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## **IDENTITIES WITH HISTORICAL REGIONS – ARE THEY ADAPTING TO MODERN ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION? THE CASE OF UKRAINE**

**Abstract.** Historical regions remain the most common basis for the formation or promotion of regional identities in Europe. However, regions and regional identities are in the process of constant formation and can change significantly in line with new conditions. In this paper we focused on the changes of the spatial spread of identities with historical regions in Ukraine in comparison to the initial boundaries of those. The results show that identities with historical regions are markedly adapting to modern administrative boundaries. At the same time, the symbolic value of historical regions constitutes an essential element of identity building in contemporary administrative regions.

**Key words:** regional identity, historical regions, administrative regions, ergonyms, identity transformation.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Europe has always been the continent of regional identities (Applegate, 1999). During the last three decades, Europe experienced a particularly dramatic increase in the role of regions as economic, cultural, and administrative units, growth of their material and symbolic capital. Regions receive more and more resources and powers transmitted from the state level; they increasingly become subjects of international relations and a competitive struggle (Keating, 1998; Boisen *et al.*, 2011; Terlow, 2012). In some cases (Catalonia, Scotland, Flanders, etc.), developed political regionalism leads to separatism, threatening the integrity of the existing states. That is why the question of regional identity,

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its essence, sustainability, and the role in the formation and reproduction of the regions remains at the top on the agenda.

Researchers in European regionalism started to pay more attention to ethnic and socio-psychological aspects rather than to political centres and regimes (Rokkan and Urvin, 1982). Schmitt-Egner (2002) outlined the understanding of a region as a historical landscape with collective historical memories. Historical regions, i.e. areas characterised by socio-cultural (including ethnic, ethnographic or linguistic) unity and/or limited to political or administrative boundaries in the past, remain the most common basis for the formation or promotion of regional identities in Europe. The European decentralization experience allows us to consider identity as an instrument of regional integration. At the same time, there are several options for the correlation of the grid of such historical regions and the modern administrative system: the boundaries of historical regions can be fixed by the existing administrative division (e.g. federal lands in Germany, autonomous regions in Spain), partly taken into account (voivodeships in Poland) or ignored (Czechia, Ukraine). In the last example, such regions may exist informally without officially recognised names, boundaries, institutions, and symbols.

Ukraine is one of the few major European countries where the administrative division, inherited from the Soviet era and, as in most post-socialist states, aimed at the development of a centralised state (Yoder, 2003), ignores the boundaries of large historical regions. Most researches dealing with the regionalisation issue in Ukraine applied to the political differentiation and electoral patterns, focusing on explaining regional differences using cultural and/or socioeconomic factors (Birch, 2000; O'Loughlin, 2001; Barrington and Herron, 2004; Yakymenko and Lytvynenko, 2006; Clem and Craumer, 2008; Barrington and Faranda, 2009; Melnykovska, Schweickert and Kostiuhenko, 2011; Liashenko and Putrenko, 2011; Osipian and Osipian, 2012; Katchanovski, 2014). Then, the influence of historical regions and borders remains definitely underestimated. However, in recent years, some works were published explaining the effect of "phantom borders" on the current social structure and political regionalisation. The analysis performed by Jelen and Dostál (2017) partially confirmed the existence of phantom boundaries in Ukraine's political and cultural-demographic aspects. Peisakhin (2013) shows differences in political views and other life attitudes along the historical border of the Austrian and Russian empires, dividing historical regions of Galicia, Bukovina, Volhynia, and Podolia. Gentile (2017) also studied the influence of former political borders on political and ideological division in Ukraine; however, he revealed local peculiarities of geopolitical orientations among citizens of Luhansk and Stakhanov criticizing the total homogenisation of Ukrainian regions (Gentile, 2015). By studying the symbols and monuments in two villages on opposite sides of a historical border in Western Ukraine, Löwis (2017) questioned traditional statistical correlations between electoral and linguistic or historical maps and shed light on the ambivalence of spaces of identification and the ties that those village communities entertain with history.

Since Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991, there were repeated calls for a change of the existing administrative division by consolidating existing first-level administrative units (oblast) or creating additional macro-regional level of governance (Popovkin, 1993; Zastavnyi, 1994; Dorohuntsov and Fedorysheva, 1996; Dolishniy *et al.*, 1997; Palamarchuk and Palamarchuk, 1998; Dolishniy, Kravtsiv and Symonenko, 2002; Symonenko, 2002; Dotsenko, 2003; Pistun and Melnychuk, 2010; Oliynyk *et al.*, 2015). It is worth noting that the network of historical regions was taken into account, to a greater or lesser extent, in determining the names and boundaries of the new macro-regions proposed. Some researchers associate the success of the decentralisation reform in Ukraine with the success of the formation of new local identities (Kotenko and Tkachuk, 2016).

Significantly, the Ukrainian national administrative-territorial system could be compared to the EU NUTS system in this way. At present, the first-level units (oblasts) are comparable to NUTS 2; the second-level units (raions) are significantly smaller in terms of population than standard NUTS 3 units, but the consolidation of raions, which brought them into line with the NUTS 3 standard, has already begun in the framework of the on-going decentralisation reform. However, there are currently no NUTS 1 regions (with a population of 3 to 7 million) in Ukraine. This gap could be filled just by creating a macro-regional level, including on the basis of historical regions.

Leaving the economic and political feasibility of such regional consolidation out of the framework of this paper, we may, however, pose a question: how justified and adequate is equating of the proposed macro-regions with the historical ones? Are historic regions a real basis for creating a network of new macro-regions, or are they just phantoms that may not be taken into account? And if they really exist, then what their essence is, including the actual limits. After all, the facts suggest that regions and corresponding identities are in the process of constant formation and cannot be tightly bound to one "correct" identity or to a specific historical period (Paasi, 1986a, 2002; Gilbert, 1988; Murphy, 1991). The "old" identities with historic regions can change significantly in line with new social, political, and economic conditions, increasingly combining both traditional and new elements that determine their dynamic and network character, temporariness of configuration, orientation rather on the needs for future development than on the historical tradition (Terlow, 2009, 2012; Terlow and van Gorp, 2014). Paasi (2001) expressed the opinion that the European regions are more likely to be the result of actual regionalisation processes than historical and cultural entities. Thus, the real perception of historical regions by their inhabitants is in question (Vaishar and Zapletalová, 2016). Moreover, while local identities formed on the basis of personal experience and individual contacts, regional identities require indirect communication between people by means of the media, political parties or other social institutions (Anderson, 1983), and, therefore, are strongly related to these institutions.

Chromy *et al.* (2004), investigating regional identity in Czechia, came to the conclusion that the traditional historical regions are quite stable in the collective memory, but this statement does not apply to certain parts of their borders: the cores of historical regions are clearly defined, while their external boundaries are unclear. In fact, the outer boundary of the identity with a historical region is often coinciding with modern administrative boundaries. Šerý and Šimáček (2012), as well as Vaishar and Zapletalová (2016), came to a similar conclusion. Studying historical regions of Małopolska (Lesser Poland) and Śląsk (Silesia) and similarly-named present-day voivodeships, Nowak (2018) concluded that old cultural and historical divisions are still important for the people, but the possible economic advantages seem to prevail. A recent study in Ukraine showed that the majority of the population of the three administrative oblasts retains self-identification with historic regions (Melnychuk and Gnatiuk, 2018). Simultaneously, in some areas, due to an alignment of a certain administrative region with a certain historical region in the public discourse, the spread of identity with another historical region (which had nothing in common with the area) takes place. The authors named such identities as hybrid because they combine both traditional and new elements of identification. A similar phenomenon on a smaller spatial scale was also noted in Czechia (Vaishar and Zapletalová, 2016). Turning back to Ukraine: Gomanuk (2016) found that the historical region of Tavria/Taurida is nowadays publicly linked predominantly to only one modern administrative region (Kherson oblast).

How universal is this phenomenon? The answer requires testing considering more historical regions and in a wider spatial context. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to determine the changes of the spatial spread of identities with historical regions in Ukraine in comparison to the initial boundaries of these regions, as well as to clarify the role of the current administrative division in this transformation.

## 2. DATA AND METHODS

Ukraine is one of the largest countries in Europe, located within several natural regions and relief macrostructures. For a long time, the territory of Ukraine was divided between neighbouring states, being cut by interstate borders. Each of these states had its own administrative system, often stable for several centuries. Due to differences in geographical locations, conditions, and availability of resources, different parts of the country have different economic specialisations. All these factors (landscape diversity, political fragmentation, persistent historical administrative division, and the differences in economic specialisations) created the prerequisites for the formation of large historical regions of different origins.

For the analysis, we selected 7 historical regions of Ukraine: Galicia, Podolia, Volhynia, Bukovina, Slobozhanshyna, Polesia, and Donbas. The first five regions from this list are political ones, that is, they existed in the past as the relevant administrative units or were separated from the rest of the country by state borders. Polesia is primarily a landscape region, represented by the zone of mixed forests, and never existed as a separate administrative or political unit. Donbas is an economic (industrial) region shaped on the basis of the Donetsk coal basin. However, political and industrial regions have certain cultural (ethnographic, in particular) specificity of the local population, as well as landscape features, which are often expressed in macro-relief toponymy (Podolian and Volhynian Uplands, Donetsk Ridge, etc.). Thus, there are many criteria for delineating the borders of a region, and all of them are important for the formation of regional identity (Keating, 2004; Zuefle, 2004). As a rule, regional boundaries, drawn according to different criteria (political, ethnographic, natural, economic), do not coincide. Thus, a historical region does not have unambiguously defined borders; instead, one may identify the core of the region where most of the criteria are fulfilled, and the peripheral part, where only some of them are true.

Therefore, in order to define the boundaries of historical regions for this research, we proceeded from the basic genesis of a region (political, landscape, or economic). In the case of political regions, we tried to outline relatively the most stable boundaries of an area once included into the respective administrative units.

Thus, we used the following boundaries of historical regions:

1. Galicia: stable boundaries of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria as part of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Austrian and Austro-Hungarian Empires (1772–1918).
2. Podolia: maximum limits of Podolian (1434–1793) and Bratslavian (1566–1793) voivodeships of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Podolian Governorate of the Russian Empire (1797–1925).
3. Volhynia: maximum limits of the Volhynian voivodeships of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1566–1795), the Volhynian Governorate of the Russian Empire (1795–1925) and the Volhynian voivodeship of Poland (1921–1939).
4. Bukovina: borders of the Duchy of Bukovina within the Habsburg Monarchy (1849–1918).
5. Slobozhanshyna: borders of 5 Sloboda Cossack regiments (1651–1765).
6. Polesia: limits of the landscape zone of mixed forests.
7. Donbas: boundaries of the Donetsk Coal Basin (roughly coinciding with the limits of the Donetsk industrial region).

The boundaries and names of modern first-level administrative units (oblasts and cities with special status) are shown in Fig. 1. The modern administrative system practically does not take into account the boundaries of historical regions, although it reflects some historical boundaries of the 20th century (e.g. the state borders between the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania in 1920–1939)

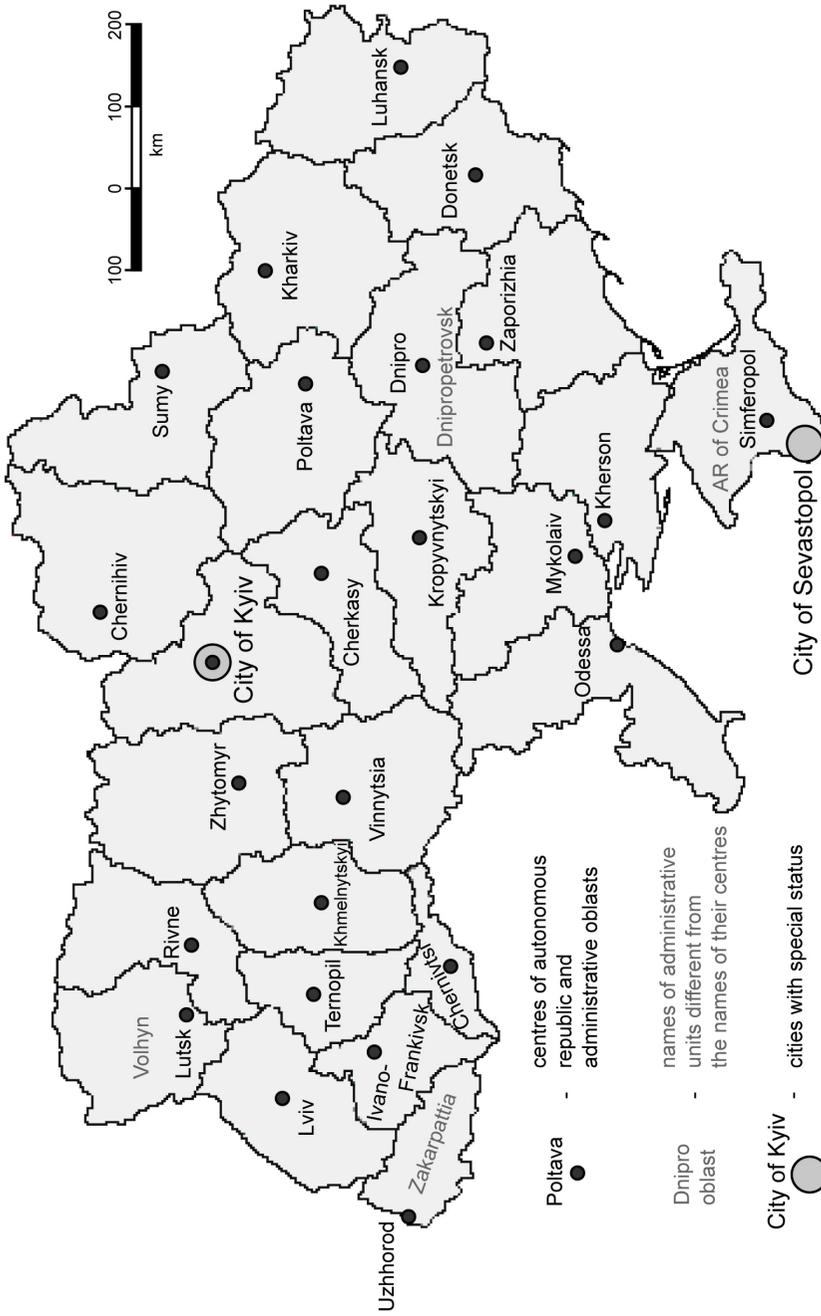


Fig. 1. Borders and names of modern administrative regions (oblasts) of Ukraine

Source: own work.

Unquestionably, a direct population survey could provide the most exact and precise data on actual regional identity. However, the labour and time-consuming nature of this method pushed us to use the so-called regional identity markers – artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts, indirectly indicating how people identify with a place or region, enabling one to study the present state, and (if several time sections available) the dynamics of identity, including its spatial patterns. In literature, identity markers are often defined as characteristics or attributes used by people to distinguish one area from another (Simon *et al.*, 2010). These markers could be different kinds of place names, names of private enterprises and institutions, local media, trademarks and brands, commemorative signs dedicated to famous local personalities or important historical events, spatial behaviour of people, including movement of goods and information across the territory (mainly various non-governmental services), residential patterns of local sports teams' fans, electoral behaviour patterns, etc. In particular, the role of toponymy as a regional identity marker was clarified in numerous theoretical and empirical contributions (e.g. Guyot and Seethal, 2007; Pavliuk, 2007; Botolv, 2009; Jordan, 2010, 2012; Bucher *et al.*, 2013; Woodman, 2014; Weaver and Holtkamp, 2016; Gnatiuk, 2018; etc.).

Thus, in this study the current limits of the spatial spread of identities with historical regions were defined using such identity marker as ergonyms – the names of private enterprises and institutions. This category of place names constitutes a dynamic subsystem of toponymy, representing a strong link to the present state of regional identity and allowing tracing its temporal changes. The feasibility of ergonyms in regional identity studies was tested by Melnychuk *et al.* (2014). A comparison of those results with the results of a direct sociological survey in three Ukrainian oblasts (Melnychuk and Gnatiuk, 2018) proved a high reliability of this marker: the areas where respondents identified with a certain historical region, in general, coincided with the areas of continuous distribution of the corresponding ergonyms.

The on-line directory of Ukrainian enterprises and organizations UA-REGION (<https://www.ua-region.com.ua/>) was used to create the database of ergonyms. The database included ergonyms derived from the names of selected historical regions: actual names of regions, basic adjective forms and regional identifications of the inhabitants. Only names given by free choice of the owner or the management were selected for the analysis. In particular, we eliminated official names of executive authorities, local self-governments and communal (municipal) enterprises, as their origin is explained by administrative factor only. Such restrictions were extremely important in cases when the name of a historical or landscape region corresponded to the name of a contemporary administrative unit (e.g. historical Volhynia and modern Volhyn oblast; region of Polesia and Poliskyi raion in Kyiv oblast, etc.)

The database was checked and cleared of any repeating and doubtful items. Then each ergonym was linked to respective administrative units (oblasts and raions). The following indicators were calculated on the basis of the database:

1. Representation (R) – the percentage of ergonyms associated with the historical regions, from the total number of ergonyms in the area (by raions).

2. Coefficient of territorial coverage ( $K_{Cov}$ ) – the proportion of administrative raions with ergonyms associated with this historical region (by oblasts).

3. Coefficient of concentration ( $K_{Con}$ ) – the percentage of ergonyms associated with the given historical region, concentrated in given oblasts (by oblasts).

The assumption was that the presence of ergonyms, semantically related to a certain historical region, pointed to the identity of the local inhabitants with a region. Mind you, those who identify with a historical region (as well as the corresponding ergonyms) may concentrate also in the basic destinations of migrants from the region concerned, first of all in large cities (Melnychuk *et al.*, 2014).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of the territories of historical regions with the spatial pattern of the corresponding ergonyms (Fig. 2), as well as the calculated coefficients  $K_{Cov}$  and  $K_{Con}$  (Fig. 3), indicated certain changes in the territorial distribution of identification with historical regions. In particular:

1. The vast majority (91.3%) of Podolia-related ergonyms are concentrated in two oblasts – Khmelnytskyi and Vinnytsia, and are almost uniformly distributed throughout their territories, including those parts that never belonged to Podolia: the northern part of the Khmelnytskyi oblast, which historically always belonged to Volhynia, and the north-eastern part of the Vinnytsia oblast, which pertained to the Kyiv (Middle Dnieper) region. Podolia-related ergonyms are also evenly distributed throughout the territory of the Ternopil oblast, except for its northern Volhynian part, but their representation is rather low, with the exception of the extreme south-east, formerly a part of the Podolian voivodeship. However, Podolia-related ergonyms are virtually non-existent in other oblasts partially covered by the historical Podolia, namely north of the Odessa oblast, west of the Cherkasy and Kirovohrad oblasts, and south-west of the Kyiv oblast.

2. More than 90% of all Volhynia-related ergonyms are concentrated within one modern region – the Volhyn oblast, and are roughly uniformly distributed throughout its territory. Also, such ergonyms are present in the southern part of the Rivne oblast and the northern part of the Ternopil oblast. All those territories were part of the historical Volhynia. However, these ergonyms are practically absent in other Ukrainian areas covered by the historical Volhynia, including in the Zhytomyr oblast, as well as in the northern part of the Khmelnytskyi oblast.

3. Galicia-related ergonyms are concentrated (90.8%) in three oblasts: Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil, and are evenly distributed across their territories, with the exception of the northern part of the Ternopil region, which historically belonged to Volhynia.

4. Almost all Bukovina-related ergonyms (80.2%) are located within the boundaries of the Chernivtsi region and are evenly represented in both its historical parts, belonging to Bukovina and Bessarabia respectively.

5. The main area of Slobozhanschyna-related ergonyms roughly coincides with the historical limits of the five Sloboda Cossack regiments, namely in the north and the centre of the Kharkiv oblast, the south of the Sumy oblast and the north of the Luhansk oblast. However, they also exist in the rest of the territories of the first two oblasts, which historically did not belong to Slobozhanschyna. Together, Kharkiv, Sumy, and Luhansk oblasts gather more than 90% of Slobozhanschyna-related ergonyms.

6. The distribution of Polesia-related ergonyms, in general, coincides with the limits of the mixed forest zone, but there are certain deviations. Corresponding ergonyms are evenly distributed throughout the Zhytomyr and the Chernihiv oblasts, including their southern forest-steppe parts. However, in the Kyiv and the Sumy oblasts, the southern boundary of their distribution almost coincides with the boundaries of natural zones, and in the Rivne oblast the majority of ergonyms is concentrated in its northern part with a lack of Volhynia-related ergonyms.

7. Donbas-related ergonyms are generally confined to the territory of the Donetsk Coal Basin. However, they are also present in adjacent areas, in particular scattered throughout the whole Donetsk oblast and the northern part of the Luhansk oblast.

Based on these findings, three types of areas can be distinguished for each historical region:

1. Status Quo areas: territories belonging to given historical region in the past and retaining a sufficiently strong identity with it.

2. Lost areas: territories that belonged to a historical region in the past, but lost (or have been losing) the corresponding identity, including cases when people began to identify with other historical region.

3. Gained areas: territories that did not belong to a historical region, but developed (and gradually strengthen) the identity with it.

Fig. 4 represents the status quo areas, lost areas, and gained areas for each of the historical regions analysed. Those are rather generalised synthetic schemes not based on accurate calculations at the level of raions and neglecting local trends, which sometimes differ significantly from the general picture. However, these schemes clearly show the last century's tendencies of changing the boundaries of areas where identities with historical regions are observed. They demonstrate that identities associated with different historical regions existed in different circumstances due to the pattern of modern administrative divisions. Historical regions

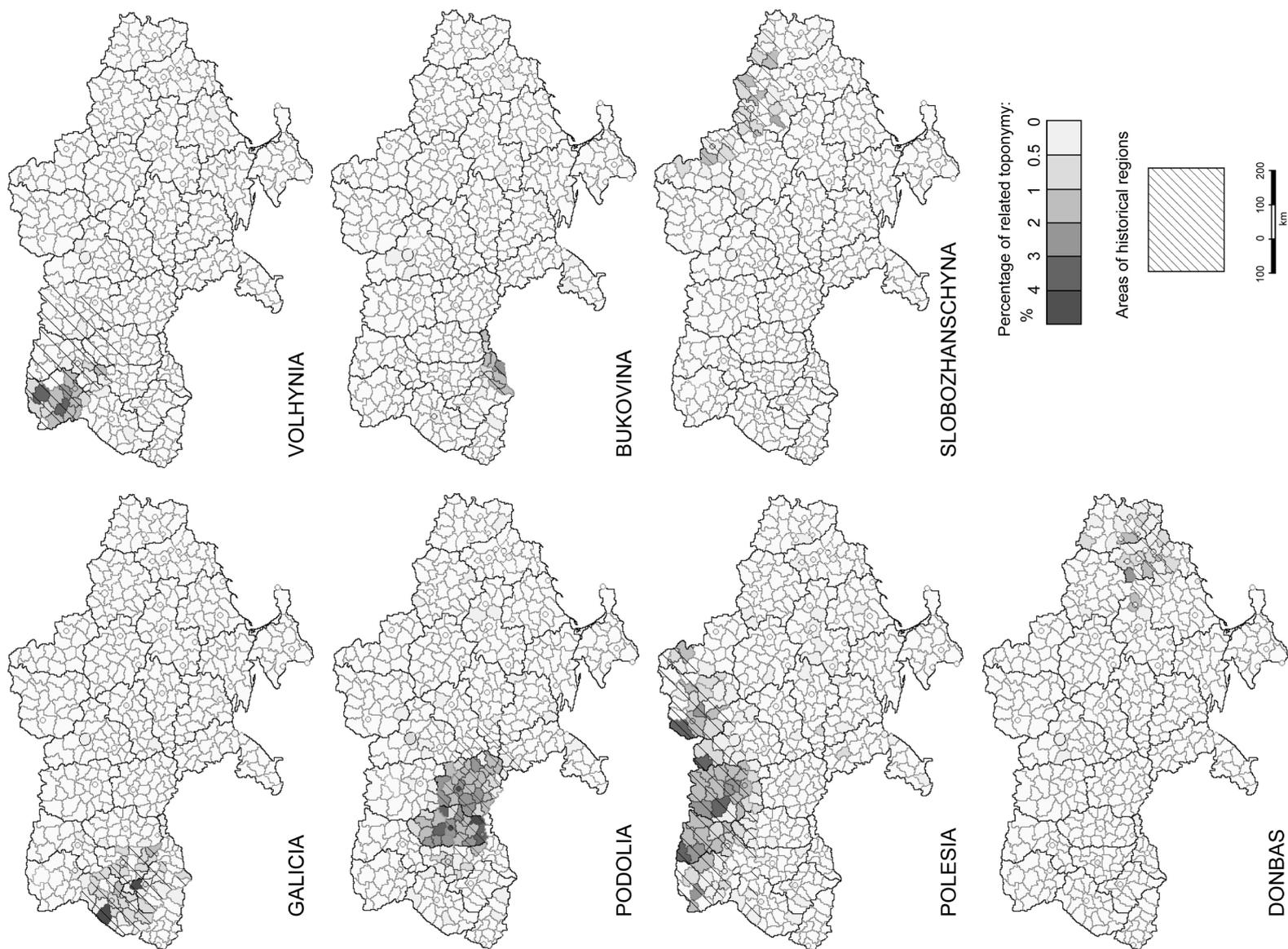
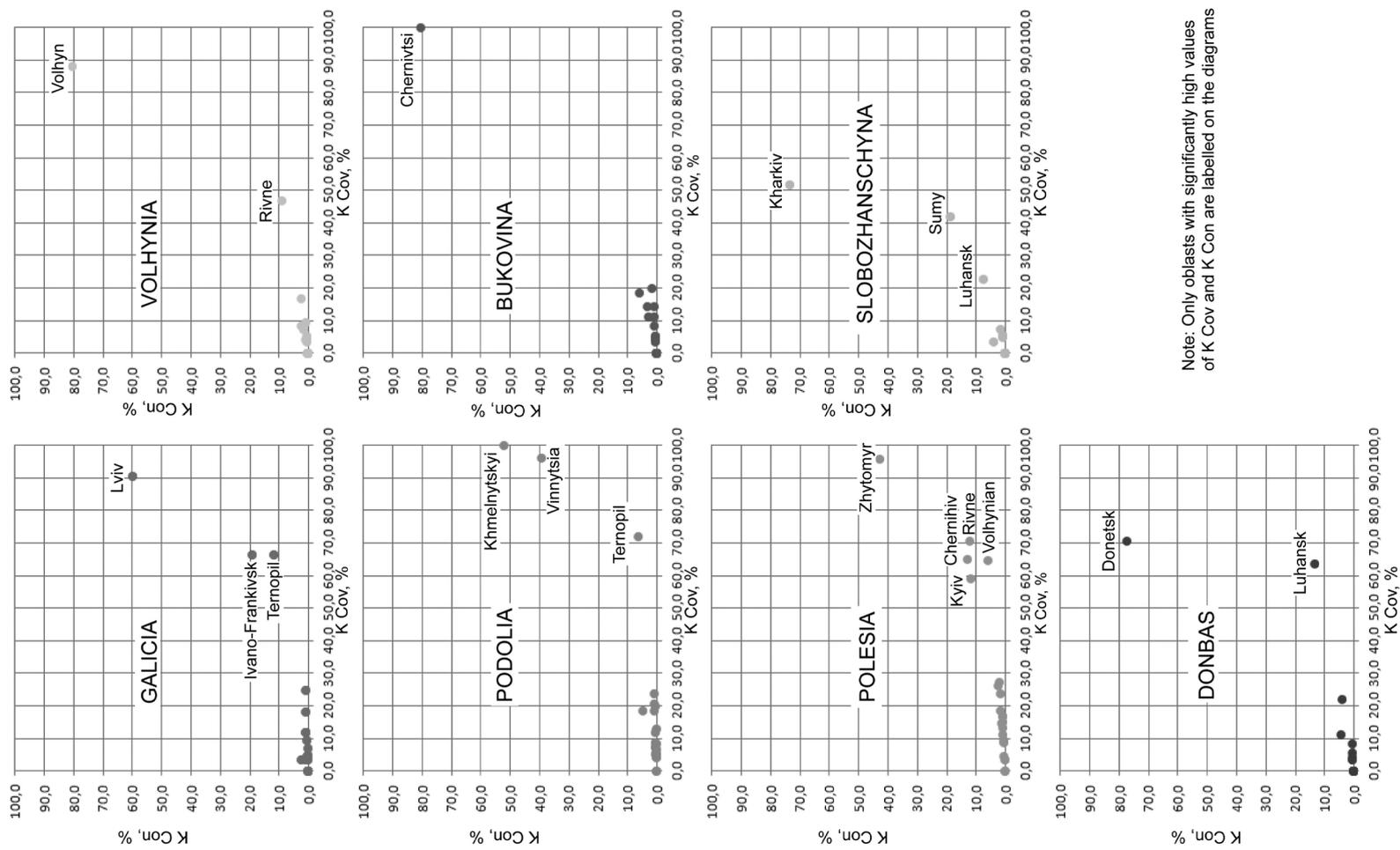


Fig. 2. Comparison of the territory of historical regions with the distribution areas of the corresponding ergonyms  
 Source: own work.



Note: Only oblasts with significantly high values of  $K_{Cov}$  and  $K_{Con}$  are labelled on the diagrams

Fig. 3. Calculated coefficients  $K_{Cov}$  and  $K_{Con}$ , for historical regions by oblasts

Source: own work.

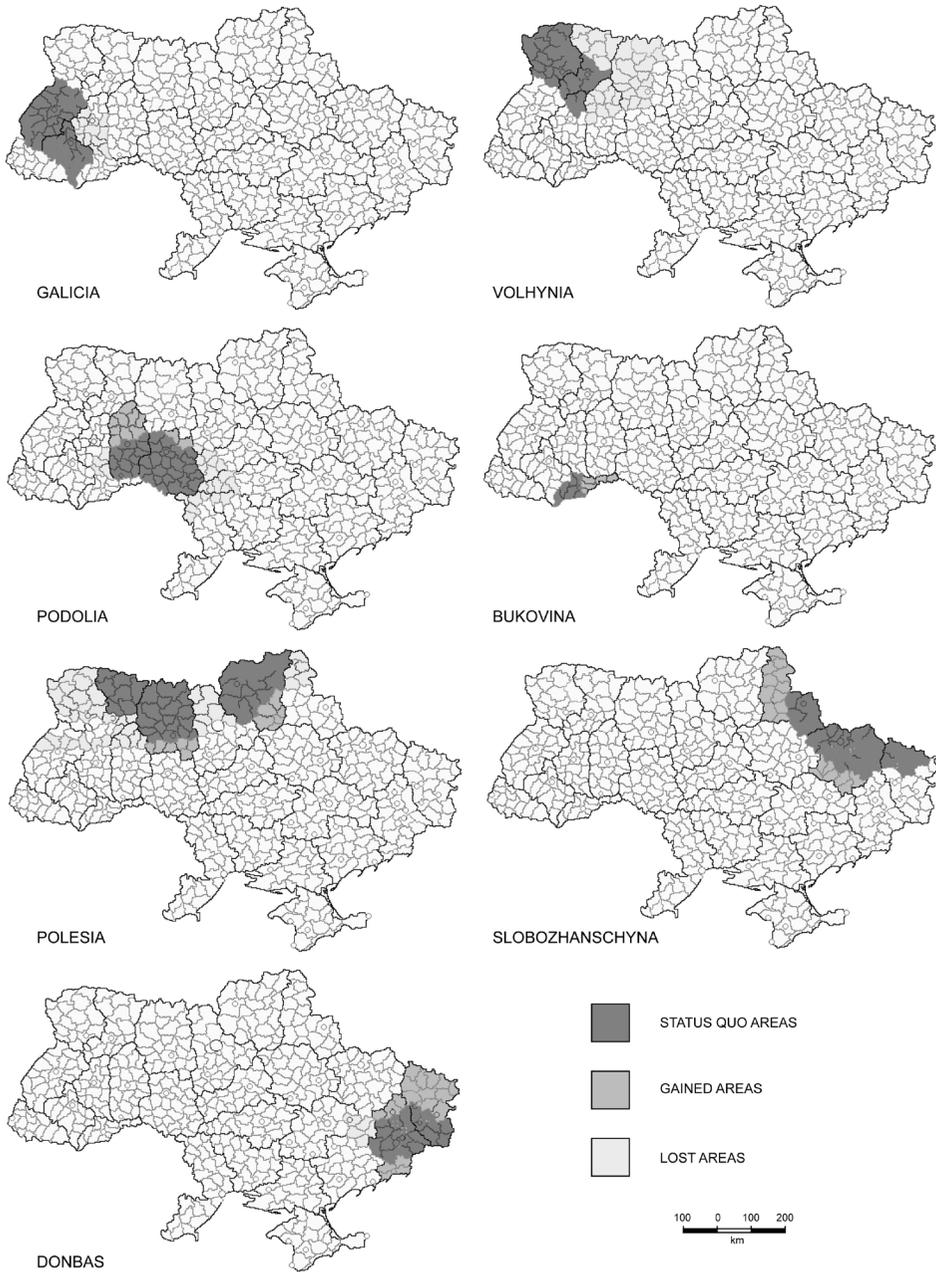


Fig. 4. Changing spatial patterns of the identities with historical regions

Source: own work.

may experience a) a significant spatial gain (Slobozhanshyna, Bukovina), b) an increase with some areas while simultaneously losing the others (Podolia, Donbas, Polesia), and, c) a significant spatial reduction (Volhynia, Galicia).

The revealed tendencies indicate that certain oblasts, under certain favourable conditions, are experiencing a process of unification, or homogenisation, i.e. the spread of identity with a certain historical region over an entire oblast. In other words, there is a matching between the identification with a given oblast and the identification with a historical region. For example, identification with Podolia has spread throughout the Vinnytsia and the Khmelnytskyi oblasts; identification with Bukovina covers the entire Chernivtsi oblast; identification with Polesia is more or less typical for the entire Zhytomyr and Chernihiv oblasts, etc.

Thus, all oblasts of Ukraine can be divided into 2 groups:

1. Anchor regions, which grasp the identity with a particular historical region, while identities with other historical regions, if any, disappeared or have been in the process of disappearing.

2. Swing oblasts, where identities with several historic regions continue to coexist.

After redrawing the administrative system in the first half of the 20th century, virtually all regions had a diversified structure of identity with historic regions. However, with time, some of them experienced a process of unification (modern anchor oblasts), while others retained the initial diversity (modern swing oblasts). The likelihood of a unification scenario was stimulated by the following factors:

Factor 1: Initial predominance of identity with one historical region within an oblast. This means that one, and only one, historical region covered the vast majority of the oblast territory.

Factor 2: An oblast centre is located within the limits of initially dominating historic region, covering the most part of the oblast.

Factor 3: Semantic link of the name of an oblast and/or oblast centre with the name of a certain historical region.

Based on Table 1, all anchor regions were influenced by at least 2 of these factors, while the effect of only one factor is insufficient to induce a unification scenario.

Table 1. Types of oblasts\* and their factor conditionality

Oblast	Identity with historical region	Type	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Chernivtsi	Bukovina	Anchor	+	+	-
Volhyn	Volhynia	Anchor	-	+	+
Khmelnytskyi	Podolia	Anchor	+	+	+ / - **
Vinnytsia	Podolia	Anchor	+	+	-
Lviv	Galicia	Anchor	+	+	-
Ivano-Frankivsk	Galicia	Anchor	+	+	-

Oblast	Identity with historical region	Type	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Kharkiv	Slobozhanschyna	Anchor	+	+	-
Donetsk	Donbas	Anchor	+	+	+
Zhytomyr	Polesia	Anchor	+	+	-
Chernihiv	Polesia	Anchor	+	+	-
Rivne	Volhynia / Polesia	Swing	-	+	-
Sumy	Slobozhanschyna / Polesia	Swing	-	+	-
Luhansk	Donbas / Slobozhanschyna	Swing	-	+	-
Ternopil	Galicja / Podolia / Volhynia	Swing	-	+	-
Kyiv	Polesia / possibly Middle Dnieper	Swing	-	-	+

\* Only those oblasts that can be confidently classified as anchor or swing according to available data are specified.

\*\* Until 1954, the city of Kamianets-Podilskyi (i.e. “Podolian Kamianets”) was the oblast centre.

Source: authors’ analysis.

What will happen to swing oblasts in the future? There are two possible answers: either their current state is metastable, or there is a process of unification, drifting into one of the historical identities, although much slower than in anchor oblasts. The answer to this question may vary in each particular case, since it depends on the complexity of various factors. However, we are likely to suppose a slow unification process in most of the swing regions. It happens because one of the identities has an advantage over the other due to one of the factors. Most often this is the location of the regional centre in the area of one of the dominant historical identities. Proceeding from this, it is possible to foresee the strengthening of the identity with Volhynia in the Rivne oblast and the identity with Slobozhanschyna in the Sumy oblast. Also, we could expect the enhancement of the identity with Donbas in the Luhansk oblast, but after its division into the Russian-occupied south (including the oblast centre) and the Ukrainian north, the drift of the northern part to identify with Slobozhanschyna is more likely. As for the Kyiv oblast, its status of a metropolitan region and the semantics of the regional centre name contribute to the strengthening of identity rather with Kyivschyna/Middle Dnieper than with Polesia. The most difficult situation took shape in the Ternopil oblast due to the competition between the three identities, none of which has obvious advantages; although the area of the identity with Volhynia in the northern part appears to be the weakest side in this “confrontation”, it does not disappear (like in the neighbouring Khmelnytskyi oblast) since neither of the other two identities has a monopolistic symbolic domination in the rest of the territory, including the oblast centre.

However, the case of the Rivne oblast is more complicated than it seems. The fact is that the neighbouring Volhyn oblast, by its very name, exclusively binds the

“brand” of Volhynia, making other oblasts “not entirely Volhynian”, which forces it to seek an alternative identity. The toponymic factor may work also in other cases. For example, Donetsk, as a regional centre, ties the Donbas “brand” to the respective oblast (Donbas = Donetsk Basin), worsening the prospects of this identity in the Luhansk oblast. If the Kamianets-Podilskyi oblast, after changing the regional centre in 1954, was not renamed into the Khmelnytskyi oblast, the same factor could weaken the identity with Podolia in the neighbouring Vinnytsia oblast.

Thus, in some cases, the process of unification can acquire the extreme form “one historical region = one administrative region”. In that case, if some oblasts monopolise brands of historical regions, others are forced to seek a fundamentally new regional identity. This identity can hypothetically be based on historic regions of a smaller scale, but also local economic specialisation, geographical situation, landscape features, etc. In fact, current rethinking of Polesia takes place according to exactly such a model.

What acts as the engine of unification in certain, specified above, favourable conditions? The authors believe that two factors are important: 1. a socio-psychological inclination to perceive objects like integral and unambiguous phenomena; 2. the influence of a socialisation process by means of institutions, primarily the media and education.

Speaking of the socio-psychological aspect, we assume two things. First, it seems that Gestalt psychology (see, e.g. Lehar, 2003) has a point here and people tend to consider spatial units (regions) as integral categories. According to Odehnal and Šerý (2012), regional boundaries play an important role in shaping regional identity: helping to define the limits of a region, they help people perceive it. Historical regions in Ukraine are informal, and not only the average citizen, but even an expert may have a problem with defining them clearly. Simultaneously, the boundaries of modern administrative regions are clearly defined landmarks convenient for the mental approximation of other spatial structures. Secondly, it is a universal psychological inclination of human beings to formulate the unequivocal hierarchical correspondence between spatial taxa. People are prone to unequivocal correlations such as “oblast k belongs to region A”, or “region B includes oblasts m and n” (ideally – “region C = oblast p”). The situation where the statement “oblast p *partially* belongs to region A” and “oblast p *partially* belongs to region B” are valid at the same time, makes a dissonance to this harmonious hierarchy; therefore, people begin to prefer one of these statements in favour of which more arguments are found.

Meanwhile, the quality of this argumentation depends on the second factor, namely, the socialisation process. Paasi (2009) admitted that the fact of belonging to a region is not obvious for the majority of the population. The most objective and unbiased information about the boundaries of historical regions comes almost exclusively from the elites, including geography and history experts. This information is disseminated mainly in academic literature, it is rarely voiced in the media, and therefore, it is not widely known to the general public. In addition, it is ambiguous, difficult to comprehend, and therefore uncomfortable for everyday

use. Instead, the mass media present a simplified, unambiguous look at things, representing the position of regional authorities, using identity with one or another historical region as a brand of the administrative unit. Since uniqueness and awareness are important for every brand, in the case of several alternative identification options, officials, knowingly or unknowingly, are more likely to choose one with more arguments to account for. The three above-mentioned factors of unification typically play a role of such arguments.

National geographical and historical education, in particular, schemes of economic and socio-geographical regionalisation set out in school and university textbooks, also should be considered. The importance of bilateral relationships between identity and education policies at different levels and in various contexts were depicted, e.g. in contributions by Hega (2001), Brown (2005), Măduța (2014), Li (2016), etc. The study of the politics of school textbooks in the Kharkiv, Sumy, and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine (Rodgers, 2006) revealed how education can frame political views in those regions. Even fiction is important: the representations of four Ukrainian cities in fictional narratives by contemporary authors show a stressed sense of belonging to the local territory, which is conveyed to the readers (Rewakowicz, 2010). In our case, since administrative oblasts are considered as regionalisation units, the historical differences within the oblasts are neglected, so that whole oblasts are included into a particular unit. As a result, such schemes stimulate the equation of administrative oblasts with a specific region. For example, a very popular scheme of economic regionalisation, presented in school geography textbooks, contains the Northwest region enclosing the Volhyn and the Rivne oblasts. In that mode, the Rivne oblast is linked to the Volhyn oblast (and hence to the historical Volhynia) and separated from the Zhytomyr oblast (i.e. from Polesia). We assume that regionalisation schemes may promote the formation of fundamentally new regional identities in the absence of historically grounded alternatives, for example, the formation of Prydniprovyia based on the homonymous economic region enclosing the Dnipropetrovsk and the Zaporizhia oblasts.

Electoral and geopolitical regionalisation is also a significant factor for Ukraine, a country located at a geopolitical fault-line and undergoing permanent political crisis. Relevant newsbreaks constitute an integral part of the everyday practices of ordinary Ukrainians and may influence the shaping of regional identities. For example, the Ternopil oblast is traditionally treated as a part of the Western Ukraine electoral region, and Galicia is traditionally considered the core region of Western Ukraine. Accordingly, the Ternopil oblast is considered by the mass media mainly as a part of Galicia. Simultaneously, according to the peculiarities of natural conditions and economic development, the Ternopil oblast is included in the Podolian economic region. This dichotomy produces two co-existing contradictory messages (“the Ternopil oblast is Galicia” and “the Ternopil oblast is Podolia”), which leads to the spread of both identities throughout the oblast and, at the same time, does not allow them to increase substantially as a result of mutual competition.

Proceeding from the universal psychological base for unification, this phenomenon should not be limited to Ukraine. Why, then, Ukraine appears to be such a good example? In our opinion, the optimal (for the revealed effect) ratio of the size of historical regions and modern administrative units (oblasts) is quite important. After all, if modern administrative regions are very small compared to the historical ones, one historical identity will sharply dominate among the new regions. Accordingly, the change of identity as the result of a unification will occur only in limited areas, so the overall transformation of the spatial pattern of historical identities will be negligible. If, however, new regions are too large (comparable in size to the historical ones), the existing differences in historical identity within the new regions could be a major obstacle of unification. Nevertheless, this is an assumption requiring further verifications.

Moreover, the process of unification is facilitated by the absence of other identities (linguistic, religious, ethnic, racial, etc.), which, being clearly assigned to specific regions, may significantly strengthen regional identification. Ukraine, by European standards, is a diversified country in terms of regional cultural traits. But in the continental part of the country, such differences are rather gradual changes with small gradients. Among the historical regions considered in this paper, Galicia is the only exception: its inhabitants in the overwhelming majority are Greek Catholics, while the inhabitants of the adjacent Ukrainian lands (Volhynia and Podolia) are predominantly Orthodox. Therefore, it is indicative that the area of identity with Galicia practically did not change its limits; it is noteworthy how the Orthodox north of the Ternopil oblast retains its identity with Volhynia.

A situation similar to that of Ukraine is observed in Czechia, where modern administrative units since 1949 have not been consistent with the boundaries of the historical regions (Bohemia, Moravia, and Czech Silesia), new and historical regions are close to the optimal size ratio, and the identity with the historic regions has an exceptionally cultural and ethnographic character (Vaishar and Zapletalová, 2016). In view of that, it is significant that our results are viewed with the results of the Czech authors cited at the beginning of the article. In our opinion, interesting results can also be obtained in France, where the modern administrative division into departments and regions is not always consistent with the boundaries of historical provinces.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

The example of Ukraine proves that the historical regions and the associated identities are not something consistent, determined once and for all. Instead, they are dynamic structures transforming over time, changing their boundaries and adapting to new (geo)political, economic, social, and cultural realities, in-

cluding to the current administrative division. In fact, the names of historical regions function as labels, which may hide a substance significantly different from the original meaning when the corresponding historical region was first shaped. Regional identity can be relatively freely chosen, since in modern conditions it is no longer firmly attached to cultural peculiarities, as well as to historical political and administrative boundaries. Of course, some of these boundaries are fairly stable, as their influence has been tracked for many centuries. But there are no fundamental obstacles for the formation of quasi-historical regions on fundamentally new grounds (modern territorial organisation of public administration, political and economic processes, including their network forms). The task for a researcher is to establish which attributes of the regions are more persistent, and which are more dynamic, and under what conditions that persistence/ dynamism is more likely to be manifested.

However, it is important that historical identities, in particular their symbolic attributes like name, coats of arms, and natural and cultural monuments, are widely used by modern administrative regions in own building their own identities. Modern administrative units, as formal structures with defined boundaries and functioning institutions, are becoming more and more important identification objects, but they do so largely due to their interaction with and integration into the network of historic regions. The factors and mechanism for assigning the brands of historical regions by the modern administrative units, as well as the formation of fundamentally new regions on the basis of geographic, economic or political criteria, is more or less understandable. However, a question remains, why for the authorities and the population it is so important to identify with something more than modern administrative units. Probably it is a desire to pull away from the modern administrative division as having no deep historical roots, being temporary, and Soviet-rooted, and to identify instead with something more rooted, long-lasting, and with a gust of historical romance and symbolism. As Paasi and Zimmerbauer (2011) accurately pointed out, regional symbols often make it possible to combine the past, the present and future of a region, fill it with real content, and ensure legitimacy.

The dynamic and hybrid nature of identity with the historical regions provides additional arguments for both supporters and opponents of the administrative division reform at the macro-level. If the network of modern administrative units reflects the real identity more clearly than academically grounded regionalisation, the task of supporters is substantially simplified: it is only necessary to integrate existing administrative units correctly, not cutting them into parts (here it remains an open question what to do with the swing regions. Possibly lower level identities, their spatial cores and peripheries should be taken into account). However, opponents of the reform also receive a serious argument: why redesign the administrative map again if historical identities are successfully developed on the basis of existing administrative regions?

In any case, it must be acknowledged that positioning modern administrative units in the context of a certain macro-region in a public discourse at a national, regional or local level is a powerful instrument of regional policy that can accelerate or slow down the development of a new regionalism and direct this process in desired direction. Indeed, although regions cannot be considered as self-sufficient fixed formations and constantly change their configurations, the importance of the sense of place and identification with relatively stable and symbolically capacious territorial units remains and presumably will not disappear.

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