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Destruction, Preservation, and Rethinking of Ukraine's Urban Cultural Heritage during the Russo-Ukrainian War. The Case of the Building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration

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Destruction, Preservation, and Rethinking of Ukraine's Urban Cultural Heritage during the Russo-Ukrainian War. The Building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration¹

This article examines the processes of destruction, preservation, and rethinking of urban cultural heritage in Ukraine during the Russo-Ukrainian War, using the case of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building. The building was partially destroyed in the missile strike on Kharkiv's city center on March 1, 2022. It had already held an important place in urban space, but its significance had undergone a complex transformation: from a symbol of Soviet power to a representation of the struggle for democracy and Ukraine's independence. Today, the building is one of the symbols of resistance to Russian military aggression and a recognizable symbol of the war. Special attention is devoted to the lively discussion surrounding its future, considering various aspects such as its significance as an object of urban heritage. Overall, participants in this discussion represent several conceptual orientations, which can be preliminarily identified as decolonial, renovative, and revalorizing. It remains an important task to develop new approaches to dealing with dissonant heritage and possible strategies for the post-war reconstruction of the urban historical environment in Ukraine. The building may become an example of social dialogue and the search for a domestic political consensus or, conversely, attest to the intensification of the "memory wars".

1. Introduction

The destruction of, and damage to, urban cultural heritage has emerged as an important component of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Intentional obliteration of a city's built environment also means a complete or partial erasure of its cultural heritage, which constitutes the basis for the cultural habitat and the memory of urban communities. This is the result of targeted bombing and shelling of Ukrainian cities by the Russian military, which is displaying signs of urbicide.²

¹ This paper was prepared with the support of the Indiana University-Ukraine Nonresidential Scholars Program.

² Cf. Yevhen Rachkov, "Znyshchennia, zberezhenia ta pereosmyslennia mis'koyi kul'turnoi spadshchyny Ukraïny pid chas rosiis'ko-ukraïns'koi viiny," *The Journal of V. N. Kara-*

To start with, devastating damage is inflicted on the heterogeneous urban environment. Destruction of cultural heritage leads to physical and symbolic fragmentation of urban space. What at first glance appears to be localized losses of cultural heritage can in fact pose an existential threat, inhibiting the stable development of both individual urban communities and the entire anthropogenic environment of the city.

For instance, on March 1, 2022, the Russian military carried out a missile attack on the center of Kharkiv, the second-largest city in Ukraine.³ As a result of this attack, the building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration was partially destroyed. Before the war, the building had primarily been seen as a hub of state power and an artifact of Soviet architectural heritage. But it had also played an important role in the symbolic space of Kharkiv as a component of the architectural complex of Freedom Square — one of the largest urban squares in Eastern Europe and firmly perceived as the “central part of the city.”⁴ Videos and images of the missile strike and its aftermath spread widely across the media and caused a significant public outcry.⁵ Thereafter, the partially destroyed building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration became one of the symbols of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Shortly after the missile attack, the regional authorities announced that reconstruction was impossible, citing the verdict of a special commission that visually assessed the condition of the building.⁶ However, many architects, restorers, historians, and other experts disagreed with this conclusion and put forward proposals for restoring the building. In the media and on social networks, a lively discussion has arisen about its future fate, taking into account various

zin Kharkiv National University. Series: History 62, 2022, 12–48.

³ Cf. Mariia Timonina (ed.), *Number of Present Population of Ukraine, as of January 1, 2022*. Statistical Publication, Kyiv 2022, 41.

⁴ Natal'ia Pozdniakova et. al., *Khar'kov: Putevoditel'*, Khar'kov 2004, 59; Volodymyr Tsaran et. al., *Kharkiv, 350. Fotoal'bom*, Kharkiv 2003, 68 u. 70.

⁵ Cf. Kharkiv. Aviaudar. Okupanty bombyly ploschu Svobody, vluchyly v ODA, YouTube. *Ukrains'ka pravda*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2g6nUezFcwE> [October 23, 2024]; Natalia Zinets, *Kharkiv Official Says Russian Missiles Hit Administration Building, Residential Areas*, Reuters, March 1, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kharkiv-official-russian-missiles-hit-city-administration-residential-areas-2022-03-01/> [October 23, 2024]; *Building Hit by Missile in Kharkiv's Freedom Square*, BBC, March 1, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-60568298> [October 23, 2024]; *Destruction in Kharkiv after Russia Steps up its Assault on the City*, CNN, March 1, 2022, https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-01-22#h_3e5614f33a411141ab0fa350d871df57 [October 23, 2024].

⁶ Cf. Olena Pavlenko, *Zberehty chy znesty: scho bude z kharkivs'kym Budynkom rad? KharkivToday*, June 6, 2022, <https://2day.kh.ua/ua/kharkow/zberehty-chy-znesty-shcho-bude-z-kharkivskym-budynkom-rad> [October 23, 2024].

aspects, including the significance of the building as an object of urban heritage.⁷ This discussion vividly illustrates the process of rethinking cultural heritage in Ukraine today, underscores the need to develop new approaches to dealing with problematic heritage, and showcases possible strategies for the post-war reconstruction of Kharkiv — which has suffered significant destruction as a result of Russian bombing and shelling⁸ — alongside other Ukrainian cities.

Unexpectedly, the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building has become a case study in the construction and representation of the new discourse of heritage in Ukraine, which is provoked and shaped by the Russo-Ukrainian War. Discursive representations constitute only one dimension of heritage; any heritage discourse is based on the principles of historicization, culturalization, and localization, and therefore serves as a kind of mediator between heritage and local communities.⁹ The discussion around demolishing, reconstructing, or modernizing the building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration confirms this thesis, showing the interconnection between the transformation of urban communal identities and the rethinking of urban heritage. Given that Kharkiv is located just 40 kilometers from the Russian border, the borderland nature of the city is one of its defining features.¹⁰ However, the Ukrainian-Russian borderland has been the zone of both contact and division, in which competing and even mutually exclusive discourses and identities coexist and interact.¹¹ Since 2014, Russian military aggression against Ukraine has triggered a critical rethinking of Russia's influence on the city's development, a transformation of Kharkiv's urban identity, and ultimately a reinterpretation of its Russian imperial and Soviet heritage.¹²

⁷ Cf. Sofiia Panasiuk, “‘Avariine’ ne dorivniuiie ‘vidnovlenniu ne pidliahaie’”. Arkhitektorky vvazhaiut’, scho budivliu KhODA mozna vriatuvaty, Liuk, June 7, 2022, <https://lyuk.media/city/kharkivoda-comments/> [October 23, 2024], Larysa Salimonovych, Vidnovliuvaty chy ni: u Kharkovi nazrivaie protystoiannia cherez doliu istorychnoi budivli KhODA, Ukraïna Moloda, 09.06.2022, <https://umoloda.kyiv.ua/number/3807/196/166965/> [October 23, 2024].

⁸ Kharkiv is considered one of the Ukrainian cities most affected by the war. According to Kharkiv's mayor, Ihor Terekhov, over 4,500 apartment buildings were destroyed or damaged in the city in just under a year of war. Sviatoslav Khomenko, Mer Ihor Terekhov: kharkiv'iiany teper radykal'nishi do rosiian, nizh zakhid Ukrainy, BBC, February 8, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-64551514> [October 23, 2024].

⁹ Cf. Zongjie Wu/Song Hou, Heritage and Discourse, in Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, London 2015, 37-51.

¹⁰ Cf. Tatiana Zhurzhenko, “The fifth Kharkiv,” *New Eastern Europe* XVII, H. 3-4/2015, 30-37.

¹¹ Cf. Vladimir Kravchenko, *Khar'kov/Kharkiv: stolitsa Pogranich'ia*, Vil'nus 2010; Volodymyr Kravchenko, *Kharkov/Kharkiv: A Borderland Capital*, New York 2023.

¹² Cf. Yevhen Rachkov, *Urban Cultural Heritage Endangered by the Russo-Ukrainian War*,

Using the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building as a case study, this paper will attempt to identify the specifics of the destruction, preservation, and rethinking of the cultural heritage of Ukraine during the Russo-Ukrainian War, and consider several issues: 1) the place of this building in the symbolic structure of Kharkiv; 2) contemporary processes of critically rethinking Russian imperial and Soviet heritage; and 3) potential strategies for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine's urban heritage.

Methodologically, this paper employs a case study approach that relies on field observation, expert interviews, and policy and media analysis. First, the theoretical framework of this study on urban dissonant heritage was identified, and the historical and sociopolitical contexts of the selected case for investigation were described. Second, in-depth interviews (36 so far) were conducted with experts in the field of cultural heritage, gathered in 2022–2023 as part of the research project “CITY AND WAR: Destruction, Preservation, and Rethinking of the Cultural Heritage of Large Cities in Eastern and Southern Ukraine during the Russo-Ukrainian War.”¹³ The core of this study involves analyzing challenges related to the preservation and rethinking of dissonant heritage, as well as possible strategies for addressing the selected case. Third, policy and media analysis were utilized to document the different conceptual directions outlined in the discussion surrounding the building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration's future.

2. Destruction and Rethinking of Ukraine's Cultural Heritage during the War

Since 2022, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused vast human casualties and destruction. Historic neighborhoods of many Ukrainian cities along with religious buildings, memorials, monuments, and other heritage objects have suffered.¹⁴ In addition, various cultural institutions — primarily museums, archives, and libraries — have endured significant losses. It is difficult to determine the exact number of damaged or destroyed cultural heritage sites and cultural institutions in Ukraine as a result of the Russo-Ukrainian War. This is due primarily to the dynamics of combat operations, as well as nume-

Forum for Ukrainian Studies, January 12, 2023, <https://ukrainian-studies.ca/2023/01/12/urban-cultural-heritage-endangered-by-the-russo-ukrainian-war/> [October 23, 2024].

¹³ Cf. the series of interviews “Expert Opinion” of the “City and War” Project, CityFace, <https://cityface.org.ua/interviews> [October 23, 2024] and https://www.youtube.com/@CityFace_CityWar [October 23, 2024].

¹⁴ Cf. Damaged Cultural Sites in Ukraine Verified by UNESCO, UNESCO, December 22, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/damaged-cultural-sites-ukraine-verified-unesco> [October 23, 2024].

rous accounting issues and the lack of a unified system of state management for the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the expert community currently defines the present losses to Ukraine's cultural heritage as the most severe since World War II.¹⁶

According to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, 945 cases of damage and destruction of cultural heritage were officially recorded between February 2022 and February 2024. That number includes 128 sites of national significance, 742 of local importance, and 75 recently discovered ones. The most affected regions are the oblasts of Kharkiv (235), Donetsk (128), Odesa (119), Kherson (116), and Chernihiv (70).¹⁷ In addition, 1,946 objects of cultural infrastructure were damaged by the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022; this includes 933 culture clubs, 695 libraries, 151 art education institutions, 113 museums and galleries, 38 theaters, cinemas, and philharmonic halls, 13 parks, zoos, and reserves, and 3 circuses. The Kharkiv region ranks second in terms of the number of losses and damages to cultural infrastructure due to the war.¹⁸

Various international organizations have joined in documenting the crimes of the Russian military against Ukraine's cultural heritage. For example, the list of damaged Ukrainian cultural heritage sites is available on the UNESCO website. As of March 13, 2024, UNESCO confirmed damage to 346 sites since February 24, 2022, including 127 religious sites, 154 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 31 museums, 19 monuments, 14 libraries, and 1 archive.¹⁹ At the

¹⁵ Cf. Instytutsiini ta pravovi problemy zberezhenia kul'turnoi spadschyny, Natsional'nyi instytut stratehichnykh doslidzhen', April 19, 2019, <https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/gumanitarniy-rozvitok/instituciyni-ta-pravovi-problemi-zberezheniya-kulturnoi> [October 23, 2024].

¹⁶ Cf. MKIP prodovzhuie fiksuvaty voienni zlochyny rosiian proty kul'turnoi spadschyny Ukrainy, Uriadovyi portal, July 3, 2022, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/mkip-prodovzhuie-fiksuvaty-voyenni-zlochiny-rosiyan-proti-kulturnoyi-spadshchini-ukrayini> [October 23, 2024]; Ukraïna z chasiv Druhoï svitovoi viiny ne stykalasia z takym masshtabom zlochniv proty kul'turnoi spadschyny, – Kateryna Chuieva, Uriadovyi portal, August 26, 2022, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/ukraina-z-chasiv-druhoi-svitovoi-viiny-ne-stykalasia-z-takym-masshtabom-zlochniv-proty-kulturnoi-spadshchiny-kateryna-chuieva> [October 23, 2024].

¹⁷ Cf. Cherez rosiis'ku ahresiiu v Ukraïni postrazhdaly 945 pam'iatky kul'turnoi spadschyny, Ministerstvo kul'tury ta informatsiinoï polityky Ukraïny, March 5, 2024, <https://mcip.gov.ua/news/cherez-rosijsku-agresiyu-v-ukrayini-postrazhdaly-945-pamyatok-kulturnoyi-spadshchiny/> [October 23, 2024].

¹⁸ Cf. 1946 ob'ektiv kul'turnoi infrastruktury zaznaly poshkodzen' chy ruinuvan' cherez rosiis'ku ahresiiu, Ministerstvo kul'tury ta informatsiinoï polityky Ukraïny, March 7, 2024, <https://mcip.gov.ua/news/1946-obyektiv-kulturnoyi-infrastruktury-zaznaly-poshkodzen-chy-ruinuvan-cherez-rosijsku-agresiyu/> [October 23, 2024].

¹⁹ Cf. Damaged Cultural Sites in Ukraine Verified by UNESCO.

same time, numerous experts stress that the war has inflicted significantly greater losses on Ukraine's cultural heritage.²⁰ Moreover, cultural heritage continues to be under assault, particularly in territories that remain under Russian occupation, where armed conflicts have taken place and are ongoing.²¹

The destruction of various elements of Ukraine's cultural heritage inevitably opens up gaps, particularly in the narratives of memory and collective identity, which in turn gives rise to the formation of demarcation lines across the cultural and symbolic urban environment and a growing separation between urban communities. One of the most important consequences of the destruction of the built environment is the homogenization of urban spatiality (primarily shared and public urban spaces).²² Researchers observe that war significantly affects the structure of urban space, because in the place of its destroyed components, others may appear — with new means and techniques of control, political regime, and values.²³ Thus, war leads not only to the physical devastation of a city, but also to the complete or partial destruction of ideological, moral, symbolic, and other aspects of urban life — the values, ideas, and identities associated with material space, along with urban cultural landscapes, images, *genius loci*, et cetera.

At the same time, the Russo-Ukrainian war has triggered a rethinking of the content and significance of cultural heritage in Ukrainian society, leading to a certain “turn” in its understanding of, and attitude toward, culture in general. On the one hand, there is heightened societal interest in traditional cultural patterns, which are perceived as the foundation of Ukrainian national identity.²⁴ One example is Ukraine's intangible cultural heritage. According to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in 2003, such heritages comprises: oral traditions and expressions, including the vehicle of language; performing arts; social practices, rituals, and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship.²⁵ It is noteworthy that during the period 2012–2021, only 26 elements were included in the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ukraine; however, since the beginning of the full-scale Russian mi-

²⁰ Cf. “Expert Opinion” of the “City and War” Project.

²¹ Cf. *Damaged Cultural Sites in Ukraine Verified by UNESCO*.

²² Cf. Martin Coward, *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction*, London 2009, 97-100.

²³ Cf. Roman Slyvka/Iryna Zakutyns'ka/Bohdan Hlukhaniuk, *Prostorovi transformatsii mis'koho seredovyscha Donbasu pid vplyvom voiennoho urbitsydu*, *Naukovyi visnyk Khersons'koho derzhavnogo universytetu. Serii: Heohrafichni nauky* 8, 2018, 122.

²⁴ Cf. Rachkov, *Urban Cultural Heritage*.

²⁵ Cf. Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention> [October 23, 2024].

linary invasion of Ukraine, 66 elements have been added. The years 2022 and 2023 were record-breaking in terms of the number of elements added to the list – 31 for each year.²⁶ On the other hand, heritage associated with Russian imperial history and Soviet history has undergone critical reassessment. Integral components of this rethinking or shift include active discussions around cultural heritage, particularly regarding the issue of which heritage merits preservation and/or restoration and which, conversely, warrants destruction and oblivion. Other components of the “turn” involve initiatives aimed at transforming the cultural and symbolic space of cities and settlements. It has been observed that after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, a new wave of toponym changes has been initiated, certain urban monuments have been dismantled, museum exhibitions have been redesigned, and library collections have been revised.²⁷

On the one hand, the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building serves as an illustrative example of the deliberate destruction of Ukraine’s cultural heritage by Russia during the war. On the other hand, it represents an example of the contemporary reevaluation of Ukraine’s cultural heritage in the direction of decolonization. This is facilitated, in particular, by the multi-faceted history of the building, the significance of which has repeatedly changed in Kharkiv’s symbolic space.

3. The Building as a Center and Symbol of Soviet Power

The contemporary building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration, destroyed as a result of a missile attack carried out by the Russian military on March 1, 2022, is the third iteration of the governmental building since the late 19th century.²⁸ It has undergone a complex evolution in architectural style, from Neo-Renaissance through Constructivism to, ultimately, Soviet Neoclassical.

In 1898–1900, a Neo-Renaissance building for the provincial zemstvo (an elected body of local self-government), designed by the architect Adolf Minkus (1870–1948), was constructed on the site of the present-day building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration. The architect Viktor Velychko (1864–1923) designed a three-story addition, which was built in 1914. In 1925, the Cen-

²⁶ Cf. *Natsional’nyi perelik elementiv nematerial’noi kul’turnoi spadshchyny Ukraïny, Ministerstvo kul’tury ta informatsiinoi polityky Ukraïny*, <https://mcip.gov.ua/kulturna-spadshchyna/natsionalnyy-perelik-elementiv-nematerialnoi-kulturnoi-spadshchyny-ukrainy/> [October 23, 2024].

²⁷ Cf. Rachkov, *Urban Cultural Heritage*.

²⁸ Cf. *Kharkivs’ka oblasna rada, Alluring Kharkiv*, <https://moniacs.kh.ua/uk/harkivska-oblasna-rada/> [October 23, 2024].

tral Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine occupied the building. In the following years (until 1932), the architect Yakov Shteinberg (1896–1982) supervised the remodeling of the old building in the Constructivist style. During World War II, the new building was heavily damaged.²⁹

The construction of the current building lasted from 1951 to 1954 and its architectural style can be defined as post-war Soviet Neoclassicism (the terms “Stalin Empire”,³⁰ “Stalin Art Deco”,³¹ and “Stalin Neo-Renaissance”³² also appear in the literature). The designers of the project were the architects Volodymyr Orekhov (1904–1979) and Veniamin Kostenko (1903–1969). Practically all Soviet guidebooks to Kharkiv took special note of the building, with one guidebook giving the following description of its architectural features: “The facade of the building with columns to its full height is lined with ceramic tile and red polished granite. The building is crowned with a granite high-relief of [Soviet – author] banners.”³³

The new building became part of the architectural ensemble of Dzerzhinsky Square (Freedom Square since 1991), which added to its importance in the symbolic space of the city. Since the 1930s, Dzerzhinsky Square has been Kharkiv’s focal spatial object and the expression of the city’s “genius loci.” The two principal architectural symbols of Soviet Kharkiv were located here: the House of State Industry (Derzhprom, the first high-rise building in Ukraine and a prominent example of the Constructivist style),³⁴ and the 20-meter-high Lenin monument, which was unveiled in November 1963 and toppled in September 2014. The square has been the city’s main venue for official national and municipal celebrations as well as for important political and cultural events.

In addition, in the aftermath of World War II, the new building became a symbol of Kharkiv’s reconstruction. The city was considered to be one of the most affected by bombing and shelling, and the fact that a new building was constructed to replace one destroyed in the war was part of the official historical narrative, reproduced in (among other publications) Soviet guidebooks to

²⁹ Cf. Aleksandr Lejbfrejd/Yuliana Poliakova, *Khar’kov: ot kreposti do stolitsi: zametki o starom gorode*, Khar’kov 1998, 100–101.

³⁰ Znyshchena краса. Istoriia Budynku rad u Kharkovi, Slobids’kyi krai, April 21, 2022, <https://www.slk.kh.ua/news/khronograf/znisena-krasa-istoria-budynku-rad-u-kharkovi.html> [October 23, 2024].

³¹ Ol’ha Shvydenko, Arkhitekturnyi proekt, scho ne buv zakinchenyi. Ploscha Dzerzhyns’koho u Kharkovi, Constructivism-Kharkiv, <https://constructivism-kharkiv.com/obiekty/36-21-45-ploscha-svobody> [October 23, 2024].

³² Maidan Svobody, Ukrainian Institute, <https://ui.org.ua/postcard/majdan-svobody/> [October 23, 2024].

³³ Cf. Nikolai D’iachenko/Mikhail Umanskii/Vitalii Oleinik, *Khar’kov. Putevoditel’ = Kharkov. Guide-book*, 2-e izd, Khar’kov 1967, 26.

³⁴ Cf. Mykola Chekhunov (ed.), *Derzhprom: Kroky v istorii*, Kharkiv 2018.

Kharkiv.³⁵ Moreover, the new building took on an important place in the city's mythology as a prominent symbol of Soviet rule. It is no accident that on post-cards, it was often placed together with other monumental sites of memory glorifying Soviet power.

4. The Building as a Symbol of the Struggle for an Independent Ukraine

After Ukraine declared independence, the administrative function of the building was preserved; it now housed the Kharkiv Regional State Administration and the Regional Council. Soviet symbols continued to decorate the main façade for a long time. Eventually, the five-pointed star on the cartouche that crowns the façade was replaced by the Small State Coat of Arms of Ukraine; however, some Soviet elements (for example, the high-relief of Soviet banners and the five-pointed stars on the capitals of the columns) can be seen to this day.

The Kharkiv Regional State Administration building became the site of important events in the modern history of Ukraine — most prominently the clashes during the Eurorevolution (2013–2014). One of the events leading up to the revolution was the signing of the so-called Kharkiv Pact in 2010 by the presidents of Ukraine and Russia, according to which the lease of the Russian Navy in Crimea and Sevastopol was extended for an additional 25 years;³⁶ this pact was signed in the building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration.³⁷

Without exaggeration, the events of the Eurorevolution in Kharkiv have determined the historical trajectories of the city's and the region's subsequent development. One of the focal points of the confrontation between the pro-European Maidan and the pro-Russian anti-Maidan was Freedom Square, on which the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building is located. It was in Freedom Square that, on November 19, 2013, the first rally in support of European integration was held, which became the forerunner of larger-scale demonstrations in the following months.³⁸ Another venue for pro-European rallies

³⁵ Cf. Nikolai D'iachenko, *Ulitsy i ploshchadi Khar'kova*, 3-e izd, Khar'kov 1974, 162; Galina Andreeva/Vitalii Oleinik, *Znakom'tes' – Khar'kov. Putevoditel'*, Khar'kov 1976, 48–49.

³⁶ Cf. 21 lystopada – Den' Hidnosti ta Svobody: informatsiino-metodychni materialy, Natsional'nyi memorial'nyi kompleks Heroiv Nebesnoi Sotni – Muzei Revoliutsii Hidnosti, <https://www.maidanmuseum.org/uk/node/1734> [October 23, 2024].

³⁷ Cf. Tryvaiut' perehovory Prezydentiv Ukraïny ta Rosiis'koi Federatsii, Kharkivs'ka oblasna viis'kova administratsiia, April 21, 2010, <https://kharkivoda.gov.ua/news/48599> [October 23, 2024]; Predstavnyky ukraïns'koi presy slukhaiut' vystupy Prezydentiv, UNIAN. Fotobank, <https://photo.unian.ua/photo/274567-predstaviteli-ukraïnskoy-presy-slushayut-vystupleniya-prezidentov> [October 23, 2024].

³⁸ Cf. “Nam – v Evropu! Kremliu – duliu”. V Khar'kove pryzivali k evrointegratsii, Media-

was the section of the Taras Shevchenko Garden around the Shevchenko monument;³⁹ on November 24 and December 1, 2013, supporters of European integration held their first mass rallies there, under the flags of Ukraine and the European Union.⁴⁰ In turn, on November 30, 2013, Freedom Square witnessed a multi-thousand-strong rally against European integration and for closer ties with Russia.⁴¹

On February 22, 2014, representatives of Euromaidan entered the building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration and resolved not to leave it until a new head of the region was appointed.⁴² On the same day, clashes took place between anti-Maidan and Euromaidan activists. The significant numerical superiority of the attackers forced the Euromaidan activists to barricade themselves in the building, which for some time served as the headquarters of their movement. The building was fenced off with metal blocks, which the authorities had previously installed in Freedom Square.⁴³ On March 1, the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building was successfully stormed by anti-Maidan forces; shots were heard during the assault. A so-called “corridor of shame” was set up for the Euromaidan activists — beaten and bloodied activists were brought out of the building under the insults and shouts of the mob, pushed,

Port, November 19, 2013, <https://www.mediaport.ua/nam-v-evropu-kremlyu-dulyu-v-harkove-prizyvali-k-evrointegracii> [October 23, 2024].

³⁹ Cf. Oleksii Musiezdov, Yevromaidan u Kharkovi: kil'ka dumok pro podii dvorichnoi davnyzny, *Ukraina Moderna*, February 21, 2016, <https://uamoderna.com/blogy/oleksi-musiezdov/jevromaydan-u-kharkovi> [October 23, 2024].

⁴⁰ Cf. Yuliia Davydova/Dmytro Hrebinnyk/Mariia Solodovnik, “Krapel'ka stae okeanom”: spohady kharkiv'ian do vos'moi richnytsi Revoliutsii Hidnosti, *Suspil'ne Novyny*, November 21, 2021, <https://suspilne.media/182284-krapelka-stae-okeanom-spogadi-harkivan-do-vosmoi-ricnici-revolucii-gidnosti/> [October 23, 2024]; “Yevromaidany” po vsii Ukraïni: vid dvokhsot do 30 000 uchasykyv, *BBC*, November 24, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2013/11/131124_euromaidan_regions_nk [October 23, 2024]; U Kharkovi bilia pam'iatnyka Shevchenku mitynhuiut' protyvnyky rozghonu Maidanu, *UKRINFORM*, December 1, 2013, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/1584156-u-harkovi-bilya-pamyatnika-shevchenku-mitinguyut-protivniki-rozgonu-maydanu-1887880.html> [October 23, 2024].

⁴¹ U Kharkovi provely masshtabnyi provladnyi mitynh, *BBC*, November 30, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news_in_brief/2013/11/131129_rl_kharkiv_meeting [October 23, 2024]; U Kharkovi rehionaly i biudzhetyky vlashtuiut' anty-Yevromaidan, *Ukrains'ka pravda*, November 29, 2013, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2013/11/29/7003511/> [October 23, 2024].

⁴² Cf. Sviatoslav Khomenko, “KhNR”: Kharkivs'ka nevдалa respublika, *BBC*, April 8, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2015/04/150406_kharkiv_sx [October 23, 2024].

⁴³ Cf. Nochnaia ataka, *MediaPort*, February 23, 2014, <https://www.mediaport.ua/nochnaya-ataka> [October 23, 2024].

abused, and forced to their knees. After the seizure of the regional administration, the Ukrainian flag was torn down and the Russian flag was raised on the roof. In the evening, the anti-Maidan protesters left the building and the Russian flag was taken down (it stayed up for 45 minutes⁴⁴). According to official reports, 97 people were injured in the assault.⁴⁵

On April 6, 2014, anti-Maidan activists seized the building for the second time, and the next day a pro-Russian rally proclaimed a sovereign “Kharkiv People’s Republic,” which lasted less than a day;⁴⁶ on the evening of April 7, the police cleared the building, after which the separatists then attempted to regain control by burning tires, throwing stones, and shooting with non-lethal weapons.⁴⁷ At night, pro-Russian activists broke into the building again, but on the morning of April 8, the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs ousted them for good.⁴⁸

The total damage to the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building as a result of these events was estimated at more than 10 million hryvnias (approximately 1 million US dollars at that time).⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the struggles of the Eurorevolution conferred new symbolic meanings on it. It ceased to be perceived merely as an administrative hub and a piece of Soviet architectural heritage: The events occurring there became an important part of the mythology of the Eurorevolution, and the building itself turned into a “site of memory” – a symbol of the struggle for independence, democracy, and development along European lines. An illustrative example is the story of Euromaidan activists’ rescue of the Ukrainian flag from the building and its subsequent ceremonial return in

⁴⁴ Cf. Andrii Portnov, How ‘Eastern Ukraine’ Was Lost, openDemocracy, January 14, 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/how-eastern-ukraine-was-lost/> [October 23, 2024].

⁴⁵ Cf. Khomenko, “KhNR”: Kharkivs’ka nevdala respublika; Pid chas shturmu Kharkivs’koï oblderzhadministratsii postrazhdaly 97 osib, zokrema nepovnolitni, Interfaks-Ukraina, March 1, 2014, <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/193700.html> [October 23, 2024].

⁴⁶ Cf. Khomenko, “KhNR”: Kharkivs’ka nevdala respublika.

⁴⁷ Cf. U Kharkovi zvil’nyly ODA, ale namahalsia zakhopyty tevezhu, Ukrain’ska Pravda, April 7, 2014, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/04/7/7021681/> [October 23, 2024].

⁴⁸ Cf. Podrobytsi zakhoplennia budivli Kharkivs’koi oblderzhadministratsii, Kharkivs’ka oblasna viis’kova administratsiia, April 8, 2014, <https://kharkivoda.gov.ua/news/70082> [October 23, 2024].

⁴⁹ Cf. Remont kharkivs’koï ODA pislia shturmu obiidet’sia v 2,5 mln hrn., UKRINFORM, March 3, 2014, https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/1626950-remont_harkivskoi_oda_pislya_shturmu_obiydetsya_v_25_mln_grn_1914201.html [October 23, 2024]; Nichni bezchynstva separatystiv u budivli KhODA obiidut’sia oblasti v 10 mln hrn., UKRINFORM, April 8, 2014, https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/1644920-nichni_bezchynstva_separatistiv_u_budivli_hoda_obiydutsya_oblasti_v_10_mln_grn_1926687.html [October 23, 2024].

October 2016, an event in which the region's top officials and President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko also took part.⁵⁰

Furthermore, after the Russian annexation of Crimea (March 2014) and the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine (April 2014), right across from the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building, activists set up a public memorial in honor of those who died during the Euromaidan and in the zone of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO)⁵¹ in the east of the country.⁵² The makeshift collection of the “All for Victory” tent museum included national symbols, portraits of the fallen, flowers, candles, fragments of shells, and military equipment from the ATO, among other things.⁵³ This memorial opposite the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building has become a sort of reminder to the authorities of the strength of civil society, as well as of the undeniable importance of the struggle for the city's and region's Ukrainian future.

5. The Building as a Symbol of the Russo-Ukrainian War

The building in Freedom Square gained an even deeper symbolic meaning after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. On the morning of March 1, 2022, the Russian military carried out a missile attack

⁵⁰ Cf. Maryna Vereschaka/Yuliia Davydova/Oleksandra Novosel, S'oma richnytsia shturmu Kharkivs'koï oblderzhadministratsii: spohady uchasnykiv podii, *Suspil'ne Novyny*, March 1, 2021, <https://suspilne.media/109401-soma-ricnica-sturmu-harkivskoi-oblderzadministracii-spogadi-ucasnykiv-podij/> [October 23, 2024]; Prezydent vidkryv pam'iatnu doshku biitsiam spetspidrozdilu “Yahuar”, yaki zvil'nyly budivliu KhODA v 2014 rotsi, *Kharkivs'ka oblasna viis'kova administratsiia*, 15.10.2016, <https://kharkivoda.gov.ua/news/83054> [October 23, 2024].

⁵¹ The Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts consisted of a set of military and legal measures conducted by Ukrainian security forces to counter the activities of illegal Russian and pro-Russian armed formations after the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian War. The ATO ran from April 14, 2014, to April 30, 2018. On April 30, 2018, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed a decree to implement the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, concluding the ATO and initiating the Joint Forces Operation under the leadership of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This operation aims to ensure the protection of the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence of Ukraine. Cf. 2014 – ofitsiino oholosheno pro pochatok Antyterorystychnoi operatsii na skhodi Ukraïny, *Ukraïns'kyi instytut natsional'noi pam'iaty*, <https://uinp.gov.ua/istorychnyy-kalendar/kviten/14/2014-oficiyno-ogolosheno-pro-pochatok-antyterorystychnoyi-operaciyi-na-shodi-ukrayiny> [October 23, 2024].

⁵² Cf. Yevhen Rachkov, Symbolic and Ritual Practices in the Post-Soviet Urban World: Symbolic Space and Festivity in the Cities of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, 1990s–2010s, *Colloquia Humanistica* 10, 2021, Article 2521.

⁵³ Cf. Heorhii Kas'ianov (Hrsg.), *Polityka i pam'iat'*. Dnipro – Zaporizhzhia – Odesa – Kharkiv. Vid 1990-kh do s'ohodni, L'viv 2018, 135–142.

on Kharkiv's city center, in which the building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration (since February 24, 2022, the Kharkiv Regional Military Administration) was partially destroyed.⁵⁴ The public memorial across the road from the main façade was also damaged.⁵⁵ According to the regional prosecutor's office, 44 people died and 15 were injured in the missile strike.⁵⁶

On the evening of August 28, yet another missile attack on the central part of Kharkiv left a crater in the front of the building measuring 10 x 9.5 meters and almost 5 meters deep.⁵⁷ Furthermore, due to shelling, a monument (specifically, a bust on a low pedestal) to Yevdokim Sherbinin — a statesman of the Russian Empire who served as the first governor of the Sloboda Ukraine Governorate and the general governor of the Kharkiv Viceroyalty in the second half of the 18th century — was demolished. Erected on August 20, 2004, the monument was located near the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building.⁵⁸ It is symbolically significant that Russian missiles are targeting monuments to the Russian Empire in the city. Overall, the monument was perceived ambivalently by the urban community; for instance, in May 2022, unidentified persons vandalized it with an unknown substance, and civic activists called for the removal of the monument as a Russian imperial symbol.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Cf. Cherez udar krylatoi raketoiu po tsentru Kharkova schonaimenshe 10 liudei zahynuly, ponad 20 travmovani – DSNS, Radio Svoboda, March 1, 2022, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-kharkiv-vybukh-dsns/31730133.html> [October 23, 2024].

⁵⁵ Cf. Hanna Ts'omyk, U Kharkovi popry raketni obstrily tsentru planuiut' vidnovyty namet "Vse dlia peremohy", Suspil'ne Novyny, September 6, 2022, <https://suspilne.media/279004-u-harkovi-popri-raketni-obstrili-centru-planuut-vidnoviti-namet-vse-dlia-peremogi/> [October 23, 2024].

⁵⁶ Cf. Hanna Ts'omyk/Dmytro Hrebinnyk, 44 liudyny zahynuly vnaslidok udariv 1 berezna 2022 roku po tsentru Kharkova – dani prokuratury, Suspil'ne Novyny, November 13, 2023, <https://suspilne.media/615909-44-ludini-zaginuli-vnaslidok-udariv-1-berezna-2022-roku-po-centru-harkova-dani-prokuratury/> [October 23, 2024].

⁵⁷ Cf. Mariia Solodovnik/V'iacheslav Mavrychev, Naslidky udaru RF poblyzu budivli Kharkivs'koï ODA 28 serpnia: fotoreportazh, Suspil'ne Novyny, September 29, 2022, <https://suspilne.media/275893-naslidki-udaru-rf-poblizu-budivli-harkivskoi-oda-28-serpna-fotoreportazh/> [October 23, 2024]; Yurii Larin, Synehubov vyslovivsya z pytannia demontazhu pam'iatnyka heneral-hubernatoru Scherbininu v tsentri Kharkova, Dumka, August 4, 2022, <https://dumka.media/ukr/kultura/1659595190-sinehubov-vislovivsya-z-pitannya-demontazhu-pam-yatnika-general-gubernatoru-shcherbininu-v-tsentri-harkova> [October 23, 2024].

⁵⁸ Cf. V tsentre Khar'kova rossiiane "demontirovali" pamiatnik heneral-hubernatoru Ekateriny II, KharkivToday, August 30, 2022, <https://2day.kh.ua/ru/kharkow/v-centre-kharkova-rossiyane-demontirovali-pamyatnik-general-gubernatoru-ekateriny-ii> [October 23, 2024].

⁵⁹ Cf. Sofiia Krasnikova, Vozle Khar'kovskoi OGA neizvestnym veschestvom oblili biust Shcherbininu (foto), Media gruppa "Ob'ektiv", May 28, 2022,

On March 1, 2023, one year after the first missile strike on the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building, Kharkiv residents commemorated the servicemen and volunteers who had died in the strike. The main façade of the building was adorned with a public memorial: flowers and a poster with the names and photographs of the fallen soldiers and volunteers.⁶⁰

6. Dissonant Urban Heritage: Between Decolonization, Renovation, and Revalorization

As already noted, the destruction of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building as a result of a Russian missile attack spurred a lively discussion in the media and on social networks about the building's future fate. However, in this discussion, it serves primarily as a context for the main disputes, which revolve around the conceptual and material implications of critically rethinking cultural heritage (above all, Russian imperial and Soviet) that was provoked by the Russo-Ukrainian War. One such consequence is the emergence of a new discourse that presupposes new ways of creating, identifying, interpreting, evaluating, preserving, managing, and using cultural heritage. This new discourse is based on a critique of earlier heritage discourse, which explains certain similarities between them; at the same time, it pays more attention to determining how the past is understood, conceptualized, and used in various local contexts. It is difficult to agree with the postulate or statement that the current reinterpretation of cultural heritage in Ukraine is limited to the idea of overcoming the Russian influence on Ukrainian culture or a "return to tradition": this process is clearly more complex and involves different ways of speaking about, seeing, and thus constructing heritage. The discussions surrounding the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building are a vivid example of this complexity. The views of their participants represent several conceptual directions for the future, which can be tentatively defined as decolonization, renovation, and revalorization.

Decolonization. The prevailing view among the supporters of this approach is that restoring the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building is unnecessary and inadvisable, primarily because it is an example of Soviet (Stalinist) architecture and a reminder of Ukraine's colonial dependence on Russia. This view finds support in the current official politics of memory, based on the prin-

<https://www.objectiv.tv/objectively/2022/05/28/vozle-harkovskoj-oga-neizvestnom-veshhestvom-oblily-byust-shherbininu-foto/> [October 23, 2024].

⁶⁰ Cf. Sofiia Tsvietkova/Marharita Dezhkina, "Nache zovsim neshchodavno, a vzhe rik mynuv": u Kharkovi vshanuvaly zabyblykh vnaslidok raketnoho udaru po ODA 1 bereznia, Suspil'ne Novyny, March 1, 2023, <https://suspilne.media/400460-nace-zovsim-nesodavno-a-vze-rik-minuv-u-harkovi-vsanuvali-zagiblih-vnaslidok-raketnogo-udaru-poda-1-berezna/> [October 23, 2024].

principles of “derussification, decommunization, and decolonization.”⁶¹ It is argued that a new administrative building with modern infrastructure should be built on the site of the one destroyed in the missile strike; this construction should mark a symbolic victory over the Soviet heritage and mythology of Kharkiv, which is still often called “the first capital” because the city was the capital of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic from 1919 to 1934.

The decolonization approach is popular among the state and local establishment as well as the general public. It should be noted that issues of Ukraine’s colonial past currently occupy an important place in the national politics of memory and in media discourse. In a sociological survey of adult residents of Ukraine conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in January 2023, 64 % of the respondents agreed with the statement that Ukraine had been a colony of the Russian Empire, 31 % disagreed, and 5 % were undecided.⁶²

Renovation. Many participants in the discussion favor the idea of restoring the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building, despite its status as part of Ukraine’s Soviet heritage.⁶³ This view is supported especially by the local authorities, even though, in the aftermath of the missile attack, many officials stated that it would be impossible to reconstruct the building. For example, Oleh Synhubov, head of the Kharkiv Regional Military Administration, declared shortly after the attack that the building was not subject to restoration,⁶⁴ but he soon changed his position. In a May 2022 interview, he said the following: “The hostilities continue. We are currently unable to carry out quality expert studies of the building, although we are already negotiating with international specialists. After that, we will know how exactly it should be restored. It is definitive that we will be restoring it.”⁶⁵ In January 2023, in another interview, he stated that emergency and conservation work in the building was ongoing and that a

⁶¹ The content of these terms is by no means fixed; they are interpreted in many and varied ways depending on context.

⁶² Cf. *Istorychna pam’iat’: rezul’taty sotsiologichnoho opytuvannia doroslykh zhyteliv Ukrainy. Analitychnyi zvit, Kyiv’s’kyi mizhnarodnyi instytut sotsiologii*, Kyiv 2023, https://kiis.com.ua/materials/news/20230320_d2/UCBI_History2023_rpt-UA_fin.pdf [October 23, 2024].

⁶³ Cf. Pavlenko, *Zberehty chy znesty*.

⁶⁴ Cf. Violetta Orlova, *Budivliu Kharkivs’koi ODA nemozhlyvo vidnovyty – Syniehubov, UNIAN*, June 3, 2022, <https://www.unian.ua/war/budivlyu-harkivskoji-oda-nemozhlyvo-vidnovyti-sinyegubov-novini-harkova-11853291.html> [October 23, 2024]; *Budivlia Kharkivs’koi ODA ne pidliahaie vidnovlenniu – Syniehubov, Ukrinform*, June 4, 2022, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/3499377-budivlia-harkivskoi-oda-ne-pidla-gae-vidnovlennu-sinegubov.html> [October 23, 2024].

⁶⁵ *Budivli muzeiu Hryhoriia Skovorody ta Kharkivs’koi ODA bude vidnovleno pislia hlybokykh ekspertnykh doslidzhen’ ikhn’oho stanu, Kharkivs’ka oblasna viis’kova administratsiia*, May 11, 2022, <https://kharkivoda.gov.ua/news/115700?sv> [October 23, 2024].

plan for its reconstruction would be produced at a later date.⁶⁶

The renovation approach is also supported by many experts in the field of cultural heritage (including architects, historians, local historians, and others). An illustrative example is the project “Ghosts of KhODA,” developed by the “Constructivism-Kharkiv” team. The project intends to “advocate” for the building by reconstructing its history from the late 19th century to the present day. The description of the project states that such an approach “will help to talk through the complex issues of the memory of the totalitarian past and promote public discussion regarding the architectural legacy of the Soviet period.”⁶⁷

The renovation approach is free of nostalgic sentiments toward the Soviet past—on the contrary, its proponents stress the importance of preserving the building as a component of the Soviet heritage, which primarily represents the negative historical experiences and values associated with the legacy of violence, the memory of the victims of the communist totalitarian regime, and the Russo-Ukrainian War.

In general, the subject of heritage plays a significant role in discussions about the future of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building. The building is officially recognized as a landmark of urban planning and architecture of local significance. It is featured in the State Register of Immovable Artifacts of History and Monumental Art of Ukraine under the name “Building of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine” (1951, 64 Sumska St.).⁶⁸ In addition, the building is part of the architectural ensemble of Freedom Square, opposite the Derzhprom, which was placed on a UNESCO tentative list of World Heritage sites in 2017.⁶⁹ Thus, its reconstruction would, among other things, ensure the preservation of the architectural complex of Freedom Square.

Revalorization. Revalorization is defined as a set of measures aimed at increa-

⁶⁶ Cf. Borys Breslavets’, *Holova Kharkivs’koï oblasnoï viis’kovoï administratsii Oleh Syniehubov: “Persnyi vyklyk pislia deokupatsii – vidnovlennia roboty orhaniv derzhavnoi vldy”*, *Uriadovyj kur’ier*, January 7, 2023, <https://ukurier.gov.ua/uk/articles/golova-harkivskoyi-oblasnoyi-vijskovoyi-administra/> [October 23, 2024].

⁶⁷ Cf. *Proiekt “Pryvydy KhODA”*, Constructivism-Kharkiv, <https://constructivism-kharkiv.com/personalii/pryvydy-khoda-filter> [October 23, 2024]; *Chomu pid chas viiny treba hovoryty pro kul’turu abo nezruchna spadschyna: KhODA, Hromads’kyi Prostir*, December 5, 2022, <https://www.prostir.ua/?news=chomu-pid-chas-viiny-treba-hovoryty-pro-kulturu-abo-nezruchna-spadschyna-hoda> [October 23, 2024].

⁶⁸ Cf. Order of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, June 4, 2020, №1883 (Preservation № 7414-Xa).

⁶⁹ Cf. *Derzhprom uviishov do poperedn’oho spysku Vsesvitn’oi spadschyny YuNESKO, Kharkivs’ka oblasna viis’kova administratsiia*, May 31, 2017, <https://kharkivoda.gov.ua/news/86844> [October 23, 2024].

sing the architectural and artistic value of individual buildings, complexes, ensembles, and so forth. Such measures may include, for example, the museumification and restoration of monuments, or the reconstruction and modernization of historic neighborhoods. Given that the destruction of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building made it a symbol of the Russo-Ukrainian War, experts have put forward various ideas for its reconstruction that are designed to boost its significance within the symbolic space of the city.

One of the best-known of these ideas is the modernization of the building as proposed by the British architect Norman Foster. Since April 2022, the architect's team has been working for free, together with Ukrainian specialists, on the master plan for the reconstruction of Kharkiv. The collaboration was proposed by the mayor, Ihor Terekhov.⁷⁰ The plan consists of five projects — including the Heritage Project, which provides for the restoration of architectural monuments and the improvement of the city's historic center.⁷¹ Special attention is given to the reconstruction of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building, which is to be reaffirmed in its role as a symbol of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Foster proposes to preserve the historic façade but to completely revamp the interior of the building. The plan resembles the architect's earlier work on the reconstruction of the Berlin Reichstag, which is a point stressed by both himself and the mayor.⁷²

Norman Foster's plan for the post-war reconstruction of Kharkiv has both supporters and critics. For an example of the latter, after some parts of the plan were made public, fears arose that the proposed ideas were too complex and expensive for the city⁷³ and that the underlying principles of dealing with

⁷⁰ Cf. Norman Foster prybuv do Ukraïny ta rozpoviv pro final'ni napratsiuвання shchodo Henplanu Kharkova, Pragmatika-Ukraine, December 20, 2022, <https://pragmatika.media/news/norman-foster-prybuy-do-ukrainy-ta-rozpoviv-pro-finalni-napratsiuвання-shchodo-vidbudovy-kharkova/> [October 23, 2024].

⁷¹ Cf. Stefan Dege, Ukraine: How Architect Norman Foster Aims to Rebuild Kharkiv, Deutsche Welle, December 23, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-how-architect-norman-foster-aims-to-rebuild-kharkiv/a-64195981> [October 23, 2024].

⁷² Cf. Sophie Jung, Historikerin über Architektur im Krieg: „Boom an patriotischen Tattoos,“ taz, October 12, 2022, <https://taz.de/Historikerin-ueber-Architektur-im-Krieg!/5884249/> [October 23, 2024]; Tetiana Fedorkova, “Misto maibutn'oho»: u Kharkovi predstavly kontseptsiu novoho henplanu, MediaPort, February 4, 2023, <https://www.mediaport.ua/misto-maibutnogo-u-harkovi-predstavili-koncepciyu-novogo-genplanu> [October 23, 2024].

⁷³ Cf. Mar'iana Matveichuk, Zirkova arhitektura – doroha zabahanka dlia dyktatoriv ta naibahatshykh mist. Chy ni? Khmarochos, April 25, 2022, <https://hmarochos.kiev.ua/2022/04/25/zirkovi-arhitektory-z-usogo-svitu-hochut-vidbudovuvaty-ukrayinu-chy-potribna-nam/> [October 23, 2024].

cultural heritage were insufficiently clear.⁷⁴ Architect Oleh Drozdov observed that the strategic plan for reconstruction should first and foremost be resident-oriented and that hasty decisions could harm the city, arguing that the reconstruction process should be better thought through.⁷⁵

The expert opinions collected within the framework of the research project “CITY AND WAR: Destruction, Preservation, and Rethinking of the Cultural Heritage of Large Cities in Eastern and Southern Ukraine during the Russo-Ukrainian War” indicate a mixed reception of Norman Foster’s plan for Kharkiv’s post-war reconstruction. While the experts acknowledged the importance of the proposed ideas, they found them premature and lacking in careful consideration. For instance, Viktor Dvornikov, a restoration architect and member of the “Save Kharkiv” initiative group, emphasized that the proposed plan overlooks local traditions and social contexts. According to this expert, it is crucial to establish a vision for Kharkiv’s post-war development from the outset, as this influences the determination of strategies for the city’s recovery. Undoubtedly, urban cultural heritage is a priority, and it is important to consider both Ukrainian and global experiences and standards in this field.⁷⁶

Architect and public figure Ievgeniia Gubkina expressed a similar opinion in an interview. According to this expert, Norman Foster’s plan was presented prematurely, while the destructive, economic, and social consequences of the war remain unclear. The plan is characterized by general deliberations and must be correlated with the actual post-war situation and challenges in the city. Furthermore, adopting the reconstruction concept of the Berlin Reichstag for the renovation of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building is not expedient; such a proposal amounts to recycling another renovation and is not suitable for the city owing to its specific history.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Cf. Ievgeniia Gubkina/Hannah Su, Rebuilding Kharkiv: Ukrainian Architect and Architectural Historian Ievgeniia Gubkina Weighs in on What is at Stake When Reconstructing the Country, *The Architect’s Newspaper*, February 24, 2023, <https://www.archpaper.com/2023/02/ukrainian-architect-and-architectural-historian-ievgeniia-gubkina-weighs-in-on-what-is-at-stake-when-reconstructing-the-country/> [October 23, 2024].

⁷⁵ Cf. “Dia vidbudovy Kharkova treba 10 rokov”. Drozdov pro povoiennie vidnovlennia, spilkuvannia z Fosterom i henplan mista, *Pragmatika–Ukraine*, May 24, 2022, <https://pragmatika.media/news/dlja-vidbudovi-harkova-treba-10-rokiv-drozdov-pro-povoienne-vidnovlennja-spilkuvannja-z-fosterom-i-genplan-mista/> [October 23, 2024].

⁷⁶ Cf. Interv’iu z Viktorom Dvornikovym, *Podkast, Chastyna 2*, Interv’iuer: Yevhen Rachkov, *Data zapysu interv’iu*: August 8, 2023, YouTube, CityFace, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QcqxF3HP3I> [October 23, 2024].

⁷⁷ Cf. Interv’iu z Yevheniieiu Hubkinoiu, *Podkast, Interv’iuer: Yevhen Rachkov, Data zapysu interv’iu*: September 18, 2023, YouTube, CityFace, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hr4JnLLO9U4> [October 23, 2024].

7. *Urban Heritage as an Instrument of the Politics of Memory*

Discussions surrounding the reconstruction of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building should be contextualized within a broader framework, one which considers the connection to the management of dissonant urban heritage, specifically the Russian imperial heritage and the Soviet totalitarian heritage. Key participants in the overall process of rethinking Ukraine's cultural heritage during this war are various "mnemonic actors" who exert significant influence over the formulation and execution of historical policies. These actors predominantly consist of governmental entities (such as the President, Parliament, Cabinet of Ministers, judiciary, Security Service of Ukraine, Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, local authorities, and state cultural institutions) and non-governmental organizations (including political parties, civil organizations, media outlets, virtual communities, et cetera).⁷⁸ While the list of mnemonic actors is provisional, it is noteworthy that all participants in Ukraine's historical politics — to varying degrees, and in various capacities — actively seek to influence the shaping of the field of cultural heritage, turning it into an integral component and instrument of the politics of memory. This largely explains the significant diversity of opinions regarding the future of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building that can be found in the media and socio-political discourse. The legal foundation for these efforts has been established, notably, through the "decommunization package" of laws since 2015⁷⁹ and the law "On the Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and the Decolonization of Toponymy," which was approved by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on March 21, 2023.

Among the state institutions influencing the current strategy for rethinking cultural heritage, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy and the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory hold significant sway. In particular, the ministry hosts an expert council, which focuses on addressing the repercussions of Russification and totalitarianism and formulating recommendations for cleansing public spaces of Russian imperial and Soviet totalitarian heritage. Nevertheless, local and urban authorities as well as civic activists exert the prima-

⁷⁸ A similar list of mnemonic actors is contained in numerous publications focused on the historical politics of Ukraine. Cf. Heorhii Kas'ianov, *Past continuous: istorychna polityka 1980-kh – 2000-kh. Ukraïna ta susydy*, Kyiv 2018.

⁷⁹ Cf. The Laws of Ukraine: "On the Legal Status and Honoring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the Twentieth Century," "On Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in World War II of 1939–1945," "On Access to Archives of Repressive Agencies of Totalitarian Communist Regime of 1917–1991," and "On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Regimes, and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols".

ry impact on the ongoing process of reshaping public space and cultural heritage in Ukraine.

Experts interviewed as part of the project “CITY AND WAR” express divergent opinions on the prospects of dealing with urban heritage associated with Russian imperial and Soviet totalitarian histories. Regarding architecture, the vast majority of experts caution against hasty dismantling and instead recommend a focus on rethinking dissonant heritage. For instance, Yaroslav Likholyetov, head of the Kharkiv City Center for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage of the Public Organization “Ukrainian Society for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments,” highlights the importance of adhering to existing legislation; this is especially crucial considering that the exceptional characteristic of Ukraine’s urban cultural heritage lies in its diversity.⁸⁰ Similarly, Viktor Dvornikov emphasizes that Ukrainian cities have a diverse architectural heritage and advises against rushing to physically cleanse various sites from urban spaces; instead, careful consideration should be given to rethinking the narratives of historical collective memory represented in the heritage that arose during the Russian Empire and the USSR.⁸¹ Ievgeniia Gubkina also stresses that Soviet architectural heritage is an integral part of Ukrainian history and should be preserved — in contrast to Soviet monuments, which ought to be removed from urban spaces.⁸²

8. Conclusion

As demonstrated above, the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building serves as an illustrative case study for the discursive representation of urban heritage. In different historical periods, it took on different interpretations, entrenching it in the changing symbolic space of Kharkiv. The building underwent three significant transformations due to its remodeling, and consequently, its symbolic significance changed: after initially serving as a center of local self-government during the Russian Empire, it evolved into a center of Communist Party and Soviet state power and, after World War II, became a symbol of post-war reconstruction. After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, the building continued to serve as the seat of the regional government. However, during the Eurorevolution (2013–2014), it became a focal point of the confrontation between the pro-European Maidan and the pro-Russian anti-Maidan move-

⁸⁰ Cf. Interv’iu z Yaroslavom Likholyetovym, Interv’iuer: Yevhen Rachkov, Data zapysu interv’iu: November 4, 2022, YouTube. CityFace, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_An18g9-wg [October 23, 2024].

⁸¹ Cf. Interv’iu z Viktorom Dvornikovym, Podkast, Chastyna 2.

⁸² Cf. Interv’iu z Yevheniieiu Hubkinoiu, Podkast.

ments, ultimately leading to a new understanding of the building as a symbol of Ukraine's struggle for independence. Finally, the devastating destruction as the result of a Russian missile strike on March 1, 2022, transformed the building into a recognizable symbol of the Russo-Ukrainian War.

The destruction of the building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration has sparked a lively discussion in the media and on social networks, particularly on the issue of rethinking cultural heritage. The building has witnessed the formation of a new discourse, provoked and shaped by the Russo-Ukrainian war, which involves a critical reconsideration of dissonant heritage and the revitalization of original Ukrainian heritage. What happens to this building may affect the choice between demolition, restoration, and modernization for other heritage sites destroyed or damaged during the Russo-Ukrainian War.

In addition, the current discussion suggests that the search for new strategies for tackling problematic heritage (primarily that invoking Russian imperial history or Soviet history) remains incomplete. It also provides insight into the process of rethinking cultural heritage more generally. The case of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building can either become an example of the search for civic dialogue and political consensus or, conversely, attest to the intensification of "memory wars." These conflicts have been a significant component of Ukraine's sociopolitical life over the past 30 years. During this time, various forms of the legacies of the Russian Empire and Soviet totalitarianism (architecture, monuments, memorials, components of ritual practices, and so on) were not entirely eradicated in Eastern Ukraine; instead, a significant portion of them were adapted to new political and cultural contexts. This reassessment has not been properly implemented in practice and has ultimately contributed to sociopolitical tensions.

Set in the context of working out strategies for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine and rethinking the country's cultural heritage, the decision regarding the future fate of the building of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration acquires special significance. Discussions surrounding the building primarily focus on dissonant heritage and historical collective memory, rather than delving into the practical aspects of its use. Presumably, this approach will underpin future decisions regarding the restoration or preservation of Ukrainian cultural heritage sites damaged by the current war.

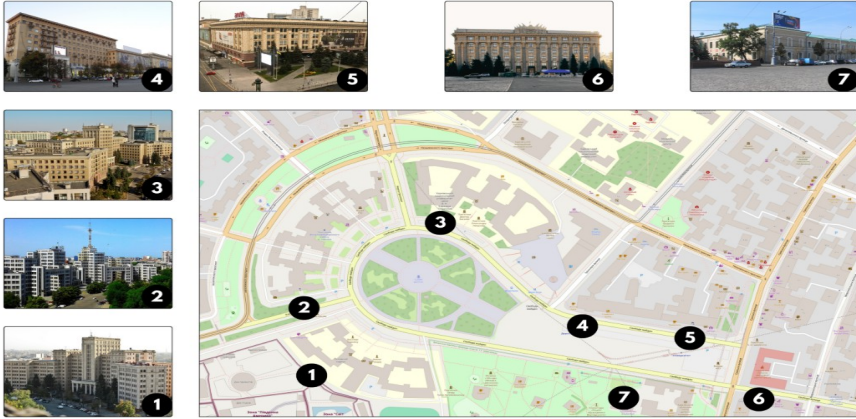


Fig. 1: Map of the architectural ensemble of Freedom Square: 1) Main building of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (Andreeva Aliona01, October 7, 2020); 2) Derzhprom (Viktor O. Ledenyov, June 21, 2016); 3) North building of V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (Sergiy Bobok, August 24, 2021); 4) hotel “Kharkiv” (Serhii Lypko, October 4, 2014), 5) office building (Andreeva Aliona01, October 12, 2020); 6) Kharkiv Regional State Administration building (Star61, October 13, 2019) (marked in red on the right) (all are local architectural and urban heritage sites); 7) Kharkiv Regional Palace of Children’s and Youth Creativity (Vladimir Khalev, September 15, 2012) (local historical heritage site). OpenStreetMap. Photos via Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 2: City view postcard “Kharkiv. Monument to V. I. Lenin. Administrative building. Monument in honor of the proclamation of Soviet power in Ukraine,” 1980 (V. H. Korolenko Kharkiv State Science Library).



Fig. 3: Consequences of the Russian missile strike on the Kharkiv Regional State Administration building on March 1, 2022 (Andreeva Aliona01, August 11, 2022). Photo via Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 4: Preservation of the Kharkiv Regional State Administration Building after the Russian missile strike (Sergiy Bobok, August 23, 2023). Photo via Wikimedia Commons.

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