenient.

Second, the mediating effect should depend on the degree to which the meaning of a practice is shared within a community. Where a symbolic act is internally contested, as Skvirskaja (2025) documents for wartime Odesa, the model predicts polarization rather than cohesion, and therefore the same practice produces opposite outcomes in communities which differ in this respect. It also follows that cultural resistance may reflect identity, belonging and solidarity or actively contribute to their formation, and that the two cases should be empirically distinguishable.

Third, and most restrictively, symbolic practice should convert into resilient outcomes only where it is coupled to at least one behavioural or material practice, such as volunteering, donations or the provision of services. Symbolic conformity decoupled from action should yield declarative identity without resilient outcomes. If declared identification alone were sufficient, the mechanism proposed here would be redundant.

Finally, the strength of the mechanism should vary with the form of violence to which a community is predominantly exposed, and comparative research across Ukrainian communities could examine whether cultural practices, stronger horizontal networks and cooperation between civic and governmental actors produce more sustainable resilient outcomes. Taken together, these expectations offer an empirical test of whether cultural resistance constitutes one of the mechanisms through which local agency becomes societal resilience.

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Концептуальна модель національної стійкості: від колоніального насилення до культурного спротиву

Стаття пропонує аналіз підходів до вивчення стійкості українського суспільства за умов повномасштабного російського вторгнення та розробляє інтегровану концептуальну модель суспільної стійкості. Застосовуючи метод систематичного огляду й концептуального моделювання, автори відображають взаємозв'язки між суспільною стійкістю, агентністю, культурним спротивом і насильством – категоріями, які досі розвивалися переважно в межах окремих дослідницьких напрямів. Аналіз виявляє три основні концептуальні підходи до джерел стійкості українського суспільства: інституційний (спроможність інституцій функціонувати й координувати відповідь під тиском), соціально-психологічний (здатність до адаптації, подолання травми, підтримання довіри та згуртованості), культурно-ціннісний (спільні цінності, національна ідентичність, культурні практики як джерело сенсу опору екзистенційним загрозам). Попри відмінності, усі вони сходяться навколо поняття соціальної агентності як механізму, що конвертує наявні ресурси й можливості в національну стійкість. Головний внесок дослідження – інтеграція багатовимірної концепції структурного насильства Галтунга з теоріями культурного спротиву, агентності та складних адаптивних систем в єдину генеративну модель. Модель демонструє, як суспільства трансформують досвід домінування, насильства й загрози у колективну діяльність і стійкі результати через культурний спротив як центральний генеративний механізм. Це перша спроба поєднати виміри стійкості як спроможності, процесу та результату в одній аналітичній рамці. Запропонована модель має попередній характер і слугує основою для подальшого теоретичного розвитку й емпіричної перевірки в різних контекстах, де Україна є ключовим кейсом для розуміння стійкості за умов екстремального і тривалого насильства.

Ключові слова: суспільна стійкість, культурний спротив, соціальна агентність, насильство, соціальні зміни, Україна

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A conceptual model of national resilience: from colonial violence to cultural resistance

This article analyzes approaches to studying the resilience of Ukrainian society under Russia's full-scale invasion and develops an integrated conceptual model of societal resilience. Using systematic review and conceptual modelling, the authors map interconnections between societal resilience, agency, cultural resistance, and violence – categories that have thus far developed largely within separate strands of research. The analysis identifies three main conceptual approaches to the sources of resilience: the institutional approach (institutions' capacity to function and coordinate responses under pressure), the social-psychological approach (capacity to adapt, cope with trauma, and sustain trust and cohesion), and the cultural-values approach (shared values, national identity, and cultural practices as sources of meaning for resisting existential threats). Despite their differences, all three converge around social agency as the mechanism that converts available resources and opportunities into national resilience. The study's main contribution is integrating Galtung's multidimensional concept of structural violence with theories of cultural resistance, agency, and complex adaptive systems into a single generative model, showing how societies transform experiences of domination, violence, and threats into collective action and resilient outcomes, with cultural resistance as the central generative mechanism. This is a first attempt to combine the dimensions of resilience as capacity, process, and outcome within a single analytical framework. The model is preliminary and serves as a foundation for further theoretical development and empirical testing in diverse contexts, with Ukraine as a key case for understanding resilience under extreme and prolonged violence.

Keywords: societal resilience, cultural resistance, social agency, violence, social change, Ukraine