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Kiev as the Ukraine's Primate City

ROMAN SZPORLUK

In his celebrated article entitled "The Law of the Primate City," the American geographer Mark Jefferson declared: "All over the world it is the Law of the Capitals that the largest city shall be supereminent, and not merely in size but in national influence."¹ Jefferson argued that its size gives the largest city "an impetus to grow that cannot affect any other city," causing it to draw away from all others not only in size, but also in character. Citing statistical evidence from many lands, Jefferson formulated a "primacy index" for measuring the degree to which capitals have succeeded in establishing their preeminence. He counted the values of the populations of a country's three largest cities as percentages of the value of the largest city. Thus, for example, in Austria the primacy index was reflected in the relationship "100 — 8 — 6," in which 100 represented Vienna (population of 1,874,000), and the next two numbers represented Graz (153,000) and Linz (109,000), respectively. In this way Austria was shown to be a highly integrated state, whereas Italy, with an index of 100 — 96 — 75, was shown to be lacking in unity. (Rome's population in 1936 was 1,156,000; Milan's 1,116,000; and that of Naples, 866,000.)²

Jefferson was clearly aware that certain primate cities lose their status while other cities achieve it, but he did not offer any explanation why this was so. He acknowledged that in 1914, Naples, not Rome, was Italy's largest and therefore, on his terms, primate city, and in measuring primacy as of 1914 he assessed Milan's and Rome's standing in relation to Naples. (Naples was 100, Milan 96, and Rome 85.) By 1936, Rome and Naples had changed places, but, in Jefferson's view, Italian unity had not really increased: the new primate city, Rome, was about as strong in relation to Naples and Milan as the old primate city, Naples, had been in relation to Milan and Rome twenty years earlier.³ Admittedly, Jefferson

¹ Mark Jefferson, "The Law of the Primate City," *Geographical Review* 29 (1939): 227.

² Jefferson, "Law," p. 228.

³ Jefferson, "Law," p. 232.

said he expected Rome now to increase further the ascendancy that it had first achieved in 1931 by becoming Italy's largest city, but he did not say why he expected this. A historian could have pointed out that Rome owed its victory of 1931 to the political decision made in 1870, which gave it the rank of a capital city. That decision had nothing to do with Rome's size, but it had everything to do with Rome's historical image and status. When Rome finally became Italy's largest city, demographic reality was made to conform to historical ideal, for ideally Rome had always been Italy's primate city.

Jefferson's neglect of the political factor is revealed in another facet of his thesis: the assumption that the primate city is not simply the most populous, but also the one which "expresses the national disposition more completely than any other city. . . . Primacy of a leading city is . . . an earmark of intense nationalism."⁴ This geographic oneness led the author to see in Austria and Vienna the most convincing demonstration of his thesis — a strange claim to make at any time, but especially so in the 1930s.

It is pointless to dwell on Jefferson's limitations. Despite them, the thesis he presented has proved to be stimulating and fruitful, and his article is read today, decades after its first publication. Let us take up, then, a theme Jefferson suggested but did not care to develop and explore: the problem of the primate city of a nation that lacks political independence. How is such a nation's "ideal capital" related to the actually existing largest or primate city in its ethnic homeland? Modern-day Ukraine offers an excellent case study for the exploration of such duality between the actual and the ideal.

At the close of the nineteenth century, when the first modern census in the Ukraine under the Russian Empire took place, Odessa emerged as the largest city located in Ukrainian ethnic territory. Kiev, at some distance behind, came in second. The actual figures (rounded off to the nearest thousand) for the largest cities were:

Odessa	404
Kiev	248
Kharkiv	174
Lviv	160
Dnipropetrovs'k	113
Mykolaiv	92

⁴ Jefferson, "Law," p. 231.

Chernivtsi	68
Zhytomyr	66
Kremenchuk	63
Kirovohrad	61
Kherson	59
Poltava	54

Source: Chauncy D. Harris, *Cities of the Soviet Union* (Chicago, 1970), table 27, p. 256ff. Note: Katerynoslav and Ielysavethrad were the names of Dnipropetrovsk and Kirovohrad, respectively, in 1897.

This list includes not only the ten largest Ukrainian cities in the Russian Empire, but also two cities located in the Austrian Empire — Lviv and Chernivtsi, the respective capitals of Galicia and Bukovyna, ethnically mixed crownlands whose capitals were located in the predominantly Ukrainian portions of those two provinces.

Following the Jefferson formula, we assign to Odessa the value of 100, and, correspondingly, those of 61 and 43 to Kiev and Kharkiv, respectively. Since the sum of values for Kiev and Kharkiv barely exceeded the value assigned to Odessa alone, it would seem that the Ukraine had a fairly strong primate city, certainly a stronger one than Italy had in 1914. But it does not take much political or historical wisdom to see that this index cannot serve as an indicator of the strength of Ukrainian nationalism. Nor does it reflect the actual hierarchical relationship among the Ukrainian cities of the time. The city of Odessa, ranking third in size in the Russian Empire, owed its growth to being an imperial commercial and transportation center, not to performing any specifically Ukrainian economic function. As for its role in Ukrainian nationalism, suffice it to say that in 1897 only 9.4 percent of Odessa's populace considered itself Ukrainian by nationality. In fact, except for Mykolaiv, where Ukrainians were even less numerous (8.5 percent), Odessa had the lowest share of Ukrainians among the ten or twelve largest cities in the Ukrainian ethnic homeland. There was only one major city situated in ethnic Ukrainian territory that had a Ukrainian majority in 1897: this was Poltava, ranking tenth in size among Ukrainian cities in the Russian Ukraine alone and twelfth if those under Austria are included.⁵

⁵ For the ethnic composition of Ukrainian cities in the Russian Empire, see *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897 g.*, 89 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1899–1905). Data quoted here are taken from table 2, "Ethnic Composition of [the] Ten Largest Ukrainian Cities, 1897," in Steven L. Guthier, "The Popular Base of Ukrainian Nationalism in 1917," *Slavic Review* 38 (1979): 41.

This fact, supported by the discovery that no other major city had a population more than 30 percent Ukrainian, reveals a significant feature of nineteenth-century economic developments such as urbanization and industrialization in the Ukraine. The most rapid economic growth took place in those parts of the Ukraine, such as the south and the east, where Ukrainians were relatively weak and which lay outside the historic "core area" of the Ukrainian nationality. Simultaneously, the traditional center of the Ukraine, Kiev, and such smaller cities as Poltava and Chernihiv found themselves side-tracked in the process. One of the consequences of this dichotomy was the pressure for Russification of Ukrainians moving to, or living in, the rapidly growing urban centers. The most drastic case in point was Odessa.⁶

For reasons that cannot be discussed here, the political center of modern Ukrainian organized life was formed in Lviv, on the western periphery of the Ukrainian ethnic homeland, just at the time that its economic centers were developing along the southern and eastern peripheries. Lviv played an exceptional role in Ukrainian politics and culture, but it could not assume the function of an all-Ukrainian capital. As a result, Ukrainian developments, as we can see, followed a pattern quite different from what the Czechs or the Poles experienced in the nineteenth century. Both Prague and Warsaw, located as they were in the core areas of their respective nations and both enjoying the status and prestige of historical capitals, became, under the impact of capitalism, major industrial, financial, and transportation centers, while at the same time functioning as centers of their national movements. In consequence, they helped modernize the Czech and Polish peoples without fostering their denationalization. In the Ukraine such centers did not overlap: commerce and transport were concentrated in Odessa; Kharkiv and Katerynoslav led in industry; and Lviv was the center stage of political and cultural activity. Kiev, meanwhile, was the Ukraine's ideal capital, its primate city *in pectore*, deriving status from the past, when it was the great capital during the Kievan period of Ukrainian history.

Where did Kiev stand in terms of the Jefferson formula, modified, however, to recognize a nation's spiritual capital as its primate city, regardless of that city's actual size? As could be expected, Kiev did not emerge as a strong center: to its 100 points, Odessa registered 163 and Kharkiv, 70. Combined, these two cities exceeded Kiev's population two and one-third

⁶ Patricia Herlihy, "The Ethnic Composition of the City of Odessa in the Nineteenth Century," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 1, no. 1 (1977): 53–78.

times. Clearly, Kiev was no capital to them. Obviously, the Ukraine was less integrated in 1897 than Italy was in 1914, a conclusion that one somehow senses to be correct without recourse to arithmetic.

The format of this essay does not allow a discussion of the political events of twentieth-century Ukrainian history in terms of the role of primate cities or the urban hierarchy in the Ukraine. It is obvious, for example, and has been noted by historians that during the Ukrainian Revolution, the Ukrainians were handicapped not only by an overall weakness in the cities, but also by the fact that their center, Kiev, lacked a clear position of primacy in relation to Kharkiv, Katerynoslav, or Odessa. The Soviets also encountered difficulties in the Ukraine that were due to lack of communication between their regional groups in the east, the south, and the west. The Bolsheviks of Kharkiv and Katerynoslav, for example, refused to recognize the claims of those in Kiev to organize an all-Ukrainian Bolshevik network. Instead, each regional center preferred to communicate directly with Petrograd and then Moscow.⁷ After the revolution and civil war, the government of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic established its seat in Kharkiv. It was not until 1934 that the capital was moved to Kiev, where Ukrainian national governments had been located in the post-1917 period. For consistency's sake, however, let us consider Kiev the Ukraine's capital city throughout the post-revolutionary era.

The census of 1926 revealed that Kiev had become the actual number one city in the Ukraine. Its population was 514,000, compared with Odessa's 421,000 and Kharkiv's 417,000.⁸ On Jefferson's index we register a definite strengthening in Kiev's position: with Kiev valued as 100, we get 82 for Odessa and 81 for Kharkiv. By 1939, when the next census was taken and when Kiev had already functioned for several years as the capital of the Ukrainian SSR, its relative strength had declined, reflect-

⁷ As examples of scholarly works in which these problems are discussed, see Jurij Borys, *The Russian Communist Party and the Sovietization of Ukraine* (Stockholm, 1960); Arthur E. Adams, *Bolsheviks in the Ukraine: The Second Campaign, 1918-1919* (New Haven and London, 1963), p. 328; Yaroslav Bilinsky, "The Communist Take-over of the Ukraine," in Taras Hunczak, ed., *The Ukraine, 1917-1921: A Study in Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), pp. 104-127; and S. M. Korolivs'kyi, M. A. Rubach, and N. I. Suprunenko, *Pobeda Sovetskoi vlasti na Ukraine* (Moscow, 1967), pp. 33-34.

⁸ Chauncy D. Harris, *Cities of the Soviet Union: Studies in Their Functions, Size, Density, and Growth* (Chicago, 1970), p. 256. Harris provides a wealth of data concerning cities and towns of the Soviet Union, including many in the Ukraine. See also Iu. I. Pitiurenko, *Rozvytok mist i mis'ke rozseleattia v Ukraini'kii RSR* (Kiev, 1972), p. 121, which contains a table giving the population growth of the eight largest Ukrainian cities (as of 1970) from 1897 to 1970.

ing, no doubt, the intensive urbanization and industrialization drive in the east and southeast of the Ukraine and a corresponding neglect of the central and western areas. Kiev and Kharkiv were almost equal in size in 1939: the former had a population of 847,000, and the latter, that of 833,000, which gave Kharkiv 98 points against Kiev's 100. Third place was held by Odessa (602,000), with 71 points.⁹ One can speculate that but for the transfer of the capital to Kiev in 1934, which brought with it an influx of thousands of officials and an expansion in housing and service construction, Kharkiv would have surpassed Kiev in size by 1939.

The Second World War brought immense population changes to the Ukraine. One consequence was an expansion of the Ukrainian SSR to the west. This transformed the geopolitical position of Kiev, giving it a more central location in the Ukraine. When the first postwar census was taken in 1959 — unusually late, one might add — it showed Kiev with a population of 1,110,000, followed by Kharkiv with 953,000, and, in third place, Donetsk with 708,000. Kharkiv represented 86 percent of the value of Kiev, and Donetsk, 64 percent; together, the two had a population 50 percent larger than Kiev's, but, relatively, Kiev had improved its position by 19 points. By 1970, third place was taken by Odessa (population 892,000) which just beat Donetsk (879,000), now number four. Kharkiv was safely in the number two position (1,223,000), and Kiev had forged ahead (1,632,000).¹⁰ By then Kharkiv had 75 percent and Odessa had 55 percent of Kiev's population, and Kiev had further strengthened its lead by 20 points. The most recent census, taken in January 1979, shows Kiev continuing its surge forward. Its population has passed the two million mark (2,144,000), whereas Kharkiv has yet to reach 1.5 million (1,444,000). Dnipropetrovsk held third place in 1979 (1,066,000), thanks to administrative annexations carried out in 1978: without them it would have remained behind Odessa, which had 1,046,000 inhabitants in 1979 and was thus number four. (Donetsk slipped to fifth place, although it has continued to grow and had 1,021,000 people.)¹¹ In percentages of Kiev's population, Kharkiv had 67, and Dnipropetrovsk had 50. Odessa, which in 1897 was so much larger than Kiev, in 1979 had less than half of Kiev's population.

⁹ Harris, *Cities*, p. 256, and Pitiurenko, *Rozvytok*, p. 121.

¹⁰ For both the 1959 and the 1970 censuses, see *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1972), pp. 43–49. This source gives adjusted figures for Ukrainian cities in 1959, by taking into account administrative annexations carried out after 1959 and omitted from the publication of 1959 returns during the 1960s.

¹¹ "Pro poperedni pidsumky Vsesoiuznoho perepysu naseleniia 1979 roku po Ukrainskii RSR," *Radians'ka Ukraina*, 25 April 1979, p. 3.

Over all, Kiev's showing in the 1979 census was the best in more than a hundred years. For Kiev was smaller than Odessa in the 1897 census and, insofar as can be ascertained, smaller than Lviv earlier in the nineteenth century.¹² It can plausibly be argued that by 1959 or 1970, Kiev had become not only the Ukraine's largest city, but also the central city for Ukrainians. It registered a Ukrainian majority in 1959 and increased it in 1970.¹³ (The nationality portion of the 1979 census returns has not yet been published.) Although its size does not correspond to the size that certain geographers project for a capital of a republic with the Ukraine's population,¹⁴ Kiev seems to have established itself solidly as the unchallenged primate city of the Ukraine.¹⁵

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¹² Harris, *Cities*, passim, and Patricia Herlihy, "Ukrainian Cities in the Nineteenth Century," paper presented at the Ukrainian Historical Conference, London, Ontario, May 1978, p. 7.

¹³ See V. V. Pokshishevskii, "Urbanization and Ethnogeographic Processes," *Soviet Geography* 13 (1972): 117 and passim, for a discussion of the significance of the changing ethnic composition of Kiev, Baku, Tashkent, and Tbilisi, as well as the capitals of other Soviet republics. For 1970 figures, see *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda*, vol. 4 (Moscow, 1973), p. 178.

¹⁴ Harris, *Cities*, p. 135, writes: "Kiev . . . is only about a third as large as would be expected from the network of 301 cities and towns of more than 10,000 population in the Ukraine." Peter Woroby, "Effects of Urbanization in the Ukraine," *Annals of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the U.S.* 13 (1973-77): 95 and 113-14, also argues that Kiev is an underdeveloped metropolis, but he notes that it improved its position between the censuses of 1959 and 1970.

¹⁵ Such is the conclusion of David J. M. Hooson, *The Soviet Union: People and Regions* (Belmont, Calif., 1966), p. 163. An interesting examination of Kiev's place in the urban hierarchy of the Ukraine, especially in comparison with the other supra-regional centers of Kharkiv, Odessa, Dnipropetrovs'k, Donetsk, and Lviv, appears in Iu. Pitiurenko, *Territorial'nye sistemy gorodskikh poselenii Ukrainskoi SSR* (Kiev, 1977), pp. 80-84. Pitiurenko argues that Vynnytsia may be in the process of becoming another such supra-regional center, in view of its location between Lviv and Kiev, the two major cities of the western part of the Ukraine which are separated by an unusually long distance (*ibid.*, pp. 83-84).