

Since the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has attracted increased scholarly attention because of its erratic and contested political processes and complex cultural dynamics. The term "Ukraine" itself needs clarification: Does it refer to a geographic territory, a state, a nation or a culture? The incongruent, albeit intersecting, dimensions of "Ukraine" make clear that a single disciplinary approach will not suffice to describe the discourses that shape and define the largest state to appear on the political map of Europe in the 20th century. This project proposes an interdisciplinary and transcultural approach that questions simplistic conceptualizations. It is a commonly acknowledged truth that regions matter in Ukraine. Yet, little is known about the discursive shape of Ukrainian regionalism and about how it affects greater processes of change. The project puts forward the hypothesis that patterns of regional identification in different social and cultural realms do not form a map with clear cut borders but rather overlap and/or form an archipelago. We expect to find similar attitudes in quite distant parts of the country and, conversely, diverse practices and values in regions that so far have been considered quite homogenic.

Five subprojects will provide insight to understanding a political entity that gained statehood only recently and is still struggling to articulate its cultural identity. The common denominator of these subprojects is their focus on regionalism. The project will begin by conducting a sociological survey to establish shared concepts and provide all subprojects with a broad, common framework. This survey will be financed by a grant from the Swiss State Secretariate for Education and Research. The results of all subprojects will be synthesized into an interdisciplinary analysis and published. Methodologically the project will combine quantitative and qualitative sociological research (questionnaires, in-depth interviews), discursive analyses, cultural histories and hermeneutics. The overarching objective of the greater project is to challenge the dominance of the nation- state paradigm in analyses of Ukraine by illustrating the interrelationship between national and regional dynamics of change. The project will show how Ukraine can best be understood through its regions and how the regions must be considered in conjunction with the nation. Thus the project aims at a reconceptualization of Ukraine as a fluid construct where various discourses intersect, concur and eventually merge. It explicitly moves beyond the perspective of an entity irrevocably defined by traditional political borders and cultural, economic, historical or religious stereotypes. The present project involves historians, sociologists, anthropologists, economists, literary critics and linguists from Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Canada and the USA. The planning for this project, which included the two preparatory conferences (Kyiv/L'viv 2008; St. Gallen 2009), was financed by a grant from the Swiss State Secretariate for Education and Research. The project proposed here will result in a collaborative volume of essays and at least 10 scientific articles to be published in international journals. Additionally, the research for four dissertations is integrated into the project, three of them codirected by a European and a Ukrainian advisor, one by a European and an American advisor.