

Regional identity and the renewal of spatial administrative structures: The case of Podolia, Ukraine

Anatoliy MELNYCHUK^a, Oleksiy GNATIUK^{b*}

Abstract

The relationships between territorial identities and administrative divisions are investigated in this article, in an attempt to reveal the possible role of territorial identity as an instrument for administrative-territorial reform. The study focuses on Podolia – a key Ukrainian geographical region with a long and complicated history. A survey of residents living throughout the region showed that the majority of respondents had developed strong identification with both historical regions and modern administrative units. The close interaction between “old” and “new” identities, however, caused their mutual alterations, especially in changes in the perceived borders of historical regions. This means that the “old” historical identities have strong persistence but simultaneously survive constant transformations, incorporating the so-called “thin” elements, which fits the concept of dynamic regional institutionalisation and the formation of hybrid territorial identities. Consequently, although territorial identity may be used to make administrative territorial units more comprehensible for people, the development of modern administrative units based on hybrid identities, which include both thick and thin elements, may be another feasible solution that involves stakeholders in regional development.

Keywords: territorial identity, regional institutionalisation, administrative-territorial division, decentralisation reform, Podolia, Ukraine

Article history: Received 18 April 2016; Accepted 20 November 2017; Published 31 March 2018

1. Introduction

Currently, the Ukrainian government is implementing a decentralisation reform, which enables, *inter alia*, the modernisation of administrative divisions. Since the spring of 2015, the existing local urban, township and rural councils have been voluntarily consolidated into new grass-root territorial communities, following official procedures approved by the government (Udovychenko et al., 2017). The next stage of reform deals with the creation of new administrative raions (counties). Another option, currently under consideration, involves the transformation of the regional level by changing the limits of existing administrative oblasts and/or merging them into larger administrative units (regions).

The current administrative division of Ukraine is inherited from the Soviet Union and basically ignores historical, cultural and geopolitical regional differences, which existed before the establishment of the socialist system. Consequently, the “old” territorial identities, developed on the basis of historical regions, existed without

any respective institutional framework for nearly a century, and therefore could evolve or disappear. So-called “new” territorial identities, however, associated for example with administrative oblasts, could have developed during the times of Soviet-originated territorial divisions. Also, one might hypothesise a complicated process of interaction between “old” and “new” identities.

The stability of any administrative division and successful territorial development largely depend on a common vision of future development strategies, which are shared by the majority of people in the territorial community and are based on a common past and common cultural values. This brings up the question: To what extent might any existing territorial identity be considered in reforming administrative-territorial divisions at different levels – or even if it should be?

Thus, the aims of this study are: first, to study the spatial patterns of territorial identity within a selected Ukrainian region; second, to clarify the relationships

^a Department of Social and Economic Geography, Faculty of Geography, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine

^b Laboratory for Regional Economics and Politics, Faculty of Geography, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine (*corresponding author: O. Gnatiuk, e-mail: alexgnat22@ukr.net)

between territorial identities and administrative divisions, including the stability of historical territorial identities and the interactions of “old” and “new” identities; and third, to discuss possible proposals for changes in the administrative divisions that follow from the study results.

2. Theoretical background

The scientific literature presents several approaches to the conceptualisation of territorial identity. The Russian geographer Krylov (2010) argued that territorial identity is a complex of individual or collective representations, originating from the individual or collective (shared) mental attachments to a certain territory and/or relevant territorial community, associated with the process of local specificity interpretation. According to Krylov, territorial identity consists in the objectification of regional characteristics in the images, symbols and myths shared and reproduced by members of the local community. More often, however, territorial identity is regarded simply as an identification that links individual or community with its own living space (Tuan, 1974; Caldo, 1996). Paasi (1986) distinguishes between properly regional (territorial) identity, conceptualised as a sense of belonging/attachment to region/place, and identity of a region, being a set of its typical (or even unique) characteristics. Thus, the definition of Krylov is based on the previous definitions (including that of Paasi) but elaborates them in a more detailed fashion.

Territorial identity develops through close physical and mental connection with the place, including involvement of a person in spatial transformations (Relph, 1976). Significant determinants of territorial identity are emotional bonds with a given place, surrounding landscape, local community, material and spiritual cultural products, as well as broadly understood cultural heritage. It is common to suggest that regional identity is oriented towards the perceived past (Hague, 2005). In most cases, the concepts of “territorial identity”, “spatial identity” and “regional identity”, as encountered in the scientific literature, may be regarded as approximate synonyms.

In debating the role of territorial identity in Ukraine, it should be noted that we are talking about one of the largest European countries with a diversified territory in terms of landscape, political history and cultural conditions. This has resulted in the formation of a variety of historical regions, and most of them have, in due time, existed as the administrative units. These regions are characterised by a greater or lesser spatial homogeneity of landscape, cultural traits, economic specialisation and administrative sub-ordinance, which could result in strong regionalism (Keating, 1998, 2004). In Socialist countries, however, territorial division rarely reflected historical or cultural ties; on the contrary, it was drawn with the aim of creating a strongly centralised state, ignoring cultural differences (Yoder, 2003), and Ukraine is not an exception: old historical regions were split apart into modern administrative oblasts. Historical regions continued to exist in common memory, however. For example, in Poland where the state of affairs did not favour the development of any forms of local or regional identity, regional differences have always existed, although their importance has diminished as a result of large internal migration waves and population mixing (Wódz, 1995). Similarly, in Lithuania centralised management was dominant, and this prevented the development of local self-government and community traditions, the solidarity of the population declined and indifference to public affairs

increased (Zigiene, 2013). Paasi (2002) argues that regional consciousness has no necessary relations to administrative lines drawn by governments.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine faced a process of strengthening regional identities that posed challenges for successful national development. The first challenge was political polarisation (Arel, 1995): the tumultuous events of the Orange Revolution (2004–2005) and especially the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) were its most noticeable consequences. For historical reasons, different parts of the country mentally gravitated toward different geopolitical formations. The annexation of the Crimea and the military-political conflict in the Donbas, lasting since 2014, although inspired by outside intervention, had, in fact, deep inner grounds: the weakening of national Ukrainian identity in favour of a regional identity and/or a strong mental attraction to Russia. On the other hand, these events occasioned both nation building and the revival of regional consciousness in Western and Central Ukraine.

Today, Ukrainian political elites have common concerns related to the possible creation of large administrative units based on historical regions: they fear the possibility of concentrating a large amount of resources that would push regional leaders to support for federalisation. Yet, actual or perceived territorial divisions are the basis for the spatial compartmentalisation of issues and problems ranging from the political to the cultural (Murphy, 1989). Another challenge is the high level of paternalism and low engagement of people in territorial development. For example, the goal of the on-going decentralisation reform is the transfer of resources and powers to the level of the territorial community, which envisages the ability (and the duty) of the territorial communities independently to elaborate a development strategy. In the vast majority of newly- created communities, however, both ordinary people and the local administration are not prepared to take on this responsibility. Instead, they expect the government to issue a ready-made territorial development strategy for each community. Therefore, the establishment of capable and stable territorial units was a challenge for most Central and Eastern European countries.

The Polish experience is perceived as inspiring in Ukraine, even though the Polish reform was carried out rapidly and centrally (Kulesza, 2002; Bafoil, 2010). On the contrary, decentralisation reform in Ukraine (at the current stage) is implemented on a voluntary basis. Thus, the experiences of Latvia and Estonia, where the reform took a very long period of time and had many faults, connected, *inter alia*, with the lack of readiness of people to take part in territorial development, should be strongly appreciated (Vanags, 2005). Negative public perceptions of the current administrative division may only exacerbate the problem: people with different views on the future hardly can achieve a common strategic vision. Some developed common territorial identity, however, may facilitate the acceptance of administrative units and the engagement of local residents in regional development (Jordan, 2003).

Territorial innovation, as Pollice (2003) argues, is successful when it comprises the results of choices shared by the local community and the authorities that govern the territory. Well-developed territorial identification and an emphasis on regional specifics may stimulate the inhabitants of problematic regions to be more active, both economically and socially (Chromý, Janů, 2003). Raagmaa (2002) offers sociological evidence that because of the common values

shared by the majority in a regional community, the process of regional re-institutionalisation and implementation of important (although quite painful) reforms can be carried out more effectively. In addition, he argues that a developed territorial identity has a positive effect on the implementation of reforms, the demographic and migration situation, as well as labour productivity, and therefore it can be considered as a tool for territorial planning, contributing to institution-building and innovative regional development. There are further opinions that territorial identity is the product of and a factor in regional institutionalisation, and therefore may be considered to be the basis for regional development (Hudson, 2005; Zimmerbauer, 2011). In Finland, even a relatively open and ambiguous historical identity of its provinces has not prevented the use of identity discourse in strategic long-term plans drawn up by the regional councils (Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2011).

Some geographers from post-Soviet countries go further in theoretical speculation and argue that the spatial pattern of territorial identity should be regarded as the basis for the territorial organisation of society, and therefore must be considered when making geographical zoning or even reforming the administrative division (Sharygin, 2003; Trofimov et al., 2008; Pavliuk, 2006; Smirnyagin, 2007). In Ukraine, the role of territorial identity as a factor in regional institutionalisation, regional development and spatial transformations has been specified, among others, by Musiyevdov (2007), Mikheeva (2008), Korzhov (2010), and Melnychuk et al. (2014).

Unfortunately, few scientific publications problematise territorial identity as a tool for reforming administrative divisions, as well as the consequences of administrative division changes on territorial identity. Looking at the experience of the other Central European Countries, Jordan (2003) shows that most of the NUTS-2 and NUTS-3 administrative units have some kind of coincidence with spatial patterns of regional identity, but the situation is quite different from one country to another. For example, most of the contemporary Polish voivodeships correspond

to historical cultural regions or sub-regions with a certain identity and inherited names; in comparison in the Czech Republic restoration to the historical lands was avoided, even though they still have distinct identities and well-identified regional capitals. According to Paasi (2001), in some countries regions may be important in governance but culturally “thin”, while in other cases regions may be understood as being deeply historical and cultural entities whose existence becomes manifest not only in identity narratives, but also in numerous social and cultural institutions.

There are some studies investigating the effect of administrative division change on local identity: for example, Pult Quaglia, 2009; Hong and Junxi, 2011. Zhu et al. (2011) found out that after the cancellation of the municipal district of Dongshan (Guangzhou) in 2005, the identity of the locals had generally been enhanced, rather than vitiated. In Ukraine, Lytvyn (2015) stated the possibility of using territorial identity for improving administrative divisions, while Nagorna (2008) discussed arguments “for” and “against” implementing the federal system in Ukraine based on regional identities. Peisakhin (2013) studied the political identity of Galician, Volhynian and Podolian Ukrainians in the former Austrian-Russian imperial borderland and presented some very valuable conclusions about possible reasons for actual differences; however, this author takes the limits of historical regions for granted, whereas our aim is to establish what the people themselves are thinking about their regional affiliation.

3. Case study region

We selected Podolia, one of the key historical regions in Ukraine, for our case study. The spatial limits of Podolia may be delineated based on different criteria: physiographical, political, ethnographic, demographic, etc. One may distinguish the core, where all criteria are satisfied, and the periphery, where only some of them are fulfilled. After considering various approaches, we decided to consider Podolia as the territorial limits of Vinnytsia, Khmelnytsky and Ternopil administrative oblasts (Fig. 1). Although this



Fig. 1: Location of the case study region
Source: authors' draft (based on an open source map)

area is marked by considerable internal differentiation in terms of both natural and cultural landscapes, it meets most of the aforementioned criteria; on the other hand, its consistency with existing administrative boundaries facilitates statistical analysis of available data and practical application of the results.

Podolia is characterised by physiographic and economic integrity but, simultaneously, by significant historical and cultural diversity. During its long history, Podolia was under the rule of different states (Kievan Rus, Principality of Galicia and Volhynia, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Ukrainian Cossack State, the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, Ukrainian National Republic, West Ukrainian People's Republic, Polish Republic, Soviet Union, and, finally, independent Ukraine since 1991). Podolia was divided between different states for a long time: for example, in the period 1793–1917 the territory of the modern Ternopil oblast, except for the far north, was included in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while the rest of the oblast was part of the Russian Empire. In the period 1921–1939, modern Vinnytsia and Khmelnytskyi oblasts belonged to the Soviet Union, while Ternopil oblast was connected to the Polish Republic, etc.

Accordingly, the administrative division of Podolia has changed several times. It is worth noting that the names of several administrative units stressed the relationship with Podolia. Among them are Podolian Voivodeship (1434–1793), Bratslav Voivodeship, generally referred as Eastern Podolia (1566–1793), and the Podolian Governorate (1793–1925). Parts of the study region, however, were included in the administrative units semantically associated with other historical regions (Volhynian, Kievan, and Ruthenian voivodeships, Volhynian and Kievan governorates, etc.). The modern administrative division into oblasts and raions has continually existed since 1939. The spatial limits of the most important historical and modern administrative territorial units are shown in Figure 2.

The majority of Ukrainian geographers consider all three oblasts as the Podolian human-geographical and/or economic region. These provisions are enshrined in the current

national school curriculum. Some scholars, such as Pistun and Melnychuk (2010, p. 244) and Olynyk et al. (2015), have even proposed the creation of a single administrative Podolian region by merging Vinnytsia, Khmelnytskyi and Ternopil oblasts. In the Ukrainian media, however, the term “Podolia” often refers solely to Vinnytsia and Khmelnytskyi oblasts, while Ternopil oblast, despite its internal geographic and ethnographic diversity, is referred to as part of the Western Ukraine in general and Galicia in particular.

4. Data and methods

Several approaches to the study of the territorial identity of a population can be found in the literature. The most widespread method is a sociological survey, including mass, expert and combined studies. Mass surveys are aimed at identifying the actual territorial identity of the population and need a sufficiently large and representative sample of respondents. Expert surveys search for the opinions of local “experts”, namely historians, geographers, ethnographers, politicians, economic actors, public activists, etc. They are focused on details that remain unnoticed in mass surveys (especially attitudes to neighbouring territories, characteristics of local symbols, or an understanding of the “spirit of the place”, etc.) and tend to show territorial identity as it “should be” from the point of view of its most expressive and conscious carriers. In this case, questionnaires introduce more in-depth and open-ended questions, and in-depth interviews are also beneficial. Combined surveys reveal both general population opinions and the opinion of experts.

Western scientific traditions have a long experience of mass surveys used in investigating territorial identities with expressed ethno-political components, in regions such as Catalonia, Scotland, Flanders, Wallonia, Quebec, etc., using instruments such as the so-called Moreno question, hierarchical questions, intensity/frequency questions and metric scales (Melich, 1986; De Winter et al., 1998; Maddens et al., 1998; Maddens et al., 2000; Chromý and Janů, 2003; Friswoll and Rye, 2009; Chromý and Skála, 2010; Wójcik, 2013). Individual respondents are asked questions about how they relate to different (sub)-national

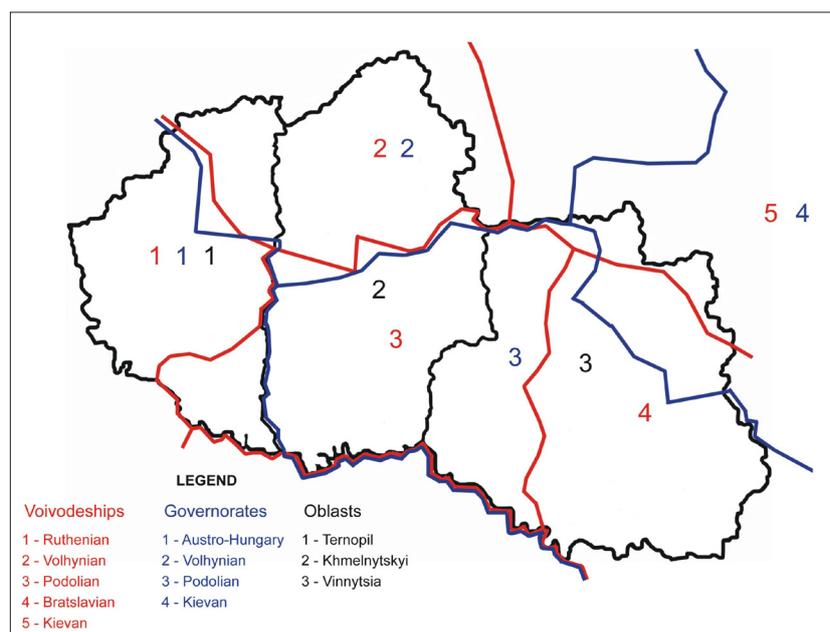


Fig. 2: Historical and modern administrative territorial units
Source: authors' interpretation of the historical record

identities. Another more comprehensive approach has been proposed by Krylov (2010), who studied the regional identities of European Russia using a large questionnaire with different blocks of questions, related to the following aspects of territorial identity: rootedness, mobility and local patriotism; reflections on local geographic specifics; community and territorial social consolidation; genealogy; the mental structuring of space, etc. Another feature of this approach is the absence of contra-posing different levels of territorial identity. Further studies of territorial identity in post-Soviet countries, in general, followed Krylov's ideas (Melnychuk and Gnatiuk, 2012; Grytsenko, 2011; Rastvorova, 2011).

A second method for this type of research is the study of territorial identity markers that is artefacts and socio-ecological factors pointing at a certain identity. Two groups of markers may be distinguished. First, there are relatively stable markers: particularities of architecture; language and customs; traditional professions and crafts; traits of the nature of the population; religious beliefs and folklore; settlement structure; macro-toponymy, etc. (Zelinsky, 1958; Shortridge and Shortridge, 1998; Weiss, 2000; Fischer, 2002). Secondly, relatively dynamic markers can be distinguished: meso- and micro-toponymy; names of enterprises and institutions; regional brands; commemorated personalities and events; the spatial behaviour of the population; spatial movement of goods and information; geography of sports fans; electoral behaviour, etc. (Shyshatskyi, 2006; Komarov, 2008; Pavliuk, 2007; Zamiatina, 2011; Melnychuk et al., 2014).

The study of spatially-anchored information flows, including official web-sites, media and social networks, is another helpful way to study territorial identity (Hale, 1984; Pavliuk, 2006; Zamiatina and Belash, 2006; Zamiatina, 2011).

For our specific case, we used a mass field survey (street interviews) of inhabitants throughout the region. The analysis presented in this paper, constitutes only a modest part of a larger comprehensive study, and follows the Krylov's approach mentioned above. The full questionnaire consisted of 40 questions designed to highlight the following aspects of 'identity': perceptions of local geographic, cultural and historical specificity; rootedness and patriotism at the local and national levels; spatial orientation and the mental structuring of geographical space; communality and territorial public self-awareness. Obviously, the complete analysis of the results goes far beyond the boundaries of this paper: from the 40 questions we have selected five items which present some direct possibility of determining the spatial pattern of territorial identity, and then relate it to the changes of administrative divisions.

The five questions are as follows:

1. Do you consider yourself ...: (response options: Podolian?; Volhinian?; Galician?; Bukovinian?; Bessarabian?; Polesian?; a resident of the Middle Dnieper Region?; a resident of the Black Sea Region?; other?; none?);
2. Do you feel a special mental attitude to....: (response options: Vinnytsia?; Khmelnytskyi?; Ternopil?);
3. What city do you consider to be the central one for the area where you live? (open-ended response);
4. What areas (oblasts or their parts) do you think are composing Podolia? (open-ended response);
5. Please, indicate a place where, in your opinion, the heart of Ukraine is located? (open-ended response).

The survey was conducted from December 2013 to April 2014. A total of 1,223 questionnaires were collected and qualified for the following research procedures: in Vinnytsia oblast, 658; in Khmelnytskyi oblast, 313; and in Ternopil oblast, 252. We considered the administrative raions as basic spatial units for both the survey and subsequent calculations: the cities of regional subordination that are not capitals of administrative raions were considered as a single unit, together with the neighbouring administrative raion. Three oblast capitals were considered as separate spatial units. In each administrative raion, except those of the oblast capitals, we selected two (2) settlements, one of which was the administrative capital of the given raion (city or town), and another was a randomly selected village, located no less than 5 km from the raion capital. In the raion capital we surveyed 6 respondents: 3 males and 3 females from each age group (≤ 30 ; 31–60; > 60). In the village, we surveyed 9 respondents: 3 males and 3 females from each age group, plus 1 additional male respondent and 2 additional female respondents from the oldest age group (> 60). In the raions of the oblast capitals, we randomly selected two villages and carried out a survey according to the procedures outlined above. The oblast capitals have the same proportion of respondents by age and sex as raion capitals, but the number of respondents was enlarged due to the larger possibilities of making a large-scale survey; also, this allowed receiving more precise data for oblast capitals.

This approach made it possible to balance, in general, the sample of each basic spatial unit by the age and sex of respondents, to reckon with opinions both from urban and rural localities, and to evenly cover the studied region with survey points. To correct the calculation of percentages for administrative oblasts, we multiplied the number of responses by weighting factors calculated as a proportion of the population in given administrative division to the number of respondents from this administrative division.

This applied method has certain limitations that cannot be omitted in this methodological discussion. Some of them were already discussed in the relevant literature. Deschouwer et al. (2015) point out three assumptions of the typical identity survey to reckon with, while interpreting the results. The first one is the assumption of a homogenous meaning of the identities: asking the respondents about a certain identity, we do not offer them the possibility to say what exactly it means for them. The second one is that the feelings of belonging are independent from the context. The third one is that the categories offered to the respondents are meaningful. To summarise, specific categories and options used in such surveys contain assumptions about identities, clamping the respondents into certain frames of understanding.

Another question is the representativeness of the sample. Using the afore-mentioned technique to select the respondent, we looked at the average parameters and assumed that the basic demography and proportions of urban and rural population are equal in all administrative raions. In fact, the real raions differ significantly in terms of urbanisation. It should also be noted that the urban population has a much higher level of spatial mobility than the rural one. Although the studied region is more or less homogeneous in terms of the age and sex structure of the population, the Ternopil oblast had a relatively larger share of males and people under the age of 18. Some bias may be caused by the fact that the level of education,

as well as professional activities, were not taken into account; however, it is well-known that these personal characteristics may seriously affect self-identification and understanding of the region. Finally, the survey was conducted in a turbulent period of Ukrainian history, and this could affect the responses.

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Territorial identities: Spatial patterns, persistence, variability and interaction

A large majority of respondents indexed their identity with one of the three historical regions: Podolia, Galicia and Volhynia, although 9.3% noted an absence of identification with any of the historical regions. The map (Fig. 3) demonstrates the structure of respondents by their identity with historical regions (pie-charts), as well as groups and sub-groups of administrative units with special proportions of these identities (colours). The next map (Fig. 4) shows the structure of answers to the question about the location of the “heart of Ukraine” (pie-charts), as well as the groups of administrative raions having similar structures of responses (colours). An overwhelming majority of respondents preferred two cities, Kyiv and Lviv, representing the two macro-regions of the country, Central and Western Ukraine respectively. The city of Kamianets-Podilskyi, the historical Podolian capital, was chosen by only 5.8% of respondents. In all three administrative oblasts, the strongest self-identification with the respective oblast and/or its capital is observed around the oblast capital and decreases to its periphery. But, in Vinnytsia oblast, the strength of self-identification with its oblast is reduced also in the semi-periphery due to well-developed sub-regional identities around the largest second-order towns. In addition, the reported identity with an administrative oblast decreases in areas where the identity with an historical region differs from the dominant identity with an historical region in a given respective oblast. The

survey revealed certain sub-regional identities, developed around second-order towns in all three studied oblasts (Fig. 5). The pattern of these identities demonstrates a good correlation with the hierarchical structure of the regional urban network.

The results show that, despite the discontinued existence of the former administrative units, residents’ perceived identities with historical regions are well-preserved even at the present. Moreover, the spatial patterns of modern territorial identities display a surprisingly strong relationship with former administrative units (including the Russian Empire governorates, abolished in 1925, and the voivodeships of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, cancelled over 200 years ago!). The historical borders between these administrative units, as well as between states, can be traced easily on the maps (compare Fig. 2 with Figs. 3 and 4): for example, areas where respondents self-identify with Volhynia, once constituted a part of Volhynia Voivodeship and Volhynia Governorate. The area of identity with Galicia clearly coincides with Ruthenian Voivodeship. The area where people have the strongest self-identification with Podolia and attribute symbolic importance to Kamianets-Podilskyi, the former Podolian capital, roughly coincides with the borders of the former Podolian Voivodeship. It is easy to see some weakening of identity with Podolia within the former Bratslav Voivodeship, compared with the areas of the former Podolian Voivodeship – despite the fact that both voivodeships usually are referred as parts of historical Podolia. Also, people living within the former Bratslav Voivodeship do not attribute so much symbolic importance to Kamianets-Podilskyi as do people living within the former Podolian Voivodeship. Thus, we may conclude that identities with historical regions, as well as mental patterns shaped by the former administrative divisions, are very stable in this part of Ukraine. This supports the arguments of Wodz (1995) and Paasi (2002) on the persistence of historical informal regions in the minds of people.

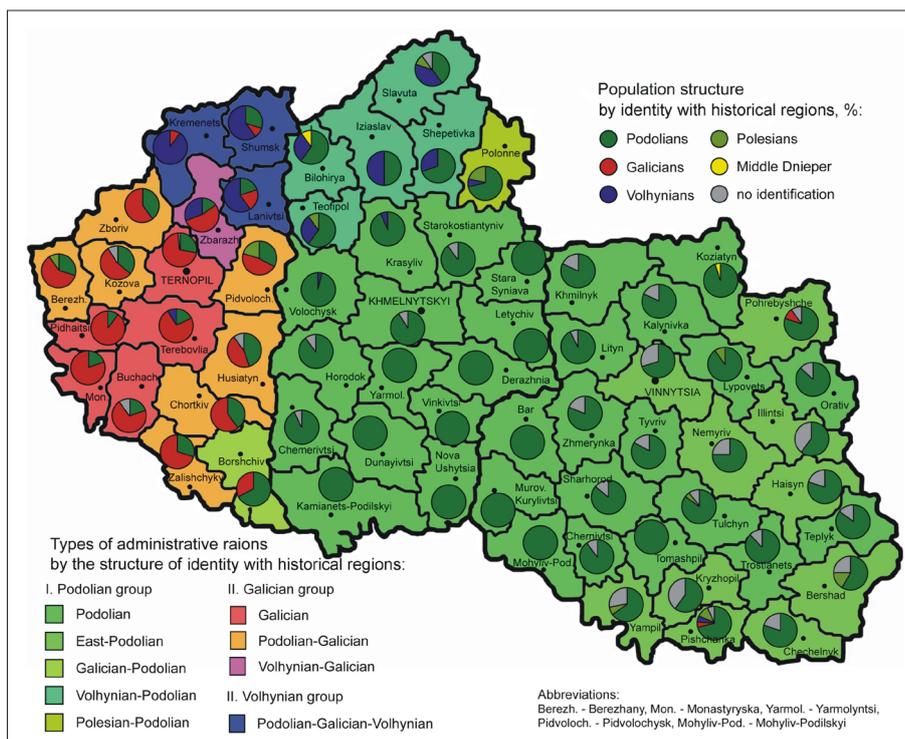


Fig. 3: Spatial pattern of identity with historical regions
 Source: authors' survey, 2013–2014

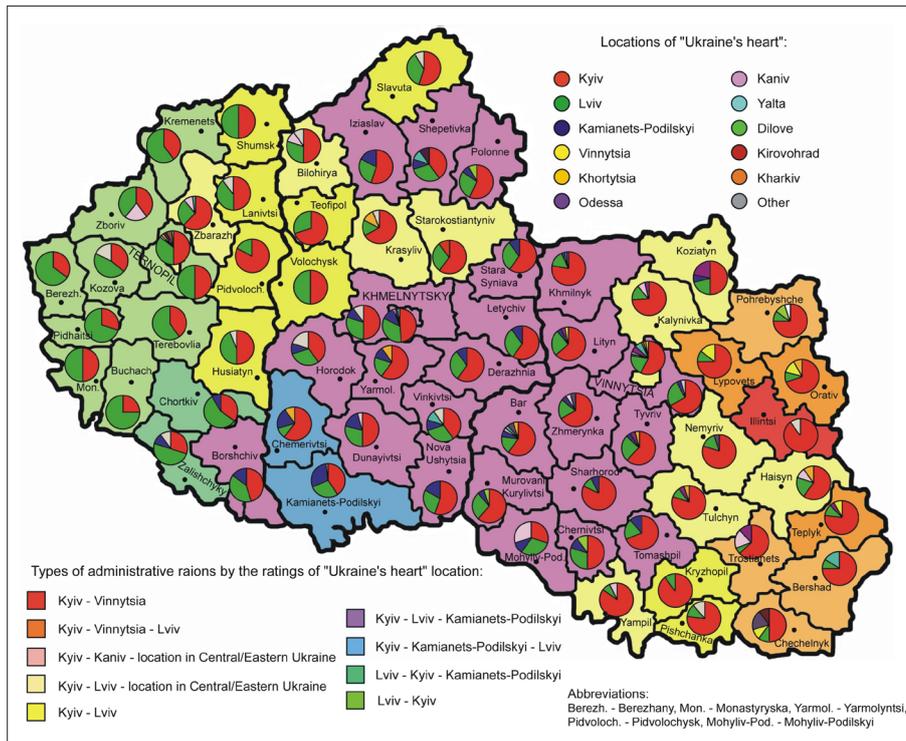


Fig. 4: Location of the "Heart of Ukraine": Respondents' perceptions
 Source: authors' survey, 2013–2014

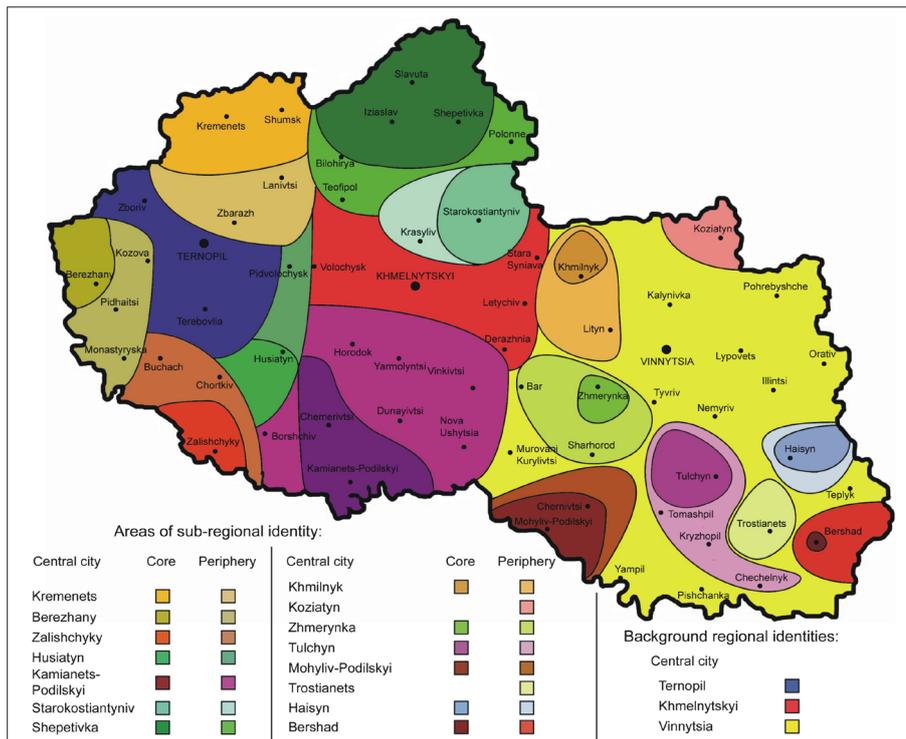


Fig. 5: Spatial pattern of sub-regional identity
 Source: authors' survey, 2013–2014

The so-called "old" territorial identities, however, are not absolutely constant and may transform under the influence of new administrative divisions. The current predominance of identity with Podolia in the north of Khmelnytskyi oblast (within historical Volhynia) and in the north-east of Vinnitsia oblast (within historical Middle Dnieper Region), is a spectacular example of this phenomenon. In addition,

to a certain extent Podolian identity has spread throughout the entire Ternopil oblast, although only its south-eastern part belonged to historic Podolia. This has happened because these two oblasts are traditionally positioned as Podolian ones in public discourse (including the media, as well as in educational and popular historical and geographical literature), while Ternopil oblast is referred to as Podolia in

school handbooks. This stimulates the inhabitants of these oblasts, even living outside historical Podolia, to identify with this region. Here we may trace a positive feedback between the two identities: for example, a resident of the historical Middle Dnieper Region may argue in the following way:

“I am a resident of Vinnytsia oblast; Vinnytsia oblast is one of the Podolian oblasts; therefore, I am Podolian”.

In Ternopil oblast, however, none of the identities with historical regions strongly dominates, and the oblast capital is located in its “Galician” part – therefore the oblast is not perceived as “typically Podolian”, and the positive relationship described above does not work.

On the other hand, “old” identities may influence the spatial pattern of “new” identities. This is illustrated by the northern parts of Khmelnytskyi and Ternopil oblasts. In both cases, the identity with their own oblasts is weakened because of the strong identities with historic Volhynia. Moreover, areas of sub-regional identity around Shepetivka and Kremenets (Fig. 5) also coincide with historic Volhynia. People may reason something like this:

“I am Volhynian, and this is important for me; Khmelnytskyi oblast is widely referred as a Podolian one; therefore, I would like not to identify myself with Khmelnytskyi oblast, but I would like to identify with Shepetivka, because this is the largest city in Volhynian north of Khmelnytskyi oblast”.

Another example is strong self-identification with Khmelnytskyi oblast in the south-eastern corner of Ternopil oblast, because the majority of people there feel themselves to be Podolians. This situation is contrary to that described above, but both of them are possible: the actual way of thinking depends on what identity is considered to be more important and therefore constitutes a starting point of argument. Empirical evidence shows that people are more likely to identify them initially with oblasts as “new” administrative units, however, which have clear boundaries and practical importance in everyday activities.

Additionally, we applied analysis of variance (main-effect ANOVA; software: Statistica 10.0) to test the relationship between different administrative divisions (former and modern) and contemporary territorial identity with historical regions. Existing administrative raions were determined to be the cases. The list of three independent variables (factors) includes the location of a certain administrative raion with respect to:

1. the voivodeships of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Podolian, Bratslavian, Volhynian, Kyivan, Ruthenian);
2. the governorates of the Russian Empire (Podolian, Volhynian, Kyivan, territory of Austro-Hungarian Empire); and
3. the contemporary oblasts (Vinnytsia, Khmelnytskyi, Ternopil).

Dependent variables were the following:

1. proportion of respondents, self-identifying with each historical region (Podolia, Galicia, Volhynia);
2. proportion of respondents considering each of the cities (Kyiv, Lviv, Kamianets-Podilskyi).

The results showed that modern administrative oblasts have the greatest impact on the spatial distribution of respondents self-identifying with Podolia; the impact of voivodeships in this case is smaller, but still significant, while the impact of governorates is insignificant. The

spatial distribution of people self-identifying with Volhynia, however, is determined primarily by the configuration of the former Volhynian Governorate, while the distribution of contemporary Galicians is specified principally by the configuration of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, i.e. by the state borders rather than the limits of administrative units. The special mental attitude to Kamianets-Podilskyi as the “heart of Ukraine” is defined primarily by the borders of voivodeships, while in case of Lviv modern oblast boundaries are significant, and in the case of Kyiv none of the factors are significant. These findings indicate that identity with Podolia is no longer limited to historical limits of the respective region and is spreading far beyond, while people, considering themselves as Podolians, have different mental attitudes (e.g. Kamianets-Podilskyi is no longer the incontestable symbolic place for inhabitants of Eastern Podolia).

Thus, evidence from Ukraine indicates that historical identities are sufficiently stable and need very long time intervals (at least several decades, but usually centuries) for crucial changes, except for situations associated with a total change in the population due for example to military actions, deportation, etc. Those already-shaped territorial identities, however, have a great potential for variability and further modification through interaction with “new” identities generated by changes in administrative divisions. With time, the spatial patterns of “old” and “new” identities are mutually adjusted; this process results in the formation of new “hybrid” identities and regions, inheriting several features from both “old” and “new” predecessors. This kind of regional institutionalisation conforms to Paasi’s analytical model (2003) as it appears to be continuous and cyclical, so leading to the formation of a more or less stable regional core (both territorial and symbolic) and dynamic periphery.

Odehnal and Šerý (2012) underline the significance of regional names, because the use of a specific name in communication assumes that the participants understand the name and know what exactly is hidden under that name, even if the name is different from the official one, e.g. administrative or political. This study shows that the names of the regions play the role of a conservative backbone in the process of the continuous reconfiguration of perceived regions. The names and nomenclature of the basic historical regions remain unchanged from the time of their first origin, but their spatial borders are understood differently over time. In fact, self-identification with the names of historical regions constitutes the basis for regional identity in this part of Ukraine, but at different times (and in the same epoch – for different people) the concepts of these basic regions have quite different meanings. This suggests that the list of historical regions, formed in the 14–16th centuries, has fixed a more or less stable set of possible regional identity options, but the real territorial coverage of these regions may vary greatly over time. It should be underlined that these large-scale changes are mediated by the emergence of later administrative-territorial units and identities with them. This correlates with the results of Chromý at al. (2004), which concluded that traditional historical regions persist for a long time in the minds of people, and that their centres are clear but the borderline is fuzzy and often equated with administrative boundaries. The factual boundaries play an important role in shaping regional identity because they help people define and perceive “their” region (Vaishar and Zapletalová, 2016).

Another topic for discussion flowing from this research is the change in the nature of identity with historical regions in contemporary Ukraine. In the past, this identity was shaped by the ethnographic traits of local populations, including local dialect, mode of dressing, housing, folklore, etc. Nowadays, all of these elements of self-identification do retain some importance for rural populations, but urban residents have more or less unified cultural backgrounds. For example, the typical Podolians and Galicians may speak the same standard language, wear the same clothes bought in international retail chains, live in standardised Soviet-era blocks of flats and almost never take part in local folk customs. Thus, for the majority of people today identity with historical regions is not taken for granted, but constitutes a free choice based on information obtained from different sources, from school education to the media. In some cases, political preferences are also important for taking decisions. For example, a resident of Ternopil, supporting a far-right party, has a larger probability for self-identification with Galicia rather than Podolia, because right-wing nationalism is more typical in Galicia. Another important factor is religion, as Greek-Catholic residents of the north of Ternopil oblast have more grounds to identify with Galicia (traditionally a Greek-Catholic region), while Orthodox residents have more reasons to associate themselves with Volhynia (traditionally an Orthodox region).

Therefore, the majority of contemporary residents seem to have a kind of “hybrid” territorial identity, combining both old and new elements. The ingredients of such a “hybrid” identity may be some mixture of ethnographic traits, actual self-identification with and mental attachment to certain region(s), a list of personally-significant (valuable) places, electoral preferences and certain views of life in geopolitical terms, the choice of religion (or, at least, attitude to different religious denominations), etc. All these items can be mixed, often in a rather bizarre and confusing form: for example, a person may have traditional ethnographic traits and religion inherited from the one historical region but, simultaneously, strong self-identification with another historical region, including electoral and geopolitical preferences. Also, it is possible that a person could have self-identification with multiple regions simultaneously. The data point to a rather continuous reconfiguration of the existing regions rather than their erosion and disappearance; however, we can assume that territorial identity was more clearly defined and spatially fixed in the observed past than the present. These findings are in line with other evidence about the multiplicity and coexistence of regional identities (Ivic, 2010), as well as the absence of the single identity narrative in a region, but often an overlapping of political and cultural identities (Kaplan, 2000).

5.2 Territorial identity and administrative reform

The spatial pattern of sub-regional identity may be applied in dividing the study region into new larger raions (counties). This process is supposed to be completely ‘painless’ as these identities do not imply any political connotations and generally reflect public views on the territorial gravitation to sub-regional functional core areas. In addition, sub-regional identity should be taken into account when determining the boundaries of territorial communities: if people have perceptual attitudes to the different sub-regional centres, the area should be divided into different communities, and vice versa. Moreover, this step, with few exceptions, does not require changes in oblast boundaries.

The next, more radical step may include changes to oblast boundaries based on identities with historical regions, to make administrative units more uniform in terms of territorial identity. Are these changes able to be recommended, what are any possible threats, and is there any reasonable alternative? There are arguments on both sides.

On the one hand, according to Boisen et al. (2011) and Terlouw (2012), specific regional identity has become a central concept for promoting local competitiveness: government officials, policy makers and various commercial and non-commercial stakeholders are convinced that a coherent, strong and attractive place identity will help to promote the economic development of their city, region and/or country.

Paradoxically, territorial identity becomes even more important in these times of globalisation and neoliberal ideologies: regions need to mobilise support from regional stakeholders, such as municipalities, local companies and inhabitants. While traditional administrative regions are based on hierarchical power relations, the new forms of regional cooperation depend more on voluntary collaboration and coalition building; therefore, communicating a distinct regional identity and spatial imaginary to stakeholders outside the administration becomes particularly important for generating support for any regional development strategy (Healy, 2006; MacLeod, 2001). Paasi (1986) sees the name of the region as the most important symbol forcing the region to constantly institutionalise and reproduce itself. Therefore, the name of a particular region acts as an important tool for identifying individuals, who are not only able to name their region but also to identify with the community inhabiting the region.

On the other hand, the formation of hybrid identities, partially hidden behind the old names of traditional historical regions, may display the gradual transition from traditional and historically-rooted “thick” identities to more transitory and economically-anchored “thin” regional identities. These new identities may compete or build on older more traditional regional identities, but sometimes may also overlap and reinforce each other (Terlouw, 2009). Moreover, hybrid regional identities combining a locally-specific mix of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ elements and linking up with regional identities at other relevant scales, appear to be the most effective regional identities for regional administrations facing the challenges of both globalisation and the decline in collective identities, such that regions can use different forms of identity for different groups of stakeholders (Terlouw, 2012; Hofstede, 2014). Boelens et al. (2017) consider regions as even fundamentally scale-less instruments, confronting problems and challenges that are shared by multiple central actors, independent of territorial boundaries.

In some studied cases, regional administrations implemented selective downloading of characteristics from the nations and regions to which they belong (“thick” elements) and the uploading of specific qualities from the cities and areas within their boundaries (“thin” elements) (Terlouw and van Gorp, 2014). In other cases, however, the secondary identity of a municipality is too weak and indistinct to support the primary local identities (Terlouw, 2016). Thus, the formation of hybrid identities, which is more or less typical for this case study region, opens up new opportunities for effective territorial governance, when successful branding of administrative regions and the consolidation of stakeholders do not need a strong correlation with historical identities.

Thinking about the further evolution of “mutated” historical identities and identities with the contemporary administrative oblasts, we may point out two different regional contexts. The first possibility is when an administrative oblast is strongly associated in public discourse with a certain historical region. Therefore, it is possible that over time the identity with the historical regions become almost homogeneous. For example, in Vinnytsia oblast this process has already finished, and we can assume that in a few decades the majority of residents in the northern part of Khmelnytskyi oblast will identify themselves with Podolia. Therefore, the homogenisation of administrative units in terms of their identity with historical regions, which now requires a radical change of oblast boundaries, will eventually happen without external deliberate intervention. Ternopil oblast represents another possibility, i.e. a territory without one dominating identity with an historical region and a powerful internal dividing factor of religion. In these circumstances, it is more likely that existing differences in self-identification with historical regions will be long-lasting. Consequently, changes in the limits of existing oblasts may be a more effective solution in this case.

Concerning the option of creating larger administrative regions to replace the existing oblasts, it is important to note that such a solution will lead frequently to competition between the former oblast capitals for the right to be the capital of the newly-created administrative unit. For example in this case study, simultaneously three cities could present themselves as the capital of Podolia. It should be emphasised that Podolians, by self-identification, living in different oblasts, have different ideas about any possible Podolian capital. Consequently, a Podolian administrative region, if created, will have internal disintegrative factors from the very beginning.

With regard to possible ethnic cleansing resulting from such a reform, we should mention that Ukraine is not such a case. This follows from the evidence that people identifying themselves with different historical regions

do not constitute separate ethnic groups. Certainly, they present some deviations in local or regional cultural traits from the national “standard”, as well as specific religious or political preferences, but these factors have never been crucial for mutual understanding as a single ethnicity. For example, Western Ukraine, including Galicia, has been almost constantly politically divided from the rest of the Ukrainian lands since the 12th century, and today differs in traditions, dialect, religion and political preferences; however, despite all these factors, the dramatic history of Ukraine presents no examples of confrontation between residents of Western Ukraine and other Ukrainian regions specifically on these grounds, and the ideas about a separate Galician ethnicity is subject to speculation only from time to time by extremely marginal politicians. The only possible “threat” involved may be the unification of the population on the basis of identity with historical regions within the newly-formed administrative units. But the very same processes are already happening within currently existing oblasts, as shown above.

Therefore, such unification is inevitable: the question here is to choose the better option between the two extremes:

1. the unification of identity within the existing oblasts created during the Soviet regime, without reference to local geography and history; and
2. the unification of identity within slightly adjusted historical regions, characterised also by high physiographic and economic homogeneity.

In fact, the first option implies the creation of fundamentally new informal regions, having only common names with their historic predecessors, while the latter option implies the revival of historical memory. Theoretically, both ways are possible and may have some risks: the first option provides for inconsistency between historical narratives (legends, heroes, valuable places) and the actual contour of things, while the second option may threaten the stability and integrity of the existing administrative unit.

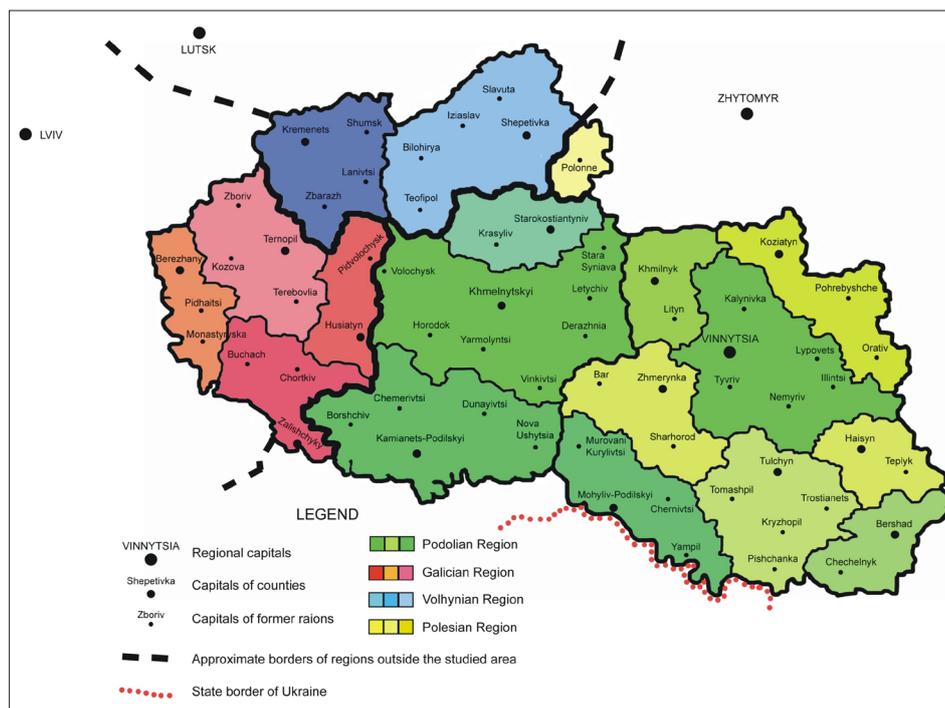


Fig. 6: Proposed administrative division of the study region
Source: authors' elaboration

Thus, we cannot claim that an administrative division, based solely on the identity with historical regions, is the best one for the study region. Depending on the government-selected scenario of reform, however, it is possible to give a series of practical recommendations. If the unitary structure of the state is a fundamental provision, then the oblasts will remain the basic administrative units responsible for shaping territorial identities, and therefore only slight partial refinement of the oblast boundaries is advisable (e.g. in the south-eastern corner of Ternopil oblast, which may be joined to Khmelnytskyi oblast). But, if it comes to a federal system (as in Germany) or a significant increase in the level of regional autonomy (as in Spain), it is advisable to ensure the formation of large, economically viable regions with common public values and prospects about future development. In this case, territorial identity with historical regions may be a “good tip” for reformers. The map (Fig. 6) represents one of the possible solutions, providing for a three-level administrative division: newly-created regions (possibly with federal rights), counties and communities (the latter are not displayed on the map).

6. Conclusions

A large majority of the surveyed inhabitants have developed strong identification with both historical regions and modern administrative units. Existing hierarchical levels of territorial identity are interrelated and cannot be considered separately, since changes at one level automatically trigger changes at another. It is very likely that spatial patterns of territorial identities of different hierarchical levels and of different origins become mutually adjusted with time. This process leads to the formation of new hybrid regions (stable historical core, where “old” and “new” identities act in a coherent manner, and a more dynamic periphery, where these identities are contesting each other), as well as hybrid identities, integrating “thick” and “thin” elements.

Thus, it seems that in Ukraine territorial identity tends to play a major role in the modern regionalisation process, in line with theories of new regionalism, considering the region not as a given essence or a historical relic, but as a social construction that is constantly (re)created and changed (Keating, 1998). Revitalisation of the “old” identities, related to the historical regions, and their interaction with “new” identities, developing on the basis of the modern administrative units, may be a good illustration of the concept of dynamic regional institutionalisation, as proposed by Paasi (1986; 2003).

The results suggest that the spatial pattern of territorial identity (including identity with historical regions) can be used to make territorial administrative units more consistent, stable and understandable for people. It is impossible, however, to propose one common solution for all national and regional contexts: specific scientific recommendations should be based on a scrutinised study of local specifics. Also, flexible regions, consisting of heterogeneous identity groups and multiple power structures, may be more economically, socially and culturally effective entities than traditional regions. This does not mean neglecting any territorial identities, but rather a shift to ‘soft’ identities with more “thin” elements. Therefore, any blind redesigning of the spatial administrative structure according to models dated from hundreds of years ago, is just as unacceptable as a complete disregard of the historical background.

Acknowledgement

This research was made within the framework of scientific project No. 16BP050-02 “Spatial Transformation in Ukraine: Models of Urban Modernization and Planning” funded by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

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Please cite this article as:

MELNYCHUK, A., GNATIUK, O. (2018): Regional identity and the renewal of spatial administrative structures: The case of Podolia, Ukraine. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 26(1): 42–54. Doi: 10.2478/mgr-2018-0004.