Workshop 'Heritage and Sustainability'

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Recovery of Ukrainian cultural heritage in the context of the full-scale war: perspectives in light of the global changes

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces in February 2022 onwards is a tragedy, first and foremost, for the people of Ukraine. The invasion illustrates the importance of intersecting and diverse interdisciplinary perspectives on territory, politics, and governance within and beyond Ukraine and Russia (Dodds et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the current war is not only about the mentioned dimensions. This armed conflict has already demolished a tremendous number of historical, cultural, and architectural heritage sites of Ukraine, and the damage from that is hardly calculatable due to the still ongoing processes of hostilities. The current brief aims to shed more light on the problem of heritage destruction and the need for its restoration, given the conditions of the enormous crisis.

Ukrainian Cultural Heritage destructions: state of play

The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine calculated that 1946 objects of the cultural heritage of Ukraine were damaged or destroyed in the period from February 24, 2022, to February 25, 2024. Among them, 118 are monuments of national significance, 653 are of local significance, and 64 are newly discovered. In particular, architectural monuments include 256 objects, architecture and urban planning – 246, history – 199, architecture, history – 32, monumental art – 19, urban planning– 17, archeology – 20, architecture and urban planning history – 37, urban planning - 5, science and technology - 2, garden and park art - 1, architecture and urban planning, monumental art - 1, architecture, monumental art – 1 (Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, 2024). In general, cultural infrastructure suffered the greatest losses and damages in Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Kyiv, and the city of Kyiv, Mykolaiv, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia regions. As of the end of February 2024, almost the entire territory of Luhansk and significant parts of the territories of Zaporizhzhya, Donetsk, and Kherson regions are still under temporary occupation, which makes it impossible to calculate the exact number of cultural infrastructure objects damaged during hostilities and occupation.

The cultural sites of Ukraine as material objects are evidence of the historical formation of the Ukrainian people. The Ukrainian nation is part of the world's cultural heritage and therefore is subject to preservation and protection from destruction or damage.
The cultural values of Ukraine are located, in particular, in museums, galleries, nature reserves, libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions throughout the territory of Ukraine, including in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, where they are periodically damaged or destroyed, in particular as a result of armed aggression (Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, 2024).

Ukraine is a party to the Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict dated May 14, 1954, according to Article 3 of which the High Contracting Parties undertake to prepare, even in peacetime, the protection of cultural property located on their own territory from the possible consequences of an armed conflict, taking such measures as they deem necessary (Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 1954).

Additionally, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) together with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine prepared the "Emergency Red List of Cultural Objects at Risk - Ukraine" (Red List of Cultural Objects at Risk in Ukraine, 2022).

On June 28, 2022, ICOM and the Department of Cultural Heritage of the Ukrainian Ministry announced plans to create a Red List. During this time, experts from 11 museums across Ukraine collaborated with the ICOM Heritage Protection Department to research and prepare the specified list of endangered cultural values.
The list presents the categories of cultural values of Ukraine that are under threat of theft, looting, and illegal export and consists of 53 types of objects belonging to 7 categories - archeology, books, and manuscripts, numismatics, as well as folk, religious, applied, and artistic art. The wide variety of presented objects emphasizes the rich, ancient, and diverse cultural heritage of Ukraine - from the Scythians to the avant-garde of the 20th century.

Where Ukraine must improve in order to advance with the preservation of cultural heritage in the conditions of emergency? Outlook of a Ukrainian scholar

According to experts and practitioners in the field of cultural heritage protection, for an effective response to emergencies in Ukraine, first of all, it is necessary:

- develop a legal framework to guarantee real, not fictitious, security of cultural heritage sites and museum staff;
- identify and eliminate legal restrictions and define areas of responsibility and competence of central and local authorities and management;
- rethink the role of cultural heritage experts in periods of civil unrest and armed conflict, given that international law cannot function de facto in many situations;
- find the right balance between diplomacy and reality, patriotism and professional ethics in emergency situations, while maintaining openness to the public;
- learn to conduct a dialogue in times of geopolitical games and in situations when colleagues have different views or support opposite sides of the conflict;
- introduce centralized digital control systems of the inventory of cultural values;
- start digital mapping of cultural values and create lists of important cultural objects for the Ministry of Defense in order to avoid damage to them and ensure systematic control of their condition;
- study international experience in the field of cultural heritage protection, practice systematic consultations with foreign partners, and conduct training courses on emergency response;
- create a network of cultural heritage expert teams for rapid response during a complex crisis;
- promote the development of the activities of the Ukrainian National Committee of the Blue Shield by involving communities and professionals in it and coordinating actions with the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield and national committees;
- to contribute to the deployment of the activities of the national ICCROM system created in Ukraine;
- to ratify the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention (Poshyvailo, 2016).

What are the ways of cultural heritage preservation applied within Ukrainian conditions?

1) "Blue shield" and sand armor.

The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy actively consults with UNESCO on methods of preserving cultural objects during wartime. The most valuable sights are marked with the international "Blue Shield" sign, which indicates an increased protection status. The destruction of such objects is a direct war crime against cultural heritage.
Many of the city's monuments are now dressed in armor made of fireproof materials, plywood shields, and sandbags. This is how the authorities try to protect them from damage that can be caused by fire, debris, or an explosive wave (Ukrainian Centre of Civic Monitoring and Control, 2022).
Ukraine received part of the equipment for the preservation of Ukrainian monuments, in particular fire-fighting equipment, from Poland. According to the Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Lviv, Poland currently has a special program that collects funds for the needs of the Ukrainian cultural sphere.
It is worth noting that some Ukrainian museums managed to take the most valuable exhibits to safer places. For others, a special Heritage Rescue Headquarters was created, the work of which is coordinated by UNESCO, the International Council of Museums, the International Center for Research, Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Values, and other international organizations. With the support of the headquarters, the National Museum of the Revolution of Dignity developed instructions for colleagues on how to act in wartime (Museum of the Revolution of Dignity, 2022).

2) Digital passports and 3D models

Unfortunately, not all cultural objects can be evacuated to bomb shelters or covered with sand. Architectural monuments remain under threat of shelling. But specialists found a way to save them - in electronic form, recording the exact dimensions and appearance. In this case, even if enemy fire damages the structure, it will be possible to rebuild it.
Such projects have already been launched in Kyiv and Lviv. In Lviv, digital passports of historical buildings are made using laser scanning. Architects have already digitized the Church of Olga and Elizaveta and other churches, the Lozynsky Palace, the Church of the Poor Clares, and others. In addition, a platform for collecting digital 3D copies of monuments and important historical buildings was initiated by the Danish organization Blue Shield Denmark together with UNESCO. Lithuania and Poland also declared their support for the digitization of Ukrainian cultural heritage ((Ukrainian Centre of Civic Monitoring and Control, 2022).

<u>International programs of restoration in light of the sustainability need</u>

UNDP’s recovery emphasis in Ukraine is centered on green recovery and sustainability. Repairs to infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, and housing, when undertaken in partnership with UNDP, are designed to meet inclusivity, environmental sustainability, and energy efficiency standards. These measures, such as improving heating systems and reducing energy use, promote environmental sustainability and produce cost savings (UNDP, 2023).

The three-year international European cultural project "UREHERIT. Architects for heritage in Ukraine: recreating identity and memory". Within its framework, European and Ukrainian heritage experts, architects, designers, engineers, representatives of local authorities, and communities of Ukrainian cities will work on the topics of protection and restoration of Ukrainian cultural heritage (Urban Coalition for Ukraine, 2023).
The project will be implemented by a consortium of 11 organizations: Association of Architects of Lithuania (project coordinator), Architects of Sweden, Federal Chamber of Architects and Certified Engineers of Austria (BKZT), Institute of Technology and Architecture of the Royal Danish Academy (IBT), Association of Romanian Architects,

National Council of Architects, Planners, Landscape Specialists and Nature Protectors of Italy (CNAPPC), Federal Chamber of German Architects (BAK), Estonian Association of Architects, National Union of Architects of Ukraine, Urban Coalition Ro3kvit, Kharkiv School of Architecture and Council of European Architects as an associate partner.
The program includes research, seminars, public discussions, other events, professional development programs and educational programs for schools of architecture. The project will last 36 months (until April 2026), and its result should be the development of a number of recommendations.

Conclusion

In the conditions of Russian aggression, state policy in the field of cultural heritage becomes a component of the formation of national security. Attacks on cultural sites and their connection with the politics of national identity raise the issue of its protection to the level of a national security problem. International approaches to the preservation of cultural heritage, and theses about its importance in the life of society should be included in the Law of Ukraine "On National Security of Ukraine" and the National Security Strategy of Ukraine.

As the war continues, the number of cultural monuments destroyed or damaged will increase. In addition, Ukrainian authorities do not have full access to information from the temporarily occupied territories. However, even now, when hostilities continue, Ukrainians already make plans to restore everything destroyed and damaged — both with the help of foreign partners and thanks to Ukrainian business. Many cultural heritage sites are currently hidden behind strong protective structures.
Nevertheless, Ukraine would still need several approaches, professionals, and techniques for how cultural heritage could be protected under any circumstances. A mix of scientific/civil society/business/government practices could be an attempt to move in the sustainable direction towards preserving the culture of Ukraine.

Questions to the seminar participants:

1. Which new perspectives could be applied to the sustainable restoration process and skills of people given the Ukrainian realities?
2. International practices you are aware of when it comes to armed conflicts and cultural heritage preservation.

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