

## PHANTOM BORDERS IN THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF EAST CENTRAL EUROPE: AN INTRODUCTION

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### 1 Phantom borders and electoral geography in Ukraine

Phantom borders as we understand them are political borders, which politically or legally do not exist anymore, but seem to appear in different forms and modes of social action and practices today, such as voting behaviour (HIRSCHHAUSEN et. al 2015). Considering the visibility of historical borders in the territorial distribution of election results, the question occurs as to whether this visibility indicates a persistence of historical (social or political) spaces, or why else these phantom borders seem to be visible.

The territorial patterns of election results in Ukraine since independence show a similar picture in most of these elections. While local and regional results may differ depending on whether they are presidential, parliamentary or local or regional elections, we nearly almost see an obvious divide between eastern and southern, and central and western Ukraine; the regional patterns being even more fragmented.

The regional macro-pattern appears astonishingly similar to historical regions, and thus historical borders. As we know, the territory of contemporary Ukraine has been part of different empires and states in the past. Ukraine is a fairly new state, which, aside from short periods of independence during the Ukrainian People's Republic (1917–1921) or the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (1918–1919), was only founded in 1991 (KAPPELER 2009; MAGOCSI 2010). The shape of Ukraine today is the same as that of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic since 1954, when Khrushchev gave Crimea as a present to the Ukrainian SSR. Before that, different regions of contemporary Ukraine were, in changing constellations, part of Russia, the Habsburg Empire, the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Hungary, if we focus only on the last 150 years (KAPPELER 2009; MAGOCSI 2010).

Considering the visibility of historical borders in the territorial distribution of election results in Ukraine, does this visibility indicate a persistence of historical (social, economic, cultural or political) spaces? If not, why else, and how, do these phantom borders or regions seem to be still relevant? Although phantom borders are our research focus, the question behind the phenomena of occurring phantoms of historical spatial orders is, how does history matter in contemporary political behaviour and space?

To explain and understand the spatial divide of electoral results is one of the main topics of electoral studies. When we look closely at the complex history of what today is Ukraine and its complex composition of ethnicities, use of languages or religion as well as social and economic factors, we may find this a challenging task. Electoral interpretations in the media dealing with the case of Ukraine, however, tend to see a clear East–West divide – exactly the divide which nowadays is prominent in politics and discourse inside and outside of Ukraine, and which seems to offer an easy explanation of current events. As we will show, this is not the most convincing one.

Some authors have complemented the East–West divide by a bit more differentiation, finding fragmentations into East, South, Centre and West (e.g. BIRCH 2000; CLEM and CRAUMER 2008; COLTON 2011). A few studies recognise and analyse even more spatial patterns, for instance, BIRCH (1995), who concentrates on the intra-regional differences in western parts of the Ukraine, or OSIPIAN and OSIPIAN (2012) who analyse the election results from an eastern Ukrainian perspective to point out that this part often perceived as homogenous is very diverse in itself and needs a nuanced analysis. BARRINGTON and HERRON (2004) propose eight regions of analysis to escape the one-sided pattern of “the East” and “the West”, complemented by Centre and South.

Whatever regional segmentation is applied, in most studies, regions are considered crucial and persistent, and justified or explained by history and historical legacy. A number of studies deal with the question of which other compositional factors play a role and/or are crucial as regional effects, e.g. economics, use of language, ethnicity etc. Various studies try to show that the regional variable decreases in importance, while other compositional factors become more important, indicating that the regional variable is dominant, but not always and not everywhere (e.g. HESLI et al. 1998; BIRCH 2000; BARRINGTON and HERRON 2004; MYKHENKO 2009; COLTON 2011).

Studies that focus on a regional variable as most important or one of the most important explanatory factors, assign first and foremost history and legacy or a historical regional context to it. MYKHENKO describes this often used East-West divide as “Ukraine’s geo-cultural divide”, mentioned for instance in almost all publications on the Orange Revolution (2009, 283). It is functionalised and exploited as pro-Russian eastern Ukraine and pro-European western Ukraine (BIRCH 1995; BIRCH 2000; HARAN 2002; BARRINGTON 2002; ROPER and FESNIC 2003; BARRINGTON and HERRON 2004; KATCHANOVSKI 2006; MELESHEVICH 2006; COLTON 2011), also for the latest elections in 2014 (SIMON 2014); the political parties are reduced to the question of whether they are pro-Russian or pro-European even in statements and articles of social scientists, leaving no space in-between. This attribution comes usually with the assumption of a more vs. less democratic attitude of those parties and the population voting for them. This again becomes associated with the belonging to past empires, usually identifying the pro-European stance with the Habsburg Empire, and the pro-Russian with the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (BIRCH 1995; BIRCH 2000; ROPER and FESNIC 2003). Other affiliations used are pro-communist/pro-Russian vs. pro-nationalist/pro-independence (KATCHANOVSKI 2006). The underlying idea is a persistence of a certain political identity or culture across time, but firmly located in space. Other aspects of orientation besides “East” and “West” and “pro-Russian” and “pro-European”, such as “pro-Ukrainian”, “none of them” or “both depending on context”, do not seem to be a political or analytical option.

For many reasons the assignment between political identities, cultures and territory (here in the case of Ukraine) is difficult, complicated and surely not helpful in understanding and explaining the spatial pattern if overly simplified. More often than not, orientalist stereotypes are evoked and transported, and a narrow culturalist generalisation of Eastness

vs. Westness is employed. It is to say, there is more regional differentiation than (pro-Russian) east and (pro-European) west (1.1), there are often myths of political cultures assigned to empires and states (1.2), the assumed transfer of culture and identity across different political systems is not sufficiently explained (1.3), the programmatic dynamics within the parties and in-between parties are high and do not allow easy or unambiguous allocations (1.4), and finally: Some studies of political identities and preferences tell often slightly different than easily spatialised or historicised stories (1.5).

### 1.1 More regional differentiation than (pro-Russian) east and (pro-European) west

A closer look at electoral maps show complex regional fragmentations and an electoral behaviour which does not correspond to an East-West divide: For instance, inhabitants of the regions of Transcarpathia and Chernivtsy (historical north of Bukovyna) in western Ukraine seem to vote similarly to those in the Eastern regions. Obviously this does not fit into the main argument of the “Habsburg” West-oriented areas which the Bukovyna and also Transcarpathia had been a part of. Also, Eastern Ukraine shows itself to be something other than a homogenous macro-region when we look for instance at the results of Tymoshenko and Yanukovich in the 2010 elections. In most recent studies, phenomena like these which do not fit into this East-West divide are simply ignored.

### 1.2 The myths of political cultures and identities assigned to empires and states

The construction of a pro-Russian East of Ukraine and a pro-European West of Ukraine are more often than not connected to orientalist stereotypes of a less democratic legacy vs. a more democratic legacy due to historical experience. In his study MYKHENKO summarises the literature referring to the Orange Revolution as a celebration of “a ‘civilization breakaway’ from Russia, confirming Ukraine’s long-overdue ‘return to Europe’”. (MYKHENKO 2009, 279) Interesting about the assigned political identities is that pro-Russian and pro-European are inadequately identified with further attributions such as pro-independence for pro-European, and hence, logically, anti-independence for pro-Russian. The latter is usually not expressed explicitly, but it is inherently part of the attribution. In consequence, assignments of politi-

cal identity are fuzzy in their apparent un-ambiguity. Beyond that, the description of what exactly is to be the political identity and experience of past empires and states remains sufficiently unclear and cryptic, neglecting historical changes even during the times referred to. One should bear in mind that unambiguous political identity of individuals, let alone of collectives or “regions” is so rare as to be impossible, and that both the Habsburg and the Russian Empires in their turbulent history have accumulated historical (social, cultural, political) experiences of nearly every kind imaginable. Astonishing is the fact that orientalist stereotypes are still (or again) functional today and particularly (re)produced by social scientists and intellectuals. Of course, Russian heritage and influence on Ukrainian politics is usually regarded as negative and problematic while the European/“Western” influence is regarded as normal and desirable (MYKHENKO 2009; COLTON 2011).

### 1.3 Transfer of a certain culture and identity across different political system changes

The studies do not so much scrutinise the fact that such myths are made functional or transferred to present societies, and how this is done; rather, they reproduce them. Regional belonging is essentialised as a matter of “cultural tradition”. (BIRCH 1995) Studies refer to the past affiliation to a state or empire and the (mostly not sufficiently qualified) participation in their political institutions as decisive for the emergence and permanent structuration of political culture in present societies. (BIRCH 1995; BIRCH 2000; KATCHANOVSKI 2006) “Dnieper Ukraine has longer association with Russia (in both its imperial and Soviet manifestations), less contact with the West, and a longer experience of communism. It almost goes without saying that these characteristics should incline its residents to be more pro-Russian and pro-communist.” (BIRCH 2000, 1025) Thereby comparatively short times under another rule are not properly considered, such as Romanian martial rule from 1918 to 1928 in formerly Austrian Bukovyna, or Polish rule in the interwar period in Galicia in Western Ukraine with its deep and violent interventions into the population structure and cultural upbringing of the population. The same goes for proto-democratic traditions in the Cossack regions of Central and Eastern Ukraine. The conclusion here should rather be that maybe not the fact of history but the way history is reconstructed in every new master narrative is the adequate question to investigate. One topic here is of course the use of the past by politicians

to mobilise the electorate (OSIPIAN and OSIPIAN 2012). In any case the existence of a persistent and unchanging political identity is an oversimplification, even more its transfer across different political systems.

### 1.4 Political dynamics

Looking at the sometimes eruptive party development and the dynamics within and in between parties in Ukraine, it is hard to say which parties were to be considered as pro-Russian and which pro-European, and even harder to determine whether a party might be more or less democratic, let alone the question of whether the electorate even of apparently “non-democratic” parties can be considered longing for dictatorship and vice versa. The founding and dissolution of parties happens very fast and often; 117 parties were registered in May 2010, for example. (RAZUMKOV CENTRE 2010, 9) Regional election results may be a consequence of only regionally focussed parties and candidates, (ibid. 25) while the multitude of parties is a result of conflicts within the parties which often lead to splits. (GÖLS 2008, 51) The dynamics of orientations of and between parties and party members is continuously changing. At the same time, there are no discernible differences between the parties concerning key issues of the political and economic system of the country. About the Party of the Regions, the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko, and Our Ukraine we read: “Each party is in support of market economy, democracy, human rights, and joining the European Union. Also, all three parties use elements of populist demagogy that come from the Socialist era. The major distinction between these parties is in the way they interpret the country’s past.” (OSIPIAN and OSIPIAN 2012, 616) It is not possible to assign parties unambiguously to a particular orientation towards Russia or Europe since what we are dealing with are continuously changing, situational political priorities that might even be intersecting.

### 1.5 Political identities and preferences

It is obviously dangerous to rely only on one type of data for the description and explanation of regions in Ukraine and subsequently subordinate other variables (ethnicity, language, religion) under the assumption of an East-West divide. Some authors combine the regional distribution of election results with the identification of either Ukrainian or Russian speaking and/or ethnically uniform West

vs. East, thus implicating a kind of coincidence of language, ethnic belonging and pro-Russian or pro-Western voting preferences. (O'LOUGHLIN 2001, 3; MYKHENKO 2009, 279; KHMELKO et al. 2011, 96). Questionnaires show however that identities within the Ukraine are not as unambiguous as it may seem or be constructed. A survey by the RAZUMKOV CENTRE in 2006 shows that language is not equivalent to identification with Ukrainian culture: 20% of Russian speakers identified with a Ukrainian cultural tradition, while 25% of Ukrainian speakers identified with Soviet cultural tradition (RAZUMKOV CENTRE 2006). In another opinion poll in 2012 concerning the question of whether people liked to think of themselves as patriots, 82% answered "certainly" or "generally, yes". Those results were similar with slight variations, in the regions considered as suspiciously pro-Russian as the Donbas (Luhans'ka, Donetsk region) (76%), the South (Krym, Odes'ka, Khersons'ka, Mykolaivs'ka region, city of Sevastopol') (73%) or the East (Dnipropetrovs'ka, Zaporivs'ka, Kharkivs'ka region) (79%). (SOTSIOLOGICHNA GRUPA "REITYNG" 2012, 7)

In summary, what all these studies have in common is the assertion of a strong effect of a regional variable and the fact that the answer to the questions of how, why and when the regional factor is intertwined with other compositional factors, how the regional factor is related to history and which regional scales and segments are useful to analyse remains foggy at best. A critical re-evaluation of electoral studies reveals that none really are able to explain the spatial/regional pattern they find. In the end, the case of Ukraine as perceived in different studies indicates that place matters (AGNEW 1996), and that presumably history matters too. It is however not yet distinctly established how they matter, since the use of history as an explanatory variable is inconsistent and maybe impossible to measure through statistical analysis (as the main method for electoral studies). Finally it shows that not only the type of data but also their scale is important, and above all, that the way categories and interpretations are constructed is crucial to the outcome. Scientists thus seem to be trapped in stereotypes of Eastness and Westness; they oversimplify data and explanations in the tradition of orientalisation, as ZARYCKI (2014) has very convincingly analysed for Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, this special issue of *Erdkunde* focuses on different assessments of the role and explanatory value of history for contemporary political behaviour.

## 2 Political behaviour and identity in space and place

The topic of our special issue is located in different fields of political geography since it involves electoral geography, border studies and historical and political geography with their conceptions of the legacies of states and empires. Electoral geography has lost importance in overall political geography approaches, for good reasons. The analysis of phantom borders however might support an advancement and rehabilitation of this discipline. It allows the analysis and understanding of regional differences following the traces of territorial distributions of electoral results as one example. It also allows and requires one to apply various methodological approaches of researching and analysing political behaviour and election results using the advantages and disadvantages of macro- and micro-sociological studies, as well as quantitative and qualitative studies.

Electoral geography basically asks: why do political parties draw more electoral support from some places than from others? And when it comes to political behaviour beyond the electoral act, why do some political initiatives occur more often in these places rather than in others? The question is not only why the attractiveness of political parties/candidates is spatially differentiated, but why these spatial differences seem to redraw political borders/states of the past, i.e. they seem to show the persistence of historical borders and historical spaces. We have discussed this for the case of Ukraine; other case studies about Poland (ZARYCKI 2015; JAŃCZAK 2015), Romania (RAMMELT 2015; ZAMFIRA 2015), Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic (ŠIMON 2015) and other regions in Central and East European countries (ZAMFIRA 2015; BAARS and SCHLOTTMANN 2015) are referred to in the contributions to this volume.

Despite all caveats mentioned above, understanding and explaining electoral maps may reveal a lot about the key questions and phenomena at stake. As the contributions try to show, this persistence or reconstruction of spatial manifestations or materialisations of political systems over long periods of time regardless of the continuity or discontinuity of these systems happen through representations, but also through institutional (including social and cultural) continuity, transmission and re-construction.

Hence, the fact that the modern nation-state governs through space over territory and thus makes the spatialisation of political, social, and cultural phenomena, needs to be considered – under particular consideration of the role of elections within this

endeavour. Further, the effects of spatially charged or grounded identities and cultural distinctions not only as essential elements of the construction of a powerful state, but also as processes of spatial socialisations that are not necessarily political, but may be political exploitable, are relevant avenues. Finally, the borders between states or within states, as the result and material manifestation of the territorialisation of power, but also as distinctions between social groups, are an issue here. The question will be: which spatial and structural effects exactly are pertinent and crucial here, where does their influence originate, and how is it effective? What socio-cultural, possibly spatially mediated practices remain despite population changes, and how are these “spatialisations” of bygone political orders appropriated, used, transformed and exploited by the new inhabitants on the one hand, and the new political order on the other? What are the relations, differences, interdependencies between these two? And finally: What role does family and the transmission of (cultural, spatial) heritage in displaced families play in new spatial contexts?

### 2.1 The nation-state and elections

The visibility of historical borders in electoral maps leads to the question as to how historical territorial limits of a state become visible regardless of the fundamental rescaling processes that have occurred in these states during the last 150 years. How – once established – do state orders remain, be it in discourse or in institutions, procedures, structures and practices. And beyond that, what makes them attractive to be reanimated or reintroduced? What does this tell us about the agencies operating those reanimations and their part in designing and developing the state nowadays? Developing and controlling territory as a powerful instrument involves not only the institutional/spatial structure, but also the application of adequate geopolitical images. It furthermore involves the transmission of such images to the individuals and their implementation into daily practice. In a next step, it may develop through daily social practice into a spatial phenomenon and a spatially defined identity. This identity may then be addressed to gain support or to legitimise political hierarchies and programmes. This involves the establishment or sustaining of images in institutions and mechanisms at different scales/levels – from the individual to the local to the regional to the national and international and vice versa. So the issue here is

how processes on different scales refer to historical orders. Key questions of electoral/political geography as PATTIE and JOHNSTON (2009, 405) formulate it are: “Do people behave and think as they do because of who they are (compositional) or because of where they are (contextual)?” Even though the line between those layers seems sometimes blurred it becomes particularly crucial in areas where ethnic cleansings and an exchange of population has taken place, like in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Ukraine. This is particularly true when voting behaviour seems to reflect the spatial political order that was in place before this exchange, so personal continuity cannot be a viable explanation.

### 2.2 Space and identity

Space and territory-related identities, so our assumption, are necessary or at least useful to win elections and to sustain in modern times territorially mediated political orders and systems of power. Parties and candidates battle about the votes in the territory to sustain their power and often address aspects of identity relating to locality and region to gain support for a seat in the (national) parliament. Although not all aspects of regional identity are necessarily political, but first of all social and cultural, most layers or dimensions of regional identity or belonging can eventually be politicised – such as, for instance, language or religion – and be used for political concerns. Of course, these differences must first be constructed, accepted and internalised as relevant for political and cultural scissions.

Spatially mediated identity even on a local level might then be the result of geopolitical conceptions of space that are transmitted through media or school textbooks. They may be a constituent of social, economic or cultural capital, as ZARYCKI (2015) discusses in his contribution. But they are not received by a society, locality or region that is entirely void of spatial identity: Usually we deal with pre-existing (though shifting) identities that derive in sedentary societies from former political or/and socio-cultural “socialisations” and “structurations” of space, which are embedded in the daily practices of the individuals and collectives. Practices and images of spatially mediated identities exist over time and sometimes become to a certain degree culturally, socially or politically charged. They receive different treatments – promotion, prevention, prohibition and so on – and contextualisation, when new political systems or states are put into place.

### 2.3 Borders between states and individuals – past or present

Distinction and the construction of identity convey the differentiation between the “me” or “us” and the “other”. In the context of (modern) statehood based on social disparity and inequality and on power organised through territory, the demarcation of political and social borders in space is the consequence. The individual, connected to certain norms and values, is located “here” – “the other” is on the opposite side of a borderline, in the next village, in another region, in another country – in Central Europe or in Eastern Europe, in the European Union, in Russia. Each scale requires an adequate geopolitical imaginary. The organisation of political space – and particularly the spatial organisation of voting, as in the construction of voting districts – mediates borders inside states, as administrative borders. These subdivisions have a history of their own. They are embedded in social and political practices as well as in institutions. JOHNSON et al. (2011, 63) have described it very adequately when stating the role of borders as social and political as well as cultural: “The strands of power that constitute (and are constitutive of) the border make it increasingly difficult to think of certain borders as local and others as global. It is the increasing complexity of the contexts of borders that forces scholars to reflect borders in relation to such categories as space/territory/region, agency and power, to social practices such as politics, governance and economics, and to cultural processes such as ethnicity and spatial (national) socializations. Contextual research gains added value in comparative perspective. An analysis of the geo-historical forms of spatial socialization and daily life experiences related to identity, citizenship, and politico-territorial loyalties can reveal the roles of borders in the making of the geographies of ideologies and hegemony in states.”

The issue of scale concerns first of all the analytical and methodological perspective. NEWMAN and PAASI (1998, 198) indicate that the border plays a rather socio-spatial role for the individual living close to it since it is/was part of daily spatial practices, while for someone living far from it, the border is/was more of a social construct of statehood. So the research on different levels of the phantom border might result in different explanations of the phenomena, but also, as the studies in this issue show, disclose different aspects or avatars of the same phantom borders.

### 2.4 (Geo-)political images

(Geo-)political images may range from rather individual and societal perspectives of phantom borders, to a regional political concept of a phantom region, towards different images of geostrategic thinkers and finally, to colonial perceptions and orientalist imaginations and perspectives of Western European imaginations of East Central Europe, and vice versa; including the self-orientalisation of countries of the East as different from what is perceived (desirably or perniciously) as “the West”. This indicates the manifold aspects of geopolitical images and again their relevance on different scales, but also the broad varieties of how they materialise, are distributed and institutionalised. An interesting and important question here is: how are these images and imaginaries constructed and in which way do they differentiate between the “own” and the “other”? And most interestingly, how do those images of spatially mediated identity “take space” or become “socially and culturally spatialised” – i.e. translated into spatial practice. The analysis of political behaviour in this issue is one approach to these questions.

## 3 The articles in this issue

This special issue brings together selected papers from the conference “Phantom Borders in Political Behaviour and Electoral Geography in East Central Europe”. It was jointly organised by JAROSŁAW JANCZAK (Frankfurt/Oder, Poznań), THOMAS SERRIER (Paris, Frankfurt/Oder) and SABINE V. LÖWIS (Berlin) and took place in November 2013 at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) and at the Collegium Polonicum in Slubice and was hosted by the BMBF-funded research network “Phantom Borders in East Central Europe” ([www.phantomgrenzen.eu](http://www.phantomgrenzen.eu)). The authors come from different disciplinary fields and locate their studies in the intersection of these fields.

The contributions address phantoms of different spaces in various manners and diverse ways and approaches. They describe more or less phantom regions which are demarcated by either borders of nation-states/empires or areas which were characterised by a concentration of a certain ethnic and/or religious group. ZARYCKI (2015) and JANCZAK (2015) both discuss the Polish case. While ZARYCKI proposes an interpretation using forms of social capital in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu and focuses on the national level, JANCZAK describes different analytical levels, down-scaling the phenomena of the Polish phantom

borders from the national to the regional and local scale. He also uses a mixture of methods, combining quantitative with qualitative, to show how the image of the phantom border changes from different points of view. ZARYCKI deals with the perspective on the national level, critically discussing orientalist stereotypes of the positively depicted western and the negatively connoted eastern (formerly Russian) part of the Polish territory. Using Bourdieu's concept of social capital allows him to describe and understand historical heritage without a fall-back into "orientalism" and to offer an alternative explanation.

ŠIMON (2015) and RAMMELT (2015) describe phantom regions in surprising ethnic and religious effects on political behaviour in the Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia and Romania. ŠIMON shows the voting patterns in the historic area of the Sudety region with reference to turn-out. Astonishing is a significantly high turn-out in the region where population exchanges took place twice. In a second case study, he shows similar voting patterns of the Catholic population and the votes for Catholic parties in the elections of the 1920s and 1930s and in the 1990s and 2010s. RAMMELT focuses on regional patterns of social mobilisation in Romania by showing that in Transylvania, which in the past was known for its ethnic minorities and religious pluralism, social mobilization is higher than in the rest of the country except for the urban centres.

An additional explanation for the higher share in social mobilisation is offered by the multi-country analysis of ZAMFIRA (2015). Her article discusses the effects of historic ethnic minorities on voting behaviour in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia which were characterised by multi-ethnic regions. ZAMFIRA shows that parties which focus on minority interests often get their votes from a population that does not belong to the represented ethnic group, a fact that she explains with the multi-ethnic experiences of these voters in their own or their families' pasts. In her paper she shows under which conditions such an effect most likely occurs, and how to analyse it adequately.

BAARS and SCHLOTTMANN (2015) finally interpret the phantom border approach from a slightly different angle than the other authors, as they describe the contemporary construction of the Central German Metropolitan Region as a continuously changing spatial concept in political discourse. Here the focus is on the multi-dimensional character of regions with contextually changing and fluid spatialities, which in the end are spatial phantoms.

All authors use and approach the concept of phantom borders in different ways. All are based on empirical work and discuss sometimes astonishing spa-

tial patterns in an innovative way beyond stereotypes, avoiding historicising simplifications, and instead critically and analytically dealing with historical legacies and their social, cultural and political repercussions.

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