The branding of the “new Ukraine”

A media production study of the encoding/decoding of Europeanness during Eurovision Song Contest 2017

By: Karin Hallgren

Supervisor: Michael Forsman
Södertörns högskola | Institutionen för kultur och lärande
Master's Dissertation 30 hp
Media and Communication Studies | Spring semester 2018
Master's Programme in Media, Communication and Cultural Analysis
Abstract
There are several studies observing the phenomenon of nation branding as political pursuits and as texts. However, the media are generally treated as neutral platforms in branding literature. Also, relatively little has been done to explore how the context of branding affects the level of text production, not least in relation to media events. Deploying a cultural approach, the present study suggests that the production of branding may be examined in terms of cultural codes (Hall, 1982) and dominant or preferred meanings (Hall, 1973/1992).

The aim of this study is to explore processes of nation branding, as part of media events, from a media production perspective. This is done through observations of the encoding/decoding of the branding narrative of the Europeanness of Eurovision, as formula for a revised Ukrainian identity, in production and backstage processes of the event 2017.

The material consists of qualitative interviews with five agents involved in the branding of Ukraine during Eurovision. The analysis is based on the theoretical concepts of, firstly, Hall’s (1973/1992) model of encoding/decoding and, secondly, Ytreberg’s (1999) model for the analysis of text production. Hall emphasises the discursive aspects of audiences’ interpretations, but, with reference to Ytreberg’s idea of text production as a result of negotiated interpretations, it is argued that discursive aspects are just as significant for agents in the production process.

Three cases are used to illuminate the tensions in the media production of the branding narrative: The encoding/decoding of a branding concept, of the relationship to Russia, and of a Ukrainian Europeanness. The tensions mainly occur between the agents in the professional position in relation to oppositional readings of the dominant code (Hall, 1973/1992). They can be understood as struggles over the preferred meaning (Hall, 1973/1992) of Ukraine’s Europeanness in the branding narrative, which are enacted in the media production.

The two main strategies for negotiating the tensions regard the representation of the categories of time and space. However, I propose that the agents in the media production also perform a third strategy in relation to the tensions that arise, the detached strategy of professionalism, based in the frameworks of knowledge (Hall, 1973/1992) that the agents possess.

Keywords: Nation branding, Eurovision, encoding/decoding, text production.
Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2

Contents ........................................................................................................................................ 3

1 Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 5

2 Purpose and research questions ............................................................................................... 9

3 Previous research ...................................................................................................................... 10
  3.1 Nation branding campaigns ................................................................................................. 10
  3.1.1 Media events ................................................................................................................... 12
  3.2 Images of a European identity ............................................................................................. 14

4 Theory ......................................................................................................................................... 16
  4.1 A cultural approach to nation branding ............................................................................ 16
  4.2 Encoding/decoding – a model for the production of discourse ....................................... 18
  4.3 Text production – a set of negotiated priorities ................................................................. 22

5 Method and material ................................................................................................................. 25
  5.1 Qualitative interviews ......................................................................................................... 25
  5.2 Method of analysis ............................................................................................................. 26
  5.3 Methodological reflections ................................................................................................. 27

6 The event and the agents ......................................................................................................... 30
  6.1 Eurovision Song Contest 2017 .......................................................................................... 30
  6.2 The agents in the media production .................................................................................. 32
    6.2.1 Lars, Johan and Fredrik: Creating the brand ............................................................ 32
    6.2.2 Klara and Lena: Promoting the brand ....................................................................... 34
    6.2.3 Agneta: Covering the brand ..................................................................................... 36
  6.3 Summary: Creating, promoting and covering the branding narrative ......................... 38

7 Tensions in the branding – three cases ...................................................................................... 40
  7.1 Case 1: Encoding/decoding a branding concept ............................................................... 40
    7.1.1 The firefly or the necklace .......................................................................................... 40
    7.1.2 The name of the game – encoding/decoding a slogan ............................................. 43
  7.2 Case 2: Encoding/decoding the relation to Russia ............................................................. 44
    7.2.1 Oppositional readings of the brand ............................................................................ 44
    7.2.2 Defending the encoding/decoding of a Ukraine identity ........................................ 47
    7.2.3 Encoding/decoding the war ..................................................................................... 49
  7.3 Case 3: Encoding/decoding European values .................................................................. 52
    7.3.1 An ambiguous linchpin in the branding narrative .................................................... 52
    7.3.2 Encoding/decoding attitudes to the LGBT community ............................................ 55
  7.4 Summary: The tensions of the branding narrative ........................................................... 56
    7.4.1 Tensions between the firefly and the necklace .......................................................... 56
    7.4.2 Tensions in the encoding/decoding of the Ukrainian relationship to Russia ............ 57
    7.4.3 Tensions concerning the European values ............................................................... 60

8 Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 62

9 Discussion .................................................................................................................................. 66
1 Introduction

In May 2017, Ukraine hosted the Eurovision Song Contest finals for the second time (the first time was in 2005). Several months in advance, a brand book had been prepared in order to present the event and to brand Ukraine as a nation. However, behind the slogan “Celebrate diversity” and the logo with the red and blue necklace, a production process with several dilemmas for the professional agents involved had taken place. This process is the subject of the present study. I intend to explore the text production of the Eurovision 2017 branding through the cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall’s (1973/1992) model of encoding/decoding and discuss it in the light of nation branding theory.

The communication scholars Göran Bolin and Per Ståhlberg (2010, p. 79-81) argue that nation building and nation branding should be regarded as different phenomena and thus analytically separated. Whereas the traditional efforts of nation building, constructing nations as imagined communities (Benedict Anderson, 1983), have been directed towards domestic audiences, nation branding is directed externally, targeting international investors. Nation branding activities also represent a temporal shift in the national rhetoric as nations increasingly represent themselves in terms of their potential future rather than of their historic background. Bolin and Ståhlberg note that even when coordinated, efforts of nation building and nation branding produce tensions among audiences, depending on differences in interpretations and relations to the past. Instead, I will concentrate on tensions and negotiations in the production process by observing Eurovision 2017.

Bolin and communication scholar Galina Miazhevic (2018, p. 8) requests nation branding researchers to examine the interaction between media agents and across institutional, commercial, technological and symbolic media logics. There are several case studies observing the phenomenon of nation branding as political pursuits and as texts. However, relatively little has been done to explore how the context of branding initiatives affects the level of text production, not least in relation to media events. The present study is an attempt to examine how the context of branding affects the texts through the different interpretations, negotiations, and tensions encoded/decoded in production.

Thus, this study explores the efforts to present Ukraine in relation to the event from a media production perspective. I want to observe the context of the production behind a media event, and how the political aims and interests of the governmental employer shapes the representations of a Ukrainian identity and the nation’s European belonging.
This ambition to analyse the media production context takes me to the concepts and models developed in cultural studies. I suggest that the different interpretations, negotiations, and tensions in the production of the branding may be examined and discussed in terms of cultural codes (Hall, 1997/2013, p. 7-10). I also suggest that the present project can be regarded as a text production study, exploring the connections between the interpretations of encoders and the coded articulations they produce. The preconditions for a historical event to become a media event are the “determinate moments” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 119) of encoding/decoding a meaning. Finally, I suggest that when it comes to the reproduction and transition of the symbolic struggle (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 122) over meaning of a Ukrainian identity and a European affinity in Ukraine, the interaction between structures and agents is part of a discourse that is decoded/encoded in the branding of Eurovision 2017.

Following media scholar Nadia Kaneva’s (2011, p. 131) call that any nation branding should be considered as an ideological project, I also base the address of this ideological dimension on a cultural approach and apply the cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model (1973/1992) as a basis for my analytical model. Hall describes discourses as ways of constructing knowledge and meaning through the formation of practices, ideas, or texts (Hall, 1997/2013, p. 34). Instead of Hall’s focus on the audience’s role in the reproduction and transition of meaning, I adapt a reversed perspective, focusing on the production of text, whereby I apply the philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s definition of the notion: “A text is any discourse fixed by writing” (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 101). Hall emphasises the discursive aspects of audiences’ interpretations, but I argue that these aspects of constructing knowledge and meaning are just as significant for agents in the production process.

The media and communication scholar Esben Ytreberg (2000) describes Hall’s model of encoding/decoding as a possible analytic model for text production studies, that is, studies of the “production process and the resulting texts” (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 53). Ytreberg points at the risk of disregard of the impact of the social context on the agents behind a certain text, and thereby on the text itself, and calls for an increased integration between research approaches on production, text and audiences. Thus, if the brand of Eurovision 2017 is described, in media and communication scholar Roman Horbyk’s words, as a narrative on “Europeanness” (Horbyk, 2017, p. 329), this narrative has been negotiated and articulated in a process of encoding/decoding before the event.
With the entire Europe and additional audiences in other parts of the world watching Eurovision, the Ukrainian government had the opportunity to communicate impressions of a positive national transformation and identity to considerable parts of the Western world through nation branding, and simultaneously to create a sense of national pride and community among the citizens through nation building. In order to ensure desirable media representations in spite of conflicts and war, the Ukrainian government appointed a national committee that, in turn, engaged a range of media and communication agents, for which in some cases the roles were a bit ambiguous as they simultaneously represented state and commercial interests. But what Ukrainian identity was to be communicated, how should the nation’s European affiliation be emphasised and, finally, how should these two aspects be designed to reach the audiences of the Eurovision? The aim for the branding of Ukraine was discussed and negotiated in the national committee who settled on goals, which were to be realised in a brand for the media event, described in a brand book and conveyed through a branding narrative on the transforming Ukraine.

The task of branding Ukraine, assigned by the governmental employers, comes with, what Hall calls, a “dominant or preferred meaning” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 123). Before encoding messages for the intended audiences of Eurovision, the media and communication professionals involved have themselves been decoding information on the task, conveyed by their employers. This decoding has provided a basis for the agents’ interpretations and suggestions for the branding, suggestions that have revealed potential tensions in relation to the employers’ interpretations, which have been negotiated and finally resolved. The process of text production can thus be understood as contributing to a dominant meaning (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 123) or hegemony. The cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1976) defines hegemony as consisting of both intellectual and political facts that are accepted as “commonsense” (Williams, 1976, p. 118) rather than as expressions for the interests of elites, and he stresses the importance of hegemony in representational political systems, where the concept of public opinion is crucial. Accordingly, the agents in the branding process can be regarded as receivers, carriers and senders of the hegemonic project of presenting an image of Ukraine that is consistent with those preferred meanings that have the potential to ensure responsible political representatives a public support for the branding efforts.

However, in this process of interpretation, reproduction and transition of meaning, the agents are responding not only to a specific task from the government and a general political climate but also to certain media logics (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Denis McQuail, 2010, p. 330), e.g.
those cultural standardizations concerning formats for media events and news coverage, but also ideas about audiences and the categories of time and space, that frame and affect the interpretations of both Eurovision and the current case of nation branding. Observations of the branding process, through interviews with the different agents, could potentially give information about the symbolic struggle over the representations of a Ukraine identity and of Europeanness. These observations may be analysed in terms of encoding/decoding and discussed against the background of previous research on nation branding and the imaginations about the audiences targeted by these efforts, thus contributing with new knowledge on encoding/decoding practices in nation branding efforts in relation to international media events.
2 Purpose and research questions
The aim of this study is to explore processes of nation branding, as part of media events, from a media production perspective. This is done through a study of the encoding/decoding of the branding narrative of the Europeanness of Eurovision, as formula for a revised Ukrainian identity, in relation to the event 2017. The study departs from the following three research questions:

- Who are the agents in the branding process, and which functions do they perform and which frameworks of knowledge do they represent?
- Which different tensions arise around the branding narrative of the Europeanness of Ukraine?
- How are these tensions negotiated?

The material consists of interviews with representatives from central agents in the branding process. Two of the agents produced the creative idea and the design of the brand; the third was responsible for the international PR for Eurovision; the fourth agent is a journalist at the national news agency; and the fifth is a PR officer from the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center (UCMC). I will focus on three cases of tensions and interpretations, which are salient in the material: the choice of concept for the branding, the encoding/decoding of the relationship to Russia, and ambiguities concerning European values. These cases will be analysed and discussed against my theoretical framework and previous research.

However, already at this stage, I would like to stress that the present study is primarily neither concerned with media events nor Eurovision. Eurovision in Kiev 2017 is in the present study but an occurrence that gives the Ukrainian government an opportunity for nation branding. Accordingly, I will briefly account for some theoretical concepts on media events because the present case of Ukrainian nation branding is performed in relation to Eurovision, but I do not intend to apply the theories on media events on my material. Also, I will not give an account of details on Eurovision, as this media event is merely the context for the media production of a Ukrainian branding narrative that is my focus of interest.
3 Previous research

3.1 Nation branding campaigns

The concept of the brand comes from market theory but has over the last decades become a notion in everyday language. Marketing scholar Leslie de Chernatony (2010, p. 29-77) offers as much as 13 interpretations of the concept. Brands can thus be regarded as logotypes, as legal instruments, as images in customers’ perceptions, as personalities or identities with certain properties, or as clusters of values which intend to inform customers’ behaviour, just to mention a few examples. The marketing theorist David A. Aaker (2004, p. 10-12) argues that these different aspects must be coordinated and managed in relation to business strategies, to ensure that they support market opportunities, organizational competences, competitive advantages and relationships to customers. In the following, I use the expression branding practices to refer to them. A document with instructions for a brand is called a brand book or a branding platform.

Branding practices have over the last decades increasingly been applied by nation-states. There are several studies on nation branding initiatives in Eastern Europe, and many of these observe the branding of Estonia as the first of the former Soviet states to engage in a branding project. As this campaign was launched in connection to Estonia’s victory and hosting of Eurovision 2001 respectively 2002, many of the studies observe media events as backdrops for nation branding campaigns. However, few of them address aspects of media production.

A team of media scholars from Sweden were present during the Eurovision final in Tallinn 2002 and some of them comment on media production aspects. Bolin (2002, p. 38) notes how the Estonian campaign mainly is performed before the event, and emphasises the increasing importance for nations in post-industrial societies to manifest their ability to produce symbolic goods. Staffan Ericson1 (2002, p. 62) reflects on how the ritual aspects of the media event are transferred from a physical community to a rhetoric relationship, which is upheld and interpreted through the commentators of the broadcast. Michael Forsman (2002, p. 69) analyses the technical and cultural production premises that are supposed to create the sense of immediacy that follows the televisual conventions of the time.

Due to the nation’s lack of instability through space and time, Bolin (2006b, p. 80)2 later refers to the Estonian branding as an interesting example of a mediated construction of a society. He analyses the content of the report Estonian Style, which was the basis for the campaign, as a set of signifying practices for an Estonian identity and notes that it represents a...
“cultural strategy” (Bolin, 2006b, p. 83) aiming at a post-Soviet image of the country. However, Bolin does not go further into the conditions for the production of the report.

Several studies address branding initiatives as a means for strengthening a European affiliation, but none of these studies address the production context.

The media scholar Sue Curry Jansen³ (2008) sees the campaign “Welcome to Estonia” as emphasising the country’s Scandinavian identity. “The core message was that Estonia had been successfully transformed; and that the world was now welcome to visit and invest” (Jansen 2008, p. 128). She also notes how the brand Estonia above all projects a “future-oriented vision of itself (Jansen 2008, p. 129). Paul Jordan (2014a) regards Estonia’s branding campaign in relation to Eurovision as a metaphor for Estonia’s return to Europe” (Jordan 2014, p. 76)⁴. Jordan (2014b, p. 296-298) addresses the tensions between the images of Estonia in the branding, the nation’s Soviet past and its Russian-speaking population, and discusses the campaign’s texts and images in terms of nationalism. He suggests that the tensions not only depend on divides between different language communities but also between the Estonian public and the elites. Eurasia expert Erica Marat (2009, p. 1125)⁵ observes that the branding narratives from Central Asian nations are tailored for international, and usually Western, audiences, but as these are far from homogenous, the messages produced above all reflect the ideas of ruling elites. “One of the challenges these states face is to convince the international public that communism no longer influences their homelands” (Marat 2009, p. 1135).

Kaneva and Popescu⁶ (2014) propose that nation branding campaigns may reproduce “hierarchies of othering” (Kaneva & Popescu 2014, p. 506). The aim to manifest a European identity conveys a search for a non-European other within the continent. In a case study of Ukraine, Ståhlberg and Bolin (2016) observe a fear of anonymity in an international environment or even of being seen as “Little Russia” (Ståhlberg & Bolin 2016, p. 280). Acknowledging the othering of Russia in Ukrainian nationalism, however, they report rather observing ambitions in branding material to represent internal diversity as a national asset.

Only a few studies discuss nation branding from a pronounced media perspective. In an investigation of agents and the media’s role in nation branding campaigns, Bolin and Ståhlberg (2015, p. 3077) identify a range of different institutional agents. However, they observe that as opposed to political and commercial agents, the media are generally treated as neutral platforms in the nation branding literature. Therefore, Bolin and Ståhlberg call for
more research on the role of media, both as technologies and organizations as well as independent agents with the ability to produce messages and create symbolic environments.\(^7\)

Bolin and media and communication scholar Galina Miazhevic\(^8\) (2018, p. 8) observe that most nation branding studies rely on sociological and anthropological theories and that few address the media’s role. They divide those studies that do focus on the media in three groups; 1) case studies related to the performance of specific media events, 2) examinations with a focus on the agents involved, and 3) textual analysis of campaign material and representations. Drawing on the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic power, they argue that in order to address and understand nation branding as a form of media practice, not only representational but also organizational and technological vantage points should be employed. “A media and cultural studies perspective on nation branding shows how the media are both the canvas for and instruments of media branding across the institutional, commercial, technological and symbolic logics that are involved” (Bolin & Miazhevic, 2018, p. 4).

I perceive Bolin and Miazhevic’s (2018) observation as a call for nation branding researchers to examine the interaction between media agents and across the mentioned media logics. So far, there are several case studies observing the phenomenon of nation branding as political pursuits and as texts. However, relatively little has been done to explore how the context of branding initiatives affects the level of text production, not least in relation to media events. According to Bolin and Miazhevic’s categorizing, the present study falls into both the category of studies connected to media events and those that examine the media’s role with a focus on the agents involved. It is an attempt to examine how the context of a branding initiative affects the media texts through the different interpretations, negotiations, and tensions encoded/decoded in the production, and to simultaneously address aspects of the production and of the text.

3.1.1 Media events
Having already stated that the present study is not concerned with media events but rather regards Eurovision as an interesting context for observing the production of a branding narrative, I still want to give a brief account for some theoretical concepts on media events. These are relevant for the understanding of previous research on media events as platforms for nation branding efforts. However, these concepts will primarily function as a background in my analysis.
Exploring how imagined communities are created and sustained through media technologies, the sociologists Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992/2009, p. 5-10) suggest that media events may be regarded as societal rites of passage, managing mass communication of contemporary experiences. They describe media events as a narrative genre characterized by pre-planned but live television broadcasting, and emphasise the capability of media events to reinforce hegemonic values.

Two decades later, the media and communication scholars Andreas Hepp and Nick Couldry (2010) argue that the understanding of media events in a globalized context needs to be updated. In a critique of Dayan and Katz’, Hepp and Couldry argue that the ritual quality of media events is above all an expression of a role the media actively seek and that media events, thus, should be analysed as “media rituals” (Hepp & Couldry 2010, p. 5) that may have the ambition to establish certain discursive positions for their audiences, for example the experience of a national community.

International media events may also be deployed as platforms for nation branding. Media scholars Bolin and Ståhlberg as well as Paul Jordan have specifically addressed Eurovision and argue that this event has developed into a manifestation of “Europeanness” (Bolin 2002, 2006, 2010; Bolin & Ståhlberg 2010, 2015; Ståhlberg & Bolin 2016; Jordan 2011, 2014). Bolin (2010, p. 132) proposes that the value of Europeanness has rather been that of a Western European supremacy. Thus, the Eurovision final 2002 in Estonia represents a turning point as the winner, Latvia, represented the Eastern European states for the second time, which challenged the idea of Western Europe as a role model for the former Soviet states.

There are several theories on media events, but in the present study, the event of Eurovision is a background rather than the object of study. Bolin (2010, p. 127) questions if it is at all possible to understand Eurovision through the theories on media events, primarily as the event is organized within the media, through the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) rather than outside. However, I suggest that because of the capacity of media events to establish discursive positions, they provide interesting cases for observing nation branding efforts.

Bolin describes Eurovision as “increasingly politicized” (Bolin, 2006a, p. 190) since its expansion to the East, and as “a discursive tool in the definitions of Europeanness” (Bolin, 2006a, p. 191). Jordan agrees that Eurovision has become a platform for nation branding – and above all an “affirmation of a nation’s European credentials” (Jordan 2014a, p. 50) – but
also a stage for political tensions and statements. Referring to the entries of Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina in 1993, he regards participation in Eurovision as an opportunity to manifest national sovereignty and present a situation of normalcy. However, there is also research that highlights the ambiguousness of the concept of Europeanness.

3.2 Images of a European identity
The sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2004, p. 12) regards Europe as a culture without a fixed identity but suggests four values that may be regarded as the foundation of a distinct European identity: rationality, democracy, justice and liberty. Like Bauman, the media and communication scholar Johan Fornäs (2012) describes Europe and Europeanness as “contradictory, contested and dynamic concepts” (Fornäs, 2012, p. 60). However, when Europe is approached as a cultural category constructed by symbolic signs, its collective identity may be understood through its mediated representations. Drawing on the critical hermeneutics of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, Fornäs proposes that the task of understanding a European identity linked to “modernity, progress and civilisation” (Fornäs, 2012, p. 12) through its “presentational symbolism” (Fornäs 2012, p. 146)

(1) … must be approached by indirect way through analysis of its expressions in various symbolic realms; (2) that it needs to be outlined not by simple and univocal definitions but by tracing the narratives through which it is told and lived; and (3) that it always unfolds in a complex interaction with surrounding others (Fornäs 2012, p. 51).

It can be added that this interaction may be understood as struggles over meaning.

Using philosopher Roland Barthes’ concept of the myth as a meta-language system of connotative significations, Fornäs examines the myths of Europe and its interpretations. He suggests that Europe is represented as “a chosen continent” (Fornäs 2012, p. 26) with extraordinary creative powers and “a land of the future” (Fornäs 2012, p. 38) through features of dislocation, alterity and migration. The result of Europe’s pursuit is described as hybridity, otherness and diversity. “Elevation combined with tensions between desire – welfare; mobility – sovereignty; and hybridity – unity: these then appear to be key elements in the investigated narratives of Europe” (Fornäs 2012, p. 42).

According to the media and communication scholar Roman Horbyk⁹ (2017), the concept of Europe, as articulated in its eastern parts, has for a long time been characterized by “abstraction and universality” (Horbyk 2017, p. 82). Horbyk identifies three categories of
values associated with Europe: 1) freedom, 2) humanitarianism and 3) democracy. The idea of Europe is also strongly connected to a “benign concept of modernity” (Horbyk 2017, p. 64). Horbyk finds that “East European narratives of Europe tend to oscillate between (1) idealising admiration, (2) materialist pragmatics, and (3) geopolitical demonising” (Horbyk 2017, p. 315). He describes this as a “compulsive dependence” (Horbyk 2017, p. 317) and explains the oscillation as an effect of alternating urges to identify with and become like the (conceived of as) superior other, or to destroy it symbolically in a sense of inferiority. Horbyk argues that Eastern Europe has not only been assigned a role as the Other by Western Europeans but has just as much invented itself through its “pluricolonial experience” (Horbyk 2017, p. 67) where the notions of periphery and hybridity has been fundamental. Firstly, Eastern Europe has been the object of recurring power conflicts, where the aggressors themselves could be defined as being peripheral to Europe, and, secondly, the elements of othering have always been mixed with a certain perceived affinity with Europe.

As for Ukraine, Horbyk (2017, p. 315-316) refers how the concept of Europe has been a source for self-perception and self-understanding as well as identity building since the first independency movements at the beginning of the 19th century. Ukraine has a long tradition of aspiring to European rights and values, and the image of European welfare is strong. Ukraine is seen as lagging behind not only when it comes to material conditions but also concerning “social practices and governing values” (Horbyk, 2017, p. 320), and Ukrainian elites appear unanimous in their representations of Europe as a role model for the nation’s self-reform.

Horbyk suggests with tribute to the political theorist Ernesto Laclau that the East European images of Europe function like empty signifiers or a metanarratives (2017, p. 329). The goals of Europeanness may be seen as more important for the rhetoric of on-going domestic political struggles than for concrete political achievements. Horbyk calls for additional studies on narratives of Europe in contexts that are non-elitist, not least as international manifestations (2017, p. 329). Eurovision may thus be regarded as a suitable study object.
4 Theory

4.1 A cultural approach to nation branding

Media scholar Nadia Kaneva (2011) defines nation branding as “a compendium of discourses and practices aimed at reconstituting nationhood through marketing and branding paradigms” (Kaneva 2011, p. 118). In a review of nation branding literature, she discerns three prevailing research approaches, analysing nation branding as a technical-economical, a political or a cultural phenomenon. She suggests that the cultural approach could develop its critical perspective on nation branding as an ideological project, on the political economy of its practices and on the representation of national communities in branding narratives (Kaneva 2011, p. 131). The present study adopts a cultural approach and will thus address the different interpretations, tensions and negotiations in the media production of a hegemonic branding narrative.

According to communication scholar Melissa Aronczyk (2013), the nation, like a brand, may be regarded as “a category of discourse and practice” (Aronczyk 2013, p. 30). Nation branding can thus be seen as a communications strategy aiming to deliver international awareness, drawing on two leading elements for description and interpretation: 1) globalization as a set of idea and discourses, and 2) neoliberalism, conceptually positing visions of private ownership blended with individual freedoms as “central values of civilization” (Aronczyk 2013, p. 22). Aronczyk makes a comparison to nation building and suggests that the practice of nation branding can be understood as a way to for national elites to compensate for eroding national structures. She stresses the idea of cultural impacts on international competitiveness, e.g. through appropriate values (Aronczyk 2013, p. 50-51).

Most scholars engaged in research on nation branding with a cultural approach seem to agree on a vantage point where the phenomenon of nation branding is understood as having its roots in a globalised neo-liberal economy, where nation-states are supposed to compete for international investments and attention in the same way as commercial businesses do (Aronczyk, 2013; Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010, 2015; Jansen, 2008; Kaneva, 2011; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Varga, 2013; Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). The goal of nation branding practices can be understood as the positioning of a nation-state in terms of increased international attractiveness and marketability. These practices, performed through communication strategies and activities borrowed from commercial business and market theory, may be targeted outwards from the state as well as inwards, shaping images of
national identity, national community, and role models for citizenry; outwards to potential international investors and inwards, and inwards, to citizens in assigned roles as brand co-creators of the nation-state. Furthermore, these practices bring considerable changes to national governance, as marketing and branding consultants gain influence on matters that could be seen as fundamental for democratic dialogue and quality.

Bolin (2006b, p.82) suggests that the representations produced in nation branding processes will necessarily be the results of negotiations between different agents representing a variety of interests, whether political, commercial or cultural. Therefore, the representations will always also represent latent tensions between these agents. Once compromised upon and overcome, these tensions may again come to the surface when the branding representations are disseminated. According to Bolin, images of nation branding may, like any system of meaningful representations, be studied through the signifying practices deployed (2006b, p. 80), and he specifically points to the comprehension and representation of the categories of time and space.

One example of the representation of time may be observed as aspects of othering in Eastern European nation branding efforts. These aspects can be regarded as connected to “local struggles over the meaning of nationhood after communism” (Kaneva & Popescu 2011, p. 195) and the need to “demonstrate the sincerity and seriousness of their desire to break with the communist past” (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011, p. 196). However, they can also be understood as a way to handle “a discourse of othering ‘the East’” (Kaneva & Popescu, 2014, p. 508) and a role for Eastern Europe as “the internal Other of the European continent” (Kaneva & Popescu 2011, p. 202), which may generate antagonisms of othering within the Eastern European nations themselves. Ståhlberg and Bolin argue that according to nation branding logic, ‘the other’ is identified as someone within the community that can be discerned in relation to ‘us’. “In Eastern European countries, that ‘internal other’ is based in the historical experience of Soviet rule” (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016, p. 280).

Ståhlberg and Bolin note a recurring Ukrainian anxiety that the nation internationally should be regarded as “Little Russia”, but report having seen no explicit othering of Russians in branding efforts. They rather observe ambitions to represent internal diversity as a national asset (Ståhlberg & Bohlin, 2016, p. 280).
4.2 Encoding/decoding – a model for the production of discourse

Following Kaneva’s (2011) call for a developed critical perspective on nation branding as an ideological project, I now proceed to explore how this approach may be realised in observations of the media production context. Hesmondhalgh (2013) proposes that a cultural approach explores how patterns of power and behaviour are reflected in the cultural production. These patterns are significant for an understanding of the interaction between economic, political and cultural power and the “increasingly complexity of the division of labour involved in making texts” (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 67).

Hall (1982, p. 56) describes critical media research as based on an “ideological perspective”, where power is understood as the opportunity to represent a certain order of things in a way that makes other agents accept this representation as natural (1982, p. 74-76). He adapts philosopher Michel Foucault’s understanding of power as a struggle for “authority of the truth” (Hall, 1997/2013, p. 33) and of knowledge as connected to “the exercise of symbolic power through representational practices” (Hall, 1997/2013, p. 249). Ideologies work through signifying practices that create shared meanings in a society through the symbolic function of cultural codes. Hall argues that signification differs from other kinds of labour as its product is a discursive object, and that the focus of the analysis of power of the media thus should be directed to “the process by means of which certain events get recurrently signified in particular ways” (Hall, 1982, p. 69).

Hall describes discourses as ways of constructing knowledge and meaning through the formation of practices, ideas, or texts, and discursive formations as “regimes of truths” (Hall, 1997/2013, p. 34). In the paper “Encoding/decoding” (Hall, 1973/1992), he discusses production of television as a production of discourse. Elaborating on a traditional communication model by means of Marxist theory, Hall addresses the importance of audiences’ interpretations to determine the meaning of a text. If an audience does not apprehend the intended meaning, there will neither be a meaningful discourse nor an effective communication (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 117). Similarly, the production of television is framed by interpretative elements, e.g. ideas on technology, professionalism and audience preferences, that to some extent will delimit possible decodings. Thus, instead of understanding communication as a linear process where a sender transmits a message to a receiver, Hall suggests a new model (see Figure 1) where messages are seen as reproductions in a constant circuit of “determinate moments” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 118) of producers’ encoding and receivers’ decoding.
Hall argues that the encoding/decoding through “all the complex rules by which language signifies” is a necessary precondition not only for any mediated communication but also for all “intelligible discourse” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 118). The encoding/decoding practices are part of the language processes that give signs in a discourse their meaning and ideological value. In discourse, the signs are continuously objects of struggles over meaning. Those signs, which appear natural, are those where meaning is (currently) not contested. Hall proposes that the meanings of signs, both at a denotative and a connotative level, are fixed through codes. These codes are tools in a constant process of classifications of the world, which together constitute patterns of “dominant or preferred meanings” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 123). Hall sees misunderstandings or distortions between broadcasters and television audiences as a lack of equivalence (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 120) in the respective codes of encoders and decoders.

A comma has in some versions of the text replaced the original slash in the title of the paper. However, I propose that this slash should be regarded as one of the main points of Hall’s model: Any encoding process that takes place proceeds from and is intertwined with a corresponding process of decoding. Thus, any media production may be understood as founded on a chain of interpretations, influenced by a complex web of conventions and
conditions of technical infrastructure, relations of production, and those individual and collective frameworks of knowledge that are activated in the production.

Discussing how societies develop discourses to constitute dominant orders, expressed through continuously negotiated codes, Hall proposes three hypothetical decoding positions in relation to those readings that have been institutionalized as parts of an ideological order: The first is the “dominant-hegemonic” position (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 125) where a receiver decodes the message in accordance with the connoted meaning intended by a producer. Hall terms this “operating inside the dominant code” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 126). The second is the “negotiated-corporate” position (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 127) where a receiver accepts the hegemony of a dominant code, but adjusts interpretations to familiar situations. This will, according to Hall, possibly generate discursive contradictions and misunderstandings. The third position is the “oppositional” (1973/1992, p. 126) where a receiver rejects the dominant code, and decodes messages through alternative frameworks. Hall regards oppositional interpretations as signals of ongoing discursive struggles in society.

However, Hall also identifies a fourth position, operating within the dominant position. This is the “professional code … which has already been signified in a hegemonic manner” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 126), adapted by media professionals, who, according to Hall, are linked to power elites through the institutional power of the media and through the media’s access to elites. The professional code is independent from the superordinate dominant position when it comes to operational criteria, e.g. of technical or practical nature. However, Hall argues that this position “serves to reproduce the dominants definitions precisely by bracketing their hegemonic quality” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 126) through professional conventions on quality and values concerning texts, representations and ethics. The operation inside the professional code thus often results in ideologically biased reproductions of hegemonic perspectives, inadvertently embedded in a guise of professional objectivity. The present study focuses on the interpretations, negotiations and tensions inside the professional position and in relation to the dominant code.

Hall notes, in passing, that “conflicts, contradictions and even misunderstandings” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 126) regularly occur between the dominant and the professional positions. I suggest that these varying degrees of conflicts also arise between agents who share the professional position, and that the lack of equivalence also may occur inside the code, so to say. Hall stresses the importance of frameworks of knowledge and the relations of production in both the encoding and the decoding part of the model. I propose that both these aspects
may differ considerably between different professional functions. The model has been
developed from the vantage point of television as production of discourse. This production
takes place in an organizational framework characterized by certain hierarchies, routines for
decision-making, and the division of labor based on assigned professional responsibilities and
so on. Thus, the professional code will include different frameworks of knowledge and
different relations of production, which in practice may constitute different professional
positions in relation to the dominant code. This will affect the encoding/decoding practices of
different professional agents in the production. Different professional positions may entail
different interpretations.

In the present study, I use Hall’s hypothetical decoding positions (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 125-
127), but I will treat them as positions of encoding/decoding. I also proceed from the
interpretation of the professional code as including different positions, and focus on the
encoding/decoding that takes place between the agents in the production. Hall developed his
model in relation to television production whereas I observe a nation branding project. This
project is partly determined by a dominant or hegemonic code, encoded by the committee
appointed by the Ukrainian government. The branding narrative about Ukraine that this
committee maps out comes with certain codes; this is what should be communicated.
However, different agents involved in the production of the branding will interpret the
branding narrative according to their respective professional frameworks of knowledge and
relations of production, before they proceed to implementation. Moreover, the agents will
reinterpret the branding narrative continuously throughout the production as they get new
feedback on their implementations.

Hall states that the encoding delimits possible decodings (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 118, 124). I
would like to add that these demarcations do not delimit the encoding/decoding in itself. As
long as new decodings are done in the text production, new encodings will also take place,
and vice versa, until the text is published and the decoding process wanders to the audience
side of Hall’s model. I intend to adapt the model to study the encoding/decoding processes in
the text production of a branding narrative, and this takes me to the media and communication
scholar Esben Ytreberg (1999, 2000), who suggests Hall’s model as a possible theoretical
framework for text production studies because of the model’s focus on the reproduction and
transition of meaning.
4.3 Text production – a set of negotiated priorities

Ytreberg (2000) describes text production studies as studies of the “production process and the resulting texts” (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 53). Dejecting an “anti-auteur position” (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 55) because of the risk of disregard of the impact of the social context on the agents behind the text, and thus on the text itself, Ytreberg argues that an increased theoretical, methodological and empirical integration between traditions from the humanities respectively the social sciences may bridge what he perceives as unproductive separations of studies of production, text and audiences.

The most seminal contributions of Hall’s model are, according to Ytreberg, the incorporation of semiology and the idea of texts as sign structures as well as the attempts to allocate the elements of determination and relative autonomy in the texts “passage of forms” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 117; Ytreberg 2000, p. 55). However, Ytreberg argues that Hall underemphasizes the discursive aspects of the encoder and how they influence the text production and its result:

“Already at the start of the text production process those involved in a given production need to have a measure of common understanding of the goal, of the kinds of texts they are setting about to produce. Thus, text production involves a recursive connection; the production of texts presumes a set of previous text interpretations that are negotiated and subjected to compromises in a social and professional context” (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 56).

Ytreberg (2000) argues that text production and text reception are comparable insofar as both “involve subjects who develop a set of expectations regarding future text interpretations – expectations which in turn are based on previous interpretations” (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 56). Drawing on the idea that the production and interpretations of texts are mutually constitutive, he proposes that the production in cultural industries thus needs to exercise a degree of control over individual interpretations in order to ensure a regular production. This control becomes visible through conflicts and power struggles in the text production. It is this process of negotiating interpretations in the production that the present study intends to observe.

Like Hall, Ytreberg (1999, p.17-19) discusses the production of television. In a study of the Norwegian public television broadcaster, he proposes that text production may be regarded as a circuit where text production and text interpretation are seen as reciprocally constitutive. This implies an emphasis on the constructive aspects of the interpretation, and on the continuity of the interpretation. The process of text production involves a continuous revision and renegotiation. Tensions will arise as individual interpretations are to be adjusted to each
other in order to meet the demands from decision-making hierarchies, deadlines and budgets. In reference to the encoding/decoding model, Ytreberg stresses that whereas audience reception is a construction of meaning out of texts on which the interpreter has no influence, production is a set of negotiated priorities, which are implemented on the texts (Hall, 1973/1992; Ytreberg, p. 15).

Ytreberg (1999, p. 24-30) describes the social interaction and hierarchies of text production as often institutionalised, that is, that roles and mandates are determined as part of a systematic context. The intentions of individual professionals in the production will inarguably have effects on the produced texts, through encoding/decoding, but these intentions have to conform to a collective compromise on the text. Ytreberg regards these compromises as characteristic for the text production of television, and describes them as strategic as they are the basis for the legitimacy of the production team, but also for the surrounding organisation. The revisions and renegotiations take place both within functional teams and different levels of hierarchies as well as between them. The intentionality of the text production should thus be regarded as institutional, as it is a product of both individual and professional as well as organisational interpretations and negotiations.

As Ytrebergs (1999) observations are made from the vantage point of television and the present study concerns the media production of branding Eurovision 2017, his concept of institutional intentionality needs to be adapted to this context. Ytreberg (1999, p. 25) describes the hierarchy of the television broadcaster as constituted by the level of production teams, the level of middle management where central decisions on the text production are made, and the top management of comprehensive decisions. In terms of the present study, I suggest that the top management can be compared to the Ukrainian government who decide how the opportunity to arrange Eurovision should be utilized; the middle management corresponds the organization committee appointed by the government; and the production team consists of the media professionals occupied with the text production. The ambition to brand Ukraine that runs like a common thread through all levels of the production can be described as the institutional, or collective, intention, which individual intentions are adjusted and conformed to. This collective intentionality is expressed in the invitation to the tender for the branding and visualised in the brand book.

The object of study in the present project, the media production of branding, partly consists of images. The cultural geography scholar Gillian Rose (2011) identifies three sites of
interpretation where the meaning of images can be said to emerge: the sites of production, the image itself, and the audience. To facilitate a more exact analytical approach to the processes of each site, she distinguishes between three modalities; a technological, a compositional, and a social modality. For the present study, the verbal images of the material will be interpreted according to Rose’s recommendations. Thus, the social modality of the production site will be approached with questions regarding different interpretations, negotiations and tensions.
5 Method and material

5.1 Qualitative interviews
In the present study, the aim is to explore and discuss processes of nation branding as part of Eurovision 2017 from a media production perspective. I want to understand how the branding narrative of the Europeanness of Eurovision of the event is encoded/decoded as formula for a revised Ukrainian identity. To get insight in the media production, I have made qualitative interviews with five agents involved in the branding (see table below). These agents have all been working with the representation of Ukraine as a nation during the event.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ukrinform</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Agneta</td>
<td>8th, 11th May</td>
<td>1:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republique Designers</td>
<td>Designers</td>
<td>Lars and Johan</td>
<td>10th May</td>
<td>1:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banda</td>
<td>Creative strategy</td>
<td>Fredrik</td>
<td>11th May</td>
<td>1:22 h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine Crisis Media Center, UCMC</td>
<td>PR officer</td>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>12th May</td>
<td>0:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine</td>
<td>International PR manager</td>
<td>Klara</td>
<td>8th August</td>
<td>1:44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Interviews
All agents but two were interviewed in personal meetings during the week of the Eurovision finals in May 2017. The PR manager was too busy for an interview during this week so the interview with her was conducted over Skype in August 2017. As for the agent representing the news agency Ukrinform, personal meetings were conducted, but the interviewee preferred to leave written answers, as these had to be confirmed by her manager.

The company CFC Consulting performed communication tasks for the Ukrainian Eurovision organization and should also have been interviewed. CFC Consulting has been approached on three occasions, but it has not been possible to get an interview within the time span available.
According to the sociologist Alan Bryman (2008, p. 413-432), a semi-structured interview normally refers to a situation where a qualitative interview is performed with the help of an interview guide, which is used in an informal manner in order to reach the quality of a colloquial dialogue where the interests of the interviewee determine the course. Bryman advises that the interview guide should be carefully prepared, follow a structure where different topics form a comprehensive order, avoid too specific or leading questions and use a language that is easy to understand. The researcher should also be careful to observe the environment and context of the interviewee, as this will facilitate the understanding and the analysis of the interview. For the same reason, Bryman also recommends that the interview is recorded and transcribed.

The interviews of the present study were originally made as part of the fieldwork of a project conducted at the Department of Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University, studying nation branding campaigns related to cultural events such as the Eurovision (see Appendix 1 for an abstract). The interviews were semi-structured and two different interview guides were used depending on the interviewees’ function (see Appendix 2). The guides were focused on the production of the Eurovision brand, as this was my specific area of inquiry in the above-mentioned fieldwork. Thus, the interviews may in the present study be regarded as a kind of archive, which is exposed to new research questions.

5.2 Method of analysis
The interviews were transcribed, resulting in a total volume of 55 pages. Thereafter, the first part of the analysis was conducted. All existing themes addressed by the agents were listed (see Appendix 3) and clustered on the basis of their internal bearings, which agents who referred to them and an appreciation of how weighty they were considered for the media production. The themes were e.g. views on a Ukrainian identity, challenges in the production process and the meaning of Eurovision. Next, the transcriptions were revisited in order to examine in which contexts the themes appeared. This process led to the identification of three contexts where reported tensions in the production were salient and stood out as significant in relation to the Ukrainian ambitions for nation branding: 1) the choice of concept for the brand, 2) the relation to Russia and 3) the representation of European values. Even if the whole transcribed material has been analysed through a hermeneutic reading based on the theoretical concepts of Hall’s (1973/1992) model of encoding/decoding and Ytreberg’s (1999) model for the analysis of text production, I will focus the presentation of my analysis on these cases as they encapsulate the most salient occurrences of tensions in the observed production.
The research questions are based on Hall’s (1973/1992) idea of encoding/decoding practices as part of the production of discourse. I want to observe the encoding/decoding of a branding narrative and how different interpretations, tensions and negotiations influence the process. I am focused on how a metanarrative of the Europeanness of Eurovision is encoded/decoded and how it relates to a revised Ukrainian identity.

Ytreberg’s (1999), 2000) methodological vantage point is that the social interaction of the text production is institutionalised, that is, that roles and mandates are determined as part of a systematic context. Thus, I start the analysis of the transcribed interviews with an observation of the agents in the branding process, the functions they perform, the frameworks of knowledge they represent, and their “set of expectations regarding future text interpretations” (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 56). After that, I explore how different interpretations and tensions impact on the media production of the branding narrative, what strategies they give rise to and how they are negotiated in my three cases. I will examine the encoding/decoding of the branding of Ukraine through a focus on patterns of “dominant or preferred meanings” (Hall 1973/1992, p. 123), the conflicts and contradictions between different decoding positions (Hall 1973/1992), and how they bring about continuous revisions and renegotiations of the branding narrative.

The presentation of findings begins with an account of the event and the agents who create, promote and cover the branding narrative. Thereafter, the three cases are presented and discussed against the theoretical framework.

5.3 Methodological reflections
Serious research should be distinguished by transparency and well-grounded argumentation. Alan Bryman (2011, p. 351-358) suggests that qualitative studies should be assessed by the criteria trustworthiness and authenticity instead of the criteria reliability and validity, which are used for quantitative studies. According to Bryman, trustworthiness consists of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Authenticity is constituted through a fair representation, which aims at ontological, pedagogical, catalytical and tactical contributions so that the people involved in the observed situation could potentially use to reach a better understanding of and an improved possibility to influence their circumstances.

In the current suggested study, these criteria will be met through the following measures:
• The interviewees have been chosen in order to represent central agent’s perspectives and responsibilities in relation to the case, thus aiming at a high credibility in observations of the collective intentionality, the encodings/decodings of the professional position and the struggle over meaning in the text production context.

• Thick descriptions of the context and the interviews are made to ensure a high transferability of the analysis.

• A high dependability is sought through a thorough account for the different steps of the studies. Also, the material for research, such as the interview guide, and the brand book will be available in appendixes. Transcriptions of the interviews have been shared with Göran Bolin and Per Ståhlberg at the Department of Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University for their, by now, concluded project on Ukrainian nation branding. The transcriptions are available on request.

• In order to reach a high confirmability, reflections on the personal background and experiences of the observer/interviewer/interpreter should be accounted for, when relevant. In the present study, it is relevant to account for and reflect on what a background as a citizen in a Western European country could mean for interpretations of the meaning of a European identity, or on potential effects on the interviews of media and communication professionals when the interviewer shares the occupational background of the interviewees. As a native Swedish citizen, growing up during the Cold War and experiencing the collapse of the Iron Curtain as a young adult, I consider myself as being raised with the ideas of a Western European supremacy (Bolin, 2010) as an innate quality in the concept of Europeanness, however ambiguous, and also a normative “compulsive Eurocentrism” (Hall 1996, p. 16) which has shown tendencies of regarding the former Soviet states in Eastern Europe as “the internal Other of the European continent” (Kaneva & Popescu 2011, p. 202). These experiences may have influenced my approach to the study object, my encounter with Ukraine and the interviewees, and my understanding of the context. However, my background as a journalist and communication professional has also affected the encounters. The fact that I to a high degree share the agents’ frameworks of knowledge and also many of their experiences inside the professional position, has probably impinged on the interviews, not only when it comes to the level of details in discussions but also for a mutual professional understanding. I have been constantly cautious to maintain a distance to my material, as the recognition has been
considerable in many cases.

- Aiming at the different aspects of authenticity, finally, the findings will be communicated to the interviewees. They will also be offered possibilities to comment and discuss the observations, analysis and findings over mail, Skype or the equivalent.
The event and the agents

In the following, I first describe the conditions for Eurovision 2017 in Ukraine briefly. Thereafter, I proceed to the agents in the branding process. I will describe and comment on the functions they perform, and which frameworks of knowledge (Hall, 2000, 1973/1992) and expectations on future text interpretations (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 56) they represent. Finally, I make a short summary of the findings on the agents.

6.1 Eurovision Song Contest 2017

Eurovision 2017 took place in Kyiv, Ukraine, with semi-finals on the 9th and 11th, and the final on the 13th of May. The preparations for the event were conducted with the on-going armed conflict with Russia in east Ukraine as a complicating backdrop. There were recurring speculations whether Russia would participate or not, and also if Ukraine would manage to host the event at all. At the same time, the Ukrainian government was intensifying their work to promote a future EU membership through changes in visa rules for citizens in the member states of the EU. Regarding this situation, the representation of Ukraine as the host of Eurovision 2017 became a communicative task heavily charged with political interests.

The organization and production was a national responsibility supervised by a governmental organization committee. This committee was also responsible for the branding of the event and formulated the frames and the requirements for the competitive tendering through which the producers were chosen. Apart from the private enterprises appointed by the government after the tendering, the other main agents in the branding process were various national representatives responsible for different functions concerning media and communications, including those specifically concerning the event.

However, the roles were a bit unclear for some agents. Since Euromaidan in 2013 and the resignation of president Viktor Yanukovych in 2014, many national institutions in Ukraine have been re-installed and several politicians have a background in private enterprises and may still be business owners. Bolin, Ståhlberg and Jordan (2016) observe “blurred” (Bolin, Ståhlberg & Jordan 2016, p. 14) boundaries between branding, journalism and diplomacy in Ukraine in the information management of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, as various actors claim to help the Ukrainian government in performing necessary tasks. My material contains an example that may be regarded as confirming this observation. After the organization committee’s choice of branding concept for Eurovision 2017, five committee members oppose the choice in a letter to the EBU and present an alternative concept. One of
the signers is not only involved in Eurovision as a committee member but also as managing director of CFC Consulting, the company responsible for the communication support for Eurovision, and as a manager of the UCMC, the NGO for national crisis communications. He obviously represents mixed interests in relation to the media production of Eurovision.

The instructions for the visual branding of Eurovision 2017 were presented in a brand book, a design manual in the form of a slide presentation\(^\text{15}\). This manual consists of 95 pages of detailed instructions, including a description of the three parts of the logotype and how these should be used, as well as guidelines for design elements such as backgrounds, colours and typefaces. The brand book is instrumental with concrete directions and explicit prohibitions meant to prevent design infringements, e.g. on what backgrounds are allowed. It also suggests how the design could be implemented on objects of various kinds. One slide refers to the concept behind the brand: “Every bead is unique. Just like every individual”.

Illustration 1
Introduction. Logotype for Eurovision 2017
6.2 The agents in the media production

6.2.1 Lars, Johan and Fredrik: Creating the brand

Lars and Johan work at the design agency Republique with branding, naming and graphic design. As they get an invitation to a governmental tender on the creation of a brand for Eurovision 2017 from the organization committee, they are well aware that they will not have an influence on the collective intentions for the brand, as these have already been negotiated between governmental representatives and the EBU.

According to their framework of knowledge (Hall, 1973/1992), Eurovision is not associated with good design. They interpret the “ politicized” production context as difficult to manoeuver, which may affect the quality negatively. However, the quality aspect is an important incentive for their participation, so they set their own professional goal. “We wanted to bring this event to designer’s community”, says Lars. This goal should be
accomplished through a contemporary and interesting design, which they do not find in previous Eurovision brands.

As Republique is specialized on graphic design, they cooperate with partner agencies for the development of creative concepts and strategies. This is how the Banda agency enters the tender. However, as Banda is categorised as an advertising agency, the organization committee has not invited them to the tender, their participation is initially criticized as a result of irregularities. As Banda proves their ranking in advertising, they are allowed in.

Fredrik works with strategy development at Banda. He agrees on the decoding of Eurovision design as indifferent, and understands the participation in the tender as a creative challenge rather than a business opportunity: “For our job, it is very important for your brain to have a challenge. It’s not about money always, and Eurovision is not about money”.

The framework of knowledge for Republique and Banda concerns the interpretation of Eurovision in terms of the quality of cultural production, above all the design. Their framework also implies a set of routines for encoding/decoding the creative task in dialogue with the client, who more often will be a commercial enterprise than an agent in the civil society. These routines will consist of analyses of the subject in question, and at least one workshop for decoding the client’s vantage point in order to identify possible encodings for the creative concepts before the work on implementations can begin. This process will result in a strategy for the project, and continue with a presentation of a couple of possible ideas, which are negotiated until a concept is accepted by the client and can be accomplished.

Following their professional routines, the agencies start to make sense of the brief for the tender and go through earlier Eurovision brands to encode/decode the production context. They interpret the collective intentions of the tender as expectations on a brand identity that creates a modern impression through a combination of international and national features, but not too ethnical or traditional. The agencies decode unity as a basic idea of Eurovision, and encode/decode a fresh interpretation as their challenge. They agree to encode unity through an emphasis of the uniqueness of components. “So it’s unity, but not impersonal”, says Lars.

However, their participation is not only a question of professional ambitions and frameworks of knowledge, but also of a commitment to Ukraine as a nation. This is crucial, as the agencies interpret the context in itself as a quality risk and the pay as relatively low. Fredrik summons their concerns for the image of Ukraine: “We said to each other that we should not let some bad agency take it, and make it really bad, because, you know, if the organizers are
some national committee or something like this, the quality is always bad. … This is the face of Ukraine, the new one, the new Ukraine. And we wanted to take part and to help”.

The agencies thus initially expect the influence from the government and the way the organisation committee is constituted, with ministry representatives alongside managers from the Ukrainian public broadcasting company and the EBU, to be a threat to their professional quality codes. The decision to prevent “some bad agency” from performing the task may also be interpreted as a business compromise in relation to the economic remuneration. The agencies are willing to do this for their commitment to Ukraine. Lars and Johan address the interests to advance the professional position and acknowledge how the quality of their production will contribute to a Ukrainian identity, thus decoding the event as an opportunity to manifest Ukraine’s ability to produce symbolic goods (Bolin, 2002). They also hope that their contribution may create an interest for Eurovision in an international design community.

According to their routines, the agencies arrange a strategy workshop with the committee to examine the prospects for the tender closer. The workshop is a positive surprise as the committee appears less “conservative” than expected. One of the EBU representatives seems to share their quality aim and asks for “brave ideas”: “He said to us, that recent years, it was so-so about the design”, Fredrik recalls. The agents in the professional positions have thus identified an ally in their quality ambitions inside the dominant position.

To get a deeper understanding, they also perform an external analysis through interviews on the event. These interviews come to be encoded/decoded as a first idea for a branding concept. Fredrik summons “the magic of the contest”: “The people said to me that there are so many evil things going on in the world right now, and they are reflecting it, I can feel it. And then, when they started to sing, like, the magic happens, like boom”.

As the production context has been decoded through a variety of measures, the agencies decide on a strategy with three options, which may in relation to their framework of knowledge be understood as a basic approach. “Safe option is like unity, and what is in the DNA of this contest. … One idea should be the underdog, like you know, the bravest one, and maybe, one should be in the middle, like fifty-fifty”, says Fredrik. However, they come to develop four ideas, two from each agency.

6.2.2 Klara and Lena: Promoting the brand
Klara, who is employed by the Ukrainian public broadcasting company, is responsible for the international PR of Eurovision 2017. She does not remember if there were any formal
decisions on the goal for the representation of Ukraine: “When we gather together as a team, we talked about what we would like the world to think about our country”. This interpretation can be understood as significant for her framework of knowledge inside the professional code. As a PR manager she is expected to work in close cooperation with the top management, and to decode/encode the collective intentions presented by the organization committee. This close cooperation is probably also the basis for her expectations on a quite independent mandate, even if it in reality is contingent on accomplishments in equivalence with the dominant code (Hall 1973/1992).

Klara’s framework of knowledge is largely based on a similar structure as that of Republique and Banda’s, although regarding a different area of communication know-how. The general communication plan with goals, activities and separate plans for crisis communication and a follow-up are all based on external analyses and embedded in the organization committee. According to Klara’s framework of knowledge, the messages in the communication plan must be substantiate: “I always tell to my boss, now, you can’t sell the pink elephants if you don’t have those pink elephants. So communications department and PR department can only promote those things, those values, they do have”. However, the promotion of Ukraine soon meets challenges where Klara will have to rely more on her own professional knowledge, than on the substance behind the collective intentions of the dominant code.

There is also a demand from the committee for coordination between agents. Klara reports that all national authorities have their own plan for the event. Above all, however, the strategy for promoting Ukraine must also be coordinated with the EBU strategy for Eurovision. Klara senses an initial scepticism from the EBU representatives. However, she describes how her new colleagues fall in love with Ukraine: “They were trying to help us, to show best of Ukraine”. Her interpretation can be read as a decoding/encoding of her task: Europe may be hesitant about Ukraine’s European affinity, but will change its mind when presented to “the real Ukraine” beyond the media reports from Maidan and the war.

Klara interpret the PR deliveries as an “outstanding success … despite of difficult political situation and a lot of negative impulses due to situation with Russian participant”. This assessment can be understood as part of her framework of knowledge, whether picked up in education or through practical experiences. As her responsibilities are closely intermeshed with the interests of the agents in the dominant position, it is extremely important for her professional position that the impact of the PR activities is independently evaluated. When the Ukrainian government appoints a PR agency to reach the LGBT community with safety
messages, Klara gets an opportunity to benchmark her work and estimates the result as to her professional advantage: “The thing I’m practicing, it’s not pushing the message but pushing a value. The main thing people should get from your communication is a value, not a message”.

Klara’s main duty is the impact of the event on the international image of Ukraine. Eurovision 2017 is explicitly used as a platform for branding Ukraine as a European nation, thus confirming the observations of Bolin, Ståhlberg and Jordan (Bolin 2002, 2006, 2010; Bolin & Ståhlberg 2010, 2015; Ståhlberg & Bolin 2016; Jordan 2011, 2014). Primarily, however, it is necessary to produce an image of a successful event: “Definitely, the first thing was to show the great show, that we can make great Eurovision … to be a real strong hosting country”.

Like the creators of the brand, Klara is very committed to the future of Ukraine.

Lena also works with PR, but in a different context and under different conditions than Klara. She describes the role of her employer, the Ukraine Crisis Media Center, UCMC16, in relation to Eurovision as a partner to the private company CFC Consulting, whose managing director Gennadiy Kurochka is also one of the founders and a director of the UCMC. The CFC Consulting has won the tender on communication support for Eurovision. When they need “help”, the UCMC will offer it. Lena is thereby indeed in the professional position, but has a more distant relationship to the agents of the dominant code and a less ambiguous mandate than Klara: “We would only communicate the messages we were given and we heard”.

Thus, Lena’s briefs and press releases are produced according to instructions from her manager. She seconds the encoding/decoding of the aim to present Ukraine to Europe and to launch Kyiv as a tourist destination, and she is cautious to make any substantive remarks on the planning for Eurovision. As Lena has quite recently finished her studies, her framework of knowledge may still be more tinged by theoretical understanding than practical experiences. She is relatively fresh in the professional position and seems obedient but also watchful in relation to the dominant code. However, the encoding/decoding of the messages she is told to communicate seems to overlap with her individual commitment for Ukraine, and maybe even more so as she as a junior officer has limited insight in comprehensive decision-making and the background to collective intentions. When she comments on the branding of Ukraine, it is largely on the basis of her personal expectations and interpretations.

6.2.3 Agneta: Covering the brand

Agneta is a reporter and head of department at the national news agency Ukrinform17. She describes Ukrinform as closely involved in the process of communication in connection to
Eurovision, even if the agency has not taken part in the branding activities. The latter point is crucial both in relation to Agneta’s interpretations of the independency of her professional role and the news agency. However, Agneta encodes/decodes the collective intention behind the branding of Ukraine: “Different Ukrainian players, both at the governmental and local levels, non-governmental organizations were involved in the presentation of Ukraine during the Eurovision Song Contest, but all of them were working towards a common goal”.

Agneta’s framework of knowledge is based on the journalistic ideal of a detached coverage in the service of the public interest, and the editorial processes in the newsroom environment. According to these, branding is encoded/decoded as a commercial practice with close connections to marketing, practices that journalists should keep on a distance. Thus, the integrity of the news agency requires that the independency of its media production be stressed, even if this production is performed inside a dominant code. Ukrinform contributes to the branding of Ukraine through a journalistic coverage of the preparations for Eurovision and the event itself (see examples in Appendix 4) and has also published a video guide, “Welcome to Ukraine”, targeting foreigner visitors to the event. Additionally, the news agency arranges a number of press conferences on Eurovision, and a seminar serial on Ukrainian culture and traditions during the week of the finals in cooperation with the Ukrainian Information Policy Ministry (Appendix 5).

Ukrinform seems to aim at encoding/decoding Ukrainian culture beyond the contribution to the pop culture of Eurovision. An exposition of world famous Ukrainian persons and phenomenon combined with features of both high culture and contemporary trends may be interpreted as encoding/decoding an image of Ukraine as a vivid and cosmopolitan cultural community with a tangible presence in the Western world. Above all, the program can be read as an ambition to stress a distinct national origin, and obvious efforts to draw attention to the war, though in a manner that evades any direct charges against Russia.

Agneta is an experienced journalist, accustomed to international contacts. Her way of describing the work of Ukrinform in relation to Eurovision is detached and controlled. However professional her journalistic approach may be though, there are occasions when it becomes obvious that she is emotionally concerned of Ukraine, e.g. during one of the news agency’s seminars, when the war with Russia is represented in a drama monologue.
6.3 Summary: Creating, promoting and covering the branding narrative
The agents in the media production work according to the expectations and interpretations of their respective frameworks of knowledge and their professional positions inside the dominant code. They encode/decode the collective intention to brand Ukraine both according to their work routines, and according to their professional and personal expectations regarding future interpretations of the branding (Ytreberg, 2000). All agents in the professional position, regardless of framework of knowledge, are deeply committed to Ukraine in terms of both nation branding and nation building. This personal commitment is crucial for the loyalty in their professional contributions. It may be argued that it makes them vulnerable to tensions that occur between the professional and the dominant position, and that on some occasions this commitment can actually be said to save the face of the dominant code.

The brand creators understand the professional outcome less as a matter of economic reward than as contributing to the image of Ukraine, and also address the task primarily in terms of articulating an identity for Ukraine. They interpret the context as a quality risk because of the political influence and expect a lack of equivalence between the dominant position and their professional framework of knowledge.

The PR professionals both act as spokespersons for the branding of Ukraine, which is in accordance to their professional frameworks of knowledge and their expected relationship to the dominant position. In her role as a manager of the international PR, Klara is expected to encode/decode the collective intentions of the committee. Her close cooperation with the dominant position is probably the basis for her interpretation of the mandate as quite independent—as long as she accomplishes her work in equivalence with the dominant code (Hall, 1973/1992).

Lena has a more distant relationship to the dominant position and a more limited but also less ambiguous mandate than Klara. The encoding/decoding of the messages she is told to communicate seems largely based on her individual commitment for Ukraine, and maybe even more so as she as a junior officer has limited insight in the processes behind the collective intentions. When she comments on the aim of branding Ukraine or the meaning of Eurovision, it is mainly on the basis of her individual interpretations.

Two aspects need to be safeguarded by the agents in the professional code of the PR work according to their framework of knowledge. Firstly, the messages promoting Ukraine must be substantiate, at least as far as the collective intentions are concerned. The agents in the
professional position cannot act as spokespersons if their top management (Ytreberg, 1999) is not prepared to support the articulated encodings/decodings. Secondly, the effects of the PR encodings/decodings must be independently evaluated to confirm the status of the professional code. Otherwise, the results may be interpreted as entirely being achieved by agents in the dominant position as the cooperation is so close that the service performed by the PR professionals might not be visible for the surrounding world.

Agneta, who is a senior journalist, describes the news agency Ukrinform as closely involved in the process of communication in connection to Eurovision. However, in line with her framework of knowledge, based on the ideal of journalistic independence, she indicates clearly that the newsroom should not be involved in any branding practices. The integrity of the news agency requires the encoding/decoding of its independent media production, even if it is performed as part of a dominant code. This can be interpreted as in equivalence with the hegemonic-dominant code, as it is part of a set of expectations on the media’s role in Western European democracies. However, Agneta acknowledges the collective intention behind the branding narrative. Thus, Ukrinform contributes through a journalistic coverage of Eurovision, but also to a broader encoding/decoding of a Ukrainian culture beyond the contribution to the event. Above all, the program can be read as an aim to encode/decode a distinctive national origin, and to draw attention to the war, though in a manner that evades any direct charges against Russia.

Bolin (2002) acknowledges the increasing importance for nations in post-industrial societies to manifest their ability to produce symbolic goods. The agents in the professional position are well aware that the quality of their text production has an impact on the image of Ukraine, both when it comes to the Eurovision event in itself and the components of the branding.

Bolin, Ståhlberg and Jordan (2016) have previously observed blurred roles among agents in the information management in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia and these circumstances seem to remain in the context of Eurovision. There is one obvious example of an agent in the dominant position who has a seat in the organization committee and is simultaneously claiming a political and commercial influence that may not be totally consistent with the collective intentions he is supposed to represent.
7 Tensions in the branding – three cases

The following chapter focuses on my second and third research questions: Which different tensions arise around the branding narrative of the Europeanness of Ukraine? How are these tensions negotiated? I will approach these questions through three cases that illustrate the most salient and significant tensions in the production of the branding narrative. The cases will be explored from the vantage point of the agents involved. The chapter is concluded with a summary of my observations.

7.1 Case 1: Encoding/decoding a branding concept

7.1.1 The firefly or the necklace

The first case concerns the creation and choice of a concept for the Eurovision 2017 brand. The tensions occur partly among agents inside the professional code and partly in their relation to agents in the dominant position, and to some extent also in relation to oppositional readings (Hall, 1973/1992). They arise firstly between the professional agents who, regardless of their cooperation, frame their strategy for the tender in a manner, which creates a streak of competition between them. Secondly, the choice of the brand can be read as a tension between different readings of the preferred meaning (Hall, 1973/1992) of Ukraine’s Europeanness.

Banda starts to refine the idea of Eurovision as an opportunity to unite in the magic of singing. Fredrik describes the concept: “Firefly is the symbol of light. You know in all fairy tales, in Ukrainian fairy tales, Russian, doesn’t matter. When firefly appears at night, you feel yourself more comfortable. Like, the light, and the symbol of light in the dark. If there is light, there is dark also. And the description of the concept, message, is ‘share the light’”.

Even if Banda brings up a range of ideas for implementation of the concept they have difficulties in turning the concept into the desired brave design, and this is also the feedback from the committee: “This concept was great but visually it was weak. … We just didn’t find the right approach to visual style of show”, admits Fredrik.

Banda’s second concept is founded on the same idea but visualised through other symbols; a traditional wreath and a nightingale, which Fredrik describes as a popular Ukrainian bird: “The legend was that all these birds, carrying small leaves and stuff, and then gain one wreath altogether. And just imagine that these birds are Sweden, Austria, Germany, Ukraine”. This concept, however, is not original enough and thus turned down by the committee.

Banda’s suggestions are decoding/encoding an interpretation of Ukraine as a nation that, in spite of conflicts, political turbulence and other strains, has the ability to transcend its hard
experiences, articulate challenges perceived by people all over the Western world and create a basis for a community of hope for peace. The pursuit to highlight Ukraine’s European belonging would be approached as a matter of common values rather than stressing a set of properties or messages. This approach is very similar to Klara’s framework of knowledge.

Whereas Banda’s production is firmly anchored in the concept of the event as a union for goodness through the magic of music, Republique has a more condensed approach to the task, as they focus on the idea of unity as expressed through a combination of design elements. The difference may be understood in terms of their respective frameworks of knowledge but also as dependent on their “expectations regarding future text interpretations” (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 56). An advertising agency is used to aspire to touch upon connotations and associations that may not yet be expressed or even conscious in the society where the marketing is supposed to take place, whereas a design agency concentrates on identifying those simple collective structures and symbols that may constitute an appealing design, which simultaneously creates a sense of recognition and innovation.

Republique develops the third idea, featuring flowers in the shape of traditional Ukrainian wind instruments. The committee turns this idea down because the Ukrainian identity is considered too weak. “It was too Brazilian … too bright, like some samba festival”, says Lars. The preferred reading (Hall 1973/1992) of a Ukrainian identity, according to the collective intention, is thus that it should not be too light and easy-going. The experiences of revolutions and conflicts are expected to be encoded/decoded in the design to create a credible identity.

A traditional Ukrainian necklace inspires the fourth concept, also developed by Republique. The idea emerges from old pictures of Ukrainian women in traditional outfits. Fredrik describes this idea as “the brave one … I didn’t believe that it will win, to be honest”, and has obviously passed it to Republique: “We’re not so rich, but anyway, just imagine Ukrainian lady in the 17th, 18th century; she would never leave her home without a necklace. And when we found these pictures, we just understand that our challenge right now, to make it modern”.

At the first instance of presentations for the organisation committee, the concept of the necklace gets unexpectedly positive reactions. Within five days of the first presentation, the agencies get a response from the EBU representative who has asked for brave ideas. Both concepts of the fireflies and the necklace are in the final. However, Banda, who is requested to make the concept of the fireflies less childish, senses that the necklace is already the main candidate and decides to put their efforts on completing it together with Republique: “We just
said, okay, let’s kill this, let’s move with necklace, because he said to us that necklace is number one, necklace is bingo. Visually, you did it guys”, says Fredrik.

The tension between the agencies, which has been acted out as a competition inside the professional code, however planned, is thus handled through Banda’s voluntary surrender of the firefly concept. This can be understood as an experienced approach in relation to expectations for future interpretations (Ytreberg, 2000) with a stronger emphasis on quality accomplishments and a commitment to what Fredrik call’s “the face of the new Ukraine” than an urge need to claim a professional status. Also, the economic remuneration may have contributed to Banda’s decision. Fredrik states that Eurovision is not about money, and, moreover, the pay is may be shared between the agencies as they enter the tender together.

When the concept of the necklace is accepted by the organization committee, it is because it meets the collective intentions in the tender, both when it comes to the expectations from the EBU on quality and the articulation of the values of Eurovision, as well as the demands from the Ukrainian organisers for a modern articulation of a distinct Ukrainian identity. “All the people on the client side, they said to us: ‘Guys, this is really a big step for Eurovision’, and thank you. And the guys in Ukrainian government commission that you have to be approved by, you know, they also said ‘yes, this is Ukraine, this is very good’”, reports Fredrik.

The choice between the concept of the fireflies and that of the necklace can be interpreted in terms of Ukraine’s geo-political situation. The collective intention can be interpreted as an aim to encode/decode both a European belonging and a distinctive national identity, regarding the conflict with Russia. These aspects reflect interests in nation branding and nation building. The concept of the necklace is an articulation of a Ukrainian character which corresponds directly to a preferred reading (Hall 1973/1992) of Ukraine as an independent nation, and thus to nation building efforts. The concept of the firefly, on the other hand, can be interpreted as more philosophical and transcendent, as it departs from the idea that a Ukrainian perspective on the situation in the world might bring new insights to Europe and the audiences of Eurovision. The visualisation of this concept is considered too weak, but it may also be interpreted as too sophisticated and too open to meet the political demands for both nation branding. Additionally and in comparison to the necklace concept, the firefly may not offer the same opportunity to encoding/decoding identification and pride among the Ukrainian population, and thus not contribute as strongly to nation building aspects. With this in mind, it may be argued that the collective intentions for branding Ukraine as a nation are closely entwined with wishes for nation building. These mixed ambitions creates tension around the
encodings/decodings of the media production and poses challenges to the professional agents. As the work with the brand enters the phase of implementation, tensions arise on concrete aspects of the branding concept, firstly the formulation of the slogan and secondly the elements of the graphic design. Both issues reveal tensions in relation to Russia.

7.1.2 The name of the game – encoding/decoding a slogan
The initial suggestions ‘celebrate unity’ and ‘celebrate harmony’ (the agencies stories differ on this point) quickly give rise to objections from the organization committee. As long as Ukraine is at war, neither ‘harmony’ nor ‘unity’ may be used. Johan refers to an interpretation of the slogan as a political comment on the Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion in Donbas: “So as Eurovision takes place in Ukraine, it would look as though Ukraine would make claims”. The objections make the agents interpret the context as “politicized”.

The notion ‘diversity’, previously turned down, now returns as a second best and is approved by all agents involved. The slogan ‘celebrate diversity’ can be interpreted both as encoding/decoding European values, and as a preferred reading (Hall 1973/1992) of diversity as a Ukrainian asset, which has been addressed in previous branding efforts (Ståhlberg & Bohlin 2016, p. 287).

Whereas Republique’s designers describe the necklace as a way to implement their original design idea of representing unity through the uniqueness of the single elements, the other agents articulate more far-reaching interpretations. The expectations of the professional code (Hall 1973/1992) on potential interpretations of the encoded/decoded symbolism may be summoned with a quote from a committee member, referred by Fredrik: “Necklace is bingo”.

The encodings/decodings of the necklace contains connotations of female strength, beauty and motherhood, and the pride of the family, passed on between generations. Klara regards this as an appropriate encoding/decoding for Ukraine: “In previous time, there was a matriarchy here”. Several agents also emphasise the encoding/decoding of Eurovision’s values of respect and cooperation. Klara says: “People here in Europe are different, from different ground, different cultures, different countries with different interests. And the beads of this necklace, they are different, but together, they make this beautiful unique jewellery”.

Above all, the agents in the text production seem firmly rooted in the idea of a European belonging as a common intention for the branding. This may be because they operate inside the professional position, which is part of the dominant code, but as most of them have
limited insight into the formation of this common intention, they could also be expressing a wider pre-understanding among Ukrainian citizens.

Fornäs (2012) identifies hybridity, otherness and diversity as central in the description of the pursuit of Europeanness. This may be understood as directly encoded/decoded in the Eurovision 2017 slogan, ‘celebrate diversity’. The encoding/decoding of diversity has a strong support among the agents. The slogan is interpreted as encoding/decoding the Ukrainian diversity as an asset and a significant link to Europe: “Ukraine celebrates diversity every single day, and I think it’s a very nice message that links both Ukraine and Eurovision together”, says Lena. The branding concept is also interpreted as a negotiation between nation branding and nation building efforts, between different temporal aspects of Ukraine, and as a reconciliation between the urge for modernity and respect for the nation’s historical distinctiveness: “I think the platform tries to re-introduce, maybe, or introduce, Ukraine to Europe, show the history and show how it was, how it is and how we carry our identity through years”, says Lena.

Although Fredrik adapts to the choice of the necklace for branding concept, there is a lingering commitment to the concept of the fireflies. One reason is the interpretation of Eurovision as a basis for cooperation: “Lots of things nowadays divide us more than five years ago and it’s a bad sign. So if you have such big show and Eurovision, then you should definitely use them as a weapon, in a good sense, against this bad stuff”. Even if the slogan ‘celebrate diversity’ has been set, Fredrik still regards the turned-down concept ‘share the light’ as the conclusive message from Ukraine to the world and describes the nation as a four-year-old child that can only bring good messages to the world. This image and the interpretation of Eurovision may both be interpreted as his encoding/decoding of Ukraine’s relation to Russia.

7.2 Case 2: Encoding/decoding the relation to Russia

7.2.1 Oppositional readings of the brand
The second case regards the impact of the conflict with Russia on the branding of Ukraine. There are instances of negative feedback on the concept of the brand that can be interpreted as oppositional readings (Hall 1973/1992) in relation to, or even within, the dominant code, which create tensions in the media production.

Tensions on the encoding/decoding of the brand are articulated as negative and politically charged reactions on the graphic design. An official from the Ukrainian ministry of culture
contacts Republique and expresses worries that the necklace evokes associations to Saint Basil’s Cathedral in Moscow. Thus, the designers are summoned to an emergency meeting with the ministry official and two experts on Ukrainian patterns, and made to change the patterns of a couple of beads. There is also a politician with a position in one of the Ukrainian ministries who makes a post in social media, interpreting the beads of the necklace as sex gadgets for homosexuals. Additionally, there are rumours saying that the agencies represent Russia, and appeals on sabotage, and finally, a Russian critique of the Eurovision brand as nationalistic and representing the Ukrainian ultra-right.

Lars and Johan who have not expected these interpretations or the critique, suspect that the negative feedback is organized: “As we think, this was promoted by somebody. There were some real trolls who were pushing this stuff despite the professional community say from the first moment that the logo has a good potential”. They interpret the feedback as coinciding with language communities, the Russian-speaking community being very negative. Similar bearings have previously been observed in Estonia by Jordan (2014), who notes tensions between different language-communities, not least in interpretations of the nation’s history and relation to the former Soviet rule.

A political impact is present also when it comes to the choice of colours. The deep blue and magenta red of the brand’s necklace have been chosen with great concern. However, the designers are made to add the colours of the Ukrainian flag. The beads are finally used in all colours on stage and the instructions in the brand book are changed shortly before the contest, according to Lars: “It was somebody strong political who said we have to be national and all the stuff”. There are also requirements that colours in the produced video-graphics for the television event should be changed, but these are not met, as they are expressed too close to the Eurovision finals and there is not enough production time.

A couple of weeks after the interview and the Eurovision final, Republique post a copy of a letter on their Facebook site (appendix 7). The letter has been sent to the EBU before the finals and is signed by five members of the Ukrainian organisation committee, among them the Eurovision winner 2004, who is also a politician, and the managing director of the company that is responsible for communication support for Eurovision, CFC Consulting, who is also one of the founders and a director of the UCMC.

The letter confirms that there have been critical considerations on the slogan ‘celebrate harmony’ because of the conflict with Russia. It also confirms the criticism of the graphic
design. In some versions displayed in the brand book, the logo is represented in the colours red, blue and white. The colours of the logo are, according to the signers of the letter, closely associated with the Russian Federation to Ukrainians. The beads of the necklace are said to resemble Saint Basil’s Cathedral in Moscow. Additionally, the signers of the letter argue that “only poor/destitute people” have traditionally worn the model necklace with one string, and that the logo thus entails a risk of representing Ukraine as a poor country. The signers propose an alternative design and claim that they have all necessary resources to implement the new concept, should it be accepted by the EBU: “If approved, the proposed concept will be treated as final and will no longer be subject to any further changes or alterations”. However, even if the slogan is changed, the EBU does obviously not accept the alternative design proposal and the letter somehow reaches Republique after the contest.

This situation, as represented by the designer’s account and by the letter, may be interpreted in terms of lack of equivalence and oppositional the readings of the dominant code (Hall, 1973/1992). However, these oppositional readings occur inside the dominant position. The signers are members of the organization committee and have had good opportunities to negotiate the collective intentions behind the production of the brand. The managing director of CFC Consulting who is also a manager at the UCMC has obvious economic interests in the media production of Eurovision. It could be speculated if the letter’s pledge for necessary resources to implement a new branding concept refers to the services of his enterprise. However, the negative feedback on the brand design may be interpreted as part of a wider and more complex context, both political and economic.

Except for the anxiety that a one-stringed necklace would connote Ukrainian poverty – which may be read as encoding/decoding an ambiguous attitude to the opportunities of the European market which are simultaneously desired and triggers feelings of inferiority – all issues on the brand design concern Ukraine’s relationship to Russia. The official from the Ukrainian ministry of culture, who worries about Ukrainian and Russian patterns, is probably not acting on his own initiative. He may rather be seen as a messenger for political agents who try to influence the collective intention behind the branding by sidestepping the processes of the organization committee and putting direct pressure on the agents involved in the media production. The colours of the brand are disputed with references to the Ukrainian flag, until the guidelines of the brand book are watered down to a generic rainbow. The agencies are accused of acting on Russian interests and perceive that they are targets for some kind of campaign, driven by political interests, but without being able to identify the source.
The letter to the EBU suggests that the negative feedback could actually origin from within the committee, and that the lack of equivalence inside the dominant position may regard the relationship between Ukrainian political representatives and the EBU, who have to safeguard the values and principles of Eurovision in a pressing environment. When the open efforts to make the EBU discard the concept of the necklace fail, the endeavours move underground and are directed to the media production itself. Different encodings/decodings of the context inside the organization committee may explain why the designers only experience support from the EBU representatives and not from the Ukrainians in the committee. It is possible that without the support from the EBU with its comprehensive focus on Eurovision as an event and as an international brand, the agents in the professional position would have had to submit to the political pressure for nation building encodings/decodings, and everything in the branding would, as Lars mocks, have been blue and yellow. This interpretation ties in with the experiences from the PR work, where tensions arise around the representations of Ukraine.

7.2.2 Defending the encoding/decoding of a Ukraine identity

For Klara, the PR work to show “the real Ukraine, the great country” is directly related to the media reports from Euromaidan and the war with Russia: “They see a picture of a country that is struggling, and actually, the country which is leading the war is not a great place usually for people to come for vacation. So we would like to change this picture”.

She has to tackle two recurring negative claims in the media concerning Ukraine’s ability to host the event; that the budget for Eurovision in Ukraine should be smaller than previous years, and warnings to potential visitors in general, and members of the LGBT community in particular, to go to Kiev for safety reasons. One of the first observations informing the planning process for Eurovision is indeed that journalists and potential visitors are worried about the safety in Ukraine. Thus, the encoding/decoding of Kiev as safe place is crucial.

However, this encoding/decoding is recurrently opposed in the media coverage that Klara has to counter. She refers to a news story about stray dogs being killed in the streets of the city, thus compromising Klara’s efforts to push the value of safety. There is also a murder of a Russian executive near the hotel of the Eurovision delegation. Klara interprets the murder as a deliberate attack on the image of Ukraine as a hosting country: “From my point of view it was really planned very well and was done just because it was that place. … So it’s awful, and actually, I can’t even explain you the feeling of what was going on here as we see these news, and how difficult it was to bring to the people of all the world and bring to the delegations that this is not usual situation for Ukraine”.

47
As the interviewee with Klara takes place after the Eurovision finals, she can admit that she connects the negative publicity to Russia: “As PR manager … I was retrenched to say so, and blame one of the participating countries. But now, I can be open with that, that there is a lot of propaganda in the world, and this propaganda is ruled by Russia, about Ukraine”.

A third issue regards the Russian Eurovision participant Yulia Samoilova who, according to Ukraine, has broken a rule on how to pass the border between the occupied territory and Ukraine and thus cannot participate. The media coverage renders the event a negative publicity that Klara finds difficult to counter: “This is not a normal situation and this is not a usual situation in terms of public relations”. At the time of the interview, the Ukrainian public broadcaster runs the risk of being punished by the EBU for not letting Samoilova participate, which Klara finds unreasonable: “We are just ordinary people, we’re doing radio and TV. … So we can’t change anything with the law of Ukraine, and we can’t control the borders”.

However, the EBU has had a different point of view and Klara has to comply the rules in her contract for Eurovision. Even if she emphasises how much she has appreciated the cooperation with EBU, it is obvious that the tensions have been exhaustive: “As a citizen of Ukraine, it hurts when I see that someone is lying about my country and I should say to journalists calling me “I don’t know where it’s coming from”, when I do know exactly where. … It’s sometimes very, very difficult inside of me. I don’t know why it’s so, and maybe it’s because I’m young and so passionate about Ukraine and reforms here”.

Klara says that she would prefer to keep politics away from Eurovision, but does not acknowledge the political aspects of the encoding/decoding of a Ukrainian brand. She has accepted her professional position inside the dominant code, but when she defends the dominant-hegemonic position, according to her commission from the organisation committee, she finds that she and her PR team have to tackle the tensions very much on their own. The EBU does not take a stand in the conflict between two member nations. The political agents in the committee may want to act but they will not do it openly as this would endanger their positions in the committee and maybe also expose them to attacks. When competing representations of the conflict with Russia are encoded/decoded with Eurovision as a backdrop, Klara and her PR colleagues are in fact the only agents who in practice represent the collective intentions of the dominant code. The negotiations behind these collective intentions seem to rift as the encoding/decoding of the branding narrative is compromised.
It also becomes obvious that the collective intentions behind the dominant code have not gone as far as recognition of the need for issue management concerning the core ideas of the branding narrative. This may be explained by a lack of reflexive consciousness in relation to the process of encoding/decoding. The EBU representatives are probably experienced when it comes to handling conflicts around nation branding interests, but may not be used to the kind of information warfare that takes place as part of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. The Ukrainian representatives, on the other hand, may be too emotionally, politically and even economically involved to reflect on their own involvement in “the exercise of symbolic power through representational practices” (Hall, 1997, p. 249). The ability to handle this kind of symbolic struggle with Russia over media representations of Ukraine may not have been addressed in the negotiations of collective intentions, or maybe the question seemed inappropriate to address in the Eurovision context. However, Klara simply has to rely on her framework of knowledge (Hall, 1973/1992) to handle the situation.

7.2.3 Encoding/decoding the war

The conflict with Russia is easier to handle for those agents who already have developed strategies to approach the subject in a direct manner, the UCMC and Ukrinform. As for the UCMC, the encoding/decoding of the war with Russia is one of the NGO’s core duties. The war is thus a significant part of Lena’s account for their contribution to the work in relation to Eurovision. She describes the deliberate efforts to draw attention to the war in Eastern Ukraine in connection to the event. Ukrainian soldiers and veterans share their experiences in order to encode/decode new perspectives on the war, e.g. through an installation on Maidan Square. Lena consistently encodes/decodes the Ukrainians relation to the soldiers as a matter of gratitude: “We do try to keep the country going for them, and thankfully for them, the country is going, because they are defending it”. The potential tension between the organization and expenses of Eurovision in Ukraine and the on-going war is elegantly rationalised. The soldiers are said to be grateful that the country is living and developing so that they may return to a country “that is not stuck ten years back”, as Lena puts it, when the war one day is over. Eurovision is encoded/decoded as part of this developing Ukraine.

There is also an explicit interpretation of Eurovision as an opportunity to encode/decode Ukraine as more than war and crisis through a European recognition of the nation’s capacity to host big events: “I think this Eurovision came in very good timing, because we’re not only… you know, we’re not a depressed country, it’s not only war”. However, Lena is quick
to stress that even if Eurovision will help to encode/decode a positive image of Ukraine, the Ukrainians themselves do not forget about the conflict with Russia.

When referring to expectations on the event, Lena particularly stresses the safety aspects. She reminds of terrorist threats in different parts of Europe and encodes/decodes these in terms of a shared challenge and common values: “You can come to Kyiv or any other European country and you should feel safe, and there shouldn’t be any attacks or threats to people, and Ukraine and Kyiv tried to do everything so people feel safe in Kyiv, and so far it’s been great. I think people can freely walk around and freely express their opinions. … We do have issues on the east, but you can feel safe here, you can feel safe everywhere”.

Through a flash mob with the hash tag ‘Eurovision matters’, Lena has heard several interpretations of the event including the idea of a new entrance for nations. Again referring to the Ukrainian soldiers and the war, this is also her encoding/decoding of the meaning of Eurovision for Ukraine: “Eurovision matters for Ukraine as a chance to show Europe that it’s safe here, that it’s fun here. You know, we’re just as European as everyone else, and we welcome everyone here”.

Although the war is present throughout the interview, Lena never mentions Russia directly. A similar strategy can be observed in most of the media representations from Ukrinform. Ukraine’s “European credentials” (Jordan 2014, p. 50) are expressed not only in PR messages but also through the journalistic work of Ukrinform, which emphasises the democratic foundation for their editorial independency and transparency and display elaborated practices to accomplish detached portrayals of the war without confronting Russia. The media texts from Ukrinform can be regarded as torn between the encoding/decoding of Ukraine as a safe place and a wish to remind visiting journalists of the war, without letting the representations of the conflict become too dominating in relation to Eurovision. This tension is also explicitly addressed by Agneta: “The current situation is notable for the fact that the Eurovision Song Contest 2017 is held amid Russia’s ongoing aggression in Donbas and occupation in Crimea. Therefore, this event is another chance to draw Europe’s attention to the issues which are acute for Ukrainians.”

Ukrinform treats Ukraine’s geopolitical situation and conflict with Russia in a journalistic but somewhat indirect manner. Several texts negotiate the relations between eastern and western Europe and encode/decode both a traditional and contemporary Ukrainian affinity to the west. The links to Europe are represented through a display of celebrity Ukrainians who have made
an impact on Western culture but also through artistic portrayals of the conflict with Russia. These portrayals can be regarded as encoding/decoding traditional binary representations of good and evil, as well as a traditional European divide between East and West. As Ukraine is obviously not siding up with Russia, the nation is encoded/decoded as closer to the West.

There are several references to an affinity to European values, such as an encoding/decoding of Ukraine as a permissive melting pot of regional diversity as a counterpart to a Western broad-minded cosmopolitanism, with Crimea and examples of Crimea Tatar traditional culture, handicraft and food as the most emphatic example. There is a presentation of the national news agency, celebrating its 100 years jubilee in 2018, which may be interpreted as a way to highlight the existence of independent media in Ukraine and the acknowledgement of European democratic values like freedom of the press. Ukrainian traditions, for example embroidery, music and cuisine, are encoded/decoded as clearly distinguished from Russian culture. Finally, both the Euromaidan and the war with Russia are addressed in a manner that exhibits the capacity of Ukrainian cultural production, e.g. through a photo exhibition of abandoned pets taken care of by Ukrainian soldiers, and a drama monologue where the expulsion of the Crimea Tartars is represented through a woman’s relationship to a cat. Even when the war is explicitly portrayed, Russia is never mentioned by name.

Agneta writes that Ukraine wants to be perceived “as a hospitable country with European values, which has much to show and be proud of.” The representation of Ukraine as a nation under strain and aggression, which still manages high quality achievements in both technical and cultural matters, encodes/decodes a narrative frame that may be interpreted as a kind of David and Goliath-story.

The conflict with Russia is thus present in the media production of all agents. Some of them are involved in encodings/decodings, which are more or less related to information warfare. Some of them have to handle symbolic attacks, which may be associated with the conflict. The political impact of the dominant code is obvious in the production of the branding but more absent when it comes to issue management. The designers have to face a contradictory negative feedback and charges but are supported by the EBU. Klara largely has to tackle a negative publicity she suspect stems from fake news production, while simultaneously complying the rules of the EBU. It appears that the conflict, which must not be addressed by the official Ukraine as a Eurovision host, is stuffed into the operative level of the media production of the branding. The political top management behind the collective intentions of the branding do not want to be visible in the tangible issues, so the agents in the production
have to manage by themselves. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the failure of the organisation committee to develop a strategy for issue management in relation to this conflict thus surfaces in the media production as strains on the professional position but without any qualified support from the agents behind the collective intentions.

Those agents who have outspoken responsibilities to deal with encodings/decodings of the conflict seem to work according to carefully drafted practices. The conflict is represented through individual cases, artistic production, detailed facts and statistics, thus encoding/decoding images of the war but avoiding direct charges and without ever mentioning Russia. However, the media production is tangibly affected by the conflict.

The collective intention to encode/decode a distinct Ukrainian character in the branding narrative may be interpreted as a “commonsense” (Williams, 1976, p. 118) undertaking, but the encoding/decoding of the media production also provoke oppositional readings (Hall, 1973/1992), also inside the dominant position. It is clear that the collective intention contains fears that Ukraine may be regarded as “Little Russia” (Ståhlberg & Bolin 2016, p. 280), which also affects the media production, both in terms of how a Ukrainian identity and the representations of the war are encoded/decoded. In correspondence with Jordan’s (2014) observations, Eurovision is also encoded/decoded as an opportunity to manifest national sovereignty and present a situation of normalcy, despite the on-going war.

7.3 Case 3: Encoding/decoding European values

7.3.1 An ambiguous linchpin in the branding narrative
The third case regards the encoding/decoding of European values. This is a linchpin in the Ukrainian branding efforts, but an ambiguity in the European belonging is obvious, e.g. when it comes to attitudes to the LGBT community. The tensions regard the different estimates of tolerance in the Ukrainian society and appear between the agents of the professional position and the dominant code, and thus also between the agents of the professional position, depending on their functions and frameworks of knowledge (Hall 1973/1992).

The branding narrative encodes/decodes Eurovision as an opportunity to a closer affinity to Europe. As Fredrik puts it: “It is the sign that they trust us, and that they want us to be more close to … not to Russia, sorry, but to the West”. The European belonging is a basic and recurrent encoding/decoding in the branding efforts, and there is also an explicit aim to promote a future Ukrainian membership in the EU, even if Eurovision is acknowledged as a formally non-political arena.
Fornäs proposes that a European identity is linked to “modernity, progress and civilisation” (Fornäs, 2012, p. 12). Klara, who in her close cooperation with the organization committee is loyal to the dominant code, interprets Ukrainian reforms as a matter of realising European values: “We think in the same way as people in other European countries do, and we’re struggling for, fighting for those European values, and with those changes in our country and those reforms we are moving to the level of life that European countries have”. The “core values of moving to Europe” are encoded/decoded as a collective “Ukrainian prospect” for the future, intended to manifest that Ukraine wants to part of a European community. The values regard transparency, respect for diversity and human rights, as well as a European standard of living which Klara encodes/decodes as “this level where you live your life with dignity”.

The agents interpret the European values of the branding narrative largely as a question of Ukrainian politics. These values appear as a “set of expectations regarding future text interpretations” (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 56), prevalent in the dominant code. It is not clear whether they are articulations of the collective intention formulated by the organization committee or a kind of public Ukrainian pre-understanding. In this sense, they can be said to represent a Ukrainian “commonsense” (Williams, 1976, p. 118) that is crucial for national elites to encode/decode in order to gain and keep the trust of the public opinion. The core encodings/decodings of the branding narrative are basically the same as Jansen (2008) summons from the campaign “Welcome to Estonia”: The nation branding encodes/decodes Ukraine as transformed and prepared to welcome visitors and investors, whereas a European belonging is encoded/decoded as a prospect for Ukrainian citizens, and to a high extent a question of sharing European values and access to a European standard of living.

The agents in the media production encode/decode European values in terms of a Western European supremacy, which Bolin (2010) regards as a traditional base in the common idea of Europeanness. However, Ukraine is explicitly described as a young nation, badly in need of reforms as well as geopolitical and economic stability. A Western European supremacy may be understood rather as a comparison to a Russian alternative future than as a depreciation of the present Ukraine. In the Ukrainian branding narrative, Europe is “a land of the future” (Fornäs 2012, p. 38). Horbyk (2017) suggests that Ukraine has a long tradition of aspiring to European rights and values, and that its elites address European standards not only for material conditions but also when it comes to “social practices and governing values” (Horbyk, 2017, p. 320). In my material, the Europeanness of Ukraine is primarily encoded/decoded as a prospect for the future. The role model of Europeanness is largely
understood in terms of political qualities such as transparency, equality in law and human rights. These values tie well in with some of the values identified by Bauman (2004) – rationality, democracy, justice and liberty. They may also be connected categories of values that Horbyk (2017) identify as associated with Europe: freedom, humanitarianism and democracy as well as the concept of modernity.

However, my material also indicates tensions in the Ukrainian society concerning the European values. These tensions are encoded/decoded as different conditions for citizens in general respectively elites, e.g. when it comes to legal proceedings, and as different mind-sets among citizens. Russia is a recurring point of reference in the tensions surrounding the encoding/decoding of Ukraine’s European belonging. The relationship to Russia is also encoded/decoded as tensions between Ukrainian citizens, depending on different mind-sets, and touches upon mechanisms of othering. The Ukrainian prospect, encoded/decoded through the idea of European values, is thus interpreted in terms of a geographic divide between east and west, a temporal distance to a communist past and an acknowledgement of the conditions for international competitiveness in a globalized and neo-liberal economy, e.g. through appropriate values. The wish to demonstrate that the nation has broken with its “communist past” (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011, p. 196) is articulated as a tension between citizens, which may be seen as a domestic othering.

Bolin (2006) points to the significance of representations of the categories of time and space. In the present study, one of the central discursive positions is implicitly encoded/decoded through the category of time. The prospect of a European belonging is represented as a future that Ukraine is ready to enter if it may prove its worthiness, its Europeanness. Russia is the ever-present but seldom mentioned alternative, which is symbolically fought, beyond the rules of Eurovision and the EBU. The collective intension behind the branding efforts seem to correspond to prevailing urges for nation building and for putting both a Soviet past and a Russian presence at a distance, rather than a thought-through “cultural strategy” (Bolin, 2006, p. 83) for a mediated construction of the nation.

The tensions also surface as a kind of domestic othering, encoded/decoded as geographically contingent mind-sets. The regional tensions in Ukraine are encoded/decoded as the presence of an “internal other” who is still based in “the historical experience of Soviet rule” (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016, p. 280). These tendencies to the encoding/decoding of “hierarchies of othering” (Kaneva & Popescu, 2014, p. 506) in my material may be understood in terms of
domestic tensions but also as a product of the professional position of the agents, as part of the dominant code (Hall, 1973/1992). Another possible understanding is that the tension could mirror societal divides between generations, urban and rural populations, and different socioeconomic groups.

7.3.2 Encoding/decoding attitudes to the LGBT community

Respect for the LGBT community is an important part of the European encoded/decoded in the branding narrative. The promotional work has to fight media reports that could scare the LGBT community from coming to Kiev. The agents acknowledge that Ukrainian attitudes towards sexual minorities may not be unproblematic and previous occurrences of violence and beatings: “But that was in the past and now everything is friendly”, says Klara, who encodes/decodes attitudes to sexual minorities it as a question of human rights: “Ukraine respect human rights, so we don’t care who you love”. She encodes/decodes negative attitudes as belonging to the past, thus revealing a tension inside the professional code, as other agents are dubious about the quality of this liberal encoding/decoding. They interpret the attitudes to sexual minorities in the Ukrainian society as conservative still, or even aggressive, and the encoding/decoding of tolerance as glossing over reality. Johan interprets the encoded/decoded tolerance of sexual minorities as a political means to approach the European market.

The agents are aware that the encoding/decoding of attitudes to the LGBT community will be important for assessing Ukraine’s ability as a Eurovision host. This is above all a question of how domestic attitudes are handled. The interviewees convey the political ambiguity: On the one hand, the Ukrainian population as a whole is conservative when it comes to sexual minorities. It may be reasoned that this is not a question that will render Ukrainian ballots. On the other hand, an increased openness is a condition for a closer relation to the EU, also in economic terms. Any incident where members of the LGBT community are exposed or even attacked would damage the encoded/decoded image of a European Ukraine and may affect potential investments, tourism and goodwill. The elites acknowledge the symbolism of the LGBT question and act in order to protect Ukrainian interests in relation to the European community and market they want to become a more active part of. The governmental strategy is to appoint a PR agency in order to take special care of the LGBT issue, but the dominant code does not even convince the agents in the professional position. The interviewees’ account display a tension between the governing elites and Ukrainian citizens.

The tensions may also be understood as differences in attitudes between a Ukrainian public and the elites governing the representations in the branding. Thus, the Ukrainian branding
narrative may be read as a reflection of the pursuits of a political and economic elite to prove their European credentials (Jordan 2014, p. 50) and the nation’s international competitiveness, consistent with Marat’s (2009) and Aronczyk’s (2013) observations. According to Aronczyk, the cultural belonging is central to an international hierarchy of perceived competitiveness. The focus on the encoding/decoding of European values in the Ukrainian branding narrative may thus be understood as a collective intention to position Ukraine in terms of international attractiveness and marketability.

However, Klara, who has a responsibility for the dominant encoding/decoding of the attitudes to the LGBT community, stresses the human right’s aspects. Lena, who occupies a similar but more subordinate position, expresses the collective intentions in terms of the core idea of Eurovision, exactly as the dominant code will have it: “It’s the festival of music, and people should come together and celebrate it, no matter where you’re from, what are your religious beliefs, what are your political beliefs. I think all of that has to be put aside.”

7.4 Summary: The tensions of the branding narrative
My three cases illustrate the most salient tensions in the media production of the branding narrative. The first case concerns the creation and choice of a branding concept. The second case regards the encoding/decoding of Ukraine’s relationship to Russia. The third case concerns the encoding/decoding of European values in the branding narrative. In the following, I summarise the different tensions that arise and how – and if – they are negotiated.

7.4.1 Tensions between the firefly and the necklace
The first case concerns the creation and choice of a concept for the Eurovision 2017 brand. The tensions occur firstly between the professional agents who frame their strategy for the tender in a competitive manner, regardless of their cooperation. This may be understood as part of their framework of knowledge (Hall, 1973/1992) in a commercial environment

The concept of the firefly can be read as decoding/encoding the idea that Ukraine, in spite of conflicts, political turbulence and other strains, could address a set of general expectations all over the Western world on future interpretations (Ytreberg, 2000) of hope for the future. The pursuit to highlight Ukraine’s European belonging would be encoded/decoded as a matter of common values rather than stressing a set of distinct properties or messages. The concept of the necklace represents a more condensed approach to the task of branding Ukraine, departing from the idea to encode/decode unity as a combination of unique elements. The different approaches may be read in terms of the agencies’ respective frameworks of knowledge (Hall,
An advertising agency is used to aspire to encode/decode those connotations and associations that may not yet be expressed or even conscious in the society where the marketing is supposed to take place, whereas a design agency concentrates on identifying those simple structures and symbols that may constitute an appealing design and encode/decode simultaneous experiences of recognition and innovation.

The tension between the agencies and the concepts is handled through a voluntary surrender of the firefly concept. This can be interpreted as a stronger emphasis on the accomplishment of “the face of the new Ukraine”, as one of the agents says, than a need to claim professional status. Also, the economic remuneration may have contributed to the decision. The concern for Ukraine may in this context be regarded as more important than the relative success inside the professional position.

However, the choice between the firefly and the necklace can also be interpreted as tensions between different approaches to the task of branding Ukraine’s Europeanness, and negotiations between the demands for nation branding and nation building. When the concept of the necklace is accepted by the organization committee, it is because it meets the preferred meaning (Hall, 1973/1992) of the collective intentions, both when it comes to the expectations from the EBU on quality and the articulation of the values of Eurovision, and the demands from the Ukrainian organizers for a modern articulation of a distinct Ukrainian identity. Through its encoding/decoding of a Ukrainian character, the necklace also corresponds directly to an urge to maintain Ukraine’s right to independence and its territory, and thus to nation building efforts. The concept of the firefly, on the other hand, can be regarded as more philosophical and transcendent and it may be argued that it is both too sophisticated and too open to meet the political demands for nation branding. Additionally, the firefly may not offer the same opportunity for identification and pride in the Ukrainian population as the necklace, and thus not contribute as strongly to nation building aspects.

7.4.2 Tensions in the encoding/decoding of the Ukrainian relationship to Russia
The second case concerns the encoding/decoding of the relationship to Russia. The implementation of the branding concept of the necklace leads to oppositional readings of the dominant code (Hall, 1973/1992). Some of these oppositional readings can be interpreted as a result of tensions inside the dominant position, which the organization committee fail to handle through negotiations. The tensions are instead projected on the implementation of the necklace, surface as political objections to the slogan, the elements of the graphic design, and even the colours, which are said to evoke associations to Russia.
A letter to the EBU confirms the critical considerations on the slogan and the graphic design inside the dominant position, related to the conflict with Russia. The signers present an alternative suggestion, and it may be suspected that one of them, who is both a member of the organization committee and the managing director of a company that delivers communication support to Eurovision, would like to take the full responsibility for the encoding/decoding of the branding narrative. However, the EBU turn this offer down. The letter suggests that a lack of equivalence (Hall, 1973/1992) inside the dominant position may regard the negotiations between Ukrainian political representatives and the EBU who have to safeguard the values and principles of Eurovision in a pressing environment. When the open efforts to make the EBU discard the concept of the necklace fail, the endeavours are directed to the media production. Different preferred meanings (Hall, 1973/1992) inside the organization committee may explain why the designers only experience support from the EBU representatives and not from their fellow citizens in the committee. However, in many ways, the agents in the professional position have to submit to the political pressure or are even sidestepped.

The designers win the tender through their encoding/decoding of the collective intention, but there is no support from the dominant position against oppositional readings (Hall, 1973/1992). The produced media texts acquire an independent status, which the agents in the dominant position seem to have limited interest in defending, maybe because this would represent a political risk and make them into targets for oppositional readings. This interpretation also ties in with the experiences from the PR work, where tensions arise around the representations of Ukraine.

The PR efforts are directly related to the media reports from Euromaidan and the war, and thus affected by tensions in the relationship to Russia. There are recurring negative claims in the media concerning Ukraine’s ability to host the event, that the budget for Eurovision in Ukraine should be smaller than previous years, and warnings to potential visitors in general and members of the LGBT community in particular to go to Kiev for safety reasons. There is also an issue with the Russian singer who is not allowed into Ukraine for Eurovision. The PR manager regards all these issues as results of Russian “propaganda”.

When the conflict with Russia is enacted in the media with Eurovision as a backdrop, the PR manager and her colleagues are in fact the only ones who represent the collective intentions of the dominant code. The EBU cannot take a stand in a conflict between two member nations. The political agents in the committee may want to act but they will not do it openly as this could endanger their positions in the committee and maybe also expose them to attacks. The
negotiations behind the collective intentions rift as the image of Ukraine is compromised through media representations. It also becomes obvious that the collective intentions have not gone as far as recognition of the need for issue management concerning the core ideas of the branding. This may be explained by a lack of reflexive consciousness in relation to the process of encoding/decoding a branding narrative. The Ukrainian committee members are in fact occupied with nation building, and the EBU representatives may have underestimated the risk for tensions or simply regarded it as not being their business.

The war is one of the UCMC’s core duties. It is significantly present in their contribution to the work in relation to Eurovision and there are deliberate efforts to draw attention to the war in connection to the event. The representations of the war are mainly encoded/decoded through the experiences of Ukrainian soldiers and veterans. The relationship between Ukrainian citizens and soldiers is encoded/decoded as a matter of mutual gratitude. The war is also encoded/decoded as adding an extended meaning to Eurovision in Ukraine.

The media representations from Ukrinform balance the ambition to present Ukraine as a safe place ready to welcome tourists with the intention to remind visiting journalists of the war, without letting the conflict become too dominating in relation to Eurovision. Ukrinform treats the conflict with Russia in a journalistic but indirect manner. Several texts negotiate the relations between eastern and western Europe and stress both a traditional and contemporary Ukrainian affinity to the West. The portrayals of the conflict with Russia can be regarded as encoding/decoding binary representations of good and evil, as well as a traditional European divide between East and West where Ukraine obviously is not siding up with Russia.

The agents in the media production display different strategies to handle the tensions concerning Ukraine’s relationship to Russia. As for the implementation of the graphic design of the brand and the international PR, the agents find themselves in positions of being a kind of hostage in relation to the encodings/decodings of the media texts. The conflict with Russia exercises an obvious and sometimes confusing pressure on the agents and there is limited support to get from the dominant position. When it comes to the UCMC and Ukrinform who have outspoken responsibilities to deal with representations of the conflict with Russia, the work seems to follow carefully elaborated strategies. The conflict is encoded/decoded through individual cases, artistic production, detailed facts and statistics, thus mediating an image of the war but avoiding direct charges and without ever mentioning Russia. However, the media production is tangibly affected by the conflict.
7.4.3 Tensions concerning the European values

The third case regards the encoding/decoding of European values. This is a linchpin in the Ukrainian branding efforts. Bourdieu (1980/1991) understands struggles over ethnic or regional belonging as relying on the naturalisation or objectification of certain categories, and the branding narrative of Ukraine aims at naturalising a European belonging through the encoding/decoding of certain values. However, these European values contain a considerable ambiguity, even in the limited context of my study; firstly as they may be regarded as a politically encoded/decoded prospect for the future rather than as tangible qualities; secondly as it is uncertain how anchored these values are among Ukrainians. The tensions regard the sincerity behind the encoding/decoding, e.g. when it comes to attitudes to the LGBT community. They appear between the agents in the professional position and the dominant code, and also between the professional agents, depending on their functions and frameworks of knowledge (Hall, 1973/1992).

Eurovision is encoded/decoded as an opportunity to a closer Ukrainian affinity to Europe. Russia is a recurring point of reference in the encoding/decoding of this European belonging. The relationship to Russia is also present as encodings/decodings of conflicting mind-sets among Ukrainian citizens. Attitudes among certain groups of citizens are interpreted as lagging behind and posing an obstacle for reforms, and there are tensions in relation to elites, who are described as less trust-worthy when it comes to transparency, corruption and judicial equality. The tensions are interpreted as a matter of sharing European values and tendencies to othering can be observed.

Respect for sexual minorities is encoded/decoded as a crucial part of the European values that Ukraine claims to share. As the attitudes to the LGBT community will be important in the assessment of the nations ability as a Eurovision host, Ukraine is encoded/decoded as a country that respects human rights. This is especially salient in the PR. However, the interviewees’ account display a gap between governing elites and Ukrainian citizens. In the case of the LGBT community, the trust in the dominant code is weak even in the professional position, but the lack of equivalence (Hall, 1973/1992) is never exposed enough to create manifest tensions in the media production.

It has previously been suggested that media events provide interesting cases for observing nation branding efforts because of their ability to establish discursive positions. The branding
of Ukraine in relation to the organization of Eurovision may be regarded as “a discursive tool in the definitions of Europeanness” (Bolin, 2006, p. 191) and presents a context of different discursive positions, which the agents in the professional position have to adapt their production to. The media production of the branding narrative thus becomes a process of managing tensions in the encodings/decodings of Ukraine in a struggle for the “authority of truth” (Foucault; Hall, 1997/2013, p. 33).
8 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore processes of nation branding, as part of media events, from a media production perspective. I have departed from a cultural approach to the symbolic power of the media as exercised through cultural codes and as production of discourse. Inspired by the idea that representations produced in nation branding processes results from negotiations between different agents (Bolin, 2006), and Bolin and Miazhevic’ (2018) call for increased focus on nation branding as media practices, I have addressed the organizational context of the branding of Ukraine in relation to Eurovision 2017 in order to examine how patterns of power and behaviour are reflected in the media production.

The study has been performed through observations of the media production of a branding narrative of Europeanness as formula for a revised Ukrainian identity, in relation to Eurovision 2017. The different interpretations, tensions and negotiations in the production have been explored and discussed with a methodological basis in Hall’s (1973/1992) model for encoding/decoding television production and Ytreberg’s (1999) idea of the collective intentionality as a governing principle in the hierarchic organisation of media production. My material has consisted of the reported experiences and verbal images (Rose, 2011) expressed in five qualitative interviews with agents in the media production. Applying Hall’s hypothetical decoding positions (1973/1992) and concentrating on the professional position and its relation to its superior, the dominant-hegemonic position, I have aimed at a deeper understanding of how the production context, with a continuous circuit of interpretations and compromises between different hierarchic levels in the production (Ytreberg, 1999), comes to shape the branding narrative. I have traced some of the tensions in the branding narrative and observed how these tensions are negotiated in the struggle over the meaning (Hall, 1997/2013) of a Ukrainian identity and the nation’s European affinity.

The branding narrative of Ukraine is created, promoted and covered by agents inside the professional position (Hall, 1973/1992), struggling to defend their position and the media production of the branding, both negotiating tensions in relation to the dominant code and in relation to oppositional readings (Hall, 1973/1992). The agents develop strategies to navigate in the exposed ground of the conflict with Russia and they stand up for the collective intentions even when their political employers do not. Their strategies are partly supported by their frameworks of knowledge (Hall, 1973/1992), which consist of professional tools and routines, quality standards and, above all, certain sets of expectations regarding future text interpretations (Ytreberg, 2000, p. 56), developed in professional training and experience.
These frameworks of knowledge facilitate their interpretations of tensions and conflicts, but equally important in this context is their considerable commitment for “the face of the new Ukraine”, to once more use Fredrik’s expression. The collective intentionality is overall strong and consistent in the media production process, even if the agents have not taken formal part in the negotiations and decisions of the dominant position (Hall, 1973/1992).

Anyhow, there is a considerable lack of equivalence (Hall, 1973/1992) between the agents in the professional position in relation to the dominant code. This lack of equivalence is not a matter of oppositional readings of the collective intentionality (Ytreberg, 1999) but rather appears as tensions in the realisation of the branding. I have used three cases to illuminate different aspects of these tensions: The choice of branding concept, the encoding/decoding of the relationship to Russia, and the encoding/decoding of a Ukrainian Europeanness.

The tensions mainly occur between the agents in the professional position in relation to oppositional readings of the dominant code (Hall, 1973/1992). They can be understood as struggles over the preferred meaning (Hall, 1973/1992) of Ukraine’s Europeanness in the branding narrative, which are enacted in the media production.

The agents in the professional position have to be loyal to the dominant code if they want to keep their positions. They also have to take responsibility for the quality of the branding narrative in order to defend their professional status. However, this professional responsibility traps them in a position of hostage in the service of hegemony, as their media texts become surfaces for projection of oppositional readings of the branding, even when this oppositional reading origins from tensions within the dominant position. The agents in the dominant code may not have gone as far as recognition of the need for a continuous re-negotiation of the core ideas in the collective intentions. The tensions instead surface in the media production and the agents in the professional position are in the end – maybe in cooperation with the EBU representatives who guard the Eurovision concept – the main defenders of the collective intention of the branding narrative.

The compromises in the media production mainly have their origin in oppositional and professional readings of the dominant code. The present context of Eurovision represents simultaneous political aims for cooperation and peace on the European level, and political aims for nation branding and nation building on the national level of Ukraine. On some occasions these political interests can be conceived of as colliding inside the dominant position, and the tensions these collisions generate come to be projected onto, and thus
inform, the media production. Ytreberg (1999) proposes that the production in cultural industries needs to exercise a degree of control over individual interpretations in order to ensure a regular production, and that this control becomes visible through conflicts and power struggles in the media production. Departing e.g. from the case with the official from the cultural ministry, I suggest that this process could also be reversed: Oppositional readings resulting from a lack of equivalence inside the dominant position (Hall, 1973/1992) will circumvent the collective intentionality (Ytreberg, 1999) in order to be articulated. The opposition surfaces as an individual initiative outside of the process of negotiations, aiming to influence the conceivable readings of the branding. Tensions inside the dominant position are enacted as struggles over encodings/decodings in the media production but beyond the control of the agents in the professional position. The media producers who have encoded/decoded the branding narrative are also expected to handle the political risks and oppositional readings of the dominant code in the place of those who have actually possess it.

The tensions that arise in the production of the branding narrative may be understood as a result of a certain confusion of nation branding and nation building efforts. Eurovision may have developed into a platform for nation branding efforts and manifestations of Europeanness (Bolin, 2006; Jordan 2014), and this is also the focus in the collective intentions. However, overtly defensive nation building activities are beyond the limits of the EBU, even if the Eurovision host literally is under attack. The incentive for nation building is strong inside the Ukrainian organisation committee and cannot be curbed by the EBU representatives. The tensions in the media production get tangible when agents in the dominant position no longer stand up for the collective intentions (Ytreberg, 1999) they have negotiated for the nation branding and instead criticize the branding narrative for not defending Ukrainian interests of nation building well enough.

There are two main strategies for negotiating the tensions that arise. They regard the representation of the categories of time and space. Bolin (2006) stresses the significance of these categories of time and space in the images of nation branding, and both occupy central discursive positions in the branding narrative of Ukraine.

As for the category of time, the European identity is represented as a future prospect that Ukraine may realise if it can prove itself European, that is, modern and liberal, enough. The European values are also represented in relation to a previous subordination to and a present threat from a superior other. The branding narrative may thus be read both in terms of a ‘once
upon a time’ of a communist past and political turbulence, and a potential ‘happily ever after’ for a future Ukraine, acknowledged as a European nation and a member of the EU.

The representations of category of space in the branding narrative may be interpreted as encoding/decoding a discourse of transition. Ukraine is encoded/decoded as moving to Europe. Eurovision is a perceived as sign that a desired European value community trusts Ukraine and wants the nation to be closer to the West. Russia is a recurring point of reference in the encoding/decoding of a Ukrainian transition. The failure to acknowledge European values is encoded/decoded as a question of mind-sets, connected to geographic places or hierarchic positions in Ukraine and representing “the old system”, as one of the designers puts it. The diversity of Europe is associated with “modernity, progress and civilisation” (Fornäs, 2012, p. 12) and linked to an innate Ukrainian quality. Europe is encoded/decoded as Ukraine’s “land of the future” (Fornäs 2012, p. 38) in the Ukrainian branding narrative.

However, I propose that the agents in the media production also perform a third strategy in relation to the tensions that arise. This strategy cannot be observed in the encodings/decoding of the branding narrative, but rather in the narrative’s very existence. I propose to call it the detached strategy of professionalism, based in the frameworks of knowledge (Hall, 1973/1992) that the agents possess. Throughout the process, when tensions arise and compromises have to be made, the agents in the professional position return to their professional routines and ideals, their quality aims and tools for evaluation. Without these tangible measures, there would not have been a branding narrative at all.
9 Discussion
I have based my analysis on Ytreberg’s (1999, 2000) argument that Hall underemphasizes the discursive aspects of the encoder in the text production and how these aspects influence the text production, as well as the idea that the production and interpretations of texts are mutually constitutive. I have also argued that the original slash between the words encoding and decoding in Hall’s (1973/1992) model should be regarded as one of the main points, and that any encoding process proceeds from and is intertwined with a corresponding process of decoding. This may be understood as a central feature in all media production, but is especially interesting when it comes to representations of knowledge and power.

Hall (1973/1992) argues that media professionals are linked to power elites through the institutional power of the media and through the media’s access to elites, basically in the service of dominants definitions and thus ideologically biased. I propose that the conditions in the professional position thus deserve more attention, as the encodings/decodings resulting from the negotiations between the dominant and the professional codes are crucial for the production of hegemonic representations of society.

It may be argued that my application of Hall’s (1973/1992) model of encoding/decoding can be regarded as a critique of it, or even a way to collapse the model. If encoding and decoding are so closely connected, why should researchers bother to address both aspects? However, that is not how I see it. Having myself a long background from practical work in journalism and communication, participating for many years in the struggles fought from newsrooms or PR war rooms over the meaning of certain ways of describing our world, the encounter with Hall’s model has been an elucidatory moment of recognition and pure relief. I simply wanted to apply the model on the media production perspective in order to illuminate how influential the processes of interpretations and negotiations on different hierarchic levels in the production are for formations, implementations and publications of media content. I am aware that my application in the current study is immature in many ways, but I am looking forward to deepen the discussion and, thus, to contribute with new perspectives on Hall’s model (1973/1992).

Additionally, I would like to point to a potential critique of the choice to drop the EBU as a potential interviewee, which would, indirectly, also be a criticism of the way I have been applying Ytrebergs (1999) model for analysing the broadcasting organization. In the present study, I have suggested that the top management of Ytrebergs institutionalised and hierarchic
The model could be understood as the Ukrainian government, deciding on the hegemonic codes for the nation branding narrative. However, in my translation of Ytrebergs model, I have disregarded the role of the EBU in order to focus on the conditions inside the professional code. The EBU, with its ownership of and responsibility for the Eurovision Song Contest, indeed represents several potential “determinate moments” (Hall, 1973/1992, p. 118) in relation to the context of the media event. At the very moment when a representative from the EBU may have said to the Ukrainian government “guys, this is not what Eurovision is about, and you are moving too far”, the opportunities for the Ukrainian nation branding efforts would have been altered. Maybe I should have put the EBU in the role of the top management and investigated this organization’s role in the production of the Ukrainian branding narrative. However, in that case, the focus may rather have been directed towards the tensions between the EBU, guarding the core values of Eurovision, and the Ukrainian government with its pursuits for nation branding and nation building. This would have been interesting but probably not have fitted inside the limited scope of a master’s thesis. I hope that the way I tried to isolate the conditions of the media production of the branding narrative has contributed to an increased knowledge on how complex these production processes may be.

This study could have been extended and deepened through examinations of the produced texts, e.g. the news items published by Ukrinform, or an analysis of the PR work, e.g. with a focus on the issue management concerning Ukraine’s ability to host Eurovision. The encodings/decodings in the production process that have been partly referred here could have been juxtaposed with different versions of texts and the reactions they have given rise too.

The audience’s perspective has been completely left out in the present study. The three cases would in themselves serve as a basis for separate reception studies. How would the different concepts of the firefly and the necklace be perceived? Would the branding narrative of Ukraine have been different if the firefly had been chosen? How did Ukrainian citizens understand the branding narrative compared to Eurovision fans visiting Ukraine? How were the messages on safety and the encodings/decodings of the war understood?

A third line for possible investigations concerns tensions between different frameworks of knowledge (Hall, 1973/1992) involved in the production. How did the agents evaluate and appreciate the different strategies and professional deliveries? As the time and space for a master’s thesis is limited, these ideas remain to be accomplished.
Finally, I would like to encourage further text production studies in order to reach a deeper understanding of how the production context, apart from the institutional factors and professional routines of the cultural industries, may contribute to the production of discourse. As political, commercial and ideological interests get increasingly intertwined in the contemporary media landscape, the need to understand the encodings/decodings of text production becomes even more urgent.
References


Fornäs, Johan (2012) *Signifying Europe*. Bristol, UK/Chicago, USA: Intellect


Kaneva, Nadia & Delia Popescu (2014) “‘We are Romanian, not Roma’: Nation Branding and Postsocialist Discourses of Alteirety”, *Communication, Culture & Critique* 7 (4) (pp. 506-523)

Marat, Erica (2009) “Nation Branding in Central Asia: A New Campaign to Present Ideas about the State and the Nation”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 61 (7) (pp. 1123-1136)


Ståhlberg, Per & Göran Bolin (2016) “Having a soul or choosing a face? Nation branding, identity and cosmopolitan imagination”, *Social Identities* 22 (3) (pp. 1-17)


Williams, Raymond (1976) *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana/Croom Helm


Digital sources

Ukrainian Crisis Media Center, http://uacrisis.org

Ukrinform, https://www.ukrinform.net
Appendix

Appendix 1  Abstract on Ukrainian project

Nation Branding and the Eurovision Song Contest 2017

Increasingly more nation have over the past two decades been involved in nation branding campaigns, seeking to attract tourists and investors to their respective countries. These campaigns are often centred on large media events such as international sports events (Olympics, European championships, World Cup), or cultural events. One cultural event that has been at the centre of nation branding campaigns is the Eurovision Song Contest. Following the successful campaign Brand Estonia that was initiated in connection to Estonia’s hosting of the ESC in 2002, countries have taken the opportunity to take advantage of the international attention given to the event in order to gain sustained attention to their tourist and other industries.

The practices behind such branding campaigns are at the focus of an on-going project at the Department of Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University (Sweden) (www.sh.se/mkv), led by Göran Bolin and Per Ståhlberg, and funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation (www.ostersjostiftelsen.se/in-english). The aim with the project is to understand the complex orchestration of nation branding campaigns related to cultural events such as the ESC, both in its organisational structure (which different actors are involved and what are their driving motifs for being engaged?), and concerning its cultural significance (what does it mean for national identity? In what way does the ESC contribute to an integrated Europe?).

The project will conduct fieldwork on site in Kyiv the week of the ESC semi-finals and final, but also conduct interviews and collect material over the spring 2017. Besides Bolin and Ståhlberg, the fieldwork will be conducted by a group of researchers consisting of Yuliya Yurchuk, Fredrik Stiernstedt, Liudmila Voronova, Karin Hallgren, Iryna Holovko and Giulia Santori.

Contact details:
Göran Bolin (goran.bolin@sh.se)
+46708300254
Appendix 2 Interview guides

Interview guide 1, branding agencies
What were you asked to do? What were your instructions?
What did the work procedure look like?
What feedback did you get?
Which ideas were approved of?
Which ideas were not approved of?
What are the core ideas of the platform?
What does the platform communicate about Ukraine?
Has the platform been used the way you expected?
What do you think about the implementation?
What is good?
What could have been done better?
Were there alternative ideas that were dropped? Core ideas? Why were they dropped?

Interview guide 2, PR and news agency
How is your organization involved/what is your role in the work with the Eurovision Song Contest event in Kiev, ESC 2017?
How do you think the event will contribute to the impression of Ukraine?
What impression of Ukraine would you like the participating nations to get from the event?
Does your organization have a special planning for communication during the ESC 2017?
Do you know the branding platform for the ESC 2017?
If you have seen the platform, what would you say are the core ideas of it?
Have you been involved in the work on the branding platform? If yes, how?
Did you implement the platform in some way? Strategically? Operationally? Is there an activity planning, supporting the platform?
What elements of the branding platform do you approve of?
What elements of the platform do you approve less of?
What do you think the platform says about Ukraine?
### Appendix 3  Themes in interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The meaning of Eurovision</td>
<td>Int PR, Ukrinform, Banda, Republique, UCMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does Ukraine want to show?</td>
<td>Int PR, Ukrinform, Banda, Republique, UCMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship to Europe</td>
<td>Int PR, Ukrinform, Banda, Republique, UCMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing European values</td>
<td>Int PR, Ukrinform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian values and identity</td>
<td>Int PR, Ukrinform, Banda, Republique, UCMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values and messages in branding</td>
<td>Int PR, Ukrinform, Banda, Republique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Int PR, Republique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolism of brand</td>
<td>Int PR, Ukrinform, Banda, Republique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges in the work</td>
<td>Int PR, Banda, Republique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Int PR, Ukrinform, Banda, Republique, UCMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production process</td>
<td>Int PR, Ukrinform, Banda, Republique, UCMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionality</td>
<td>Int PR, Banda, Republique</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4  Examples of Ukrinform news items on Eurovision
Examples of news and feature items, published by Ukrinform in relation to the Eurovision Song
Contest:

Interviews with Ola Melzig, Technical Director of the Eurovision Song Contest 2017
(https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-society-and-culture/2204876-ola-melzig-technical-director-of-the-
eurovision-song-contest-2017.html) and NaviBand, participant from Belarus in the Eurovision Song
Contest 2017 (https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-eurovision2017/2216803-naviband-participant-in-the-
eurovision-song-contest-2017.html),

News items on tickets on ESC2017 (https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ukrnews/2178475-tickets-for-
eurovision-sold-out-in-15-minutes-when-will-we-receive-the-next-batch.html),
(https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ukrnews/2203895-scandal-around-eurovision-russia-should-be-
disqualified-first.html), on ESC and Russian singer Yulia Samoilova
(https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ukrnews/2203895-scandal-around-eurovision-russia-should-be-
disqualified-first.html), on the training of Eurovision 2017 volunteers
(https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-eurovision2017/2216697-how-eurovision-2017-volunteers-are-
taught-to-smile.html), on impressions about the Eurovision in Ukraine from foreign journalists
(https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-eurovision2017/2227034-ukraine-and-eurovision-through-
journalists-eyes.html).
Appendix 5  
Events at Ukrinform’s Art Hub

Events at Ukrinform’s Art Hub in cooperation with the Ukrainian Information Policy Ministry

May 1, 2017. Opening of the ‘WOW, Ukraine!’ exhibition. We will tell you the facts about Ukraine which you have never known. Who created the world's largest plane? Have you known that Malevich was Ukrainian? How many Hollywood stars are from Ukraine? What Ukrainian song does the whole world sing?

May 3, 2017. Press Day. The presentation of Ukrinform, the oldest news agency in Ukraine. This day you can discover how the news agency, celebrating the 100-year anniversary next year, works and communicate with colleagues - Ukrainian journalists.

May 4, 2017. Ukrainian Fashion Day ‘Ukrainian Embroidery. Step in Time’. Ukrainian embroidery has conquered catwalks all over the world. The traditional decoration of the national dress is filled with deep symbolism. Using the example of ancient and modern costumes, we will demonstrate you trends that are not losing their relevance with the course of time.

May 5, 2017. World Hits performed on bandura. A meet-the-artist event with musician, inventor of the electronic bandura Valentyn Lysenko. Have you ever heard how incredible is the sound of Metallica’s or Sting’s hits performed on bandura? Come to us and you will enjoy an unforgettable concert and see unique instruments made by Valentyn himself.

May 6, 2017. Days of Ukrainian regional cultures’ diversity. General overview. We would like to introduce the journalists who arrived to the Eurovision-2017 not just to the capital of our country but all regions of Ukraine. After all, Ukraine has thousands of architectural masterpieces, incredibly beautiful nature, ski and sea resorts. For your attention, there will be presented a booklet that contains information about the most outstanding sites of every region of Ukraine and a video about the incredible beauty of our country. And all of this will be accompanied by ancient musical compositions performed by children's ensemble.

May 7, 2017. Days of Ukrainian regional cultures’ diversity. East. Center. Crimea. We will tell you about the wealth of culture, life, traditions of Ukrainian regions. Dancing and singing groups will perform folk songs and music. You will see traditional Crimea Tatar wedding ceremony, which is several hundred years old; traditional clothes and jewelry of Crimean Tatars, taste traditional sweets and enjoy a coffee ceremony.

May 8, 2017. Animal Protection Day. Exhibition ‘Fluffy Guards’. Monodrama ‘I wish I was born a cat’. We will present a photo exhibition of pets rescued in the combat zone.

May 10, 2017. Days of Ukrainian regional cultures’ diversity. Zakarpattia. This day we will show you the process of creating ‘taistra’ - Hutsul traditional woven bags, and unique wood carvings. We will arrange master classes in embroidery and Zakarpattia ‘spivanky’ (folk songs), tell about the
winemaking and artisan cheesemaking traditions of Zakarpattia. We will also demonstrate the beautiful nature of this region, which is a favorite holiday destination of Ukrainians and our foreign guests.

May 11, 2017. The presentation of famous photographer Ihor Haidai’s exhibition and his photo project Razom.ua. You will have an opportunity to talk to the prominent artist who ‘looked into the face of the Ukrainian revolution’. His exhibition was displayed at the world’s best museums. Gaidai has been working on the project ‘RAZOM.UA’ for eight years. The project has been implemented in the three-meter panoramic photographs and explores the phenomenon of collective energy, individual and collective interaction.

May 12, 2017. Introduction to Ukrainian cuisine. Workshop on varenyky making. This day culinary specialists will teach everyone to make varenyky, a traditional Ukrainian dish. Everyone can join the process of making and sampling one of the main symbols of Ukrainian cuisine.
Appendix 6  
Letter to the EBU

https://www.facebook.com/studioRepublique/posts/1788732771153238

"Dear Mr. Jon Ola Sand,

We, the Members of the ESC Ukraine Organisation Committee, would like to appeal to you with a request to review and reconsider the creative concept of Eurovision 2017. In their activities related to the preparation of the Eurovision 2017 contest the members of the Committee are guided and driven by the same goal as the leadership of the European Broadcasting Union - to hold in May 2017 a memorable Eurovision Song Contest in Kyiv that will be well received and highly praised by the millions of the contest's fans and supporters worldwide.

After the existing concept (Celebrate Harmony) and its visual and graphic representation was approved by both the NTU and the EBU, we began receiving feedback from different quarters of the Ukrainian society (artists, civic activists, media, cultural commentators and experts) that while the concept is in many ways well designed and professional, some aspects of it have a potential to create controversy and are viewed as unacceptable for a number of reasons.

As you know the political and social situation in Europe has recently been extremely volatile and complex. Even more so in Ukraine, which for the past three years was engulfed in a military conflict on its Eastern border. In simple terms, it is difficult, if not inappropriate and insensitive, to "celebrate European harmony" in a country where more than 10000 people have died as a result of a war and more than two million were internally displaced.

Another key problem with the approved creative concept is its graphic solution. In particular, the logo is designed in blue, red and white colours, which in the minds of many Ukrainians are strongly associated with the national colours of the Russian Federation - the country responsible for the military conflict in the East of Ukraine, as well as for the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula."
Moreover, the balls making up the necklace in the approved logo are reminiscent of the domes of the Saint Basil’s Cathedral - Moscow's main architectural landmark and its key touristic attraction.

These aspects of the approved creative concept contain socially explosive political connotations and thus can potentially stir controversy within the currently extremely sensitive Ukrainian society, dividing it, instead of uniting it around the celebration of Eurovision 2017. The extremely high level of the sensitivity of the Ukrainian society to Russia-related contexts is well illustrated by today's news related to the former Eurovision participant Ani Lorak. The singer, who won the second place in Eurovision 2008 in Belgrade, has recently gained notorious reputation for participating in show-biz events and giving concerts in Russia. So when the public learnt today that Ukraine's No1 entertainment magazine VIVA nominated Ani Lorak as one of the most beautiful performers of 2016, social media and civic activists responded with a massive wave of outrage and criticism.

So even such a seemingly minor and insignificant occasion with Russia-related overtones, which in any other European country would have no negative ramifications, in Ukraine can stir extreme controversy and generate highly negative publicity.

The approved concept is also viewed by some cultural experts as archaic, because a necklace with just one string was historically worn in Ukraine only by poor/destitute people. So the approved logo runs the risk of positioning Ukraine as a poor country, which is not an image most Ukrainians would like to communicate to the hundreds of millions of Eurovision viewers around the world.
Having quickly identified these controversial and problematic issues with the approved concept we have created an alternative solution which we would like to propose for your consideration (see the presentation and relevant graphic references attached). This alternative version is politically neutral, modern and in line with the ethos of both the ESC and the current day Ukraine.

The concept is based on the artistic heritage of the most famous person to have ever been born in Kyiv - the world renowned artist Kazimir Malevich. In other words it could be said that Malevich is the author of the proposed creative concept.

The colours used in the concept represent the full spectrum of the national colours of all European countries.

The slogan of the proposed concept - Celebrating the Extraordinary - is based on the unique art of Kazimir Malevich and represents the exceptional nature of Eurovision, respect for the always extraordinary talents of its participants and Ukraine’s remarkably memorable contribution to the contest since it joined the EBU in 2003.

We appreciate that this initiative comes at a rather late stage in the ESC preparation process. Yet we guarantee that we have all necessary professional and creative resources needed to implement this new concept, should it be approved, on time and without any disruption to the ESC preparatory activities.

If approved, the proposed concept will be treated as final and will no longer be subject to any further changes or alterations.

We hope you find our request and reasoning behind it well-founded and in the best interest of all the parties involved in the preparation of Eurovision 2017, and will thus support our initiative.

Yours sincerely,

Ruslana Lyzhychko
Sergii Proskurnia
Oleksandr Ksenofontov
Nataliya Popovych
Gennadiy Kurochka

Social activists, members of the 2017 Eurovision Song Contest Committee
In reference to Dayan and Katz (1994).

The article discusses the Estonian nation branding campaign from the vantage point of cultural technologies significance for symbolic production, which is described as a central capacity in a shift from a techno-industrial to a techno-cultural modernity. Bolin (2006a) argues that there are two industries that particularly feed on the symbolic production of media events: the technological and the cultural industries. These industries thus get a symbolic meaning, which is also picked up in nation branding.

Jansen defines nation branding as a commercial practice and examines the “industry perspective” (Jansen, 2008, p. 123). She describes the “future-oriented vision” of nation branding as a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Jansen, 2008, p. 129).

The study discusses nation branding and nation building in the post-Soviet states against a theoretical framework of identity politics.

Marat’s case study departs from the idea of nation branding as a highly politicized means of public diplomacy in order to raise a country’s prestige in a globalised economy and international politics.

Kaneva and Popescu perform a critical discourse analysis of the campaign “Romanians in Europe”, initiated by the Romanian government.

Bolin and Ståhlberg emphasise that even if national initiators such as governments try to realize their ideas of how the nation in question should be portrayed, their influence will always be negotiated in relation to the texts and images that media organizations choose to produce and distribute. As societies become more dependent on the media for the upholding of vital communicative functions, the media simply get increased power to determine the conditions for the circumstances they are supposed to cover.

Bolin and Miazhevic investigate the soft power of commercialized nationalist symbols.

Horbyk uses discourse theory, postcolonial theory, the concept of the public sphere, field theory, haontology and the concept of the empty signifier to analyse mediated representations of Europe in Ukraine, Poland and Russia during Euro-Maidan and the following crisis between Ukraine and Russia.

According to the invitation to the tender, the branding should contain ideas for the creation of a concept, including a theme and a slogan, as well as a visual identity, which should follow the visual identity guidelines for Eurovision. Also, the concept and all its implementations should convey a positive image of Ukraine as a hosting nation and an image of Eurovision as a non-political and friendly competition that unites people and features modern pop music. Additionally, the production should include samples of branding products such as banners, flags, umbrellas, T-shirts and posters for public transportation. However, the committee responsible for the organization of Eurovision and the tender decides upon the suggested ideas, which places the agencies in a subordinate position. The commercial conditions specified in the tender are detailed but can briefly be summarized as a
conveyance of the immaterial rights of the contribution from the company that wins the tender to the committee.
The invitation to the tender is available on request.

11 Johan asks Lars to translate his answers from Russian to English. This may have the effect that some of Lars’ quotes are actually translations of things Johan has said.

12 The interviewees’ names have been changed in order to ensure as much anonymity as possible.

13 The transcriptions are available on request.

14 According to the official website of Eurovision (https://eurovision.tv/about/facts-and-figures), the contest started in 1956, initiated by the European Broadcasting Union, the EBU, which is an alliance of public service broadcasters in Europe founded in 1950. Seven nations participated in the first contest. Since then, the contest has grown considerably, especially with the entrance of the Eastern European states in the 1990’s. The event has been adjusted to the growing numbers of participants and today consists of two semi-finals and one ‘grand’ final. According to the fan site Eurovision World (https://eurovisionworld.com/facts), the contest is the world’s biggest music show, broadcast across five continents with as much as 200 million people viewing at least some part of one of the three finals.

15 The brand book is available on request.

16 The UCMC is an NGO, founded 2014 with international support. The aim is provide a platform for “accurate and current information on the situation in Ukraine” from representatives from the civic society, politics, authorities and other public agents, targeting international media (http://uacrises.org/about).

17 (https://www.ukrinform.net) Apart from the production of news material, Ukrainform also runs a press centre and offers media support.