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## **PERCEPTUAL GEOGRAPHY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CONDITIONS OF DECENTRALIZATION FOR POLYETHNIC REGIONS OF UKRAINE**

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### **Abstract**

This article is devoted to highlighting the importance of perceptual geography as a socio-geographical science in the research of public perception of various geographical places, territories and spaces. Today, the process of decentralization continues in Ukraine, as a result of which a new administrative and territorial system has been formed in Ukraine since January 1, 2021. It is perceptual and geographical research that can reveal the mental peculiarities of the population's perception of the unification of settlements into territorial communities, which form a system of consolidated districts. Therefore, the study of such

features of the development of perceptual geography in Ukraine is quite relevant and especially significant for polyethnic regions, among which ethno-contact Chernivtsi oblast is a vivid example.

**Keywords.** Perceptual geography; cognitive geography; decentralization; polyethnic region; identification of geographical boundaries.

## **ПЕРЦЕПЦІЙНА ГЕОГРАФІЯ ТА ЇЇ ЗНАЧЕННЯ В УМОВАХ ДЕЦЕНТРАЛІЗАЦІЇ ДЛЯ ПОЛІЕТНІЧНИХ РЕГІОНІВ УКРАЇНИ**

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Дана стаття присвячена висвітленню важливості перцепційної географії як суспільно-географічної науки в дослідженнях суспільного сприйняття різних географічних місць, територій та просторів. Сьогодні в Україні триває процес децентралізації, внаслідок якого з 1 січня 2021 року в Україні сформований новий адміністративно-територіальних устрій. Саме перцепційно-географічні дослідження можуть розкрити ментальні особливості сприйняття населенням об'єднання поселень у територіальні громади, які утворюють систему укрупнених районів. Тому дослідження таких особливостей розвитку перцепційної географії в Україні є досить актуальним та особливо значимим для поліетнічних регіонів, серед яких яскравим прикладом є етноконтактна Чернівецька область.

**Ключові слова.** Перцепційна географія; когнітивна географія; децентралізація; поліетнічний регіон; ідентифікація географічних меж.

**Formulation of the problem.** Today's time is especially different considering a number of factors that influence the formation of geographical space. Understanding socio-geographic features among the population of multi-ethnic regions will allow creating optimal

conditions and contribute to the multifaceted development of territorial communities, taking into account their socio-geographic, ethnic, demographic and natural features.

Today, perceptual geography in Ukraine is becoming more and more relevant, and perceptual-geographic research is quite important for understanding the characteristics of the population and proportional development in the socio-economic spheres of life, taking into account the residence of indigenous ethnic groups and national minorities, which play an important role in the socio-economic life of multi-ethnic regions. In a region where several nationalities live compactly, this is especially important for the preservation of integrity and peace, which increases the relevance and general significance of such scientific research.

**Purpose and objectives of the research.** The purpose of this scientific study is to highlight the theoretical and practical aspects of the development of perceptual geography in Ukraine and the role of perceptual-geographic research in the study of the geographical space of multi-ethnic regions. The main tasks were: to study the peculiarities of the development of perceptual geography in Ukraine, as one of the sciences included in the structure of social geography; to justify the importance of scientific research of polyethnic regions through their perception by the population.

**Presenting main material.** All his life, as long as a person exists, he perceives the surrounding world. His perception and acceptance occurs gradually and may change. All information collected by a person is formed on the basis of a person's perception of the environment. A person's feelings that can reflect a certain set of properties, are analyzed by him, creating his own identity and forming relationships and attitudes towards others, their perception and understanding. After all, the concepts of perception and understanding testify to the cognitive process of reflection and understanding of phenomena or processes as a complete object in the totality of all components.

Perception and understanding are different, so it is worth distinguishing these two terms as: understanding refers rather to cognitive processes and rather refers to cognitive geography, and perception is rather the result of understanding, relies more on the perception of a person, his feelings in general and refers to perceptual geography.

Perception is the sensory perception of external objects and phenomena by a person. According to G.V. Leibniz, perception is distinguished as a simple direct representation of the surrounding world [9]. It is also worth including such a concept as social perception, which is better suited for revealing the topic of scientific work, because we live and develop in society, contact and communicate with it through our own already created and acquired connections, build new ones, take it as a basis for moral and ethical aims. We take into account the

peculiarities of society, and plan our own life in line with many factors that are activated by the organs of perception.

Considering the fact that a person lives in a social space, it is impossible to consider his perceptual and cognitive feelings without taking into account the social influence on his development and formation. It is worth understanding that the research also belongs to the field of social geography. It studies the regularities in the territorial organization of the community with regard to various factors that are specific to it. Factors of human socialization as a whole are created for a better understanding of regional development, especially taking into account the following factors: geographical, socio-economic, historical, national and ethnic for processes in regional systems, which in turn improve and optimize development that is the goal of regional social geography. Taking into account all these factors, a separate type of perceptual study of geographical space and self-identification as a social perception is distinguished.

The definition of social perception in the general sense is identical to the definition of the process of interpersonal understanding and can be defined as the formation of an image of another person in the human mind. The image itself begins with a reflection of the appearance, but even at this stage, most people draw conclusions about the personal traits of other people, which are not revealed at the level of direct perception.

A common phenomenon is the phenomenon of stereotyping, which often manifests itself after a person already belongs to a certain social community, self-identifies himself, determines his social status, role. The way a person creates a stereotype about other people in accordance with various factors entails the creation of a certain attitude for further searches and fixation of certain properties: ethical, moral or physiological in a person or a group of people. Such stereotypes can arise both at the sensory (perceptual level) and at the logical, conscious (cognitive) level of reflection. The same stereotypes can be presented not only in one person, but also in a population group as a whole, where the phenomenon of social perception and the formation of views is inherent and repeated in groups of people. According to O. H. Topchiev: "Population is a stable and self-reproducing set of people that has its own unique natural-historical development and is the main component of human society" [9, 10]. Based on this definition, it can be understood that the natural-historical development is represented due to the perceptual understanding of the entire ethnic group, the formation of general cognitive processes inherent to the majority of the population.

Perceptual geography or the geography of perception is a socio-geographical science that examines the peculiarities of sensory perception of space, as well as the age-related

evolution of spatial (territorial) ideas, the specifics of personal and communicative transmission of various chronological information, the interaction of people between themselves and the surrounding (geographic) environment [8]. According to P.O. Maslyak, perceptual geography – the geography of mentality, ethnic self-identification, perception of the environment [6].

Cognitive geography is the geography of understanding how people see space and the environment. It includes the formalization of factors that affect a person's spatial perception of the world, both personal space and within the framework of the social environment.

It should be noted that at the confluence of the two sciences, four zones can be distinguished by which research should be characterized: psychogeographical, sociogeographical, cultural-geographical, linguistic-geographical.

The psychogeographical zone is characterized by the perception of spatial information, territorial features, and geographical location. It is an idea of the surrounding world, the peculiarities of the location of important objects that are necessary for the identification of this territory.

The sociogeographical zone is mostly a person's perceptual understanding and idea of other people, namely stereotypes, evaluation of other people and their behavior. It is an idea of society as a whole, understanding of ideology, behavior of a certain social group.

The cultural-geographic zone is distinguished by the fact that it is a representation used in the associated culture (folklore, national clothing, food, etc.). It covers features that are inherent only to a certain ethnic group, or a national group that may differ linguistically, culturally, and religiously, or have their own characteristics that are not characteristic of other ethnic groups.

The linguo-geographical zone provides the peculiarities of a person's perception and idea of the language of the ethnic group, their emotional expression of words, intonation and context for displaying verbal information of words. This also includes mimicry, gesticulation, features of information presentation, expression of positive and negative emotions in certain features of information presentation by certain representatives of this ethnic group.

The aspect of cognitive geography that will be considered in the work will cover a person's identification of himself, and the selection of his own image in the environment precisely in terms of his cognitive abilities, the ability to identify other geographical units according to the information he has acquired, his possible stereotypical ideas about certain geographical aspects that will be considered in scientific work.

Identification is a way of understanding another person through conscious or unconscious identification with oneself, trying to understand a person's state, mood, attitude to the world and to oneself, putting oneself in their place. Identification is based on various aspects such as: physiological features, nationality, language, religion, ethnicity, etc.

For better self-identification, a person uses social perception, which can be attributed both to the sphere of perceptual geography and to the sphere of cognitive geography, because social perception is a multifunctional process that involves the perception of external signs of a person, their correlation with his personal characteristics, interpretation and prediction on this basis of his actions. It's the identifying similarities and differences in the perception of other people and identifying one's own personality depending on various identification factors.

It is worth emphasizing that identification by national, religious and linguistic composition of the population as a socio-geographical category has many more factors from demographic to socio-economic, this concept is much broader in its meaning than simple identification with social groups. Often, identification, especially social identification, passes through all areas of knowledge of a person and his daily affairs and life, ethical and social moral values.

Let us consider the importance of perceptual-geographical research using the example of the polyethnic Chernivtsi region [2]. Taking into account the history of the formation of this region, the formation of historical and geographical regions (Northern Bukovina, Northern Bessarabia and parts of the Dorohoy district) [2, 3] perceptual studies of the ethnic, linguistic and religious composition of the population of this region in conditions of decentralization will play a particularly important role not only for familiarization and study of the features, but also for a better understanding and perception of multi-ethnic regions within the oblast. Northern Bukovina and Northern Bessarabia have gone through a difficult path in the process of forming from these two historical and geographical regions the components of Chernivtsi oblast within its administrative boundaries. Each historical and geographical region has its own peculiarities in ethnic and national composition, their history is reflected in traditions, culture, language, as well as in today's processes that occur and are reflected in demography, politics, socio-economic processes.

There is also importance of research for government officials, specialists in regional development and spatial planning for a better understanding of the population for whom they work and for whom they improve the life and development of communities, understanding certain aspects of population placement in accordance with linguistic, ethnic, historical and

geographical factors that influence the further life of the community. In modern society the dynamics of social processes often lead to the growth of interpersonal contacts of people, the creation of socio-economic contacts for conducting business and economy between different ethnic groups and nationalities. Taking into account the territorial peculiarities of the religious composition of the population, national and ethnic minorities, it will be possible to reduce or even prevent the creation of religious, inter-ethnic and inter-national conflicts, to create the most optimal conditions for the development of national minorities and the entire population of Chernivtsi oblast [3, 5, 7].

This, in turn, leads to the perception of another personality and the formation of images of a person, images of ethnic groups and nationalities living in the territory of Chernivtsi oblast, which in turn enters the field of interpersonal perception.

Aspects of interpersonal and social perception are especially manifested in national and ethnic minorities of Ukraine and can be characterized by features of ethnic consolidation and resistance to assimilation. In the framework of decentralization, this can be manifested by the fact that communities are inclined to independently deal with the problems of their community within the framework of their traditional residence or in the territory where the given population is autochthonous. They tend to the preservation of one's own social perception, one's own perception of other social groups, the influence of already formed stereotypes in terms of managing a community or a social group.

It should also be added that the ethnic factor is primarily very important due to numerous decisions in local councils in ethno-contact regions regarding various projects for the development and life of the community, in which ethnic, linguistic, and religious aspects are often mentioned as important factors for the arguments of one's own decision or the expression of opinion. That is, it is worth understanding how important the perception of a certain national minority can influence decision-making by members of this community, social group. Their perception often shapes their ideas about the correctness of the decisions made in relation to their own perception of ethnicity and social identification, that is, a person's perception of an ethnic group can be conditioned by his social perception that he formed while being a part of this ethnic group.

In order to better create separate territorial communities, there are certain mechanisms that, in terms of perceptual research, can preserve the interests of national minorities and take into account their special features during the creation of territorial communities. Among such mechanisms, there are certain rules such as not uniting different ethnic and national groups in one community, or creating electoral districts taking into account different ethnic groups and

their compact living. After all, respect for the interests of national minorities is the main component of European democracy, which is enshrined in numerous European treaties, of which Ukraine is also a party. As an example, we can cite the framework convention of the Council of Europe on the protection of national and ethnic minorities, which describes the need to refrain from measures that can change the proportional composition of the population in communities where national minorities live.

In the process of uniting communities in Ukraine, one can also rely on Article 132 of the Constitution of Ukraine: “The territorial system of Ukraine is based on the principles of unity and integrity of the state territory, a combination of centralization and decentralization in the exercise of state power, balanced and socio-economic development of regions, taking into account their historical, economic, ecological, geographical and demographic features, ethnic and cultural traditions”. In addition to this thesis, Article 4 of the Law of Ukraine “On the Voluntary Unification of Territorial Communities” is worth noting: “On making decisions regarding the voluntary unification of territorial communities, historical, ethnic, cultural and other factors affecting socio-economic development of territorial communities” [1].

**Conclusions.** The study of perceptual geography, in particular the perception of geographical space by the population of certain regions, is an extremely important issue. The relevance of the research is the study of the population of Chernivtsi oblast, as one of the most heterogeneous regions of Ukraine, whose heterogeneity is due to geographical location, historical factors that influenced the formation of borders, boundaries and demarcation of territories of compact residence of national minorities.

In the process of creating separate territorial communities, compactly settled national minorities should be taken into account. The goal of their formation, just as in places of compact residence, and in other cases, should be the creation of territorial communities that are strong in all aspects, capable of self-organization, covering financial or economic factors of the socio-economic basis of the community for its sustainable development, social factors for preserving the development of the traditional environment in national minorities and their development without any obstacles. The system of local authorities should be able to take into account and implement the specific needs of each ethnic community and to conduct its own targeted ethno-national policy. Taking into account the principle of voluntariness in the created communities with different ethnic composition, measures should not be taken that could in any way change the ethnolinguistic structure of the population, because this could be the result of limiting collective or individual rights and freedoms.



It is important to note that each territorial unit, which is represented by a compact residence of a national or ethnic minority, has its own inter-ethnic ties, therefore, when creating a new separate territorial community or including it in a new separate territorial community, it is necessary to take into account already existing and acquired local and inter-ethnic ties of this community.

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