

CITY AND WAR

Destruction, Preservation and Rethinking of the Cultural Heritage
of Large Cities in Eastern and Southern Ukraine
During the Russo-Ukrainian War



WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?

CITY AND WAR is an interdisciplinary project aiming to explore and reinterpret diverse aspects of the cultural heritage of several key cities in eastern and southern Ukraine (Dnipro, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Odesa, and Kharkiv), with a focus on its state and evolution since the start of the war in Donbas in 2014 and the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022.

The project brings together views of academics, museum, library, and archival workers, journalists, writers, artists, photographers, and experts in other fields on the destruction, preservation, and rethinking of urban cultural heritage in Ukraine – particularly on the developments provoked by Russia's ongoing military aggression.

The project is an open network connecting mainly scholars and students from Ukrainian universities. They are cooperating closely to fashion new approaches to cultural heritage and help ensure Ukraine's sustainable development in the future.

WHAT ARE WE INVESTIGATING?

The project tackles issues of the preservation, investigation, and mediatization of various types of urban cultural heritage, both tangible (architectural monuments, urban area development, industrial heritage, monuments, memorials, and landmarks, as well as museum, archival, and library artifacts and collections) and intangible (urban celebrations, festivals, customs, language, street art, cuisine, and the like). The contributors also consider transformations of collective cultural memory and interpretations of cultural heritage by urban communities.

As a system, tangible artifacts and sites and intangible values comprising the cultural heritage of the largest cities of eastern and southern Ukraine create unique historical and cultural cityscapes that are embodied in, and at the same time influence the formation of, the shared values and collective identity of these urban communities.

HOW ARE WE DOING IT?

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of urban cultural heritage, using a variety of methods and techniques is essential for encompassing all kinds of heritage and its further presentation and mediatization (in the form of web projects) for the general public.

We pay special attention to the development of urban art during the Russian-Ukrainian War. Art that is being created in our five subject cities today not only lays the foundation for the cultural heritage of the future, but also contributes to the formation of the value system of the younger generations of urban residents and influences the ongoing transformation of historical memory.

Our research team consists of several working groups. We plan to organize public debates and propose new development strategies for the cultural heritage of the largest urban centers of eastern and southern Ukraine.

The underlying principles shared by the participants in the project are objectivity, attentiveness, flexibility, creativity, and professionalism.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has caused large-scale destruction of cultural heritage. At the same time, the war has become a trigger for the rethinking of urban cultural heritage, particularly influencing the attitudes of urban communities regarding what should be preserved and revitalized, and what should be relegated to 'the margins of history' (by not only physically removing objectionable heritage, but also erasing it from communal memory).

As the war continues, some practices of the self-representation of cities disappear. Instead, new forms of consolidation of urban communities are invented. New strategies for the preservation of elements of cultural heritage provoke our particular interest.

Obviously, an integrated approach to the preservation and rethinking of the urban cultural heritage of eastern and southern Ukraine is very important. The active involvement of the urban communities themselves in this process is a necessary condition, as the war has made particularly clear. Any significant and lasting transformations also require the efforts of a coalition of experts to develop new methodological tools for dealing with Ukrainian cultural heritage.

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