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SOCIAL COHESION IN DECENTRALIZED UKRAINE: FROM OLD PRACTICES TO NEW ORDER

The article presents a systematic study of social cohesion phenomenon at the level of amalgamated hromadas as a key local entity of decentralization reform in Ukraine. Building on the analysis of the 26 semi-structured interviews conducted in amalgamated hromadas of two border regions of Ukraine – Kharkiv and Chernivtsi, the author has identified social cohesion components, their interconnection as well as positive and negative factors of social cohesion strengthening at community level. Relying on Chan's empirical model and perceived perspective of social cohesion, hromada amalgamation is conceptualized as a transformation process of avoiding 'old practices' to form 'new order'. In the process, the establishing of democratic tools, local activist growth, reducing gaps between center and periphery, formation of common sociocultural space are emphasized. Strengthening social cohesion components at the hromada level are stated to become a sure basis for 'a giant leap' of Ukraine's democratisation in the nearest future.

Key words: social cohesion; amalgamated hromada; hromadap; decentralization; Ukrainian society

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Spójność społeczna w zdecentralizowanej Ukrainie: od starych praktyk do nowego porządku

Celem artykułu jest systematyczne zbadanie zjawiska spójności społecznej na poziomie podstawowych jednostek samorządu terytorialnego – połączonych hromad – powstałych na skutek reformy decentralizacyjnej w Ukrainie. Na podstawie analizy 26 wywiadów częściowo ustrukturyzowanych przeprowadzonych w połączonych hromadach w dwóch przygranicznych obwodach Ukrainy – charkowskim i czerniowieckim – zidentyfikowano elementy spójności społecznej, ich powiązanie oraz czynniki wzmacniające i osłabiające spójność społeczną na poziomie wspólnoty. Na podstawie empirycznego modelu Chana i perspektywy akcentującej postrzeganą spójność społeczną, powstawanie nowo połączonych hromad jest pojmowane jako proces transformacji polegający na unikaniu „starych

praktyk" w celu utworzenia „nowego ładu". Przy tym akcent jest położony na wprowadzanie demokratycznych narzędzi, wzrost aktywizmu lokalnego, redukowanie różnic między centrum a peryferiami oraz tworzenie nowej przestrzeni społeczno-kulturowej. Badania pokazały, że wzmocnienie spójności społecznej na poziomie hromady tworzy solidne podstawy do tego, żeby procesy demokratyzacji w najbliższej przyszłości zaszły w Ukrainie.

Słowa kluczowe: spójność społeczna; hromada; decentralizacja; społeczeństwo ukraińskie

Decentralization reform as a cohesive reform in the Ukrainian society: contexts and perspectives of sociological focus

Starting from 2000s, in many sociological studies the Ukrainian society is defined as one of post-Soviet transformation (Babenko 2002; Golovakha 2006; Kutsenko 2004) with a vague vector of societal changes. Uncertainty of transformation endpoint prompted lack of stable democracy that has not been established in Ukraine by 'steady promotion of democratic reforms and efforts to repudiate structural legacies of the communist past' (Oleinekova 2020: 315). Some reasons of this state of affairs are found in historical specific of Ukraine that has gone through a set of civilization challenges (for a long time before the USSR period being under the pressure of Austro-Hungarian (western part) and Russian Empires (eastern part of Ukraine). Such historical peculiarity has become sociocultural one. It was analyzed as discourse of 'two Ukraines' that explains regional ethno cultural diversity in different parts of Ukraine (Riabchuk 2015). Studying the role of identity politics in Ukraine Crisis of 2013–2014 Tatiana Zhurzhenko summarizes: 'this discourse juxtaposes the Ukrainian-speaking pro-European west and the pro-Russian, Soviet-nostalgic east as two historical and cultural entities, informed by conflicting collective memories and antagonistic identities' (Zhurzhenko 2014).

Visible manifestations of 'internal fight' of the discourse mentioned have been represented in political elections in times of Ukrainian independency. They caused both 2004 Orange Revolution (victory of pro-European President V. Yushchenko) and 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity (mass-protests against postponing signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and power usurpation by pro-Russian President V. Yanukovych). Start of Revolution of Dignity was reinforced by deep political crisis in the Ukrainian society. According to the annual monitoring of the National Science Academy of Ukraine Institute of Sociology, the level of distrust to key representatives of the national power – the President (39%), Verkhovna Rada (45%), the Government (42%) – increased to the highest rates in 2013 since 1994, the year of beginning of the annual monitoring (Ukrainian Society, 2013).

2014 has become a crucial and dramatic year in the Ukrainian history: it has been marked by V. Yanukovych's escape, the Crimean annexation and armed conflict in Donbas. While 'the risk of a new military escalation and a full-fledged Russian intervention remains high' (Zhurzhenko 2014), the renewed Ukrainian power formed from opposition to V. Yanukovych's politicum received civil society's credibility on realization of the set of pro-European political reforms in Ukraine: power deconcentration, decentralization and cleansing of all branches. Despite discussions and initiatives to devolve power to local communities in Ukraine earlier, it has become possible only in 2014 due to approval of 'Concept of Reforming Local Self-Government and Territorial Structure of Power' (Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2014) and the 'State Strategy for Regional Development in 2015 - 2020' (Resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2014). Thus, decentralization has become an 'internal product' of the Ukrainian society, generated by national, not external impulses (Umland 2019). This reform[1] has become the key one after Revolution of Dignity and beginning of Donbas conflict.

Started in 2014, decentralization reform consisted of two main aspects – structural (formation of new basic level of local self-government in Ukraine – amalgamated territorial hromadas[2]) and functional (transfer of powers and finances from state authorities to local self-governments – newly established hromadas). According to the legislative acts, the core idea of decentralization refers to formation of effective local self-government to create and maintain full-fledged living environment for citizens; provide high-quality and accessible public services; establish institutions of direct democracy (Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2014). Amalgamated hromadas have to be viable to solve issues of local importance for the sake of hromada members basing on own local resources: financial, infrastructural and human ones. Hromada amalgamation procedure has its own specific which is based on non-administrative (voluntary) approach to the appropriate decision making (Law of Ukraine 2015). Noted the mentioned characteristics make heuristic decentralization reform studies within sociological perspective due to social reordering as a phenomenon created in this direction.

Still decentralization reform is far to be finishing. According to monitoring on September 10, 2020 during 2015–2020 983 amalgamated territorial hromadas have been established from 1466 that are envisaged in Perspective

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[1] More details about decentralization procedure in Ukraine see (Bader 2000).

[2] In this paper we use nomination ‚hromada' using transliteration from Ukrainian ‚громада' into English. In English this term may be translated as ‚community'. It has its own sociocultural specifics that will be shown in this study. Such terms as 'hromada', 'amalgamated hromada', 'amalgamated territorial hromada' and the 'ATC' are used as synonyms in the paper.

Plan (Monitoring of the Decentralization Process 2020). Different regions of Ukraine have various speed of hromada amalgamation that is hard to correlate with territorial dimension. In Kharkiv and Chernivtsi regions – key regions of our empirical study – the number of amalgamated hromadas is 23 from 56 and 37 from 52 correspondingly. Decentralization reform claims to be implemented in the studied regions at least on 50% and more. This fact testifies relevance of studying decentralization experience via narratives of locals from amalgamated hromadas to identify changes of social cohesion on the community level in perspective of 'before' the reform and 'after' it.

Despite the fact that decentralization is considered as one of the most progressive and effective reforms in Ukraine after Revolution of Dignity (Tkachuk 2018), sociological research of it and its social consequences for the Ukrainian society among domestic and foreign scientists still is not presented profoundly. The most widely investigated fields are economic, managerial, political and geopolitical aspects of the reform and its impact on the Ukrainian society based on interdisciplinary approach, not a sociological one (Aasland Aadne, and Oleksii Lyska 2016; Romanova and Umland 2019; Tkachuk 2018; Shelest and Rabinovych 2020). While sociological models of social cohesion operationalisation may become helpful in discovering decentralization as a cohesive reform of the Ukrainian society oriented on its strengthening on the local level as a state response to Donbas conflict.

Not being nominated in the legislative acts as a cohesive reform, decentralization was planned to become the latter due to its goal and procedure of implementation. As it is widely known, successful implementation of territorial development projects implemented by territorial communities has a significant effect on development of the state's cohesion on the whole (Zhalilo 2019). Being seen as an effective tool for modernization and democratization in Ukraine (Oleinikova 2020) as well as euro integration vehicle (Umland 2019), decentralization still may trigger certain social risks – in particular, a local elite capture (Bader 2020) or multiple conflicts during amalgamation – on resource distribution, local elites, land conflicts etc. (Report Conflicts in the ATH 2018). In this case, decentralization has become a new macro social context, which has to improve local hromada's unity theoretically but still may cause a lot of obstacles.

This paper suggests search for answers to the research questions: What are social cohesion components already being set on the community level of newly established amalgamated hromadas? What are pros and cons factors of social cohesion strengthening in the ATH? How decentralization reform is perceived in hromadas? Answers on these questions have become more urgent due to stated possible risks of decentralization implementation that may weaken social integration in the Ukrainian society and national security. The information provided will sum up if the legal fact of decentralization reform

implementation (hromadas amalgamation) has become the social ones as well as contribute to further sociological studies of nexus between decentralization reform and social cohesion strengthening. In practice, Ukraine has become a country of 'paramount interest for decentralization scholars globally, given its deep process of devolution granting greater autonomy to regional governments since 2014' (Oleinikova 2020: 322). Due to a significant role of decentralization in democratization and modernization, studying the Ukrainian experience will become a useful 'roadmap' for other East-European post-Soviet countries on the way of democratic values establishing and successful euro integration.

Social cohesion in amalgamated hromadas: theoretical framework and empirical studying models

Social cohesion is a quite vague phenomenon that is difficult for explanation as it is constructed empirically. It is determined by multidimensional presence on all levels of social reality – individual, group and structural ones as well as multiplicity of its theoretical definitions. 'Social cohesion' has become a panacea for numerous new social cleavages (Bottoni 2018). Being a scientific category, it is widely used as a policy being a key characteristic of resilient cities (e.g. Rotterdam Resilient Strategy) on the regional level and state policy direction according to international guideline ('Towards an active, fair and socially cohesive Europe' Council of Europe 2008; Perspectives on Global Development 2012 OECD 2012).

Our research focuses on studying social cohesion on the community level. It is proved by the fact that amalgamated hromada is becoming a new social entity within renewed territorial borders. It follows a common goal of being capable to solve local issues solely (Law of Ukraine 2015). This goal contributes to appearance of new social bonds and practices coming with the goal attainment. So, the most suitable definition of social cohesion used for studying amalgamated hromadas is Xavier Fonseca's one: ,the ongoing process of developing well-being; sense of belonging and voluntary social participation of society members while developing communities that tolerate and promote multiplicity of values and cultures; granting at the same time equal rights and opportunities (Fonseca et al. 2019: 246). Pros of it are underlining procedural nature of social cohesion construction and its simultaneous presence on at least two levels of social reality – community and society. Besides, this definition involves different spheres – economic factors (well-being), identity (sense of belonging), civil activism (voluntary social participation), multiculturalism (multiplicity of values and cultures), and inequality dimension (equal rights and opportunities) as key components of social cohesion. Revising social cohesion

approaches Xavier Fonseca does not provide models of its empirical operation-alisation suitable for the definition developed.

Most models of empirical social cohesion measurement are in the framework of macro sociological scope based on quantitative indexes and rates – Social Cohesion Radar Measuring Common Ground (Dragolov 2013); operationalisations developed by Dickes et al. (2010), Bottoni (2018), Delhey (2018), Rajulton et al. (2007). These statistically experienced models show comparative international perspective of social cohesion measurement. They do not display such components of social cohesion as sense of belonging, models of perception, meanings of shared values – phenomena that show their heuristic and senses in qualitative sociological perspective.

Studying social cohesion sociologists often use Chan's 2x2 measurement scheme of social cohesion (Chan et al. 2006), Jenson's five-dimensional model of social cohesion (Jenson 1998) and social cohesion 'societal goal dimensions' developed by Berger-Schmitt (Berger-Schmitt 2000). Our search of the most suitable model was driven by specifics of amalgamated hromadas as a social phenomenon which appears basing on legislative procedure. The latter implies different kinds of political processes and mechanisms (public hearings open meetings, voting etc.) due to making public decision on hromada amalgamation. In this context we decided to base on Chan's et al. (Chan et al. 2006) model of social cohesion empirical operationalisation. Besides, the first steps and further being of amalgamated hromada coincide with Chan's focus on social cohesion as 'people's repeated interactions that are spatially specific' (Chan et al. 2006: 286). However, we are not able to use it in a coherent way because of several reasons. Firstly, in this paper we base on qualitative empirical data. Secondly, we do not share Chan's approach to social cohesion as 'a state of affairs' (Chan et al. 2006: 290) because hromada amalgamation is a social process; we also admit limitation of his approach by ignoring socio-economic and sociocultural components of social cohesion. Thirdly, we try to adopt Chan's approach on the community level, not society one.

Chan's model of empirical operationalization includes four mixed dimensions divided by two thematic directions of social cohesion – horizontal-vertical; objective-subjective. Horizontal-vertical axe concentrates on type of social bonds among different social entities – 'the horizontal dimension focuses on relationship among different individuals and groups within society while the vertical dimension looks at relationship between the state and its citizens (or civil society)' (Chan et al. 2006: 293). In our study horizontal dimension is presented by relationships between amalgamated hromada locals, vertical – by relationships between amalgamated hromada members (as representatives of civil society) and hromada authorities.

Objective components of social cohesion refer to 'people's actual

participation, cooperation and helping behavior' while subjective components – to 'norms and subjective feelings of trust, a sense of belonging and willingness to help' (Chan et al. 2006: 291). Bollen and Hoyle (1990) distinguish perceived perspective of social cohesion which refers to a member's perception of own position in the group. In this way both types of social cohesion components developed by Chan may be studied in qualitative sociological perspective through interviewees' narratives about their experience in sphere of social practices (a level of social action – objective components) and attitudes to certain patterns of behavior and esteems of norms, values, identities (a level of norms, feelings, belongings – subjective components). For each dimension Chan et al. suggests feasible indicators for quantitative measurement, but do not provide theoretical definitions (see table 1).

Table 1[3].Social cohesion dimensions and types of indicators developed by Chan

Horizontal subjective:	Horizontal objective:	Vertical subjective:	Vertical objective:
general trust with fellow citizens (interpersonal trust)	social participation and vibrancy of civil society (membership in civil institutions; depth of participation)	trust in public figures, confidence in political and other major social institutions (trust to personalities and institutions)	political participation (active citizenship practices – petitions, demonstrations; voting activity)
willingness to cooperate and help (readiness to cooperate with different social groups)	voluntarism and donations (readiness and experience of voluntarism and donations)		
sense of belonging or identity (degree of country's identity)	presence of absence of major inter-group alliances or cleavages (readiness or its absence to cooperate on intergroup level)		

Chan's model has become a methodological roadmap for studying hromada amalgamation process and hromadas being in terms of social cohesion (details of Chan's model adaptation due to paper research questions are presented in the following data and methods chapter).

In studies of social cohesion phenomenon to distinguish factors affecting social cohesion, its components and indicators is a complicated task (Dickes et al. 2010). Some researchers use these terms simultaneously or even imply them as synonyms. This paper leverages the term 'components' of social cohesion due

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[3] Developed by the author on analysis of Chan's work (Chan et al. 2006).

to specific of qualitative empirical data. At the same time we distinguish pros and cons of social cohesion strengthening in amalgamated hromadas via narratives.

Data and methods

The paper is based on the data collected within the Ukrainian-Norwegian research project 'Accommodation of Regional Diversity in Ukraine (ARDU)'. Empirical data collection was conducted in two bordering regions of Ukraine - Kharkiv and Chernivtsi in October 2019. These territories were selected as bordering regions of Ukraine. They are ethno culturally diverse and historically represent 'two Ukraines' – Western (Chernivtsi region borders with Moldova) and Eastern (Kharkiv region borders with the Russian Federation and Donbas region). Bordering status of the chosen regions enhances significance of studying social cohesion phenomenon in the context of the national security issue in Ukraine.

This paper is build on 26 semi-structured interviews with decentralization experts, representatives of civil society, cultural experts, local elected officials and local authorities in the amalgamated hromadas of Kharkiv and Chernivtsi regions (more details see Table 2). It was important to select participants for the interviews both with decentralization experience (local elected officials, authorities in the ATHs, local activists) and decentralization focus (scientists, experts from NGOs) to make the view on decentralization issue theoretically based and practically profound.

Table 2. Categories and amount of interviewees on decentralization issue in Kharkiv and Chernivtsi regions

Category of interviewees	Number of interviewees in Kharkiv region	Number of interviewees in Chernivtsi region
Decentralization experts	2 (scientists, experts from NGOs)	2 (scientists, experts from NGOs)
Representatives of civil society	2 (local activists)	2 (local activists)
Local elected officials	4 (deputies and starostas)	4 (deputies and starostas)
Local authorities in the ATHs	4 (chiefs of the ATHs, deputy chiefs of the ATHs, workers of the ATH apparatus)	4 (chiefs of the ATHs, deputy chiefs of the ATHs, workers of the ATH apparatus)
Cultural experts	1 (expert of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation)	1 (expert from local cultural center)

Dealing with local elected officials, representatives from different political parties were selected to balance possible conformist views on decentralization

implementation among local authorities. The research guide of this part of interviews was devoted to the issue in what way the ongoing decentralization reform affects social cohesion in the new established amalgamated hromadas. It was developed in collaboration of the Ukrainian and Norwegian project participants.

Table 3. Adaptation of Chan's model to qualitative perspective of social cohesion measurement

Social cohesion components	Guide questions for identification
Horizontal subjective: • general trust; • willingness to cooperate and help; • sense of belonging or identity. *Vertical subjective:* • trust in public figures, confidence in political and other major social institutions.	What has changed in your life and village life after hromada amalgamation? How do you evaluate these changes? What are advantages and disadvantages of decentralization? How did amalgamation process occur? Is there something that unites you all in hromada? Is there something that you do all together, by hromada? Is your hromada rather a formal unification or informal community?
Horizontal objective: • social participation and vibrancy of civil society; • voluntarism and donations; • presence of absence of major inter-group alliances or cleavages.	Projective questions to share own and hromada experience –history of successful hromada life in other regions with emphasis on social participation indicators actualization through comparison with own hromada life. What is the atmosphere in your hromada? How often do you face conflict situations? What are they related to? What are you attitudes towards other hromada members, from other villages? Are you ready to cooperate with them, take into account and respond to their problems? Do you have such experience? Do they understand and take into account specifics of your village?
Vertical objective: • political participation.	How did amalgamation process occur? What has changed in your life and village life after hromada amalgamation? How are decisions made in your hromada? Do you follow up on decisions taken in your hromada? What areas of work are you satisfied or dissatisfied with?

The research was designed in the perspective of explorative research strategy with no direct questions about social cohesion. It was made to avoid daily meaning of social cohesion term and identify its components already being set on the community level of newly established amalgamated hromadas. The guide included several general questions as well as additional ones up to four mixed dimensions of social cohesion by Chan to distinguish the most tangible social cohesion aspects of the participants' narratives (see table 3). Table 3 contains not full list of guide questions, but the most comprehensive ones. The questions developed for studying horizontal subjective social cohesion components demonstrate informative feature for vertical subjective ones too. Besides, some questions are repeated for different social cohesion components. It means that

they led to several social cohesion components identification. The research team set the main task not to define and refer to social cohesion components directly in the guide questions but to produce these components by analysis of the participants' narratives.

All the interviews transcribed, uploaded into and were coded in the Nvivo Pro 12 programme. Codes were elaborated in an iterative process largely based on the structure of the interview guide but allowing for refinement of the codes during the course of the coding. The codes that were eventually used were the following (with number of references in parenthesis): activism, civil society, grassroots activation (52); decentralization challenges (104); positive decentralization experiences (74); merge – why (not) (76); local politics, power relations, parties governance (72); cohesion (100).

Empirical findings

Social cohesion in amalgamated hromadas: key components and identified factors

From vertical to horizontal: relationship between hromada social cohesion components

The empirical data gathered have shown that process of hromada amalgamation already includes different kinds of political participation as a vertical objective component of social cohesion. Several decentralization experts have noticed that according to amalgamation procedure public hearings have to be held in each territorial unite of future hromada – in such a way locals approve or disapprove amalgamation. It means that conducting public hearings in each region may demonstrate both potential of locals' political and social participation. Public hearings have a dual nature in social cohesion perspective. On the one hand, they could be attributed to horizontal objective component of social cohesion as a kind of local social activism. On the other hand, it is a mechanism of political participation (vertical objective component of social cohesion) which combines social activism and influence on local policy making. In this regard, we sum up that chronologically first components of social cohesion that appear in the process of hromada amalgamation are objective ones – vertical and horizontal. Their strengthening is prompted by legislative procedure:

'The Law on the Voluntary Hromada Amalgamation provides a mandatory study of public opinion at the stage of making the amalgamation decision. What form it will take place in - public consultations, public hearings, round tables, information campaigns…' (a local authority, Kharkiv region).

The same dual nature is inherent to participatory budgeting – democratic decision-making tool for locals' participation in municipal budget allocation. Participatory budgeting combines local activism with influence on local budgeting policy, so it may be viewed both as a mechanism of political participation (vertical objective component of social cohesion) or a form of social participation (horizontal objective social cohesion component). Participatory budgeting as one of decentralization achievements aroused in interviewees' narratives in both regions as a new democratic practice that was established after hromada amalgamation to improve quality of local policy. Our research has shown that both authorities and local activists are quite satisfied with using this democratic mechanism. Interviewees from both regions often positioned participatory budgeting as a reason of locals' growing interest and participation in hromada activities. Besides, participatory budgeting as a practical tool has become a significant instrument of 'being heard' that we interpret as a link for transition from objective axe (vertical and horizontal components) of social cohesion to subjective ones. Visible results of participatory budgeting interviewees associated with the idea of 'being heard', 'you may influence on' in hromada that prompted their narratives about sense of belonging. As we may see, sense of belonging in interviewee's narratives was linked with social activism and political participation:

'All these changes and reforms also provide a chance to feel that something depends on you. That you are a member of a community. Not a simple screw, but you are a member of this community, you may say something, you can be heard, they can react, you will get result.' (a local activist, Chernivtsi region).

'This is a voluntary hromada amalgamation… It gave people the opportunity for these 4 years to form a certain sense of complicity, participation; an idea that they may influence processes in their community and country.' (a decentralization expert, Kharkiv region).

Sense of belonging as horizontal subjective social cohesion component has risen also in the context of new cultural practices in amalgamated hromadas. In both regions interviewees mentioned several cultural events established after hromada amalgamation. Cultural practices in this case also may be viewed as a form of social participation that works on social cohesion strengthening. Despite cultural settings are not presented in Chan's conceptualizations, they play a significant role for both social levels – a level of action (social relations and interactions intensification among individual and group members of hromada) and a level of norms, values, identities (formation of sense of belonging and identity). By participation in common cultural events hromada's members realize new boundaries and make them more visible:

'As we have amalgamated, we have a lot of festivals. We have such a tradition based on the feast of Trinity: we gather all the districts and celebrate with the whole hromada, all together… 3 days ago we had a celebration in starostinsky district, it was also a holiday, all units came together.' (a local activist, Kharkiv region).

Some of our interviewees have noticed that the first activity of amalgamated hromadas is to form new cultural traditions and other types of holidays – for instance, Hromada's Day. This is quite important not only in a cultural or symbolic sense, but also due to internal linkages of horizontal subjective social cohesion components – general trust with fellow citizens, willingness to cooperate, sense of belonging. These components of social cohesion were identified by interviewees' perceptions of cultural events organization:

'If, for example, there are some kind of joint holidays, then of course everyone helps with organization. Likewise, our employees, cultural workers, schools, everyone helps - there is no such thing, there are no problems with organization of certain holidays.' (a local activist, Chernivtsi region).

The mentioned narrative leads to establishing horizontal subjective social cohesion components in amalgamated hromadas and its possible presence not only in sphere of cultural cooperation but in daily practices of hromada members too. These social cohesion components we consider as a possible base for a new model of identification image formation – a model of hromada identity. The gathered empirical data are not enough to analyze deep roots and variable content of new identity type as well as to conclude that it has already being formed and perceived. At the same time we may highlight some preconditions for it. One of them is new common cultural events based on common cultural settings that take place in amalgamated hromadas in both studied regions. The second precondition for hromada identity formation is described by formula 'we are not, they are'. A strong desire to distinguish from the other local model of identification – previous rayon (district) model was seen in several interviews. In the narratives interviewees tried to oppose hromada to rayon as something 'new, active and progressive' (hromada) to 'old, passive and regressive' (rayon). Such positions were detected not directly but rather implicitly:

'I am inclined to believe that a hromada is a self-sufficient unit. Because our people are active and this allows them to participate more in governance issues not only on the territory of our district (rayon), but also throughout the hromada. We somehow moved away from the district (rayon) and for us now the district, New Vodolaga, does not exist.' (a local activist, Kharkiv region).

Such a model of perception between hromada and rayon has arisen a lot of times in interviewees' narratives – especially in the sphere of new economic

opportunities created by decentralization implementation. The reform makes it possible for hromada to get budget directly on the state level passing region or district:

'There is a formula, and thanks to it we get money for education, medicine and for every inhabitant who lives on the hromada's territory. Therefore, of course, this brings us together' (a local authority, Chernivtsi region).

This statement demonstrates that new economic opportunities have worked on empowering internal hromada sense of belonging and togetherness, but at the same time have identified presence of inter-group cleavages in relationship between hromadas and rayons on the level of horizontal objective social cohesion components. Gathered data have shown three main axes for presence of major inter-group alliances and cleavages. There are:

1) opposition between 'previous power' (rayons, local administrations) and 'new power' (hromada);

2) inequality gap between 'poor hromadas' and 'rich hromadas';

3) inequality gap between hromada center and periphery.

The first opposition was prompted by inconsistency between power distribution in local administrations and hromadas. A lot of interviewees noticed that hromadas have already got all the functions while local administrations still exist, do nothing and just get salaries. This fact as well as impossibility to solve some local hromada problems because of state administrations competence (a problem of road repair was noticed likewise) prompted tension motives in interviewees' narratives.

The second axe was formed by opinion that each hromada has unequal economic opportunities from the start (e.g, a lot of territorial units in Ukraine do not have enough amount of economic entities on their areas to provide future hromada resilience). In this case one of the interviewee in Chernovtsi region has mentioned that 'rich hromada will defend its own interests, implement programs at the expense of the poor'. Such a position is quite alarming in the perspective of worsening inter-group cleavages both among different unites inside hromada and different hromadas as well.

The third axe considers an urgent problem of managerial inequality between hromada center and periphery. The key question that identified political participation has shown a managerial basis of inequality (a question about ability to influence on decision-making on hromada level by each hromada unit). The expert in Kharkiv region has drawn attention to relationship between hromada's size and influence of small units on decision-making. He opposed the prospect of hromada being created in boundaries of former rayons (districts). In his opinion, this coincidence reproduces 'old practices' such as concentration of resources in the hromada administrative center. 'Old centers of influence' are

also reproduced on of hromadas created on the basis of cities of a provincial status. The expert points out it makes impossible to hear the 'voice' of each village in the newly amalgamated hromada. The latter ultimately discredits the decentralization reform:

'It seems to me that the smaller hromada is, the greater likelihood of equality between its unites is. The larger hromada is, the less opportunity of small units to influence is left. Zolochivs'ka, which included the entire district, except for two small villages. I doubt that every village there may somehow consider influence. And there are pretty many cases like that. Let's say Kolomakska hromada where our entire district has entered to. It also contains hromadas that are formed on the level of cities of a provincial status. Lozova or Izum. I also doubt that every village which became a part of hromada may be for influence' (a decentralization expert, Kharkiv region).

The stated demonstrates that the prospective plan of hromada amalgamation (a number of units it will include; boundaries it will set) significantly and uniquely influence strength of hromada social cohesion on different interrelated levels.

Despite ethno cultural diversity other ethno cultural issues (language, ethnicity and religion) have not been noticed among reasons to create major inter-group alliances and cleavages neither in Chernivtsi nor Kharkiv regions.

The most difficult to be empirically captured is trust in public figures, confidence in political and other major social institutions as indicators of vertical subjective social cohesion components. Being far from idea of total trust in public figures and political institutions on local level, the one essential is interviewees' awareness of extra large power concentration in hands of hromadas' heads in both regions. In Kharkiv region the interviewee has mentioned that 'there are a lot of powers in hands of hromada's head – especially inspection services', which we definitely interpret as a lack of trust and 'old practices'. In Chernivtsi region another interviewee has highlighted that 'we still have patronal system when decision-making process is made by hromada's head'. These positions testifies that vertical subjective social cohesion components remain quite weaken and intangible in the studied hromada and are associated in interviewees' perception with 'old practices' of former local political systems.

Horizontal objective social cohesion components: reducing disparities as hromada 'new order'?

Being a social process, social cohesion from perceived perspective may be identified by the changes of its components in interviewees' perception. In this case some of our interviewees have not recognized any tangible changes in hromada life after its amalgamation. Along with absence of local changes created by decentralization we also have faced several positions of locals

who have not seen any social value or other 'high idea in this reform'. Their perception of decentralization was simplified and pragmatic at the same time. They did not associate decentralization with any changes in 'relationships between people' perceiving hromada as a 'union of power structures on a certain territory', highlighting that 'communication between people has remained the same' and decentralization goal is just 'rational distribution of funds'. Such positions were more common in Kharkiv region that we explain by the lower speed of decentralization reform implementation in this region. Meanwhile our research has not confirmed the narrowness of 'rational distribution of funds among all hromada members'. It underlines social consequences of decentralization reform implementation. First of all, new economic opportunities created by decentralization implementation have influenced social cohesion potential. New economic possibilities of hromada development have contributed to appearance of horizontal vertical social cohesion indicators: voluntarism and donation. Furthermore, new economic and infrastructural opportunities show a perspective how to influence on social inequalities alignment between urban and rural territories. This direction has been defined by interviewees as a priority both in Kharkiv and Chernivtsi regions:

'When the hromada was amalgamated, the main risk was all the money to go to the center. It is that risk our hromada heads are trying to avoid first of all. During the first years they invest in periphery, the territories that are not in the center... But this is an objective, it is necessary to equalize standards of living in the countryside and the city. It's inevitable. We need to wait a couple of years for everything to get balanced' (a local authority, Chernivtsi region).

The question of resource allocation is on the agenda in amalgamated hromadas. It is always a risky zone because it possibly may cause either local consolidation or disintegrated conflicts. As our research has shown, there are two strategies of resource allocation: in rural-urban areas the emphasis is done on rural units; in completely rural areas equal distribution is chosen.

'We, the village council, try to work in such a format that distribution of funds is evenly distributed to all unites. There is no such thing that in one village ... something is being built, but in the other not. Everything goes in proportions…' (a local authority, Kharkiv region).

These managerial strategies may be viewed as a donation component of social cohesion (horizontal vertical). They are oriented on reducing disparities between urban and rural areas. This emphasis may be defined as hromada orientation on setting 'new order' by reducing inequality gap between hromada center and periphery established as 'old practices'. As analysis of major inter-group alliances and cleavages has shown that 'new order' is quite

requested in the studied hromada, therefore we define the managerial strategies as progressive ones in terms of strengthening social cohesion in the established hromadas.

Our research has revealed several other examples of voluntarism and donation on hromada level. The identified types of donation were dedicated to voluntary improvement of hromada infrastructure or solving some kinds of local problems. For instance, in Chernivtsi region local businessman bought for hromada 400 pine saplings and local activists organized planting. In Kharkiv region a group of active youth realized a local pond cleaning. The common is the effect of individual or group social donation with its chain reaction of social participation. In both cases other locals were involved in donation practices and empowered effect on horizontal vertical axe of social cohesion.

'Soviet trace' in social cohesion components: pros and cons factors

Dialectics of 'old practices' and 'new order' also has become tangible in interviewees' description of paternalist orientations formed during the Soviet times as they block local activist growth in amalgamated hromadas. Such positions were declared by interviewees primarily in Kharkiv region. The local deputy has highlighted that half of locals think that 'hromada is here – in this building', so hromada leaders must do everything for locals not themselves. Another local authority representative has mentioned that he conducted a local survey and the most common answer to the question about 'the engine of hromada's development' was 'leadership must do everything'. On the one hand, these positions need to be taken into account to avoid idealistic views on decentralization implementation in Ukraine. On the other hand, despite such paternalist orientations a decentralization expert in Kharkiv region has highlighted transformation of this pattern prompted by participatory budgeting as one of decentralization achievements:

'Today inertia is even greater, because for almost 70 years we lived in a structure that someone would think and decide for me, this leaves a big imprint. But after seeing real deeds, using the participation budget today, as one example, we see that people mean something and not something, but basically mean. That they can manage resources, take part in the life of community ... '(a decentralization expert, Kharkiv region)'

The 'soviet trace' in interviewees' perception was also identified as pro factor of social cohesion strengthening. One may not neglect heuristic phenomenon of memory bond between the Soviet form of social organization as kolkhoz (a collective farm) and decentralization perception among amalgamated hromada's members. The participants of our interviews noted a lot in common between kolkhoz and amalgamated hromada, underlying high level of social cohesion that existed in times of kolkhoz (a collective farm). The local activist

in Kharkiv region has drawn an analogy between hromada and kolkhoz high-lighting that 'the collective farm was responsible for schools, roads, and kinder-gartens using the money that was earned in it' and concluding that the collective farm that once existed unites people. So, hromada amalgamation is embodiment (or return to) of collectivistic value orientations well-known during the Soviet times. Memory bond is based on positive emotional background by interview-ees' opinions in Kharkiv region:

'Our community once built by our parents is a base. May you imagine if you have been working at the same enterprise all your life together, you are united by something... The same goes for the collective farm that existed; it provided a basis for some warmer re-lations between certain groups of people (a local deputy, Kharkiv region)'.

Despite a big difference between kolkhoz (a collective farm) and hromada, from our point of view, such discourse of comparison and projection is considered as a pro factor of amalgamated hromada social cohesion strengthen-ing. It is explained by the shared memory phenomenon among older members of hromada, images of which work on development of general trust with fellow citizens, willingness to cooperate and a sense of belonging as horizontal subjective social cohesion components. At the meantime, the identified memory bond between the Soviet form kolkhoz (a collective farm) and hromada perception need more deep and detailed further research.

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Discussion

Adaptation of Chan's model of social cohesion measurement for studying decentralization reform in Ukraine demonstrates both heuristic potential and analytical gaps. The latter is lack of attention to inequality dimension as a component of hromada social cohesion. The identified socioeconomic settings of social cohesion untapped in Chan's works make it to address Berger-Schmitt's point of view about inequality dimension of social cohesion (Berger-Schmitt's 2002). Criticizing Chan's approach to social cohesion as a two-dimensional model (vertical-horizontal; subjective-objective), Berger-Schmitt provides inequality dimension of social cohesion that 'concerns a goal of promoting equal opportunities and reducing disparities and divisions within a society' (Berger-Schmitt 2002: 406). Analysis of the empirical data has shown that this approach plays a significant role in case of hromada social cohesion formation.

The research has found that studying social cohesion on the level of amalgamated hromada has to involve a mixture of its models of empirical operationalization. Influence of a new basic level of local self-government on different social processes and phenomena on the local level develops a renewed theoretical definition and empirical model of social cohesion operationalization actual. This study has demonstrated usage of simultaneous utilization of Chan's four dimensional approach (horizontal-vertical; subjective-objective), Berger-Schmitt's emphasis on inequality dimension of social cohesion (regional disparities; equal opportunities) as well as a separate focus on sociocultural phenomena (identity and cultural practices).

In analytical perspective, it has become quite debatable to identify the correct dimension (horizontal objective vs. vertical objective component of social cohesion) of Chan's social cohesion model dealing with such kinds of social practices as public hearings and participatory budgeting. In our opinion, they have a dual nature being kinds of local social activism and mechanisms of political participation.

Despite some scholars of Western theories that highlight negative role of the Soviet legacy as a con factor for post-Soviet countries liberal democratization (Mansfield and Snyder 2002), our research identifies ambiguous role of the 'soviet trace' in hromada locals' perception due to effective decentralization implementation. On the one hand, prevalence of paternalist orientations of the Soviet times blocks local activist growth in amalgamated hromadas as a con factor of social cohesion strengthening. On the other hand, the identified memory bond between the Soviet kolkhoz (a collective farm) and hromada perception enhances development of general trust with fellow citizens, willingness to cooperate and a sense of belonging. Establishing these components of social cohesion on the local level we interpret them as an evidence of successful decentralization reform implementation in Ukraine.

However, the reform implementation is not safe from point of social cohesion weakened on the local level. A risky zone is extra large power concentration in hands of hromada heads. In this regard our research has issued risks of possible local elite capture - 'local elites exploiting decentralization reform to further their personal interests at the expense of the public good' (Bader 2020: 266) that are dangerous in bordering regions for both future reform implementation and national security.

Conclusions

The conducted research presents an attempt to adapt Chan's model of social cohesion measurement to qualitative sociological perspective as well as to use

it on the level of local community instead of the whole state. The empirical data have given opportunity not only to identify social practices and value orientations standing beyond social cohesion components in perception of amalgamated hromadas locals, but also to find unexpected linkages between horizontal-vertical and objective-subjective social cohesion components. The latter form preconditions for developing and broadening Chan's model of social cohesion in the framework of qualitative sociological perspective.

The research has provided an opportunity to define possible chronology of social cohesion components strengthening after hromadas amalgamation. The first components of social cohesion in amalgamated hromadas are objective one – vertical (political participation) and horizontal (social participation and vibrancy of civil society; voluntarism and donations; presence of absence of major inter-group alliances or cleavages). Their strengthening is prompted by both legislative procedure of hromada amalgamation and presence of an appropriate level of local activism to realize it. Vertical and horizontal axes of objective social cohesion dimension are strongly interconnected. Their active state creates background for awareness that is supported by general trust; willingness to cooperate and help and sense of belonging (horizontal subjective social cohesion components). Cultural practices and newly established traditions on hromada levels have made social interactions inside hromada tighter and exerted tangible influence on social cohesion formation on the level of locals' sense of belonging and being together. This gives additional level of cultural components into empirical models of social cohesion operationalisation in case of its studying on a community level of amalgamated hromadas. Still it's difficult to conclude about specifics of vertical subjective components of social cohesion (trust in public figures; confidence in political institutions) that primarily have stayed uncovered during empirical data analysis.

Socioeconomic settings have shown up through empirical data quite ambivalent. On the one hand, new economic possibilities of hromada development have contributed to appearance of horizontal vertical social cohesion indicators: voluntarism and donation. It has created opportunities for reducing disparities among urban and rural unites in alamgamated hromadas. On the other hand, socioeconomic factor has prompted presence of major inter-group alliances and cleavages due to inequality gap between 'poor hromadas' and 'rich hromadas' because of unequal economic opportunities from the start of the reform.

Except the inequality gap our research has shown two more axes for presence of major inter-group alliances and cleavages in amalgamated hromadas that are presented as con factors of social cohesion strengthening in Chan's model. They are: opposition between 'previous power' (rayons, local administrations) and 'new power' (hromada); inequality gap between hromada center and periphery. These oppositions are quite alarming in the perspective of worsening

inter-group cleavages both among different unites inside hromada and among different hromadas as well. They make a visible tension between 'old practices' and 'new order' in interviewees' perception.

Despite ethno cultural diversity of the studied regions ethno cultural issues have not become reasons for creating of cleavages neither in Chernivtsi nor Kharkiv regions. Interviewees' positions about decentralization perception in both regions were taken in. One except of a more visible 'soviet trace' was fixed in Kharkiv region that is explained by historical specific mentioned above.

Dialectics of 'old practices' and 'new order' have been arisen in interviews narrative. Hromada amalgamation in this case was associated with transformation process to get rid of 'old practices' on the way to establish 'new order'. 'Old practices' were presented in interviewees perception as: a) concentration of resources in the hromada administrative center; b) impossibility to hear 'voice' of small villages; c) prevalence of paternalist expectations; d) a gap between center and periphery. Decentralization is perceived as renewed social order with emphasis on establishing democratic tools, local activist growth, reducing gaps between center and periphery, rural and urban unites and formation of common sociocultural space.

Our research has created adequate empirical base for confirmation of theoretical conclusion considering decentralization reform in Ukraine as an effective tool of democratization and euro integration. Hromadas amalgamation leads to strengthening such components of social cohesion as social participation and vibrancy of civil society; voluntarism and donations; political participation on the level of social action as well as transformation of locals' paternalist expectations up to participatory orientations on the level of value orientations. These first steps on local self-government level may be transformed into 'one giant leap' for Ukraine's democratisation in the nearest future.

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