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**DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL CHRONOTOPE OF RUSSIAN-
UKRAINIAN BORDERLANDS DURING NONEQUILIBRIUM
TURBULENT CHAOS**

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Abstract

The paper studies the dynamics of the social chronotope formed in the Russian and Ukrainian border regions in times of nonequilibrium turbulent chaos, which was present in this geopolitical space for the past two decades. The cross-border social chronotope is referred to as an established cultural model inherent in the collective conscience of the borderland residents, which reflects the specificity of interpersonal relations between border dwellers and their self-identification with phenomena of the past, the present, and the future. This paper proves that following the disintegration of the USSR, the dominant cultural model in the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands ceased to exist and two separate chronotope systems emerged on either side of the border. Their autonomy is further proved by the growing mutual misunderstanding between the border communities and a broadening gap in their interpretation of the past, the present and the future. In this paper, each social chronotope is analyzed as a dissipative system. At the same time, the need for security affects ambiguously the dynamics of the social chronotope. On the one hand, it consolidates the regional border communities; on the other hand, it serves as a potential source of dissatisfaction with the actions of the authorities as incapable of removing a set of dangers and threats.

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Keywords: Russian-Ukrainian borderlands, social chronotope, turbulent chaos, dissipative system, strange attractor, safety



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1. Introduction

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the zones of geopolitical and politic-cultural delimitation emerged along the borders of new states. Such delimitation is viewed as a process of designation of statuses of adjacent geopolitical formations; as a result of this process the citizens of one state form strong convictions of the political and cultural systems of the neighbouring state. The above mentioned zones as a whole may be defined as the “post-Soviet borderlands”. The authors argue that this geopolitical and cultural and civilizational phenomenon has a potential to play a significant role in the global space which reconciles the processes of integration and unification with cultural and civilizational (often ethnocultural) self-determination and development. This potential, inherent in the borderlands, being a creative force, an on-going process (Soja, 1996) that makes them both contact zones between cultures and civilizations and sources of conflicts at the regional and global scales.

2. Problem Statement

Despite a vast number of research papers exploring the relations between Russia and Ukraine (Chernomaz, 2014; Kolosov, 2011; Manoylo, 2014; Zhurzhenko, 2011), the research does not offer a comprehensive concept of the socio-cultural aspect of the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands development, although such aspect is as important in the global context as socio-economic or political spheres. .

3. Research Questions

The analysis of border zones as zones of inter-civilizational contacts and confrontation are particularly relevant for the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands as the relations in this zone are in the spotlight of the global and national elites and significantly affect the global policy.

4. Purpose of the Study

The objective of this paper is to attempt to interpret the socio-cultural aspect of the dynamics of the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands development applying the chaos theory.

5. Research Methods

The research is based on the findings of the sociological questionnaire survey “Development of New Identities in Border Regions of Russia and Ukraine” conducted by the authors in 2015 among residents of Belgorod, Bryansk, Voronezh and Kursk regions in Russia and Kharkiv, Sumy, Chernyiv and Luhansk regions in Ukraine; the sample is a quota multistage, and the quota attributes include residence, sex, and age; n = 1000.

6. Findings

In this research the authors elaborate on the image of a social chronotope that dominated in the collective conscience of the residents of the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands for a long period (over three

centuries); this chronotope was based on the idea of cultural similarity of Russians (Great Russians) and Ukrainians (Little Russians). The similarity was localized within a limited geographical area and rested on the kinship and interpersonal contacts and – to a certain extent – differentiated border dwellers from residents of other Russian and Ukrainian regions both in terms of their local interests and in their ethnocultural characteristics, which was especially evident in Ukrainian and Russian urban areas. The Ukrainian historian V.V. Sklyar argues “A peculiarity of the South-Eastern and Eastern borderlands is the presence of significant differences in ethnic composition and languages spoken in border rural areas and regional capitals, especially in Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk regions” (Sklyar, 2006, 22-23, our trans.).

In this context, the chronotope is referred to as a cultural model construed consciously or unconsciously by individuals to identify themselves simultaneously with the current surroundings, ancestors and bearers of the ideal future. This model assumes that each individual forms bonds with the past, the present and the future creating a consistent outlook and a vision of a particular place in the world as well as explicit and implicit incentives to social action. A borderland chronotope is an established cultural model inherent in the collective conscience of the border dwellers that reflects the specificity of relations between borderland residents and their self-identification with phenomena in the past, the present, and the future.

The borderland chronotope development was not free from challenges and controversies. The political demands of time often led to socio-cultural misbalances, for instance, to the so-called Ukrainization in certain Russian regions and de-Ukrainization in the Ukrainian counterparts. Moreover, V.V. Bublikov and V.V. Markova point out that both processes took place almost simultaneously in the 1920ies and 1930ies (Bublikov and Markova, 2014, 54-55). Obviously, the dominant chronotope was not unique. Both Russian and Ukrainian border regions saw a rise of marginal cultural models. It was particularly evident in Ukraine which was never homogenous in terms of cultural and civilizational identities. In the process of reinventing their nation, or “constructing homelands”, the nationalist elites strived to mobilize “the myths and images of a primordial homeland to reinforce the depiction of the nation as an ancient community of belonging” (Kaiser, 2002, 230). An example to this may be the so-called “Galician tradition” which in the 1990ies took the form of the “Ukrainian Piemonte” by analogy with the historic region in North Italy as a symbol of national renaissance (Dergachev, 2007).

Nevertheless, since the second half of the 20th century, the dominant social chronotope in the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands was established as a socio-cultural system. Its stability was maintained, in one respect, by its nucleus – common values, including not only the official Soviet values but also universal human values of interpersonal communication between similar in their lifestyle communities and, in the other respect, from the outside, at the institutional level, through typical Soviet national political strategies. This system was linear, open and rather successful in times of political stability.

The disintegration of the USSR has destabilized the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands and resulted in nonequilibrium turbulent chaos where, as argued by I. Prigozhin and I. Stengers, “we have such an abundance of macroscopic time and length scales that the system appears chaotic (Prigozhin and Stengers, 1986). The social space defined by turbulent chaos is extremely unstable and orderless. As D. Gleick argues, turbulent chaos violates the rules functioning in a linear system. “All the rules seem to break down” (Gleick, 1987, 121). In turbulence, rigid systems turn into dissipative ones. Their behaviour

is determined by strange attractors, the complex phenomena which serve as points of attraction in nonequilibrium systems.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union, which led to emergence of multiple social phenomena both within its territory and beyond it, was a trigger for transformation of the dominant social chronotope of the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands from a linear to a dissipative system. This process was rather long; it offered multiple possibilities at different stages and ultimately has destroyed the relatively solid cultural model.

Our research proves that at present the social chronotope of the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands has a number of traits implying its chaotization in response to the unstable environment.

Firstly, the chronotope has disintegrated into the Russian and Ukrainian components becoming even less coherent over time. Interpersonal relations, even between family members, show signs of mutual alienation. Surprisingly, this trend is more evident in Russian border regions. As shown by the research, only 19.6% of the Russian respondents vs. 47.2% of Ukrainians report mutual understanding with their relatives across the border. Such misbalance may be explained by a certain “failed expectations syndrome” when the other’s behaviour has proved to differ from what was expected. Pointedly, 52.4% of Russian citizens attribute the change in their attitude towards Ukrainians to the so-called “Euromaidan” which has become a bifurcation point in chaotization of the Ukrainian reality.

Broadening the communication gap and overall alienation are important signals of destruction of the common social chronotope and emergence of relatively independent chronotopes on either side of the border. While the previous cultural model was supra-ethnic, new chronotopes are ethnocentric in their core.

Secondly, the attitudes of Russian and Ukrainian border dwellers are becoming not only incongruent, but opposite in many respects. It is particularly evident in self-identification: for instance, the absolute majority of the respondents from Russian border regions identify themselves with the Russian culture (70.8%). A small share (8.8%) of the respondents reports their belonging to the European; 9.2% – to the global; and 2.6% - to the Eurasian culture.

On the contrary, almost a quarter of the respondents (24.2%) in the Ukrainian borderland claims to belong to the global; 18.6% - to the European culture; and only 15.8% to the Ukrainian, 11.8% – to the Russian, and 11.2% - to the Eurasian cultures. 45.6% of the respondents claim to be Russians and 13.0% – Ukrainians ethnically. Other respondents believe ethnic self-identification to be insignificant. 15.8 of the respondents identify themselves with their city or region; 12.0% with the corresponding macroregion; 6.0% believe to be cosmopolitans and 3.4% – Europeans (the others could not answer).

Therefore, while self-identification of Russian border dwellers is rather homogenous, this process in the Ukrainian borderland is differentiated and displays the traces of the traditional self-identification with Russia and the Russian culture.

Thirdly, the research has revealed disparities in the symbolic representations of the past in the Russian and Ukrainian public conscience, although such disparities are less evident than the differences in self-identification. For instance, the question “What do you feel proud of?” has rendered the following answers: 50.4% of the Russian respondents name the victory in the Great Patriotic War (World War II) and 46.8% – the historic heritage. Among Ukrainians, the victory in the Great Patriotic War (World War

II) is mentioned only by 33.8% of the respondents, and 28.4% of the survey participants report to be proud of the historic part. Only 20.8% of Russians believe that the common Soviet past unites Russians and Ukrainians, while this statement is supported by 27.0% of Ukrainians. 26.8% of the Russian and 37.0% of the Ukrainian respondents believe that the common history both unites and separates the two nations.

The findings of the research give grounds to conclude that the image of the common historic past is gradually smearing in the collective conscience of Russian and Ukrainian border dwellers, though is still partially consolidating for the communities. Such smearing is even faster in the Russian regions in comparison with the Ukrainian borderland where a number of the Soviet symbols still hold significance being considered “quasi-Imperial”, rather than Russian, attributes.

Fourthly, the emerging social chronotopes feature a significant gap in the image of the future for Russia and Ukraine. Among Russian citizens, the idea that Russia and Ukraine should coexist as independent states is gaining popularity (29.2%); the relative majority (37.0%) see the two nations as neutral states, and only 16.8% of the respondents would like to rebuild a single state. In Ukraine, on the contrary, the dominant image is that of a single state (35.6%); 31.6% of the survey participants want to see Russia and Ukraine as neutral states, and 25.4% – as independents allies.

The authors believe that the orientation to integration and cooperation, prevailing in Ukrainian border regions, may also be explained by the inertial Soviet tradition. Yet, it goes in line with the natural wish to find stability and security in the social chaos. Such stability is often sought in reinstitutionalization of the USSR. Yet, obviously, the ongoing social processes make this idea increasingly delusive denying the possibility to become a significant attractor of social borderland chronotopes.

In this context, it is important to determine the strange attractors of development of social chronotopes formed in the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands.

The authors believe that the strange attractors in Ukrainian border regions are the following two phenomena: need for security and national self-determination. To a certain extent, these phenomena are interconnected but each has a different development pathway.

Need for security is cultivated by a number of various real and imaginary factors inherent in the turbulent chaos. This attractor may be called strange because it is specific for each region. For instance, the so-called Novorossiia (Donetsk and Luhansk regions) feels need for safety and security as a result of the ongoing military actions. The majority of other regions seek security as a reaction to the conflict with Russia (Russia’s aggression), speculated over in mass media, and fear of marginal organizations. Illustrating the significance of this phenomenon, this research has shown that security is the most significant value for Ukrainians with the respondents giving it 7.8. point out of 10.

Depending on the intention, need for security may either consolidate the borderland with other Ukrainian regions or widen the gap between them.

The rise of national self-determination is another significant attractor of the evolution of the Ukrainian borderland chronotope. In the recent years, the national idea has become an important part of the state ideology and the focus of multiple studies in the Ukrainian ethnicity. For instance, V.M. Sklyar writes “... in the focus of attention of researchers [ethnophilosophers] there are the Ukrainian national

idea, ethnic archetypes, and the ethnomental phenomena of being Ukrainian” (Sklyar, 2006, our trans.) The national idea and growing anti-Russian sentiment have become elements of Ukraine’s home and foreign policy and have consolidated the majority of the population.

At the same time, the Ukrainian border regions, due to their historically strong bonds with Russia, do not have strong anti-Russian sentiment. Moreover, it is not always accepted by the population of these regions and becomes the basis for hidden (except for Novorossiia) conflicts. Nevertheless, national awareness is gradually spreading in the borderlands, especially, among the youth. This trend may have adverse effects for the chronotope because, apart from moral aspects (radicalization entails various phobias and extremism), it reduces cross-border contacts, as is seen in the recent years.

The social chronotope in the Russian borderland has rather different strange attractors. We argue that the most significant attractor is the bureaucratization of culture, as it covers all aspects of the public life. The bureaucratization of culture is referred to as total formalization of the sociocultural space by the existing state administration system. The bureaucratization of culture leads to its simulation manifested in substitution of real actions with decoration, declaration and demonstration. As a result, the process of the social chronotope development becomes fully controlled by the state but gradually loses its impulse for self-development and limits itself to certain stereotypes-simulacra. The bureaucratization of the dynamics of the social chronotope can be seen, for instance, in the rise of paternalistic views (56.2% of the respondents believe that the state should take care of all citizens and provide them with an adequate standard of living, whereas only 24.6% think that the state should create a level playing field and ensure the rules are not violated). Moreover, 46.8% of the respondents prefer material welfare and only 28.6% – political rights and freedoms.

In this context, the state bureaucracy becomes the primary creator of a cultural model and its reliable protector. In line with this, 42.6% of the Russian respondents have claimed that the state is the most consistent in protection and development of the national culture.

Yet, border regions are a space for implementation of the state foreign policy which does not have absolute norms, while a social chronotope requires cultural constants. In view of this, the bureaucratization of culture is charged with an imminent conflict with consequences that are unpredictable in nonequilibrium turbulent chaos.

The second strange attractor for the dynamics of the Russian border chronotope coincides with that in Ukraine and constitutes the need for security. Residents of the Russian borderland feel anxiety because of chaotization of the Ukrainian reality as opposed to stability in Russia. This anxiety increases the importance of security, which is even of a higher priority for Russians than for Ukrainians (8.3 out of 10). It is further proved by the fact that the Russian respondents named aggression as one of the most significant traits of Ukrainians (34.2%), which contradicts the traditional image of the Ukrainian national character established in the Russian culture.

Need for security as a strange attractor has an ambivalent impact of the dynamics of the social chronotope. In one respect, it consolidates the regional border communities; yet, it is a potential source of dissatisfaction with the authorities being unable to overcome the existing dangers and threats. Such ambivalence turns this strange attractor into potentially confrontational. Most probably, it will gain significance if the present nonequilibrium turbulent chaos continues to exist in the Russian borderland

and will minimize the prospects for recovery and development of cross-border cooperation which is crucial both for the material welfare of border residents and for mutual cultural enrichment. .

7. Conclusion

The conducted survey proves that the dynamics of the social chronotope of the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands in the current nonequilibrium turbulent chaos conflicts with the fundamental needs of the population and the objective national interests. It opposes the strategically vital trend to form a global civilization which would balance global and ethnocultural development. The problem lies not only in the destruction of a common cultural model after the disintegration of the USSR, which is natural for delimitation, but in the formation of two autonomous social chronotopes on both sides of the border that are governed by strange attractors contributing to chaotization rather than harmonization of the systems. Without control of the chaos, it leads to increasing confrontation which is dangerous for both states and the whole Eurasian system.

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