

**SOCIO-POLITICAL ASPECTS OF FORMATION OF LOCAL IDENTITY
IN THE UKRAINIAN DANUBE REGION**

Oleksii Zaporozhchenko¹

**СОЦІАЛЬНО-ПОЛІТИЧНІ АСПЕКТИ ФОРМУВАННЯ
ЛОКАЛЬНОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ В УКРАЇНСЬКОМУ ПОДУНАВ'І**

Олексій Запорожченко¹

Abstract. *The article is devoted to the study of the peculiarities of interethnic social interaction and identity formation in the multinational region, which is the Ukrainian Danube region. Recently, people's search for their identity has intensified which makes this problem relevant. There are briefly considered the evolvement of the modern concept of identity, objective socio-historical and political factors that have a significant impact on the formation of different types of identity, and subjective socio-psychological factors of identity formation. Particular attention is paid to ethnic identity which reflects the feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group. The peculiarities of interethnic interaction of the region's inhabitants throughout history are also considered which makes it possible to understand the peculiarities of the regional identity formation and the phenomenon of dual ethnic identity, characteristic of Bessarabia.*

Key words: *ethnicity, social interaction, identity, identification, ethnic identity, regional identity, self-consciousness, mentality, assimilation.*

Анотація. *Стаття присвячена вивченню особливостей міжетнічної соціальної взаємодії й формування ідентичності в багатонаціональному регіоні, яким є Українське Подунав'я. Останнім часом активізувався пошук людьми своєї ідентичності, що робить цю проблему актуальною. Коротко розглядаються становлення сучасного поняття ідентичності, об'єктивні соціально-історичні та політичні чинники, які мають істотний вплив на формування різних типів ідентичності, розглядаються й суб'єктивні соціально-психологічні чинники формування ідентичності. Особливу увагу приділено етнічній ідентичності, яка відображає відчуття приналежності до певної етнічної групи. Також розглядаються особливості міжетнічної взаємодії жителів регіону протягом історії, що дає змогу зрозуміти особливості формування регіональної ідентичності, феномен подвійної етнічної ідентичності, характерний для*

¹ Associate Professor, PhD, Izmail State University of Humanities, Ukraine, Address: Repina St, 12, Izmail, Odessa Region, 68601, E-mail: alexzap1973@gmail.com; ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0496-2605>

¹ Кандидат філософських наук, доцент, Ізмаїльський державний гуманітарний університет, Україна, адреса: вул. Репіна, 12, м. Ізмаїл, Одеська область, 68601, E-mail: alexzap1973@gmail.com; ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0496-2605>

Бессарабії.

Ключові слова: *етнос, соціальна взаємодія, ідентичність, ідентифікація, етнічна ідентичність, регіональна ідентичність, самосвідомість, ментальність, асиміляція.*

The problem of studying social interaction and features of forming self-consciousness of inhabitants in multinational regions, which, of course, is the Ukrainian Danube region, becomes especially relevant in the conditions of sociocultural transformations when there are changes in traditional models of interaction and self-consciousness, a search for new, more adequate forms of coexistence and identity. The growth of population's social mobility, the dynamics of individuals' lives, and the information impact make the problem of identity especially relevant, because it's identity that is an important prerequisite for a safe and comfortable human life, social community, and society in general.

This problem has a complex, interdisciplinary nature and is dealt with by historians, ethnologists, political scientists, sociologists, and philosophers. Peculiarities of interethnic interaction and identity of the inhabitants of such a multinational region as Bessarabia are studied by I. Verkhovtseva, A. Kisse, S. Koch, S. Kuzmina, O. Lebedenko, O. Prigarin, A. Tychyna, L. Tsyganenko, N. Goncharova, V. Tserkovna, V. Drozdov, and others.

The purpose of the article is to point out the general sociocultural aspects of local identity formation, to reveal the features of social interaction and identity in such a multinational region as Bessarabia, and to substantiate the philosophical and anthropological aspects of the identity phenomenon.

In studying the processes of development of interethnic interaction and formation of regional identity, it is necessary to take into account both objective socio-economic and political processes that have taken place in the region throughout history and religion, housekeeping peculiarities, cultural and mental features of ethnic groups inhabiting the region, the level of their self-awareness, features of the modern sociocultural environment, which has a great influence on the dynamics of social interaction today. Recently, there has been a revival of national traditions, culture, and the desire to find «their» identity. This tendency is a natural reaction of the population to globalization processes as well as to the tense military and political situation. To characterize the peculiarities of the development of self-awareness of the region's population, let's turn to the concept of «identity». Although that concept was introduced into scientific circulation relatively recently (in Ukraine, it appeared only after 1990), it has already gained wide recognition in academic circles and become a central concept used to describe many sociocultural processes in general and ethnological ones in particular. Now the concept of identity is used in many social and humanitarian sciences, but the first identity theory appears in psychology, in particular in the studies of E.

VII Дунайські наукові читання

Erikson, who studied identity formation in the close relationship of personality with sociocultural environment. In his works, identity is seen as a subjective sense of sameness and involvement in society which allows you to feel with-it, i.e., psychologically comfortable. E. Erikson also found that identity is a dynamic process, not a given that accompanies a person throughout their life. As identity is determined by constantly changing socio-historical conditions, the nature of identity also changes, which in its development undergoes «identity crises», as a result of which the former identity «dies», and new types of identity are formed that are more in line with reality [1, p. 23].

Among those who also addressed the identity issues in the context of sociology were J. Mead, J. Habermas, and J. Turner. Today, it is customary to talk about multifaceted identity in which one distinguishes gender, social, ethnic, professional, religious, political, and other aspects.

One of the main identities is ethnic identity which is a subjective sense of belonging to a particular ethnic community and its culture, historical past, traditions, sense of unity, and common destiny. Individuals of any society are in one way or another involved in a certain ethnic community which determines their attitude to the world, defines them in linguistic, cultural, religious, and everyday aspects, and affects their entire lives. Ethnic identity is the result of self-awareness, self-determination, and active construction of one's ethnic group image. The need for ethnic identity is associated with the individual's desire to belong to «their» stable sociocultural niche which performs almost all the functions of social identity – the protective, status, orientation, educational, communicative ones, and so on. Unlike other types of social identity, ethnic identity is based on objective factors (place of birth, family ties, anthropological characteristics, genetic characteristics, place of residence, etc.) and depends on the community's objective living conditions: geographical location, economic and political situation, external and internal challenges and threats. Thus, ethnic identification is a socio-psychological process included in the general process of socialization, and its result is the formation of personality as a subject of a particular national community.

Ethnic self-consciousness is a holistic system of ideas, knowledge, and beliefs that allow an individual to consider themselves a member of a particular ethnic group. It is established that ethnic self-consciousness allows satisfying a person's need to belong to a social group that has a rich original history and culture with a stable system of values which, in turn, gives a feeling of «rootedness» in the regional sociocultural space. The result of the process of forming the ethnos self-consciousness is an understanding of its identity, features, its role in the formation of the whole region, and its people are perceived as the subject of an objective socio-historical process. Awareness of belonging to a particular ethnic group is manifested in the development of a system of internal ethnic norms and values that regulate all spheres of an individual's life in society, from economic interaction and ways of business cooperation to domestic aspects and spiritual

values.

The self-consciousness of the ethnos in the multinational region, which is Ukrainian Bessarabia, is formed throughout history in the force field «own-foreign», and it is in the process of comparing the «own» and «foreign» culture, that there formed the main components of both the ethnic and supranational (regional, national) identity, which is an image of the native land and includes ideas about the past, present, and possible future options of one's native land. If the comparison of lifestyles, types of reality perception, features of mentality and everyday culture does not reveal fundamental contradictions, then a tolerant attitude to neighboring ethnic groups and cultures is formed. But if there are fundamental differences, and the norms of culture contradict each other, then there is a cultural distance between ethnic groups, which can lead to interethnic conflicts. As a result of such comparisons and interactions of cultures in Bessarabia, which has a long history and develops naturally, a dialectical unity is formed, both as tolerance for another culture and even a sense of belonging and distance from another culture in order to avoid assimilation and preserve identity. This in itself is an invaluable, unique experience in the formation of social interaction and identification which has been gained throughout the region's history. Elements of other cultures represented in the region are assimilated by a certain ethnic community and are perceived as products of its own local culture. And the ability to assimilate the elements of the neighboring culture determines the ethnic group's degree of tolerance, flexibility, and ability to quickly adapt to the changing sociocultural situation as well as to quickly establish effective socio-economic ties with neighbors. The idea of "one's own" territory and the ethnic groups inhabiting it form a stable regional, supra-ethnic identity which plays an important role in the formation of stable socio-political and economic relations in the region.

Let's consider the features of interethnic social interaction and the formation of self-awareness as well as features of identification of Bessarabia's inhabitants. The specificity is that the region due to its geographical location was on the periphery of political influence of external mighty states. Because of that, the region was mainly a border area (frontier) between major state and political centers and empires: Rome, Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. Due to its «peripherality», the region was a relatively autonomous and therefore favorable region which became attractive to many migrants from both the East and the West. Throughout history, Bessarabia has been a refuge for a number of diverse ethnic groups: the Scythians, Huns, Nogais, Turks, Albanians, Bulgarians, Tatars, Slavs, Greeks, Jews, Germans, Romanians, and more. This explains the heterogeneity of the sociocultural space and the lack of a single dominant cultural basis in the region. The sociocultural space of the region has always been heterogeneous and multilayered throughout history [2, p. 644].

Those features (slight foreign policy impact and the lack of a common cultural basis) determined the nature of interethnic relations and social interaction in the region.

VII Дунайські наукові читання

The lack of strong central authority, sociocultural diversity, lack of a dominant and stable titular culture led to the fact that ethnic culture began to play the role of social representation: ethnic groups in the region were differentiated depending on the type of activity. For example, Turks, Greeks, and Albanians served mainly in civilian and military administrations and performed military service; Jews, Armenians, Greeks were a group of merchants, moneylenders, artisans; Moldovans, Germans, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Romanians, and Russians (the most numerous and ethnically diverse social group) were engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing. That differentiation by field of activity contributed to constructive social interaction based on complementarity and exchange.

Far from strong imperial influence, relative cultural and confessional independence could be found, while Russia's interest in developing fertile lands in the south of the empire contributed to the region's sociocultural development. Both a common religion (Orthodoxy) and general economic problems contributed to consolidation of ethnic groups and the development of interethnic interaction. Peculiar forms of socio-political life and local self-government helped to prevent conflicts on ethnic, religious, and social grounds. The communal system contributed to the creation of a unique social space here, where each commune was a microworld with its own cultural traditions. As a result, most ethnic groups in the region lived quite separately, each occupying its own economic niche and developing new lands, considering them its own. An important feature of the region was that none of the ethnic groups was assimilated under the pressure of the titular nation, because, first, there was actually no titular nation in the region; secondly, all state and political programs implemented by different states throughout history concerned all the region's inhabitants equally. Autonomous ethnic settlements developed self-government and self-sufficiency, which determined their rather high socio-economic efficiency and cultural self-sufficiency. That led to the emergence of ethnocultural enclaves with clear sociocultural boundaries and administrative centers (the Bulgarian one – in Bolgrad, German one – in Tarutino, and Gagauz – in Comrat), which, in turn, allowed local residents to preserve their native language, traditions, religion, everyday life, and ethnic identity as well as made it possible to distance themselves to the necessary extent from the national ideology of the titular states and preserve their identity.

Gradually, due to the development of interethnic interaction and natural assimilation processes, the sociocultural environment became more homogeneous. It was likely that it was the permanent change in the region's ethnic composition and the special economic status that minimized the likelihood of interethnic conflicts and contributed to the strengthening of social interaction in the region. The second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century are characterized by the unification of socio-economic and cultural life of ethnic groups. The experience of interethnic interaction and gradual mutual enrichment, interpenetration of cultures led to the formation of a single

sociocultural space while preserving the identity of most ethnic groups. Although, as noted above, each ethnic group had its own economic and cultural experience, the common history and practice of constructive social interaction led to the formation of a single regional culture. Each nation has brought elements of its original culture into the common pot of the region's culture. There was also formed a unique experience of tolerance and solidarity between representatives of different ethnic groups. There is also a general supra-ethnic identification – a Bessarabian [3, p. 683].

In the 20th century, the Danube region faced a number of trials related to the tragic events in Europe: the First and Second World Wars, Stalinism, fascism, and the Romanian occupation. At the same time, the Romanian authorities planned to deport Bulgarians and Gagauz from the region. Many Jews, Gypsies, Gagauz, and Greeks perished as a result of the genocide. Bulgarians, Greeks, Albanians, and Romanians were discriminated against by the Soviet authorities or even deported to Siberia, the Urals, or Kazakhstan. The policy of the USSR on the region's ethnic groups was aimed at mass reidentification: the centers of national culture were closed, the desire of people to search for their national identity was suppressed in every possible way, and teaching was carried out only in Russian. Any attempts at national revival were interpreted as nationalism and ended in repression. Of course, that gave rise to the desire of people to hide their ethnicity in every possible way. Since there are no social institutions for the support and development of certain cultures, there is significant assimilation which is manifested, for example, in the emergence of double identification: a Gagauz-Bulgarian, Moldavian-Romanian, and a Bulgarian-Ukrainian. Such transculturalism makes it possible to create a more flexible, universal identity that has a large margin of tolerance for other cultures. And for modern conditions, it is tolerance that is the political necessity to preserve the good neighborly relations in the region that have developed over the centuries in the conditions of constant sociocultural transformations.

In the philosophical and anthropological aspect, the process of identification, in addition to geographical, historical, economic, socio-political, and cultural factors, is directly related to the internal existential aspects of human existence which are expressed in worldviews, values, beliefs, and emotional experiences. It is these existential factors that unite the national community into a whole that forms a sense of identity which is expressed in knowledge and respect for its history, national culture, language, traditions, understanding of its involvement in national ideas, ideals, goals, values, needs, etc.

In modern society, people simultaneously interact with a large number of disparate social groups and agents of socialization which offer completely different, contradictory requirements, an unsystematic array of disparate information which leads to a person's disorientation, makes their worldview fragmented and contradictory, which may even lead to loss of values. Naturally, this situation evokes feelings of alienation, helplessness, and loneliness; a person seeks to find lost inner peace and stability by turning to their

VII Дунайські наукові читання

roots, the ethnic values that were formed by ancestors throughout history and reflect the deep aspirations of a particular ethnic group and its «rootedness» in life. [4, p. 168]. The greater the gap between a person's ability to absorb incoming information and organically integrate it into their worldview and the complexity, randomness, and alienation of the information environment in which a person has to live, the greater is the need to find their ethnic identity, develop an ethnic component of self-awareness which is expressed, as noted earlier, in the formation of a sense of belonging to their people, their roots, the revival of traditional moral values, traditions, patterns of behavior, and language.

One of the most important factors in the personality formation is ethnic and national and cultural identification. This is the mechanism that ensures the formation of the axiological basis, without which it is difficult to imagine a harmoniously developed personality. Loss of identity inevitably leads to the collapse of the value system, anomie, which ultimately leads to the collapse of society.

Джерела та література

1. Козловець М.А. Феномен національної ідентичності: виклики глобалізації : [монографія]. Житомир : Вид-во ЖДУ ім. І. Франка. 2009. 558 с.
2. Киссе А.И. Межэтнические связи и опыт взаимоотношений. Буджак: историко- этнографические очерки народов юго-западных районов Одесщины. Книга для чтения / ред.: А.И. Киссе, А.А. Пригарин, В.Н. Станко. Одесса: PostScriptUm. СМІЛ, 2014. С. 637-660.
3. Киссе А.И. Практика межэтнических взаимодействий. *Буджак: историко-этнографические очерки народов юго-западных районов Одесщины*. Книга для чтения / ред.: А.И. Киссе, А.А. Пригарин, В.Н. Станко. Одесса: PostScriptUm. СМІЛ. 2014. С. 661–685.
4. Цимбал Т. Людина у пошуках ґрунту : [монографія]. К.-Кривий Ріг: Видавничий дім. 2010. 284 с.
5. Верховцева І.Г. Етноконфесійні аспекти формування регіональної ідентичності населення Українського Подунав'я. *Релігія, релігійність, філософія та гуманітаристика у сучасному інформаційному просторі: національний та інтернаціональний аспекти: збірник наукових праць*. Ч. 1. Луганськ: Вид-во СНУ ім. В. Даля. 2011. С. 148-151.
6. Кирчанів М. Регіональні дискурси української історії. *Регіональна історія України: збірник наукових статей*. Вип. 1. К., 2007. С. 79–88.