



# UPPSALA UNIVERSITET

## **“Ukraine at the regional level”**

**Mapping emerging identities in Kharkiv  
and Slobozhanshchyna**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the regional perspective in the second largest city of Ukraine, Kharkiv, and investigates various self-identification strategies with a particular emphasis on the local and regional element. A specific time period was chosen, starting with the Orange Revolution in 2004 and ending with the month before the Russian invasion in 2022, with a target group consisting of Kharkiv politicians at both the state and local levels. The study was conducted by thematic analysis of interviews, speeches and other statements mainly from Ukrainian media sources in Russian during this period. As the result revealed, identification with the region was noticeable and often manifested under certain political circumstances. There was also a noticeable national-civic consciousness, especially among young politicians in the analyzed cohort. But the themes identified in this study strongly indicate attachment to both the region and the state community as the most prominent self-identification strategy. The results lead to the conclusion that it is necessary to conduct further research not only on the regional units of Ukraine, but also their content, which will contribute to a better understanding of the region within the framework of the nation-building process throughout Ukraine.

**Keywords:** Kharkiv, Slobozhanshchyna, identity, regional, politicians, theme, Ukraine

**Word count:** 24988

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# **1. Introduction**

Given the ongoing war and its unknown future, research on Ukraine could not be more valuable and timely. Modern day Ukraine is a state riddled with competing and contradictory patterns of ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional diversity, and its peculiarities lies not in the fact that there are sizeable national minorities within her citizenry, but more in the fact that the ethnic Ukrainian titular majority does not constitute a unified, homogenous and coherent nation (Rodgers, 2008, p. 33). Despite this reality and the huge potential for the study of identity that it carries, most of the contemporary research on Ukraine takes as a starting point a deep gap between the western and eastern parts of the country. The general description defines the first as a pro-European, Ukrainian-speaking region, while the second is pro-Russian (Soviet), where the Russian language is widely spoken. This rather simplistic, but for many researchers also convenient dichotomy has overshadowed other models of studying identities in Ukraine.

However, in the period after the Orange revolution in 2004, there was an increase in identity research at the local-regional level, but identity research after the events of 2014 was marked by a focus on the rise of national-civic identification in the country as a whole, excluding Donbas and Crimea. Today the scientific discourse on the need to study the genesis of the specifics of the development of Ukrainian regions, taking into account the historical, socio-economic, civilizational, cultural, spiritual and political features of regional identity in the further development of the country is acquiring special importance (Balabanov, Pashyna & Lysak, 2019, p. 492). If we take into account the ongoing war and the fact that it affects more regions than Donbas, it would not be an exaggeration to say that identity studies on Ukrainian regions, besides the traditionally studied Galicia and Donbas, were insufficient or even absent, and, in all likelihood, will be open for investigation in a Ukraine, which has risen from the ruins of war in the near future.

## **1.1. Aim and research questions**

The present thesis seeks to contribute to repairing the above-mentioned scholarly omission by studying emerging identities in a key city and region of Ukraine – Kharkiv and its surroundings, known as the historical region of “Sloboda Ukraine” or “Slobozhanshchyna”. The city of Kharkiv with its dominant Russian-speaking culture and strong leftist political sympathies have struggled to find its proper place in the nation building process and to adapt its hybrid “Little Russian” identity to the new ideology of a “national revival” (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 205). The actors involved in this process are both a centralized state (Ukraine) and a kin-state (Russian Federation). The region’s

geopolitical location resulted in the creation of “a material and spiritual culture that absorbed the various dimensions of the national-cultural elements” of both countries (Zaharchenko, 2016, p. 61).

By addressing the regional perspective in Ukraine’s second largest city, located only 40 kilometers from the border with the Russian Federation, this thesis aims to nuance the picture and show that several (regional) identities can be accommodated under the term “Ukrainanness”. There is a need to deconstruct the state into regional units, because they deserve recognition within the polyphony of Ukrainian self-identification. For this purpose, two research questions are formulated that will guide this research project.

The main research question of the study is:

***What does the regional Kharkiv identity consist of?***

This is followed by a secondary research question:

***How does this regional identity relate to other competing identities?***

## **1.2. Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of the study is that regional identification mainly intersects with other identification strategies common in this region, such as identification with the state community or with a supranational “Soviet Union”, although in various hybrid forms. The geographical location and the fact that the city has always been a meeting place between Ukrainians and Russians, as well as other peoples living in the region, explains that Kharkiv residents have a wider horizon of imagination.

This is reflected in a pragmatic attitude towards attempts to politicize the geographical location of Kharkiv or the constant “war of memories” and other questions that have divided the country in recent years. This “pragmatism” did not allow a significant part of the population to fall into political extremes during 2014, and this attitude persists today (or at least until February 2022). In addition, certain political circumstances, as well as other features, such as personal gain, can affect self-identification strategies. This complex reality must be understood in the broad historical context to which Kharkiv and Slobozhanshchyna belong.

## 2. Historical Background

### 2.1. Sloboda Ukraine – a specific borderland territory

The territory of Kharkiv region began to be actively settled under the Russian government's control, by refugees escaping from Ukrainian lands that were engulfed by the Cossack war led by Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi in the mid seventeenth century, resulting in the social transformation of the former Steppe "Ukraine" from a military frontier into the "Sloboda Ukraine" border region (Kravchenko, 2020, p. 171). The name "Sloboda Ukraine" comes from *slobodá* (settlement) and is etymologically connected to the modern Ukrainian word *svobodá* (freedom); *ity na slobodú* means "to go to the free lands" (Zhurzhenko, 2010, pp. 222 - 223). In addition to Ukrainian peasants, a large number of Russian settlers also arrived in the region, which led to the subsequent formation of a peculiar Russo-Ukrainian amalgam and a regional identity of Sloboda Ukraine or "*Slobozhanshchyna*".

In 1765 the Cossack administrative system of Slobids'ka Ukraine, still enjoying considerable autonomy, was abolished and replaced by *Slobodsko-Ukrainskaia Guberniia* with its capital in Kharkov (Russian spelling), which eventually became the Kharkov general-government (*namestnichestvo*) (Baker, 2016, p. 10). According to Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2010: 225-226), Sloboda Ukraine underwent a significant loss of Ukrainian traditions and identity as the first Ukrainian land incorporated into the Russian Empire, but the region flourished thanks to trade and tax privileges provided by the tsar.

An important event in the history of Kharkiv occurred in 1804 with the establishment of the University, the second oldest in modern Ukraine. The new intellectual environment emerging around Kharkiv University brought Sloboda Ukraine eventually closer to Little Russia and when the function of chief marker of identity was gradually switching from religious and social to ethnocultural criteria – above all linguistic -. the residents of Slobidska Ukraine and neighbouring Little Russia began to share the name "Little Russia" (Kravchenko, 2020, p. 180).

Nevertheless, as shown by Serhiy Bilenky (2012: 270), Romanticism, which came to be the dominant literary paradigm in Ukraine beginning from the late 1820s, especially in poetic and prose works of writers associated with Kharkiv University, helped to shape a modern Ukrainian movement. The discourse of the "Ukrainian idea" was centered around the university, which included a position of exceptional national identity, aggressively anti-Russian, anti-Polish and anti-Jewish (Himka, 2006, p. 484). The development of ethnographic and historical studies at Kharkiv

University and the foundation of the Kharkiv Historical Philological Society (1877) contributed at the end of the 19th century to the growing awareness of Slobozhanshchyna as a Ukrainian land (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 223).

Serhiy Bilenky (2012) argues, that the new Romantic generation of Ukrainians used the terms “Ukraine” and “Little Russia” interchangeably, and it was Taras Shevchenko who provided the poetic *Ukraine* – appraised and imagined by Kharkiv Romantics – with a distinct political meaning that finally replaced the term *Little Russia*. Consequently, Kharkiv University became a hotbed of Ukrainian romantic nationalism in the 19th century. However, the Sloboda Ukraine region and its capital continued to play an important role in the permanent shaping and reshaping of the Ukrainian-Russian borderland with its porous boundaries and elusive or hybrid identities (Kravchenko, 2020, p. 170).

## **2.2. Kharkiv in the 20th century**

In the second half of the 19th century, Kharkiv went through a capitalist modernization and became an important industrial centre and a transport junction connecting Moscow with Crimea and Caucasus (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 201). The abolition of serfdom, the development of industry, and the construction of railroads, with Kharkiv as a regional hub, accelerated Russian migration to and Russification of the city (Baker, 2016, p. 11). Volodymyr Kravchenko argues, that imperial russification became one of the principal directions of the cultural policy of Kharkiv’s local self-government, but the city retained a Ukrainian ethnic profile:

In the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, the concepts of “Ukraine” and “Little Russia” were radically reinterpreted and reformulated under the influence of modern nationalism. The first of these concepts came to signify modern national (ethnocultural) identity, while the second one remained part of early modern Orthodox-Slavic “Russianness” (“rus’kost”). The new “Ukraine,” developing out of “Little Russia” and becoming distinct from it, came into conflict with the early modern Slavonic-Russian identity. As a result, a struggle was waged between Russian and national discourses for a symbolic control of Kharkiv (2020: 183).

According to the first empire-wide census of 1897, in Kharkiv city 109,914 declared themselves to be Russian speakers (63 percent), whereas only 45,092 acknowledged themselves as Ukrainian speakers (26 percent), and surrounding this quite Russified urban population was a great mass of Ukrainian speaking peasants (Baker, 2016, p. 11). Despite attempts at Russification by local and state authorities, Kharkiv still remained an important center of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, as in the era of Romantic nationalism in the 19th century. With the abolishment of the restrictions on the public use of Ukrainian language in the early 20th century one of the leaders of Ukrainian



nationalism, Kharkiv lawyer Mykola Mikhnovskiy, founded the newspaper *Slobozhanshchyna* – its title sounding like a challenge to the local Russian-language press, which usually labelled the region as “South Russia” (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 224).

The difference in national consciousness between the urban and rural population was palpable until the First World War. As shown by Mark R. Baker (2016: 202 - 203), the peasant community of Kharkiv Province retained a local view of the world during the upheavals and did not want to sacrifice for broader community ideas, such as the broader concepts of Ukraine or Russia.

Kharkiv was the first capital of the Ukrainian SSR from 1918 to 1934 and grew to become a major centre for the military-industrial complex as well as a major cultural, transportation and intellectual centre (Rodgers, 2006, p. 686). By the early 1930s, Kharkiv with its 521,000 residents had also undergone noticeable changes in its ethnosocial structure: ethnic Ukrainians were now in the majority (38.6 percent in 1926), while the number of ethnic Russians decreased to 37.2 percent (Kravchenko, 2020, p. 188). Severely affected by the Holodomor, local historians estimate the population losses of the Kharkiv oblast at around 1.5 million; however at that time it included parts of neighboring regions (Zhurzhenko, 2011, p. 636). While state authorities banned any discussion of the Great Famine of 1932 - 1933 in Soviet times, interpretations of the Holodomor became highly politicized in Ukraine after Ukraine gained independence in 1991, reinforcing the traditional imaginary dichotomy of “two Ukraines” (Himka, 2006).

During the Khrushchev era of the 1950s and 1960s, Kharkiv turned into a symbolically important city on the border between Ukrainian and Russian culture, and Communist bureaucrats who had close ties with Kharkiv held high positions in Kyiv at that time (Dobczansky, 2019, p. 367). Paradoxically, the city’s entry into the Soviet Russian cultural space took place alongside Kharkiv’s affirmation within the symbolic Ukrainian space after the loss of its capital status and in the post-war period (Kravchenko, 2020, p. 190). The image and perception of a “borderland” city were abandoned, at least until the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

### **2.3. Kharkiv after 1991: Ukrainian, Russian and (post)Soviet identities**

After Ukraine gained independence in 1991 both Rukh and the first president Leonid Kravchuk attempted to find a middle ground between an ethnically based Ukrainian identity and a civic identity based on Ukrainian citizenship without any success, and over the 1990s, the new quasi-civil conception gave ground to the two older, historically formed identities (Himka, 2006, p. 492). But can the issue of identity be primarily perceived as a historical Russian/Ukrainian dichotomy? In the

context of post-Soviet Ukraine, as a result of the peculiar legacy of Soviet nation building and of Russian-Ukrainian encounters, identities have a highly ambiguous character and are in constant flux (Hrytsak, 1998, p. 265).

According to an all-Ukrainian sociological survey conducted in the period 1993-1994, 57 percent of the adult population of Ukraine consider themselves to be exclusively Ukrainian by nationality, while 11 percent consider themselves to be exclusively Russian, and another 25 – 26 percent of respondents considered themselves to be Russian and Ukrainian simultaneously (Pirie, 1996, p. 1087). The phenomenon of intermarriages in Ukraine is a certain pattern that scholars often neglect. Over the 60 years following the revolution the rate of intermarriages in Ukraine as a whole increased sevenfold, to 30,1 percent in 1979, and a decade later this figure in the North East (including Kharkiv) was 36 percent (Pirie, 1996, p. 1086). Most people living in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands have relatives both in Ukraine and Russia, and, according to sociological studies conducted during the late 1990s, ethnic Ukrainians in Kharkiv and in the Belgorod oblasts “feel closer” to Russians than to Ukrainians from the western regions (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 272).

Kravchenko (2019: 330) argues that all three main discourses of collective identity, that is, the Ukrainian national, the Russian Orthodox-imperial, and regional post-Soviet ones, were reflected in Kharkiv’s public space and cultural landscape in the post-Soviet period. The discourse emphasizing the identity of Slobozhanshchyna was partly reinvented as an alternative to the ethnic concept of the Ukrainian nation, hinting at the region as a bearer of a special historical experience: namely, the voluntary and mutually beneficial interactions of Russians and Ukrainians (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 228). In this discourse, the role of Kharkiv as a mediator of relations between Russia and Ukraine is justified (Rodgers, 2008, p. 75). The contemporary reconstruction of the identity of Sloboda Ukraine involves various symbolic resources and sometimes contradictory historical narratives: the glorious Cossack past with its democratic traditions, the peaceful character of hardworking Ukrainian peasants, a “multiculturalism” and ethnic tolerance typical for the borderlands, the historical experience of cooperation between Russians and Ukrainians, the settlement mentality with its liberal and individualistic attitudes, and the merchants’ prosperity and capitalist spirit of Kharkiv (Zhurzhenko, 2010, pp. 221 - 222). Nevertheless, it is tempting to believe that this “grand narrative” was firmly embraced by the regional ruling elite in the first place. Kravchenko (2019: 329) argues that this regional discourse was promoted by the local Russian-speaking elites, which emphasizes the role of Kharkiv as an alternative, Russian-oriented rival to Kyiv. One thing is clear, however, the politics of identity and memories became extremely polarized in Ukraine – and, in particular, in Kharkiv – at the beginning of the 21st century.

## 2.4. “War of memories” and the subsequent crisis in 2014

Regardless of the political compromise resulting from it, the Orange Revolution of 2004 split Ukrainian society in two and the bifurcation did not occur along imagined civilizational border, but rather through the middle of each oblast, each city, and even individual families (Kravchenko, 2019, p. 335). Regarding the 2004 presidential election in Kharkiv oblast, whilst the majority of voters supported Yanukovich’s desire to maintain close ties to Russia, over a quarter of voters here were willing to engage with and support Yushchenko’s vision for a European-oriented, democratic Ukraine (Rodgers, 2008, p. 75). As Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2011) has shown, the political actors supporting the Yushchenko memory regime tried to encourage the “negative identifications” with the Soviet regime among the citizens of the Kharkiv region, when the memory of Holodomor was promoted after the Orange Revolution. As a result of the policies based on the anti-Soviet narrative, the anti-Orange elites defended the Soviet – implanted historical memory as part of a distinct identity of their east – southern constituency (Kulyk, 2019, p. 1034).

In Kharkiv, the two opposing visions of Ukraine’s future – the pro-European “Orange coalition” and the blue-themed “Regionals” - were represented, in the former case, by Arsen Avakov, a local businessman and head of the Kharkiv Oblast Administration, appointed by President Yushchenko, and by Mykhailo Dobkin, the selected mayor of Kharkiv and Avakov’s political rival (Kravchenko, 2019, p. 336). What was considered a political consensus among the Kharkiv elites before the 2004 presidential election was completely destroyed by political conflicts over the interpretation of the Holodomor. Indeed, the political battles about Holodomor memory brought the borderland status of Kharkiv to the fore with statement by Ukrainian nationalists, such as “Kharkiv still remains a fortress of the Communist-oligarchic mafia” and the proclamation of an “Autonomous South-Eastern Ukrainian Republic.” by the former governor of Kharkiv oblast Yevhen Kushnarev (Zhurzhenko, 2011, p. 609). Kharkiv turned out to be a hotbed of political tensions in the subsequent crisis of 2014, resulting in a war in Ukraine’s easternmost regions, which today has spread to other regions of Ukraine.

With a political elite well known for its loyalty to President Yanukovich and openly pro-Russian views, Kharkiv appeared to be the ideal place to mount opposition to Maidan actions in Kyiv during the winter of 2013-14 (Kravchenko, 2019, p. 342). Moreover, popular opinion in Kharkiv also more closely resembled that in the Donbas than any other region of eastern Ukraine; while pro-separatist or pro-Russian sentiment was not quite as high in Kharkiv as in Donbas, numerous surveys indicate

that public views were much closer to Donbas than to other parts of eastern Ukraine (Buckholz, 2019, p. 152). However, when Yanukovich escaped from Kyiv and tried to convene an assembly of deputies from the southern and eastern regions in Kharkiv on February 22, 2014, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets to express support for Ukraine's unity and opposition to separatism (Carnegie, 2018, p. 2). Nevertheless, pro-Russian activists stormed the Regional Security Administration building on several occasions, raising a Russian flag over the building on March 1 and eventually seizing control of most of it on April 6, subsequently declaring the "Kharkiv People's Republic," just as separatists had in Donetsk and Luhansk (Buckholz, 2019, p. 157).

Scholars and observers pointed to various aspects showing why Kharkiv was spared from armed conflict during the deep crisis of 2014. It is argued that the decisive actions of the pro-Ukrainian elites – especially the role of Arsen Avakov, Ukraine's interior minister and a Kharkivite – was the main factor in the preservation of control over Kharkiv by the central government (Carnegie, 2018; Buckholz, 2019; Kravchenko, 2019). Alternative explanations points to the fact that Kharkiv Oblast is less urbanized than Donbas and the growing identification of its population with Ukraine since the 1990s produced a different outcome during the crucial period (Stebelsky, 2018). In a sense, Kharkiv became the focal point of two competing national discourses, similar to intellectual battles at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. These looming tensions sowed divisions among the people of Kharkiv, many of whom wished to remain on the sidelines and stay loyal to their local community (Carnegie, 2018, p. 3). As for the battle between two national discourses in 2014 and beyond, it would be premature to draw conclusions without taking into account the presence of regional identity in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands. Kharkiv's cultural space will continue to be a battlefield of competing discourses, and its border section was and remains a gray zone with typical hybrid-identity types, engendering more questions than offering answers (Kravchenko, 2019, p. 351).

### **3. Literature review**

While 2014 was a dramatic year that managed to arouse some scholarly interest in Kharkiv and how the events unfolded in this city, the period before the Maidan practically did not attract the attention of scholars to the study of identities in Kharkiv. But there are some exceptions and they will be presented in this chapter along with other studies that provide an in-depth discussion of existing identities in Eastern Ukraine and their content. In addition to this, the Russian language appears as an important marker of (regional) identity due to the image of Kharkiv as a Russian-speaking city, and deserves special attention. First, this chapter will present how scholars have described the peculiarities of a Western Ukrainian identity, which in the historical and political context is often described as the antipode of Eastern Ukraine, to which Kharkiv geographically belongs. Another reason why western Ukraine (Galicia) is discussed in this chapter is related to the traditional designation of this region as the 'Piedmont' of Ukraine – the true keeper of national identity, as Rodgers claims (2008: 60). This image does not correspond to reality in relation to Kharkiv, and therefore it must be challenged.

#### **3.1. National/regional identity in western Ukraine**

Studies of regionalism and nationalism in western Ukraine and the classification of regional/national identity can be divided into two subcategories depending on the historical context: Galician-Ukrainian identity and Soviet western Ukrainian identity. The former refers to the pre-Soviet period, when the benevolent regime in the multinational Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy allowed and encouraged the development of national consciousness and movements among its population and the latter is associated with the period after the Second World War, and its formation has been more differently interpreted by scholars. As many other scholars on contemporary Ukraine, John-Paul Himka (2006a) accepts the existence of “two Ukrainian identities”, referring to two discursive national identity projects, which he classifies as “Central European identity” and post-Soviet identity. Himka (2006a) characterizes the Central European identity as a “mutually exclusive” identity with the historical region of *Galicia* as the heartland.

The development of Ukrainian identity in Galicia penetrated much more widely and deeply in society, and nationality in Austria was a key issue in politics, while social issues were secondary (Himka, 2006a, p.487). As a result of the failure to achieve statehood in the revolutionary years, nationalism became the hegemonic ideology of Ukrainian Galicia in the interwar period, which

obviously emerged and developed in the Central European context (Himka, 2006a, p. 489). Thus, Himka presents a historical description of the Galician Ukrainian identity which is national in its content:

While Ukrainians in the Russian Empire developed a certain openness to Russian language and culture, the Galicians developed an exclusivist, either/or identity, Ukrainian not Polish, Ukrainian not Russian. In the interwar era, this same Central European environment exposed the Galician Ukrainians to the extreme nationalism and fascism that was prevalent in much of continental Europe, particularly during the Great Depression. The main body of the Ukrainians, of course, were isolated from these influences, immersed instead in the teachings and practices of Lenin and Stalin (2006b: 18).

Drawing on historical and political works on Ukrainian perceptions of Galicia and Galicians from the late 19th century until the Second World War, historian Volodymyr Potul'nyts'kyi (2005) also argued that Ukrainians had developed a strong sense of their national identity in Austrian Galicia where religion and language made the Ukrainians a conspicuously distinct group. Potul'nyts'kyi (2005: 97), claims that all currents in Ukrainian political and historical thought regarded Galicia as part of a single Ukrainian patrimony, not as anything separate. Moreover, Galician distinctiveness did not pose a danger for a Ukrainian state or the Ukrainian nationality and if Galicians identified themselves as Galicians, this did not make them any less Ukrainian (Potul'nyts'kyi, 2005, p. 97).

A more detailed description of the relationship between the alleged Galician identity and other competing identities in this region is presented by historian Yaroslav Hrytsak who used a regression analysis to further investigate selections of valued identities among citizens of Lviv and Donetsk, carried out as projects between 1994 and 1999 (with supplemental data from 2001 and 2004) by the Institute for Historical Research at the University of Lviv (Hrytsak, 2005, pp. 187 - 188). The results obtained by using the method indicate that self-identification in these cities has a regional dimension, and therefore the historical criterion [deserves] special attention (Hrytsak, 2005, pp. 188 – 189). According to Hrytsak, the Ukrainian idea in Galicia was largely an intellectual import whose national history replaced the regional history of Galicia and managed to overcome the proponents of rival ideas (2005: 196). Without an affiliation with Ukraine, the Galician community was roughly the size of the Lithuanian or Slovak nationalities, and perhaps it was the sense that Ukraine offered them the best hope of survival vis-à-vis Poland that made it possible for [Greek] Catholic Galicians to unite with the Orthodox Eastern Ukrainians – against Catholic Poles (Hrytsak, 2005, p. 196). Hrytsak (2005) goes further to argue that unlike other ethnic Ukrainian territories that were sovietized and ukrainianized “from above”, in Galicia, ukrainianization was the result of long-lasting and organic work “from below”, but claims, like Himka (2006), that the Galician-Ukrainian version is much more exclusionary with respect to Russians.

The formation of a Soviet Western Ukrainian identity was a top priority for the Soviet authorities in the new western borderlands in the period after the end of World War II. An essential study of this regional identity and how it developed was carried out by William Jay Risch. According to Risch (2011: 31) the Soviet strategy was to bring about a sudden “revolution from above” to rid the locals of the “backwardness” of their “bourgeois nationalist” world. The backwardness to be overcome by Galician Ukrainians was the behavior and values of the Western capitalist world, inherited from Austrian and Polish rule and the formation of a Soviet Ukrainian national community should be bilingual, embracing not only Ukrainian, but the language cementing this multinational state, Russian (Risch, 2011, p. 28).

However, Risch (2011: 253) argues that this regional identity and the identity of Soviet Lviv were the result of a complex set of dialogues between state actors, intellectuals, and the local population, as well as between this region and other regions of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the formation of a Soviet Ukrainian identity involved processes that differentiated the region from other parts of Ukraine, including not only accommodating local historical legacies or appreciating its more “Western” values and behavior, but also reifying negative stereotypes of the region as more “anti-Soviet,” “bourgeois,” or “nationalist” than others (Risch, 2011, p. 254). This, in turn, contributed to the adoption of alternative identities among Western Ukrainians, who, obviously, were completely alien to Soviet identity (Risch, 2011, p. 254). The description of the peculiar Soviet western Ukrainian identity and how this identity correlated with state policies up to the Gorbachev era, when, as Risch (2011) put it, bourgeois nationalist otherness became an important symbol rallying opposition to the Soviet state, is very rich in depth.

Historian Martin Åberg (2005) analyzed postwar urbanization in close relation to the “success or failure” of Soviet industrialization policies in Galicia and Lviv by examining statistics on ethnic composition, language use and urban growth in Lviv in the postwar period. According to Åberg (2005: 292), ethnic cleansing combined with incomplete Soviet modernization did not lead to assimilation of Galician Ukrainians, but rather contributed to the reconstruction of Ukrainian ethno-nationalism in Lviv. Åberg (2005: 295) further argues that Soviet modernization did not lead to the expected leveling of ethno-linguistic differentiation between the Ukrainian and Russian languages in the city, which also facilitated the preservation of such forms of Ukrainian identity as Greek Catholicism through the postwar period. Åberg (2005: 296) concludes that upon an examination of postwar industrial output and the rate of urbanization, the Soviet postwar policies did not succeed in assimilating local society and, as an unintended consequence, the socio-cultural and demographic

foundation of Lviv to become the “secret capital” of Ukraine and the major centre of ethno-nationalist politics was laid.

A different interpretation was presented by Tarik Cyril Amar (2015: 321) who in his study of the postwar transformation of the city of Lviv, noted that the persistence of western Ukraine’s peculiarity was not simply the result of somehow withstanding the Soviet onslaught but was at least as much shaped by Soviet policies. Amar (2015: 11 - 14) puts a certain emphasis on the interaction between the local Ukrainian pre-Soviet legacies and the Soviet transformative drive, which eventually shaped a local identity by what was in effect a Bolshevik *civilizing mission*. According to Amar (2015: 19), the intentional Soviet making of the local – in the form of a distinct but transitory type of not-yet Sovietized western borderland Ukrainian – had the unintended effect of shaping and solidifying a special and persistent western Ukrainian identity, which was distinct from the eastern, pre-1939 variant of Soviet Ukrainian identity (Amar, 2015, p. 19). Similar to the interpretation of Risch (2011), Amar (2015) argues that the Western Ukrainian local was seen as backward, and to be Sovietized, the Western Ukrainian local had to be saved, elevated, and developed, but the locals responded in complex ways. Overall, Amar (2015) offers a different and convincing explanation of the significant role of the party state in shaping identities with a specific emphasis on an inseparable process of Sovietization and Ukrainization in the postwar period in western Ukraine and, in particular, in Lviv. Amar’s account definitely strengthens the argument in favor of why identity research in Ukraine should be conducted at the regional level.

### **3.2. National/regional identities in Southern and Eastern Ukraine**

The above-mentioned approach of “Two Ukrainian identities” has obviously developed a universal explanation of a “pro-European West” and “pro-Soviet (Russian) East”, which, according to Tanya Zaharchenko (2016: 39), “has provided a convenient binary interpretative framework, rendering a complex country temptingly simple: its internal dynamics could now be attributed to a skirmish between its good and bad halves.” Indeed, the question remains whether such an identification division of Ukraine has a broader analytical value, since many nuances are omitted. To challenge this questionable claim, scholars have explored applications of the notion of regionalism to Ukraine (Zaharchenko, 2016, p. 43). At a relatively early stage, Paul S. Pirie (1996) argued that research into ethnic identity in southern and eastern Ukraine must attempt to understand the varieties of ethnic affiliation, including mixed ones, and begin to investigate which social forces were responsible for the growth of these various identities. Pirie analyzed sociological surveys conducted by local centres



for the study of public opinions since the late 1980s, including data provided by Democratic initiatives, based in Kyiv, and Pulse, based at the University of Odessa.

Building on this observation, Pirie (1996) emphasizes that there are a variety of strategies of ethnic self-identification which do not fit into simple paradigms of 'russification' and assimilation, and he not only sheds light on the high rate of urbanization and intermarriages in eastern Ukraine, but also on the fact that these regions have the greatest number of residents who were born outside the borders of Ukraine (which in Kharkiv exceeds 10 percent). According to Pirie (1996: 1099), these are the main factors that play a decisive role in defining patterns of ethnic identification. Pirie's (1996) study was extremely relevant, showing that an individual can possess multiple identities, and his argument that this pattern is particularly characteristic of the eastern regions of Ukraine is very convincing, standing out as a regional approach against the dominant "Two Ukraine" approach that prevailed in the 1990s.

The proposal for further research on Ukraine at the 'regional level' was emphasized by Peter W. Rodgers. By using empirical data generated during his fieldwork in study areas in eastern Ukraine – including Kharkiv, Sumy and Luhansk – Rodgers (2008) sought to examine how individuals reflect on the importance of the 'regional' factor within processes of identity change, and also to what extent is Russia perceived as the 'other' in the identity politics of Ukraine. The method used by Rodgers was in-depth qualitative interviews with school directors, history teachers and schoolchildren and the results confirmed that individuals living in the eastern borderlands have a clear 'regional' understanding of their place in Ukraine. This prompted Rodgers (2008) to assert that the region of residence is a determining factor in the formation of identity, and he advocated an analysis of Ukraine's unique brand of regionalism not in terms of division, but rather in terms of regional differences and diversity.

The focus on borderland (and/or regional) identities was continued by Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2010), who conducted a field study in five villages (three in the Kharkiv region and two in the Belgorod region). The aim was to collect valuable information about people's attitudes and perceptions of the new border and show how national and local identities manifests itself on this border and is transformed by it. The research was based on focus group interviews with people from various professions: teachers, village administrators, medical personal etc. The respondents generally had a positive attitude to the Soviet past and still often referred to their native village as "multinational", as a "small Soviet Union", but, according to Zhurzhenko (2010: 272 - 273), the role of "Soviet" identity is constantly diminishing. Instead, new political/civic identities are taking shape on both

side of the border with reference to territory and citizenship as the most widespread way of self-identification (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 274 - 275). Zhurzhenko (2010: 275) further argues that in many cases – and particularly on the Ukrainian side – one has a feeling that this new “national identity” imposed from above just needs time (and positive social changes associated with the new state) to be internalised by the population. Contrary to the observation of Rodgers, Zhurzhenko places a particular emphasis on the consistent growth of national/civic consciousness among the residents of the Kharkiv region. However, Zhurzhenko (2010: 279) contends that neither by Russian nor by Ukrainian citizens is the new border perceived as a cultural boundary, and it is rather different social provisions related to citizenship as well as economic asymmetry that make the border “real” for local populations.

Nevertheless, Zhurzhenko does not reduce the significance of what she calls “the borderland identity” of Kharkiv. In her case study of the Holodomor commemoration in the Kharkiv region, Zhurzhenko (2011: 633) explicates how the “memory wars” in Kharkiv during 2006 to 2009 have revealed more than just tensions between the center promoting a new national identity and a reluctant “Sovietized” region adhering to its political mentality and commemorative culture. Zhurzhenko (2011: 608) describes how the official narrative of Holodomor as a genocide prompted Kharkiv’s local political actors to merge several narratives which became celebrated as particular characteristics of the Kharkiv mentality, such as Sloboda Ukraine with its Cossack heritage, the academic and cultural center of the Russian Empire, the dynamic capitalist metropolis, and the “First Capital” of Soviet Ukraine combined with pragmatism, ethnic tolerance, bilingualism etc.

Therefore, the political element in formation of identities is particularly emphasized by Zhurzhenko (2010a; 2011b), and national identities in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands have shifted and crystallized in response to dramatic political events, while internal as well as external political actors have made use of conflicting memories and antagonistic historical symbols (2014: 250). In this regard, Zhurzhenko (2014) further notes that Russia’s recent policy is aimed at exporting “alternative identities” to Ukraine by using heroic narratives and symbols of military glory associated with the Soviet victory in World War II. This argument reflects what Rogers Brubaker has formulated as the politics of an external kin-state who seeks to construe certain residents and citizens of other states as co-nationals, as fellow members of a single transborder nation, and when they assert that this shared nationhood makes the state responsible, in some sense, not only for its own citizens but also for ethnic co-nationals who live in other states and possess other citizenships (1996: 5).

### **3.3. Language as a marker of identity in Kharkiv**

The third category relevant to our research relates to language as a marker of identity, and we limit our interest to the city of Kharkiv itself. Margrethe B. Sovik (2005a; 2010b) analyzed perceptions of the language situation and reported language practices and attitudes among a segment of the population in Kharkiv. In doing so, Sovik (2010: 13) added the concepts of “identification” and “utility” and discussed the relationship between identification and language and the notion of utility in relation to language of instruction. Sovik (2005a; 2010b) conducted group interviews with Kharkiv students and asked the respondents to describe the language situation in Kharkiv, as well as for self-identification in accordance with categories acknowledging the existence of mixed identities (cf. findings in other studies, i.e., Pirie 1996). The results showed that even though the respondents were primarily Russian speaking, Ukrainian, being the national language, may also be important for Russian-speaking persons and hence may be a symbol they support (Sovik, 2010, p. 14). According to the general perception of the language situation in Kharkiv, the use of Russian is the norm, and Ukrainian appears as the more odd one, but as soon as one spoke of an international context, the Ukrainian language appeared very clearly as a border marker, in particular towards “the Russian” (Sovik, 2005, p. 335). The respondents supported the idea of the Ukrainian language as the only state language but without distancing themselves from the Russian language (Sovik, 2005, p. 342). Moreover, Ukrainian assume an important position not only in terms of identification, but also in terms of utility, since Ukrainian as a state language is supposed to be the only one used in certain domains e.g., state administration, hence requiring at least second-language use from some part of the population (Sovik, 2010, p. 15).

In her study of the language ideologies and practices of Russian-speaking Kharkivites, Ganna Pletnyova (2020) focused on the interaction between two factors: the discourse of “pride” in speaking a particular language, which is anchored in a speaker’s interpretations of the role of language in a nation, and the discourse of “profit”, which is based on a speaker’s expectation of economic benefits related to mastering a certain language. Pletnyova (2020: 112 - 114) interviewed 32 Russian-speaking Kharkiv residents from three different ideological groups (pro-Ukrainian “Language matters” and “Language does not matter”, and pro-Russian), including an equal number of women and men aged 18 – 67. Russian was chosen as the interview language by 22 out of all 32 respondents, 6 chose Ukrainian, and 4 participants switched from Russian to Ukrainian, which indicates that one third of the sample corresponds to the pro-Ukrainian “Language matters” group (Pletnyova, 2022, p. 116). This is a notable change since Sovik’s study were all interviews were in Russian with only single utterances in Ukrainian (Pletnyova, 2020, p. 116). Interestingly, only two

participants had made a complete switch to Ukrainian in all areas of everyday life, while four participants said that, out of principle, they avoided using Ukrainian in their daily lives as much as possible (Pletnyova, 2020, p. 116 – 117). Despite the fact that the participants responses indicate a huge polarization in attitudes toward Russian and Ukrainian languages between the opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, bilingualism were mainly considered as assets and capital, and this factor united the three ideological group, according to Pletnyova (2020: 120 – 125). Moreover, Pletnyova (2020: 119) notes, that unlike Sovik's study (2010), which showed that Russian-speaking city-dwellers in the east expected Ukrainophones to switch to the Russian language, participants in Pletnyova's study, that is, from the post-Maidan period, reported accomodating Ukrainian speakers to show respect for them, to make a political statement, or to practice the language with native speakers.

Therefore, in this thesis with the focus on Kharkiv, special attention will be paid to whether it is possible to confirm the existence of a relationship between identification and language. In addition, the above-mentioned categoriees of identities in Western and Eastern Ukraine, respectively, strongly reflect the success of the deconstruction of the state into regional units and the analysis of the content of specific regional identities with all their nuances that should be accepted within the polyphony of Ukrainian self-identification, which is also connected to the resaerch aim of this thesis. In the following chapter, the four main presuppositions for self-identification proposed in this study will be presented.

## **4. Theoretical framework**

After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, many Western scholars, as emphasized by Paul S. Pirie (1996: 1080), examined the ethnic factor and its implication for politics in their studies of national identity, based on the premise that the national identification of individuals may be neatly compartmentalised: one is either Russian or a Ukrainian. As a point of departure, this study aims to de-ethnize the concept of “identity” and rather sheds light on the prevailing regional identities with constant Ukrainian-Russian encounters in the border zone where Kharkiv is located. The border is in dialogical interaction with a centralized state (Ukraine), promoting a nationalizing policy, and a broader transnational community which a kin-state (Russia) seeks to exploit.

This reality with a regional/border identity and two antagonistic actors creates a multiple center of gravity, which this study aims to investigate. For this purpose, I put together an analytical framework based on the four basic routes to self-identification (in the case of southern and eastern Ukraine) presented by Paul S. Pirie (1996):

1. Strong primary regional identification
2. Dual identity: a member of a state community and a region
3. Indeterminant – with a state and regional identity
4. Transnational identity: a view of a broader locality where the state is not important

These contesting categories will guide this study and help to contextualize the findings. It is also a developing theory aimed at avoiding the trap of ethnicity, and the focus here is on regional uniqueness. However, other ways of self-identification cannot be ruled out entirely, especially if we take into account the political upheavals that unfolded after the Maidan revolution in 2014.

### **4.1. Strong primary regional identification**

A first strategy is a straightforward one with identification with the historical Kharkiv region or “*Slobozhanshchyna*” with its mixed Ukrainian-Russian cultural roots and its bilingualism as valuable assets of the region (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 220). Perhaps the national consolidation and the promotion of national identity based on ethno-cultural and linguistic characteristics which overtly began when Viktor Yushchenko came to power in 2004, and the threat of separatism initiated by Moscow due to Russian language issues in the “near abroad”, as argued by Zhurzhenko (2010: 193),

have strengthened the belonging of Kharkiv residents to their historical and/or reinvented regional identity.

The retention of a strong regional identity and its interaction with the national identity in Ukraine have been emphasized by Balabanov, Pashyna & Lysak:

As social practice show, complex relations with the centre and infringement (or the presence of mass ideas about such restrictions) of regional political, socio-economic, spiritual interests can become factors of hypertrophic politicization of regional identity. In this case, in the ranking of identities, it is precisely regional identity that comes to the fore, which significantly harms the national one. The potential of regional identities depends not only on the attractive force of attraction, but also on the strength or weakness of the national-civic identity. These two identities can be complementary, but under certain conditions they can also resist each other. So, in the case of inadequate capacity of state institutions, there is a hypothetical possibility of the development of regionalism according to a destructive scenario (2019: 511).

In addition, Balabanov, Pashyna & Lysak (2019: 499 – 500) argue that according to various criteria in modern Ukraine, there are four macroregions in the domestic public space, and Kharkiv belongs to the Eastern macroregion and “Slobozhanshchyna” is considered one of the total number of nine sociocultural regions. A regional framework has also been adopted by other scholars but the division of Ukraine into regions is different. It is sufficient to mention here the eight-region model used by Barrington & Herron (2004), which places Kharkiv together with Dnipro and Zaporizhzhia as the “east-central” region in the eight-region analyses, with the argument that Kharkiv is less Russified than Donetsk and Luhansk (Barrington & Herron, 2004, p. 57).

Anssi Paasi (2009: 137) suggests that regional identity, like the region, has become a catchphrase since 1980s and has been recognised as an important element in the making of regions as social and political spaces. Regional identity is multi-scalar in the sense that people may identify with a number of spatial units and relations that occur in various material and social processes (Paasi, 2009, p. 141). Moreover, regional identification implies two intertwined contexts: cultural – historical and political – economic but political ideologies and regionalism/nationalism do not themselves produce identification, for the latter comes – and here culture and history enter the stage – only if it interprets and provides an appropriate attitude for an experienced reality (Paasi, 2009, p. 141). This experience may be politically manipulated but any symbol and ideology without a relevant experience is meaningless and impotent in terms of evoking identification (Paasi, 2009, p. 141). In a similar vein, Zhurzhenko (2010: 195) argues that regional identity is not just a static set of stereotypical cultural features; it also implies the “search for a *'usable past'* (my emphasis), that is, a set of historical referents which can guide a regional society on its distinct road to modernization, bridging the past, via the present, with the future. Therefore, regional identity may be rooted in historical traditions

and myths but, in its contemporary form, is a social construction, forged on a specific context under the influence of social, economic and political pressures (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 195).

This conception of regional identity or “regions” as social constructs is supported by Paasi (2009: 133), who notes that regions should be recognised as social constructs that do not rise in vacuum but are made in broader social practice – regions are hence contested results of power relations. Alexander B. Murphy (1991: 29) contend that we must see dominant ideas about regions as product of historical interactions between large-scale institutional and ideological developments, on the one hand, and place-specific activities, interactions and understandings, on the other. As social constructions, regions are necessarily ideological and no explanation of their individuality or character can be complete without explicit consideration of the types of ideas that are developed and sustained in connection with the regionalization process (Murphy, 1991, p. 30). In the case of Kharkiv and its regional peculiarities, Zhurzhenko emphasized before the 2014 crisis how much “Slobozhanshchyna” has to offer: it is the historical name of a region that was half forgotten during Soviet decades, it refers to a history that is at a safe distance from the current “memory wars” in Ukraine; it is neutral enough not to provoke divisions and exclusions; finally, it is pro-Ukrainian but not anti-Russian (2010: 222).

## **4.2. Dual identity**

The question of identification is a dynamic construct, which develops over time and can be changed through external influences (Henke, 2020, p. 10). The rise of civic dimensions of nationalism in Ukraine has been explained as a result of the Maidan revolution in 2014, followed by Russian aggression and the war in Donbas (Henke, 2020). With civic nationalism, people in a nation-state think that what can, does or should unite and distinguish all or most members of the nation are such features as living on a common territory, belief in common political principles, possession of state citizenship, representation by a common set of political institutions and desire or consent to be part of the nation (Schulman, 2004; p. 35). Nevertheless, another vital part of civic identity is to exercise certain duties and responsibilities, which contribute to a successful integration into society as a Ukrainian citizen, including respect for Ukrainian values, knowledge and practice of the Ukrainian language, etc. (Henke, 2020, p. 10). While the state authorities in post-Maidan Ukraine adopted a more ethno-centric approach to civic identity, the previous administrations in post-Soviet Ukraine gave priority to the building of an inclusive, civic nation rather than one based on ethnicity and

culture (Shulman, 2004, p. 37). Consequently, a member of the State community cannot be fully perceived as an individual adhering to a monoethnic conception of civic identity.

However, as Pirie (1996) discussed, the assumption that individuals holds one overarching identity is unlikely to apply to Southern and Eastern Ukraine. Moreover, it cannot be completely excluded that individuals may undergo a slow, frequently painful process of transition from one identity to another (Pirie, 1996, p. 1083). Another possibility is that identities overlap, and with dual identities – both regional and civic – individuals can operate freely without having two potentially conflicting identities. They can rather complement each other and provide a sense of comfort.

Altogether, having more than one identity is perceived an asset and can build bridges across divides (Henke, 2020, p. 10). Thus, a second strategy is more comprehensive and involves attachment to both regional and civic identity.

### **4.3. Indeterminant with state nor regional identity**

Wilson (2002) identified a large “middle group” that makes up the potential majority in Ukrainian society and is designated by the author as the ‘Other Ukraine’. It is argued that the first obvious epithet for the ‘other Ukraine’ is *Soviet*, because many elements of this identity are still extant in Ukraine, and on many different levels. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent unstable process of state-building in Ukraine, combined with a rejection or a weak regional identity may contribute to the development of psychological ambivalence about identity and belonging. As a result of this ambivalence, associated with civic and regional identity in post-Soviet Kharkiv, ‘indeterminate’ identification is included as a third self-identification strategy.

Other processes, such as adaption to a new society and culture, can provide an individual with a “marginal” identity, as Pirie (1996) argues. Despite its outdated connotations, *marginal man theory* makes an interesting contribution in this regard. The marginal man arises in a bi-cultural or multi-cultural situation (Stonequist, 1935, p. 1). This is very relevant for Kharkiv residents in connection with the dismantling of one state and the birth of another in the early 1990s. When an individual shaped and moulded by one culture is brought by migration, education and marriage, or other influence into permanent contact with a culture of a different content, or when an individual from birth is initiated into two or more historic traditions, languages, political loyalties, moral codes, or religions, then he is likely to find himself on the margin of each culture, but a member of neither



(Goldberg, 1941, p. 52). The qualification of the *marginal man theory* was defined by Milton M. Goldberg (1941) as follows:

If (1) the so-called “marginal” individual is conditioned to his existence on the borders of two cultures from birth, if (2) he shares this existence and conditioning process with a large number of individuals in his primary groups, if (3) his years of early growth, maturation, and even adulthood find him participating in institutional activities manned largely by other “marginal” individuals like himself, and finally, if (4) his marginal position results in no major blockages or frustrations of his learned expectations and desires, then he is not a true “marginal” individual in the defined sense, but a participant member of a *marginal culture*, every bit as real and complete to him as is the nonmarginal culture to the nonmarginal man (1941: 53).

Drawing on our de-ethnification of Pirie’s (1996: 1083) theory, we can add here that the potential tensions between the Soviet heritage and regional or civic markers or the tensions between the latter two will draw the individual’s allegiances in different directions in the same way that mixed parentage does.

Only a few scholars have shed light on the high level of intermarriages in the Ukrainian-Russian border areas, which in the case of Kharkiv reaches almost 40 percent (Pirie, 1996; Rodgers, 2008; Zhurzhenko, 2010). This creates another reality of dichotomies, which could potentially contribute to a vague or indeterminate identity. More importantly, as argued by Rodgers (2008: 36), the legacy of Soviet nationality practice should not be underestimated. In the Soviet Union, nationality was described ascriptively, with a strong bias towards either one’s father’s nationality or to the republic of residence, and this official practice served to undermine the meaning of nationality, which is especially characteristic of Ukraine where the rates of intermarriage is extremely high (Rodgers, 2008, p. 36): The results of ethnographic research in the Ukrainian-Russian bi-cultural belt clearly demonstrates this with several respondents describing their ethnicity as “under one regime, we were Ukrainians, under another we were Russians, but frankly speaking we do not know who we are (Rodgers, 2008, p. 36).

#### **4.4. Transnational identity**

A fourth strategy encompasses those individuals who go beyond the paradigms of nation-states and state boundaries and are more inclined to embrace a transnational identity. The assumption in most theories of transnationalism is that citizens in European states have multiple, nested, situational and fluid identities (Taras, Filippova & Pobeda, 2004, p. 836). Political transformative processes have

changed the traditional notion of citizenship, and economic and cultural globalisation further undermines exclusive attachment to a nation-state (Taras, Filippova & Pobeda, 2004, p. 836).

Unlike indeterminate identity, the transnational identity may be a strong allegiance as another potential reflection of the Soviet past. In this regard, we endorse the statement of Lewis. H Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch (2016: 974) that the Soviet Union never was a nation-state but rather an entity containing many nations, and crossing borders defined as national did not mean leaving the country. This is a legacy that may have contributed to the formation of a transnational identity in the peculiar borderland of “Slobozhanshchyna”. As Zhurzhenko (2010: 155) put it, objective factors as a former administrative division, a historical or ethno-linguistic boundary or pure political will are not sufficient for creating a border. The border has also to be drawn in the minds of the people (Zhurzhenko, 2010, p. 155).

But transnational identity as it exists in Ukraine today may be captured in a number of ways: it appears to be virtual, mixing ethnic pluralism, civic values and feelings of loyalty to the state without in any tangible way transcending state borders (Taras, Filippova & Pobeda, 2004, p. 852). A possible transnational identity option may be a East Slavic identity reflected in the causal rhetoric of fraternity and ‘open borders’ (Schulman, 2004). Individuals may follow a strategy which attempts to reconcile two identities with an over-arching ‘pan identity’ as a mode of reducing internal tension stemming from a difficult identity decision, as argued by Pirie (1996: 1083).

A high level of social interaction, resulting in strong cross-border cultural and economic ties, has potentially created a transnational community – a broad locality - that is attached to both the host-state and the kin-state since this makes them feel more mobile.

There is a high probability that a certain target group is inclined to use the aforementioned self-identification strategies, which will be discussed in the next section.

## **5. Methodology**

Having delved into the literature on identities in Ukraine, which mainly concerned western Ukraine (Galicia) or eastern Ukraine (Donbas), the present author first developed the idea of studying emerging identities in Kharkiv in the autumn of 2020. At first, the idea was to conduct qualitative interviewing with representatives of the Kharkiv intelligentsia as a target group, and some contacts were actually established in early February 2022 in the hope that a snowball sampling would expand the number of respondents to the study. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine (including the Kharkiv region) at the end of February led to the abandonment of this research design, and it was necessary to develop a new framework for the collection and analysis of data. This chapter will present and explain the methodological approach used in this study, along with a discussion of the selected material.

### **5.1. Thematic Analysis**

Of course, several strategies can be used to study emerging identities among a certain cohort of respondents in a city and region, but here it is argued that the inability to use direct observation due to an ongoing war is an invitation to apply a Thematic Analysis. This approach has emerged as a general, though not terribly well defined, approach to qualitative data analysis that has become a common description used by qualitative researchers to summarize how they went about their task (Bryman, 2016, p. 570). Thematic analysis is unusual in the canon of qualitative analytical approaches, because it offers a method – a tool or technique, unbounded by theoretical commitments – rather than a methodology (a theoretically informed, and confined, framework for research) (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This means that, unlike many qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective, a considerable advantage given the diversity of work in learning and teaching (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3352).

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a dataset and can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 2). According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 4), it is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Despite its theoretical flexibility and lack of an identifiable heritage, as argued by Alan Bryman (2016), it is important to

note that researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12).

### **5.1.2. Epistemology: constructionist thematic analysis**

If researchers seek to adopt the technique as part of their research analysis, they must offer a clear theoretical position, which will increase the perceived validity of the data and the transparency of the thematic analysis (Ozeum, Willis, & Howell, 2022, p. 150). For this study, the theoretical framework with the emphasis on the regional element was outlined in the previous chapter.

In contrast to an inductive approach, where the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves, indicating that this form of thematic analysis is data-driven, a deductive analysis is driven by the researchers theoretical and analytical interest and may provide a more detailed analysis of some aspect of the data (Nowell., 2017, p. 8). This form of thematic analysis was designated by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a theoretical thematic analysis. It is assumed that one can either code for a quite specific research question (which maps onto the more theoretical approach) or the specific research question can evolve through the coding process (which maps onto the inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12). In addition, another decision revolves around the 'level' at which themes are to be identified: at a semantic or explicit level, or at a latent or interpretative level (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). Semantic codes are identified through the explicit or surface meanings of the data, while latent coding goes beyond the descriptive level of the data and attempts to identify hidden meanings or underlying assumptions, ideas, or ideologies that may shape or inform the descriptive or semantic content of the data (Byrne, 2022, p. 1397). A thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13).

In light of the above considerations, the theoretical interest of this study and the intention to study identity construction in political discourse imply that a theoretical thematic analysis with the aim of studying latent meaning corresponds to our interest. Analysis within the latent tradition tends to come from a constructionist paradigm, and in this form, thematic analysis overlaps with some forms of 'discourse analysis', where broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorised as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13). From a constructionist perspective, meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced, rather

than inhering within individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 14). A constructionist epistemology has particular implications with regard to thematic analysis, namely that in addition to the recurrence of perceptibly important information, meaningfulness is highly influential in the development and interpretation of codes and themes (Byrne, 2022, p. 1395). Thus, the interpretive potential of thematic analysis is largely utilised when it is conducted within a constructionist framework.

## 5.2. Phases of Thematic Analysis

Nowell et al. (2017: 2) argue that rigorous thematic analysis can produce trustworthy and insightful findings, but there is no clear agreement about how researchers can rigorously apply the method. Indeed, the issues associated with this method include how to ensure validity and how to conduct effective thematic analysis (Ozeum, 2022, p. 144). With this in mind, it is tempting to apply the six-phase version proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which has widely been cited by other authors as a suitable version of thematic analysis (Bryman, 2016; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; Byrne, 2022). Since there is a certain consensus relying on Braun and Clarke (2006), this creates legitimization, and this study aims to follow this tradition. The six-phase version is not only an approach to *doing* thematic analysis, but also *learning how to do* thematic analysis, as argued by Byrne (2022: 1398). Table 1 presents the phases of thematic analysis documented by Braun and Clarke (2006).

**Table 1: Phases of Thematic Analysis**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of the process</b>
<b>1. Familiarising yourself with the data:</b>	<b>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.</b>
<b>2. Generating initial codes:</b>	<b>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</b>
<b>3. Searching for themes:</b>	<b>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</b>
<b>4. Reviewing themes:</b>	<b>Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.</b>
<b>5. Defining and naming themes.</b>	<b>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the</b>

	<b>analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</b>
<b>6. Producing the report:</b>	<b>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</b>

**(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 35)**

This method is actually an iterative and reflective process that develops over time and involves a constant moving back and forward between phases (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4). As such, it is important to appreciate the six-phase process as a set of guidelines, rather than rules, that should be applied in a flexible manner to fit the data and the research question(s) (Byrne, 2022, p. 1398).

### **5.3. Material sampling approach**

The selected material for this study is interviews, speeches and other statements concerning identity questions, as well as underlying ideas and conceptualizations concerning self-identification of 17 Kharkiv politicians. These politicians will be selected from media sources on the Internet without any selection based on a certain political orientation. Russian is also the language of the Internet search, and it is impossible to assess whether Russian was the original language of communication, because in many Ukrainian and Kharkiv media sources on the Internet, both Ukrainian and Russian can be chosen as languages. The presentations in English are based on Yandex translations, where also the present author sometimes corrected if necessary.

The studied material includes 49 texts from media sources and one video on Youtube, which are still accessible on the Internet. All statements are categorized according to the surname of the politician, followed by the number 1, 2, 3, etc., and the link to the source and the date when it was accessed can be found in the “primary sources” section in the reference list. Some politicians were chosen because of some previous knowledge from the literature about the Maidan revolution and its impact on Kharkiv. The use of search words, such as, “the most influential people of Kharkiv”, further contributed to new interesting findings on the Internet, but some well-known Kharkiv politicians did not comment on the identity question at all. On the recommendation of researchers from IRES at the

Uppsala University, some material from the pre-Maidan period were also found. It is also worth noting that the question of identity became much more relevant in the period after Maidan in 2014.

The aim is to select an expanded dataset and start by examining the discourse after the Orange Revolution from late 2004 to January 2022. This allows us to explore how the regional (Kharkiv) identity is framed by politicians and the motivation behind the selection of this cohort stems from the idea that *regionalization* can be instrumentalized by politicians for their own purposes. Identity as a concept plays an important role in denoting beliefs and political ideologies and is therefore utilised by politicians. The present author supports the argument put forward by Dominique Arel (2018) that identities frame an issue, whether respondents consciously prioritize them or not, and identity variables operate in the expression of political preferences. Therefore, by studying latent meaning, we can ascertain how the identity variables operate in the political discourse with a particular focus on the regional element.

#### **5.4. Thematic coding and ethical considerations**

Thematic analysis is often highly dependent on coding as a means of identifying themes in the data (Bryman, 2016, p. 570). Coding is conceptualised as a process of searching for evidence of identified themes that are developed early in the analytic process, through engagement with data and/or theory (Braun & Clarke, 2016, p. 741). For Braun and Clarke, the “keyness” of a theme is not essentially dependent on numeric measures, but on the quality behind the theme and whether the theme contributes to the research question (Ozeum, Willis, & Howell, 2022, p. 150). An important question to address in terms of coding is what counts as a pattern/theme, or what ‘size’ does a theme need to be (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). To avoid some ambiguity, this study refers to Alan Bryman’s definition of what a theme is:

- a category identified by the analyst through his/her data;
- that relates to his/her research focus (and quite possible the research questions);
- that builds on codes identified in transcripts and/or field notes;
- and that provides the researcher with the basis for a theoretical understanding of his or her data that can make a theoretical contribution to the literature relating to the research focus (2016: 584)

There can be as many levels of coding as the researcher finds useful, but too many levels can be counterproductive to the goal of attaining clarity in organizing and interpreting the data (Nowell,

Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 6). Moreover, coding will to some extent depend on whether the themes are more 'data-driven' or 'theory-driven' - in the former, the themes will depend on the data, but in the latter, the data will be approached taking into account specific questions that the researcher wish to code around (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 18). The 'theory-driven' approach is absolutely more in line with our aim. Finally, when it comes to searching for themes, a set of codes that do not seem to belong anywhere can also appear, and it is perfectly acceptable to create a 'theme' called *miscellaneous* (my emphasis) to house the codes – possibly temporarily – that do not seem to fit into the main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 20).

While recognizing that complete objectivity is impossible, the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith; in other words, it should be apparent that he or she has overtly not allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and the findings deriving from it (Bryman, 2016, p. 386). In order for the discussion to be credible, the researcher should discuss all of the relevant results, including results that were unexpected or did not correspond to the main explanations of the phenomenon being studied (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 11). As outlined in the previous chapter, this study relies on four main prerequisites for self-identification among a certain cohort of respondents from Kharkiv, but relevant results concerning self-identification among this group will not be completely discarded, as already stated. Therefore, the statements of these politicians concerning only the regional element will not be given any priority. Instead, the discussion will focus on what really follows from the results, which is also important for the representativeness of the study as a whole.



## 6. Findings

This chapter will present quotes from both significant and more marginal politicians from Kharkiv, as well as the context in which they were made. It should be emphasized that this presentation is not based on any form of ranking. Rather, it is a presentation of a politician and his or her quotes, which at that particular time were the focus of attention for analysis. Thus, at the very early stage of the analysis, the focus was on more well-known Kharkiv politicians, such as former mayors and those who are known at the state level. Further research on the Internet resulted in more quotes from politicians who until recently were completely unknown to the author. The Internet search was carried out only in Russian using the name of the politician, followed by words such as “I am a Kharkivite”, “I am Ukrainian”, or simply “Slobozhanshchyna”. The first three phases of thematic analysis will be implemented in this chapter.

### 6.1. Mykhailo Dobkin

One of the most famous Kharkiv politicians of the post-Soviet period, as well as one of the most ardent critics of the Maidan Revolution is undoubtedly the previous mayor of Kharkiv **Dobkin**. In March 2010, President Yanukovich appointed him as Chairman of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration, i.e., Governor of Kharkiv Region, a post he held until March 2014 (Putin’s list, 2018-2022). Unlike many colleagues from the Party of Regions, Dobkin remained in Ukraine after the Euromaidan (Babel, 2021). Moreover, Dobkin scored the second largest vote in the last Kharkiv mayoral election, which took place on October 31, 2021 (Zaborona, 2021). The following quotes from Dobkin were made in the period before the mayoral election of 2021:

*I’m Mikhail Dobkin. I was born and raised in Kharkiv. I’m a Kharkivite. There are people in our city who are not afraid to tell the truth and call a spade a spade [...] Outsiders do not understand Kharkiv. They cannot understand her strong character.*

A strong hint of regional peculiarities of bilingualism can also be confirmed by the following statements by Dobkin:

*THEY force us to choose a language: Russian or Ukrainian. But if our native language is Russian, if the language in which WE dream or sing lullabies to our children is Russian, if the language WE speak with our parents is Russian, then WE have an absolute right to use our language everywhere. We need both the Ukrainian and Russian languages.*

*[...] All these are our values. And together we strove to ensure that Kharkiv retained its own identity, which is our identity.*

(Dobkin 1 and 2)

*My core values are a prosperous Kharkiv, the opportunity to preserve its culture, historical identity, and the opportunity to communicate and study, including in the language that people are familiar with, which they speak at home [...]*

(Dobkin 3)

As a reaction to the politics of the post-Soviet period and, in particular, to the dramatic events in 2014, Dobkin advocated for what he called a “cultural decentralization” of Ukraine, which is another evidence of a strong identification with Kharkiv and the historical region of Slobozhanshchyna:

*The idea of the Maidan is built on nationalism, and this is the ideology of Galicia. Well it's impossible to impose it all over Ukraine. After the collapse of the USSR, it was necessary to divide Ukrainians into subnationalities: Galicians, Slobozhans, Black Sea residents, but all had to obtain Ukrainian citizenship [...]*  
*We would have one citizenship, one economy and one army, but different cultures within the state.*

(Dobkin 4)

## **6.2. Alla Aleksandrovskaya**

The former Communist Party of Ukraine was banned in 2015 and its Kharkiv party organization was headed by **Aleksandrovskaya**, who was elected the People’s Deputy from the Communist Party in 1998 and remained a member of Parliament until the Parliament elections in 2012 (Liga.net, 2021). In 2016, Aleksandrovskaya was detained on suspicion of encroaching on the territorial integrity and inviolability of Ukraine and she was also suspected of attempting to bribe people’s deputies from the Kharkiv region so that they would write a collective letter to the president asking for the federalization of Ukraine (<https://my.ua>). The political activities of Aleksandrovskaya in the post-Maidan period was dominated by the idea of creating a new administrative district called “Slobozhanshchyna” and the following quotes reflect her political ambitions at that time:

*We need a successful and prosperous Kharkiv region as part of a strong and indivisible Ukraine. I’m sure that the residents of our region expect responsibility and determination from the state authorities and respect the opinion of their own citizens. We are moving in the right direction, the Kharkiv region and its resident said a firm “yes” to our project [...]*

(Aleksandrovskaya 1)

*Today we say “yes” to the creation of a particular development region - “Slobozhanshchyna”, so that one of the key regions of Ukraine – Kharkiv region, will become the locomotive of economic growth of our country. 25 thousand Kharkiv residents supported the petition “For Slobozhanshchyna”.*

(Aleksandrovskaia 2)

Aleksandrovskaia reacted emotionally to the accusations of separatism, but still stressed the importance of a new state structure for Ukraine:

*I want to remind you that Chornovil<sup>1</sup> spoke about the need for federalization to preserve the unity and integrity of our country. Chornovil said: “Federalization is the expansion of self-government, not national self-determination.” Millions of Ukrainians voted for him. Are they all separatists too? Maybe all citizens of Ukraine are separatists?*

(Aleksandrovskaia 3)

### **6.3. Arsen Avakov**

Probably the most famous Kharkiv politician at the state level is the former Minister of Internal Affairs **Avakov**, who, like other Ukrainian politicians began his business career during the period of *perestroika* (Osw, 2020). In 2002, Avakov entered politics as an official in Kharkiv’s City Council and was later appointed governor of the province of Kharkiv by President Viktor Yushchenko in 2005 (Wsws, 2021). He joined the party “Fatherland” and accepted the proposal of Yulia Tymoshenko to head the Kharkiv regional organization of the political party VO Bat’kivschina (Fatherland) in April 2010 (<https://avakov.com>). Avakov was appointed Interior Minister in the midst of the reshuffle that followed Ukraine’s Maidan revolution in 2014, and held this position until his resignation in July, 2021 (Carnegie, 2021). In a long interview with the famous Ukrainian journalist Dmitry Gordon, Avakov gave the following answer about his nationality:

*I am little Ossetian, a little Armenian, but more Ukrainian – I live here most of the time and so I feel, and to be more precise, I am a Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationalist. I prefer to apply this definition [...] Our citizens (I emphasize: ours, not Russian citizens), who are used to reading, thinking and expressing thoughts in Russian must be treated with respect. I call it Slobozhansky because Kharkiv Russian differs from Moscow, for example.*

(Avakov 1)

At least before the Russian invasion in February 2022, Arsen Avakov was also a frequent participant in various political talk shows, and his statements about a “Slobozhan Russian” language or dialect appeared several times on the eve of the Russian invasion:

*When they say that people in Kharkiv have traditional Russian connections, I, as a Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationalist, would like to declare: Kharkiv is the first capital of Ukraine with one of the most*

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<sup>1</sup> Viacheslav Chornovil was a candidate in the 1991 presidential election in Ukraine

*prominent Ukrainian intelligentsia. Kharkiv is a Ukrainian city where the Russian culture and as I use to say, the “Slobozhan” language is developed. This is a statement of fact. (Youtube.Com, 2022)*

(Avakov 2)

*If I, as a Kharkivite, write this text in Slobozhan Russian with free Russian spelling, it does not mean that I, like many other Kharkiv residents, will accept the “Russian world”.*

(Avakov 3)

#### **6.4. Hennadiy Kernes**

Unlike Avakov, whose political activity in recent years has taken place at the state level, **Kernes** is known as a local Kharkiv politician who enjoyed great popularity among Kharkiv residents. Running as an independent candidate in his first (1998) and second (2002) elections to the Kharkiv City Council, Kernes supported Yushchenko during the Orange Revolution in 2004 (The Insider, 2020). Nevertheless, only two years later, Kernes headed the election campaign of the candidate for mayor of Kharkiv Dobkin, and became the secretary of the City Council and headed the city branch of the Party of Regions (thepage.ua). After Viktor Yanukovych’s victory in the presidential election in 2010, Kernes became acting Mayor of Kharkiv, a position he held for an astounding ten years, and despite the fact that he did not participate in the 2020 election campaign (due to illness), he received more than 60 percent of the vote (thepage.ua), which is a vivid reminder of the popularity of Kernes among Kharkiv residents. The aforementioned journalist Dmitry Gordon asked how the mayor would characterize the peculiarities of Kharkiv:

*(Gordon): How do you think Kharkiv differs from other cities, what is its peculiarity, uniqueness?*

*(Kernes): Well, they say that a Kharkiv resident is a nationality...Of course, Kharkiv has its own highlights – like any other Ukrainian, Russian, or any other city [...] The history of Kharkiv is glorious, and let’s not forget that it was the first capital of Ukraine.*

(Kernes 1)

Kernes was widely known for his receptivity to interviews in which he praised Kharkiv and expressed strong local feelings in recent years:

*A Kharkivian are like a nationality. Our people are kind beautiful and very fair. They are patriots of our country and our city, and they observe cleanliness. Yes, they generally love their city [...] I think that I am doing the right thing, that I am reviving the greatness of Kharkiv. We instilled love and patriotism for Kharkiv.*

(Kernes 2)

In answering the question how he is going to change the public opinion of Kharkivites in terms of geopolitics, Kernes emphasized the understanding of (political) processes:

*I will participate in the process when it begins, because first of all I am a Kharkivite, and then I am the mayor. And, of course, a citizen of Ukraine in the first place.*

(Kernes 3)

It is interesting to note what Kernes said in an interview at the height of the crisis in early 2014, which reflects a belligerent attitude towards Maidan supporters:

*(...) if they come to us from Ternopil or Lviv, put on masks, take molotov cocktails, then who should protect their hometown? (...) We will take over this function and protect (...) I feel the moods of the people who will not give even a millimeter of Slobozhanshchyna land to some aliens who will hang out portraits of Stepan Bandera here.*

(Kernes 4)

## 6.5. Ihor Baluta

A much more anonymous politician compared to Kernes, **Baluta** was a former member of Yulia Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna Party and was appointed Governor of the Kharkiv Region by the acting president Oleksandr Turchynov at the height of the protests by supporters and opponents of Maidan in the city in March, 2014 (<https://genshtab.info>). During the presentation, Baluta noted that Ukraine is going through a critical moment, and Kharkiv residents must unite and hold out:

*We must clearly understand that Ukrainians are a united people, and no one should split us. Starting today, I urge you to impose a moratorium on any manifestations of separatism.*

(Baluta 1)

Baluta also emphasized Kharkiv's place in the Ukrainian state in his public statement on the day of the Ukrainian flag in 2014:

*Dear slobozhans! I heartily congratulate you on the Day of the National Flag of Ukraine. The Ukrainian flag is a symbol of respect and centuries-old history of our people [...] this is the pride, glory and greatness of the nation.*

(Baluta 2)

However, Baluta participated in the elections to the Kharkiv region in 2020 as a member of the Accent party, which, according to him, is an alternative to those forces that either destroy the Ukrainian statehood or create corruption schemes:

*The Accent Party is a Ukrainian patriotic party, around where people who share the principles of the rule of law are now gathering. We understand that for the successful development of Ukraine in general, and the Kharkiv region in particular, professionals are needed, but honest and patriotic professionals. We start our party building with local elections because we believe that the success of the country is built in the regions [...] We attract to our ranks people who have proven themselves as patriots and were not associated with the separatist movement. (Baluta 3)*

## **6.6. Dmytro Svyatash**

Another former Kharkiv politician who has repeatedly changed his party affiliation is **Svyatash**, who in 2002 was a people's deputy of Verkhovna Rada, and then in 2005 became a member of the Party of Regions (<https://genshtab.info>). Svyatash was a devoted defender of President Yanukovich and commented on the events at the end of 2013 as follows:

*Kharkiv Euromaidan is three cripples who stand near the monument and litter. They are hitting each other so that someone will pay attention to them. Maybe they want to get into big politics through their smelly Euromaidan, but they don't get there that way. I completely exclude the participation of the city authorities and the Kharkiv police in this. And the fact is that Kharkiv's residents have an extremely negative attitude towards opposition representatives. If you ask Kharkiv residents the question "Do you consider Svoboda to be a fascist organization?", then 90 percent will answer in the affirmative.*

(Svyatash 1)

The Ukrainian public was outraged when Svyatash disparaged Galicians in early 2014, and also openly talked about the collapse of the country:

*In Kharkiv, and personally for me bandera, shukhevich, savur etc (all with small letter) are fascist henchmen, murderers and scum. Therefore, those who consider them heroes are their full counterparts. But in fact, the problem is one thing: there are really two countries within the geographical borders of Ukraine in terms of history, mentality and religion. Sooner or later, this unnatural union will break up, although I personally would not really like that. Or we will kill each other. The only unifying factor is the language, although the Galician dialect is not Ukrainian, but a bad version of Polish [...] And Eastern Ukrainians live and work in their country. I'm afraid that this is why the historical division of the country is inevitable in the long run.*

(Svyatash 2)

Surprisingly, the language was much more conciliatory on the eve of the 2014 parliamentary elections, when Svyatash was one of the candidates in a Kharkiv district:

*I will defend the peace and unity of Ukraine (...) I will: grant more powers to the regions, increasing the part of tax revenues remaining in the region; create a Kharkiv deputy group in the Verkhovna Rada to lobby for*

*the interests of Kharkiv residents; create comfortable living conditions for Kharkiv residents [...] I commit myself to: do everything possible to resume peaceful life in Ukraine; contribute to the development of the civil society in Ukraine [...] guarantee war and labor veterans, war children, combatants, Chernobyl victims enhanced social protection [...]*

(Svyatash 3)

## **6.7. Anton Herashchenko**

Having an antagonistic political orientation compared to Svyatash, the previous short-term adviser to former Interior Minister Avakov from 2014 to 2019, **Herashchenko** is known for his active pro-Ukrainian position (liga.net, 2022). A vivid example of his pro-Ukrainian orientation occurred in September 2014, when he called on Kharkiv residents to attend a planned rally of pro-Ukrainian activists “Kharkiv is Ukraine”, which should demonstrate that Kharkiv is a patriotic city:

*I would really like so many of us to gather tomorrow so that Putin and his puppets like Aleksandrovskaya will forever give up hope for a separatist sabbath in Slobozhanshchyna.*

(Herashchenko 1)

Later, Herashchenko commented on the rally in Kharkiv as follows:

*Kharkiv residents came to the rally “For Ukraine” at the call of their hearts and souls. There were a lot of Kharkivites at the rally – patriots of their city and Ukraine. This is an authentic civil society that will control the authorities to build a new European Ukraine and not let it get off this path.*

(Herashchenko 2)

In December of the same year, another rally was organized, at which Herashchenko addressed the audience as follows:

*I am here today as a Kharkivite, and as a citizen of Ukraine. I want to say no to Putin’s terrorism. I am sure that we will win, because history is on our side.*

(Herashchenko 3)

## **6.8. Yevhen Kushnarev**

Experts agree that by his participation in the political life of Ukraine, **Kushnarev** has earned a place among the most influential persons of the state (liga.net, 2020). He served as the governor of the Kharkiv region from 2000 to 2004, and then in the same year, Kushnarev was one of the main founders of the “New Democracy” political party, which a year later decided to merge with the Party of Regions ([www.peoples.ru](http://www.peoples.ru)). As a member of this party, he participated often and harshly in

disputes with political opponents (liga.net, 2020). Kushnarev was one of the organizers of the congress of deputies of local councils in Severodonetsk in 2004, at which the idea of creating the South-Eastern Republic was expressed ([www.peoples.ru](http://www.peoples.ru)) and his speech at this congress is well known in Ukraine:

*Don't try our patience... we have a worthy response to any attack – up to the most extreme measures. And I want to remind the hotheads under the Orange banners: it is 480 kilometers from Kharkiv to Kyiv, and to the border with Russia – 40!... We want to live in a state where everyone is protected. We understand that the East is very different from Galicia, and we do not impose our way of life on Galicia, but we will never allow Galicia to teach us how to live!... We will not accept a lifestyle imposed on us, we will not accept other peoples symbols, because our symbol is Orthodoxy!*

(Kushnarev 1)

At an online conference more than two years later, a participant named “Vitaly” asked Kushnarev the following question:

*Vitaly: Do you really want our children and grandchildren to live under the dictation of the Russian Empire under the feudal?! I was then at the Ice Palace in Severodonetsk, I heard your speech...*

*Kushnarev: You heard, but probably did not listen. If you dream of an ethnic nation, then you and I will not find a common ground, because I am an unequivocal supporter of the formation of a single Ukrainian political nation, to which everyone who considers himself a Ukrainian feels belonging, regardless of what language they speak and what church they go to.*

(Kushnarev 2)

Kushnarev had a definite view on the future state structure of Ukraine:

*Without the second stage of constitutional reform, without the decentralization of power and budget policy, we will not be able to create a full-fledged democratic model of the state. The main thing is to start moving along the path of federalization, and no one knows how long we will follow it.*

(Kushnarev 3)

## **6.9. Yuliya Svitlychna**

If Kushnarev belongs to the older generation of Kharkiv politicians, then **Svitlychna** belongs to the younger. She served as the head of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration from 2016 to 2019 and became the first woman in this position, as well as the youngest head of the Regional State Administration in the history of Ukraine (World-today, 2021). In 2020, Svitlychna announced the creation of her own political party and participation in the 2020 local elections in Kharkiv



(peoples.ru, 2021). She said the following after she was appointed head of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration by President Petro Poroshenko in 2016:

*One of the priorities is to further strengthen the foundations of democratic, pro-Ukrainian public life in the region, strengthen systemic interactions with civil society, and with everyone who is ready to participate in regional development.*

(Svitlychna 1)

One journalist hinted that people from the political camp of President Poroshenko are not very popular in the east of the country, which prompted Svitlychna to respond as follows:

*After the occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, there was a real threat of importing the “Russian world” into our region. The fact that today the Ukrainian flag is waving on the central square of Kharkiv, and not the tricolor; is the merit of Kharkiv residents and the President personally (...) I am a Kharkivite, working in the Regional State Administration since 2006 (...) I know how Kharkiv region lives and I understand its strengths and weaknesses (...)*

(Svitlychna 2)

After receiving a seat in the Ukrainian parliament of Verkhovna Rada in 2020, Svitlychna was asked if she had forgotten Kharkiv:

*Well, what do you mean by that? Kharkiv holds my heart and is the most priority question for me [...] Now I am a People’s Deputy of Ukraine. My main task is to protect the interests of the Kharkiv residents in the parliament. That’s what I’m focused on.*

(Svitlychna 3)

## **6.10. Ihor Terekhov**

The acting mayor of Kharkiv is **Terekhov**, who won the elections in October 2021, gaining more than 50 percent of the vote (kyivpost, 2021). His political activities was previously limited to the Kharkiv region, but at the end of 2020, Terekhov became acting mayor of Kharkiv after the death of Hennadiy Kernes and therefore, by virtue of membership in the Kernes Bloc – Successful Kharkiv party, he won the last mayoral elections of Kharkiv (liga. net, 2022). Russian was abolished as a regional language by the Kharkiv regional administration in May 2021, which prompted Terekhov, at that time a candidate for the post of governor of Kharkiv, to respond that it was more comfortable for Kharkiv residents to speak Russian:

*This is the position of our regional political force, because in fact today more than 80 percent of the population of Kharkiv speaks Russian. The request of the society in the city of Kharkiv for the Russian language exists [...] It is convenient for people to communicate in Russian and the interests of Kharkiv residents are above all other interests for me. Sorry, but I will defend it.*

(Terekhov 1)

In an interview before the mayoral elections in 2021, a journalist noted that there should be something attractive in Kharkiv, “like raisins in a bun”, so that people would be drawn here, to which Terekhov replied:

*As for the raisins, well, firstly, a Kharkiv citizen is a citizen with a spirit. Secondly, I can tell you that we, Kharkiv residents, love our city very much. And we love our city for its stability, and for the fact that Kharkiv is constantly developing (...) The ideology of Kharkiv is close to me: that is, the interests of the city. I am a man of Kharkiv.*

(Terekhov 2)

About a month before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Terekhov assured Kharkiv residents that “there is no cause for concern,” and Kharkiv,, will develop successfully under a peaceful sky:

*Dear Kharkivites!*

*Kharkiv was and will be a Ukrainian city, whose inhabitants are citizens of a united and indivisible Ukraine. And anyone who attempts to seize Kharkiv should understand that not only Kharkiv residents, but also all Ukrainians will stand up to defend their beloved city. In turn, I want to assure all Kharkiv residents that the city is ready to give a firm rebuff to a potential invader, we have all the forces and means to defend Kharkiv.*

(Terekhov 3)

## **6.11. Kostyantyn Nemichev**

As the youngest politician in this cohort, as well as a representative of the far-right political forces, **Nemichev** was a single candidate for the post of mayor of Kharkiv in 2021 from four pro-Ukrainian parties and the leader of the Kharkiv “National Corps”, and he commented on this appointment as follows:

*[...] I began to engage in political and public activities after returning from the front. During this time, my team managed to make a lot of positive projects for Kharkiv residents. And now, after many years of conscientious work, with the support of patriots, I am participating in the mayoral elections in order to preserve and demonstrate to everyone the pro-Ukrainian Kharkiv.*

(Nemichev 1)

During the same month (August, 2021), Nemichev invited combatants, volunteers, patriots to take part in the March of Defenders for the 30th anniversary of Ukraine's Independence:

*It is necessary to show that there are those in Kharkiv who defended and will defend independence. Come and honor the memory of the Heroes who laid down their lives for Ukraine. Thank those who took part in the Russo-Ukrainian war. Let's celebrate the independence day together!*

(Nemichev 2)

## 6.12. Andriy Lesyk

An active politician, best known for his criticism of far-right Ukrainian nationalism in the period up to February 2022, is **Lesyk**, who was the head of the Kharkiv City organization of the political party "Opposition Platform – For Life" (<https://www.chesno.org>). He was involved in political scandals several times in the post-Maidan period, including for supporting the alleged "Odessa People's Republic" in 2014 and was deprived of his deputy mandate in 2017 for wearing the St. George ribbon (<https://my.ua>). At the end of 2019, Lesyk was elected head of the "Opposition Platform – For Life", which he commented on in the following way:

*(...) You all know my goals – they coincide with our party. My biggest dream is to live in peace. The key goal is to develop our country. I have always said that we – Russians and Ukrainians – have always been and will always be fraternal peoples. I am proud that it did not break down in 2014, 2015, or 2017.*

(Lesyk 1)

Lesyk commented on the political situation in Kharkiv and preparations for the celebration of Victory Day in 2021, saying that:

*It is very important for Kharkiv to establish mutually beneficial cooperation with fraternal Russia and with the fraternal people of the Russian Federation. This is important. And it is important to honor and respect our history and it is necessary to choose: either black or white. And what happened in Kyiv, the march of these fascists (march in honor of the SS division "Galicia"), is simply unacceptable.*

(Lesyk 2)

In one session on the adoption of the budget for 2022 in the Kharkiv City Council, Lesyk further developed his opinion about the political situation in the region:

*I express my opinion that, indeed, the time we had to familiarize ourselves with the budget is enough for someone, not enough for someone. What is the reason for that low incomes are generally associated with an*

*extremely negative situation in the country, including the political situation in the country [...] Of course, for the Kharkiv region it is important that we have good relations with all our neighbors, including the Russian Federation (outrageous exclamations were heard in the hall).*

(Lesyk 3)

### **6.13. Valery Pisarenko**

Another relatively well-known politician who can be classified as “changed political affiliation” is **Pisarenko**, who was a People’s Deputy of the Verkhovna Rada in 2006 as a member of the Tymoshenko’s Bloc faction, but later expelled from the faction in 2010 for supporting the ruling majority, at that time – the Party of Regions (<https://my.ua>). Pisarenko continued to support the Party of Regions but was non-partisan until the 2019 parliamentary elections (liga. net, 2021). As for the political consultations that were held in 2008 on coalitions between parties, Pisarenko noted that deputies of the parliament have learned not to discuss issues on which there is a contradiction:

*We do not discuss membership or not in NATO, we do not discuss the issues of languages, we do not discuss issues as whether there would be a western Ukraine or an eastern Ukraine. That does not exist. There is only one Ukraine and one nation – Ukrainians, regardless of which part of Ukraine they live in.*

(Pisarenko 1)

In answering the question if he manages to combine work in parliament – in Kyiv, and deal with local problems of one district in Kharkiv, Pisarenko answered as follows:

*So it happened in my life that my work schedule became very intense. I live in Kharkiv and rightfully consider myself a Kharkiv citizen. I love this city and I want to realize the potential of the first capital [...]*

(Pisarenko 2)

However, at the end of 2014, Valery Pisarenko became the head of an inter-factional deputy association called “For Kharkiv! For Slobozhanshchyna!” in the Verkhovna Rada (in which the aforementioned Dmytro Svyatash was also present), and Pisarenko said that the main task of the association’s work would be to solve the problems in Kharkiv and lobby for its interests:

*Our association is aimed at stable and fruitful work, we are preparing to be active in protecting the interests of Kharkiv. Our next work will be related to increasing the financing of urban programs and the implementation of projects on decentralization of power in Ukraine.*

(Pisarenko 3)

### **6.14. Volodymyr Seminozhenko**

A former party leader of the Party of Regions in 2001-2003 before Yanukovych came to power, **Seminozhenko** also served as Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine in three different periods: 1999, 2001 - 2002 and in 2010 (liga. net, 2022). Later, he headed the “New Politics” party, but due to disappointment with the situation in the country, he left the election campaign in 2014, and Seminozhenko commented on this act as follows:

*Dear Fellow Countrymen!*

*I declare with all responsibility that I am not leaving my hometown, my native Derzhinsky district, I will continue to actively participate in its life and work in the interests of its residents, as I have done for all years. Kharkiv is my hometown, I owe him a lot, the interests of Kharkiv residents have always been and will always be in the first place for me. I am sure we need to live sincerely with the concerns and problems of our city.*

(Seminozhenko 1)

At the local elections in 2020, Seminozhenko headed the list of the party “Our Region” and put forward the idea of the development of the Kharkiv region:

*It is important to emphasize that Kharkiv is the capital of domestic pharmacy. This is the topic that should form the basis of the development strategy of the Kharkiv region, which is the most important component in the development of the whole of Ukraine. The Kharkiv team of “Our Region” is participating in the local elections in order to strengthen and raise the level of regional power. The main thing that unite us is our love for Kharkiv. You know, I think there is a special Kharkiv patriotism.*

(Seminozhenko 2)

As a native of Kharkiv, widely represented in the Ukrainian political and scientific elite, Seminozhenko answered the question, does he want his hometown to regain its former status as the capital of Ukraine?:

*There are no former capitals, as well as presidents. I like that Kharkiv is still the intellectual, scientific capital of Ukraine (...) It is necessary to restore the traditions through which it can maintain the status of the capital. It is possible that if the mess continues in Kyiv, then the capital will have to be moved to Kharkiv.*

(Seminozhenko 3)

## **6.15. Volodymyr Hrynyov**

Former presidential candidate of Ukraine **Hrynyov** was not an active politician in the period following the Orange Revolution in 2004 (<http://значеніе-имен.рф>). However, Hrynyov is well known for his support of a federal structure of Ukraine, which he and Viacheslav Chornovil, as the

only presidential candidates out of four, promoted in the first presidential elections in 1991 (cripo.com, 2010). Hrynyov participated in an interview in 2016, that is, more than 25 years since he became a people's deputy of the Verkhovna Rada, and explained how he supported a federal structure of a newly independent Ukraine immediately after the August 1991 coup:

*I supported a federal structure – like in Germany and U.S back in 1991, so that regions with different mentalities in east and west, like Slobozhanshchyna and Galicia – could focus on their development without being dispersed, thereby strengthening the whole country. I am still supporting this. Federalization is not separatism at all – when it comes to the process within the country, there is no danger of a split, we are all citizens of Ukraine. Moreover, more than a quarter of a century ago, my supporters and I did not sign the Act of proclaiming the independence of Ukraine. We regarded it as support for the independence of one nation, and we wanted more: multinational independence, which implies democracy. For me, the collegial Ukraine is Ukraine, woven from different colors, rich in its diversity.*

(Hrynyov 1)

## **6.16. Ihor Rainin**

The former head of the Administration of President Poroshenko in 2016-2019, **Rainin** worked in the Kharkiv Regional State Administration until August 2016 (pravda, 2019). President Poroshenko appointed Rainin as the new head of the Kharkiv region in February 2015, which was well received by the latter:

*I am sure that Kharkiv can become a leader in carrying out reforms in Ukraine, which is my personal responsibility (...) Those who are destructive, who put themselves against Ukraine, will be cut off immediately and harshly. Total intolerance of separatism, total intolerance of corruption (...)*

(Rainin 1)

Shortly after, Rainin honored the heroic deeds of the participants of the Maidan revolution and said the following:

*A lot of events have happened in the country this year, but Ukraine has proved and Ukrainians have proved that we are all one country. There is no turning back. From Donbas to Lviv – we are all Ukrainians, regardless of nationality and political beliefs (...)*

(Rainin 2)

However, Rainin made a spectacular U-turn and was introduced by Yuriy Boyko, one of the leaders of the “Opposition Platform – For Life”, as the only politician who defended the interests of Eastern Ukraine in a political leadership, consisting only of Galicians, and appointed him the new chairman

of the Kharkiv regional organization of that party in 2019, which Rainin commented on in a conciliatory way:

*I want to say that we have an election year ahead – elections to local councils (...) Here it is necessary to apply efforts and to discard certain ambitions, certain other moments, In order to be useful, we must unite and win local councils that are in demand by an ordinary person, an ordinary Ukrainian.*

(Rainin 3)

### **6.17. Irina Efremova**

As the first deputy chairman of the Batkivshchyna party in Kharkiv during the parliamentary election campaign in 2012, **Efremova** is known as a long-time associate and confidant of the former Minister of Internal Affairs Avakov, but in 2014 she headed the “Popular Front’s” electoral headquarters in the Kharkiv region (glavnoe, 2015). During the Maidan, Efremova supported the idea of creating a mobilization point for organizing the population, which was called the “Resistance Movement:

*Yulia Tymoshenko’s idea to create a Resistance Movement was fully supported by the population in the Kharkiv region (...) We have no right to delay, because every hour is worth its weight in gold when it come to the unity and integrity of the country, everything else is secondary.*

(Efremova 1)

Another social movement called “Rukh Support” was created in 2014 with the aim of mobilizing all segments of the population to protect the integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, and was also supported by Efremova:

*I emphasize that “Rukh Support” is not a political movement. Its creation is caused by the fact that our army and militia, which was practically destroyed by Yanukovich, today need the help of citizens, patriots of Ukraine.*

(Efremova 2)

Efremova attended the celebrations on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation, which has been celebrated in Ukraine since 2015:

*No one in the Second World War could have imagined that a brother will turn against his own brother, that Russia would occupy part of our territory. Today, our soldiers are dying on the collision line for Ukraine to be free and independent.*

(Efremova 3)

## 7. Discussion

In this chapter, the results that have been identified from the previous section will be presented. This implies that the last three phases of thematic analysis will be carried out, i.e. a discussion of emerging 'main' themes, as well as 'latent' themes through the lens of our theoretical framework and how they answer the research questions of this study. After completing the first three phases of thematic analysis, a summary table is presented below for the convenience of the reader. A certain categorization of the selected politicians into 'significant' and 'marginal' was carried out, since the former can be characterized as prominent at the local level and/or holding high positions at the state level, while the second "group" is less known to the public outside Kharkiv. The purpose of this categorization is to see which potential themes are particularly prominent and which are not for each group.

**Table 2: Summary of 'main' and 'latent' themes**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Main theme</b>	<b>Latent theme</b>	<b>Code in the texts</b>
<b><u>Significant:</u></b>			
<b>Dobkin</b>	<i>Kharkiv's regional identity</i>	<i>Russian as a regional and/or state language</i>	<i>(...) opportunity to preserve its culture, historical identity (Slobozhans)</i>
<b>Aleksandro vskaya</b>	<i>Kharkiv region as a key region</i>	<i>Federalization will preserve an indivisible Ukraine</i>	<i>We say "yes" to the creation of a "Slobozhanshchyna" region</i>
<b>Avakov</b>	<i>Ukrainian national identity</i>	<i>Slobozhansky Russian is unique for Kharkiv</i>	<i>I am a Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationalist</i>
<b>Kernes</b>	<i>Kharkiv resident is a nationality</i>	<i>Ukraine in the first place</i>	<i>Kharkivites are patriots of our country and our city</i>
<b>Kushnarev</b>	<i>Eastern Ukraine is very different from Galicia</i>	<i>Federalization will create a democratic Ukraine</i>	<i>I want to remind the hotheads under the Orange banner</i>
<b>Terekhov</b>	<i>Kharkiv residents and their interests</i>	<i>Russian as a regional and/or state language</i>	<i>We – Kharkiv residents love our city very much</i>
<b>Pisarenko</b>	<i>Kharkiv residents and their interests</i>	<i>There is only one indivisible Ukraine</i>	<i>We are (...) protecting the interests of Kharkiv</i>
<b>Seminozhenko</b>	<i>Kharkiv residents and their interests</i>	<i>Kharkiv can once again become the capital</i>	<i>The interests of Kharkiv residents (...) will always be in the first place for me</i>
<b>Rainin</b>	<i>There is only one indivisible Ukraine</i>	<i>Kharkiv can help reform Ukraine</i>	<i>Ukrainians have proved that we are all one country</i>



<b><u>Marginal:</u></b>			
<b>Baluta</b>	<i>There is only one indivisible Ukraine</i>	<i>Kharkiv can help reform Ukraine</i>	<i>Ukrainians are a united people</i>
<b>Svyatash</b>	<i>Kharkiv residents and their interests</i>	<i>Eastern Ukraine is very different from Galicia</i>	<i>There are really two countries within (...) Ukraine</i>
<b>Herashchenko</b>	<i>A pro-Ukrainian Kharkiv</i>	<i>Kharkivites do not support separatism in Slobozhanshchyna</i>	<i>There were a lot of Kharkivites (...) patriots of their city and Ukraine</i>
<b>Nemichev</b>	<i>A pro-Ukrainian Kharkiv</i>	<i>Kharkiv residents and their interests</i>	<i>(...) there are those in Kharkiv who defended and will defend independence.</i>
<b>Svitlychna</b>	<i>Kharkiv residents and their interests</i>	<i>A pro-Ukrainian Kharkiv</i>	<i>Kharkiv (...) is the most priority question for me</i>
<b>Lesyk</b>	<i>Russia is a fraternal state for the Kharkiv region</i>	<i>Eastern Ukraine is very different from Galicia</i>	<i>(...) important for Kharkiv to establish (...) cooperation with fraternal Russia</i>
<b>Hrynyov</b>	<i>Federalization will create a democratic Ukraine</i>	<i>Eastern Ukraine is very different from Galicia</i>	<i>I supported a federal structure (...) so that regions with different mentalities (...) could focus on their development</i>
<b>Efremova</b>	<i>There is only one indivisible Ukraine</i>	<i>A pro-Ukrainian Kharkiv</i>	<i>(...) A Resistance Movement was fully supported by the population in Kharkiv</i>

From the results of the coding process, eight themes were identified, which allow us to get a clear picture of the features of Kharkiv's regional identity and its relation to competing identities. In what follows, these themes will be presented, starting with the 'significant' group.

### **7.1. In praise of Kharkiv and Slobozhanshchyna**

A prevalent main theme among the 'significant' group was indeed the local and regional peculiarities of *Kharkiv* and *Slobozhanshchyna*. Dobkin even goes so far as to speak of “*Slobozhans*” as a subnationality that needs to be recognized and equated with other regional identities below the Ukrainian national identity. Kernes spoke of Kharkivite as a *nationality*, with certain traits as kindness, fairness and love for their city, or, as Terekhov put it: “Kharkivites have a spirit, and they value their city for its stability and constant development. Seminozhenko talked about a “special

Kharkiv patriotism”. These statements are in good agreement with the descriptions of a “dynamic capitalist metropolis” and a city known for its “pragmatism”, as emphasized by Zhurzhenko (2010). It is not entirely clear in what context Terekhov believes Kharkiv is a “stable” city, but there is an assumption that he is referring to the geographical location of the city and the region at the border, which, unlike the Donbas regions, is calm and stable. But during large-scale political unrest in the country as a whole, identification with the city and the region turned out to be even more noticeable, as Kushnarev showed at the beginning of the Orange Revolution in 2004, referring to the proximity of Kharkiv to the Russian border as a warning to his political opponents. Kernes himself, in the midst of the Maidan, rethought that Slobozhanshchyna will not give up any land to Maidan supporters. These statements correspond to a strong primary regional identification described in chapter 4, where this self-identification strategy and the region itself arise as a result of contested power relations. Political unrest combined with inadequate state capacities sowed the seeds of regionalism according to a destructive scenario (see chapter 4), where the the integrity of the state was threatened.

### **7.1.1. Kharkiv – the “First Capital”**

But what first of all became a noticeable sub-theme is the reference to the “First Capital”, which is an excellent example of the search for a ‘usable past’, a historical referent that causes a strong primary regional identification, as described in the theoretical framework. This was clearly expressed by four politicians from this group, and it obviously appears as a social construction forged on a specific context under the influence of social, economic and political pressures, or as an “idea” that develops and is sustained in connection with the regionalization process, phenomena that are all discussed in chapter 4. Even such a prominent Kharkiv politician at the national level as Avakov spoke of “Kharkiv - the first capital” and “its prominent Ukrainian intelligentsia”. The emphasis on the latter was the main theme emphasized by Seminozhenko, who spoke of Kharkiv as the “intellectual, scientific capital of Ukraine”, and as a suitable alternative to Kyiv as the capital of modern Ukraine. This social construction of the “First Capital” was widely combined with the description of the economic potential of Kharkiv (Aleksandrovskaya, Pisarenko, Seminozhenko, Rainin), which must be used for the prosperity of Kharkiv and Ukraine as a whole. This shows that the economic context provides an appropriate attitude to regional identification.

### **7.1.2. Galicia as an antipode and the need for federalization**

From a cultural and historical point of view, a strong primary regional identification was embodied in the presentation of western Ukraine and Galicia as antipodes that provoked opposition. Statements by Dobkin, Kernes and Kushnarev are convincing proof of this feature. Dobkin branded nationalism as the ideology of Galicians, which is completely alien to Kharkivites, and his reference to THEY was probably emphasized in the context of Galicia as an antipode. Kernes also touched on this sub-theme to a small extent, referring to the aversion of the Slobozhanshchyna region to Ukrainian nationalists who fought against Soviet power in the 1940s. As shown in Chapter 2, Kunshnarev's highly controversial speech at the famous Congress of deputies in 2004 led to accusations of separatism (Zhurzhenko, 2011, p. 609).

The emphasis on the need for a federal state structure and/or decentralization of power is another strong sign of regional identification or the development of regionalism. The need to decentralize power was one of the main goals for Pisarenko, while Seminozhenko spoke about "strengthening and raising the level of regional power". It is more interesting to delve into Dobkin's statement about "cultural decentralization", which is also connected with the memory of the Second World War. Aleksandrovskaya and Kushnarev went further, arguing that only "federalization" will preserve and unite Ukraine.

As shown in the theoretical framework, complex relations with the centre (due to an alleged national idea promoted by western Ukrainians) lead to the politicization of regional identity, who emerges here as an important element in the making of the region as a political space and resembles a social construction, forged on a specific context under the influence of social, economic and political pressures (see chapter 4).

In addition to these themes that contribute to identification with Kharkiv and Slobozhanshchyna, there was another controversial theme that turned out to be really important for this group.

### **7.1.3. Russian language as a marker of regionalism**

The debate in Ukraine about Russian as a second state language has been controversial since independence in 1991. Pisarenko's quote - "*We do not discuss the issues of languages*" indicates that the language issue opens the Pandora's Box of politics in Ukraine. A 2012 law had elevated the legal status of Russian but was recognized as unconstitutional in 2018 (Atlantic Council, 2018). As can be seen from the analyzed material, the decision to repeal the language law of 2012, according to some politicians, did not correspond to the interests of Kharkiv residents.

Dobkin took it on a more personal level, arguing that the abolition of the legal status of the Russian language violates the right of Kharkivites to use the Russian language in private life. Avakov also takes the language question on a more personal level, albeit in a different context compared to Dobkin. But Avakov's message is clear: Ukrainian ultranationalists who are trying to push the issue of the status of the Russian language is unpleasant to him (Bul'var Gordona, 2019). His quote "*I am a Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationalist*", should be considered in light of his demand to be accepted as a Ukrainian nationalist/patriot, despite the fact that he is a Russian speaker. Avakov also attempts to distance himself from Russia, claiming that he speaks "Slobozhansky Russian", and not what he calls "Moscow Russian". This alleged "Slobozhansky Russian" language (or probably dialect) is a strong marker of regionalism, given the fact that it emerges in a cultural – historical context (albeit intertwined with a political context), which provides an appropriate attitude for an experienced reality, as stated in the theoretical framework (chapter 4) regarding the emergence of regionalism. The use of "Slobozhansky Russian" is obviously confined to Kharkiv and the Slobozhanshchyna region (even if Avakov himself does not mention it) and, therefore, marks the border line with the Russian language spoken in Russia and in other parts of Ukraine.

Terekhov spoke about the restoration of the legal status of the Russian language in Kharkiv in a more conciliatory tone, but still in a regional political context, where the interests of Kharkiv residents are an absolute priority for him. By supporting a language policy, which contradicts the nationalizing policy of the state authorities, Terekhov points to the existence of a complex relation with the centre and how the Russian language becomes a "symbol" associated with a relevant experience, due to its widespread use in Kharkiv and a potential factor causing regional identification, as described in the theoretical framework (see chapter 4).

These aforementioned themes and their specifics were analyzed and discussed through the lens of strong primary regional identification, and they also indicate its great potential, which really arises under certain conditions. Indeed, political unrest, as well as complex relations with the centre, create certain conditions under which regional identity comes to the fore at the expense of national-civic identity or because of the weakness of the latter, a process described in the theoretical framework (chapter 4).

The Orange and Maidan revolutions and the political consequences they entailed created good foundation for the identity of Slobozhanshchyna. Moreover, Pisarenko's quote about avoiding discussions of language issues, Seminozhenko's emphasis on the "intellectual, scientific capital" and the call for bilingualism also merge with such features of the Kharkiv-Sloboda mentality as

pragmatism, the academic and cultural center, and ethnic tolerance, as shown in chapter 3 (Zhurzhenko, 2011). These are the characteristics of Kharkiv that produce (regional) identification, since they provide an appropriate attitude for an experienced reality, as discussed in chapter 4.

But further analysis showed that “indeterminate” self –identification also appeared in this group. The actions of Rainin, a well-known Kharkiv politician who once defended the nationalizing policy of the state authorities, did not protest at all when he was later presented as a defender of the interests of “Eastern Ukraine” during his tenure in the State Administration. Kernes, who at first negatively characterized the Maidan as contrary to the interests of Slobozhanshchyna, but only a year later declared that Kharkiv was a pro-Ukrainian city (Ukrainska Pravda, 2015) also demonstrates an ambivalent attitude towards civic or regional identity. These actions corresponds to an individual who adapts to a new society, or is initiated into two or more traditions and political loyalties, which leads to an indeterminate self-identification, as described in the framework (chapter 4).

But the most important themes for this group do not support either a strong primary regional or an indeterminate (and transnational) identity as the most prominent ways of self-identification.

#### **7.1.4. Belonging to Ukraine and Slobozhanshchyna**

From what can be seen from the themes that are most central to the “significant” Kharkiv politicians, the attachment to both regional and civic identity appears to be most noticeable. In fact, no politician has completely distanced himself from identification with the state community or the state language, and this applies both to those who openly spoke about federalization, Russian as a regional/state language, and to the peculiarities of Kharkiv. Despite accusations of separatism, Aleksandrovskaya spoke about the need for federalization in the context of expanded self-government and as a contribution to a strong and indivisible Ukraine. In a similar vein, Kushnarev spoke about “a single Ukrainian political nation, to which everyone who considers himself a Ukrainian feels belonging.” Dobkin also spoke about “one citizenship” and that Kharkivites actually need both Ukrainian and Russian languages, and never even talked about federalization as a suitable state structure. Seminozhenko’s praise of Kharkiv was emphasized within a pro-Ukrainian context. All politicians, with the possible exception of Rainin, referred to dual identification in their quotes.

The themes highlighted by this group correspond to our dual-identification strategy presented within the framework, since regional identification took place in parallel with identification with the state community. This manifested itself in the discourse about living on a common territory,

representation by a common set of political institutions and possession of state citizenship, all of which are important characteristics of civic nationalism, as discussed in the framework. Dual identification within this group seems to provide a sense of comfort where one identity is stressed more than another depending on the context, which further refutes the argument that individuals holds one overarching identity in Kharkiv (and in Eastern Ukraine as a whole), as shown in chapter 4. The emphasis in this group was placed on an “inclusive, civic nation”, and not on a “mono-ethnic” concept of civic identity. The latter turned out to be not important for this group. In general, this group is distinguished by rhetoric, mostly distanced from extremes, with the exception of Kushnarev (1) and Rainin (1). The difference between these two groups was characterized by more “tolerant” and more “extreme” rhetoric, with the former being associated with the “significant” group.

## **7.2. A pro-Ukrainian Kharkiv**

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the idea was not to completely exclude other ways of self-identification that do not coincide with the theoretical framework. Therefore, it is not surprising that such codes as “for Ukraine”, “pro-Ukrainian” and “separatism” had no place in our framework. Thus, self – identification as Ukrainian emerged as one of the main themes in the “marginal” group of Kharkiv politicians and appeared as the sixth category extracted from the analyzed material. Perhaps the description as a “miscellaneous” theme is not suitable in this regard, but we nevertheless include it here because it was a theme that stood out from the rest. From the very beginning, it should be emphasized that it is not always clear whether self-identification as “Ukrainian” refers to the national or civic dimension. Indeed, they themselves may rather overlap or complement each other in many contexts.

The idea of being “patriotic” appeared several times in the rhetoric within this group. It was important to show that Kharkiv in a Ukrainian context is a “patriotic” city (Baluta 3, Herashchenko 1, Efremova 2) and its pro-Ukrainian orientation (Svitlychna 1, Nemichev 1). The National flag also appeared in the quotations as a symbol of Kharkiv’s “Ukrainanness” (Baluta 2, Svitlychna 2). Self-identification as “Ukrainian” was also manifested in the implicit dichotomy “we and the separatists” (Baluta 1, Herashchenko 1). For some (Herashchenko 1, Nemichev 1), it was important to “demonstrate” to others that Kharkiv is a pro-Ukrainian city. The ‘marginal’ group was also more inclined to mention the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine in their statements.

Perhaps this shows that the emerging nationalism is exclusively “national” in its content and not civic. On the other hand, both Baluta and Herashchenko referred to “Slobozhanshchyna” in their quotes, which may indicate a more inclusive Ukrainian nationalism. No mention of “Slobozhanshchyna” was made in the regional context. The regional aspect, as a rule, was much less important for this group. Kharkiv as the “First capital” of the Soviet Ukraine, or Russian as a regional language, or any quote hinting at “local patriotism” could not be found at all among most politicians in this group. Thus, it seems obvious that Ukrainian national-civic identity is becoming a serious competitor to regional identity in Kharkiv. This is also, of course, the result of the political crisis of previous years. Moreover, it shows the strength of national-civic identity at a time when the potential of regional identification can also be developed under certain conditions, as discussed above. However, not everyone in this group shared the idea of an exclusive Ukrainian national-civic identity.

### **7.2.1. Eastern Ukraine is very different from Galicia**

Another important identified theme for this group seems to be actually antagonistic from a political point of view to the one previously described. The description of Galicia as the real antipode of Kharkiv and Eastern Ukraine is similar to some quotes from the “significant” group, but the tone was more militant among politicians from the marginal group. This is shown by both Svyatash 2 and Lesyk 2, who more or less openly branded Ukrainian independence fighters in the 1940s as “fascists” and those who consider them heroes in contemporary Ukraine “*are their full counterparts*”. According to Svyatash 1, the political ideology of these fighters is completely alien to the vast majority of Kharkiv residents and therefore demonstrates, in accordance with the framework (chapter 4), how regional identity comes to the fore due to “certain conditions”, such as political unrest and complex relations with a centre, promoting a national-civic policy with a political antagonistic content.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, identities in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands have shifted and crystallized in response to dramatic political events, and antagonistic historical symbols play a crucial role in this regard. Svyatash’s furious statements can be related to Zhurzhenko’s (2011) description of a “Sovietized” region, reluctant to submit to the center. Similarly, Lesyk (2) branded the Galician military unit as “fascist” in a pro-Soviet context and stressed that the (Soviet) history belongs to Kharkiv, and it should be respected and honored. Soviet history appears as a “usable past”, a historical referent that can guide a regional society, and Victory Day and the Ribbon of Saint George

are “symbols” associated with a relevant experience that cause identification, which is consistent with the analytical framework (chapter 4).

Efremova (3) reveres the events of the Second World War from a different point of view and draws a parallel with today’s conflict with Russia. At the same time, she demonstrates a strong national-civic identification.

Hrynyov spoke about regional differences and the need for federalization in a very conciliatory and pragmatic tone. Like Aleksandrovskaya (3), Hrynyov argued that federalization would strengthen the country, and it is a mistake to equate federalization with separatism. The emphasis on the difference between two historical regions – Slobozhanshchyna and Galicia – was made in the context of living on a common territory and consent to be part of the nation, which emphasizes the presence of civic nationalism, as discussed in the framework (chapter 4). Hrynyov’s statement is probably the most striking example of dual identification in the marginal group.

It is also worth noting that traces of transnational identity could also be seen in this group. Given the proximity of Kharkiv to the Russian border, Lesyk’s statement about the “fraternity of Russians and Ukrainians” corresponds to Zhurzhenko’s (2010) statement that neither by Russian nor by Ukrainian citizens is the (new) border perceived as a cultural boundary (see chapter 3). Lesyk express loyalty to the state without transcending the state borders in any tangible way and embraces a East Slavic identity reflected in the causal rhetoric of fraternity and ‘open borders’, which correspond to transnational identity, as discussed in our framework.

### **7.3. Kharkiv belongs to an indivisible Ukraine**

The presence of dual identification was also evident in the marginal group, because everyone demonstrated their commitment to the region. Attachment to both the state and the region became the most prominent self-identification strategy in this study, but they manifested themselves in completely different ways, and the quotes confirming identification with the state community strongly resembled two antagonistic political ideologies with different interpretations of the historical and political role of Ukraine in the 20th century. If one interpretation connects Kharkiv’s history with the Soviet Union and the Victory in the Second World War, then the second interpretation refuses to connect Kharkiv with a glorious Soviet past. This is reminiscent of the “negative identification” with the Soviet regime encouraged by politicians who supported Yushchenko’s memory policy in Kharkiv following the Orange Revolution, as shown in Chapter 2.



It seems obvious that the results of this study confirm the continuation of the “memory wars” in Kharkiv.

But it should be added here that the second interpretation and the majority of the politicians in the ‘marginal’ group (as well in the ‘significant’ group) associated their support of the state community with post-Soviet or even post-Maidan independent Ukraine and not, for instance, with Ukrainian independence fighters in Galicia in the 1940s. This is a statement of facts. The main difference between the two groups lies in the language expression. The ‘marginal’ group, as a rule, was more extreme and intolerant towards political opponents, and it is difficult to determine the reason for this, but one explanation may be the gap between generations. Is it possible to say that older people, and in this case those who grew up in the spirit of “Friendship of the peoples” since Soviet times, are more pragmatic and tolerant towards people of other origins and political orientation? Politicians in the ‘significant’ group were older, and only two politicians were born in the period 1970 - 1980. In the ‘marginal’ group, all but two were born in the period 1970 – 1996, and the oldest in this group (Hrynyov, born in 1945) spoke in a very conciliatory tone.

## 8. Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to identify the main elements of Kharkiv's regional identity and how it relates to other competing identities by studying emerging identities during and after two significant political crisis in the 2000s. The thesis also sought to contribute to the field of identity studies in Ukraine by focusing on a specific city and region that were largely absent from identity studies, especially after 2014. The study applied a theory-driven approach with four main presuppositions for self-identification, but with the possibility to allow other prominent strategies of self-identification to emerge. As the results showed, regional identification is widespread among the target group, and features such as "pragmatism", "bilingualism" and appeal to the status of an intellectual and scientific city are characteristic features of Kharkiv's regional identity, but it is particularly closely intertwined with identification with the state community. Traces of indeterminate and transnational identities were mostly absent, although some examples could be found.

In the course of the study, it was possible to show that identities are in constant flux and mainly depends on certain political circumstances, but also that new political identities are being formed in a young state that emerged in the early 1990s. The results do not pretend to be representative of the whole of Kharkiv and Slobozhanshchyna, but, nevertheless, these politicians to a very large extent represent the activity and opinion of Kharkivites, because they are elected and supported by them at the regional and state levels.

A secondary objective of this study was to demonstrate the limitations of the simplified West-East dichotomy of Ukraine and to show that other regions in Ukraine are carriers of a special historical experience and a conglomerate of hybrid identities. Moreover, it follows from this study that multiple identities can be accommodated under "Ukrainanness" and if we accept the idea of a "pluralistic" identity, it will also mean that this "pluralistic" identity does not pose a threat to the integrity of the state. In this regard, therefore, it is possible to discuss issues such as federalization and decentralization without any threat to the integrity of the state. In fact, identification with a region, as, for example, in the case of Kharkiv, can serve as a more pragmatic and reconciling factor in the hopefully not too distant future after the ongoing war, since it is neutral enough not to provoke divisions and exclusions, and it is pro-Ukrainian, but not anti-Russian, as Zhurzhenko (2010) very aptly put it (see chapter 4). The low turnout of only 28 percent (kyivpost, 2021) in the last mayoral elections in October 2021 and extremely low support for radical right (or left) political forces indicate that the population is less inclined to support any form of political and/or ethnic division,

despite the long period of political conflict in Ukraine. At least, that was the case before the Russian invasion in February 2022.

It would be unfair to label a city like Kharkiv as less 'Ukrainian' than, for example, a city in Western Ukraine. The previous research on Galicia has created a prototype of being a "Ukrainian", which does not correspond to the reality shown in this study. If we accept the assumption put forward by Potul'nyts'kyi (2005) (see Chapter 3) that "if Galicians identified themselves as Galicians, this did not make them any less Ukrainians", then here we argue that the same can be applied to local Kharkiv patriots and Slobozhans. The difference may be that the former are more exclusionary in relation to Russia, the Russian language and Ukraine's Soviet past, while the latter emphasize bilingualism, ethnic tolerance and stable relations with their nearest neighbor as an asset and capital that should be preserved.

Future research on identities in Ukraine and especially in the borderland regions should not be limited to any "exclusionary" or "mono-ethnic" concept of identity, but rather focus on its "pluralistic" dimension. Therefore, it is difficult to disagree with the statement of Rodgers (2008) (see Chapter 3) that the analysis of Ukraine's unique brand of regionalism should be carried out not in terms of division, but rather in terms of regional differences and diversity.

This will not only entail more knowledge about existing identities in particular, but also more about Ukraine in general, which, undoubtedly, is of great importance today, given the Russian aggression and long-lasting kin-state actions, especially in relation to the eastern regions. But in order to fully understand Ukraine, we need to investigate not only the existence of regional identity, but also the content of regionalism. In addition to suggesting further studies of Ukraine at the regional level, this thesis has hopefully outlined the complex and unfinished process of nation-building. The main argument put forward in this thesis is that any form of monocultural nation-building will not be a productive way to create a stable and unified Ukraine. Rather, it would be useful to focus on creating a "pluralistic" Ukraine or, as Rodgers (2008) argued, to create "unity out of diversity".

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