

Spatial heterogeneity of socio-cultural transformations in border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region under wartime conditions

<https://doi.org/10.17721/2786-4561.2026.7.1-01/14>

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Надійшла до редакційної колегії 10.03.2026

Прийнята: 15.05.2026

Abstract. The article is devoted to the analysis of the spatial heterogeneity of socio-cultural transformations in border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region under conditions of full-scale war. The relevance of the research is determined by the need to move beyond the interpretation of borderlands as a one-dimensional zone of risk and to consider them as a set of territorial communities with different wartime experiences, levels of security pressure, adaptive capacities, and recovery prospects. This approach is particularly important for the Chernihiv region, where border communities directly adjacent to the state border with the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus experienced different forms of wartime impact, including hostilities, temporary occupation, military transit, logistical isolation, shelling, evacuation decisions, and long-term security tension. The source base of the study includes open materials of public authorities, strategic documents of territorial communities, public communications, and analytical materials related to the functioning of border territories during the war. The study applies methods of analysis and synthesis, a comparative geographical approach, elements of spatial interpretation, content analysis of open materials, and analytical systematisation of transformation factors. It is established that the spatial differences in socio-cultural transformations are shaped by the character of wartime experience, the intensity of threats, access to services, settlement structure, transport accessibility, institutional capacity, and the functional role of a community within the regional system. The article substantiates the importance of a differentiated approach to the analysis, support, planning, and post-war recovery of border territories.

Keywords: border communities, socio-cultural transformations, spatial heterogeneity, spatial differences, war, Chernihiv region.

Просторова неоднорідність соціально-культурних трансформацій прикордонних територіальних громад Чернігівської області в умовах війни

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Анотація. Стаття присвячена аналізу просторової неоднорідності соціально-культурних трансформацій прикордонних територіальних громад Чернігівської області в умовах повномасштабної війни. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена потребою розглядати прикордоння не як одновимірну зону ризику, а як сукупність територіальних громад із різним воєнним досвідом, рівнем безпекового тиску та можливостями адаптації. Джерельну базу дослідження становлять відкриті матеріали органів влади, стратегічні документи громад та публічні комунікації. Під час дослідження використано методи аналізу та синтезу, порівняльно-географічний підхід, елементи просторової інтерпретації та аналітичну систематизацію чинників трансформацій. Встановлено, що просторові відмінності зумовлюються характером воєнного досвіду громад, інтенсивністю загроз, доступністю сервісів, поселенською структурою та функціональною роллю громади. Обґрунтовано доцільність диференційованого підходу до аналізу, підтримки, планування та післявоєнного відновлення прикордонних територій.

Ключові слова: прикордонні громади, соціально-культурні трансформації, просторова неоднорідність, просторові відмінності, війна, Чернігівська область.

Introduction. The war has substantially changed the conditions under which Ukraine's border territorial communities' function, increasing their security and social vulnerability, which, in turn, affects the intensity of socio-cultural transformations. The border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region, which directly border the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, are no exception. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, these communities have experienced different forms of wartime impact, including hostilities, temporary occupation, military transit, logistical isolation, regular shelling, evacuation decisions, and prolonged security tension. This has resulted not only in infrastructure damage and demographic losses, but also in changes in everyday life, social ties, local adaptation practices, and public perceptions of security and the future development of these territories.

In contemporary research, borderlands are increasingly analysed not as static peripheral zones or merely administrative boundaries, but as dynamic socio-spatial processes through which borders influence mobility, social interactions, local identities, and the regimes of everyday life. The theoretical foundations of these approaches are provided by the works of D. Newman, A. Paasi, T. Wilson, H. Donnan, and H. van Houtum, in which borders are understood as processes of social and spatial ordering rather than solely as lines of state demarcation (Newman, 2006; Paasi, 1998; Wilson & Donnan, 1998; van Houtum, 2000). In the Ukrainian context, studies of rebordering, security regimes, and the transformation of border regions as a result of war are of particular importance (Zhurzhenko, 2024; Kotsan et al., 2022). A separate strand of research addresses the impact of war on demographic processes, forced migration, local adaptation, and post-war recovery of territories (Mezentsev & Mezentsev, 2022; Garcia Ferrari et al., 2024; Provotar, Shchuka, & Mezentsev, 2025; Malchykova et al., 2025).

Therefore, border territories cannot be regarded as homogeneous. Their development depends not only on proximity to the state border, but also on the mode of border functioning, the intensity of security restrictions, local wartime experience, access to services, settlement structure, administrative capacity, and the functional role of a community within the regional system. In this context, the emergence of the concept of an "outpost community" is significant, as it reflects the particular attention of state policy to territorial communities located near the line of contact or the state border with the Russian Federation. At the same time, for socio-geographical analysis, the spatial criterion alone is insufficient, since communities with a similar border location may differ in the level of threats, forms of adaptation, and socio-cultural consequences of the war.

Thus, the relevant research task is not the formal attribution of communities to a certain category, but the identification of spatial and socio-cultural differences that explain the diverse trajectories of their functioning under wartime conditions. These differences are manifested in changes in everyday practices, interaction models, local self-organisation, symbolic space, social support, and development priorities.

The object of the study is the border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region whose administrative boundaries directly adjoin the state border of Ukraine.

The aim of the study is to identify the spatial heterogeneity of socio-cultural transformations in these communities under wartime conditions and to determine the factors shaping different trajectories of their adaptation and post-war recovery.

To achieve this aim, the following research **objectives** were defined:

- to summarise contemporary approaches to the analysis of borderlands under conditions of security challenges;
- to outline the specific features of wartime impact on the border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region;
- to identify the factors shaping the spatial heterogeneity of socio-cultural transformations;
- to substantiate the relevance of analytically distinguishing communities according to dominant conditions and manifestations of change;

- to determine the significance of a differentiated approach to the support and post-war recovery of border territories.

Materials and research methods. The empirical basis of the study consists of open sources that reflect the functioning of the border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region under wartime conditions. In particular, the study draws on official reports of state authorities and local self-government bodies, strategic documents of territorial communities, materials of the regional military administration, public communications of communities, analytical materials, as well as open data on wartime impact, evacuation decisions, the state of infrastructure, social support, and local development.

The methodological basis of the study is a socio-geographical approach, which makes it possible to consider border territorial communities not only as administrative units, but also as socio-spatial formations with different modes of functioning under wartime conditions. The analysis applied methods of analysis and synthesis, a comparative geographical approach, elements of spatial interpretation, content analysis of open materials, and analytical systematisation of transformation factors. Analysis and synthesis made it possible to generalise the main manifestations of socio-cultural transformations. The comparative geographical approach was used to compare communities with one another, while spatial interpretation made it possible to identify differences related to border location, the security situation, access to services, and settlement structure.

In the course of the analysis, attention was focused on several interrelated aspects that help explain the spatial heterogeneity of socio-cultural transformations. These include the nature of a community's wartime experience, the intensity and duration of security threats, the presence of regular shelling or evacuation decisions, the specific features of recovery after deoccupation, access to basic services, settlement structure, and the role of the community within the regional system of mobility and service provision. The manifestations of socio-cultural change were also considered separately, including changes in everyday practices, local social ties, symbolic space, mechanisms of self-organisation, social support, and the strategic vision of development.

Taking into account the limitations of wartime, in particular uneven access to certain territories, fragmented statistical data, and the varying degree of public visibility of communities, the study applied the principle of combining sources. This involved comparing official materials, strategic documents, community communications, analytical sources, and the results of previous empirical observations. This approach made it possible to avoid a generalised interpretation of the borderland as a homogeneous zone of risk and to focus on identifying spatial differences in socio-cultural transformations within the Chernihiv region.

Results and discussion. Within this study, the border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region are considered as administratively defined socio-spatial formations whose boundaries directly adjoin the state border of Ukraine. According to this criterion, the border territorial communities of the region include the Mykhailo-Kotsiubynske, Liubech, Ripky, Dobrianka, Horodnia, Snovsk, Koriukivka, Novhorod-Siverskyi, and Semenivka territorial communities (Decentralizatsiia, n.d.). This framework makes it possible to focus not only on the fact of border location, but also on differences in wartime experience, security regimes, access to services, and local adaptation capacities within a single border region. The socio-cultural transformations of the border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region under wartime conditions are clearly spatially differentiated. Border location is a common feature of the communities under study, yet it does not produce identical consequences for their functioning. These differences are shaped by a combination of several factors, including the nature of wartime experience, the intensity of security threats, settlement structure, transport accessibility, the availability of basic services, administrative capacity, and the role of a community within the regional system.

In theoretical terms, these differences correspond to approaches in which borderlands are understood not merely as lines of state demarcation, but as dynamic socio-spatial formations. In the works of D. Newman, borderlands are interpreted through the processes of bordering, that is, the

continuous formation, maintenance, and reinterpretation of borders in political, social, and cultural dimensions (Newman, 2006). A. Paasi, in turn, emphasises the institutionalisation of regions, the symbolic marking of space, and the formation of territorial identity (Paasi, 1998). In the context of wartime threats, the barrier function of the border becomes particularly significant, as it is associated with strengthened control, restricted mobility, and changes in the regimes of everyday life (van Houtum, 2000; Zhurzhenko, 2024). At the same time, even when the barrier function intensifies, the borderland does not become a homogeneous space, since different communities are incorporated into wartime reality in different ways and possess different capacities for adaptation.

For the Chernihiv region, this heterogeneity has become especially visible since 2022. During the first weeks of the full-scale invasion, some border territorial communities experienced active hostilities, temporary occupation or military transit. Other communities faced logistical isolation, infrastructure damage, mobility restrictions, and increasing security tension (Ministerstvo rozvytku hromad ta terytorii Ukrainy, 2025). After the deoccupation of the region, the situation also developed unevenly. For some communities, the war remained a background factor of border vulnerability, whereas for others it became a constant regime of everyday life that shapes mobility, demographic behaviour, access to services, social ties, and local security practices (Zapototskyi & Ryndich, 2025).

It is important for the analysis that spatial differences are not limited to physical proximity to the state border. Proximity to the border creates a general framework of vulnerability, yet the specific character of transformations depends on how this proximity is combined with the intensity of shelling, the presence of evacuation decisions, transport accessibility, the functioning of educational, medical, and cultural institutions, the activity of local self-government, and the ability of a community to maintain social ties. Therefore, the borderland of the Chernihiv region should be considered not as a continuous zone of risk, but as a space of different regimes of wartime experience and adaptation.

In this context, the emergence of the concept of an “outpost community”, introduced in 2025 within the framework of an experimental project aimed at promoting systematic interaction between territorial communities, is significant. This concept reflects the particular attention of state policy to communities located near the line of contact or the state border with the Russian Federation (Postanova Kabinetu Ministriv Ukrainy, 2025). Such a definition is important for organising support for border and frontline territories. However, for socio-geographical analysis, the spatial criterion alone is insufficient. Communities that formally belong to border areas or are located close to zones of security risk may differ substantially in the intensity of threats, the nature of wartime experience, the degree of disruption to everyday life, and their recovery capacities.

Therefore, the research significance lies not in formally assigning communities to a particular category, but in identifying the factors that explain their internal heterogeneity. Within this approach, attention is focused on how the combination of security, spatial, social, and institutional conditions shapes different manifestations of socio-cultural transformations. This approach makes it possible not to duplicate administrative or normative categories, but to explain why communities with similar border locations may have different support needs, different adaptation capacities, and different prospects for post-war recovery. To specify this approach, several analytical dimensions can be identified through which the spatial heterogeneity of socio-cultural transformations in the border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region can be traced (Table 1).

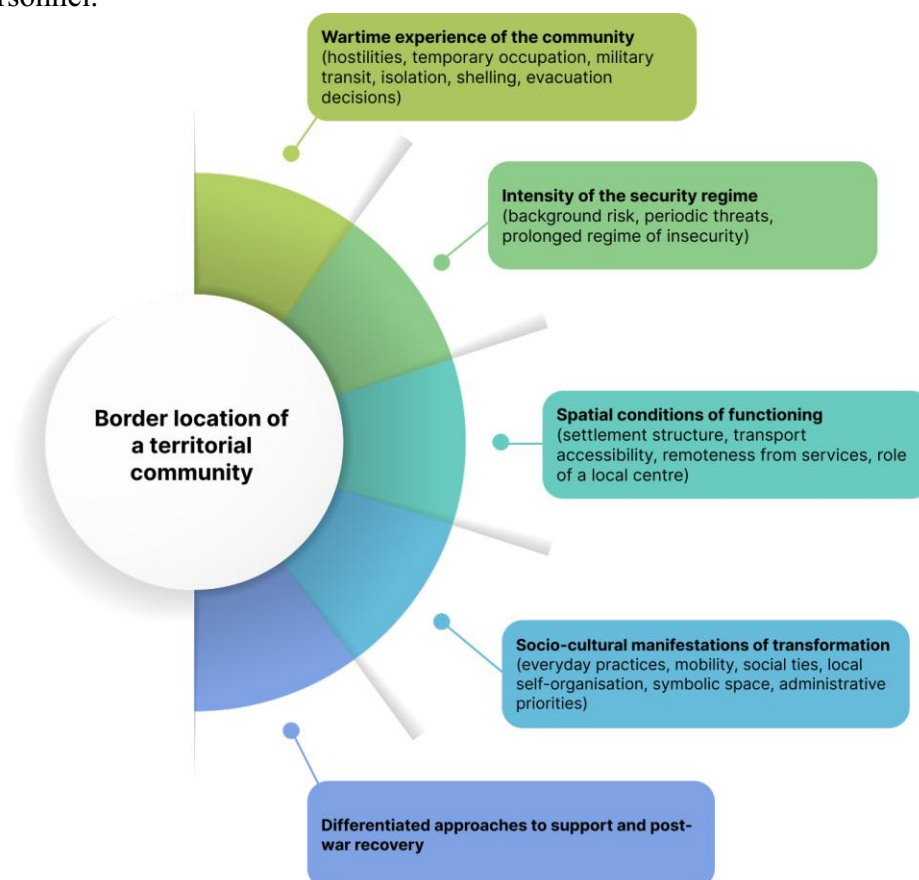
These dimensions do not form a rigid classification of communities, but help explain why a similar border location may be accompanied by different manifestations of wartime experience, adaptation, and recovery.

Socio-cultural transformations are manifested across several interrelated dimensions. First, they involve changes in everyday practices, including movement routes, increased attention to shelters, restrictions on spontaneous mobility, and household preparedness for risk situations. At the same time, social ties are also changing, as neighbourly contacts, local information channels, volunteer networks, and informal mutual-aid practices become increasingly important.

Table 1. Analytical dimensions of the spatial heterogeneity of socio-cultural transformations in border territorial communities

Analytical dimension	What it helps explain	Examples of manifestations in communities
Wartime experience	The degree of direct impact of the war on the everyday life of a community	Hostilities, temporary occupation, military transit, logistical isolation, shelling
Security regime	The intensity of restrictions, risks, and changes in population mobility	Evacuation decisions, changes in movement routes, restrictions on public activity, orientation towards shelters
Spatial conditions of functioning	Opportunities for access to services, support, and regional centres	Settlement structure, transport accessibility, remoteness from medical, educational, and social services
Socio-cultural manifestations of change	Changes in interaction, self-organisation, symbolic space, and visions of the future	Strengthening of neighbourly ties, volunteering practices, reinterpretation of memory, renewal of local development priorities

A separate dimension consists of cultural and symbolic changes related to the reinterpretation of public space, memory, local symbols, and experiences of loss and resistance. Institutional changes are reflected in the revision of local programmes, strategic priorities, security procedures, and measures of social support for vulnerable groups, veterans, internally displaced persons, and families of military personnel.

**Fig. 1.** Logic of substantiating a differentiated approach to the analysis of socio-cultural transformations in border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region

In this context, the security regime can be regarded as a factor that influences the pace and character of other transformations. Where the threat is prolonged and recurring, security becomes not merely a separate area of governance, but a basic condition for the organisation of social life. It affects access to services, the functioning of institutions, communication by local self-government bodies, residents' decisions regarding departure or return, and perceptions of the community's future. By contrast, in communities where security pressure is less intense or has a different character, socio-cultural transformations may be manifested through gradual stabilisation, the restoration of institutional work, the activation of local initiatives, or the strengthening of a service role for surrounding territories.

To summarise the logic behind the formation of spatial differences in socio-cultural transformations, a scheme is proposed that reflects the relationship between initial spatial conditions, wartime experience, manifestations of change, and recovery needs (Fig. 1).

Conclusions. The study has shown that the border territorial communities of the Chernihiv region cannot be regarded as a homogeneous zone of risk, since their shared border location does not produce identical socio-cultural consequences of the war. The spatial heterogeneity of transformations is shaped by wartime experience, the intensity of security threats, transport accessibility, settlement structure, access to basic services, administrative capacity, and the role of a community within the regional system. It has been established that socio-cultural transformations are manifested in changes in everyday practices, local social ties, self-organisation, symbolic space, and perceptions of the future development of territories. The scientific significance of the study lies in substantiating the need to move from a formal spatial criterion of border location to the analysis of the specific conditions under which communities function during wartime. The concept of an “outpost community” is important for state support policy, yet in socio-geographical analysis it should be complemented by an assessment of wartime experience, the security regime, access to services, and socio-cultural manifestations of change. The practical significance of the results lies in substantiating a differentiated approach to the support and post-war recovery of border territories, taking into account not only physical destruction, but also changes in social life, mobility, local interaction, and the adaptive capacity of communities.

Conflict of interest statement. The author declares no conflict of interest.

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