

Decolonization of the space.

The uncomfortable heritage of Ukrainian socialist cities

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abstract

The process of decolonization in Ukrainian cities is significant because of the remaining socialist heritage. This includes architecture, urban planning structures, toponyms, and symbolic spaces. While this heritage is deeply implemented in the contemporary cityscape, it has also become the subject of criticism, particularly after the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2014. Socialist cities such as Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, and Kryvyi Rig played a prominent role in shaping the urban landscape and were conceptualized by Soviet urbanists in the 1920s and 1930s. These cities were designed to gain complete control over the social and professional aspects of residents' lives, reflecting the ideological ambitions of the communist party. This article explores the importance of socialist cities in the context of colonial heritage, examining the origins of the idea and its ideological significance.

KEYWORDS: Socialist cities, decolonization, architecture, urbanistic, Ukraine.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine drove forward the cleaning up of Soviet heritage from the Ukrainian urban space. While the dismantling of Lenin monuments was the most obvious form of this process, the decolonization of Soviet architecture is not so explicit. So why should Ukrainian socialist cities be included in the discussion about decolonization processes in Ukraine? The point is that decolonization/decommunization of socialist cities is quite a challenge because it does not simply involve removing individual monuments or mosaics with propaganda connotations, but in this case the architectural and urban space itself is propaganda. Thus, one of the main problems, not purely of academic but also of practical meaning, is how to deal with this heritage.

Firstly, the concept of dissonant heritage could be useful in describing socialist cities. As Oksana Dovgopolova argues, heritage is not always what we want to be proud of, but what changed us as a society.¹ Although the socialist cities were created by a totalitarian regime, they are part of an important period in urban planning, industrial development, and architecture. At the same time, they were an attempt to rebuild society by implementing a specific urban structure, to implement ideology (and here we could refer to the concept of the producing of space by Henri Lefebvre,² although he considered the experiment of Soviet constructivists to have failed).

Another point is the use of memory studies. One of the main questions relates to where socialist cities' heritage is located in the hierarchy of remembering/forgetting. For example, in the

academic field, we could mention that there has been a certain research interest in the history and urban planning of the New Kharkiv or Kharkiv Tractor Plant district and Sixth Settlement, while other socialist cities (mostly in Donbas) are not so well researched. The same could be said about reflecting on their past in the public and artistic field, which we will return to later.

APPLYING THE decolonization issue could be tricky, however. While Ukraine was not a colony in the classical sense, the classical postcolonial paradigm should be reconsidered. We could argue about the correlation between colonial and totalitarian discourse. What if, while looking at socialist heritage only in the same way as on colonial heritage, we do not take into the consideration the important problem of our own participation in the creation of the Empire? New Kharkiv was planned and created, for example, by Kyiv architect Pavlo Alyoshyn, not by the Petersburg architects; thus, should it be considered as heritage imposed from above or is it our own heritage? Pierre Nora understands decolonization not only in a strictly ethnic way of the classical relationship between colony and metropolis, but in an ideological one as well:

[...] there is a third type of decolonization which followed on the collapse of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes, whether communist, Nazi or just plain dictatorship: an ideological decolonization which has helped reunite these liberated peoples with traditional, long-term memories confiscated, destroyed or manipulated by those regimes.³

Perhaps combining the classical definition of decolonization as a removal of the imperial symbols with the removal of the totalitarian ideology could be one perspective for the Ukrainian case.

However, speaking about the issue of decolonization, we need to admit that we should deal not only with the academic field, but with the public and (in the Ukrainian case, at least) legal fields as well. Speaking about the issue of decolonization, Volodymyr Vyatrovich, the former Head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, highlights its nature as a part of forgetting:

[...] now the decolonization in Ukraine is the removal of imperial heritage, which is used for the renewing of imperial influence.⁴

Thus, decolonization is often understood as purely instrumental, whereby the urban space is simply cleansed from imperial and communist symbolism without exploring the mechanism of its influence on identity. Oksana Dovgoplova mentions this in her interview:

How does the postcolonial syndrome in Ukraine find its expression? In the desire to wipe out everything imperial, and this is a normal postcolonial practice. But we can look at how this is done in other countries and decide – first of all for ourselves, not for Russian propaganda – what we should do with our heritage.⁵

Speaking about the legal situation, the set of decommunization laws were adopted in 2015, but decommunization was understood then within the concept of the totalitarian past. Communist symbols were prohibited together with Nazi symbols. With the beginning of the full scale invasion, the situation changed.

The law “About condemnation and prohibition of propaganda of Russian imperial policy in Ukraine and the decolonization of toponymy” put the Soviet Union in the context of previous imperial politics. The law defines Russian imperial politics as “a system of measures taken by governing bodies, armed groups, political parties, non-governmental organizations, institutions, enterprises, groups or individual citizens (subjects of the Russian/Moscow tsardom), the Russian Empire, the Russian republic, the Russian state, the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet

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Republic, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the Russian Federation aimed at the subjugation, exploitation, assimilation of the Ukrainian nation.”⁶ This suggests a succession of all regimes. At the same time, decolonization in the legal field directly affected heritage laws. Due to the law “On Changes to Certain Laws of Ukraine Concerning the Specifics of Forming the State List of Immovable Monuments of Ukraine,” if the tangible heritage object belongs to the communist or imperial heritage, that may be a reason for its exclusion from the register (or non-inclusion, if it is a newly discovered monument).⁷

Thus, in practice, heritage discourse sometimes conflicts with the decolonization discourse: while the first is about preservation and remembering, the second is about destruction and selective forgetting. While some imperial/communist monuments stand separately and could be transferred, for example into the museum space (for example, pieces of monumental art), some Soviet symbols are built into architectural monuments, and cannot be simply removed without damaging this heritage object; a lot of bureaucracy work also needs to be done in cases like this.⁸

General context about Ukrainian socialist cities

The planning of socialist cities in Ukraine began with the establishment of the state commission for the building of socialist cities (June 12, 1929) (Figure 1). The general plans for Makiivka, Horlivka, Lysychans’k, Kramatorsk, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia were developed. They meant to be the “ideal model for equality”



Figure 1. Map of socialist cities in Ukraine. Source: the authors.

- 1 Grand Zaporizhzhia
- 2 New Kharkiv
- 3 Toretsk
- 4 Nikopol
- 5 Kryvyi Rih
- 6 New Kramatorsk
- 7 Makiivka
- 8 New Horlivka
- 9 Dniprodzerzhynsk (now Kamianske)
- 10 Lisichansk



Figure 2. Metallurgists Avenue. The socialist city of Kryvyi Rih. Photo from 1971.

and urban centers for the proletariat.⁹ Socialist cities were influenced by both communism and Western urban planning ideas. Some researchers mention that it was “Americanism”.¹⁰ According to Pavlo Kravchuk, socialist cities can be divided into two groups based on their ideology: Those built on social utopian ideas (Magnitogorsk, New Kharkiv) and those closer to Western examples.¹¹ Socialist cities were a concentration of Soviet ideology in the urban space; therefore they are important for studying the decolonization process. Firstly, the priority was not the city itself, but the object of heavy industry; secondly, the main task of the space organization was common everyday life, to eliminate individuality.¹² Mart Stam, a Dutch architect who was involved in creating the master plan for Makiivka, emphasized that the city scheme should reflect the living needs of the working class, rather than just being a calculated mechanism.¹³

SOCIALIST CITIES are viewed by Western historians as an extension of the Russian Empire’s imperial politics. For example, Dutch architect and historian Koos Bosma suggests that “industrialization, including the collateral social engineering, can be interpreted as inner colonization in the Caucasus, the Urals, the Ukraine and Siberia. The new socialist man or woman would live in a new socialist town that was the front of the battle against backward Czarist structures and extreme climatic conditions: mountains, rivers, deserts, and steppes. In the USSR, the organization and use of the labor force underwent a radical change”.¹⁴ Heather Denaan, an American historian studying the experience of Nizhny Novgorod, comes to the same conclusion. She highlights that, especially during the classical period, Stalinist architecture is the most prominent example of such politics.¹⁵

To understand the place of the socialist cities in Ukrainian collective memory, we should look at how this idea was implemented on Ukrainian territory. In classical empires, changes were made without considering local conditions. But, as far as

Ukraine was not a classical colony, we can trace some variations of this transition. Studying the Soviet Union in the context of postcolonial studies, Estonian researcher Epp Annus argues that “the relationship between colonizer and colonized are characterized by notions of hybridity, mimicry and camouflage, of the splitting and doubling of identities.”¹⁶ Svitlana Shlipchenko, Ukrainian architect and philosopher, emphasized the cultural origin of institutions in planning late modernist projects in Ukrainian cities. She highlights that although Ukrainian architects made the projects, all important decisions were made by the Moscow authorities. She suggests putting this kind of institutional relations into the frame of hybridity.¹⁷

“ALTHOUGH UKRAINIAN ARCHITECTS MADE THE PROJECTS, ALL IMPORTANT DECISIONS WERE MADE BY THE MOSCOW AUTHORITIES.”

The team that built Kharkiv Tractor Plant district or New Kharkiv, mostly Ukrainian, was led by Kyiv architect Pavlo Alyoshyn. The planners studied in Kyiv and Kharkiv institutions (Nina Manucharova, Petro Shpara, Ivan Taranov-Beloziorov et al.).¹⁸ The degree of influence the ideas of Russian urbanist Nikolai Milutin

had on its planning is debatable. For example, in Vadim Alyoshyn’s dissertation he argues that the project of KhTZ deviated from the ideas of “Sotsgorod” so much that it could be considered as a different project. Another example is that the parallel settlement was accepted by Pavlo Alyoshyn’s team before the publication of Milutin’s book. Other features where KhTZ differs from Milutin’s concept were a certain restriction of space and absence of water space; the socialist city was wider than it was supposed to be according to the concept of the linear city.¹⁹

We see a different situation in the case of Zaporizhzhia, where the team was supervised by Moscow architect Victor Vesnin, and the Ukrainian architects were excluded from decision-making.²⁰ In some cases, we can also see collaboration with foreign pro-communist architects; thus the idea of socialist cities was not implemented in a Soviet vacuum. For example, in 1930, Ernst May visited Kharkiv and gave a series of lectures about new

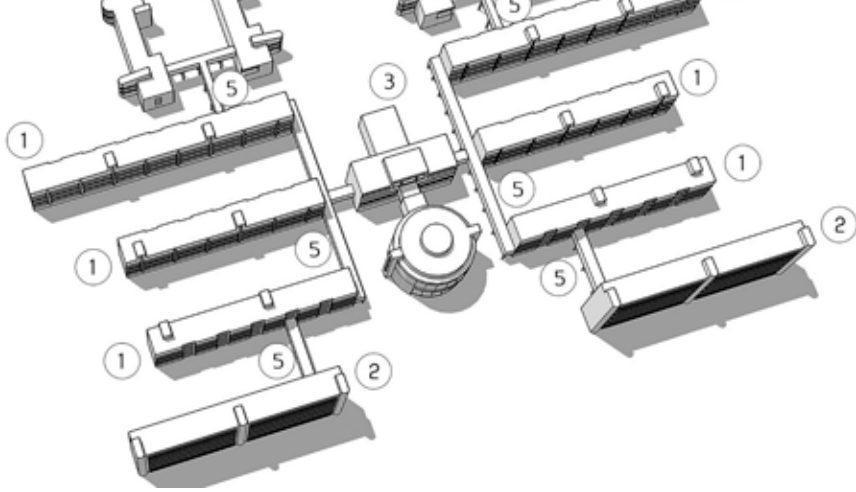


Figure 3. Schematic view of a residential kombinat. It was developed on the basis of the project of a residential kombinat in the socialist city of Traktorograd (New Kharkiv).

1. Apartments for singles.
2. Apartments for families.
3. Canteen.
4. Kindergarten and nursery.
5. Warm passages.

Ukrainian socialist cities.²¹ Another aspect was the direct inclusion of foreign architects via International to the planning team. Dutch architect Lotta Stam-Beese worked with Pavlo Alyoshyn on the planning of Tractorobud, while Mart Stam participated in the project of Makiivka.²² Writing about their ideological beliefs, Dutch architecture historian Koos Bosma mentioned that there was a whole spectrum: from convinced leftists to architects who were skeptical of communism and worked just for payment.²³

Thus, we can conclude that the ways in which urban planning concepts were realized during the interwar period had some elements of colonial relationship (for example, the case of Zaporizhzhia), while other cases have the signs of hybridity.

The implementation of communist ideology in space

Urban planning in the Soviet socialist context was a powerful tool for implementing ideological principles. In the late 1920s, the USSR developed models of the future society, where architects inspired by revolutionary visions aimed to rethink the idea of social relations, lifestyle, and family. The goal was to create a harmonious living environment for the working population, ensuring comprehensive development and contributing to the formation of a new personality. Therefore, socialist cities provided for extensive green areas, parks, and boulevards that met the needs of workers and contributed to their health (see Figure 2).

An important aspect was not only the creation of comfortable living conditions, but also the development of social institutions, including the family, education, the role of women in society, the organization of cultural and educational work, and other important areas. The first attempts were made to change the lives of working people and to eradicate the routine of household chores by introducing new approaches to planning and organizing cities. Every adult citizen was obliged to participate in productive work and public activities, which was fixed at the legislative level. Children under 16 were provided with full state services and lived in nurseries, kindergartens and boarding schools. An extensive social and amenity complex (catering facilities, retail chains, bath and laundry complexes, department stores, post



Figure 4. Socialist city of Kryvyi Rih. The Metallurgic Palace of Culture. First of May, 1960s. Source: Facebook group "Kryvyi Rih Antiquities".

offices, hospitals) and a system of centralized cultural services (palaces of labor and culture, parks and recreation, stadiums) met the daily needs of the population and created conditions for collective leisure.²⁴ Based on the concept of socialized life, the following spatial solution was developed for a residential kombinat.²⁵

The concept of a residential kombinat was a complex of buildings that functioned in a specific cycle, where all the necessary aspects of life (sleeping areas, household services, childcare, leisure) were combined within one or two city blocks that interacted as an integrated unit (Figure 3). For example, in the socialist city of Novyi Kharkiv, a distinct planning arrangement of two residential estates remains evident.

The introduction of ideological symbols and concepts into the urban environment of socialist cities reflected the desire to reproduce socialist values through architectural and spatial elements. Sculptures, reliefs, murals, and other decorative elements on buildings contributed to visual propaganda, supported the ideology of the socialist regime, and carried certain messages and symbols that reinforced the ideological narrative. For example, monumental compositions depicted workers' and peasants' solidarity, the ideals of communism and the victory of the Soviet way of life.



Figure 5. The dining club is a part of the residential kombinat of the Socialist city “New Kharkiv”. It was rebuilt into a residential building. Contemporary photo 2019.

Source: the authors

The evolution of socialist urban architecture underwent distinct phases across different historical periods. In its early phase, notably during the 1930s, the dominance of constructivism was evident, characterized by specific spatial attributes. Due to the architectural minimalism of that era, notable for its absence of ornamental elements, communist symbolism found its expression through diverse metal structures adorned with posters and signs. These symbols were integrated both as autonomous structural elements and as integral components of the architecture, such as parapets, railings, and handrails. The subsequent shift towards socialist realism introduced propaganda motifs like flags, stars, hammers, and sickles, seamlessly incorporated into the architectural elements, including capitals, pediments, and façade decorations. Symbols representative of the early 1930s Soviet regime did not withstand the test of time due to their mobile nature and were systematically removed during this era. In contrast, the symbols of the Stalinist era, the “Khrushchev Thaw,” and the “Brezhnev Stagnation” persist within the urban landscape, presenting an artistic dilemma. These art installations bear historical and artistic significance, necessitating preservation for the enlightenment of future generations and the exploration of the era’s artistic legacy. However, efforts to preserve the Soviet heritage face challenges from a part of society that wants to eliminate all remnants of the Soviet era.

Balancing between preservation and adaptation of urban architectural heritage

Europeans appreciate modern architecture as they do ancient monuments. In Germany, the UNESCO World Heritage List includes various monuments of modernist architecture, both singular structures and ensembles, as well as industrial complexes.²⁶ Unfortunately, the current state of the monuments of architecture and urban planning of Soviet early modernism in Ukraine is poor. Many urban ensembles and residential areas continue to lose the authenticity of their components, the com-

plexity of urban planning objects is disturbed, and their value is lost.²⁷ (Figure 5)

As an illustration, in Germany, six modernist housing districts have been granted protected heritage status.²⁸ This status affected all aspects of the environment, including buildings, open spaces and landscaping. The spatial configuration, surface materials, and vegetation types are meticulously preserved. Consequently, the original characteristics of the locale, along with the functional and aesthetic interplay between spaces and individual architectural structures, remain perceptible to this

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day. Ukraine is in the early stages of recognizing the significance of its urban heritage from the 1920s and 1930s, with the subsequent focus on the aspiration to safeguard this legacy for future generations. Initial outcomes of Ukraine’s endeavors indicate the identification of a notable array of architectural and urban planning entities dating back to the 1920s and 1930s. Research and attribution efforts have been undertaken for these landmarks,

contributing to the enlargement of the purview of this heritage.²⁹

The protective statute of Ukrainian legislation, “urban planning monument”, is not widely used today due to the lack of methodological materials that reveal the principles of its operation, although some scientific works address this issue.³⁰ The arsenal of principles for the identification and preservation of urban heritage makes it possible to choose an effective tool that can actually ensure the preservation of the urban heritage of early modernism for future generations. Thus, during the conservation of urban planning complexes and ensembles, the focus of preservation should encompass not only individual buildings or groups of structures but also the entire urban landscape, incorporating its essential features like spatial arrangement, three-dimensional composition, architectural facades, landscaping elements, urban furnishings, and more. The 1920s and 1930s marked an era of innovation in building materials and technologies. It can be argued that the authentic materials and structures from that period often exhibit significant operational limitations when compared to contemporary solutions. Replac-

ing them with modern materials leads to a loss of authenticity and changes the appearance of the building, depriving it of the character of its era.

AS A RESULT, the availability of carefully formulated technical (engineering) methodologies for conserving the architectural legacy of the 1920s and 1930s in Ukraine is of critical importance. These methodologies should be accessible not only for application in the case of the most significant landmarks, but also for everyday activities involving the entirety of the architectural heritage from that era. Presently, there exists a demand to formulate restoration methods for early modernist heritage that would facilitate the preservation of the buildings' functionality, preventing their conversion into mere museum artifacts.

Another, more general issue for the Soviet heritage is that it belongs to the so-called "modern heritage".³⁴ This concept refers to architectural objects that have emerged in relatively recent history, often in the last century or even later, and have great potential to become cultural heritage sites. These objects can be representatives of different architectural styles and trends that characterize a certain period of time. One of the key features of "modern heritage" is that these objects have not yet acquired the status of classical or historical monuments, but they may already be valuable from cultural, architectural, historical, or aesthetic perspectives. The concept of modern heritage is closely linked to the phenomenon of remembrance. The architectural heritage of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was shaped in different contexts of memory. For instance, architectural histories of the Modern Movement (European modernism) and Soviet architectural history were grounded in collective memory. Conversely, regional architectural histories relied on individual, social, and national memory. The postmodern history of architecture is based on cultural memory.

The socialist cities of Ukraine encompass all the characteristics of the "modern heritage" category. Integrating socialist cities into the modern cultural landscape of Ukraine can provide new avenues for enriching the national culture, enhancing citizens' awareness, and forming a distinct cultural identity for the nation. In recent years, the heritage of socialist cities in Ukraine has been the subject of scholarly discussions and has undergone fresh rethinking. Simultaneously, the public perception of this heritage faces numerous challenges and discussions.³²

THESE DISCUSSIONS reflect the diversity of viewpoints and approaches to the preservation (or lack thereof) and adaptation of the "modern heritage" of socialist cities. One pivotal topic of debate is the consideration of whether to retain the heritage of socialist cities as an important component of Ukraine's cultural legacy, taking into account all aspects of the ideological nature of these areas. While most scholars and public figures³³ believe that the architectural structures and urban planning of socialist cities hold significant historical and cultural value as evidence of the past, the national-patriotic community is concerned that retaining the authenticity of these cities (without reconstruction) may endorse Soviet ideology that contradicts modern



Figure 6. Participants of the workshop Dreaming Up the KhTZ. October 2019. Source: Kharkiv School of Architecture

values. Another substantial debate revolves around the appropriate approach to reconstructing and adapting these spaces. The first position advocates preserving the heritage at all levels: urban planning, spatial, and architectural elements, with careful adaptation to modern needs.³⁴ The second position advocates maximal modernization of both urban planning and architectural details without preserving authenticity. The discussions also encompass the utilization of the heritage of socialist cities for educational purposes. An important aspect of these discussions is the issue of dignity and remembrance, especially in the context of overcoming a traumatic past. Thus, preserving this heritage can serve as a means of honoring the memory of those who lived through this period. On the other hand, it may also be seen as a lack of respect for the victims of the regime. Finally, the discussions address the contemporary use of socialist cities. They examine their potential roles in tourism, art projects,³⁵ entertainment, and other aspects of modern life.³⁶ All of these discussions point to the complex and multifaceted nature of the legacy of socialist cities within contemporary society. They help society understand different perspectives and approaches to these sites and determine the most suitable and acceptable methods of preservation and utilization (Figure 6).

Rethinking the totalitarian and colonial heritage

The planning of socialist cities from scratch also allowed the creation of communist toponymic space. For example, writing about New Kharkiv, Mariia Tahtaulova highlights that:

[...] in the toponymic of this district Bolshevik and proletarian components prevailed, which formed a toponymical ensemble. The main street was the Avenue named after Sergo Ordzhonikidze, where the main infrastructure and administrative objects were concentrated. Among other urbanonyms, there are avenues named after Kosior and Frunze, the Second Five-Year Plan Street, Third International, Seventeenth Party Congress, Inessa Armand, etc.³⁷

Among the changes made to this ensemble in 2015 due to the law of decommunization, three of the nine streets were named

after artists and architects of the interwar period; thus, these new names are connected with the period when this district was planned: one is named after Biblik, former Soviet director of the Tractor plant.³⁸ However, the renaming of the Seventeenth Party Congress Street as the Sevryn Potocki Street is questionable. Count Potocki was a Russian official of high ranking and loyal to the empire, despite his Polish roots. The Oleksandrivs'ki Avenue has another touch of the empire – although named after Saint Oleksandr, this naming tradition is associated with the Russian Empire. This trend is typical not only for Kharkiv; in Kherson's case, Sergiy Vodotyka mentions the streets renamed after Count Potyomkin and Richelieu, the main actors of imperial policy in southern Ukraine. He argues that such a tendency is a marker for the "little-Russian" identity of the southern and eastern Ukrainian cities' municipalities.³⁹ Now, these urbanonyms should be changed again, due to the new set of the decolonization laws.

Returning to the decommunization of the KhTZ district, we should also mention the research of Roman Lubavskij, who considers that the "gentle" decommunization was connected with the mostly neutral narrative about this district in the late Soviet Union-early years of independent Ukraine:

The narrative of the history of the 'socialist town' did not include stories about the 'revolutionary achievements of the working class', so the description of its space was always focused on the everyday life of its residents [...] It is worth noting that the image of the district formed during the 1970s and 1980s led to the removal of its planning beyond the context of the policy of the Bolshevik totalitarian regime in the 1930s. This ensured the 'gentleness' of the decommunization of this space in 2014 when the names of Soviet political figures (S. Ordzhonikidze, S. Kosior) disappeared from the toponymic landscape, but the names of the directors of the tractor plant (V. Biblik, P. Svystun) appeared.⁴⁰

The tendency to tolerate Soviet toponymy more in industrial cities, such as Kramators'k, Slovians'k, and Kamians'ke, was mentioned by Oleksii Gnatiuk and Viktoriia Glibivets in their research of Ukrainian toponymy. They connect it with the toponymical tradition of naming the streets after the founders of local industry.⁴¹ The inertness of the Kryvyi Rih municipality was mentioned at the official level when in 2016 the city was the only one that ignored decommunization. That is why this process was transferred directly under the control of the provincial administration.⁴²

While decommunization is provided by the municipalities, presenting the more official side of memory politics, non-governmental organizations present the other point of view towards the communist heritage. Speaking about their perception of the Soviet heritage, during our work with the inhabitants we observed some division connected with the chronological periods: while in recent years, the attitude to the constructivist heritage became more positive, Stalinist architecture (often referred to as "Stalinist vampire" – wordplay with Stalinist empire style) is still perceived as "bad" architecture both in the aesthetic and semantic meaning



Figure 7. KhTZ residents share their family stories. June 2020. Source: the authors.

– as totalitarian and colonial, while interwar architecture is almost appropriated as our own; it does not have such strong totalitarian connotations (despite the fact that KhTZ and Dnipro GES were built at the same time as the Holodomor was unleashed).

As an example, we could mention the participative practices in which the main target groups are residents of the socialist cities, who often do not understand the importance and controversy of this heritage. In 2017, within the bigger Bauhaus-Zaporizhzhia project, members of the City Garden NGO provided a workshop, "You are living in the legend", during which the participants had an opportunity to share their memories, family photos or documents connected with the Sixth Settlement, as well as to draw mental maps. In their survey of inhabitants, the NGO members found out that 90% of respondents feel they belong to this heritage while 92% are aware of the necessity to protect the settlement's buildings at national level.⁴³ Another example is the "Art-oborona" workshop with the residents of the KhTZ, where the activists asked the inhabitants to share their family stories while also telling them about the significance of this heritage, which helped to explain the importance of the KhTZ as urban planning heritage. We could observe here both some examples of non-critical nostalgia – "My grandfather built this himself", "This was a better time" and just a sense of curiosity about "how it was" (see Figure 7).⁴⁴ Similar practices, rather chaotic, could also be observed in thematic groups devoted to the history of socialist cities, when people write their recollections related to the posted photos.⁴⁵ The social mapping of KhTZ, "Summer Marathon KhTZ", helped not only to actualize architectural objects as a heritage for residents but also deepened the understanding of the problems with former socialist cities.⁴⁶ Speaking about such practices, it is hard to find any discussion that show awareness about colonialism, but for us it is important to register this understanding of heritage as "one's own", the feeling of belonging and heritage.

CONTEMPORARY ART is another medium through which the discussion about this dissonance in relation to heritage could be promoted. Unlike participative practices, artists often come from outside; they are not deeply involved in the context and do not take into account the residents' opinions. One example is the activity of the residents of "Our school KhTZ". The work of

Aleksander Adamov depicted Joseph Stalin. His miniature bust was made from bread, which was a symbol of the transience of the totalitarian regime, but this work caused great dissonance among the artists.⁴⁷

Conclusions

So how could we define a decolonization discourse within memory studies in the urban space of Ukrainian socialist cities? Should it be described as a practice of (selective) forgetting/erasing? We should highlight here that in Ukraine decolonization is not only academic, but a legal definition, which, in our opinion, has a slightly different connotation. As Ukraine deals with the decolonization of space in socialist cities, a careful balancing of historical preservation and modern adaptation is required. It means that we should not simply remove communist and imperial symbols; a discussion on architectural heritage and cultural values should also be provided. Another point in this discussion is about applying the totalitarian discourse – how should it be connected with decolonization? Could we perhaps use the definition of both colonial and totalitarian heritage at the same time in referring to Ukrainian heritage of the Soviet period? Maybe postcolonial discourse is the only right way to remember the Soviet and imperial past during the active phase of war, but after its end, we as a society should move on. The third set of questions is about the relationship between decolonization and heritage studies. We see some contradiction, because while decolonization is about trying to destroy what does not fit official narratives and what is not “good” about the past, heritage discourse calls for preservation and discussion about every heritage object, especially those that represent difficult periods of history. Embracing the concept of modern heritage, encompassing Ukrainian socialist cities, poses both challenges and opportunities. Discussions about their preservation and adaptation balance the recognition of historical value and the negotiation of difficult heritage, ultimately providing fertile ground for a sustainable future. Participatory and artistic practices offer insightful perspectives in reimagining the legacy of socialist cities. Contemporary art serves as a potent medium, provoking dissonance and contemplation on the totalitarian and colonial dimensions inherent within these urban landscapes. ✖

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