

## **Peculiarities of the Social Chronotopes of the Boundary Regions of Russia and Ukraine**

Valentin P. Babintsev, Helen I. Babintseva, Oleg V. Bykhtin  
Alexander V. Pastyuk and Viktor A. Sapryka  
Belgorod State University, Pobedy St. 85, 308015 Belgorod, Russia

---

**Abstract:** The study considers the specifics of social chronotopes of the boundary regions of Russia and Ukraine. The social chronotope of a boundary region is defined as a conceptual paradigm according to which this administrative-territorial formation is considered as a geopolitical structure localized within a socio-cultural space (non-linear socio-cultural system). The most common specific features of the chronotope of the Ukrainian (discontinuity of the social space and time, mosaic structure, presence of a few centers of gravity) and the Russian (homogeneity, focus on a single center) boundary regions.

**Key words:** Social chronotopes, boundary region, social space, social time, temporal topologic processes, peripheral subcultural environment

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Despite the great number of objective conditions for constructive and productive cooperation the relationships between Russia and Ukraine are currently characterized by a high level of confrontation. In this situation, the boundary regions, i.e., the administrative-territorial units directly bordering on the adjoining states play a special role. Their position to a large extent determines the trend or development of interstate relations. Close relations between them has a long tradition. During the last decade the factor of the state border separating and at the same, time connecting the adjoining territories became so relevant for their development that each boundary region may be considered as a particular socio-cultural environment the analysis of which requires design and application of a specific conceptual framework. In this regard, the concept of a social chronotope substantiated by M. Bakhtin provides significant heuristic capabilities. He understood a chronotope as a formal category 'time-space' (Andrew, 2014; Bakhtin, 1975).

### **PROCEDURE**

The study relies on the reasoning of the results of theoretical analysis of issues of the social time by Sorokin and Merton (1937). It is considered as a mean of social coordination as well as dimension assigned to the pattern of actions within the system for maintenance of the social order (Borgatta and Montgomery, 2005). The concept 'social time' is intrinsically related to the concept

'social space' that is interpreted by us as an objectively existing sustainable system of territorial relations between the social subjects approving itself through communication (Chernyavskaya, 2008). The social chronotope category is still underinvestigated (Kemerov, 2007). Even less investigated is the issue of the 'spatial-temporal' context of changes relating to the 'new border zone' despite the fact that the boundary theme more and more often becomes the subject of research of both the national and Foreign researchers (Kolosov and Vendina, 2011; Pfoser, 2014; Prokkola, 2009; Golunov, 2014).

The empirical framework of the paper is the results of the expert surveys 'Conditions and factors of formation of cultural-civilizational identity in an unstable socio-cultural environment' (N = 40), 'Economic integration of the boundary regions: trends and horizons' (N = 30) performed in 2014 by the department of the social technologies of the Belgorod State University in the boundary regions of Russia and Ukraine.

### **MAIN PART**

Based on the developments concerning the issue of the social space and social time, we define a social chronotope of a boundary region as a category of a social research and at the same time as a conceptual paradigm according to which this administrative-territorial formation is considered as a geopolitical structure localized within a socio-cultural space (non-linear socio-cultural system) the spatial-temporal characteristics of which are intrinsically interrelated and are synchronously changed

under influence of both external and internal factors. From the content-related perspective, the specifics of the social chronotope is shown as a set of values, fundamental ideas and adequate symbols by means of which different groups of population identify themselves with the suggested images of the past, present and the future.

The most remarkable feature of a Russian-Ukrainian chronotope is the 'compression' of the space and time formed under the influence of the information-communicative systems and determining the possibility of the 'explosive' interaction concentrating at the bifurcation points. In the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian border zone it is felt the most. Firstly because any border zone represents a 'temporal-topologic fault', a place of contact of different cultures and civilizations. Secondly in this case, we observe the attempt made by the Ukrainian elite to form a new cultural-civilizational community. Such attempts almost always mean abruption of the traditional spatial-temporal ideas the initiators attempt to perform as fast as possible.

The high discreteness of the social time is typical for the Ukrainian boundary regions. The social time within the ideas prevailing in the collective consciousness of Ukrainians is split into the periods deprived of the common logic of development that are often opposed against each other. Upon such perception the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods of development are recorded in the form of relatively independent fragments which creates the background for manipulating the historical facts in the political and economic interests. An obvious example of the discreteness of the social time is the conflict of interests in the course of which the re-evaluation of the milestone historical events is performed or the monuments of the historical persons are reconstructed.

The discreteness of the social time is implemented in the mosaic structure of the social space in which non-uniform socio-cultural phenomena are combined. The background of the mosaic structure has historical nature and is determined by the poly-ethnicity of population that is traditional to the Ukrainian-Russian border zones. However, recently the mosaic structure was rapidly enhanced as the result of the so-called 'Euro Maidan' and following events. According to most of experts surveyed the result of these events was intensification of processes of cultural-civilizational differentiation in the boundary regions. With regard to the boundary regions of Russia, this fact was mentioned by 47% of experts surveyed, with regard to Ukraine 50%.

The mosaic structure of the social space of Ukrainian border zone is currently not only not smoothed by the focused policy of central authorities but is rather actively

used primarily for maintenance of the interregional tension. From the short-term perspective this allows minimizing the opposing position of the border zone and its possible orientation towards Russia. Obviously, the level of the mosaic structure of Ukrainian regions is different. The highest level is observed in the Western and Eastern regions of Ukraine.

Unlike Ukraine, the Russian boundary regions are as homogenous as possible. In the elite and mass consciousness of population, the reconstruction of the social time initiated by the federal structures that is far from being perfect in terms of logic is construed within which searching for the reference points for each historic period is performed. Two of them have been already definitely specified: in respect of the Kievan Rus' Christianization by the knyaz Vladimir in respect of the Soviet period victory in the Great Patriotic War.

Much more problems arise as the result of positioning of the present time (they are solved by means of symbolization of the acting President of the Russian Federation) and the future which remains to be rather vague.

Forming of the Russian and Ukrainian social chronotopes proceeds initially asynchronously which will create additional challenges for the boundary cooperation and interstate relations in whole.

The specific feature of chronotopes of the boundary regions of Russia and Ukraine is the low level of self-sufficiency. They are formed and evolve under the strong influence of a few centers of gravity at the same time. Firstly, the capital (Kiev) one that sets the samples of the socio-cultural codes that are met with a mixed reception in the border zones. Secondly, the Russian one determined primarily by the historic tradition the role of which is significantly reduced (in the course of the expert survey performed by us the 'increase in the mutual interest' as the priority trend of the mass consciousness of Ukrainians in the boundary regions was mentioned by 19% of experts while 'decrease in the mutual interest' 28%). Thirdly, the global, international one is in its turn quite much differentiated as it is represented by different states, associations of states and transnational corporations interested in integrating the border zone in the sphere of their interests.

The low level of self-sufficiency of the boundary chronotope of Ukrainian regions restrict their capabilities in the formation thereof, however, this is partially compensated by the possibility of selection of external samples.

On the contrary, the Russian boundary regions are quite definitely oriented towards the federal center which is one of the consequences of the successful establishment of the ultimately rigid vertical of power

during the 2000's. Both in Ukraine and Russia the prevailing chronotopic structures feature peripheral nature falling to a certain extent beyond the general mainstream. The result of asynchrony of the temporal-topologic changes is formation of the peripheral subcultural environment with a value-conceptual set that is quite independent from the national one. It is the level of formation that determines the limits of autonomy of the boundary regions within the frameworks of a single state the degree of which shall not be overrated, however, cannot be ignored.

### **SUMMARY**

Thus, the chronotope of a boundary zone is never completely identical to the common chronotope of the state which may be considered in the politically applied context as a problem and at the same time as the source of additional opportunities for interstate cooperation. The task of the political leaders oriented towards interaction and cooperation is the use of resources arising as the result of complementarity of the temporal-topologic structures. In its turn and it is still visible in the Russian-Ukrainian interaction the non-conformity of the social chronotopes may be easily used for self-isolation and confrontation.

### **REFERENCES**

- Andrew, C., 2014. Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives. *J. "The European Legacy"*, 19: 266-267.
- Bakhtin, M.M., 1975. Forms of time and chronotope in a novel. Outline of the historic poetics. M.: Fiction. Issues of Literature and Aesthetics, pp: 234-407.
- Borgatta, E.F. and R.J.V. Montgomery, 2005. *Encyclopedia of Sociology Macmillan reference*, 2nd Edn., 5: 31-53.
- Chernyavskaya, O.S., 2008. Social space: review of theoretical interpretations. *Bulletin of the Lobachevsky Nizhny Novgorod*, 5: 329-335.
- Golunov, S., 2014. The EU-Russian Borderland: New Contexts for Regional Cooperation. *J. Borderlands Studies*, 4 (28): 517-518.
- Kemerov, V.E., 2007. Social chronotope as the issue of integration of the modern social science. *Scientific Almanac of the Institute of Philosophy and Law of the Ural Branch at the Russian Academy of Sciences*, 7: 109-114.
- Kolosov, V.A. and O.I. Vendina, 2011. Russian-Ukrainian border zone: 20 years of separated integrity: monograph. *New Chronograph*, pp: 352.
- Pfoser, A., 2014. Between Russia and Estonia: narratives of place in a new borderland. *J. Nationalities Papers*, 2 (42): 269-285.
- Prokkola, E., 2009. Unfixing borderland identity: Border performances and narratives in the construction of self-researcher. *J. Borderlands Studies*, 3 (24): 21-38.
- Sorokin, P.A. and R.K. Merton, 1937. Social Time: A Methodological and Functional Analysis. *J. Am. Sociol.*, 5 (42): 615-629.