

## Teaching place, assembling the nation: local studies in Soviet Ukrainian schools during the 1920s

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This study focuses on the Soviet introduction of local studies to Ukrainian schools during the 1920s. It argues that, through their efforts at pedagogical reform, educational planners sought a fundamental re-imagining of place. The Ukrainian Commissariat of Education asked teachers and their students to engage the ‘productive’ world surrounding the school and make connections to an understanding of a nationally defined, territorial Ukraine. However, because the commissariat left decisions regarding curricular content to regions and municipalities, many instructors were able to resist this utilitarian notion of space. Local studies was the linchpin in Soviet educational reform for Ukraine, yet the state’s emphasis on decentralised planning created opportunity for ‘flawed’ interpretations of local and, consequently, national meanings.

**Keywords:** education; ethnicity; history

The October Revolution set off a period of violence and disorder, but it also created opportunity for significant intellectual, scientific and artistic experimentation. Former subjects of the tsar who had not necessarily embraced the Bolshevik brand of socialism found themselves applauding revolution for revolution’s sake. A progressive stratum of the former empire’s educated elite welcomed the chance to do away with hated practices of the old. The pedagogical world was no exception. Revolution gave way to a tremendous amount of discussion throughout the former empire, regarding the task of building a radical ‘new school’. Educational planners debated numerous options, but their overwhelming concern was dissociation from the classical education of the tsarist gymnasium and promotion of pedagogical innovation.

In the Soviet Union’s Ukrainian republic (UkSSR), the campaign for a transformation of pedagogy led to the development of a highly progressive and distinctive educational system. The founders of this system argued that the republic required schools attuned to economic and social particularities resulting from the devastation of civil war and centuries of tsarist oppression. Educational planners sought to incorporate local studies (*kraieznavstvo* in Ukrainian, *kraevedenie* in Russian) into the new school’s curriculum, believing this methodology offered the best means to integrate disciplinary approaches into overarching themes familiar to the students and encourage a readily accessible labour culture. As the students’ study of the ‘region’ progressed, guides published by the Ukrainian Commissariat of Education (Narkomos) asked teachers to expand their instruction further to a focus on territorial Ukraine, having first

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defined the place of the region within the republic. For Narkomos, the ultimate intent of the ‘new school’ was the creation of a modern Soviet generation capable of managing the economic potential of ‘their Republic’. It was through an education premised on experience that these future citizens would be prepared for their public duties.

The push for Ukrainian studies (starting at the local level) reflected a republic-wide project to promote the Ukrainian language and culture. Labelled Ukrainisation, the campaign was part of the larger policy of *korenizatsiia* (indigenisation), an all-Union strategy for the advancement of non-Russian languages and the promotion of non-Russians in the Communist Party, republican governments and trade unions.<sup>1</sup> Party authorities provided a definitive rationale for Ukrainisation. The Soviet republican government had to conduct its affairs in Ukrainian if it was to justly serve the interests of the predominantly Ukrainian-speaking population and integrate Ukrainians into the new political order. As Francine Hirsch has argued, Communist support for directed nation-building, or ‘state-sponsored evolutionism’, was a critical step in the effort to ‘accelerate the revolution’ for the Soviet population as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars have often placed education at the heart of their discussions of nation-building projects. Ernest Gellner famously argued that the very survival of modern states depended on the establishment of educational systems capable of transmitting universalised culture and basic literacy. The product of this educational effort, Gellner claims, was the popular recognition of an affinity often perceived in national terms.<sup>3</sup> However, Celia Applegate has emphasised that modernisation arguments regarding national identity, such that of Gellner, are incomplete.<sup>4</sup> In her investigation of how provincial Germans in the border region of Pfalz understood and used the concept of homeland (*Heimat*), Applegate seeks to provide an answer to how individuals experienced this feeling of national belonging.

This study accepts Applegate’s claim that local studies projects facilitated national identity construction.<sup>5</sup> However, local studies in Soviet Ukrainian schools explored this association in a fundamentally different manner. Like *Heimat* campaigns in Germany, *kraieznavstvo* offered a way to think about national belonging. However, the type of national identification this effort embraced was necessarily shaped by the particular challenges of defining a national culture for a historically rural nation in the world’s first Communist state. Soviet Ukrainian educators promoted a production-centred, active-learning form of local studies instruction that was meant to link largely agrarian areas to a newly delineated ‘place’, the socialist Ukrainian republic. Ukrainian educational policy-makers attempted to manipulate the tensions inherent in local studies instruction to ensure that children would reach a proper understanding of what was Ukrainian and what Ukraine’s position was within the multi-national Soviet Union. An examination of the particular case of Soviet Ukraine provides a reminder

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed discussion of the political motivation and debates behind linguistic Ukrainisation, see: Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–39* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 75–123.

<sup>2</sup>Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 8–9.

<sup>3</sup>See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 29–38.

<sup>4</sup>Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>5</sup>This argument is also advanced by Alon Confino: Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 97–210.

of the unpredictable nature of nation-building campaigns accomplished through local studies education and of the limits of state support for such efforts.

Several recent publications on regional history and the Russian practice of *kraevedenie* have informed this work.<sup>6</sup> However, this is neither an investigation of events from a regional perspective nor an account of a particular group engaged in the telling of local history. Rather, it concerns a definition of local studies articulated by non-local authorities (in this case, the Ukrainian republican Commissariat of Education) and the linkage of local studies to a specific social project: training in the value of labour and production at the primary school level. James Andrews's illuminating work on science in 1920s Soviet Russia explains how pre-revolutionary provincial scientific societies adapted their objectives to the demands of the new Soviet state.<sup>7</sup> Ukrainian educators made a similar adjustment, and the published course plans of some leading teachers who championed the goals of Narkomos are detailed below. However, many rank-and-file teachers and parents resisted the construction of place as it was articulated by the 'centre' (i.e. the republic) because they saw little motivation to change. Furthermore, the ambiguous proposals of Narkomos for local studies afforded individuals occasion for continued variant understandings of place and the region's relationship to a constructed Soviet community.

Throughout the 1920s, the Ukrainian Commissariat of Education maintained a separate, distinct educational system from Russia, whose objectives will be outlined below.<sup>8</sup> Established work on progressive pedagogy in the Soviet Union has focused almost exclusively on the Russian experience.<sup>9</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick's work provides insight into the origins and motivations surrounding the establishment of an educational system in Soviet Russia.<sup>10</sup> Her groundbreaking book, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union*, concerns the debate regarding the future direction of this

<sup>6</sup>Donald J. Raleigh, ed., *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917–1953* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001); Susan Smith-Peter, 'How to Write a Region: Local and Regional Historiography', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 3 (2004): 527–42.

<sup>7</sup>James T. Andrews, *Science for the Masses: The Bolshevik State, Public Science, and the Popular Imagination in Soviet Russia, 1917–1934* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup>In August 1932 the All-Union Central Committee ordered all Ukrainian seven-year primary schools to convert to the union standard of a 10-year polytechnic school. However, scholars widely consider 1930, when an All-Union Communist Party meeting first laid the plans for educational centralisation, to be the end of a separate Ukrainian educational system. H.I. Iasnyts'kyi, *Rozvytok narodnoi osvity na Ukraini (1921–1932 rr.)* (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Kyivs'koho universytetu, 1965), 162; A.H. Bondar and others, eds., *Narodna osvita i pedahohichna nauka v Ukraini RSR* (Kyiv: Radians'ka shkola, 1967), 54; I. Krylov, *Systema osvity v Ukraini: 1917–1930* (Munich: Institute for the Study of the USSR, 1956), 78; O.V. Sukhomlyns'ka, ed., *Narys istorii ukrains'koho shkil'nystva (1905–1933)* (Kyiv: Zapovit, 1996), 173.

<sup>9</sup>Two recent works on Soviet Central Asia reference the subject of education in the 1920s, but in the context of a larger discussion of nation-building and gender identity formation: Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006). Although Catriona Kelly's sweeping study of childhood provides some commentary on progressive education, her treatment necessarily privileges the Russian experience: Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 527–35.

<sup>10</sup>Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky, October 1917–1921* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

educational system and the social mobility it offered working-class youths.<sup>11</sup> Both studies give a brief glimpse into the initial separation of the Ukrainian and Russian educational system, but say little regarding the actual classroom practice in Ukraine. Unlike Fitzpatrick, Larry Holmes discusses in considerable detail the application of progressive pedagogy at the primary school level. However, his focus is on Russian primary schools and larger institutional and party discussions regarding methodology.<sup>12</sup> Lisa Kirschenbaum's research on Russian pre-schools and kindergartens provides a helpful framework for understanding methodological shifts (and their political rationale) that has relevance for policy towards school-age children, but her concern for the youngest of children is understandably limited.<sup>13</sup>

This study has perhaps most benefited from William Partlett's recent publications on the pedagogical experimentation of Stanislav Shatskii.<sup>14</sup> There are clear parallels between the type of education Shatskii promoted at the First Experimental Station in Kaluga, Russia and the course that Ukrainian educators embraced. However, Partlett's first concern is for Shatskii's role in the formulation and application of new methodology and not the wider relationship of this methodology to the movement for local studies. Furthermore, he emphasises that Shatskii's experimentation was fundamentally a strategy for rural schooling.<sup>15</sup> This study emphasises the use of progressive pedagogy to bridge the divide between the rural and urban, which in Ukraine had an added ethnic dimension given the generally Ukrainian character of the countryside and Russian character of the city. 'Becoming Bolshevik' for much of the 1920s was about breaking this separation or, at the very least, about orienting the village towards the city.

Additionally, by studying the Ukrainian context, this study maintains that a clearer picture emerges of the Soviet use of progressive pedagogy as a means to inculcate a 'labour spirit' among the next generation of Soviet citizens. As will be discussed below, unlike in Russia, debate in Ukraine over the educational system's labour orientation was not as constant and intense because Ukrainian educational officials had already embraced some vocationalisation for the republic's secondary schools and had shortened the duration of primary schooling to meet this objective. Teachers knew those students who advanced would enter a professional school. Lessons oriented towards local studies were not meant to provide vocational training, but to give students an

<sup>11</sup>Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union: 1921–1934* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>12</sup>Larry E. Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917–1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1991). Similarly, Douglas Weiner's useful work on science education during the 1920s mainly regards debate among high-level pedagogical theorists and stake-holders in Russia. Douglas R. Weiner, 'Struggle over the Soviet Future: Science Education versus Vocationalism during the 1920s', *The Russian Review* 65, no. 1(2005): 72–97.

<sup>13</sup>Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917–1923* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001).

<sup>14</sup>William Partlett, 'Breaching Cultural Worlds with the Village School: Educational Visions, Local Initiative, and Rural Experience at S. T. Shatskii's Kaluga School System, 1919–1932', *Slavic and East European Review* 82, no. 4 (2004): 847–85; 'The Cultural Revolution in the Village School: S.T. Shatskii's Kaluga School Complex, 1919–1932', *Journal of the Oxford University History Society*, no. 3 (2005): 1–27; 'Bourgeois Ideas in Communist Construction: The Development of Stanislav Shatskii's Teacher Training Methods', *History of Education* 35, nos 4–5 (2006): 453–74.

<sup>15</sup>Partlett, 'The Cultural Revolution in the Village School', 4; 'Breaching Cultural Worlds with the Village School', 884–5.

awareness of industrial and agricultural production and prepare them for the next step of a vocational school. This next step was a much greater likelihood in Ukraine.

Lastly, this study provides a partial closure of the gap Thomas E. Ewing has identified in the existing literature, which does not examine ‘the range of experience contained within so-called national education, the tensions between policies decreed by the centre and the practices within classrooms, or the agency of those involved in schools’.<sup>16</sup> I have addressed this concern, at least as it regards the Soviet campaign to promote Ukrainian as a language of instruction in a more comprehensive fashion elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> The challenges of implementing progressive pedagogy in primary schools – as detailed by Holmes and Partlett and dealt with in the context of local studies here – were compounded in Ukraine by the requirement that teachers instruct ethnic Ukrainian children in Ukrainian, a mandate for which teachers had little training and few resources. However, Ukrainian educational policy-makers viewed the promotion of Ukrainian studies (the ultimate end of local studies in Ukraine) as part and parcel of their effort at linguistic Ukrainisation (*ukrainzatsiia*).

### The Ukrainian educational system and pedagogical reform

Ukrainian educational planners decided on the use of *kraieznavstvo* in the schools after first considering a reform agenda designed to tie educational objectives to the cultural and economic demands of the new Soviet republic. In a broad assessment of the Ukrainian educational system, written on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, Narkomos Deputy Commissar Ian Riappo maintained that Ukraine had developed an educational ‘path’ distinct from the Russian Federation that better satisfied the republic’s needs.<sup>18</sup> In designing its educational system, Riappo wrote, Ukraine benefited from the fact that civil war prevented the establishment of a network of schools in Ukraine until 1920. Russia already had two years of experience by this time and planners made liberal use of Russian debates over the intent and form of education.<sup>19</sup>

Initially, Ukraine did not concern itself with implementation of progressive pedagogy in the schoolhouse. Narkomos’s pre-eminent worry was the civil war’s legacy of millions of homeless children. Their numbers grew even higher as the result of a 1921–1922 famine in the Volga basin, which stretched into southern Ukraine and brought countless refugees to the republic.<sup>20</sup> Narkomos’s first duty then was to organise, protect and provide for these children. Unlike its Russian counterpart, Riappo argued, Narkomos was forced to fully realise the child-rearing aspect of its directive. The principal institution for this task was the children’s building, described by Riappo as a ‘lighthouse’ (*maiak*) for Ukraine’s neglected children.<sup>21</sup> In 1923, at their high

<sup>16</sup>Thomas E. Ewing, ‘Ethnicity at School: “Non-Russian” Education in the Soviet Union During the 1930s’, *History of Education* 35, nos 4–5 (2006): 503.

<sup>17</sup>Matthew D. Pauly, ‘Building Socialism in the National Classroom: Education and Language Policy in Soviet Ukraine, 1923–30’ (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2005).

<sup>18</sup>Ia. P. Riappo, *Narodnia osvita na Ukraini: za desiat’ roktiv revoliutsii* (Kharkiv: Derzhavne vydavnytstvo Ukrainy, 1927), 31.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Alan Ball suggests the number of homeless and half-homeless children for Ukraine reached two million on the basis of published Soviet statistics. Alan Ball, ‘The Roots of Besprizornost’ in Soviet Russia’s First Decade’, *Slavic Review* 51, no. 2 (1992): 247.

<sup>21</sup>Riappo, *Narodnia osvita na Ukraini*, 62.

point, 1928 children's buildings in Ukraine cared for 114,000 homeless and neglected children.

As the economy in Ukraine stabilised to some degree and starvation no longer posed an immediate danger, the number of children's buildings steadily declined. However, the ideology of 'social upbringing' that motivated the formation of children's buildings did not diminish. Hryhorii Hryn'ko, the Ukrainian Commissar of Education from 1920 to 1922, had argued for children's buildings to take charge of all children, claiming that a school's pedagogical and organisational influence on a child left in the care of the 'individualistic' family will be lost 'in a night'.<sup>22</sup> Although this idea was abandoned as both impractical and fiscally impossible, the state's desire to ensure instruction by the 'social collective' persisted and influenced Narkomos's preference for a progressive pedagogy that emphasised the centrality of the school, shared projects and civic activity. Narkomos labelled this approach 'social upbringing' (*sotsial'ne vykhovannia – Sotsvykh*)

With the gradual decline of the children's building, Narkomos turned to the schools as the basis of the Ukrainian educational system. Hryn'ko's commissariat outlined the structure of a separate Ukrainian variant at the First All-Ukrainian Meeting on Education in March 1920.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the Russian Commissariat of Education retained a four-year primary school followed by a five-year general secondary school, the Ukrainian Narkomos opted for a seven-year extended primary school followed by a two-year professional secondary school. The professional schools offered vocational training in a specified field of employment as early as age 15. The Ukrainian Commissariat saw them not only as models for proletarian schooling, but also as the answer to Ukraine's desperate need for qualified workers.<sup>24</sup> Hryn'ko was a strong advocate for this type of applied instruction and a critic of the duplicative general education function of the Russian secondary school. Although he insisted it was not Ukraine's initial intent to pursue a separate path, he added he would not permit 'any slave-like copying' of the Russian educational system.<sup>25</sup> Hryn'ko believed that not only was a technical-vocational orientation better suited to the needs of Ukraine, but also that this orientation should form the basis for a united educational policy for the Soviet Union.

The differences between the Russian and Ukrainian systems were most striking at the secondary level. Historians such as Sheila Fitzpatrick and Larry Holmes have referenced these distinctions, particularly in regard to the discussions held at the First Party Meeting on Education in 1920–1921.<sup>26</sup> Riappo and Hryn'ko's promotion of professional schools at this meeting elicited support from Komsomol, Vesenkha (Supreme Economic Council) and labour union representatives and the meeting passed a resolution criticising Russian moves away from vocational training. In instructions to the VKP(b) Central Committee and in a February 1921 *Pravda* article Lenin also proposed early vocational training as a 'temporary and practical expedient'.<sup>27</sup> The Komsomol continued to press the case and the Russian Commissariat did permit

<sup>22</sup>Ninel' Kalenychenko, 'Problema sim'i ta simeinoho vykhovannia', *Shliakh osvity*, no. 4 (1997): 47.

<sup>23</sup>Sukhomlyn's'ka, ed., *Narys istorii ukrains'koho shkilnytstvo*, 86.

<sup>24</sup>Riappo, *Narodnia osvita na Ukraini*, 31.

<sup>25</sup>V.V. Lypyn's'kyi, 'Kontseptsia ta model' osvity v USRR u 20-ti rr.', *Ukrains'kyi istorichnyi zhurnal*, no. 5 (1999): 5.

<sup>26</sup>Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union*, 45–6; Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 22–3.

<sup>27</sup>Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 23

several types of professional schools, the most widespread being the factory apprentice school (known by its Russian acronym, FZU), to operate parallel with its general secondary schools. However, the Komsomol maintained its pre-existing suspicion of junior trade schools as ‘circles of hell’ for the poor, which stifled their cultural liberation and restricted their advancement.<sup>28</sup> While it allowed for the FZU, it insisted on its inclusion of a general educational curriculum even in this institution.

The Ukrainian preference for early professional training at the secondary level inevitably influenced the character of its extended primary school, the chief concern here. The continuing battle for the expansion of vocational training in Russia detailed by Fitzpatrick, and to a lesser extent, Holmes, was absent in Ukraine because it had already committed itself to this path. Emboldened by the party meeting’s decision, the Ukrainian Commissariat insisted on an educational system oriented towards vocational training.<sup>29</sup> The curriculum of Ukraine’s primary schools reflected their mandate to prepare and matriculate students into professional secondary schools. Although both the Russian and Ukrainian educational systems embraced the principle of a ‘united labour school’, the Ukrainians insisted that their institutions truly embraced labour-oriented methodology and successfully integrated a general educational foundation with technical preparation. Graduates of the Ukrainian seven-year primary school, Riappo maintains, were far more ready to undergo this training than the many Russian youths who sought admission to an FZU or other alternative professional school with only four years of completed primary schooling.<sup>30</sup> The reality, of course, was that probably an equivalent proportion of Ukrainians left school before completion of their seven-year degree, but on paper the Ukrainian system did offer the opportunity for uninterrupted study leading to professional schooling. The Russian route towards this end was indirect and one that enjoyed little institutional support by the Russian Commissariat of Education.

The medium for instruction at the primary school level was not a uniquely Ukrainian solution. Labelled the complex method, it was a system of instruction derived by Russian and Ukrainian Soviet educators alike from the progressive pedagogy embodied in the writings of John Dewey and other Western educational theorists. The authors of Ukraine’s annual teaching guide, the *Poradnyk sotsial’noho vykhovannia* (Handbook for Social Upbringing), had embraced child-centred instruction early on, arguing that education should be tailored to the natural development of children and their environment. An explicit shift to the ‘complex method’ was a natural consequence of this approach. In a complex education, instructors organised their pedagogy around a set theme or complex. All traditional disciplines (such as mathematics, science, history and language) would be subordinated to this thematic instruction. The children’s talents and interest played a significant part in the selection of this complex, which often called for the study of children’s immediate surroundings through the performance of various practical tasks.

### **A call for *Kraieznavstvo*: discussion in the pedagogical press**

*Kraieznavstvo* was critical to successful instruction by the complex method. Strictly speaking, the term *kraieznavstvo* means ‘local studies’, but perceptions of its application

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<sup>28</sup>Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union*, 44.

<sup>29</sup>Riappo, *Narodnia osvita na Ukraini*, 38.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

shifted. In the early 1920s, *kraieznavstvo* denoted a general, often folkloric, study of a region surrounding a school and of the larger Ukrainian republic.<sup>31</sup> In the 1924–1925 academic year, when Narkomos mandated a full-scale transfer to education by the complex method, *kraieznavstvo* proved agreeable to this shift because of its early emphasis on self-discovery of a region's features and places of interest. *Kraieznavstvo* became the main organising principle for construction of future complexes and, thus, the most essential tool for educational reform.

Ukrainian scholarship on *kraieznavstvo* in the 1920s has generally been concerned with the activities and eventual repression of individual scholars and groups.<sup>32</sup> Teachers staffed several civic and state-sponsored local studies groups, including subject-specific commissions that operated under the All-Ukrainian Academy of Science (*Vseukrains'ka akademiia nauk*, VUAN), but a detailed investigation of their role is still needed. Until the 1925 creation of a Ukrainian Committee for Local Studies under Holovnauka (the Main Administration for Science – a subsidiary organ of Narkomos), commissions in Kyiv (Kiev), Kharkiv (Khar'kov) and Odesa (Odessa) managed regional coordination of activity.<sup>33</sup> It fell to regional methodological committees of Narkomos and individual educators to develop municipal and regional curricular material for the schools.<sup>34</sup>

The year 1925 saw the publication of several articles in the Soviet Ukrainian pedagogical journal *Radians'ka osvita* on the subject of teaching *kraieznavstvo*, using the complex method. To explain confusion over its teaching, one leading educator, A. Lazaris, pointed to a lack of ideological and organisational leadership in *kraieznavstvo* prior to 1924.<sup>35</sup> According to Lazaris, initial efforts to tie *kraieznavstvo* to practical work had little to do with concerns of real life. Now 'proletarian students' had taken over leadership of *kraieznavstvo* and directed its application to present concerns. A 1924 All-Union Congress on Local Studies set the defining agenda for all future *kraieznavstvo* work. *Kraieznavstvo* could no longer devote time to the study of customs and tradition, but rather had to concentrate on an examination of the 'productive forces and general growth of planned economic construction'.<sup>36</sup> Although the congress placed primary schools at the centre of *kraieznavstvo* work, it called upon 'a wide circle of workers' to involve themselves in the development of this work.

An emphasis on active engagement with the community promised greater localisation of instruction. Teachers were encouraged to favour the study of the immediate surroundings of the school first and foremost. Urban children had the advantage in the study of new *kraieznavstvo* because of the great variety of 'productive forces' in their place of residence. Another contributor to *Radians'ka osvita*, I. Haliun, argued that

<sup>31</sup>Sukhomlyns'ka, ed., *Narys istorii ukrains'koho shkil'nytstva*, 208.

<sup>32</sup>See, for example, I.S. Vynokur et al., eds., *Represovane kraieznavstvo (20–30-ti roky)* (Kyiv: Ridnyi kraj, 1991).

<sup>33</sup>P.T. Tron'ko, *Ukrains'ke kraieznavstvo v XX stolitti (do 75-richchia Vseukrains'koi spilky kraieznavstv)* (Kyiv: NANU Instytut istorii Ukrainy, 2002), 27. A Central (All-Union) Bureau of Local Studies administered contact between the Ukrainian Committee and local studies organisations beyond the UkSSR, although Ukrainian authorities also set up their own direct ties. Tron'ko, 29.

<sup>34</sup>Sukhomlyns'ka, ed., *Narys istorii ukrains'koho shkil'nytstva*, 216–19.

<sup>35</sup>A. Lazaris, 'Ukrains'ke kraieznavstvo i perspektyvy iohu rozvytku', *Radians'ka osvita*, no. 5 (1925): 49.

<sup>36</sup>Lazaris, 50. The First All-Ukrainian Local Studies Congress met 25–28 May 1924 and confirmed this agenda. Tron'ko, *Ukrains'ke kraieznavstvo v XX stolitti*, 23–4.



constant change in a child's urban environment produced a 'type of existence that is more developed, with a sharpened interest to everything that surrounds him'.<sup>37</sup> He further insisted that schools must develop courses suited to this particular 'psychology' of the urban child with the ultimate goal of producing a 'future, conscious worker' for socialism. *Kraieznavstvo* in the cities would also encompass the surrounding region's topography, natural world and material culture. Haliun recommended that urban teachers collect 'living folklore', including common sayings and songs, as well as 'living memories', such as personal accounts of the revolution and histories of specific enterprises.

Narkomos adjusted the complex system to meet its educational objectives in rural schools. *Kraieznavstvo* determined the content of complexes in rural schools just as it did in cities. However, rural students were to focus primarily on agricultural activity, as well as some folklore, local customs and events. Although Haliun lauded the presence of expressions of the 'victorious new' outside the city, he conceded that folklore derived from the past should provisionally form a large basis for the study of *kraieznavstvo* in the rural school. Material such as fairytales, fables (*baika*), legends and customs had an effect on rural children at birth and could be used to inspire an interest in the everyday life of the village and its 'productive forces'.<sup>38</sup> Haliun lamented the fate of children in rural schools, 'now completely torn from city schools' and from the city in general. Rural schools had to strengthen their ties to urban schools so that students would not act like 'wild beasts' when they encountered the city.

For both urban and rural children lessons in *kraieznavstvo* work were not confined to the limits of the classroom. Children made trips in their region (and sometimes beyond) to visit farms, factories, architectural sites and other points of interest. However, children were not to just passively observe the places they visited. I. Kopyl, a teacher from the Poltava region, described the experience of his sixth-grade group in *Radians'ka osvita*.<sup>39</sup> For this group's *kraieznavstvo* work, Kopyl assigned students the task of examining village soviets in the district. The students designed a form (*anketa*) in order to plan questions for their observation of the village and interviews with residents and members of the soviet. They included questions not only on the village's economy and production, but also on its social structure, party membership, civic activism and cultural achievements (in particular literacy levels). One group went even so far as to judge the number of dogs and cats, information, Kopyl stressed, that was not easy to acquire.

Such interactive excursions served a number of purposes, according to Kopyl. First, they satisfied a public need. Although Kopyl conceded that the students' work might not have been entirely accurate, because of its comprehensive nature, the students helped inform the district executive committee and 'improve their parents' and neighbours' economic management'.<sup>40</sup> Notwithstanding the students' inexperience, the report may well have been less biased than other official reports of the time because the children posed questions with few inhibitions. Second, Kopyl argues that the students' work in the region had the potential to increase the school's authority among the population, 'an authority, by the way, that many schools do not have'.

<sup>37</sup>I. Haliun, 'Kraieznavstvo i shkola', *Radians'ka osvita*, no. 5 (1925): 54.

<sup>38</sup>Haliun, 'Kraieznavstvo i shkola', 57.

<sup>39</sup>I. Kopyl, 'Sproba vyvchennia kraiu: zolotonoshs'ka okruha na Poltavshchyni', *Radians'ka osvita*, no. 5 (1925): 58–59.

<sup>40</sup>Kopyl, 'Sproba vyvchennia kraiu', 59.

Through their engagement of local officials and residents, students demonstrated the utility of schooling to a rural population that had historically valued it less. Lastly, because the students were required to conduct their research independently, they took greater pride in the realisation of the project. This, in the end, was the chief merit of instruction by the complex method coupled with *kraieznavstvo*. Since the students were investigating something already familiar to them, they accomplished their tasks with greater alacrity and effect.

### **Training teachers in the new methodology: a decentralised vision**

The discussion in the pedagogical press reflected wider concern among Narkomos officials, educational planners and teachers involved in the practical implementation of the *kraieznavstvo* in the schools. A call for pedagogical innovation meant little if teachers were unprepared to accomplish it. Largely out of consideration of cost, provincial sections continued to design pedagogical courses that emphasised self-study. The Volyn' province organised a congress for the summer of 1925 bringing together district organisers of study groups and teachers undergoing retraining. The plan for the congress's work stressed that it would not hold courses specifically for retraining but would seek to instruct participants in skills necessary for 'self-training'. Most of the activity of the congress would take place in work groups, with only three summary reports given to the whole congress. Although teachers had some input on the congress's agenda, it would work generally according to a provincial strategy devised by the Zhytomyr educational section that gave a central role to 'local studies of production' (*vyrobnychne kraieznavstvo*).

*Kraieznavstvo* was the foundation of the new school. It was, the Volyn' provincial congress planners believed, the 'the most important task in education' and one which they saw at the heart of teacher training. However, their instruction in this critical methodology was decidedly non-specific. Similarly, Budnov, a speaker at a March 1925 meeting of Kyiv provincial primary school workers, argued it was up to the teachers themselves to be promoters of *kraieznavstvo*: 'the new programme functions as only a skeleton which needs to be given living flesh of local studies material'.<sup>41</sup> He also cautioned against the study of history and folk customs and lauded the investigation of labour activity prescribed by the Narkomos programme. The teachers' task was to apply this directive to their own locale. Budnov recommended broadening their study to the whole district, but not beyond. By limiting the study this way, they would focus their observations on what was familiar and privilege direct examination. As students advanced, the teachers would ask them to draw connections to the region and the Ukrainian republic beyond.

There was a danger that educators' emphasis on teacher self-training and independent activity in the schools might have negative consequences. Muzychenko, also a speaker at the Kyiv provincial conference, warned that educational sections had to ensure that teachers did not turn *kraieznavstvo* to the study of 'olden times'.<sup>42</sup> Another participant named Kamyns'kyi argued that Narkomos must supply teachers with concrete and specific *kraieznavstvo* material so that teachers would not pick their own disparate information. He recommended that teachers undergo a full year of instruction

<sup>41</sup>*Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchychk orhaniv vlady i upravlinnia Ukrainy (TsDAVOU)*, f. 166, op. 5, spr. 671, ark. 206.

<sup>42</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 5, spr. 671, ark. 224.

in correspondence courses if Narkomos were to have any hope of setting up instruction in *kraieznavstvo* complexes. Muzychenko and others added that the number of local studies experts outside the city of Kyiv was still small and the success of the programme would depend on the cooperation between teachers, ties between central and provincial research institutions and, perhaps most importantly, a revamping of pedagogical training. They insisted that the rationale of all study, whether self-motivated or organised by Narkomos, should be ‘Soviet building’ through *kraieznavstvo*, not the ethnographic romanticism of the past.

Educators such as Budnov favoured *kraieznavstvo* so greatly because they claimed it offered an activist vision for Soviet Ukrainian youth to participate in the building of socialism. In a remarkable statement that contrasts sharply with the accepted understanding of the command-and-control Stalinism to come, Budnov insisted that *kraieznavstvo* was ‘not accidental, not a temporary passion, not a fashion, but rather a natural consequence of the entire internal policy of Soviet power, a policy based and built on decentralisation’.<sup>43</sup> This assertion repeats the sentiment expressed by writers in *Radians’ka osvita*: teachers, children and the general public would assume responsibility for surveying the challenges that faced their locality and using the information they gained to suggest solutions to Soviet authorities. Budnov’s suggestion, however, verges on claiming *kraieznavstvo* as a tool for the devolution of power. Ultimately, this notion of citizen participation, articulation and management was at the heart of educational experimentation.

### Connecting to things Ukrainian

The establishment of the complex system and the new Soviet school in general depended on the success of Ukrainian language and area studies, localised in the first instance and then broadened to the republican level. A Kyiv regional report on teacher training specifically connected *kraieznavstvo* to Ukrainian studies and offered a way to ensure teachers did more than teach abstract principles. Teacher training was needed, the report stated, because ‘children must know about production in our Republic and especially in their own district’.<sup>44</sup> The report ordered district educational sections to oversee the creation of small groups (*kushchi*) of teachers to collect *kraieznavstvo* material. They were to evaluate ‘territorial specifics’ through direct observation, to consider how they might be integrated into complexes and what sort of ‘verbal or illustrative’ work could be developed. While the district methodological bureau would compile a catalogue of the general characteristics of the district with the help of local intelligentsia, each school’s faculty would decide what details and sub-themes might be used in a given complex.<sup>45</sup> The end goal was an awareness of ‘our Republic’ Ukraine, defined as the aggregate of local production contributions.

On 1 August 1923 the Ukrainian republican government passed a decree ordering the linguistic Ukrainisation of all levels of government and requiring Ukrainian-language instruction in primary and secondary schools according to the republic’s proportion of ethnic Ukrainians. Narkomos formalised Ukrainian studies, *ukrain-oznavstvo*, as a separate course in national minority schools and encouraged a variety

<sup>43</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 5, spr. 671, ark. 206.

<sup>44</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1960, ark. 16.

<sup>45</sup>The Kyiv regional inspector specifically noted that it was not necessary for schools to use district plans, but they had to adjust complexes to local needs. See *TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1985, ark. 6.

of Ukrainian-related subjects as a component part of Ukrainisation. With the shift to the complex method, educational planners also began to promote a generalised discipline of social studies (*suspil'noznavstvo*) as a mechanism for the creation of new complexes. The commissariat's promotion of social studies enabled schools to orient their curriculum around revolutionary themes, without having to formally emphasise any one 'productive force'. Teachers needed to base social studies lessons on local experience, but they then had an obligation to tie these lessons to information on the region and the republic. Accordingly, *kraieznavstvo* was intimately connected to Ukrainisation because Narkomos encouraged schools to privilege 'Ukrainian' material. Educators believed that without Ukrainian content the complex method would flounder.

Ukrainian educators drew on numerous aspects of Ukraine's past to develop social studies complexes, including the lives and works of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary heroes. The paradigmatic figure of Ukrainian Soviet values was the Ukrainian national poet and hero, Taras Shevchenko. Raised to an exalted level by Ukrainian national movement, the young Soviet state co-opted and re-worked the mythology surrounding him. One school that responded to the Soviet authorities' promotion of the Shevchenko myth was a former tsarist gymnasium in Kyiv, renamed Shevchenko Labour School No. 1. Volodymyr Durdukivs'kyi, a well-known pedagogue, headed the school. Under his leadership, the school gained a reputation as a centre of pedagogical innovation and Ukrainian cultural advancement.

Durdukivs'kyi emphasised his school's advancement of social studies to the Soviet authorities. Due to the absence of 'appropriate conditions', Durdukivs'kyi maintained to the local Narkomos authorities in Kyiv that an industrial or agricultural orientation was currently impossible.<sup>46</sup> He argued that the Narkomos *poradnyk* was 'only a guide, not a dogmatic tool', but also insisted that the proletarianisation of the school was under way through the introduction of labour-oriented classes in social studies. In a 1924 article published in the Soviet pedagogical journal, *Radians'ka osvita*, Durdukivs'kyi further outlined his school's development and use of a 'Shevchenko complex'.<sup>47</sup> In designing the complex, the school sought to 'light in children, with Shevchenko's fiery words, disgust of all despotism, tyranny, and exploitation and to educate in them a class proletarian consciousness, a revolutionary fuse and capacity for struggle'. Lessons on Shevchenko therefore pertained to the larger *krai*, Ukraine. Durdukivs'kyi believed that by encouraging children to engage with the life of Shevchenko, to learn his poetry and write works inspired by him, these children would spread Shevchenko's legacy and his message of 'social truth'. Although Durdukivs'kyi noted Shevchenko's importance as a figure for national liberation, Shevchenko was most importantly an 'inflexible revolutionary' and a 'prophet for a joyous socialist future'.<sup>48</sup> Durdukivs'kyi claimed that instructors placed primary significance on this role in their development of lessons for the complex.

The Shevchenko complex also afforded an opportunity for civic training. One second-grade teacher at Kyiv Labour School No.1, who published under the initials Iu.T. (almost certainly the teacher Iurii Trezvyns'kyi), described how his students

<sup>46</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1960, ark. 11.

<sup>47</sup>V. Durdukivs'kyi, 'Shevchenkivs'ka shkola – Shevchenkovi', *Radians'ka osvita*, no. 3–4 (1924): 37–47.

<sup>48</sup>Durdukivs'kyi, 'Shevchenkivs'ka shkola', 37.

planned and agreed upon assignments for the complex.<sup>49</sup> The process mimicked the formulaic proceedings of a village or city soviet. The children proposed several projects that were then debated. The results of the debate were drawn up in a plan entitled protocol No. 10 that was voted on and approved by the class as a whole. Furthermore, even at this early age, the children were encouraged to fulfil a public function. The school arranged for the children to perform a skit on Shevchenko at the district theatre and participate in celebrations honouring Shevchenko's birth at a workers' theatre and club.<sup>50</sup> Even the children's journals and drawings were put on display at the school museum for the whole school and the public to see. Information regarding Shevchenko was collected and retransmitted by these little *kobzari* (bards, a moniker usually applied to Shevchenko), as Durdukivs'kyi called them, to the Soviet public at large.

Because of the less formalistic nature of the complex approach, the kind and character of information acquired by children was not strictly regulated. Teachers, in fact, encouraged children to use all sources open to them to collect information on Shevchenko. The children of Kyiv Labour School No. 1 invited the school caretaker, the son of a contemporary of Taras Shevchenko, to tell them about his acquaintance with the famous poet. His story was subsequently published in the school newspaper. Furthermore, Iu.T. (Trezvyns'kyi) asked the children to compare their childhood and their 'region of the world' with that of Shevchenko's. They solicited material at home and retold their stories the next day. Iu.T. did not describe in detail what they related, but emphasised that all work was done independently. The children were thus permitted to make their own judgement regarding the progress made in Ukraine since Shevchenko's time. These children, born in the midst of the civil war, adopted Shevchenko's words for their poster art: 'struggle and you will overcome'. In the poverty of 1925 Kyiv, it is the promise of the revolution, repeatedly cited by Iu.T., and not its immediate accomplishment that must have had the greatest resonance. As Durdukivs'kyi conceded, 'Shevchenko's convictions are close, native to our contemporary life'.<sup>51</sup>

The children would be taught about the history of the revolution in Ukraine in other complexes. It is perhaps significant, however, that this personage from the past, and not a contemporary figure, was chosen as the pre-eminent revolutionary for Ukraine. Durdukivs'kyi argued that 'every year we must unite not only the children of our school but of all schools in Ukraine' in the study of Shevchenko. It was Shevchenko's life that further provided material for the study of Ukraine in turn. Children learned of Ukraine outside Kyiv through Shevchenko's works and by tracing Shevchenko's life and journeys on a map. A study of Shevchenko then defined territorial Ukraine, told of the oppression of its people, and invoked its revolutionary spirit. Neither Durdukivs'kyi nor Iu.T. explicitly mentioned the role of the Communist Party in this struggle and lessons in Marxism were conspicuously absent from the complex. They placed Shevchenko at the fore of contemporary revolutionary struggle and called upon the children to connect their own experiences to this movement. Iu.T. concluded that at the end of the complex his students sang with greater awareness the

<sup>49</sup>Iu.T., 'Pered Shevchenkivs'kymy dniamy: z zhyttia II hrupy Kyivs'koi 1-oi trudovoi shkoly im. Shevchenka, za 1924 r.', *Radians'ka osvita*, nos 3-4 (1924): 48-56.

<sup>50</sup>Durdukivs'kyi, 'Shevchenkivs'ka shkola', 46; T., 'Pered Shevchenkivs'kymy dniamy', 56.

<sup>51</sup>Durdukivs'kyi, 'Shevchenkivs'ka shkola', 46.

Ukrainian version of the Internationale (and at the time the Soviet state anthem): ‘oppressed and hungry workers of all countries rise up!’ Shevchenko was in the lead.

While the Kyiv school teachers’ description of the political role of a Shevchenko complex omitted mention of the party, the 1927–1928 Narkomos curricular plan explicitly linked the Shevchenko complex to a complex on the February Revolution and the Bolshevik role in the civil war. In the interpretation of Narkomos, the February Revolution and the Bolshevik liberation of Ukraine fulfilled the vision of Shevchenko’s mid-nineteenth-century struggle against tsarism and the aristocracy. Narkomos recommended that teachers discuss events in Ukraine, including the Central Rada, the revolt against Hetman Pavlo Skoropads’kyi, banditry under the Directory, Petliurism, and the relationship between the USSR and UkSSR.<sup>52</sup> The Narkomos guide saw the objective of this joint complex as the cultivation of ‘disgust for social and national subjugation, disgust for national enmities, and a consciousness of the class essence of Shevchenko’s works’. It suggested that children read Shevchenko’s works and biography, as well as works on serfdom, and memoirs and interviews of those who participated in war and the February revolution. Of course, according to the complex system methodology, work could not just be confined to the classroom. Children were to take excursions to pre-revolutionary landlord estates to witness the history of serfdom first hand and publish declamations and wall newspapers recounting the events of the revolution in Ukraine and its promise. Above all, Narkomos emphasised that the ‘emotional moment’ should predominate in all class exercises.

Further instructions for the 1927–1928 school year sought to make the connection between schoolwork and activity even more explicit. Another programme on Shevchenko and the February Revolution directed children to collect stories from their parents about their participation in the war to determine for whom they had fought and for what reason. The purpose of this technique was ‘to emphasise that the participation of peasants and workers in the war was for the tsar, their final subjugation, and spoil’.<sup>53</sup> Of course, the interviews may have well turned up disquieting material about parents who fought in the tsarist army only to then join Ukrainian nationalist (‘Petliurist’) forces or peasant bands opposed to Bolshevik rule. The Narkomos programme gave no advice to school administrators or teachers on how to handle such dangers. Narkomos viewed such political lessons as absolutely necessary, but the very latitude of the complex system presented a dilemma. For the present, educators’ trust in the potential of progressive pedagogy displaced these concerns.

### **The practice and challenge of *Kraieznavstvo***

What were the real consequences of promoting this sort of applied *kraieznavstvo* in the schools? Apart from class exercises, Narkomos expected teachers to ensure children’s participation in Soviet Ukrainian society through public work outside the schools. However, local authorities regularly informed Narkomos that teachers were failing to

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<sup>52</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 7, spr. 675, ark. 25. The Central Rada was Ukraine’s governing body after the February Revolution. It was overthrown by a coup of conservative landowners in April 1918 and a new government headed by a former tsarist general, Pavlo Skoropads’kyi, was installed in its place. A left-leaning government known as the Directory ousted Skoropads’kyi in November and its military commander, Symon Petliura, assumed power.

<sup>53</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 7, spr. 675, ark. 60.

institute this programme.<sup>54</sup> Kharkiv educational section reported that in the 1926–1927 school year the most successful area of public work for its schools was their maintenance of ties with community enterprises.<sup>55</sup> Urban schools also retained direct affiliation with rural schools, simultaneously preserving the *zmychka* (the union between peasants and workers for the building of socialism) and their own cultural leadership. However, beyond the celebration of political holidays, the schools did little. The Kharkiv report evaluated the association of regional schools with a number of public activities, among them participation in Soviet elections, the sowing campaign, and the struggle against saboteurs. Schools had met their ‘goals’ in all by less than 25%.<sup>56</sup> Overall, the report concluded the schools’ work in public activity was sporadic and ‘isolated from Soviet society and leadership’. It pointed to the weakness of the complex system and underscored a need to further localise material according to the dictates of *kraieznavstvo*. The implicit judgement was that an effective complex system, grounded in local study, would encourage political work and political work in turn would support the complex system. The reality was that few teachers had any sort of concrete training in this exercise and local communities often did not support the expanded mission of the ‘new’ school.

The procedure for establishing a complex system of instruction through application of *kraieznavstvo* remained vague and purposefully so. What may have appeared to be a fanciful product of Narkomos ruminations in fact had a firm grounding in Western progressive pedagogical theory. However, it had never been applied on the sort of mass scale that Narkomos educators envisioned for Ukraine and, ambiguous or not, it was a task left to local officials to work out the new methodology and cast it in a Soviet mould. As local administrators and teachers struggled to understand and institute a progressive curriculum, parents and individual officials began to point to the system’s failure to meet basic educational goals.

Although Narkomos was pushing through a fundamental reform of education, the expectations of parents remained essentially the same. Schools had to provide fundamental knowledge. According to the report of one school director, Pasika, parents were afraid that the overcrowded Narkomos schools were not teaching their children the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. As a result, they were hiring private teachers and forming independent study groups.<sup>57</sup> Pasika warned his audience at a 1925–1926 meeting of Kyiv district labour school heads that this practice threatened Narkomos control and hoped that salvation would ultimately be found in the complex system. However, in spite of some discussion of the methodology in teacher conferences, plans did not yet exist for a new curricular schedule. Pasika conceded that the complex system was mostly a matter of ‘idle chatter’. Even worse, the ‘ability and knowledge of children in the third and fourth grades in particular do not correspond with the state minimum’.

While Pasika maintained that only the full transfer to complex system would increase the Soviet school’s authority among the population, his account reveals that teachers had very little idea how to realise the sort of instruction in *kraieznavstvo*

<sup>54</sup>Holmes details problems regarding the use of the complex method generally in Russia and Partlett discusses similar challenges at Kaluga. Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse*, 37–55, 69–83; Partlett, ‘Breaching Cultural Worlds with the Village School’, 860–1; ‘Bourgeois Ideas in Communist Construction’, 468–9.

<sup>55</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 7, spr. 396, ark. 14.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1960, ark. 2.

intended by Narkomos to facilitate this transformation. They simply knew that the old methodology was bad. When they tried to implement the new *kraieznavstvo*, some worked from the generalised Narkomos guide or with entirely abstract material. For example, students studied literature on tropical rain forests rather than observing the lumber industry in their own districts.<sup>58</sup> Other teachers abandoned methodology altogether or worked only with those students who showed promise. The result was a collapse of discipline and an increase in truancy.

Other local reports confirmed the picture Pasika paints. In the Kharkiv schools, children demonstrated some knowledge of general physical geography, but knew very little about the village, district and region.<sup>59</sup> Their knowledge of the political economy was devoid of historical perspective and context. A report by the Kyiv regional educational inspector concluded that in the Ivankivskyi district the four-year school had given little heed to the study of the local environment and children were generally not engaged in contemporary life.<sup>60</sup> In another school, students could not name any local bodies of water. When pressed, one student named the Black Sea, but placed it in Japan. They knew about the October holiday, but had no idea that it was to commemorate a revolution and thought Mikhail Frunze, the Soviet Commissar of War, was a former tsar. The inspector concluded that students needed to spend much more time studying the school's surroundings and, at the very least, they should be aware of prominent features of the republic such as the Black Sea and the Dnipro.<sup>61</sup>

In such an environment, parents naturally grew angry. Vasylenko, another district labour school director at the 1925–1926 Kyiv meeting, cautioned, ‘the school is not a place for idle talk. When parents are emphasising that children are not gaining knowledge, then it is necessary to listen.’<sup>62</sup> The shortcomings presented by Pasika and local education inspectors had to be addressed immediately or schools risked losing the authority they had. Vasylenko similarly did not suggest abandoning the complex method, but rather argued for its acceleration through a renewed emphasis on *kraieznavstvo* and public work.

Aside from professional conferences, teachers had little opportunity to study the new methodology. At an April 1925 meeting of the teachers’ union Robos, speakers emphasised that teachers were unable to buy the pedagogical press and that concerns for retraining had to be narrowed if teachers were expected to cope.<sup>63</sup> Teachers in the Myronivka District Labour School participated in training during breaks in the academic year, but they had to pass around personal copies of new literature to review or borrow publications from the chief employer in the city, the sugar refinery.<sup>64</sup> The amount of new literature in the school library was so small that ‘really one must speak of “creating” a library, a teacher and student library’.

Still, it ultimately fell to teachers and school administrators to perfect the complex system’s use of *kraieznavstvo* and Narkomos principally blamed teachers for the methodology’s failures. The director of the Ivankiv’ska District Labour School, Kryvenko, maintained at the Kyiv regional meeting of school heads that ‘the teacher does not have a sense of responsibility for his work, no one controls it and [the work]

<sup>58</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1960, ark. 4.

<sup>59</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 7, spr. 396, ark. 12.

<sup>60</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1985, ark. 6.

<sup>61</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1985, ark. 10–11.

<sup>62</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1960, ark. 5.

<sup>63</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 5, spr. 680, ark. 60.

<sup>64</sup>*TsDAVOU*, f. 166, op. 5, spr. 671, ark. 468.



remains dependent upon the unsupervised consciousness of this very worker'.<sup>65</sup> He further notes that teachers' work was hampered by an alarming shortage of books and laments the fact students were forced to buy their own. Ironically, it was the latitude of the complex system that seems to have troubled him most. Without any direct guidance and unable to use sanctioned literature, teachers were bound to err. Kryvenko's school is included in a 1926 report of the Kyiv regional inspector. The inspector's assessment is generally positive, but it also cites cases where teachers did not allow students to participate in the presentation of material, 'thus paralysing in part the initiative of the children and their self-activity'.<sup>66</sup> There was little chance of schools realising the sort of experiential, public *kraieznavstvo* that was the basis of the complex system if teachers kept to such an arrangement.

A year later, little had changed. A 1927 inspector's report on the Baryshpils'kyi district in the Kyiv region criticised one school for expanding *kraieznavstvo* too greatly: Students were studying geographic features of the world, 'but they do not know about "near Ukraine". Local material, the agricultural surroundings, are not studied.'<sup>67</sup> In another school, students were using a geography primer on Ukraine, but understood it poorly. Students were failing to see the connection between their immediate environment and a larger, integral Ukrainian territory.

Because of the importance Narkomos attached to progressive local studies for its formative value in future vocational training, it did not begin to abandon the technique until the height of the Kremlin's sanctioned attack on non-party intelligentsia throughout the Soviet Union, known as the cultural revolution.<sup>68</sup> However, well in advance of this date, even as Soviet authorities formally supported progressive pedagogy, they expressed worry about the flawed lessons in Ukrainian studies children might be learning under this interpretive methodology. A meeting of party and Komsomol school staff in Kyiv found that Russians and Ukrainians had begun to 'show their real face' in 1927.<sup>69</sup> Of critical importance to Ukrainian studies, the meeting singled out the danger represented by Labour School No. 1, where Durdukivs'kyi and Iu. T. (Trezvyns'kyi) taught according to the lesson plans cited earlier. One participant maintained that nearly all the teachers at the school were former members of the pro-independence Ukrainian Social Democratic Party and the direction of the school remained oriented towards the former national platform of this party.<sup>70</sup> Progressive advocates of Ukrainian studies, such as Durdukivs'kyi, Trezvyns'kyi and Hryhorii Ivanytsia, a co-editor of *Radianska osvita*, were implicated in the 1930 public show trial of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (an organisation fabricated by the Soviet state police, the OGPU) and accused of fomenting nationalism in the schools.<sup>71</sup> A 1930 All-Union Party Meeting on Education confirmed a decision to standardise

<sup>65</sup>TsDAVOU, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1960, ark. 2.

<sup>66</sup>TsDAVOU, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1985, ark. 6.

<sup>67</sup>TsDAVOU, f. 166, op. 6, spr. 1985, ark. 63.

<sup>68</sup>Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 115. Even at this time schools pursued progressive methods, such as student involvement in collaborative projects, but now largely to demonstrate their participation in state-directed campaigns for collectivisation and industrialisation.

<sup>69</sup>*Derzhavnyi arkhiv Kyivs'koi oblasti (DAKO)*, f. 1043, op. 3, spr. 31, ark. 52.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>I have dealt with the protracted evolution of the party's suspicions regarding non-Communist teachers and educators elsewhere. See Pauly, 'Building Socialism in the National Classroom', 225–97.

educational systems across the republics and progressive pedagogy in Ukraine, and in the Soviet Union as a whole, fell widely out of favour.

### Conclusion

The hope of Narkomos for real pedagogical reform rested on its articulation and promotion of local studies in the schools. The premise of the new Soviet Ukrainian school was a rejection of instruction by rote repetition of disciplinary knowledge. *Kraieznavstvo* offered a vehicle for an education that was both unified and applied. Educational planners wanted teachers to create interdisciplinary lessons drawn from their students' interaction in and understanding of place. They prescribed a definition of region that was labour and production oriented and largely excluded a folkloric rendering of customs. Place, in this sense, was a tool for political education and a step towards future vocational training. Narkomos intended a cumulative awareness of the interconnection between localities to offer a definition of Ukraine. Lessons tying Taras Shevchenko's writings to the revolution's political and economic promise for the region surrounding a school gave students a direct connection to a concept of Ukraine.

Narkomos placed trust in the premise of decentralisation. It left the task of defining a Soviet rendering of an individual region and incorporating exercises that engaged this sense of region to local Narkomos organs, schools or teachers. Unfortunately for Narkomos, many teachers had a weak notion of the sort of place envisioned by its plans and those of leading progressive pedagogues. When rural Ukrainian teachers looked out beyond their classroom they did not automatically see a terrain populated by peasants and factory workers labouring in pursuit of socialism. In the schoolhouse, underpaid instructors were struggling to just keep order: to teach overcrowded classes and procure basic school supplies and the textbooks they still relied on for preparation of their lesson plans. The freedom that progressive pedagogy offered through *kraieznavstvo* created uncertainty, opportunity for academic failure, and potential for liberal (and politically hazardous) interpretations.

The case study of Soviet Ukrainian schools speaks to a larger literature on local studies education and seeks to move it in a new direction.<sup>72</sup> Soviet educational authorities saw local studies or *kraieznavstvo* as a fundamentally progressive project that would transform the Ukrainian nation into a modern, socialist and urban-oriented community. Like Heimat campaigns that preceded and coincided with it in Germany and elsewhere, local studies curricula allowed Ukrainian children simultaneously to take pride in their locality and in a larger whole. The state mandated the coupling of *kraieznavstvo* with a type of active-learning instruction akin to that practised in other European countries. Several recent studies on the history of childhood and education have referenced the application of this 'new pedagogy', although Marjorie Lamberti's discussion of its place in the *Grundschule* of Weimar Germany is the most

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<sup>72</sup>Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 34–63; Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 62–5, 156–66.

complete.<sup>73</sup> Like Soviet Ukrainian educators, Lamberti argues, Weimar proponents of progressive pedagogy believed that: ‘The elementary school served the needs of civic education most effectively by becoming “a working and living community according to the model of the active-learning school”.’<sup>74</sup> In the post-civil war era, this was the official Soviet vision as well.

However, the Soviet Ukrainian local studies project was much more interventionist and radical in its scope. Communities mattered, but it was their linkage with the proletarian state that mattered most. The Ukrainian Commissariat of Education chose local studies as first step towards a participatory labour culture. But there was a danger in how communities understood the connection with the wider community beyond the locality. The very flexibility of early Soviet progressive pedagogy meant that the Commissariat’s own educational objectives were ill defined (and therefore not predictable). Furthermore, the seemingly simple trajectory that dominated Heimat educational projects elsewhere did not exist in Soviet Ukraine. *Kraieznavstvo*’s promotion of a connection between the community and a delineated national territory (Ukraine) made the state’s objectives more understandable (and palatable for some), but questions surrounding the nation’s place within a supranational, socialist homeland, the Soviet Union, created an inevitable tension. The case of Soviet Ukrainian education in the 1920s offers an instructive lesson in the intersection between a progressive local studies agenda and a nation-building project, however circumscribed. In the end, the demands of local studies education provoked teacher resistance and compounded the suspicions of an increasingly centralising state.

### Notes on contributor

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<sup>73</sup>Even Lamberti’s study is mainly concerned with the politics surrounding state support for this pedagogy rather than classroom practice itself: Marjorie Lamberti, *The Politics of Education: Teachers and School Reform in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002). For descriptions of the use of progressive pedagogy in children’s summer camps in France and interwar Czechoslovakia: Laura Lee Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working-Class Movements and the Colonies de Vacances in France, 1880–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 196; Zahra, 153. Benita Blessing also references how Weimar-era progressive practices inspired the ‘new school’ in Soviet-occupied Germany. Benita Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet-occupied Germany, 1945–1949* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 163.

<sup>74</sup>Lamberti, *The Politics of Education*, 122.