

"Battle of peoples": history and modernity of self-positioning against the backdrop of globalization processes.

Interdisciplinary Conference

"Self-Positioning of Eastern European Communities in Global Relations - Concepts of Space and Self-Presentation in School Textbooks"

2017, November 6-7
Leipzig, Germany

Organizers: Leibniz ScienceCampus, Eastern Europe - Global Area (EEGA) in cooperation with the German Association for East European Studies (DGO)

Report by Volodymyr Poltorak

The symposium was attended by speakers from Germany, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Sweden and Ukraine.

According to its stated scientific purpose, EEGA "strives to develop new research perspectives in Eastern Europe, engaging in exchange of knowledge in the region with stakeholders and encouraging young researchers."

The symposium was intended to determine how the positioning of Eastern European countries correlates with national / collective identity. They are in constant flux, reproduced, contradicted and corrected. "In this regard, history, geography, higher education, school curricula give an interesting idea of (national) self-positioning", summarized the conference outline.

The very format of the EEGA campus is striking researchers from Greece, Sweden, Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Russia and Romania were invited to the event, which resulted in a rather high level of discussion following the presentations.

Briefly about the venue

Leipzig is the outstanding scientific and cultural center of Saxony. First of all, it is known in history for the "Battle of Peoples" in October 1813, when half a million soldiers fought in the decisive competition between European Emperors. The climax of the Napoleonic wars is less famous than Waterloo, but definitely more crucial. Ukrainian historians are interested in the participation of Cossack regiments in the battle, the role of Leipzig in Eastern European trade from the 15th century, and the publishing activity of Brockhaus in the 19th century. Symbols of the outstanding scientific and cultural achievements of the city comprise such figures as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Johann Sebastian Bach and Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. In the eyes of ordinary Ukrainians, the

modern city has some special features: biking lanes, excellent public transport (which is extensive and at the same time affordable¹). The historical core of the city is small, perhaps a little larger than the centre of Lviv, and less preserved because of the bombing and battles of 1944-1945.

Part One: External and Self-positioning in the Globalization Processes

Stefanie Zloch (Braunschweig), Tamás Hardi and Andrea Miklosne-Zadar (Budapest) and Rune Brandt-Larsen (Lund) noted the weight of migration processes, the self-positioning of the citizens of eight Central European countries and the role of the joint past in shaping the content of school textbooks on geography and history.

The Swedish researcher, Rune Brandt-Larsen, analyzed the textbooks of the Eastern European states whose territories were part of the Commonwealth in order to determine how the common past was used and what role today's context plays in shaping the image of the past. Brandt-Larsen's main conclusion – was that historical narratives are closely related to the context and the political circumstances in which they are formed.

Stefanie Zloch noted the role of migration processes in discussions about the identity of the peoples of Eastern Europe since the late 1920s. Scientists and politicians have often focused on the historical problem of forced migration during and after the Second World War. This episode in European history is also an integral part of textbooks. By applying a comparative analysis of Polish, Czech and Russian textbooks on geography and history from the 1990s to the present day, Zloch showed that self-identification in the global world directly influences the interpretation of migration processes and the spatial concept of material presentation.

Tamás Hardy and Andrea Miklosne-Zadar presented the results of surveys conducted between 2012 and 2015 by the Institute for Regional Studies (CERS). The purpose of the surveys was to understand the spatial representation of students and their formative factors in Hungary and eight neighboring countries (Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia). They demonstrated the fundamental differences among the responses in some countries to the concepts of “Central Europe”, “Eastern Europe” and “the Balkans”. Educational institutions, the media, public discourse, as well as individual experience and economic feasibility have, according to the scientists, played a significant role in the development of such representations. They also noted a temporal transformation of representations, which allows us to talk about identity drift, and not just about steady positioning.

During the discussion of these reports, German colleagues identified a number of problems. In particular, terminological differences (lack of criteria for determining adherence to European macro-regions in particular), and the limited research base (groups without representativeness, individual textbooks without analysis of the process of their writing) did not allow a definition of a common basis for understanding the general trends underlying the development of

¹ 15 minutes by train for under 5 euros from the airport to the center.

globalization processes in Eastern Europe. However, the very fact of engaging in interdisciplinary discussion (historical-geographical and sociological) represents an important step in establishing an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the data collected. Personally, it seemed to the author that globalization processes were generally not taken into account by the speakers, but rather they were captured by an interpretive discourse dictated by the sources investigated.

Part Two: Self-Presentation in School Textbooks

Peter Bagoly-Simó (Berlin), Volodymyr Poltorak (Odessa) and Svetlana Potapenko (Kyiv) focused on educational means of maintaining identity and adjusting it.

Romanian textbooks, according to Bagoly-Simó, conceptualize the position of the country as a Western European representative in the east. This, in the opinion of the researcher, creates the image of a civilizational mission of the Romanian people, and therefore substantiates the exceptional position of the country in the region. Changes in the emphasis of geography teaching in Romania over the past two decades have shown impressive significant drift of ideas about the country's place in the world towards the East-West, even at the expense of regional positioning. However, as the previous session showed the fixation in a textbook is not directly related to prevailing ideas (this is evidenced, in particular, by sociological surveys).

Continuing the theme of the conceptualization of the boundary of the national space, Poltorak noted that the school historical atlases of the Lower Danubian countries use geographic objects for this purpose, in particular the Danube. The culture and history of the Lower Danube are presented in the national history programmes of Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria and Russia (which indirectly influences the teaching of history in secondary schools regarding the unrecognized Transnistrian Moldavian Republic). The geographic region is a promising link of cross-border ties. However, local students do not have a coherent and conceptual picture of the past and the present of neighboring nations. From the national point of view, the integrity of the national historical narrative is traced, but in the periphery, in areas such as the Lower Danube, local students receive fragmentary and often conflicting knowledge of history. This feature is accentuated when comparing the educational materials of neighboring countries. The interconnected historically grounded claims made by the Romanians and Ukrainians on the Lower Danube rivers due to Moldova's drift in the near future will slow down the globalization processes in the region, continuing the trend of cautious and even defensive attitude towards the neighbor. One of the organizers, Sebastian Lentz, pointed out that, of course, the educational card should be perceived not only in terms of "truthfulness" (adequacy) of the historical process, but also as a separate technology for the formation of identity and its support. And here it will be very difficult to retreat from adopted stereotypical representations, from generalizations and simplifications - and, consequently, differences in different national traditions. Europeanization as a manifestation of globalization is parallel to the national educational process by the discourse, which if it falls into the training courses, is then viewed through the prism of actual political interests.

According to Svetlana Potapenko, Ukrainian school textbooks define the 16th-18th centuries as the "Golden Age" of Cossack Ukraine. She analyzed the image of Cossacks during this period in the current curriculum and textbooks for Ukrainian schools. The Cossack period, Potapenko emphasized, is exclusive, since the Cossacks succeeded in creating / restoring the state. No other similar historical analogy succeeded. In discussing her contribution, German colleagues generally emphasized the romantic perception of the Cossacks in Europe and, having been surprised by Ukrainian historians, suggested the commonality of the Ukrainian and Russian Cossacks (and the latter is stereotypical associated with foreign campaigns of the Russian army). According to the author of this report, it is very difficult to determine the place of representations of the Cossack period in designing the attitude towards globalization, especially considering the inherent anti-Polonism and anti-Turkism inherited from the Soviet system of education. It is the illumination of the formation, prosperity and crisis of "Cossack Ukraine" that lays the foundations for a pessimistic view of the hostile environment. Instead, the mutual influence and cultural ties, and economic cooperation of the era of early modern-day globalization, are at the periphery of the students' attention.

Part Three: Concepts of Space

Peter Balogh (Budapest), Alexander Zabirko (Münster) and Jörg Stadelbauer (Freiburg) plunged into the methodological depths of the formation of educational programs.

Balogh analyzed spatial concepts in Hungarian school textbooks as part of a wider project. Hungary is a country that in recent years has been actively changing its role in the European and global context. The strict homogeneity of the material of textbooks on geography in the era of state socialism preceded the marketing and diversification of the concepts of textbooks in the 1990s and 2000s. The recent years have again signaled the concentration of the market in the hands of several selected national publishers, although there is still room for educators to include materials outside the compulsory national curriculum.

Jörg Stadelbauer spoke about the initiative of George Ecker's Institute to hold bilateral discussions between Soviet and German geography experts on 1980s textbooks. They aimed, in the context of a comprehensive analysis of curricula and textbooks, to develop proposals for the improvement of the educational process. Both sides agreed on the principles of the development of the textbook that the other country should not be discriminated against, but regarded positively and realistically.

Alexander Zabirko presented a comparative study of Ukrainian textbooks on the history of state and law. Particular attention was paid to the seven most striking textbooks on the subject published since 2000 on the recommendation of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, which are used as standard lecture courses for law schools of higher educational institutions. While paying much attention to the state, modern Ukrainian higher education does not take on the prominent role of European law, nor its influence on Ukraine during the millennium. Zabirko finally poses the question: Is historical analysis limited by the level of legal

dogma, or can the author of the textbook allow himself to proceed from the fact that the history of law is part of a larger area of cultural history and ideas?

Consequently, the third session of discussion determined that the areas of "Historical Hungary" (the Carpathian Basin) are in general the territory of studying the past of Hungary; that the modern, special course of the history of state and law of Ukraine examines the space in the continuous political and administrative dynamics, but ignores intellectual history and culturology; and the Soviet - German Dialogue of the 1980s was based on the principle of "Say either good or nothing."

In conclusion, it was clear that the issue of borders between national ranges is the red thread woven through almost all the presentations. Geography in some countries follows history (as in Hungary, where the Carpathian region is three times larger than the modern country studied in geography as the only physical and geographical space), or history follows geography (as in the case of Ukraine and partly in Romania), or they are closely intertwined (the history and geography of Poland with claims to the Eastern Crests, along with the West Crests). Historical borders as a precedent are perceived in most Eastern European and Central European countries. This poses a threat to international relations. The absence of bilateral dialogues exacerbates the existing gap between educational systems, while hampering the Europeanization of certain countries. German scientists are surprised to note the similarity of modern trends in Eastern Europe with centuries-old trends in Western Europe. Then such "historical battles of the peoples" made the First World War inevitable, dictating the scenario to both the peoples and their governments.

Russia between the West and the East

Within the framework of the symposium, in addition to the speeches of guest speakers, there were also two side events: Nikolaus Katzer's lecture "Playing the West and the East: Russia's Self-Positioning and School Textbooks and Social History" as well as an open interview with the respected scientist Steffi Marung "Between the North Atlantic and the North Pacific - Russia's role as an intermediary in Europe and Asia". Unlike the conference itself, both events took place in German, primarily because of the public importance of the issues. Katzer - the director of the German Historical Institute in Moscow since 2010, - touched upon both his traditional statements of Russian historical education and current trends, in particular the increasing importance of highlighting ties with China and Asia in general in Russian schools. He is interested in the social system and social changes in the wars and revolutions, as well as modern science and technology in Russia. Katzer acknowledged the difficulty of implementing his mission as a cross-border mediator and at the same time a historian, but he guided his inner conviction: "As a historian, I would like to preserve interest in history. Every generation and every person must again and again feel a keen interest in the secrets of the past that put under question the formation and transformation of cultures and countries".

The general conclusions from the conference were summed up by Sebastian Lentz, who noted the predominance of the hermeneutic method of research, along with the grave practicality of

the underestimated constructivist. According to Lentz, the study of mechanisms for forming images of a separate and common past is fertile ground for follow-up of this direction of research. In the near future a brief overview of reports will be published, and a special collection of articles on the materials of the symposium is also scheduled to be published.

To summarize, the productivity of the interdisciplinary approach should be applauded, but the symposium itself showed the absence of points of intersection between the interests of geographers and historians from different countries. The development of a common methodology and methodological apparatus is still ahead. Most of the reports resembled lectures and discussions were hampered by the lack of a platform and a commonly formulated problem. As for me, one problem is obvious: the deepening of an already forgotten memory of conflicts among the peoples of Eastern Europe is the result of existing school curricula on history and geography. The prospects of the region have been trapped in the multiple claims of national narratives. Finding intersections and time-tested principles such as "Speak well, or nothing about a neighbor" are topics for future dialogues.

Review was published first time: Historians.in.ua

Volodymyr Poltorak, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of History of Ukraine, I.I.Mechnikodrv Odessa National University.