

Identity of Lemkos on the Polish and Slovakian side of the Carpathian Mountains

ABSTRACT

Lemkos, likewise known as Ruthenians or Rusnaks, have been inhabiting the area of the contemporary Polish-Slovak borderland since the 14th century. This area has been exposed

for many years to: changes in administrative borders, passage of troops and war fronts, clash of religious and cultural influences, displacement and other historical turmoil.

In consequence, the people living there could lose their self-awareness, and thus identity and a sense of community. In this article the author will try to answer the following questions:

Do Lemkos / Ruthenians inhabiting the northern part of the Carpathian Mountains have a common identity? What factors affect a sense of their separateness? Which of the elements of identity is the most important to them? What symbols does the group identify with? How is a sense of their identity spatially distributed? In order to answer the above questions, the literature on Lemkos and Ruthenians, the notion of identity and identity issues of the group was reviewed. Pilot studies were made to identify the most salient areas from the point of view of the surveyed group, so that its identity could be addressed. The interviews and observations were conducted according to the well-established theory providing thus the author with the most important points of reference. A questionnaire was carried out giving empirical data and finally confirming the study.

In addition, the author being a member of the discussed community from an early age is cognizant with its specificity, the social phenomena affecting it and their internal influences. Knowledge combined with the applied research methodology, their organization and course allowed the author to maintain the distance between the subjective assessment of the researcher and scientific objectivity.

