

Regional Studies in Ukraine

Regional studies in Ukraine were traditionally concentrated in the different institutes of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and in leading universities such as the Kyiv National, Lviv National, Odessa National and Kharkiv National Universities. The collapse of the Soviet system and the transition of the country to a market economy led to fundamental changes in this field of research, as the basic principles of the humanitarian sciences shifted from egalitarian socialism and central planning towards capitalism, personal freedoms and the strength of the market. At the same time, the country experienced a gradual but significant increase in socio-economic disparities between regions, between urban and rural areas, and between the capital city and the rest of the country. Among the key reasons for this process were the lack of budget funding and the abolition of state redistributive programmes.

Some divergence between regions is 'normal' and in some ways this is in line with European trends. However, the way in which it happened gradually led to increasing alienation between different regions and spurred demands for much greater regional autonomy. This was a key factor in the massive political crisis which resulted in the so-called 'Orange Revolution' in late 2004. This was a conflict between small businesses and an economy dominated by a few big companies and oligarchs, and between a corrupt and self-indulgent ruling elite and a mass of citizens who wished to live in a democratic state, but it was not only about this – it was also a conflict between the industrial, more prosperous East and South and the rural and service-orientated West and Centre of Ukraine, which had fewer assets but a strong national identity and Western aspirations.

The Orange Revolution brought to power a new leadership with a distinct pro-European and free market orientation. However, this new government failed from the start to acknowledge the negative impact that growing regional divergence was having on the nation's identity, cohesion, and stability, and did not seem to understand why this was happening. Despite the existence of adequate legislation and a proliferation of regional policy initiatives, in actual fact little was done to identify the key problems faced by different regions and localities or to address them using socio-economic policy instruments. Thus, the process of spatially drifting apart actually accelerated. Another interesting phenomenon in Ukraine is that the region's wealth has not translated into a wealthier population: the industrial powerhouses of the East and South of Ukraine contain pockets of the worst deprivation in the country. The global economic crisis, which has hit Ukraine hard, has only exacerbated these difficulties.

At the moment, only a few state-funded institutes undertake research relating to regional development and policy in a way that is integrated into the international research community while responding to the needs and challenges of Ukraine and

its regions ([full list of institutions here – link to the list](#)). A number of other scientific centres which used to be big players in this field are now lagging behind due to a lack of resources and a low rate of scholars speaking foreign languages (particularly English). This could explain the low rate of participation of Ukrainian scholars and researchers in international networks and associations and the fact that few publish in international professional magazines and even fewer are cited. This does not mean there are no bright people or bright ideas in Ukraine – only that there are limited opportunities to develop young talent and communicate these ideas.

There are other research centres which are actively engaged in regional studies, but they are mainly concentrated in the non-governmental sector and are mostly funded by foreign donor organisations (e.g. the Canadian and American governments and the EU), or to a lesser extent by donations from the Ukrainian private sector. Their research is often concentrated on different aspects of the competitiveness of regions and localities and their attractiveness for domestic and foreign investors. Other issues which are often in the spotlight include quality of life and sustainable development.

Among the most interesting recent publications regarding regional development in Ukraine that are available in English are:

1. Competitiveness of the Regions of Ukraine (2008) by Razumkov Centre, available at <http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/journal.php?y=2008&cat=119>
2. Rating of competitiveness of Ukrainian regions (2008) by the Foundation of Effective Governance, available at www.feg.org.ua

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