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**CENTRAL UKRAINE AS A HISTORICAL REGION:
THE PROBLEM OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION**

Abstract. *The purpose of the article is a scientific theoretical conceptualization of the definition "Central Ukraine" as a research concept. In modern historical science the lack of comprehensive research, the subject of which would be the study of Central Ukraine as a separate region, is one of significant gaps. The analysis of historiographic research on the issue proved that during the use of this concept there is a toponymic uncertainty concerning the territories of this region; there is an alternative interpretation of the concept "Central Ukraine"; multiplicity of interpretations of this definition. The research methodology is based on the principles of historicism and objectivity, application of interdisciplinary methodical optics: critical analysis, synthesis, systematization, comparative studies, geographical method, generalization of discovered and analyzed materials. The scientific novelty consists in the fact that the research fills in the existing lacuna of scientific knowledge, it contributes*

to the development of historical regionalism, without the study of which it is impossible to understand the processes of the Ukrainian history fully; the research contributes to the formation and updating of the scientific conceptual apparatus. **The Conclusion.** Among historians, there is a territorial and terminological uncertainty in using the concept “Central Ukraine”. Researchers who use this term lack a professional argument for defining the boundaries of this region. That is why, there is a considerable confusion of the terminological apparatus when using this definition. Taking into consideration the confusion of terminological apparatus, the authors proposed their own original interpretation of the concept “Central Ukraine”. Criteria for the boundaries of this historical region have been elaborated, and two maps have been created. It has been proposed to use the concept of “Middle Ukraine” as a synonym for “Central Ukraine”.

According to the authors, Central Ukraine is a separate microregion of Right Bank Ukraine, which has the characteristics of a historical region associated with the formation and development of the Ukrainian Cossacks in the 16th – 18th centuries and its revival in the form of free Cossacks during the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917 – 1921. According to the authors' conclusions and modern territorial and administrative division of Ukraine, Central Ukraine region covers the territories of Kirovohrad, Cherkasy, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolayiv, Poltava, and Zaporizhzhia regions.

Key words: Central Ukraine, Middle Ukraine, historical regionalism, map, historical region.

ЦЕНТРАЛЬНА УКРАЇНА ЯК ІСТОРИЧНИЙ РЕГІОН: ПРОБЛЕМА ТЕОРЕТИЧНОЇ КОНЦЕПТУАЛІЗАЦІЇ

Анотація. *Мета дослідження* – наукова теоретична концептуалізація дефініції “Центральна Україна” як дослідницького концепту. Однією із суттєвих прогалин сучасної історичної науки є відсутність комплексних досліджень, предметом яких стало б вивчення Центральної України як окремого регіону. Аналіз історіографічного доробку проблематики довів, що під час використання цього поняття присутня топонімічна невизначеність стосовно теренів цього регіону; трапляється альтернативність тлумачень концепту “Центральна Україна”; множинність трактування цієї дефініції. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на принципах історизму та об’єктивності, застосуванні інтердисциплінарних методичних оптик: критичного аналізу, синтезу, систематизації, компаративістики, географічного методу, узагальнення виявлених і оброблених матеріалів. **Наукова новизна** полягає у тому, що дослідження заповнює наявну лакуну наукового пізнання, сприяє розвитку історичної регіоналістики, без вивчення якої неможливе осмислення процесів української історії в усій повноті; сприяє формуванню та оновленню наукового понятійного апарату. **Висновки.** Серед істориків існує просторова та термінологічна невизначеність під час використання концепту “Центральна Україна”. Дослідникам, які послуговуються цим терміном, бракує фахової аргументації визначення меж означеного регіону. Це вносить значну плутанину в термінологічний апарат під час використання означеної дефініції. Зважаючи на це, авторами запропоновано власне оригінальне тлумачення концепту “Центральна Україна”. Розроблено критерії меж історичного регіону, створено дві карти. Запропоновано використання поняття “Серединна Україна” як синоніму до дефініції “Центральна Україна”. На думку авторів, Центральна Україна є окремим мікрорегіоном Правобережжя, що має ознаки історичного регіону, пов’язаного зі становленням та розвитком українського козацтва в XVI – XVIII ст. та його відродженням у формі вільного козацтва періоду Української революції 1917 – 1921 рр. За висновками авторів, відповідно до сучасного територіально-адміністративного поділу України регіон Центральна Україна охоплює території окремих районів Кіровоградської, Черкаської, Дніпропетровської, Миколаївської, Полтавської, Запорізької областей.

Ключові слова: Центральна Україна, Серединна Україна, історична регіоналістика, карта, історичний регіон.

The Problem Statement. Research papers on Ukrainian regional studies are a promising direction. This is proven even by a cursory review of the leading Ukrainian scientific and historical journals topics (Tsetsuk & Martyniuk, 2019, pp. 85–95; Kovalova & Smaliukh,

2022, pp. 65–74; Korobka & Korobka, 2022, pp. 19–31; Ruban, 2022, pp. 139–166). The territories of Central Ukraine remain one of the least researched regions. This scientific problem arose under the influence of several factors. The first one is a territorial uncertainty among historians when using the term “Central Ukraine” (Hrytsak, 2021, pp. 238, 242; Mondzik, Kozhen’ovs’kyy, Lyatavets & Tarasyuk, 2017). The territorial uncertainty is explained by the lack of scientifically based criteria for the borders of Central Ukraine, as a research concept. Another problem that arises when historians use the concept “Central Ukraine” is terminological. Researchers use different concepts to designate the territories of this region: South, Steppe Ukraine, Kherson region, Naddnyprianshchyna region (Kuras & Soldatenko, p. 5; Koval’chuk, 2012, pp. 66–86; Boyko, 2015, pp. 24–27). Under the influence of terminological uncertainty, the problem of multiple interpretations of this concept arises, which does not contribute to its clear conceptualization.

The mentioned above nuances complicate the research process of this region, dissolve it in macro-regions: Right Bank Ukraine, Naddnyprianshchyna, Podniprovia and do not contribute to identification, understanding and generalization of the peculiarities of Central Ukraine as a historical region. Professor Valentyn Ivanenko emphasized the problem of actualizing researchers’ focus on the history of microregions, their separation from macroregions, in the article “Regional and Historical Research in Modern Ukraine: Scientific and Socio-cultural Dimension” (Ivanenko, 2004, p. 13).

Therefore, the purpose of our publication is to draw attention to the concept of Central Ukraine as an unresearched region. The article is aimed at scientific substantiation and theoretical conceptualization of this definition; solving the problem of terminological interpretation of this concept; definition of criteria for the borders of Central Ukraine; creation of maps of this region. The objective of the research is not a fundamental revision of historical and geographical, historical and cultural zoning of Ukraine, but clarification and scientific justification of the borders of Central Ukraine.

The authors are aware that the volume of one publication is insufficient for a comprehensive analysis of this little-researched concept. Therefore, attention is focused on the solution of individual research objectives related to the scientific substantiation of the concept “Central Ukraine”. The result of the research can also be seen in the renewal of conceptual and methodological apparatus of Ukrainian regional studies. The territorial method is the basis of the research. Its foundations were laid by Volodymyr Antonovych and Mykhailo Hrushevskyy. They used regional historical research and land direction of scientific studies (Ivanenko, 2004, p. 12). The topic of the publication and setting of scientific objectives require the use of interdisciplinary approaches. A similar methodological strategy promotes correlation and use of methods of history, geography, historical regional studies, and historical mapping. To achieve the scientific goal, the following methods are used: analysis, synthesis, systematization, comparative studies, interdisciplinary methodical optics, geographical method, generalization. We hope that this publication will contribute to the renewal of object-subject field of research and scientific conceptual apparatus, and it will expand the geography of Ukrainian regional studies.

The Analysis of Recent Research Papers and Publications. The analysis of the research papers of historians who used the term Central Ukraine influenced the article issue formation and definition of research objectives. A brief analysis and review of individual professional publications convinced us that among historians there is no common view on understanding of the concept Central Ukraine, sometimes there is toponymic uncertainty

regarding the boundaries of this historical region. Different borders of Central Ukraine appear in the studies, but their justification is missing, so the selection criteria remain unclear. In our opinion, this is one of the reasons why, compared to other regions, Central Ukraine is on the margins of scientific regional studies.

From the research issue formation, we will move on to the analysis of specific historiographical examples. In general, historians rarely use the term “Central Ukraine” in their papers. One of those who uses this concept is Yaroslav Hrytsak, a historian. In his research, he uses the terms “Central Ukraine” and “Centre of Ukraine”, equating them (Hrytsak, 2021, pp. 238, 242; Hrytsak, 2011, pp. 181, 192–194, 334–337). Let’s consider specific examples of the scholar’s application of this definition. In the book “Global History of Ukraine: Overcoming the Past”, Ya. Hrytsak, while analyzing the processes of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917 – 1921, writes the following: “On December 14, the Directory occupied Kyiv... But within two weeks, the Bolsheviks took Kyiv again. The government and troops of the UNR (the Ukrainian People’s Republic) retreated to Central Ukraine” (Hrytsak, 2021, p. 238). What Ya. Hrytsak understands by Central Ukraine can be seen from another research of this author: “Essay on the History of Ukraine: Formation of Modern Ukrainian Nation in the 19th – 20th Centuries”. In the chapter “In the Heat of War and Revolution: 1914 – 1921” we come across the following thesis: “On February 2, 1919, the Directory and the government left Kyiv and moved to Podillia, first to Vinnytsia, later to Rivne, and from mid-June to Kamianets-Podilskyi” (Hrytsak, 1996, p. 145).

The analysis of fragments of two books by this author, devoted to the issues of the liberation struggles of 1917 – 1922, allows us to understand that Ya. Hrytsak included Podillia and Volhynia in Central Ukraine. However, an attentive reader has a question: to which historical region does Ya. Hrytsak refer the territories of Kyiv, Katerynoslav, Yelyzavethrad, if the cities of Vinnytsia, Rivne, Kamianets-Podilskyi are the territory of Central Ukraine? We do not find an answer to this question on the pages of Ya. Hrytsak’s research paper. There is no justification for the borders criteria of Central Ukraine, as a historical region of Ukraine, so readers and researchers can only guess about them.

In the book “Global History of Ukraine: Overcoming the Past” we come across the following sentence: “...The government and troops of the Ukrainian People’s Republic retreated to Central Ukraine. There, in July of 1919, they joined the government and the ZUNR army, which lost the war in Galicia and moved to former lands occupied by Russia” (Hrytsak, 2021, p. 238) (We underlined the word *there*. – The authors). That is, Western Podillia and Kamianets, where the Galician army retreated, Ya. Hrytsak considers Central Ukraine.

In another case, during the analysis of the Jewish pogroms in Ukraine in 1919, which the historian for some reason calls “a distinctive feature of the Ukrainian revolution”, Ya. Hrytsak notes that during the year of 1919 the base of the UNR army was precisely Central Ukraine, but he does not indicate its territorial boundaries again (Hrytsak, 2021, p. 242). In our opinion, this state of affairs introduces considerable confusion into understanding of the complex course of events of the liberation struggle of 1917 – 1922. We can only assume that Ya. Hrytsak used the concept Central Ukraine as a synonym for Great Ukraine or Naddniprianska Ukraine, located between Western and Eastern Ukraine. However, even in such a territorial interpretation of this concept, it remains unclear: how can the path of retreat of the UNR army in February of 1919 from Kyiv to Podillia and Volhynia be considered the retreat to Central Ukraine? (Hrytsak, 2021, p. 238).

A geographical view of generally accepted or agreed borders of Central Ukraine, which most often mean the territories of modern Kirovohrad, Cherkasy, Poltava, Dnipropetrovsk and Vinnytsia regions, and the analysis of the military events of 1919, taking into account the geographical method, allows us to conclude that the territory of Central Ukraine was controlled by the UNR army only at the beginning of 1919 and in August of 1919. It should be noted that, only on the condition that we agree to recognize Kyiv region as part of Central Ukraine, although the author of this version, Ya. Hrytsak, does not consider Kyiv to be a part of this region: there should be mentioned the thesis about the retreat of the UNR army from Kyiv to Central Ukraine (Hrytsak, 2021, p. 238).

In the collection of essays by Ya. Hrytsak “Passion for Nationalism” in the publication with the rhetorical title: “Who are the Ukrainians and what do they Want?”, borrowed from M. Hrushevskiyi, we come across a mention of the Centre of Ukraine. This time in the context of analysis of electoral preferences of the population of Ukraine (Hrytsak, 2011, pp. 334–337). In this case, the historian applies the division of Ukraine by political sympathies according to the criteria: West – East – South – Centre. According to the logic of a similar approach, should we understand the North to be the Centre? But only Ya. Hrytsak knows the answer to this question.

In the essay “Non-Euclidean Ukraine” of the section “Conclusions, Forecasts and Recommendations” we find statistics of the historical sympathies of the population of Ukraine, compiled according to a geographical approach and divided into regions: Western, Central, Eastern, Southern (Hrytsak, 2011, pp. 191–193). In another case: the table of ratings of trust in power structures and other social institutions in a regional section – we come across a similar, but slightly different distribution by regions: Western, Central, Eastern, Southern, Kyiv (Hrytsak, 2011, p. 194)

Thus, based on the analysis of several papers of one of the most authoritative historians of Ukraine and Europe, we notice the above-outlined problem of toponymic and terminological uncertainty when using the definition “Central Ukraine”, the lack of its theoretical justification and criteria for the selected territorial boundaries of this region.

In the introductory article to the collective monograph “Confederation and Regionalism in Ukrainian State Creation (1917 – 1920)”, which was published in 2001, Professor Ivan Kuras emphasized the importance of studying regional aspects of the Ukrainian history without understanding which it is impossible to understand the past, as separate regions, and the state as a whole. He offered his own vision of the regional division of Ukraine, formed under the influence of historical circumstances: “The specifics of the development of individual regions are well known (Donetsk and Kryvyi Rih basins, Left Bank in general; Eastern Galicia, Bukovyna, Transcarpathia – the western territories; the South – the so-called Novorossiya, the South-Western region”, and more precisely, the Dnieper region – the central part of Ukraine from Poltava region to Western Volyn and Polissia)” (Kuras & Soldatenko, 2001, pp. 4–5).

Such division raises many questions: from the use of Russian imperial narratives, a talk about “Novorossiya”, and the criteria for the chosen borders of the so-called “South-Western Territory”, which, according to I. Kuras, stretches from the Dnieper River to Western Volyn, to misunderstanding of on what grounds Kryvyi Rih was included in Left Bank, because a large part of it is also the territory of Right Bank. In contrast to Ya. Hrytsak, I. Kuras notes what he means by Central Ukraine, but he also does not provide justification of the criteria for the chosen borders (Kuras & Soldatenko, 2001, p. 5).

In foreign historiography, one of the latest studies devoted to the issues problems of Central Ukraine is a collective monograph of Polish historians entitled “The Poles in Central

and Eastern Ukraine in 1832 – 1921” (Mondzik, Kozhen’ovs’kyy, Lyatavets & Tarasyuk, 2017). The book is based on the territorial method. But its authors do not explain in a single line why they include the territory from Galicia to Donbas as part of Central Ukraine. There is no justification for the borders of Central Ukraine defined by the authors on the pages of the monograph, that is why, its criteria remain unknown (Mondzik, Kozhen’ovs’kyy, Lyatavets & Tarasyuk, 2017).

Borys Shevchenko and Vadym Kolechkin, researchers from Kirovohrad region, in the annotation to the publication “Battle for Central Ukraine (Military confrontation between the Red Army and the Wehrmacht in Kirovohrad region in January – March of 1944)” write that the book is dedicated to the events of the history of Kirovohrad region during World War II. That is, in this case, by Central Ukraine, local historians mean only the territory of Kirovohrad region (Kolyechkin, Shevchenko, 2021, p. 2).

Local historians of Kirovohrad region often use the definition Central Ukraine, understanding by it only the territories of this region, which also unjustifiably narrows this concept spatially. A similar approach to understanding the borders of Central Ukraine in their research is related to several factors: geographical and axiological. In the 90s of the 20th century – at the beginning of the 21st century the research papers of geographers who managed to calculate the geographic and geometric centres of Ukraine appeared (Shevchenko, 1993, pp. 23–28; Munich, 2002, pp. 2–7). Using modern scientific methods, scholars determined the coordinates of the geographic centre of Ukraine for the first time. The principle of equidistant from the extreme borders of our country’s borders: southern, northern, eastern and western was chosen as the main approach to scientific calculations. The coordinates of Dobrovelyckivka, a settlement of Kirovohrad region, began to be considered the geographical and geometrical centre of Ukraine. However, soon geographers suggested several more options for the geographical centre of Ukraine: the second one – the north-eastern outskirts of the village of Marianivka, Shpoliansky district, Cherkasy region, the third one – the town of Vatutine, Zvenyhorodskyi district, Cherkasy region (Munich, 2002, pp. 2–7).

The geographers’ research received feedback primarily from the society of Kirovohrad region. Trying to avoid mentioning the name of Serhiy Kirov, one of the organizers of the Holodomor of 1932 – 1933, in the titles of studies devoted to the history of the region, local historians began to use the terms: Centre of Ukraine; Central Ukraine; Central Ukrainian region (Biloshapka & Kuzyk, 2005; Shevchenko, 2001, pp. 15–23; Kozyr, 2012, p. 5; Holoborodko, 2018; Khmara & Shevchenko, 2022). Local historians of Kirovohrad region chose toponyms related to Central Ukraine for the titles of their journals: “Between the Buh and the Dnipro: Scientific and Local History Bulletin of Central Ukraine” or “Museum Bulletin of Central Ukraine”, published collections of their papers in “Central Ukrainian Publishing House” or in the columns of the journal “Ukraine-Centre”. There were no alternatives to this term for a long time. It was expertly substantiated by geographers, received a response from historians and turned out to be axiologically successful, because it contributed to the decommunization of the region, long before the adoption of the laws on decommunization in 2015.

The scientific regional elite sought to legitimize the use of the definition Central Ukraine as an alternative name for Kirovohrad region. Two leading universities in the region chose names with Central Ukrainian instead of Kirovohradskyi: Central Ukrainian National Technical University and Volodymyr Vinnychenko Central Ukrainian State University (Mel’charek & Orlyk, 2018, p. 28).

This is not the first such example of an attempt to substantiate a scientific concept for further use theoretically, both in the scientific community and beyond. As a successful example of the application of similar research strategies, Professor V. Ivanenko called the history of emergence of the concept “Dniprovske Nadporizhzhia” as an alternative to “Dniprovske Zaporizhzhia”. Initially, this definition was used in a geographical context exclusively, and later as a unit of cultural and historical content (Ivanenko, 2004, p. 15).

During the renaming campaign in 2015, suggestions were made to rename Kirovohrad region to Central Ukrainian region. According to geographers, this would allow to localize the name of this region and make it easily recognizable (Domaransky, 2015, pp. 43–47). By the way, none of the other regions included in the list of central Ukrainian regions: Poltava, Dnipropetrovsk, Vinnytsia, even the one closest to the geographic centre of Cherkasy, does not use a toponym associated with the geographic centre of Ukraine.

On the basis of previous theoretical justifications and author’s generalizations, one may get the impression that by Central Ukraine we understand only the territories of Kirovohrad and Cherkasy regions. However, this is not the case. One of the scientific objectives of the publication was the definition and substantiation of the criteria of Central Ukraine as a historical region. We will offer developed approaches to determining the borders of Central Ukraine without reference to the administrative borders of the regions, because they have never been permanent territorial units. Actually, these criteria are the theoretical justification of the borders of Central Ukraine as a historical region. An interdisciplinary toolkit was used to solve this objective.

First of all, it should be emphasized that by the centre we mean territories equidistant from the outskirts. In our case, from the extreme geographical points of Ukraine, carefully calculated by geographers. This approach is the basis of the conclusions of V. Shevchenko and V. Hrytsevych, which allowed to establish the geographic and geometric centres of Ukraine (Shevchenko, 1993, pp. 23–28; Munich, 2002, pp. 2–7). We have every reason to note that Central Ukraine is the territory between northern and southern, western and eastern Ukraine.

The next task is to define and substantiate the borders of Central Ukraine. Logically, these should be areas both equidistant from the outskirts and close to the geographic centre. In this case, to determine the borders of Central Ukraine, we suggest choosing a hydronymic criterion, i.e. delineating the borders of this region with the water arteries of the country. In the east, such river, in our opinion, is the Dnipro; in the west – the Syniukha river; in the north – the Ros river; in the south – the Southern Buh. Unlike territorial and administrative borders, which are easily changed by people, rivers are not, therefore they are more permanent borders. In addition, it is a common practice to demarcate borders along rivers.

The defined criteria for the borders of Central Ukraine allow establishing the neighbourhood with other similar historical regions. In the east, it is the Dnieper region with Nadporizhzhia and Zaporizhzhia. In the west – Eastern Podillia, Bratslav region. In the north – Kyiv oblast. In the south – the Black Sea region.

The proposed version of the borders of Central Ukraine partially coincides with the approach of the historian M. Hrushevskiy, applied during the territorial and administrative reform in the Ukrainian People’s Republic on March 6, 1918. After the liberation of Kyiv from the Russian Bolshevik occupation, the Central Rada approved the administrative reform. The division into provinces was abolished. Instead, a land distribution was proposed, which took into account historical, geographical, ethnographic features of Ukraine, and specifically the Ukrainian toponyms were used for their names. M. Hrushevsky suggested

31 administrative units (Vivsyana, Zhytkov, Marenets', Mytrofanenko, Orlyk & Pasichnyk, 2022, pp. 49–50). According to modern scientific calculations, the lands “Cherkashchyna” (the centre – Cherkasy) and “Nyz” (the centre – Yelyzavet, nowadays – Kropyvnytskyi) were located in the centre or inside the UNR. In the north, the neighbour of “Cherkashchyna” was “Kyiv and its surroundings (20 – 30 versts)”; “Porossie” (the centre – Bila Tserkva). Next to the territory “Nyz” with its centre in the city of Yelyzavet was “Pomorie” (the centre – Mykolayiv). In the east – “Sicha” (the centre – Katerynoslav). In the west – “Bratslavshchyna” (the centre – Vinnytsia) and “Pobozhie” (the centre – Uman) (Vivsyana, Zhytkov, Marenets', Mytrofanenko, Orlyk & Pasichnyk, 2022, pp. 49–50).

In the list of lands marked on the map, Cherkashchyna and Nyz were the closest to the centre of Ukraine according to the borders of 1918. There should be also mentioned M. Hrushevskiy's approach, who separated “Kyiv and its surroundings” from “Cherkashchyna” in a radius of 30 versts (Vivsyana, Zhytkov, Marenets', Mytrofanenko, Orlyk & Pasichnyk, 2022, p. 49). We will use the approaches of an authoritative historian and allow ourselves to substantiate the northern border of Central Ukraine with territories close to Kyiv at a distance of 30 kilometers.

The next stage of theoretical substantiation of the borders of Central Ukraine is the answer to the question: the territories of which regions are included in it from the point of view of modern territorial and administrative division? The selected criteria allow us to answer this question by superimposing the determined borders of this region on a modern political map of Ukraine. According to modern territorial and administrative system, these are the territories of individual districts of six regions. Kirovohrad region – Kropyvnytskyi, Novoukrainskyi, Oleksandriyskyi districts; Cherkasy region – Cherkaskyi and Zvenyhorodskiy districts; Dnipropetrovsk region – Dniprovskiy, Kamianskyi, Kryvorizkiy, Nikopolskiy; Poltava region – the right bank of the Dnieper, the part of Kremenchuh district; Zaporizhzhia region – the right bank of Zaporizhzhia district; Mykolaiv region – northern areas of Bashtanskiy, Voznesenskiy, Pervomaitskiy districts of the Southern Buh basin.

There is a question of excluding parts of Cherkasy and Kirovohrad regions from Central Ukraine, on the territory of which there are geographical centres of our state. The western districts of Kirovohrad region beyond the Syniukha (Holovanivskiy and the western part of Novoukrainskiy districts), Umansky district of Cherkasy region are included in the historical and cultural district of Eastern Podillia, which is close to Central Ukraine and close to these areas. Zolotoniskiy district and Kaniv – to Kyiv region.

It should be noted that the version of Ukraine borders suggested by us does not radically change historical, geographical or cultural and historical zoning of Ukraine, but only clarifies it. Physical and geographical zoning in many places coincides with the selected boundaries. In Ukrainian historiography the criteria for Central Ukraine borders determined by the authors are the first attempt to substantiate them with the help of an interdisciplinary toolkit scientifically. The result of combination of methodological optics of history and geography was the creation of maps of Central Ukraine, which we hope will be used, clarified, corrected by researchers and experts in history and cartography. The borders of Central Ukraine are easily superimposed on modern territorial and administrative zoning, which makes these areas promising for the research of historians, sociologists, and politologists.

The ideological, statist shell of the spatial image of Central Ukraine under the conditions of temporary occupation of our state by Russia is also relevant. Constantly the Ukrainian diplomats emphasize that the Crimea, Donbas, Kherson region, and Zaporizhzhia region

are temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. A clear, scientifically based and easily recognizable image of Ukraine's central part, in accordance with the borders of 1991, can become an important symbol of sovereign Ukraine.

One of the objectives of this theoretical article stated by the authors was to update the conceptual apparatus of the Ukrainian historical regionalism. In our opinion, the conclusions of geographers allow historians to draw attention to the concept of "Central Ukraine". In the 20s of the 20th century, for the first time, mentions of "Central Ukraine" are found in the research papers of Stepan Rudnytskyi, a historian who, on the advice of M. Hrushevskyi, became a geographer: "Approximately in the very middle of our Great Ukraine, as far from the northern as from the southern, from the western and from the eastern borders of Ukraine there is located the town of Chyhyryn" (Rudnyts'kyy, 2018, p. 642). (underlining by the authors).

S. Rudnytskyi, who skillfully used interdisciplinary methodological tools, called the territories between Chyhyryn and Yelysavethrad "the heart of the territory of Ukraine". Regarding Chyhyryn, S. Rudnytskyi wrote the following: "It is located, as if by a strange fit, in the heart of the current Ukrainian territory" (Rudnyts'kyy, 2018, p. 205). The "current territory" should be understood as Ukraine within the borders of the USSR (the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic) in the 20s of the 20th century. S. Rudnytsky called Chyhyryn "the heart of Ukraine". At the same time, the scholar did not mean the former capital status of this town, which was provincial at the time of his scientific activity, but the geographical location of Chyhyryn. S. Rudnytskyi wrote about Yelyzavethrad, Kryvyi Rih, and Nikopol, classified according to our criteria as Central Ukraine, as important industrial centres "inside the country" (Rudnyts'kyy, 2018, p. 94). (underlining by the authors).

Research papers by historians and geographers allow us to suggest using the definition "Middle Ukraine" as a synonym for the concept of "Central Ukraine", the region located in the middle between the south and the north, the east and the west of the country. In historiography, we encounter similar interpretation approaches in the context of research related, for example, to Central (Central-Eastern) Europe; as an alternative to this term, scholars use the definition "Middle Europe" (Kahanov, 2005, p. 334).

The Conclusion. The next objective of theoretical substantiation of the concept "Central Ukraine" is to answer a number of questions, for example: Is Central Ukraine a micro or macro region? The second question: Is it a historical and geographical or historical and cultural region?

The importance of separating micro-regions from macro-regions and identifying their unique features was emphasized by V. Ivanenko in a publication devoted to the scientific and socio-cultural dimension of historical and regional studies (Ivanenko, 2004, p. 5). The analysis of historiography allows us to conclude that historians most often use the concept of "Central Ukraine" as a macro-historical one. In our opinion, Central Ukraine (Middle Ukraine) is a micro-region with its own historical and cultural features, which should not be dissolved in neighbouring historical and cultural areas.

Geographical maps created in the process of theoretical substantiation of the concept "Central Ukraine" make it possible to notice peculiar features of this region. To do this, we will use a successful quote by the Ukrainian publicist Anatoliy Striliany, who noted that it is impossible to write the history of Ukraine without mentioning the Cossacks (Hrytsak, 2021, p. 114). This apt historical metaphor can also be applied to the territories of Central Ukraine, it helps define the specificity of the region. These areas were one of the centres of the Ukrainian Cossacks enclaves formation, the place of Zaporizhzhia fortresses foundation:

Tomakivska, Mykytenska, Chortomlytska, Pidpilnenska – for a long time the population of these areas was the bearer of the Cossack traditions, which were revived on this soil during different periods of the history (Kyzymenko, 1992, Shevchenko, 2001, Boyko, 2015, pp. 24–27; Brekhunenko, 2010, pp. 183–184).

The Cossack lands were the historical core of Central Ukraine. This fact gives us reason to link them into one socio-cultural and historical space. Perhaps it was this fact that M. Hrushevskiy used, when in 1918 he selected the name for the newly formed territorial and administrative unit of the Ukrainian People's Republic called "Nyz" with its centre in Yelyzavet (nowadays – Kropyvnytskyi), in the heart of Central Ukraine (Vivsyana, Zhytkov, Marenets', Mytrofanenko, Orlyk, Pasichnyk, 2022, p. 50). A clear justification of the Nyz land as a historical concept can be found in the research papers of M. Hrushevskiy's student, a historian and geographer S. Rudnytskyi: "Zaporozkyi Nyz is called the part of the Black Sea coast low land on both sides of the Dnieper, between God and Kalmius and the Sea of Oz, where there were ancient lands of Zaporizhzhia Sich and its palanquin The Black Sea Nyz embraces entire Kherson region and entire Katerynoslav region" (Rudnyts'kyy, 2018, p. 651). The quote by S. Rudnytskyi needs to be clarified. By Kherson region, the scholar meant not only the territories of modern Kherson region, where Kamianska Sich and Oleshkivska Sich were located, but also the lands of current Kirovohrad region. In the 18th century the territories of this region were part of Kodak, Buho-Hardiv and Inhul palankas of the Zaporizhzhia Viysko, therefore they preserved the Cossack traditions for a long time (Kyzymenko, 1992; Shevchenko, 2001; Brekhunenko, 2010, pp. 163, 183–184; Boyko, 2015, pp. 24–27; Mytrofanenko, 2015, pp. 37–41).

During the liberation struggle of 1917 – 1922, according to Isak Mazepa, an active participant and analyst of the turbulent era, who visited these areas in 1920, these lands became the most favourable ground for the revival of historical traditions in the form of organization of paramilitary units of the Free Cossacks: "Katerynoslavshchyna and Khersonshchyna were an inexhaustible source of raw but good fighting Cossack material. The traditions of the former "Freedoms of the Zaporizhzhya Army" seem to have been preserved here to a greater extent than in other regions of Ukraine" (Mazepa, 2001, p. 66). (underlining by the authors).

In this case, under the term Kherson region there should be understood the territory of modern Kirovohrad region, because the territories of Yelyzavethrad and Oleksandriyskyi districts, nowadays – the territories of Kropyvnytskyi and Oleksandriyskyi districts, were part of Kherson Governorate during the liberation struggle. In 1917 – 1918 it was the very place where powerful and numerous military Free Cossack units were located, which strongly resisted the Russian Bolshevik aggression (Mytrofanenko, 2018, pp. 10–30). At the beginning of 1919, Yelyzavethrad even became a temporary administrative centre of Kherson province as part of the Ukrainian People's Republic after losing control over the South of Ukraine at the end of 1918 – the beginning of 1919.

The above mentioned criteria for defining the boundaries and theoretical justification of the concept Central Ukraine, according to the authors of the publication, allow it to be considered a historical and cultural region located within Ukraine. We hope that the results of the publication will become a good discussion platform for researchers in the field of historical regionalism and cartography. In our opinion, Central Ukraine territories issues have a perspective for future scientific studies. We are aware that we covered only a part of the history of this region, so we hope that the publication will find a response among specialists as a kind of intellectual provocation, and will have the effect of a challenge for further scientific research, achievements, theoretical generalizations and discussions.

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Annex 1. Map of central Ukraine

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