

# Friendship as a Framework: Emotional Solidarity Among Ukrainians and Lithuanians

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This paper applies Georg Simmel's sociological model of friendship and sociability to examine the relational dynamics between Ukrainian war refugees and Lithuanian hosts. Departing from formal or policy-driven integration models, it emphasises micro-level interactions – trust, sincerity and affect – as crucial indicators of lived inclusion. Drawing on qualitative interviews with Ukrainian youth and Lithuanian aid organisers, the research demonstrates how symbolic boundaries, emotional gaps and informal networks shape integration beyond legal access. Artificially constructed spaces, such as language courses and volunteer programs, can evolve into authentic arenas of emotional support and community when grounded in mutual participation. Simmel's framework reveals how solidarity is co-produced and how sociability, not structure, becomes the key mode of moral incorporation.

**Keywords:** Georg Simmel, Geselligkeit, friendship, Ukrainians, micro-level interactions, Lithuania

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## INTRODUCTION

In times of large-scale displacement and geopolitical upheaval, the ongoing war in Ukraine, refugee integration becomes not only a political or humanitarian question but also a sociological one. Traditional models of integration – typically concerned with legal status (Joppke 2003), economic incorporation (Kymlicka 1996), or cultural assimilation (Gordon 1964) – often overlook the subtle, emotionally textured ways that individuals relate to one another in everyday life (Nowicka, Vertovec 2013; Vertovec 2022; Bourdieu et al. 1999). It is worth noting that the emerging of new diasporas,<sup>1</sup> one might add – especially from the former Soviet territory, provoke attempts to analyse how solidarity and emotional bonds are created and maintained in conditions of migration in different contexts: on the everyday responsibility of care among young migrants (Krivonos 2025), institutional and societal solidarity towards war refugees (Schrooten 2025) and emotional bonds in transnational families (Schwittek et al.

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<sup>1</sup> *Naujausiame Migracijos metraštyje – aktualiausi statistiniai rodikliai. Migracijos departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos vidaus reikalų ministerijos (The Latest Migration Yearbook Contains the Most Relevant Statistical Indicators. Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania).*

2025). In Lithuania, the first works focus on examining structural circumstances and migrant agency (Genys 2025), war ethnography (Šliavaitė 2024) or aspects of labour market integration (Skučienė et al. 2022) are also emerging. As other recent research shows (Duszczuk et al. 2023; Grabowska et al. 2023), the micro-sociological perspective serves productively in explaining hospitality and forms of communion. For this reason, Georg Simmel's ideas offer a powerful lens (Frisby 2003; D'Andrea 2009) to rethink the sociological stakes of refugee–host interaction.

Unlike structural or policy-driven models of integration, Simmel's (Simmel 1911 [2007]) approach focuses on the form and quality of human interaction itself (Frisby 1992). His notion *Geselligkeit*, or sociability, refers to social interactions that are voluntarily entered, emotionally balanced and symbolically equal. Though seemingly apolitical, this framework reveals how the style, distance and boundaries of social life can either foster belonging or entrench exclusion. It allows us to analyse how war refugees and host communities co-construct fragile spaces of togetherness – through language classes, volunteer initiatives, dormitory life, or simple gestures of friendliness, without presuming integration as a completed or even desired goal. Simmel's framework adds a unique analytic precision by showing how solidarity and distance coexist within the same interaction, allowing researchers to unpack the affective and performative dimensions of social ties (Niesbet 2000). Rather than bracketing emotion or formality, it asks: What kind of togetherness is made possible, and under what symbolic conditions?

The goal of the paper is to reconceptualise refugee integration by applying Georg Simmel's micro-sociological theory of sociability (*Geselligkeit*), particularly focusing on the emotional and relational dimensions of refugee–host interactions in the Lithuanian context. Key objectives are the following: to investigate how informal social bonds (e.g. friendship, trust and emotional solidarity) shape the lived experience of Ukrainian war refugees in Lithuania; to compare Lithuanian and Ukrainian perspectives on support provision and reception, analysing everyday interactions through the lens of sociological form; to demonstrate how artificially created spaces (language classes and volunteer settings) can evolve into emotionally meaningful sites of mutual recognition and moral community.

The paper presents a timely and conceptually original contribution to refugee integration studies by foregrounding the emotional and relational dimensions of sociability through a Simmelian lens. In contrast to dominant policy-oriented or structural frameworks, this study highlights how trust, tact and informal friendship dynamics shape the lived experience of refugees in host societies. Its empirical richness, derived from both Ukrainian refugees and Lithuanian aid providers, allows for a nuanced, two-sided understanding of how support is both given and received. The paper adds a critical insight into how historical legacies and cultural codes continue to shape moral inclusion. These aspects make the study highly relevant not only for academic audiences in sociology and migration studies but also for practitioners seeking to humanise and deepen the ethical dimensions of integration work.

However, the research has twofold limitation, first, its conceptual reliance on micro-level interactional analysis allowed the exploration of local emotional experiences but did not captured broader structural factors such as state policies or long-term social change; second, qualitative interviews provided the opportunity to explore symbolic meanings but limited the analysis to a specific time, place and context.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND OPERATIONALISATION OF SIMMELIAN SOCIABILITY

Georg Simmel's sociological reflections on friendship and sociability offer a compelling lens to interpret the micro-dynamics of social integration, especially in contexts of displacement and

forced migration. In his analysis, friendship emerges not simply as a personal relationship, but as a social form with distinctive structural, emotional and ethical features. This theoretical framework can be mobilised to understand how Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania negotiate everyday belonging through the formation of interpersonal bonds, the navigation of intimacy, the creation of networks, the cultivation of trust and the participation in deliberately constructed social spaces.

### **Forms of Friendship: Emotional Function and Social Origin**

Simmel regarded friendship as a voluntary and reciprocal tie, formed outside institutional constraints and rooted in mutual recognition (Wolff 1950). For displaced persons, such as Ukrainian refugees, these friendships are not just emotional anchors – they are survival mechanisms that fill the void left by the rupture of previous social networks. In fragmented modern societies, friendship, as Simmel suggests, acquires heightened significance because it allows for individualised forms of belonging that are neither imposed by institutions nor entirely private (Simmel 2007: 265–266).

The empirical differentiation between Ukrainian-Lithuanian, Ukrainian-Ukrainian and mixed networks speaks directly to the dual function of friendship: providing both cultural continuity and pathways for cross-cultural integration. While intra-ethnic friendships may offer emotional familiarity and shared memory, inter-ethnic friendships provide access to the host society and mitigate feelings of marginalisation. The Simmelian understanding of friendship as an emotionally meaningful but tactfully restrained interaction allows us to grasp how refugees negotiate closeness without overexposure, maintaining dignity while seeking support.

### **Formality vs Intimacy: Sociability and Sincerity**

Simmel's concept of *Geselligkeit* – sociability devoid of utilitarian ends – helps explain how individuals build emotionally resonant but non-instrumental connections (Simmel 2007: 261). This is particularly relevant to the contrast between formal and informal interactions in refugee experiences. Formal relationships with institutional actors (e.g. social workers and integration officers) sometimes remain superficial, governed by bureaucratic scripts and hierarchical roles. By contrast, informal friendships and spontaneous encounters allow for sincerity, trust and mutual emotional investment.

The perceived sincerity of these interactions, whether one feels truly accepted or merely tolerated, becomes crucial for psychological well-being. Simmel's insight that true friendship requires a balance between distance and closeness offers a useful framework for analysing emotional boundaries in host-refugee relations. While too much formal distance risks alienation, too much forced intimacy may feel intrusive. Refugees thus carefully navigate these boundaries, often preferring spaces where genuine sociability can occur without the pressure of institutional expectation.

### **Structure vs Networks: From Bureaucracy to Belonging**

Modern society, according to Simmel, increasingly relies on rigid structural arrangements that constrain the spontaneity of human interaction (Ritzer 2011). Refugees encounter this in their engagement with integration systems – legal aid, housing services, or employment programs – which are necessary but emotionally sterile. In contrast, informal networks based on shared interests, hobbies, or cultural affinities allow for more organic and emotionally fulfilling relationships.

The empirical distinction between formal structures (like schools or health care) and informal networks (such as friendship circles or diaspora communities) mirrors Simmel's dichotomy between imposed order and voluntary association. Moreover, the density of these networks, whether they are cohesive and supportive or dispersed and weak, profoundly affects integration outcomes. Simmel's work implies that the more voluntary and emotionally resonant the network, the more likely it is to foster solidarity, moral development and reciprocal understanding (Levine 1989).

### **Trust and Solidarity: Foundations of Integration**

Trust, for Simmel, is an essential precondition for all social interaction, particularly in non-institutional settings (Simmel 2007: 263). In the refugee context, trust is not only interpersonal but also symbolic – it reflects one's faith in the broader social order to recognise and value them. Friendships and informal interactions often become the first sites where this trust is tested and either strengthened or undermined.

Acts of solidarity offering help during crises, sharing resources, or simply listening become tangible indicators of trustworthiness. At the same time, experiences of betrayal or neglect, especially when expectations of support go unmet, can produce emotional withdrawal and reinforce exclusion. The analytical category of 'disappointments' aligns with Simmel's idea that the fragility of trust is inherent to modern social life. Friendship, as a moral practice, is never immune to rupture, and its ethical weight becomes particularly visible in these moments of tension (Simmel 1971).

### **Artificially Created Worlds: Intentional Spaces and Symbolic Belonging**

Simmel proposed that individuals create symbolic social worlds, settings stripped of utilitarian purpose where equality, playfulness and spontaneity flourish (Simmel 2007; Ashley, Orenstein 1990: 314). Refugee-focused events, cultural hubs and diaspora initiatives can be read as attempts to construct such artificially created worlds, where the logic of institutional integration gives way to human-centred sociability.

Whether these spaces are perceived as 'authentic' or 'artificial' is critical. When such spaces are created for refugees rather than with them, they may be experienced as imposed, performative, or hollow. However, when refugees actively participate in the design and enactment of these spaces – through cultural performances, food sharing and language exchange – they become sites of genuine *Geselligkeit*, where individuals meet as equals and form bonds of symbolic friendship.

Participation levels active vs passive also reflect broader feelings of empowerment. Simmel's (2007: 265–266) theory suggests that only when individuals feel emotionally secure and socially equal, can they fully engage in such communal worlds. Hence, integration should be reconceptualised not just as access to resources or legal rights, but as the co-creation of meaningful social spaces that foster human dignity, trust, and mutual recognition.

### **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: RESEARCH DESIGN AND RATIONALE**

A qualitative method was chosen to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the emotional underpinnings of everyday interactions. The two groups occupy different positions within the integration process – service providers on the ground versus relatively young and able to adopt recipients – their experiences are fundamentally interwoven. This

dual perspective enables a richer understanding of integration not just as a set of legal or institutional mechanisms, but as an emotional and relational field. Drawing on Simmelian microsociology, which emphasises the subtle forms of interaction that structure everyday life, the inclusion of both perspectives makes visible the social texture of empathy, solidarity and distance. The main areas of the questions included the following: forms and circumstances of everyday interactions (e.g. access to services and social networks), forms of emotional involvement (e.g. social acceptance and distance) and experiences of institutional communication (e.g. trust and perceived sincerity). Accordingly, the empirical analysis was performed by combining the deductive and inductive logic: first, the interview data were analysed to identify emotional and social motives, then the generated initial code units were grouped into themes, such as trust, friendship functions, or structural distance. These themes were reviewed, named and interpreted by comparing the narratives of the two groups, thus revealing the emotional field of integration and its sociological and political significance. Such comparative approach enhances the internal validity of the study through thematic triangulation, allowing core themes – such as trust, social boundaries, or perceived sincerity – to be examined from multiple angles. It also sheds light on discrepancies between intended institutional practices and lived emotional experiences. Such a method offers not only analytical depth but also political relevance. It invites a reconsideration of integration as a process of mutual adaptation, where emotional inclusion becomes as important as legal status or access to services.

Qualitative interviews with Lithuanian Aid Organizers: semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals involved in organising the long-term support for refugees through governmental and non-governmental institutions, using the snowball principle. These interviews explore the emotional motivations behind civic engagement, the challenges of empathy in bureaucratic systems and the symbolic significance of solidarity actions. The in-depth interviews with persons working in governmental (6) and non-governmental (6) organisations/institutions (covering both major cities and small towns with notable Ukrainian population) who have directly participated and/or are participating in the provision and/or organisation of (long-term) assistance to Ukrainians (at least half a year), in May–June 2024, total 12 (2 males, 10 females), conducted (face-to-face) by the author.

Qualitative interviews with relatively young (19–28) Ukrainian nationals in Lithuania: semi-structured interviews were conducted (again, using snowball principle) with young people who are in education, on maternity leave, or as young workers. Those are young Ukrainian people who arrived in Lithuania before (9) and after (6) 2022. Interviews analyse the perception of life abroad, everyday life challenges, feelings of integration, and further life intentions. The data captures various patterns of initial adaptation and subsequent integration due to the complexity of every Ukrainian agency that they bring with them. Moreover, the Russian-Ukrainian war impact comes to the forefront as one of the factors that triggered mobility and has plenty of social consequences on the lives of young people. 15 interviews (6 males and 9 females) were selected for the analysis.<sup>2</sup>

The study was conducted in accordance with all ethical standards for social science research. Informants were informed in advance about the objectives of the study, participation was completely voluntary, and the informed consent was obtained verbally before each interview. All data collected were anonymised – each participant was assigned a numerical code

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<sup>2</sup> Overall 30 interviews were collected by Ph. D student Dmytro Mamaiev, as a part of his bigger project 'Migration and Challenges of Integration of Ukrainian Youth in Lithuania'.

that does not allow tracing of personal identity. The information obtained during the study was kept confidential and used only for scientific purposes.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS. FROM RANDOM INTERACTIONS TO FORMS OF TOGETHERNESS LT–UKR

The comparative insights outlined in this table invite a Simmelian interpretation of refugee–host interactions not as formal ‘integration outcomes,’ but as dynamic social forms emerging through fragile, situational and affective encounters. Rather than viewing these as static categories, Simmel encourages us to examine how relationships are formed, negotiated and symbolically maintained. Across all categories, we see Simmel’s dialectic of distance and nearness, formality and intimacy, and structure and individuality shaping the social landscape between Ukrainian war refugees and Lithuanian hosts.

*Forms of Friendship.* Simmel viewed friendship as a voluntary, emotionally significant and non-institutional form of association, precisely the kind of a social form that gains significance in the absence of structural belonging. The Ukrainians’ lack of close Lithuanian friendships, alongside the emergence of therapeutic, trust-based ties through Lithuanian service providers, mirrors Simmel’s idea of sociability, where bonds arise not from the status or duty, but from the shared emotional labour. Lithuanian informants (both governmental and non-governmental) act not merely as functionaries but as mediators of symbolic friendship, creating a social space where formality gives way to intimacy. Here, *Geselligkeit* is not merely leisure; it becomes a form of moral inclusion, blurring the distinction between aid and friendship (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative thematic analysis of Ukrainian and Lithuanian perspectives on forms of friendship

Categories and subcategories	Empirical illustrations, analysis and comparison
Forms of friendship <i>Nature of relationships</i>	<i>‘I don’t have Lithuanian friends at all. After 4 years... All my friends are foreigners.’ (Inf 1 UKR)</i> <i>‘We engage in social consultations in the broadest sense... They want to console themselves, talk...’ (Inf 5 LT)</i>
	Ukrainians often lack close Lithuanian friends, bonding mostly with other Ukrainians or foreigners (e.g. Inf 1 & 2 UKR). From the LT side, friendships emerge indirectly – language teachers and volunteers describe emotionally close, supportive relations formed through service provision (e.g. Inf 5 & 7 LT). These relationships evolve into therapeutic, trust-based exchanges.
Origin of friendships	<i>‘We have 200 Ukrainian students... We usually do tasks in Ukrainian.’ (Inf 2 UKR)</i> <i>‘We realized it is necessary to explain not only the language, but also the cultural phenomena...’ (Inf 5 LT)</i>
	Most friendships originate within Ukrainian peer groups or digital nomad/international circles (e.g. Inf 2 & 3 UKR). Lithuanian respondents note that while services begin formally, connections often grow deeper through ongoing shared experiences like consultations and community programs (e.g. Inf 5&7 LT).
Functions of friendship	<i>‘We used to go to the forest, walking, talking...it helped to calm down.’ (Inf 12 UKR)</i> <i>‘Volunteers build friendships and form communities.’ (Inf 1 LT)</i>
	Ukrainians rely on friendships for emotional support, calm, and shared activities (e.g. walks and games – Inf 5 & 12 UKR). Lithuanian service providers emphasise creating spaces that enable emotional comfort, language learning and cultural translation (e.g. Inf 1 & 5 LT), demonstrating an indirect but meaningful role in supporting interpersonal ties.

*Formality vs Intimacy.* One of Simmel's core insights is that overly formal structures often fail to accommodate the emotional nuance required for true sociability. The data vividly illustrate this: Ukrainians report feeling 'tolerated, not included', despite access to services. Lithuanian informants, in turn, acknowledge the institutional empathy gap. This disjunction reflects what Simmel might call a crisis of the form, where the form of the relationship (legal access and professional service) does not correspond to the feeling of recognition or belonging. Simmel would stress that true intimacy requires tact, discretion and mutual recognition, qualities not easily encoded into bureaucratic interaction. The tension between formal inclusion and affective exclusion thus reveals the limits of rationalised social structures when confronted with emotional needs (Table 2).

**Table 2. Comparative thematic analysis of Ukrainian and Lithuanian perspectives on formality vs intimacy (sincerity)**

<b>Formality vs intimacy (sincerity)</b> <i>Level of interaction</i>	<i>'You live parallel lives. You study and go home.'</i> (Inf 4 UKR) <i>'Due to human factors – tiredness, distraction – we fail to be as empathetic as we should.'</i> (Inf 6 LT)
	Ukrainians report limited spontaneous interactions with Lithuanians; relationships stay task-based (e.g. Inf 4 & 6 UKR). Lithuanians acknowledge institutional limitations – large-scale service structures prevent a deep engagement, despite efforts to be professional (e.g. Inf 6 LT).
<i>Perceived sincerity</i>	<i>'Even when they smile, you feel it's formal.'</i> (Inf 8 UKR) <i>'We are still lacking a humanistic approach.'</i> (Inf 4 LT)
	Ukrainians often feel tolerated, not fully accepted (e.g. Inf 8 & 1 UKR). Lithuanian informants recognise the lack of a 'humanistic approach' within state coordination and point to an institutional empathy deficit (e.g. Inf 4 LT).
<i>Social distance</i>	<i>'They don't let you in easily. You are tolerated, not included.'</i> (Inf 6 UKR) <i>'People are waiting in lines longer than they should.'</i> (Inf 6 LT)
	Ukrainians describe Lithuanians as emotionally distant or 'closed' (e.g. Inf 6 & 7 UKR). From the LT side, empathy is framed as a goal but often compromised by systemic fatigue and overload. The emotional gap persists, despite institutional goodwill (e.g. Inf 6, 8 & 10 LT).

*Structure vs Networks.* In Simmelian terms, formal structures represent fixed forms of association, often stable, but impersonal. Networks, by contrast, reflect fluid, emergent configurations. Ukrainian peer networks, formed through dormitories or social media, function as protective bubbles – closed systems offering solidarity but also reinforcing separation. Interestingly, Lithuanian providers recognise that the meaningful support often occurs 'outside the system', a point Simmel would find revealing. Social action here becomes personalised, moral, and based on emotional obligation, echoing his concept of interaction as the essence of the social. The emergence of hybrid pathways, where formal service provision evolves into informal bonding, is one of the strongest validations of Simmel's model: social integration occurs not in structures, but in interactions (Table 3).



**Table 3. Comparative thematic analysis of Ukrainian and Lithuanian perspectives on structure vs networks**

<b>Structure vs networks</b> <i>Means of socialisation</i>	<i>'All our contacts are through dormitories or Ukrainian social media groups.'</i> (Inf 9 UKR) <i>'Personal contacts, appeals to humanity came in handy.'</i> (Inf 9 LT)
	Ukrainians socialise through inner groups, peer networks and student groups (e.g. Inf 9 & 5 UKR). Lithuanian informants describe hybrid pathways: formal structures catalyse informal bonding and community (e.g. Inf 1, 5 & 9 LT).
<i>Nature of networks</i>	<i>'In university, we are in our bubble. We don't mix.'</i> (Inf 12 UKR) <i>'Leadership arose organically... We're obliged to help.'</i> (Inf 1 LT)
	Ukrainians remain in intra-group 'bubbles' (e.g. Inf 12 UKR), with rare Lithuanian inclusion. Lithuanian-side actors acknowledge that help often comes 'outside the system', through personalised networks and moral impulse (e.g. Inf 9 & 1 LT). This reflects a parallel informal logic.
<i>Density of connections</i>	<i>'I know many, but just on Instagram or Facebook. We don't meet.'</i> (Inf 10 UKR) <i>'Programs for families, seniors...volunteers who care...'</i> (Inf 7 LT)
	High cohesion within Ukrainian communities; weak bridging ties with host society (e.g. Inf 10 UKR). Some feel isolated, even depressed (Inf 13 UKR). The LT side mirrors this: services sometimes spark network building, but integration remains uneven and contingent on active engagement (e.g. Inf 5 & 7LT).

*Importance of Trust and Solidarity.* Trust, for Simmel, is foundational to modern social life, it allows for interaction in the absence of complete knowledge or control. Here, Ukrainians express surprise at the solidarity they received, while Lithuanian actors describe professionalism as a trust-building strategy. This distinction points to two kinds of trust: one affective (based on emotional resonance), and one structural (based on institutional reliability). Simmel's lens allows us to understand that solidarity actions, whether spontaneous or organised, gain their moral value not merely through scale, but through symbolic recognition. When help is rendered through empathy (LT Informant 10), it transcends utility and becomes a social form of mutual regard, anchoring moral obligation in everyday action. On the contrary, disappointments, meanwhile, reflect the failure of social forms: when individuals are treated as numbers, trust collapses not only at the interpersonal level, but also in the legitimacy of the institution. For Simmel, this rupture is critical – it reveals where social distance becomes alienation (Table 4).

**Table 4. Comparative thematic analysis of Ukrainian and Lithuanian perspectives on importance of trust and solidarity**

<b>Importance of trust and solidarity</b> <i>Level of trust</i>	<i>'I did not expect such a level of solidarity from Lithuania.'</i> (Inf 2 UKR) <i>'Our service must be professional...Motivation through mission.'</i> (Inf 3 LT)
	Ukrainians appreciate Lithuanian support, sometimes surprisingly so (e.g. Inf 2 & 12 UKR). Lithuanian actors view trust through professionalism – services built on mission and ethical commitment (e.g. Inf 3 LT).
<i>Solidarity actions</i>	<i>'People brought us food, offered rooms. It was touching.'</i> (Inf 4 UKR) <i>'Manager volunteered, taught staff...Humanism is the key trait.'</i> (Inf 10 LT)
	Ukrainians recall various events, food deliveries and spontaneous hospitality (e.g. Inf 4 & 6 UKR). The LT side reflects an intentional cultivation of empathic organisational culture and leadership modelling solidarity (e.g. Inf 10 LT).



Table 4. (Continued)

<i>Disappointments</i>	<i>'Doctors were refusing to provide assistance...no temporary protection.'</i> (Inf 15 UKR) <i>'We fail to be as empathetic as we should.'</i> (Inf 6 LT)
	Ukrainians report exclusion from healthcare, or feeling like 'a number' in the system (e.g. Inf 14 & 15 UKR). Lithuanian institutions admit limits of empathy due to fatigue, procedural gaps and human error (e.g. Inf 6 LT), highlighting structural fragility in sustaining solidarity.

*Deliberately Artificial, Specially Created World.* Simmel believed that even artificially created social forms – clubs, cafés and salons – could become authentic through shared experience and interaction. The 'created' social spaces described in both Ukrainian and Lithuanian quotes (language classes, Telegram groups and community centres) reflect this idea. Though top-down in origin, these spaces gain authenticity through participation, mirroring Simmel's emphasis on the form over the origin. When Ukrainians say 'these spaces feel created', they echo Simmel's tension between the surface form and the lived substance. Yet when trust and mutual involvement are present, even constructed spaces can foster the real connection. This illustrates one of Simmel's core ideas: the social world is not defined by structure, but by how people animate it (Table 5).

Table 5. Comparative thematic analysis of Ukrainian and Lithuanian perspectives on deliberately artificial, specially created world

<b>Deliberately artificial, specially created world</b> <i>Creation of social spaces</i>	<i>'We created a Telegram group to support newcomers.'</i> (Inf 15 UKR) <i>'All places were filled in two hours...to make our country their home.'</i> (Inf 2 LT)
	Ukrainians build support groups (Telegram), engage in Ukrainian centres and clubs (e.g. Inf 15 & 2 UKR). The Lithuanian side describes courses and NGO efforts as socially constructed, yet increasingly 'authentic' through shared need and mutual participation (e.g. Inf 2 & 5 LT).
<i>Level of participation</i>	<i>'I was working with the Red Cross every day for 6–7 months.'</i> (Inf 11 UKR) <i>'We offer programs...build friendships.'</i> (Inf 7 LT)
	Ukrainians vary – some volunteers are active (e.g. Inf 11 UKR), others remain passive (Inf 5 UKR). LT providers recognise these variations and attempt to sustain participation through humanistic, flexible programming (e.g. Inf 7 LT).
<i>Perception of authenticity</i>	<i>'These spaces are created, not natural. You feel that.'</i> (Inf 14 UKR) <i>'They want to talk, discuss cultural differences...therapeutic.'</i> (Inf 5 LT)
	Ukrainians express ambivalence – spaces feel 'created', not natural (e.g. Inf 14 & 12 UKR). LT informants agree on artificial origins, but see authenticity forming through trust, mutual involvement and affective learning environments (e.g. Inf 2 LT).

## CONCLUSIONS

Simmel's sociological approach to friendship and sociability might serve as an important analytical tool for understanding how migrants experience integration through emotional, voluntarily chosen connections. The research shows that even with rights and needs, refugees

can remain emotionally peripheral, as symbolic and cultural boundaries often remain more resistant to services than legal ones. True inclusion requires not only institutional participation, but also authentic interpersonal connection, shared space and mutual recognition of vulnerability – otherwise integration risks remain formal rather than transformative.

Empirical findings reveal that informal networks, empathetic leadership and grassroots-level interaction offer vital pathways to solidarity and belonging. While institutions often operate with good intentions, their formality can inhibit emotional resonance. However, where professionalism meets moral responsibility, in our case language classes or volunteer initiatives, artificially created spaces gain authenticity. These become incubators of trust, empathy, and reciprocal friendship, demonstrating that even designed frameworks can nurture genuine human connection when sustained by ethical engagement.

Rather than viewing integration as a linear process driven by policy benchmarks, Simmel's perspective urges us to recognise the affective, symbolic and ethical dimensions of social life. Refugee integration thus becomes not just a question of housing or employment, but of friendship, sincerity and trust – core human needs that only genuinely shared social worlds can fulfill.

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DAINIUS GENYS

## Draugystė kaip analizės karkasas: emocinis solidarumas tarp ukrainiečių ir lietuvių

### *Santrauka*

Straipsnyje taikomas Georgo Simmelio sociologinis draugystės ir socialumo modelis, siekiant ištirti ukrainiečių ir lietuvių santykių dinamiką. Dėmesys sutelkiamas į mikroygmens sąveikas – pasitikėjimą, nuoširdumą ir emocijas – kaip esminius įtraukties rodiklius. Remiantis kokybiniais interviu su Ukrainos jaunimu ir Lietuvos pagalbos organizatoriais, tyrimas parodo, kaip simbolinės ribos, emociniai skirtumai ir neformalūs tinklai formuoja integraciją, neapsiribojant formalia prieiga. Specialiai sukurtos erdvės, tokios kaip kalbų kursai ir savanorių programos, gali virsti autentiškomis emocinės paramos ir bendruomeniškumo erdvėmis, kai jos grindžiamos abipusiu dalyvavimu. G. Simmelio teorinis karkasas leidžia geriau suprasti solidarumo formavimosi aplinkybes ir tai, kaip socialumas, o ne struktūra, tampa pagrindiniu moralinio įsitraukimo principu.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** Georgas Simmelis, *Geselligkeit*, draugystė, ukrainiečiai, mikroygmens sąveika, Lietuva