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## **EXPLORING THE FACE OF THE CITY<sup>1</sup>**

*The book entitled “Exploring the Face of the City: Self-Representation Practices of Ukrainian Cities in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Age” (Kharkiv, 2021) was published at the end of 2021. It is devoted to the study of some theoretical and practical issues of urbanism. The main focus is on the symbolic spaces and cultural landscapes of five large cities of Eastern and Southern Ukraine — Dnipro, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, and Kharkiv. The authors of the book are participants of the scientific project “CityFace: Practices of self-representation of multinational cities in the industrial and post-industrial age” (<https://cityface.org.ua/>), which was supported by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. They consider these cities as centers of socio-cultural interaction and various innovations, as dynamic systems that are constantly changing, searching for their own relevant “face.” The central place in the book belongs to the study of the practices of self-representation of cities (the use of symbols and emblems, the formation of a pantheon*

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<sup>1</sup> This is an English translation of the introduction to the book Кравченко, В., Посохов, С. (ред.). У пошуках обличчя міста: Практики саморепрезентації міст України в індустріальну та постіндустріальну добу. Харків, 2021. Translated by Yaroslav Prihodko.

*of local heroes, the celebration of “significant” events, etc.), as well as options for articulating certain achievements, features of the city and its citizens, that is, ideas that are able to rally the urban community around certain ideological constructions (self-stereotypes). In this regard, the authors were interested in places of collective memory, commemorative and ritual practices, the process of symbolic coding and recoding of urban space. This approach allows us to get closer to understanding the specifics of micro-regional identities, which is considered a very relevant scientific task today. The publication is intended for everyone who is interested in the history and current state of socio-cultural processes in Ukraine. In this case, the introduction to this book is published, which has been translated into English, with the hope that this text will attract additional attention of readers to the book.*

**Keywords: self-representation of the city, urbanism, symbolic space of the city, urban cultural practices, micro-regional identities.**

The history of cities as a phenomenon of human civilization goes back several millennia, but today cities play a special role—they embody modernity. Urbanization continues apace; according to UN estimates, by 2030, 60 percent of the world’s population will live in cities, and every third in cities with at least half a million inhabitants (The World’s Cities in 2016). Even today, in Europe (including Ukraine), the vast majority of the population are urban residents. However, it is not just about the numbers. According to some researchers, by the end of the 20th century, “non-urban” life had, in a sense, already gone out of existence (The Routledge Companion 2019, 13). Cities are centers of innovation; here exchange of ideas and accumulation of experience happen quicker. At the same time, cities are becoming clusters of problems endangering the sustainable future of society. The range of these problems is vast, and tackling them demands input from a wide variety of experts. It is no wonder that academic interest in cities is burgeoning and that in the last three decades urban studies have become a notable interdisciplinary branch of scholarship.

However, debates in urban studies go far beyond purely urban issues. In particular, we refer to such vexed issues as the progress of globalization, ways to ensure sustainable development, the relationship between modernity

and traditionalism, consequences of the development of the network society, and others. If we were to look for a general trend or direction in urbanistics, one noteworthy development is the growing interest in urban culture. More and more researchers are writing about discursive and cultural practices, symbolic space, urban identity, and the like. Problems of this kind are rather complex since they have to do with plastic subjectivity (because a person can easily change the angle from which they perceive and evaluate themselves and the surrounding world). However, without such work, it is impossible to form an adequate understanding of the colorful and contradictory modern city phenomenon.

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Georg Simmel, in his seminal work *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (*Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben*), noted that the city, on the one hand, fostered individualism, indifference, and isolation, but on the other hand, because of its size and large population, pushed residents to look for ways to express themselves in order to make themselves visible — among other things, via indicating their belonging to a certain group (Zimmel' 2002, 33). That is, the cultural diversity of the city is its essential feature. This fully applies to the Ukrainian case. One of the chapters in the textbook *Together in One Land: The Multicultural History of Ukraine*, published a few years ago, is entitled “The City as a Crossroads of Cultures and Civilizations in the History of Ukraine” (Kenzd'or 2012).

At the same time, the 21st century seems entirely dominated by mass culture and “mass production.” Shopping malls, entertainment centers, and the design of public spaces exhibit a fair degree of uniformity. The phenomenon of mass culture is generated and disseminated by the city. In today's world, this phenomenon has acquired new traits. “Global cities,” or “world-class cities,” have become attractive models for emulation. Such cities are no longer connected to “their” region but rather to a global network of investors and financial institutions. Yet globalization is not a sufficiently homogeneous process to eliminate all regional differences. Globalization has led to dramatic clashes of cultures and increased mobility. It accelerated many social and cultural processes, which, in turn, gave rise to even greater diversity, which is reflected in the urban space. Competition between cities has also intensified, both globally and nationally. In this “race of cities,”

it becomes important to identify and showcase your advantages. The term “smart city” has come into use (See: Komninos 2018), denoting urban centers where everything is done for comfortable human existence (including such aspects as the ability to meet a diversity of needs, security, developed infrastructure, environmental sustainability, health care, etc.). An attractive urban image becomes a necessity for drawing in investment and maintaining reliable growth. As of late, the term “brand” often appears in this context, understood as “an image that has value in itself, known and fixed in the public consciousness” (Parfinenko 2011, 11). Further, given the transformations that are taking place in cities in the post-industrial era, researchers have begun to speak of the “rebranding of cities” (The Routledge Companion 2019, 7).

Cities, especially large ones, are in a constant search for their own, socially and culturally relevant “face.” Thus, it becomes important to uncover images of a given city that formed in the minds of its residents, visitors, and even those who only have second-hand knowledge of it. These images come together in (not always structured) systems that combine assorted symbols and stereotypes; they contain various disparate elements (sensory experiences, emotional reactions, conscious norms, desires, utopian ideas, etc.). They can assume stereotypical forms, be broadcast or fixed in a certain group, or become simulacra. We need stereotypes because they make it seem that the complex world around us is comprehensible; they serve to impart meanings to one’s actions. Undoubtedly, we can find many images of a given city. However, comparing them, we can distinguish between “dominant” and “marginal” images; we can try to typologize them and determine their dynamics.

It has been noted that “the image of a city, created in the minds of its residents, visitors, and neighbors, is the basis for its cultural appeal, which is often not limited to the technical comforts of life... A resident is both a hostage and creator of the image of the city. It reflects his ideas about the sphere of the proper” (Artemenko 2018, 255). How people create the image of a city and how cities shape people is considered today one of the most promising avenues of research in urban studies (Bittner 2010, 36). In this context, the focus should be on “discursive models of self-identification that develop in the sphere of culture” (Leerssen 2006, 17). It is also important to distinguish endogenous images (or “autoimages”) from exogenous

ones (“heteroimages”) and reflect on their interplay (Imagology 2007, 27). As J. Leerssen points out, self-identification is necessarily about establishing differences from “the other”: “We order the world primarily by subdividing it, and the sense of collective togetherness involves unavoidably a sense of collective separateness” (Leerssen 2006, 17).

Indeed, why and when do we begin to speak of “my city,” what defines the awareness of one’s belonging to an urban community, and is there such a community at all (perhaps we should speak of “communities”)? Obviously, people distinguish between different cities based not only on the specifics of architecture, urban landscape, or infrastructure, but also on the repertoire of monuments, museums, and peculiar forms of cultural life. Other criteria include the understanding of the role of a given city in history and specific “national and cultural” heritage, which can significantly affect the formation of a city’s image.

The attractiveness of a city is becoming a powerful factor in its development. So, it is not surprising that a lot of effort is sometimes put into creating an attractive image. Researchers note that cities and urban dwellers, immersed as they are in a dense communicative world, are fundamentally given, on the one hand, to self-presentation, and on the other — to reflection on the local specifics of their community. In addition, it is cities that possess the developed networks of necessary institutions (museums, educational establishments, local media, etc.), the mission and competence of which include the construction and broadcasting of the local text and education of local patriotism. Their work facilitates the emergence and development of the industry of local identity: publication of literature on local studies, production of merchandise with local symbols, identification and “canonization” of notable natives, creation of songs and poems about the city, toponymic activities, development of relevant websites, etc. (Alekseevskij 2010, 20). Naturally, this symbolic space also includes municipal celebrations and rituals (that is, different forms of representation: visual, verbal, actional).

The presentational characteristics of a city are related to those of identification. The process of self-representation includes the articulation of achievements and features of the city and its residents. Such achievements

and features represent ideas that conceptualize this particular city and are therefore intended to unite the urban community around specific ideological structures (auto-stereotypes), mark its specificity, and oppose it to certain other communities (usually the so-called “rival cities,” against which the community competes most intensely). Naturally, such an urban community is imagined (according to B. Anderson, any community larger than a primitive settlement is imagined (Anderson 2001, 31)) because it cannot be founded on immediate communication between its participants; it is based on the “awareness” of commonality. There may be doubts, therefore, as to the notion of the “self-representation” (or “auto-representation”) of cities. Indeed, any attempt to pinpoint the specifics of a city has at its root an author. It would appear that this axiom completely removes the concept of “urban self-representation” into the realm of abstraction. And yet, when it comes to “established” opinions and value judgments of urban residents, we must recognize that an important role in the process of selecting certain versions of “localness” is already played not so much by personal tastes of residents but rather by attitudes of social groups or communities. The balance between such groups, pushing to the fore certain images, constitutes the urban community that determines the specifics of the city’s “self-representation” (as a textual strategy or discourse). Because this community legitimizes certain symbols, rituals, sites of remembrance, and the like, it thus creates that which is called “the city’s idea of itself.”

Of course, such ideas are fluid. Their transformations become especially noticeable in periods of changing values, ideological shifts, or transitions of the city from one system of coordinates to another. J. Leerssen proposes the concept of counterimage to denote transformation in the semantics of an image, a polar change in its emotional and value load. Such a period of “turbulence” can cause a crisis of urban identity and negatively affect the development of a city. Thus, the search for stable components of urban images becomes a strategic task when it comes to ensuring the sustainable development of cities on the basis of the available cultural resources. (It should be kept in mind, of course, that these components as such are not able to create images; this is done by persons, authors.) In the future, a stereotypical image for a particular community, meeting the demands of a particular historical

moment, may emerge on this basis. It has been argued that “images do not reflect identity, but rather provide an opportunity for identification” (Imagology 2007, 27). Such processes can, in part, be controlled; at least, it makes sense to speak of a certain social responsibility in this regard on the part of both intellectuals and political elites.

Central to this book is the study of practices of urban self-representation (the use of symbols and emblems, formation of a pantheon of local heroes, commemoration of “significant” events, and so forth). The authors are thus interested in sites of collective memory, commemorative and ritual practices, and operations of the symbolic coding and recoding of urban space. In working on the project, we proceeded from the idea that it is the symbolic space of a city that affirms its specificity, influences the identity of its residents, and invests their lifeworld with certain distinctive meanings and values. Thus, we wanted to determine how powerful the process of passing down and inheriting cultural traits is, how the actualization of cultural heritage takes place in certain historical conditions, whether new cultural phenomena are continuing to emerge and mature in the cities we chose for study, and if so, what these phenomena are. We believe that this will bring us closer to understanding the specificity of micro-regional identities, which is seen today as an important research problem (Miller).

Urban images can be found in a variety of cultural texts. Thus, work on this project involved the analysis of different types and classes of sources: city guidebooks and social commentary, monuments and memorial plaques, memoirs and oral testimonies, fiction and materials of local periodicals, urbanonyms and trademarks, coats of arms and emblems, souvenirs and promotional materials, museum exhibits and musical works about cities, and more.

In particular, city guidebooks often served as key sources. Guidebooks to countries and cities became widespread in the 19th century, as new transportation opportunities appeared and tourism began to develop. Guidebooks as a genre of popular non-fiction have already come to scholarly attention. For instance, a recent collaborative project by Estonian scholars set out to study images of Estonia and Estonians in guidebooks from the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries (Kiseleva 2008). This task proved

impossible without first making sense of the nature of the guidebook as such. Thus, in 2007 an international seminar on “The Guidebook as a Semiotic Object” was held in Tartu. Papers were published analyzing genre features of guidebooks (Rožanova 2014; Tarasenko 2002). City guidebooks, more specifically, have also recently become an object of study, by Ukrainian scholars, such as Kateryna Dysa and Marianna Movna (Dysa 2016; Movna 2011; 2013). The researchers pointed out that these texts function as part of both the advertising and political and ideological discourses.

Although guidebooks were intended primarily for tourists and visitors, they also influenced the resident’s identities. This applies, first and foremost, to guidebooks published in a given city and representing, so to speak, an “inside view” (that is, the endogenous version of the city’s representation or self-representation). Initially, this category of guidebooks arose as a result of the desire on the part of some groups within urban communities to call attention to the landmarks and practical advantages of their cities. Guidebook writers had to take into account and reflect the views of the local residents — that is, they played a role in the self-representation of cities. As a rule, writers drew the reader’s attention to the most important landmarks, suggested routes around the city, and mentioned the “most important” events and “most prominent” personalities in its history. Of course, most often, information was doled out in compact blocks, and possibilities for detailed characterization were limited. However, even in this form, it could become the basis for the construction of the urban image. In fact, in such pithy chunks, it was all the more accessible to the wide readership.

Clearly, the study of “urban self-representation” cannot be limited to guidebooks alone. Even when our main focus was on guidebooks, project participants drew on other sources as well, as mentioned above. It should also be noted that the poststructuralist approach to the text prompts us to view sources primarily as socio-cultural phenomena. The complexity of this task is to some extent conveyed by the following statement: “... urban symbolic space is a distinctive kind of text in which words alternate with signs, architectural structures with landscapes. Time moves in a circle, so that characters that belong to widely different eras end up as close neighbors. This text has many co-authors: narrators and listeners at the same time,



and immersion in it is a condition of belonging to the urban community. Each individual symbol is ultimately correlated with the urban myth” (Lejbovich 2012, 56-57). Of course, such an attitude makes it impossible to embrace the entirety of the possible sources. We endeavored to explore the processes of the formation of “local texts”<sup>2</sup> and to throw light on the mechanisms of their reception and their role in the fashioning of specific regional identities.

Focusing attention on distinct types of sources entails differences in methods and a degree of fragmentation in the presentation of research results. As for the former, it is a matter of not only methodological dissimilarities between, say, historians and sociologists but also the application of modern scientific methods and technologies to the processing of data. In particular, several authors used database technologies, which allowed for a deeper analysis of individual social and cultural processes in their dynamics and helped to reach more firmly grounded conclusions.

It should be noted that the analyzed cities are represented disproportionately in this book. This is partly due to differences in the composition of the working groups and the organization of their work<sup>3</sup>. Most of the studies were contributed by authors from Kharkiv, which determined the prevalence of Kharkovian topics. Still, all five cities are featured in some depth. Furthermore, while the multifaceted nature of the overall subject virtually excluded the possibility of direct comparison of cities, a few of the contributions tackle this aspect as well.

The structure of the book reflects the objectives of the project. In particular, the latter had three basic components (symbolic, semantic, and spatial), and the book includes corresponding thematic sections.

Most of our authors are professional historians, but culturologists, sociologists, philologists, and art historians also participated in the project. Interdisciplinarity is another feature of this collaborative undertaking. It is no coincidence that the first section of the book is titled “Urban

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<sup>2</sup> The term “local text” is understood today in a variety of ways. We agree with the definition that characterizes “local text” as “a system of mental, linguistic, and visual stereotypes, persistent themes, and behavioral practices associated with any city and topical to the community that identifies with that city” (Alekseevskij 2010, 19).

<sup>3</sup> Heads of the working groups were: in Dnipro — Prof. T. Lytvynova; in Donetsk — Prof. N. Temirova; in Zaporizhia — Prof. V. Milchev; in Odesa — Prof. V. Khmarsky; in Kharkiv — Prof. S. Posokhov.

Studies: New Horizons.” Here the reader will find papers by representatives of various humanities and social sciences, who attempt to define and convey their vision of the main current trends in urban studies. Although some believe that the “city” has always been the subject of interdisciplinary research and that marking off “subject areas” based on academic disciplines is superficial (Sadovoj 2010, 185), it should be recognized that, among other things, in Ukraine, the study of cities was done for a long time as part of local history. Every city sought to acquire a “biography” of its own, and such work was the purview of historians and specialists in “local and regional studies.” The situation changed significantly in the late 20th century, when representatives of many disciplines developed an interest in the city as a social and cultural phenomenon and when comparative studies gained in popularity. The need to approach the city from an interdisciplinary perspective began to be asserted more and more often. However, this turned out to be easier said than done. Representatives of various disciplines are frequently eager to apply “borrowed” principles and methods; however, disciplinary boundaries persist, hindering communication between researchers. And yet, we can say that a kind of synthesis has indeed taken place. This was due principally to the spread of the so-called “cultural turn,” when, regardless of the object of study, in defining the subject of their research, scholars gave more and more attention to urban culture in its various dimensions.

The second section of the book is “The City Metaphorical.” Certain definitions and comparisons that we encounter in various texts about cities have a metaphorical nature. Thus we can say that the urban image that gains currency in a given period is formed on the basis of the “dominant metaphors” (a term proposed by Paul Reeker). The contributors to this section tried not only to identify such metaphors but also to understand how they tied into the culture of a particular era, trace which metaphors replaced them, consider the problem of continuity/discontinuity, and characterize “living” and “dead” metaphors. All this makes it possible to see how the “imputation” of certain meanings to the city took place and how “axioms of thought” (Wojciech Wrzosek) were formed within the framework of the city.

As we know, historical narratives are made up of events arranged in a certain way with their corresponding interpretations. One of the subjects

of analysis in this book was the procedures of selecting “significant” events that become anchors for building the periodization of a given city’s history, identifying the “fateful” points of its evolution, and, finally, creating distinctive images of it. Obviously, “significant” events thus selected become a means of not only organizing narratives, but also constructing memory because such events usually serve as the basis for the development of corresponding commemorative practices, organization of segments of urban space, and, hence, formation of a certain collective identity and perception of the distinguishing features of this or that city.

The third section of the book is entitled “The City Personified” because, in the course of the formation of the urban image, an important role is played by the names of prominent individuals. The memory of these figures is honored with monuments and memorial plaques; they are immortalized in the names of streets and institutions. The names of “the most respected figures”/“city-defining luminaries” become important “raw material” in the process of urban self-representation. The master list of “TOP-figures” does not remain unchanged; it is constantly updated, reflecting new ideological, political, or cultural values. A considerable portion of the book is devoted to the analysis of these aspects of urban culture.

The fourth section, “The City Symbolic,” deals with the symbolic space of the five cities under study — in particular with its components as urban emblems and rituals, sites of memory, traditions of celebration, and so forth. The role of elements of symbolic space is to accumulate, reproduce, and broadcast the cultural meanings of a city, which form the visual matrix of urban memory (See: Fedotova 2019). It is no coincidence that urban symbolic space is increasingly drawing the attention of agents of the politics of memory and becoming subject to the sway of both endogenous and exogenous factors.

We know that the coming and going of symbolic architectural dominants, destruction of old or construction of new monuments and memorial plaques, and renaming of streets and squares manifest the ongoing symbolic coding and recoding of urban space. The fourth section of the book focuses on urban mnemonic sites, which are viewed as a collective symbolic text and an important component of the cultural memory of cities. In addition, the contributors discuss aspects of the artistic perception of the cities under

study and explore the reproduction of urban “points of pride” on city view postcards, envelopes, stamps, and coins. Souvenirs and memorabilia, as well as commercial goods and brands, are also considered as means of symbolization of the city.

The symbolic space of a city contains not only *objects* (such as monumental sites of remembrance) but also *actions* (first and foremost municipal celebrations and ceremonies), which represent so-called “invented traditions” (Eric Hobsbawm). The study of attributes of urban ritual practices (such as City Day, city anniversaries, the celebration of national holidays at the local level, etc.) occupies a special place in this section. Urban traditions of celebration are a formalized language of performance/action, characterized by a certain level of stylization, stereotyping, and generalization. The mnemonic effect of such traditions lies in the way they embody and manifest the cultural values of the community (Konnerton 2013).

Contributions to the fifth section of the book (“The City Vernacular”) explore the relationship between the physical and symbolic space of the city, specifics of urban landscapes, and practices of their consumption by various social actors. The term “vernacular” comes from linguistics, where it denotes dialects. In urban studies, it can be applied to the drawing of zone boundaries that have no official status and arise as a result of the perception by the residents or neighbors of the specifics of a certain segment of the urban landscape. The historical development of Ukraine’s industrial cities led to the formation of central business districts and peripheral working-class neighborhoods, with differences in housing, communications, and level of exposure to the benefits of civilization. The study of the practices of urban “expansion” and construction of new space captures the experience of the modernization of urban life in the industrial era. We can, for instance, investigate the internal structure of outlying workers’ settlements and identify and study the “framework,” “fabric,” and “plasma” of their terrain. The post-industrial era posed before cities the problem of finding a use for the former industrial zones, so it is important to explore changes in their status and practices of self-representation.

The problem of the interrelation between the center and periphery is important for modern cities. The structure of the “face” of the city is formed

by streets and transportation nexuses (Kevin Lynch), which are its “riverbeds,” spaces of lingering, and spaces of transit (Gutnov 1990, 178, 271). They form a “text” that is “consumed” by urban residents and visitors (Michel de Certeau). This volume does not overlook the transportation networks of the cities of Eastern and Southern Ukraine and touches on the evolution of views on urban transportation and the question of its importance as part of the urban image. In addition, the task was set to explore the practices of the “appropriation” and “consumption” of the urban space. Since students are the most mobile social group of urban residents, analysis of their experiences is quite important for the study of this issue.

The population of the large cities under study is multi-ethnic and multi-confessional. In addition to the quantitative characteristics of the urban ethnic and cultural mosaic, considering practices of the self-representation of ethnic communities in the space of the city is important for understanding the life experience of all urban residents. This section includes a discussion of the establishment of sacred loci in cities (religious buildings, necropolises) and their inclusion into, and exclusion from, the physical and mental space.

This collective monograph thus brings together a large group of contributors, each with his or her own vision of the problems outlined above; a wide variety of sources are used and topics considered. Thus the outcome is, unsurprisingly, somewhat heterogeneous. Because of this, we decided to forgo final conclusions. And yet, we hope that the overall subject is covered in respectable enough depth, and even more — that the book will encourage further research into the complex and fascinating phenomenon of the city.

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## **У ПОШУКАХ ОБЛИЧЧЯ МІСТА**

*Книга з назвою «У пошуках обличчя міста: Практики саморепрезентації міст України в індустріальну та постіндустріальну добу» (Харків, 2021) вийшла друком наприкінці 2021 р. Вона присвячена дослідженню деяких теоретичних і практичних проблем урбаністики. Основну увагу зосереджено на символічних просторах і культурних ландшафтах п'яти великих міст Східної та Південної України — Дніпра, Донецька, Запоріжжя, Одеси й Харкова. Автори книги — учасники наукового проєкту «CityFace: Практики саморепрезентації багатонаціональних міст в індустріальну та постіндустріальну добу» (<https://cityface.org.ua/>), який був підтриманий Канадським інститутом українських студій (Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies). Вони розглядають зазначені міста як центри соціокультурної взаємодії та різноманітних інновацій, як динамічні системи, що постійно змінюються, перебуваючи в пошуках власного актуального «обличчя». Центральне місце в книзі належить дослідженню практик саморепрезентації міст (використання символів та емблем, формування пантеону місцевих героїв, відзначення «знакових» подій тощо), а також варіантів артикуляції певних досягнень, особливостей міста й містян, тобто ідей, які здатні згуртувати міську спільноту навколо певних ідейних конструкцій (автостереотипів). У зв'язку з цим авторів цікавили місця колективної пам'яті, комемораційні та ритуальні практики, процес символічного кодування*



*та перекодування міського простору. Такий підхід дозволяє наблизитися до розуміння специфіки мікрорегіональних ідентичностей, що на сьогодні вважається вельми актуальним науковим завданням. Видання призначено для всіх, хто цікавиться історією та сучасним станом соціокультурних процесів в Україні. У даному випадку публікується вступ до цієї книги, який перекладено англійською мовою, з надією, що цей текст приверне додаткову увагу читачів до зазначеної книги.*

**Ключові слова: саморепрезентація міста, урбаністика, символічний простір міста, міські культурні практики, мікрорегіональні ідентичності.**

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