



**Interview with Iryna Baturevych
Co-founder, Chytomo**

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KENNEALLY: When Russian armed forces opened a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, the ordinary lives of millions from Kyiv to Kharkiv were upended. Two years later, Ukrainians have earned the world's admiration, not only for their courage on the battlefield, but also for their determination to maintain a functioning civil society.

Welcome to CCC's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content.

The Russian invasion targeted Ukrainian culture as much as the country's infrastructure. Chytomo, an online publishing news platform, has diligently documented the resistance by the country's publishers and poets, as well as booksellers and novelists, to that attack.

Iryna Baturevych, co-founder of Chytomo, joins me from Montréal to reflect on two years of wartime news coverage. Welcome to Velocity of Content, Iryna Baturevych.

BATUREVYCH: Hello, Chris. Thank you for inviting me.

KENNEALLY: Let's begin with the name of your platform, which is Chytomo. Why did you choose that name? What is the mission of your publication?

BATUREVYCH: Chytomo is basically Readable, because we are trying to give our readers something that is worth reading and something that is quite a quality cultural product, quality literature, quality books.

So we've been trying to work in the field of literature and publishing markets in Ukraine for quite a while. It's been 14 years. And readable for us means that we are trying to put good literature in the spotlight. This literature was Ukrainian literature. Our website has a Ukrainian version and an English version, but we never had Russian language as an option, because we knew that Russian literature doesn't need any kind of support. It's quite well supported. But Ukrainian literature back then – it really needed some attention.

Now, I think we don't need to frame it like this, because mostly Ukrainian publishers now are publishing in Ukrainian. But still, it's very important to put a light on some nice



literary pieces on what Ukrainian publishers are doing. And especially in the times of war, I think it's important to show what is Ukrainian cultural life and what is Ukrainian culture now for abroad.

KENNEALLY: On the first full day of the full-scale invasion, Chytomo was victim of a Russian-sponsored cyberattack. What happened, Iryna, and what did you think it meant?

BATUREVYCH: I think that these first days of Russian invasion – they were extremely hard for each Ukrainian and for all medias as well. For sure, now we know that Russian war – it's not only the war for territories. It's also the war against Ukrainian culture. And I think our website could be a target because, first of all, we are trying to support Ukrainian culture.

Many Ukrainian medias were under attack. Because the first thing that Russians did – they tried to make the attack for Ukrainian hosters. But the thing is it's very complicated to shut down Ukrainian internet, because it's not like the internet of totalitarian countries that is just hosted in one spot, and you just need to target it, and nobody will have any access. In our case, we are very diversified, and we have lots of hosters, and it's very free.

And for our foreign partners to have this firsthand information from Ukraine about what is happening, it was also very important. From the first days of war, we tried to show what's going on. Yes, we are a cultural website, but we know what is happening in Ukraine, in our homeland. So now, we are trying to follow the events. Now, for sure, we are focused more on the field of literature, culture, cultural heritage.

But back then, I think everyone was confused. And these attacks – I think they just raised the panic.

KENNEALLY: Chytomo receives a high credibility score from the monitoring site NewsGuard. What are you doing, Iryna Baturevych, to ensure the publication is trusted in Ukraine and abroad?

BATUREVYCH: Here, we have a situation where so many medias are popping up out of the blue, and they're providing this firsthand information. But how can we ensure that this information is trusted? How can we explain that we have this experience?

We decided to join this Journalism Trust Initiative and fill in all the documents, submit all of our applications, and show what are our sources of financial support, how do we operate, how we check the information. What is our editorial policy? It's been quite a big job for us. And I think we put everything on the website. It's very transparent. You can see the source of budgets that we have. It's mostly grants. It's also donations of our



readers, which is super-valuable for us. And we almost – first of all, we are independent media. We don't belong to anyone. We are an NGO. That's what we want to maintain.

KENNEALLY: Among winners in November for the 2023 Chytomo Award for outstanding achievement in publishing was Translatorium, which was recognized for creating a communications platform for translators and interpreters. What success have Ukrainian authors had in seeing their works translated since the war began?

BATUREVYCH: I think Ukrainian writers were becoming more and more visible abroad, and over the last 10 years, I think we had more and more translations – up to 100 translations that were appearing abroad in English, French, Spanish, German languages and many, many others. At the same time, with the beginning of this full-scale invasion, Ukrainian writers were the voices that people wanted to support, and they wanted to give the voice to the Ukraine literary community as the one that experienced the war and the one that really needs help on one hand.

Starting from 2022, we had a big, big increase in the number of translations. So if before, we had 100 translations per year, let's say, and it was quite a successful figure, in 2022, we had 230 translations that appeared abroad. This year, we had a little decrease, but at the same time, we can see that the internet in Ukrainian literature is rising.

And I think it's a very important bridge and a very important connection that helps us to present not only Ukrainian literature, but also Ukrainian history and Ukrainian modern history through fiction texts, through nonfiction texts. This trend is very, very, very interesting.

That's why Translatorium got the award, because the translators community, translators' events, translators' festivals, and translators' input is so much crucial now for Ukrainians. We have a big demand, and we can see how much Ukrainian studies are popping up around the world and how much more interest they gained from the students, from those who want to discover not Slavic, not Russian literature, but Ukrainian literature in particular.

KENNEALLY: Novelists and poets are fighting and dying on the front lines in the war, Iryna Baturevych. Soldier-poet Maksym Kryvtsov is a recent notable example of such sacrifice. How will he and his work be remembered?

BATUREVYCH: There's been so many writers, poets, publishers who died or who are still fighting this war. And as a media, we're trying to commemorate all of these people. We all remember Victoria Amelina. We remember Volodymyr Vakulenko. We remember all of these names, and we are publishing these stories one by one. Unfortunately, there are



more and more stories and more and more people to remember. According to the data of the Ukrainian Book Institute, I think there is more than 30 now, unfortunately, writers who got killed by Russians, and there is more than 80 who are fighting now.

For sure, many people heard about poet Maksym Kryvtsov, whose memory now is – like people are paying tribute to his work and life. Just now in Kyiv, his friends and family – they opened an exhibition of his works, his photos – because he was also a photographer, he was very talented – and of his poetry.

What Chytomo is doing – we are trying to make some translations together with quite talented translators like Nina Murray or Rostislav (inaudible), and we will publish it one by one. We had an interview with Maksym that we recorded just a few months before his death.

KENNEALLY: The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine began two years ago, Iryna Baturevych. What is the mood today in the Ukrainian book world?

BATUREVYCH: Well, the mood is to keep on fighting, because we have no other opportunity. But I must say that it's very weird to understand that new bookstores are opening. New festivals are appearing – are establishing in Kyiv and in other cities all over Ukraine. This is something absolutely unique, and this is showing how much Ukrainian people – how much we want to have normal life back.

This is also very important, because we know that with the help of Ukrainian literature, with Ukrainian culture, we are not only normalizing our life. We're also trying to make our society, our country, stronger, because knowing that this war is the war against Ukrainian culture – this war is something that is trying to erase our history and to erase our culture that is showing that we are independent, that we are absolutely a European nation.

Also, people want to have these physical spaces where they can come up together, when they can be together. Ukrainian festivals, Ukrainian fairs, they're coming back, too.

But for sure, all of these formats are a bit limited. They are transforming. They are changing, because our reality is also changing. This is something that's bringing people together, but it's also driving the industry forward. This is very important. And I think that as soon as we won't have any military action in the territory of Ukraine, as soon as we won't have any missile attacks on Kyiv, on Kharkiv, on western Ukraine, on Kherson, many other Ukrainian cities, I think everything will be – not flourishing, for sure not, but we will rebuild. I know that people would manage and that people will keep on going, keep on publishing. I'm sure that we will be stronger than before, and we would always remember those were fighting, who is fighting now, and who gave their lives to protect our freedom.



KENNEALLY: Iryna Baturevych, founder of publishing news platform Chytomo, thank you so much for speaking with me today.

BATUREVYCH: Thank you so much.

KENNEALLY: That's all for now. Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts. You can also find Velocity of Content on YouTube as part of the CCC channel. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for joining me.

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