

Cooperation Between Cross-Border Regions of Russia and Ukraine in Public Opinion and Expert Appraisal

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Abstract: The study presents the process of formation of new cultural and civilizational identities in cross-border regions which reflects the reality emerged after a 'new frontier' delimitation. An analysis of possibilities of implementing the European experience in Russian-Ukrainian border zone was carried out. Relations of Russian and Ukrainian cross-border regions in the difficult socio-political situation were studied on the basis of a sociological research. The study reveals main tendencies in development of integration, re-integration and confrontation as well as challenges and prospects of cross-border cooperation as viewed in public opinion and assessed by experts. The degree of the regions residents' interest in cross-border cooperation was assessed and the experts' evaluation of importance of cross-border cooperation for the regions development was analyzed. Potential ways and actors of cross-border cooperation in Central Eastern Europe were determined. The study is written as part of their search project by order No. 2014/2459 for conducting of state work in the field of research within the competitive part of the state order of Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation (coordinator V.P. Babintsev).

Key words: Cooperation, East Central Europe, Euroregions, frontiers, regional policy, cultural identities, civilizational identities, cross-border region, sociologic, public opinion, expert appraisal

INTRODUCTION

Issues of Russian and Ukrainian cross-border regions development draw increasing attention of researchers in sociology, economics, politology, discourse analysis and other fields. This attention roots in the necessity to estimate the global experience for instance, European practice which views cross-border cooperation as a factor of growth and development of border zones. At the same time, numerous aspects of European integration require further analysis. Continental Eurasian integration remains an under-studied phenomenon which requires further research, especially empirical (for several areas, like informal trade, emergence of cross-border networks or FDI, we simply lack reliable data for more elaborated analysis). It is also an issue that should be taken into account by policy-makers and which is often overlooked (Vinokurov and Libman, 2012).

In this framework, researchers can state the importance of the scientific analysis of prospects of reintegration processes in the post-Soviet space including Russian and Ukrainian cooperation whose ambiguous nature of development was emphasized by numerous researchers even before the Ukrainian crisis of late 2013-2014 (Keating, 1995). It is evident that the

contradictions will deepen due to marked aggravation of Russian-Ukrainian relations (up to open confrontation) in the past months. It is crucial to understand its potential long-term impact on cross-border cooperation and in a broader context, on relations between the two post-Soviet states.

Besides, in the socio-cultural sense, it is necessary to study the process of new cultural and civilizational identities formation in Russian and Ukrainian border zones as this process reflects new realities related to the 'new state border' which is viewed both as a certain socio-cultural barrier and an interaction channel for communities on either side of it. This factor is viewed as significant for integration. Specifically, Zhurzhenko (2004) emphasizes the impact of nationalization of border zones in the course of nation-building in the CIS states, their incorporation in national territories and creation of new cross-border identities on integration processes.

The cross-border regions between Russian and Ukraine witness nowadays a unique situation. On the one hand, they continue cooperation and carry out joint social and economic and other projects. On the other hand, Ukrainian crisis accompanied de facto by the state fragmentation triggers new geopolitical configurations often undermining the above projects.

Thus, the complexity of interaction processes which comprise integration, reintegration and confrontation trends require comprehensive studying that would allow foreseeing cooperation prospects and as far as practical, adjusting them for the benefit of the participants.

Literature review: The theoretical background for the study includes the theory of interregional relations (Reiterer, 2009; Robles, 2007; Keating, 1995), theory of cross-border cooperation (Grix, 2001), an integration paradigm of vertical and horizontal relations, the paradigm of the border-zone development the social identity concept (Tajfel, 1974; Hall and Gay 1996; Turner *et al.*, 1987; Pawluczuk, 2009).

A number of modern, we state that the post-Soviet space is a geopolitical, historical and to a great extent legal reality. Though, it is pointed out that the collapse of the USSR which lead to rearrangement of political power and social allegiances destabilized established categories of identification and initialized new phases of renegotiation and redefinition (Bassin and Kelly, 2012), the last decade saw a rapid shifting of post-Soviet identities, generally from more nationalist and exclusivist to more tolerant and inclusive (Suny *et al.*, 2006). In this framework, V.G. Yegorov claims that the collapse of the USSR resulted in a territorial localization of new independent states united by their similar experience of being a part of the same state and consequently preserving a common identity which is the most adequately defined as the post-Soviet one. Nevertheless, the focus of most studies lies not in cultural and ideological but in institutional and political aspects of interaction of post-Soviet states. A range of papers strive to characterize present unions of the post-Soviet states. In particular, N.I. Promskiy distinguishes the following subregional entities within the post-Soviet area: the CIS, the Union State of Russia and Belarus (the Union State), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), the Common Economic Space (CES) (Analytical Report Itogideyate lnosti SNGza 20 letizada china perspektivu, <http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=3147>).

In view of this, our academic interest lies in the problem of prospects of the new entities integration which despite the common history is often discounted. The modern political elite and academic community both in the post-Soviet area and external states share the opinion that the CIS project is declarative and of little effect.

At the same time, a number of studies emphasize that nowadays, at the final stage of the CIS nations building with relatively stable economic growth (the global economic crisis only modifies but does not eliminates this trend) and modernization of national economies there emerged favorable conditions to accelerate efforts to create viable integrated entities.

Revisiting the opposition of global vs. regional integration with the latter implying that “nations of a geographic region come together in some type of partnership to foster trade and development the framework Ya.G. Ashikhmina speaks of global integration as international as opposed to regional and claims that in the modern world they often intercross establishing numerous, sometimes even inert integration structures. Regional integration is currently considered in the context of globalization (Bendee, 2002; Coleman and Underhill, 1998) which is differently assessed by countries with different level of the economic growth. At the same time, integration is an objective process of deepening of various bonds on the global scale, achieving a new level of cooperation, unity and interdependency in economy, finances, policy, science and culture (Gusev, 2010).

It should be noted that interstate projects in the post-Soviet area do not usually promote integration of the ex-USSR states. For instance, the Eastern Partnership project, being an initiative of the European Union and evolving in Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus, aims at their future integration with the EU. The history of development of interstate relations shows that such international organizations as the EU, the OSCE and the Council of Europe are interested in development of a common economic and social area on the basis of regional cooperation with the post-Soviet states (Declaration on regionalism in Europe, http://www.aer.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PressComm/Publications/DeclarationRegionalism/DR_GB.pdf).

In this frame, cross-border cooperation has become a new focus of attention both for theoretic and practical consideration. For instance, an overview of best practices of cross-border cooperation was given in a number of reports by related institutions (Commission, 1992) and research groups (Smallbone *et al.*, 2007) as well as by a vast number of scholars (Sousa, 2013). The fields of study of cross-border relations include spatial, institutional, social and economical, trading, socio-cultural, etc. development of bordering regions (Martin, 1995).

At a time when regional policy has been generally weak, cross-border cooperation has

contributed significantly to cohesion and it is also a good indicator of stability in the region (Turnock, 2002).

Specialists of Russian Institute for Strategic Studies claim that cross-border cooperation requires new approaches to promote the integration potential of Russia and the CIS countries.

One of such approaches envisages analysis of regional discourses in the border zone taking into account creation and evolution of nominal identities assumed by respondents while assessing the integration processes and positioning themselves as participating/not participating in their implementation.

Though, identity in discourse is viewed as a complex issue which goes beyond the question of either the social or personal identities of the participants (Scollon, 1997), recent research emphasize the role of social factors in formation of identities as identity is a process embedded in social practices within which discourse practices (Fairclough, 1989) have a central role and which frame the way individuals and groups present themselves to others, negotiate roles and conceptualize themselves. Gee argues that identity is socially constructed at several levels: through relationships between the speaker and what is being said; through relationships between self and other in face-to-face occasions of talk and interaction; through relationships represented in the propositional content of talk; through relationships to the dominant ideologies, widespread social practices and underlying power structures drawn together as Discourse (Gee, 2008). Scholars in the membership categorization analysis movement (Antaki and Widdicombs, 1998) pointed out that identity construction is often related to the definition of categories for inclusion or exclusion of self and others and to their identification with typical activities and routines. This led to a reflection on the nature of identification categories and on the relationship between individual identity and group membership.

Yet, this somewhat static concept of identity wrongly suggests that people belong to a solid, unchanging, intrinsic collective unit because of a specific history which they supposedly have in common and that as a consequence they feel obliged to act and react as a group when they are threatened (Martin, 1995). A number of scholars argue that identity is not merely a result of process of social categorization, as it constitutes a discourse of belonging, similarity and difference, subject to constant renegotiation.

This statement is particularly true if speaking about national identity. Being an 'imagined community' and at the same time a 'mental construct' (Wodak *et al.*, 2009), a 'system of cultural representations' (Hall and Gay, 1996),

the nation is constructed and conveyed in discourse, predominantly in narratives of national culture. From this perspective, national identity can be regarded the product of discourse.

As a mental construct, the nation has elastic, though finite, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations (Anderson, 1983). Thus, border zones see formation of new types of cultural and civilizational identities, reflecting the individual or group self-reference with historical systems of values, social codes, forms of conscience and structures, behavior patterns, cultural standards and mentality. R. Wodak distinguishes certain core areas in the discursive construction of national identities at the content-level, i.e., a collective past, a collective present and future, a common culture, a common territory and a homo nationalis (Wodak *et al.*, 2009).

New identities of border zones undergo institutionalization through a range of factors both stable (traditions, axiological patterns, integration to larger social groups) and labile, changing in the course of time. As Hopkins and Dixon put it, the ways abstract social categories such as 'nation', 'class' or 'race' which impact on lived experience and are reproduced though it are greatly influenced by place and time (Hopkins and Dixon, 2006). Besides, such changeable factors include socio-political aspects, dynamic public opinion and recently, mass influence of subcultural modification practices applied by various social institutions. Thus, the nationality becomes a narration, 'a story which people tell about themselves in order to lend meaning to their social world' with the national identity becoming an open-ended identity which gives meaning to one's practice, 'leaves room for variations on the past and also for initiatives in the future' (Martin, 1995).

Lying on the intersection of national identities, inhabitants of cross-border regions can display "polyphonous" identities, i.e., simultaneously assume voices that are associated with different identity categories and that they can "perform" identities, i.e., represent themselves as different from what their personal "visible" characteristics would suggest (Barrett, 1999). If one assumes that every identity inevitably involves inclusion and exclusion, then hybrid, multiple identities represent a potential corrective element which can counteract the practices of exclusion and differentiation.

In view of this, it is possible to tell about formation of regional identity which possesses common natural or cultural traits such as landscapes, dialects, local foods or the names of places and firms which are regarded both as determinants of identity and expressions of it.

Alternatively, regional identity can be seen to derive from narratives circulated through the broadcast media, novels and poems or from performances such as plays, concerts and exhibitions (Paasi, 2013). Ye.V. Yeremina, at the same time, gives a more detailed definitions of regional identity as a result of cognitive, axiological and emotional processes of an individual's self-reference with the regional community.

Thus, the scope of studies for integration processes and cross-border cooperation are currently moving to a socio-cultural sphere which allows defining not only temporal determinants thereof but also global factors established by historical traditions.

Cultural and civilizational self-identification has a major impact on perception of conditions and factors of cross-border cooperation on its assessment and on the formation of an own position as to challenges inherent to interaction between regions separated by a state border.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objective of the present research is to study the perception of cross-border cooperation by the population and experts in the cross-border regions of Russia and Ukraine. In order to achieve this objective, the following interconnected tasks are set and tackled:

- To single out and justify theoretical approaches for studying cross-border cooperation of Russian and Ukrainian regions
- To give the estimation of the cooperation of Russian and Ukrainian cross-border regions by the population
- To give the expert estimation of major integration projects in the frame of cross-border cooperation.

Implementation of the research work is based on a set of the following research principles: Principle of scientific validity, which provides for elaboration and improvement of an appraisal system the cross-border cooperation between post-Soviet states taking into account recent theories, approbation of new data estimation tools and using state-of-the-art information technologies.

Principle of consistency, i.e., the necessity to study a cross-border region as a system of interconnected components, including commercial and non-profit institutions, state/federal, regional and municipal authorities, etc. Principle of comprehensiveness, i.e., estimation of projects in the frame of cross-border cooperation of post-Soviet states is carried out taking into account all external and internal factors.

Principle of durability, i.e., the estimation results should take into account the prospects of strategic development of cross-border regions and the state to forecast its future situation.

Principle of contingency, which means that projects in the frame of cross-border cooperation of post-Soviet states should be regarded as a component of the social and economical development of the corresponding state with account of national peculiarities.

The researchers viewpoint as to the cross-border cooperation is based on two fundamental assumptions. The first assumption is defined within the model of 'order through fluctuations' proposed by Prigogine and Stengers (1984) and states that in the unstable world trivial causes lead to significant changes. In view of this assumption, cross-border cooperation is viewed a dynamic dissipative system which in the course of its developments passes bifurcation points where it can drastically change due to seemingly insignificant reasons. The second assumption is the statement by J. Baudrillard about the 'death of reality' in the postmodern epoch and its substitution with 'hyperreality' where 'signs' are not exchanged for the 'signified' but are self-referential and existence of social systems continues as simulation hiding absence of 'profound reality' (Baudrillard, 1994). In the frame of this assumption, it is practical to distinguish imitation and constructive projects of cross-border cooperation.

At present, it is crucial to understand how the border-zone community reacts to corresponding socio-political processes because this reaction underlies individual and collective behavioral strategies. The main methods of collection of the raw sociological data include.

Questionnaire survey of residents of Belgorod and Kharkiv Regions in 2011 (N = 500) and in 2010 (N = 500). The survey was used with quota sample which allowed building a model of universe population of the Slobozhanshchina Euroregion. Groups according to gender and age in urban and rural population and separately according to different types of urban population were singled out. On the basis of statistical data of male to female ratio in different age groups of urban and rural population quota samples were determined. The sampling was determined by the presence of statistical data (quota parameters) characterizing the region: Belgorod region (Russia) 35.50% and Kharkiv region (Ukraine) 64.50%. Processing of the mass questionnaire survey results was performed by simple and cross-grouping of data with determining of statistically significant differences between the respondents' groups singled out according to gender, age, type of settlement and other socially significant characteristics.

Expert surveys (N = 20, 2012; N = 30, 2013; N = 30, 2014). The selection of experts was prompted by the following criteria: personal participation in elaboration or implementation of project (programs) in cross-border cooperation and professional competence (scientific or practical work in the field of cross-border cooperation; scientific publications in cross-border integration or social identification). As a result, the expert group comprised: deputies of City and Regional Councils of Kharkiv and Belgorod Regions; state and municipal officials of Kharkiv, Belgorod, Kursk, Sumy, Voronezh, Chernugiv, Bryansk and other border-zone region; officials of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and Ukraine; entrepreneurs; lecturers and scholars; project coordinators; customs and frontier officers of the Russian Federation and Ukraine; NGO members; mass media representatives, etc.

The study uses sociological studies carried out in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation in 2013 and 2014 by other authors and research institutions.

Data presentation: One of tasks of a sociological research conducted in 2011 was to reveal the attitude of Belgorod and Kharkiv Regions inhabitants to the emergence of a state border between Ukraine and the Russian Federation and its impact on the border-zone residents. The majority of the respondents stated that the emergence of a state border between Ukraine and Russia influenced them (75.00%). Total 22% of respondents rated this issue as insignificant. The rest of the respondents, 3% were undecided.

The border factor is now a days perceived by the majority of the respondents in terms of practical, not subcultural problems. The canvassed residents of Belgorod and Kharkiv regions stated that with establishment of the border they started to face difficulties while visiting relatives (61.29%) and saw substantial decrease of financial standing (48.96%). The last answer is more typical for residents of Kharkiv Region which is related to the economic situation in Ukraine. Respondents from Belgorod Region rated this problem third in significance (10.18%).

The 13.85% respondents mentioned cancellation on many projects as a negative consequence of the border delimitation. This variant of answer was the most frequently chosen by entrepreneurs, public servants and public sector workers aged 20-49. A part of respondents chose variants 'conflict situations on the grounds of extremism and xenophobia emerged' (11.39%) and 'linguistic bars emerged' (5.12%). These variants prove the emerging gaps in the cultural and civilizational

identification processes of the border-zone inhabitants on either side of the border. Yet, these gaps, though present, are not particularly evident so far.

A scope of tasks of the research conducted in 2011 included estimation of the extent to which residents of Kharkiv and Belgorod Regions are interested in the cross-border cooperation development. The 46% of respondents noted their personal interest in the development of cross-border cooperation; 29% of people canvassed claimed that they were not interested in cross-border cooperation and 25% of residents of the Slobozhansh china Euroregion were undecided. Therefore, most probably, the deepening cultural and civilizational discrepancies still do not play a crucial role for determination of the attitude towards border-zones interaction for almost half of the residents.

Nevertheless, the 'border-zone' factor plays an increasingly significant role for the population's self-identification. The research conducted in 2012 set a task to reveal the self-perception as border-zone residents in the population of Belgorod and Kharkiv regions and it showed that such self-perception is characteristic for the majority (55.1%) of respondents. 42.3% of respondents do not notice this peculiarity of the region they live in (Slobozhansh china Euroregion) (Table 1).

If analyze the distribution of answers depending on the age groups, elderly citizens (42%) whose youth and middle ages passed in the USSR tend not to notice 'border-zone residence' while the younger generation (up to 35 years old) perceives the border and its presence in the region as a fact (28.4%).

The survey showed that 62.4% of respondents state that the status of a cross-border region influences the residents' quality of life (Table 2). The majority of the respondents claimed that the cross-border status of the region has a positive impact on the quality and availability of education and on the cultural progress.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question: "Do you feel affiliation to a cross-border region?"

Answer variant	Quantity	
	Abs.	Percentage
Yes	275	55.1
No	211	42.3
Difficult to say	14	2.6
Total	500	100.0

Table 2: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "Does the status of cross-border region influences the population's lifequality?"

Answer variant	Quantity	
	Abs.	Percentage
Yes	312	62.4
No	118	23.6
Difficult to say	69	13.8
Refused to answer	1	0.2
Total	500	100.0

Table 3: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "Which priority areas of cooperation of cross-border regions should be developed in the first place?"

Answer variant	Quantity	
	Abs.	Percentage
Economic cooperation	268	53.6
Preservation of heritage	174	34.8
Development of tourism	142	28.4
Increasing of population's welfare	135	27.0
Social programs and projects	126	25.2
Ecology and environmental protection	101	20.2
Development of transportation in the regions	101	20.2
Scientific cooperation and education	94	18.8
Innovation cooperation	38	7.6
Military cooperation and security	38	7.6
Other	23	4.6
Youth policy implementation	22	4.4
Creation of political alliance	19	3.8
Refused to answer	12	2.4
Difficult to say	4	0.8
Total	500	100.0

Table 4: The survey was conducted among experts in state and municipal administration, scholars and deputies of all levels of governmental authorities in Ukraine, N = 20, 2012; evaluation of integration processes in the post-Soviet space (The survey was conducted among experts in state and municipal administration, scholars and deputies of all levels of governmental authorities in Ukraine, N = 20, 2012)

Variants of answers	Percentage
Integration processes in the post-Soviet space are declarative	24
Integration processes are of very narrow focus and lack consistency	44
Integration projects meet the needs of the states at the current stage of development	4
Interstate programs and projects of the post-Soviet states use the integration potential in full	4
Integration projects and programs fulfill strategic goals of development of the CIS countries	4

The new border phenomenon is not perceived by the majority of respondents as a significant obstacle for interaction and even cooperation, which are viewed as natural and necessary. At the same time, 53.6% of residents of Belgorod and Kharkiv regions see the future of cross-border interaction in economic cooperation. Table 3 represents other variants of answers in descending order of significance.

The emphasis on economic cooperation reflects real priorities of cross-border cooperation and shows mostly pragmatic perception of the border-zone reality not concerning self-identification. Nevertheless, 34.8% of respondents assumed the function of heritage preservation for integration processes, i.e., the function of conservation of the common cultural and civilizational identity.

Yet, this position is typical for the minority of residents. The majority of population are motivated for cooperation by practical reasons. The priority of utilitarian view is noted both by Russian and Ukrainian experts.

Expert polls conducted by BelSU Regional Cross-Border Cooperation Science and Education Centre

Table 5: Distribution of experts' answers to the question "What obstacles or challenges hamper projects in cross-border cooperation of the post-Soviet states?" (2013)

Variants of answers	Percentage
Absence of common regulatory and legal framework	50
Absence of mechanisms and tools for implementation of joint programs	45
Absence of funding for integration projects and programs	50
Lack of interests from business entities	20
Population inactivity	30
Linguistic and cultural barriers	5
Increasing nationalism and xenophobia	15
Creation of the enemy image	15
Unreadiness of the elites	20
Struggle for resources	5
Military and political collaboration with opponents	20
Different level of scientific and technical development	5

in 2012-2014 give grounds to state that over 50% of experts also view economic cooperation of cross-border regions as the priority of their relations notwithstanding the adverse impact of the socio-political environment.

At the same time, experts saw restrictions of integration processes as early as in 2012 without relating it to cultural and civilizational barriers. The majority of the experts stated that integration processes are of very narrow focus and lack consistency (44%) (Table 4).

Ukrainian experts see the biggest obstacle for cross-border cooperation of the post-Soviet states in absence of a common regulatory and legal framework and absence of funding for integration projects and programs (50%), which is supported by our previous research (Sapryka, 2012) (Table 5).

The expert poll (N = 25), conducted in 2014, proved that in large the situation has not changed and absence of a common regulatory and legal framework (57.14%) and absence of funding for integration projects and programs (34.7%), remain the biggest obstacles for cross-border cooperation (Table 6).

None of the experts pointed out linguistic and cultural barriers as obstacles for integration while two years ago this reason was noted by 5% of experts.

Therefore, despite the difficult socio-political situation in Ukraine and ongoing conflict escalation, cross-border cooperation with underlying practical reasons will continue to develop. Still, it will be potentially hampered by the processes of new identity formation. In Ukraine, they will be centered around the basic idea of independence from Russia which is gaining weight in the public conscience. It is telling that according to the sociological research "Ukraine. Presidential Elections, 2014, April" (N = 6200), the majority of respondents claim that Ukraine and Russia should be independent but friendly states with open borders without visas or

Table 6: Distribution of experts' answers to the question "What obstacles or challenges hamper projects in cross-border cooperation of the post-Soviet states?" (2014)

Variables	Percentage
Absence of common regulatory and legal framework	57.14
Absence of mechanisms and tools for implementation of joint programs	30.61
Absence of funding for integration projects and programs	34.70
Lack of interests from business entities	10.20
Population inactivity	10.20
Linguistic and cultural barriers	0.00
Increasing nationalism and xenophobia	4.09
Creation of the enemy image	8.16
Unreadiness of the elites	12.24
Struggle for resources	8.16
Military and political collaboration with opponents	2.04
Different level of scientific and technical development	2.04

customs (59.4%). Despite political discords of official Kyiv with Moscow, the majority of Ukrainian population perceive the frontier as a barrier and an obstacle which should be overcome (Electoral orientations of Ukrainians, April 2014. Available at: <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=rus&cat=reports&id=269&page=1>). If in the Cross-border cooperation can become such a means to increase the contact-inducing function of the frontier.

In his case, differences in identification processes in Ukraine are likely to influence the focus areas of cooperation. Most probably, in the South-Eastern part of the state, it will be oriented towards integration. The poll "The views and opinions of South-Eastern regions residents of Ukraine: April 2014" conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in April 8-16th, 2014 presents the public opinion of the residents of cross-border regions of Ukraine in integration projects (The views and opinions of South-Eastern regions residents of Ukraine: April 2014 (N=3232) <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=news&id=258>).

As the Table shows, the majority of the respondents would join the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (Donetsk region 72.5%, Luhansk region 64.3%, Kharkiv Region 46.5%) (Table 7).

Nevertheless, it appears that socio-cultural aspects have been so far undervalued by specialists who reduce the cross-border cooperation issues to mainly technical aspects. It was proved by the expert poll conducted in the Slobozhanshchina Euroregion in 2014 (N = 30) which covered the issues of Russian-Ukrainian cross-border and interregional cooperation, especially in related challenges. The respondents included state officers, municipal officers, expert scholars, public figures, mass media representatives and deputies of Kharkiv and Belgorod regions. The experts named the following major challenges in cross-border cooperation:

- No coordination between the regional, municipal and state authorities

Table 7: Distribution of respondents' answers to the question: "Please, imagine that there was a referendum on whether Ukraine should join the European Union or the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, You can vote for entry into the EU or into the Customs Union, What would be your choice in this case?"

Variables	Donetsk region (%)	Luhansk region (%)	Kharkiv region (%)
I would vote for entry into the European Union	9.4	11.2	26.5
I would vote for entry into the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan	72.5	64.3	46.5
I wouldn't participate in the referendum	8.4	10.4	16.8
Difficult to say	8.9	11.4	9.4
Refuse to answer	0.7	2.7	0.7

- Difficulties while crossing the border (absence of an entry point based on the principle of the 'single point of contact')
- Absence of joint projects
- Reduction of goods turnover between the states
- Customs barriers, loss of economic ties and shrinking of manufacturing facilities
- Absence of long-term ties in cross-border cooperation
- Disinterestedness of business due to complicated border crossing procedures
- Insufficient population awareness of cooperation issues
- Lack of financial tools and inconsistency of strategic planning of joint projects
- Opposition from the part of the state authorities of Ukraine
- Insufficient appeal of cross-border projects
- Inequality of economic development of regions in the Russian Federation and Ukraine

So, none of the expert did not conceptualize the role of socio-cultural factors determining cooperation. It is also typical for suggestions made by the specialists in order to overcome emerging barriers. The experts state that for fulfillment of cross-border regions it is necessary:

- To adopt real state programs with mechanisms of funding for local initiatives
- To make the border more open, to upgrade entry points and the procedures of registration of individuals crossing the border
- To develop economic cooperation between the Russian Federation and Ukraine
- To raise investment from large and medium business for interregional and cross-border cooperation programs
- To promote integration processes
- To provide legal coverage and funding for cross-border cooperation projects

- To establish joint innovation enterprises, to introduce instruments of financing of innovation projects by transparent tenders
- To expand rights of Ukrainian regions and to provide economic and legal conditions at the state level

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the raw sociological data of integration and cooperation processes in the post-Soviet space shows that at present cross-border cooperation between Russia and Ukraine is perceived in public and expert opinion chiefly as necessity and is estimated in practical terms. As the empirical data prove that the majority of residents are aware of living in border zones of different states but do not see it as a significant identification factor.

In perception of the majority of citizens, the border factor has not become a barrier significantly complicating their everyday life, though it created certain inconveniences. Until recently the frontier had been viewed as a relatively easy obstacle and its crossing had not created difficulties for establishing (or restoration) of business or other relations between partners. To a large extent, it was attributed to the fact that a large part of Ukrainian and Russian population still have the concept of a common cultural and civilizational identity based mainly on memories of the past. Due to this fact, a third of the respondents perceive cross-border cooperation as a possibility to preserve the common past and the traditional socio-cultural identity.

The pragmatic approach to cooperation predetermines estimation thereof by the majority of the citizens and by the experts from the perspective of technical determinism.

Nevertheless, Ukrainian crisis and deterioration of Russian-Ukrainian relations will not only hinder cross-border cooperation but also speed up formation of new significantly different cultural and civilizational identities. These processes will be heterogeneous and will be more active in the West and center of Ukraine and in the East and the center of Russia, but they will definitely affect the border zone.

It is clear that self-organization on the basis of new identities will not become the barrier to abandon cooperation, especially in economy but it will complicate its implementation. If until recently the factor of the common identity played the role of a certain moderator and mediator in cooperation, in future participants of cross-border cooperation will have to look for new ways to reconcile interests. Actors of cross-border cooperation on either side of the border should be ready to solve this issue.

CONCLUSION

Sociological analysis of the phenomenon of cross-border cooperation between Russian and Ukrainian regions proves the necessity of its further studying not only in Russia and Ukraine but throughout the post-Soviet space. It should be noted that cross-border cooperation between Ukraine and Russia does not play the integration role it has in Western and Central Europe. On the one hand, it is motivated by purely practical reasons. On the other hand, it will certainly be influenced by socio-cultural processes in Russia and Ukraine.

The difficult socio-political situation in Ukraine together with global geopolitical processes turn cross-border cooperation in the only working instrument of neighborliness and development of adjacent territories. In view of this, it is possible to outline the following lines of cross-border development:

- Determination of lines of cross-border development crucial in the current unstable socio-political situation
- Determination of mechanisms of interaction between state and municipal authorities promoting cross-border cooperation
- Creation of project groups and projects aimed at mitigation of socio-political conflicts in border zones.

Social interaction and further development of border zones is impossible without effective integration projects and introduction of cross-border cooperation models which should be elaborated and implemented taking into account not only technical aspects but also socio-cultural processes of formation of new cultural and civilizational identities.

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