

CHALLENGES TO THE PRESERVATION OF UKRAINE’S CULTURAL HERITAGE DURING THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR: REFLECTIONS OF EXPERTS FOR THE “CITY AND WAR PROJECT”¹

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Abstract: *Since 2014, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has inflicted vast damage and destruction on the country’s diverse cultural heritage. The expert community estimates Ukraine’s cultural losses as already the highest since World War II, and they continue to mount, especially in areas of active hostilities and those still occupied by the invaders. Furthermore, the Russo-Ukrainian War has triggered a broad reassessment of the cultural heritage in Ukrainian society, causing a ‘turn’ in the understanding of, and attitude towards, culture in general. Recognizing the complexity and momentousness of these developments, in May 2022 a group of scholars from the V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University launched the 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”. The project brings together thoughts of cultural experts on the war-related destruction of Ukraine’s cultural heritage and efforts to protect it. The project team has already collected 36 in-depth interviews with Ukrainian specialists. The paper approaches this body of expert opinion as important testimony for understanding the pre-war state of Ukraine’s cultural heritage, its current situation, and further prospects for its preservation and reinterpretation.*

Keywords: *Cultural heritage, Ukraine, Russo-Ukrainian War, City and War project.*

Sommario: *Dal 2014, l’invasione russa dell’Ucraina ha inflitto ingenti danni e distruzioni al variegato patrimonio culturale del paese. La comunità di esperti stima che le*

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perdite culturali dell'Ucraina siano già le più alte dalla Seconda guerra mondiale e continuano ad aumentare, soprattutto nelle aree di ostilità attive e in quelle ancora occupate dagli invasori. Inoltre, la guerra russo-ucraina ha innescato un'ampia rivalutazione del patrimonio culturale nella società ucraina, provocando una "svolta" nella comprensione e nell'atteggiamento nei confronti della cultura in generale. Riconoscendo la complessità e l'importanza di questi sviluppi, nel maggio 2022 un gruppo di studiosi dell'Università Nazionale V. N. Karazin di Kharkiv ha lanciato il progetto "Città e guerra: distruzione, conservazione e ripensamento del patrimonio culturale delle grandi città dell'Ucraina orientale e meridionale durante la guerra russo-ucraina". Il progetto riunisce le riflessioni di esperti culturali sulla distruzione del patrimonio culturale ucraino dovuta alla guerra e sugli sforzi per proteggerlo. Il gruppo del progetto ha già raccolto 36 interviste in profondità con specialisti ucraini. L'articolo affronta questo corpus di opinioni di esperti come una testimonianza importante per comprendere lo stato prebellico del patrimonio culturale ucraino, la sua situazione attuale e ulteriori prospettive per la sua conservazione e reinterpretazione.

Parole chiave: *Patrimonio culturale, Ucraina, Guerra russo-ucraina, Progetto "Città e guerra".*

Introduction

Since 2014, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has inflicted vast damage and destruction on the country's diverse cultural heritage. The expert community estimates the damage to the cultural heritage of Ukraine as already the greatest since World War II (MCIP 2022). In addition, the Russo-Ukrainian War has triggered a rethinking of the forms and meaning of cultural heritage in Ukrainian society and caused a 'turn' of sorts in the understanding of, and attitude towards, culture in general (Rachkov 2023). On the one hand, traditional cultural models of the Ukrainian people, seen as the foundation of modern Ukrainian national identity, are experiencing a revival; public interest particularly in intangible Ukrainian ethnic heritage has been growing steadily since the start of the war (Rachkov 2024). On the other hand, heritage linked with Russian imperial and Soviet history is subjected to a critical reflection. The ongoing reevaluation of culture in the Ukrainian media discourse and

academic literature is most often denoted using the terms 'decolonization', 'decommunization', and 'de-russification'.²

Conscious of the complexity of these developments and the importance of preserving and rethinking Ukraine's cultural heritage today, in May 2022 a group of researchers out of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University launched an academic project under the name "City and War: Destruction, Preservation and Rethinking of the Cultural Heritage of Large Cities in Eastern and Southern Ukraine During the Russo-Ukrainian War." The project became possible thanks to the support of the Contemporary Ukraine Studies Program (CUSP) of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS) at the University of Alberta. It is an interdisciplinary undertaking built as an open network bringing together researchers and students mostly from Ukrainian academic institutions (CityFace 2024c).

City and War focuses on the study and reevaluation of diverse aspects of the cultural heritage of the largest urban centers of eastern and southern Ukraine (Dnipro, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, and Kharkiv) in the aftermath of the start of the war in Donbas in 2014 and the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022. The project is concerned with both tangible sites and artifacts (architecture, urban environment, industrial heritage, monuments, memorials, and places of interest, as well as museum, archival, and library collections and more) and intangible heritage (local celebrations, festivals, urban street art, and the like). The project team seeks to put on record views of cultural experts on the ongoing processes of destruction, preservation, and reinterpretation of cultural heritage in Ukraine provoked by the Russian invasion. To this end, the

² The content of these terms long remained unfixed, but today it is even established in law. See for instance the Law of Ukraine on the Legal Status and Commemoration of Fighters for the Independence of Ukraine in the 20th Century (2015), the Law of Ukraine on the Commemoration of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War of 1939–45 (2015), the Law of Ukraine on Access to the Archives of Repressive Agencies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime, 1917–91 (2015), the Law of Ukraine on the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols (2015), the Law of Ukraine on the Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and Decolonization of Toponymy (2023), and others. In addition, see the recommendations of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance on overcoming the consequences of Russification and Totalitarianism in Ukraine (Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance 2024).

project team is building a collection of interviews with representatives of the Ukrainian expert community (CityFace 2024c).

This paper will take stock of the views of experts interviewed for the project on several key issues in safeguarding Ukraine's cultural heritage: 1) systemic problems in the field of cultural heritage protection in Ukraine; 2) challenges faced by the field as a result of the Russo-Ukrainian War, particularly since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022; 3) strategies for preservation of cultural heritage in wartime; 4) the use of digital technologies to help protect and preserve cultural heritage during the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Interviewing experts for the City and War project

To date, the City and War project team has collected 36 semi-structured in-depth interviews (over 29 hours of recordings) with experts in the field of cultural heritage protection in Ukraine. The interviews are grouped into two thematic series: "Expert Opinion" and "Digital Heritage". The "Expert Opinion" series includes interviews in several formats: 1) video, 2) podcast, and 3) text. Conversations with the experts were held in Ukrainian. All interviews were transcribed in full. Some of them have already been published on the project's website (CityFace 2024a) and YouTube channel (CityFace 2024b). Interviews were made public with the respondents' consent. Some interviews were reproduced in full, others in abridged form (either due to technical issues during the recording or, in rare cases, at the request of the respondent). When an abridged version of an interview was published, it was noted in the description. The published interviews range in length from eighteen minutes to just over two hours. Conversations took place in the video conference format using Zoom.

Chronologically, the interviews fall into three groups: those recorded in 2022 (11 interviews), 2023 (15), and 2024 (10). The respondents live and work in the following Ukrainian cities: Vinnytsia/Donetsk (1), Zaporizhzhia (1), Kyiv (2), Odesa (2), Lviv (3), Dnipro (4), and Kharkiv (23). Snowball sampling was used to find respondents: first, the project organizers turned to experts they knew and then asked each interviewee to recommend other colleagues. The project team sought out experts who work with different forms of cultural

heritage (movable and immovable, tangible and intangible, and so on). So far, only a few representatives of the expert community have declined interview requests. Experts usually responded willingly to the invitation to talk in the interview format and often noted the importance of discussing pressing problems in the preservation and reevaluation of Ukraine's cultural heritage as the war goes on.

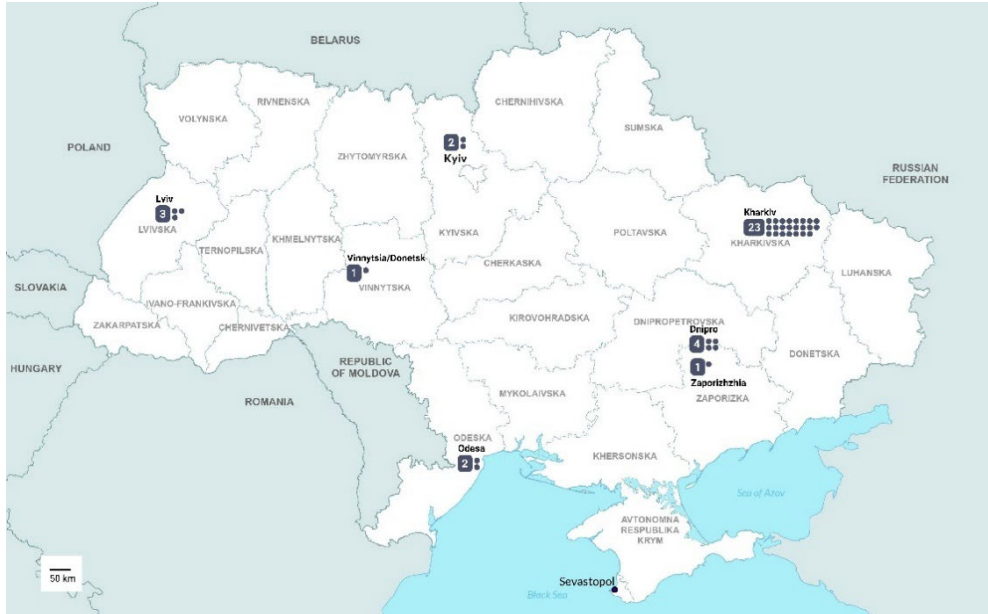


Fig. 1. Distribution of interviewees by city. Created by Yevhen Rachkov.

Overall, the interviews collected as part of the City and War project deal with the following topical issues: preservation and rethinking of Ukraine's urban cultural heritage in wartime; protection of immovable and movable cultural heritage in wartime; history museums and archaeological heritage in the conditions of war; city museums, archives, and libraries in wartime; preservation and reinterpretation of university heritage in the conditions of war; contemporary art and strategies for dealing with uncomfortable legacies; representation of the cultural heritage of Ukraine on Wikipedia; protection of cultural heritage and solidarity tourism during the war, and more.

A separate questionnaire was prepared for each interview, which enabled the interviewers to define the central subject of each conversation and take

into account the specialization of each respondent. For example, a special set of questions focused on each individual respondent's work experience and professional accomplishments in cultural heritage protection. Another group of questions concerned the institutional specifics of the respondent's workplace (museum, library, archive, university, art center, and so forth). There were several questions, however, that were present in most of the interviews. These dealt with preservation of various types of cultural heritage in the conditions of war; strategies for rethinking cultural heritage; principles of handling uncomfortable (mainly Russian and Soviet) heritage; the role of various actors (the government, municipal authorities, local communities, public associations and activists, and more) in preserving and reinterpreting cultural heritage; the use of digital tools in cultural heritage preservation, and others. Special attention was paid to the characteristic features of the cultural heritage of Ukraine's large cities, primarily in the south and east of the country.

Let us consider the responses of the project's experts to several key questions regarding cultural heritage protection in Ukraine. We should state at the outset that the following reflections represent the interviewees' personal views. As a final note, most of the experts at the time of recording lived and worked in the large cities of southern and eastern Ukraine.

Systemic problems in protection of Ukraine's cultural heritage

The Russo-Ukrainian War has posed numerous challenges to safeguarding Ukraine's cultural heritage. In particular, it exacerbated many existing systemic problems related to the legal, organizational, financial, logistical, informational, and other aspects of cultural heritage protection. Institutional and legal problems in this sphere, for instance, were analyzed in some detail by the National Institute for Strategic Studies in 2019.³ The study stated that cultural heritage protection is the most problematic area of cultural work in Ukraine and named several issues undermining the effectiveness of the government

³ The institute serves as the primary research institution providing academic and analytical support for the work of the President of Ukraine and the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine and as a consultative and advisory body under the President of Ukraine.

policy on the preservation and use of cultural heritage: the absence of a unified administrative apparatus in this sphere; unjustified restrictions on the powers of cultural heritage protection agencies; weakness of the existing legislation in prosecuting damage to cultural heritage; and an imperfect system for keeping track of cultural heritage (in particular, the lack of a proper database of cultural heritage and objects of cultural value) (National Institute for Strategic Studies 2019).

Of particular note are the manifold corruption risks inherent in the operation of cultural heritage protection agencies in Ukraine and government policies in this sphere. The public associations Together Against Corruption and Anti-Corruption Headquarters named among such risks, for example, destruction of immovable objects of cultural heritage for the benefit of developers and improper cataloguing and monitoring of cultural heritage assets (Together Against Corruption 2020).

Experts of the City and War project also draw attention to various systemic problems plaguing cultural heritage protection in Ukraine, generally along the above lines. They identify first and foremost the following challenges: 1) popular indifference to the preservation of cultural heritage; 2) lack of a unified system of heritage protection and regulatory weakness in this sphere; 3) problems in inventorying and monitoring the vast range of cultural heritage assets; 4) excessive bureaucratization and lack of transparency in the operation of cultural heritage protection agencies; 5) insufficient funding and limited production of new specialists; 6) poor state of technical equipment; 7) lack of due attention on the part of the government to issues of cultural heritage protection; 8) lack of state programs for digitization of cultural heritage, and more (CityFace 2024a).

For instance, Olena Tytova, member of the Ukrainian National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites and the National Union of Local Historians of Ukraine and head of the Center for Cultural Heritage Studies at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and UTOPIK (2003–20), notes that «[I]n general, the domain of culture [in Ukraine – Ye. Rachkov] has always in fact been a problem area. Like, again, I don't like to talk about money, about funding, but it's hard to do anything without it. Yes, the public is a great thing, activists are a great thing, but there still needs to be a base. Yes, the basis for this work, in order to do useful things. But you

and I both know very well that culture [in Ukraine – Ye. Rachkov] has always been funded residually» (translated from Ukrainian) (Tytova 2023a).⁴

A similar view is expressed by Viktor Dvornikov – architect-restorer, public activist, and member of the National Union of Architects of Ukraine: «And if we talk about the system of protection, then, probably, the issue was the insufficient funding of this field. We know that every regional council has a cultural heritage protection department. And people usually work there not because it's their dream come true. That is, it's either volunteers working there, or people who have nowhere else to go to work, because it's minimum wage, and there is just no technical equipment for this work» (translated from Ukrainian) (Dvornikov 2023a).

Kateryna Kublytska, practicing architect-restorer, public activist, and member of the Save Kharkiv initiative group, in her turn stresses the problematic legal aspects of cultural heritage protection in Ukraine: «There are so many gaps, so many points written up [at the legislative level – Ye. Rachkov] that need to be refined, developed further. Some things the law passes down to the local protection departments. And because of this, different approaches arose in different regions around Ukraine. That is, there is no common unified policy, there is no common approach at all to solving the problems [in the protection of Ukraine's immovable cultural heritage – Ye. Rachkov]» (translated from Ukrainian) (Kublytska 2024).

Wartime challenges to cultural heritage protection in Ukraine

As already noted, the Russo-Ukrainian War has inflicted significant damage and destruction on the cultural heritage and cultural infrastructure of Ukraine. A wealth of information about damaged and destroyed assets, with varying degrees of verification, can be found in the public domain: 1) official data from regional and municipal cultural heritage protection departments, regional administrations, and the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine;⁵ 2) verified data from international organizations, such as

⁴ All translations are by the author unless noted otherwise.

⁵ For example, according to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine,

UNESCO;⁶ and 3) data collected by public initiatives that work with government institutions to establish systematic monitoring of the state of cultural heritage sites.⁷ It should be taken into account that the country's cultural heritage continues to suffer losses, especially in the territories still occupied by Russian troops (in particular, there are risks of theft of cultural valuables, their removal to Russia, illegal repair and restoration work, and more). In addition, it is virtually impossible to ensure proper protection of cultural heritage in areas where hostilities are ongoing.

Since the start of the Russian invasion, cataloguing and monitoring war-related damage and destruction of cultural heritage assets has become one of the primary tasks in heritage protection. Opinions of respondents regarding the effectiveness of the existing practices in this area are divided. For example, Yaroslav Likholyetov, head of the Kharkiv Municipal Center for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage UTOPIK and researcher at the Kharkiv Scientific and Methodological Center for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, notes that «[n]ow under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy there is this government agency – the Ukrainian State Institute of Cultural Heritage. These days, they are probably the first to accept the challenge among us specialists, this is Kyiv, the city of Kyiv. And they... travel all over Ukraine and [...] personally record destruction and, damage to cultural heritage sites» (Likholyetov 2022). According to Viktor Dvornikov, however, ««[t]hey [specialists of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine – Ye. Rachkov] do monitoring only from open sources [...]. I'm involved in this work sometimes with local, with regional heritage protection agencies. I know that they don't visit the sites, they have neither the resources nor established guidelines, how this should work. Like, this kind of work is not being done, that is, everything hinges on individual public initiatives» (translated from Ukrainian) (Dvornikov 2023b). Project experts also emphasize that

during the period from 24 February 2022 to July 2024, 1,096 cultural heritage sites were damaged or destroyed in Ukraine (MCIP 2024a).

6 In addition, as of 31 July 2024, UNESCO confirmed damage to 432 cultural heritage sites in Ukraine since 24 February 2022 (UNESCO 2024).

7 For instance, the HeMo: Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab initiative recorded 784 damaged or destroyed cultural heritage sites as of 17 January 2024 (HEMO 2024).

official numbers on damaged or destroyed cultural heritage assets are often lower than monitoring data from public initiatives (Kublytska 2024).

According to several respondents, the state apparatus of cultural heritage protection was insufficiently prepared for the challenges of war and functioning in emergency situations. Examples include various museums, archives, and libraries whose collections were not evacuated to safety and suffered damage or were looted by the invaders. Thus Pavlo Kravchuk, chief specialist of the Department of Arts, Education, and Cultural Affairs at Zaporizhzhia City Council's Department of Culture and Tourism, notes in his interview: «Here we must understand that, in fact, the system of agencies for the protection of cultural heritage and, I want to stress, historical and cultural patrimony [...] it was uncontrollable in the pre-war times. Like, controllability was lost completely [after 24 February 2022 – Ye. Rachkov]. As an example, we can look at the Melitopol Museum of Local History, where even on the day of the invasion there was no order to evacuate the valuable collection of gold ornaments of the Scythians, Sarmatians, like, the famous Hun diadem. All this is lost at present» (translated from Ukrainian) (Kravchuk 2022).

Many respondents state that the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 came as a terrible shock to them, and that there were no clear instructions and necessary resources to ensure the safety of cultural heritage. For example, Olha Bulhakova and Olha Nahorniuk, staff members at the M. S. Hrushevsky Odesa Regional Universal Science Library, describe the start of the full-scale war as follows: «We were devastated. We didn't even know what to do, we came to the library, but the military administration had not been set up yet. Our state administration and department of culture have not issued any orders. We came and looked at each other, just talking about what to do. Towards the end of the day an order came, because we have a very important strategic site here – the abandoned library building. And so on for a few days, until 1 March, like, we were at home and working only on the phone. This is how the war started at our library. Then, we got together and started thinking about how to work in a state of war» (translated from Ukrainian) (Bulhakova, Nahorniuk 2022). Oleksandr Starik, Acting Director of the Dmytro Yavornytsky Dnipro National Museum of History, also observes that state cultural institutions were not prepared to function in emergency situations: «I don't think I will reveal any secrets if I say that, as

such, we, like many museums, had no training for a situation like that. That is, there were no specific instructions on how to act, no evacuation plans had been worked out. And what's more, those plans that we did have earlier, they envisioned evacuation to the east, that is, we were to evacuate towards our enemy. So, of course, basically everything was left for the museum staff, to their discretion, what needed to be done. And literally from the start of the large-scale military aggression the expositions were taken apart. The artifacts of the main collection were carefully hidden, and, in principle, everything was done to ensure maximum protection, maximum removal of artifacts» (translated from Ukrainian) (Starik 2023).

As a result of mass shelling and bombing campaigns, many cultural institutions in Ukraine suffered serious damage. One example is the historic building of the V. H. Korolenko Kharkiv State Science Library – an architectural landmark of local significance. In March 2022, a blast wave destroyed the heating system, damaged the roof of the building and the plaster of the ceilings, and blew out the skylight, windows, internal doors, and more. The library's director Natalia Petrenko states that «[A]s a result of all the damage caused, the library collections, first and foremost as a significant component of the State Library Holdings of Ukraine, are under threat. We cannot currently ensure optimal conditions for their storage. The library collections today number more than 7 million items. [...] There were no direct hits or damage to the collections. But for almost 17 months already they have been stored in improper conditions: the temperature and humidity regime, the light, sanitary, and security regimes are violated. In the first days after the shelling, because of the absence of windows, dust and precipitation were getting into the library spaces, which negatively affects the physical basis of the documents. And accordingly, the biggest challenge for us was to immediately close all window openings and somehow secure the buildings [...]» (translated from Ukrainian) (Petrenko 2023).

Staff members at cultural institutions often risked their lives saving artifacts and collections under fire, dismantling permanent exhibitions and moving their contents to safe locations. Here, for example, is how Olha Soshnikova, Acting Director of the M. F. Sumtsov Kharkiv Museum of History, describes the first days of the full-scale Russian invasion: «I also stayed at the museum. 24/7 we did our duty – we did everything we had to hide – because we have a huge collection» (translated from Ukrainian) (Soshnikova 2023).

It should be noted that many cultural institutions in eastern and southern Ukraine still have not resumed full operation on the pre-invasion scale. Some of them are closed to the public and offer limited or no online access. Many skilled museum, archival, and library staff have been either forced to leave for safer areas and work remotely or made redundant due to cuts in state funding (CityFace 2024a).

Strategies for the safeguarding of cultural heritage in wartime

To ensure the safety of Ukraine's immovable cultural heritage sites from Russian shelling and bombing, some monuments and historic buildings (especially in large cities, such as Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, Kharkiv, and others) were reinforced with protective structures and coverings made of fire-resistant materials, sandbags, plywood, and so forth. The relatively quick installation of such structures became possible thanks to collaboration between public initiatives (including the volunteer movement), Ukrainian business, government agencies, and international organizations in the field of cultural heritage protection.⁸ Numerous architects and architecture firms also came forward with projects for securing objects of immovable cultural heritage. Thus, Balbek Bureau, at the request of volunteers and in partnership with the Alliance of Restorers of Historic Buildings of Ukraine and Department of Cultural Heritage Protection of the Kyiv City State Administration, proposed in April 2022 a system for protecting monuments from war-related damage under the name "RE: Ukraine Monuments" (Balbek Bureau 2022; Lviv Heritage Bureau 2022).

Experts of the City and War project stress the importance of the existing measures to protect immovable cultural heritage assets but also insist that much more needs to be done in this area, and more reliable methods need to be found. Viktor Dvornikov, for instance, states in his interview: «Unfortunately, I think that all these measures, that are being done, what we see in the streets, they are not effective. Because we see the outcome of any

⁸ The importance of consolidating the efforts of government agencies, business, the public, volunteers, and other actors to ensure proper protection of Ukraine's cultural heritage during the war is also stressed by the experts interviewed for the City and War project (CityFace 2024a).

missile strike, and no bags, no plywood constructions or whatnot, they are not able to protect, even in part, not able to protect the sites or their elements or sculpture. Currently in Kharkiv, we see only examples, right, when sculptures are protected. Maybe that covering, that was made for the Shevchenko monument [...] – it's a decent stab at it, maybe. And in principle it's unlikely to protect from a direct impact, but at least from flying fragments, I think, this is very good defense put up there. But in other cases, it seems to me, like, it's more of a case of populism. That is, we see efforts of the local government, I am not talking about Kharkiv now, it's probably more about Lviv, where some reinforcements and protection for sculptures have also been done in the main square. Well, they have more of a kind of, maybe, moral protection than physical, so I think this is not effective. Active protection is more effective – that is, by the military» (translated from Ukrainian) (Dvornikov 2023a).

Another important problem is the lack of a clear legal framework and methodological guidelines for working with war-damaged or destroyed cultural heritage assets in Ukraine. Several interviewees observe that state and municipal agencies responsible for dealing with the consequences of enemy shelling and bombing often do not understand the specifics of working with cultural heritage. For example, valuable structural remains and decorative elements of damaged buildings have often been thrown away with other debris, complicating future restoration work (Dvornikov 2023a). As noted by Kateryna Kublytska, «[t]he war has been going on in our country since 2014. Accordingly, sites have been suffering damage since 2014 and have had direct hits and suffered from the effects of blast waves. In all this time, no document, no regulation, nor any methodological guidelines have been developed. No guidelines have been developed for municipalities with historic sites, how to act at all when a site's been hit, and how to deal with it. No simplified procedures for the immediate stabilization of sites have been developed. And this slows down work with artifacts a lot. Because if it's an ordinary site, without status, you can react very promptly and you can stabilize it somehow, conserve it. But in the case of sites that are architectural landmarks, there is still a bureaucratic hell that you need to go through to do something with the site» (translated from Ukrainian) (Kublytska 2024).

Notably, experts of the National Institute for Strategic Studies have also given attention to problems of safeguarding Ukraine's cultural heritage during

the Russo-Ukrainian War. In 2023, the institute released an analytical report on “Cultural Heritage and National Security”, in which cultural heritage was identified as a key factor in the unity of Ukrainian society, strengthening of Ukrainian civic identity, and further sustainable democratic development. Among other things, the authors argued that a strategy for the protection of Ukraine’s cultural heritage should be developed at the national level; it should be based on international approaches to the preservation and management of cultural heritage and should become a component of the postwar recovery plan for Ukraine (Potapenko et al. 2023: 4, 43).

Digital technologies and cultural heritage protection in wartime

Since the 1990s, there have been sporadic attempts to employ digital technologies in the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine. But it was the full-scale Russian invasion that spurred the development of a new national ecosystem of cultural heritage. First and foremost, it presupposes the creation of electronic catalogues of cultural heritage and the digitization of cultural valuables (Horlach 2022). Work continues today, for instance, on the “State Register of Immovable Monuments of Ukraine” and the state electronic inventory of cultural valuables “Register of Museum Holdings of Ukraine”. In addition, many research initiatives that appeared in the aftermath of 24 February 2022 propose to compile digital archives of Ukraine’s movable (mainly museum, archival, and library collections) and immovable (mainly monuments and historic buildings) cultural heritage. Digital technologies (databases, interactive maps, and other forms) are also widely used today to inventory war-damaged and destroyed cultural heritage assets (Rachkov 2023).

Replying to the question about the use of digital technologies in the preservation and popularization of Ukraine’s cultural heritage during the war, the experts of the City and War project focus heavily on the advantages of these technologies, almost or completely ignoring the disadvantages.⁹ As Kateryna Kublytska puts it, for instance, «[i]n my eyes, it’s only advantages [from using

⁹ On the advantages, threats, and challenges inherent in the digitization of cultural heritage, see (ReHERIT 2024).

digital technologies to help preserve architectural heritage – Ye. Rachkov], there are almost no disadvantages. Right now, like, we use 3D scanning to inventory sites that have suffered direct damage because of armed military aggression. This helps to make a record of the site quickly, measure it, and then even get monitoring results with the condition of the site» (translated from Ukrainian) (Kublytska 2024).

Other respondents also dwell on the importance of using digital technologies in the field of cultural heritage protection during the war. For example, Ievgeniia Gubkina, architect, public activist, and researcher specializing in modernist architecture, notes that «[a]gain, in the situation constantly that we can lose these heritage sites, the better they are recorded and digitized, the more it will give us the chance to restore these sites in the future, to have at least some knowledge of these sites. And again, another aspect of it all [of the use of digital technologies – Ye. Rachkov]. Coming back to the tribunal and to bringing to justice those who are destroying these sites [the prosecution of Russian war crimes – Ye. Rachkov], this will enable us then to present these data in court, because it's precisely part of the documentation and evidence base for what this site had been like before it was destroyed. So, it is highly important and during the war it is even more important» (translated from Ukrainian) (Gubkina 2023).

In her turn, Valentina Kholodok, Director of the Regional Communal Institution “Kharkiv Organizational and Methodological Center for Tourism,” observes that the importance of utilizing digital technologies in cultural heritage protection not only increases during the war, but also is in keeping with the global trends: «The global practice of preservation and future reproduction of historical and cultural heritage, the use of augmented reality technologies in tours, the virtualization of museum exhibits – all of it becomes even more relevant in the conditions of war. Because it is with the help of such technologies that it is possible to restore at least in virtual reality those destroyed tourist sites, either burned down or smashed to pieces» (translated from Ukrainian) (Kholodok 2023).

Among the problems plaguing digital technology use in cultural heritage protection in Ukraine, the respondents named, first and foremost, 1) the human factor; 2) sporadic and uncoordinated process of digitization of cultural heritage assets; 3) lack of necessary technical equipment; 4) absence of

specialized government programs and agencies; 5) insufficient funding; 6) lack of digitalization specialists on the ground, and more. (Buhaichenko 2023; Dvornikov 2023b; Gubkina 2023; Muravska 2023; Tytova 2023b).

Conclusions

Interviews with experts collected as part of the “City and War” project are a valuable source for the study of the pre-war development, current state, and future prospects of cultural heritage protection in Ukraine. The interviewees share important reflections on several systemic problems in the protection of Ukraine’s cultural heritage, including those that existed before the Russian invasion and have been exacerbated by the war. For example, many experts note that, both in 2014 and 2022, the state apparatus of cultural heritage protection proved ill-prepared to meet the challenges of war and function in emergency situations. According to some interviewees, the lack of a clear legal framework and methodological guidelines for working with war-damaged and destroyed cultural heritage assets also remains an important issue.

The range of pressing wartime issues in cultural heritage protection identified by the project experts is broad, and there is disagreement among the interviewees about, for instance, the effectiveness of the existing forms of inventorying and monitoring war-damaged or destroyed cultural heritage assets, as well as the sufficiency and reliability of the methods used to secure monuments and historic buildings against bombing and shelling. However, virtually all experts agree that most initiatives to preserve the cultural heritage of Ukraine have become possible thanks to close partnership between public associations (the volunteer movement), Ukrainian business, government institutions, and international organizations in the field of cultural heritage protection. Similarly, the respondents generally agree on the importance of using digital technologies to help protect and preserve cultural heritage in wartime. They mostly focus on the advantages of these technologies, glossing over the threats and challenges inherent in the digitization of cultural heritage.

Overall, engaging with the expert community and putting together this body of interviews has convinced the City and War project team that cultural experts should more actively publicize their perspectives on pressing problems

in cultural heritage protection and strive to communicate their views clearly to the public. In addition, there is need for effective collaboration between cultural experts and other social actors involved in the preservation and re-thinking of Ukraine's cultural heritage. It is important that experts not only respond to social demand but also take a more active part in the public debate surrounding heritage, and to a certain extent guide the public opinion. In the end, experts should have a greater role in the development of new strategies for working with cultural heritage in today's Ukraine.

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