

# ETHNOCULTURAL REGIONALIZATION OF LITHUANIA OR ALL THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR REGIONS

## Subject of research

In a broad sense the subject of this research is the territorial organization of Lithuania's ethnocultural regions. In a narrow sense it focuses on Lithuania's ethnocultural regions. This research aims to carry out ethnocultural regionalization of Lithuania.

## 1. Research methodology

### *The concept of the region's spatial structure*

Any attempt at cultural regionalization, according to William Norton, should involve two dimensions – spatial and cultural. Spatial dimension comprises various levels of regional structure in terms of scale and size, whereas cultural dimension is expressed through the application of diverse cultural criteria (Norton 2000). By choosing a single cultural criterion, a horizontal structure of the region may be distinguished, while a combination of all hierarchical layers produces a vertical structure of the region. The horizontal structure of ethnocultural region must include certain identifiable structural elements, such as core, periphery and boundaries.

Ethnocultural regionalization is conducted based on three types of culture regions recognized by cultural geographers: functional, formal and perceptual (vernacular) (Jordan, Domosh, Rowntree 1997, 8). Functional region has clearly defined territorial borders and is organized around a focal point. It is made up of different places linked in a system of interactions that are organized to function politically, socially and/or economically. Functional region represents the nodal kind of territorial

units, because it forms in the zones of influence exerted by the territorial nodes or centres (Jordan, Domosh, Rowntree 1997, 8). Formal regions reflect the territorial distribution of one (simple regions) or more (complex regions) measurable, shared traits that distinguish them from the surrounding area. Perceptual or vernacular regions are defined by the cultural, ethnic, sub-ethnic and regional self-perception of people who inhabit the area, their self-identification, past and present, with the territory, certain region and its name (Daugirdas 2015). These regions are often equated with dialect or mental areas that have become ingrained in the regional self-perception of the region's inhabitants (Zelinsky 1980, 1–4).

## 2. Results

### *Territorial organization of Lithuania's ethnocultural regions*

In the course of this research, the structure of ethnocultural regions has been analysed in terms of functional, formal and perceptual patterns. Functional regions have been distinguished by comparing them to the boundaries of the functional units. Boundaries of the regional and sub-regional administrative units have been delineated in the thematic map (Fig. 3.4.1.), taking into account the historical period and time frame of their existence. This map also shows functional cores and functional centres of these units, which have been defined according to the overlapping territories between these functional units.

The development of functional territorial organization at the regional level was rather uneven in different parts of Lithuania. The

earliest territorial organization developed in Klaipėda region due to the long-established border of the Lithuanian state. Two core areas of functional organization may be identified within this region, pertaining to the influence of the cities of Klaipėda and Tilsit (Tilsit). The city of Klaipėda was the most influential centre in the western core of territorial organization. In the southern part of this functional region similar influence may be ascribed to the urban core of Pagėgiai.

The median line of the Samogitian functional regions should be identified with the eastern boundary of the former Eldership of Samogitia, which became a sort of an 'established' eastern boundary in later administrative (boundaries of Šiauliai county in 1918 and 1995) and religious (Samogitian Diocese in 1417; Šiauliai Diocese in 1926 and 1997) functional units. The southern median of Samogitia extends to the Nemunas, which served as a natural demarcation line of administrative and religious functional units even after the third partition in 1795. The internal structure of the functional territorial organization of Samogitia is rather heterogeneous. The analysis of hierarchical relationships between the region's functional centres has revealed that the territorial organization of the Samogitian region has been divided into three parts related to the most important regional centres including Telšiai, Šiauliai and historical functional centre in Raseiniai. Having analysed the overlapping territories between functional territorial units, smaller cores of stable territorial organization have been distinguished around Kretinga, Mažeikiai and Tauragė.

A rather distinctive region of territorial organization has formed in Užnemunė, where the Nemunas served as a natural divide between administrative and religious functional units that remained essentially unchanged from 1795 to 1918. The region's internal structure may be divided into functional cores of Marijampolė–Vilkaviškis, Alytus and southern edge of the Samogitian Eldership (with the centre in Šakiai). Due to unequal importance of functional centres, the core of territorial organization

around Šakiai may be subsumed under the core of territorial organization around Marijampolė–Vilkaviškis. Another historically, functionally and administratively important centre is the city of Alytus, around which a separate region of territorial organization has formed whose boundaries may be identified with those of the present Alytus County. A city divided in two by the river Nemunas may be also seen as a centre, unifying western and eastern parts of the region, each of them having their own locally important centres with different function in the region's history – Lazdijai in the west and Merkinė in the east.

An attempt to distinguish the boundaries of territorial organization in the region of Aukštaitija is aggravated by the special status of territorial organization attributed to Lithuania's largest cities – Vilnius and Kaunas. Historically, both cities were included in the same region of territorial organization, which encompassed the functional cores of Vilnius, Utena, Ukmergė, Kaunas and Trakai, and around which the Lithuanian state had been created. On the other hand, along with the expansion of these cities separate territorial units have been formed: duchies (14<sup>th</sup> c.), voivodeships (15<sup>th</sup> c.), governorates (since 1843) of Vilnius and Trakai. Following the Polish occupation of the Vilnius region in 1920, the broken bicentric structure of the functional core at the very heart of the Lithuanian state was soon remedied by establishing a locally significant functional core around the town of Kaišiadorys (the Diocese of Kaišiadorys was founded in 1926). Lithuania's largest cities Vilnius and Kaunas have gradually formed their respective regions of territorial organization, while the remaining part of the original core of the state gave way to the territorial organization of the region of Aukštaitija. The median of its territorial organization may be identified with the eastern boundary of the Samogitian Diocese (founded in 1417). However, it should be noted that this territory also included the land of Uplytė, whose functional significance was never associated with the original core of the state because historically it was the zone of transition between the region

of Samogitian territorial organization and the core of the state, or the latter's line of defence. When analysing the territorial boundaries of functional units, it is interesting to discover that the land of and later powiat of Upytė (in the 15<sup>th</sup> c.) was situated within the approximate borders of the present-day Panevėžys county (1918 and 1990), whereas the city of Panevėžys, which is considered a capital city of Aukštaitija, is found in the periphery of Aukštaitija when viewed historically. To complicate matters even more, the internal structure of Aukštaitija region has two distinct units of territorial organization with the centres in Panevėžys and Utena. Smaller functional cores of local importance may be further distinguished within the boundaries of larger units: Biržai in the periphery of Panevėžys, Ukmergė in the periphery of Vilnius, as well as those of Rokiškis and Zarasai.

In the analysis of the territorial structure of formal regions, the method of comparison between dialectological, ethnoarchitectural and ethnomusical features within the same region has been applied. Ethnographic core areas have been distinguished based on the territories of their overlap (Fig. 3.4.2.).

6 ethnographic core areas have been delineated in the thematic map: Samogitia, Sudovia (Sувalkija), Dzūkija, Aukštaitija, Vilnija and Lithuania Minor. The ethnographic core area of Samogitia is characterized by remarkable consistency of dialectological, ethnoarchitectural and ethnomusical traits whose territorial distribution within the region is almost coalescent. The Samogitian core area has quite a distinctive tripartite structure. The northern edge of the ethnographic core of Samogitia, extending from Kretinga to Akmenė, stands out for its ethnoarchitectural and ethnomusical features. Although this territory falls between two different speeches of the northern Samogitian sub-dialect – the Kretingiškiei and the Telšiškiei, it has some common phonetic characteristics, such as diphthongs *ou* and *ei* pronounced instead of accentuated ogonek vowels *ą* and *ę*. The other part of the ethnographic core area, encompassing the environs of Telšiai, Plungė and Rietavas, shows coalescent ethnomusical

and linguistic features, but includes only a fraction of the core territory distinguished through ethnoarchitectural regionalization. The remaining part of the Samogitian region may be divided into southern, the so-called Paprūsė (at the Prussian frontier), and eastern parts.

Sudovia, more widely known by its ethnographic name Sувalkija, also has a strong ethnographic core area, in which the boundaries of ethnoarchitectural and ethnomusical regions mostly coincide. The area of the Kauniškiai speech, as a variety of the western Aukštaitian sub-dialect specified by dialectologists, is considerably larger than the ethnographic core area. The territory that stretches beyond that core area may be conceived as the transition zone between the regions of Sudovia and Aukštaitija or Dzūkija. Sudovian ethnographic core area may be divided into sub-regions of Šakiai in the north and Marijampolė in the south.

Dzūkian ethnographic core area has been defined by the territory of overlap between ethnoarchitectural, ethnomusical and linguistic regions. Even though the boundaries of all three regions essentially converge, it is diverging boundaries, one might say, that frame the internal structure of Dzūkija ethnographic region: Dzūkian sub-region in Užnemunė or western Dzūkija; central Dzūkija covered by woodlands; northern sub-region occupied by agrarian Dzūkiams with specific ethnoarchitectural features; and eastern Dzūkija, localized in the strip between Trakai and Eišiškės.

East Lithuania (Vilnija) may be considered as a transitional region between Dzūkija and Aukštaitija, which displays some distinctive ethnomusical (such as specific melodic type of harvest songs originating from East Lithuania) and dialectological (the Vilniškiai speech of eastern Aukštaitian sub-dialect) features. This territory is also defined as a separate ethnoarchitectural region of Vilnija or Vilnija part of the Dzūkian ethnoarchitectural region.

Aukštaitija has a multi-unit ethnographic core structure. Although the boundaries of ethnomusical, ethnoarchitectural and dialectological features within this core area do

not converge, the constituent units are rather distinct. Among these are sub-regional units of Biržai (characterized by the multipart singing tradition and the unique genre of polyphonic *sutartinės* with secundal dissonances; Panevėžiškiai speech of the eastern Aukštaitian sub-dialect; masonry previously used in the construction of houses), Rokiškis (ethnomusically akin to Biržai area; dialectologically encompassing the Kupiškėnai, Anykštėnai and partly Uteniškiai speeches of the eastern Aukštaitian sub-dialect; in terms of ethnoarchitectural traits, distinguished for unique cross-crafting traditions and thus identifiable as a separate part of north-eastern Aukštaitian sub-region), Zarasai (akin to Rokiškis area, as is shown by the prevalence of stepwise trichordal melodies of the *sutartinės* and distinctive melodic type of eastern Aukštaitian harvest songs, similar cross-crafting traditions and the Uteniškiai speech of the eastern Aukštaitian sub-dialect), Utena (characterized by the Anykštėnai and Uteniškiai speeches of the eastern Aukštaitian sub-dialect, stepwise trichordal melodies of the *sutartinės*; based on distinctive features of the local cross-crafting and ethnoarchitecture, it may be distinguished as a separate sub-region of hilly Aukštaitija) and Ukmergė (encompassing the area of prevalent trumpet-like intonations in trichordal *sutartinės* and the Panevėžiškiai and Širvintiškiai speeches of the eastern Aukštaitian sub-dialect, this sub-regional unit is part of the so-called region of Western Aukštaitija or Central Lithuania).

The ethnographic core of Lithuania Minor raises many questions. First of all, its dialectological attribution to two different dialects – the western part of Lithuania Minor to the western Samogitian sub-dialect of the Samogitian dialect and the eastern part to the Kauniškiai speech of the western Aukštaitian sub-dialect – seems questionable. The same bipartite division is reflected in the dissemination of ethnomusical features, but, unlike in dialectological divisions, ethnomusically Lithuania Minor is subdivided into northern and southern parts, with a broad transition zone between the two.

This points to the existence of a consistent, albeit bipartite, ethnomusical dialect. In terms of ethnoarchitecture, a separate region of Lithuania Minor, encompassing the entire Klaipėda region, may be distinguished.

In an attempt to regionalize manifestations of regional self-perception, the data obtained through research of regional self-perception conducted by the author have been compared with the findings of Žilvytis Šaknys, who surveyed the understanding of ethnographic regions among young respondents (Šaknys 2012), and Petras Kalnius, who investigated the identity of inhabitants of the Samogitian border area (Kalnius 2012). Comparison helped distinguish 6 perceptual (vernacular) regions: Žemaitija, Žiemgala, Dzūkija, Sūduva, Aukštaitija and Lithuania Minor (Fig. 3.4.3.).

Lithuania's most distinctive vernacular region appeared to be the Samogitian region of ethnographic self-perception, whose boundaries were adjusted according to the results of the investigation conducted by Kalnius. Taking into account the findings of the survey conducted by Šaknys, the eastern border of the Dzūkija vernacular region was adjusted and moved westwards from the settlement of Giruliai and Nevėžis. Further adjustments were made to the boundaries of the vernacular region of Lithuania Minor. There were also minor changes made to the boundaries designated by the author in her own research, but overall all these investigations yielded very congruent results and at the same time substantiated the existence and boundaries of perceptual regions.

Finally, all three types of regions – functional, formal and perceptual (vernacular) – were superimposed and their boundaries compared. Thus the boundaries of ethnocultural regions have been delineated according to the overlap of the median of territorial organization, ethnographic core and active perceptual regions. Following this method, the regions of Žemaitija, Dzūkija and Sūduva have been distinguished. The ethnocultural region of Žiemgala, whose ethnographic distinctiveness has rarely been accentuated and territorial organization

rather loose, was defined based on the characteristics of the perceptual region. The boundaries of ethnocultural region of Lithuania Minor, whose ethnographic traits are rather prominent and territorial organization strong but the regional self-perception rather weak, were defined based on the designated borders of the functional unit of Klaipėda region. The region of Aukštaitija, encompassing a large transitional territory in Central Lithuania, adjoins other regions and thus was delineated after all other regions had been distinguished.

Cores of ethnocultural regions have been determined by the territory of vernacular cores, while the rest part of the region has been termed the zone of core influence. Sub-regional units have been distinguished based on territorial organization and distribution of ethnographic traits. Cores of almost every ethnocultural region are not homogeneous because specific conditions within their internal structure have determined the formation of distinctive sub-regional parts. Thus the sub-regional part of Curonian influence may be detected in Žemaitija, that of Užnemunė Dzūkai in Dzūkija, Zėnavykai in Suvalkija, western Aukštaitian, Selonian and Vilnija in Aukštaitija. The majority of them have their own zone of influence and constitute a distinctive part in the ethnocultural core, except the sub-regional unit of Vilnija that has its own core and zone of influence. In this particular case, cores of ethnocultural regions have been delineated based on the core of vernacular region.

Having compared the development of ethnocultural regions and distinctive ethnocultural features, the affinities and differences between ethnocultural regions became evident. This led to the distinction of western and eastern ethnocultural realms. Even though the boundaries of ethnocultural realms have not been subjected to analysis within the scope of this research, they have been drawn according to the boundaries of ethnocultural regions, based on systematic integration of all obtained data. Thus Žemaitija and Lithuania Minor have been ascribed to the western ethnocultural realm, while Aukštaitija and Dzūkija to the eastern.

The regions of Suvalkija and Central Lithuania, displaying the features of both ethnocultural provinces, have been merged into one transitional zone. These boundaries for the most part coincide with the ones distinguished by Vidmantas Daugirdas (2002) and S. Vinciūnaitė (2012).

The territorial structure of ethnocultural regions, which has been identified in the course of this research, is presented in Fig. 3.4.5.

## Conclusions

1. Even though there is a large number of studies dedicated to regional ethnoculture, the aspects and scope of research vary significantly. Consequently, the inconsistency of findings in diverse fields of research aggravates the comparison of various regional features and thereby bears testimony to the fact that the integrated notion of ethnocultural region is not yet prevalent. To develop such notion in research of ethnocultural regions, it is necessary to apply interdisciplinary approaches and integrated methodology.

2. The ethnocultural regionalization of Lithuania is based on the guiding principles of historicity, integration and representativity, which dictate the following criteria for defining ethnocultural regions: segregation, overlapping, historical compatibility, historical significance, functioning and uniform composition of a region. A combination of these principles and criteria enables to define the existing and historically grounded territorial structure of Lithuania's ethnocultural regions.

3. In the process of change within the network of Lithuania's functional (administrative, religious) units, historical regional formations of territorial organization might be traced through adoption of the boundaries of functional units at sub-regional level. The structure of Lithuania's territorial organization comprises 5 regions of territorial organization:

- Klaipėda region, with the sub-regions around Klaipėda and Pagėgiai;

- Žemaitija, with the sub-regions around Telšiai, Raseiniai and Šiauliai and the local centres of Mažeikiai, Kretinga and Tauragė;
- Užnemunė, with the sub-regions around Marijampolė, Šakiai and Lazdijai (Dzūkai of Užnemunė);
- Dzūkija, with the sub-regions around Alytus and Merkinė-Varėna;
- Aukštaitija (core of the state), with the sub-regions around Vilnius, Kaunas, Kaišiadorys, Utena and Panevėžys and local centres in Ukmergė, Zarasai, Rokiškis and Biržai;

4. A comparison between ethnographic regions and distribution of dialectological, ethnoarchitectural and ethnomusical traits revealed that the manifestations of distinctive traits unique to a particular ethnocultural region differ according to the form of material and nonmaterial ethnoculture. Therefore the delineation of the boundaries between distinct ethnocultural regions depends on the chosen aspect of research. The structure of Lithuania's formal regions comprises 6 core areas:

- Samogitian ethnographic core area, defined by distinctive dialectological, ethnoarchitectural and ethnomusical traits;
- Aukštaitian ethnographic core area, defined by distinctive ethnomusical and dialectological traits, but showing ethnoarchitectural affinity to the core areas of Vilnija and Dzūkija;
- Dzūkian ethnographic core area, defined by distinctive ethnomusical and dialectological traits;
- Vilnija ethnographic core area, defined by distinctive ethnoarchitectural and ethnomusical traits;
- Suvalkian ethnographic core area, defined by distinctive ethnoarchitectural and dialectological traits, but showing ethnomusical affinity with the Dzūkian core area;
- ethnographic core area of Lithuania Minor, defined by distinctive ethnoarchitectural and ethnomusical traits, but dialectologically related to the Samogitian and Aukštaitian dialects.

5. The existence of regional self-perception reflects the vitality of ethnocultural regions. However, besides the ethnographic self-perception, related to distinct ethnographic regions, there is also more or less pronounced ethnocultural self-perception, which may be ascribed to the following historical ethnocultural formations: Selonian in the north-eastern part of Aukštaitija region; Dainavian, which basically covers the entire region of Dzūkija; Sudovian in the ethnographic region of Suvalkija; and Curonian in Žemaitija. The inhabitants of the north-western part of Aukštaitija relate themselves to the historical region of Semigallia (Žiemgala). Because of the Semigalian self-perception, a separate perceptual (vernacular) region of Žiemgala is distinguished in the western part of Aukštaitija ethnographic region. The structure of Lithuania's perceptual (vernacular) regions comprises the following core areas of regional self-perception: Žemaitija, Žiemgala, Dzūkija, Sūduva, Aukštaitija and Lithuania Minor.

6. The horizontal and vertical structure of Lithuania's ethnocultural regions might be laid out based on configurations of territorial organization, ethnographic core areas and regional self-perception. The territorial structure of Lithuania's ethnocultural regions is divided into:

1. *Eastern ethnocultural realm*, encompassing the ethnocultural regions of Aukštaitija and Dzūkija:

1.1. *The ethnocultural region of Aukštaitija* approximately fits within the boundaries of the ethnographic region of Aukštaitija, whose heterogeneous structure and fragmentation of regional self-perception (the identification of its inhabitants with the particular locality, town of residence, or the entire region) has been determined historically.

1.2. In the formation of *the ethnocultural region of Dzūkija* two factors were of decisive influence: the long-established boundaries of the functional units and a distinctive dialect that lent its name to the whole region. The concurrence of functional and ethnocultural core is now manifested in strong regional self-perception

and rather conspicuous overlap of ethnographic and ethnocultural self-perception.

2. *Western ethnocultural realm*, encompassing the ethnocultural regions of Žemaitija and Lithuania Minor:

2.1. A distinctive character of *the ethnocultural region of Žemaitija* is largely determined by the centuries-long history of functional and administrative autonomy and distinct ethnocultural identity that has been currently evidenced by the presence of strong regional self-perception.

2.2. *The ethnocultural region of Lithuania Minor* was shaped by the long-established border of the state, which determined the functional, cultural and vernacular distinctiveness of the region. The present territory of Lithuania includes the northern edge of the former territory of Lithuania Minor. Perhaps for this reason the ethnocultural identity and self-perception of the region's inhabitants is rather inconspicuous.

3. *Transition zone*, encompassing the regions of Žiemgala and Sūduva:

3.1. The formation of *the ethnocultural region of Sūduva* was strongly influenced by

the development of territorial organization. Its core area is distinguished on the basis of region's ethnographic and territorial organization.

The ethnocultural region of Žiemgala is defined by the manifestations of regional identity. Supported by their northern neighbours in Latvia, the inhabitants of northern Lithuania foster their Semigallian identity. The region is also characterized by distinctive dialectological and ethnoarchitectural features.

7. The conducted ethnocultural regionalization of Lithuania reflects the currently existing territorial structure of ethnocultural regions. The methodology applied in this research might be useful for further research in ethnocultural regionalization: for example, by adding possible new aspects of research; by updating the previously collected data obtained through ethnocultural research; by going into more detail about the structural components of the regions; and by applying the delineated territorial structure of ethnocultural regions in the fields of state governance and land management.