

Helena Diakova

Kharkiv Scientific and Methodological Center of the Protection of Cultural Heritage
email: djakova.elena.hnpu@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7767-0756>

Urbanonymy as an Instrument of Commemoration and De-commemoration of the German-Soviet War in Kharkiv

Summary: The article explores the process of commemoration and de-commemoration of the Second World War events in Kharkiv. The study examines how the memory of the German-Soviet War is inscribed into Kharkiv's toponymic landscape and analyses the transformations shaping this commemorative dimension in the present era. The scientific novelty of this publication lies in examining the emergence and consolidation of the memory of individuals and events of the Second World War, particularly its German-Soviet dimension, within the toponymic landscape during the second half of the XX century and the first quarter of the XXI century; in assessing the influence of state normative and legal acts adopted between 2015 and 2025 on the contemporary nomination of urbanonyms; and in advancing hypotheses concerning the prospective trajectories of commemorating the history of 1941–1945 through the renaming of specific toponyms.

Analysing the transformations in Kharkiv's contemporary toponymy, the author concludes the city is undergoing a reformatting of historical memory through the new nomination of urbanonyms. The current authors of state ideology, active proponents of a revised interpretation of Ukraine's history, expect that by renaming objects within the street and road network, they will be able to reshape the commemoration of the German-Soviet War. Over time, this is anticipated to erode the respectful attitude toward that period of the country's past in popular memory and to alter public perceptions of the veterans of that war. An examination of the de-commemoration of the German-Soviet War reveals an intensifying state involvement in the nomination of geographical names. At present, Ukraine has a series of normative legal acts that regulate the narratives to be employed in geographical naming. An analysis of commemoration and de-commemoration in Kharkiv indicates that the formation of the city's new toponymic landscape is significantly influenced by members of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) 'Decolonisation. Ukraine.'

<https://doi.org/10.18778/3071-7779.2026.1.08> — received: 2025-09-25 — verified: 2025-10-21 — accepted: 2026-03-22

135–148

funding information: Kharkiv Scientific and Methodological Center of the Protection of Cultural Heritage — **conflicts of interests:** none
declaration regarding the use of GAI tools: not used — **ethical considerations:** the authors assure of no violations of publication ethics and take full responsibility for the content of the publication — **the percentage share of the author in the preparation of the work is:** [HD 100%]



© by the author, licensee University of Lodz – Lodz University Press, Lodz, Poland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

This organisation seeks to contest and reframe the public memory of those who fought against the Nazis in the ranks of the Red Army during the Second World War, as well as the events that unfolded in the Kharkiv region between 1941 and 1945.

Keywords: World War II, Kharkiv, urbanism, ideology, commemorations, de-commemorations

Introduction

Humanity tends to preserve the memory of pivotal historical events, and those of particular symbolic weight are often inscribed into geographical names. This dynamic is evident in the commemoration of the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945. Across numerous cities of the former Soviet Union, streets and avenues were named after Soviet liberators or after events linked to the liberation of settlements from Nazi occupation. Kharkiv, like thousands of other settlements of the former Soviet Union, embodies this commemorative practice in its toponymic landscape.

The aim of this study is to examine how the memory of the German-Soviet War has been embedded in Kharkiv's toponymic landscape and to explore the disruptions affecting this commemorative aspect in the present day. The scientific novelty of this publication lies in investigating the emergence and consolidation of the memory of individuals and events from the Second World War, particularly its German-Soviet dimension, through toponymy in the second half of the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st century. Additionally, it aims to identify the impact of state normative and legal acts adopted between 2015 and 2025 on the contemporary naming of urbanonyms.

This article is based on the minutes from the sessions of the City Council deputies covering the period from 2010 to 2024.¹ It also references decrees issued by the mayor² and regional authorities,³ all of which can be found on the official websites of the respective administrations.

To explain the reasons for the renaming of urbanonyms, the study draws on the Methodological Materials for the Commemoration of the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation and the 70th Anniversary of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War (8–9 May 2015), published by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, as well as the relevant laws of Ukraine: On the Legal Status and Honouring of the Memory of the Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the XX Century, On the Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in the Second World War of 1939–1945, and On the Condemnation

1 Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 156/16; Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 437/23; Rishennia Kharkivskoi mis-koi Rady.

2 Rozporyadzhennya no. 120.

3 Rozporyadzhennya no. 513V.

and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and the Decolonisation of Toponymy. The latter two are commonly referred to as the laws on decommunisation and derussification.

The author explored certain aspects of the subject in her own publications. Notably, she contributed to the volume *Kharkiv: A Reference Guide to Names: 7,000 Streets, Squares, Parks, Districts...*, which provides systematic, reference-style descriptions of the city's streets, including their origins, naming and subsequent renaming.⁴ Additionally, in her article *The Reflection of the History of the Great Patriotic War in the Toponymy of Kharkiv*, the author analysed the chronology and mechanisms by which elements of the street network were named to commemorate the events of the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945.⁵ Contemporary changes in urbanonyms have also been documented by several current journalists.⁶ Their publications provide detailed reports on the proposed modifications to street names and consistently follow the process of implementing the relevant legislative acts.

Data Analysis and Results

The first urbanonyms related to the stated theme appeared shortly after the end of the war. In the course of rebuilding the city, the inhabitants of Kharkiv established streets named *Armiiska* (Army Street), *Artilleriiska* (Artillery Street), *Hvardiiska* (Guards Street), *Serzhantska* (Sergeant Street), *Ofiterska* (Officer Street), and others.

Subsequently, a number of additional Streets were established, including *Kharkivskyykh Dyvizii* (Kharkiv Divisions Street, 1963), *Hvardiitsiv-Zaliznychnykh* (Guards Railwaymen Street), *23-ho Serpnia* (23rd of August Street, 1968), *Heroiv Stalingradu* (Heroes of Stalingrad Avenue, 1982).⁷ These urbanonyms serve to commemorate significant episodes in the history of Kharkiv connected with the events of that war.

Hvardiitsiv-Zaliznychnykh (Guards Railwaymen Street) was named so due to its proximity to the Railway Administration. On 1 July 1941, the 28th Railway Brigade departed for the front from this location. By the end of the war, the unit bore the official title First Guards Railway Warsaw Order of Kutuzov Brigade, which had distinguished itself in combat operations in Ukraine, Poland and Germany.

The 'Heroes of Stalingrad' narrative bears a direct relevance to the Kharkiv region. Within historical scholarship, it is widely acknowledged that the Battles of Stalingrad and the Caucasus (1942–1943) were the consequence of the Red Army's defeat in the spring and summer of 1942 in the Kharkiv region and in Crimea.⁸

4 Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 2011.

5 Diakova E. 2010, 327–330.

6 See: *Ponad 500 vulic...*

7 *Ponad 500 vulic*; Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 2011, 68, 69, 84, 334.

8 Antill P. 2007, 29.

In the aftermath of the victory at Stalingrad, Soviet forces advanced westward, undertaking the liberation of Ukrainian territories from German occupation. Between January and March 1943, combat operations extended into the Kharkiv region. At the outset, these engagements proved favourable for the Red Army, and on 16 February, Kharkiv was liberated for the first time. However, on 19 February, German troops launched a counteroffensive of the battle to their advantage. It was only on 25 March that the Red Army succeeded in re-establishing stability along the front line.

Fierce fighting took place near the villages of Taranivka and Sokolove. On 2 March, a platoon under the command of Lieutenant Petro Shyronin assumed the defence near the railway junction close to Taranivka. The unit successfully blocked the advance of 25 tanks and mechanised infantry. In the course of repelling repeated assaults, the guardsmen destroyed 16 tanks and assault guns and inflicted nearly 100 enemy casualties. Twenty-five soldiers received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for their actions.⁹

On 23 August 1943, Kharkiv was finally liberated from German occupation,¹⁰ and the event provided the basis for commemorating this victory through the naming of a street. Upon the completion of military operations in the region, ten divisions that had distinguished themselves in the battles for the city were conferred the honorific title 'Kharkivski' (Named after Kharkiv). Thus, the chrononyms listed above bear direct relevance to the history of the Kharkiv region and were intended to preserve the memory of the events that took place in the area between 1941 and 1943.

In the Soviet period and during the years of Ukraine's independence (up to 2014), the majority of streets within this thematic category — 115 in total — were of an anthropological character, that is, they were named after individuals who had demonstrated courage and heroism either at the front or in the enemy's rear. A number of toponyms commemorated Heroes of the Soviet Union, including pilot Mykola Gastello, General Lev Dovator, commander of the 17th Rifle Brigade of the NKVD troops Ivan Tankopii and junior lieutenant of the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Infantry Battalion Otakar Jaroš. Others were dedicated to commanders of fronts and armies involved in the liberation of Kharkiv from Nazi occupation, such as Marshals Ivan Konev, Rodion Malinovskyi, and Pavlo Rybalko. Further examples honouring partisans and underground activists, among them Ivan Bakulin, head of the Kharkiv underground regional committee of the Communist Party and Oleksandr Zubarev and Halyna Nikitina, leaders of the Kharkiv underground regional Komsomol committee.¹¹ Thus, through the naming of elements of the street and road network, the residents of Kharkiv were consistently reminded of those who had fought against the Nazis both

⁹ Khandozhko R., Lastouski A., Sklokina I. 2012, 39–45.

¹⁰ Erickson J. 1983, 121.

¹¹ Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 21, 67, 92, 111, 140, 183, 211, 276, 310–311, 366, etc.

at the front and in the occupied territories, as well as of the heroic deeds of Red Army soldiers and commanders, partisans, and underground activists.

Substantial shifts in the interpretation of the events and participants of the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945 took place in 2014, coinciding with the change of political leadership in Ukraine. The first legislative acts to redefine approaches to the war were adopted on 9 April 2015: On the Legal Status and Honouring of the Memory of the Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the XX Century, and On the Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in the Second World War of 1939–1945.¹² These laws placed Red Army soldiers on the same level as Ukrainian nationalists and fighters of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). In doing so, the laws effectively blurred the dividing line between representatives of opposing sides, individuals who had confronted one another on the battlefield.

An additional landmark document influencing the interpretation of the events of 1941–1945 was the 'Methodological Materials for the Commemoration of the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation and the 70th Anniversary of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War' (8–9 May 2015), issued by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (Ukrainskyi instytut natsionalnoi pam'iaty, UINM) on 30 April 2015. From that moment, it became official in Ukraine to refer to the conflict not as the Great Patriotic War, but as the German-Soviet War or the Second World War.¹³ Although these methodological guidelines were not directly concerned with toponymic change, they clearly signalled a reorientation of the state ideology regarding the events and participants of the war. For scholars examining the naming and renaming of urbanonyms, it was evident that the new ideological framework would necessitate transformations in the nomenclature of the street and road network.

The first state legal act to mandate changes in geographical names was the Law of Ukraine: On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and the Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols. This law established the requirement to alter toponyms, with the explicit caveat that this did not apply to 'the names connected with resistance and the expulsion of Nazi occupiers from Ukraine.'¹⁴ In other words, the document specified that anthroponyms associated with individuals who had participated in the expulsion of the Nazis from Ukraine were exempt from renaming.¹⁵ This provision could be interpreted as indicating that the names of the street and road network commemorating Soviet servicemen who had participated in the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945 were not subject to change. To ensure clarity in the implementation of the law, the staff of the UINM

12 Zakon Ukrainy no. 314-VIII, no. 25, art.191.

13 Metodichni materiali...

14 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII, art. 1, point 4, subpoint E.

15 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII, art. 1, point 4, subpoint E.

compiled a list of individuals falling within the scope of the decommunisation legislation, thereby designating the hodononyms commemorating them as subject to remaining.

The register also included the name of Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgii Zhukov, who had long been regarded as the ‘Marshal of Victory’, but was included on the grounds that he had ‘distinguished himself by numerous orders for the execution of Red Army soldiers and by engaging in acts of looting in the occupied territories of Germany.’¹⁶ The name of Georgii Zhukov entered the toponymic landscape of Kharkiv in February 1990. At the public hearings on urbanonymic renamings held on 10 November 2015, the residents of the district where the avenue is located voted by a majority to retain the Marshal’s name. Nevertheless, pursuant to the order issued on 17 May 2016, by Ihor Rainin, then Head of the Kharkiv Regional Administration, the avenue was renamed in honour of Petro Hryhorenko.¹⁷

The decision provoked considerable discontent among part of Kharkiv’s residents, including the city’s then mayor, Hennadii Kernes. He filed a lawsuit seeking the annulment of the order of the regional administration, arguing that a majority of participants at the public hearings had opposed the renaming. This initiated protracted litigation between the municipal authorities and the UINM, which consistently advocated for the renaming of the avenue. The legal dispute continued until September 2020, when Kernes contracted COVID-19 and subsequently passed away in December, thereby bringing the proceedings to a close. The renaming in honour of Petro Hryhorenko ultimately prevailed. Hryhorenko himself had been a participant in the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945 and pursued a military career after the war, attaining the rank of major general. From the 1960s onward, however, he was subjected to persecution for his criticism of the Soviet regime. His connection to Kharkiv was limited to a two-year period of study at the Technological Institute (now the National Technical University Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute).¹⁸ It is noteworthy that since the 2010s, the public image of Georgii Zhukov in Ukrainian mass media has been constructed almost exclusively in negative terms. This ongoing stream of critical representations has had a profound impact: currently, a significant portion of Ukrainian society views Zhukov unfavourably, characterising him as a corrupt figure and a military commander who showed little regard for the lives of his soldiers.

The year 2015 should be regarded as the starting point for the reconfiguration of collective memory concerning the events of 1941–1945. The systematic demystification of Georgii Zhukov and other military commanders precipitated an erosion of the previously dominant positive remembrance of the war. Within this framework, maintaining

16 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII, art. 1, point 4, subpoint E.

17 Rozporyadzhennya no. 181.

18 *Hryhorenko Petr Hryhorevich*.

thematically related toponyms has become increasingly difficult to justify and legally inconsistent with decommunisation legislation, since the Red Army soldiers fought to restore Soviet authority rather than to establish Ukraine as an independent state.

Notwithstanding the ongoing process of de-commemoration, in 2016, a new anthroponym associated with the Second World War was nonetheless introduced into Kharkiv's urbanonymic landscape: Dzherelnyi Lane was designated in honour of Vanda Binevska, a sniper of the 1st Czechoslovak Battalion who had fought on the territory of Kharkiv in March 1943.¹⁹

An indicator of the declining reverence toward veterans and the events of the German-Soviet War is the launch in 2017 of the online project 'Decommunize Kharkiv'²⁰ by nationalist-oriented youth. The project's primary objective was to monitor the implementation of the decommunisation law.

The large-scale renaming of toponyms acquired renewed momentum with the outbreak of the War of Independence of Ukraine²¹ on 24 February 2022. In response to the Russian aggression, nationalist-oriented groups began to demand the removal of all geographical names in Ukraine that evoked associations with Russia or its shared history with Ukraine. On 21 March 2023, the Law of Ukraine: On the Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and the Decolonisation of Toponymy was enacted.²² This legislative act established the requirement to replace geographical names, including anthroponyms dedicated to individuals who had 'supported, glorified, or justified Russian imperial policy,'²³ thereby extending its scope to those who had fought for Soviet power during the years 1941–1945.

In Kharkiv, a considerable number of elements of the street and road network were subject to renaming, many of them connected with the German-Soviet War. It was apparent that the simultaneous renaming of all designated urbanonyms was not feasible; consequently, the process was implemented gradually over a two-year period and was formally completed on 24 July 2024.

With the change in the political situation in Ukraine, the members of the online project 'Decommunise Kharkiv' reconstituted themselves as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) 'Decolonisation. Ukraine'. The relatively slow pace of standardising the names of Kharkiv's street and road network provoked dissatisfaction among the organisation's representatives, who sought to accelerate the process of eliminating Russian and Soviet legacies. For this reason, they came to be referred

19 Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 156/16, 4.

20 Alina Alina. 2017.

21 A new term, introduced based on: Zakon Ukrainy no. 4579-IX, chapter 1, article 1, point 1, subpoint 1.

22 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII. no. 65. art. 221.

23 Zakon Ukrainy no. 317-VIII. art. 8, point 6.

to colloquially as ‘decolonisers’, a term by which they will subsequently be designated in this publication. These activists continued to identify urbanonyms for renaming in accordance with the law on decolonisation.

In March 2022, the decolonisers compiled a register comprising 509 elements of Kharkiv’s street and road names network, proposed for remaining, 41 of which were associated with the events and participants of the German-Soviet War.²⁴ The register was published online and subsequently submitted to the City Commission and to the Department for Toponymy and the Protection of the Historical and Cultural Environment²⁵ of the Kharkiv City Executive Committee. Within this thematic category, the decolonisers identified for renaming such urbanonyms as Heroiv Stalingradu (Heroes of Stalingrad), Molodohvardiiska (Young Guard), Hvardiitsiv-Shyronintsiv (Shyronin Guardsmen), Panfilovtsiv (Panfilov’s Men), and 7-ma Hvardiiska Armiia (7th Guards Army), along with 36 additional anthroponyms. The latter group encompassed generals who had commanded forces in the liberation of the Kharkiv region from Nazi occupation, among them — Marshal of Armored Forces Pavlo Rybalko, Colonel General Ivan Managarov, and Colonel General Mykhailo Shumilov — as well as soldiers and officers awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union, including both local residents and those decorated for their actions in battles fought on Kharkiv soil, such as platoon commander Lieutenant Petro Shyronin, writer and journalist Serhii Borzenko and NKVD officer Colonel Ivan Tankopii. The register further incorporated underground activists who had resisted either in Kharkiv or in other regions of the Soviet Union, for example Oleg Koshevoi, the leader of the underground organisation ‘Moloda Hvardiia’ (‘Young Guard’) in Donbas and Lialia Ubiivovk, head of the Poltava underground organisation and a graduate of Kharkiv University.

Finally, the list was inconsistent, including both genuinely distinguished figures and individuals who can be seen as constructs of Soviet propaganda, such as the political commissar Vasily Klochkov (remembered for the phrase later transformed into a slogan, ‘Russia is vast, but there is nowhere to retreat — Moscow is behind us!’) and Sydir Kovpak, one of the leading commanders of the Soviet resistance movement.

The first renaming addressed a designation associated with Moscow, the capital of the Russian Federation: on 11 May 2022, Moskovskyi Avenue was renamed Heroiv Kharkova (Heroes of Kharkiv).²⁶

The city’s mayor, Ihor Terekhov, justified the new designation with the following explanation: ‘By Heroes of Kharkiv one should understand all those who have defended and continue to defend Kharkiv during the war — the army, territorial defence units,

²⁴ *Ponad 500 vulic.*

²⁵ Вони мають однакову назву.

²⁶ Rishennia Kharkivskoi miskoi Rady narodnykh deputativ no. 258/22.

rescuers, medical personnel, volunteers and municipal workers.²⁷ This rationale implied a departure from anthroponyms commemorating participants of earlier military conflicts. Subsequent changes in the nomenclature of the street and road network, however, demonstrated inconsistency of such an interpretation.

Based on the estimates of activists from the NGO (NGO) 'Decolonisation.Ukraine' between 2023 and 2024 a total of 561 toponyms²⁸ were altered in Kharkiv, including a number connected with the events and participants of the German-Soviet War. In the course of this process, streets were either restored to their historical designations or renamed in honour of individuals who had fallen in the War of Independence of Ukraine. For example, Vulytsia Koneva (Konev Street) was reverted to its earlier name, Honcharivska,²⁹ Vulytsia Malynovskoho (Malinovskiy Street) regained its historical designation, Zbroiarska (in Ukrainian, but previously named Oruzheynaya from 1937 to 1968),³⁰ and Prospect Heroiv Stalingradu (Heroes of Stalingrad Avenue) was restored to its prior name commemorating the English poet George Byron. By contrast, Vulytsia Henerala Lva Dovatora (General Lev Dovator street), which had honoured a Hero of the Soviet Union, was renamed to commemorate Valerii Romanovskiy,³¹ a serviceman and historian who was killed in 2023.

Two renamings from this period warrant particular scholarly attention: Vulytsia Hastello (Hastello Street) and Vulytsia Kashuby (Kashuba Street). The former was renamed in honour of Oleksii Naikov.³² A native of Kharkiv, Naikov emigrated to Israel in 1996 and subsequently served in the Israel Defence Forces. On 29 October 1998, while escorting a school bus, he encountered a vehicle laden with explosives driven by members of Hamas. In order to avert the loss of children's lives, Naikov deliberately rammed the terrorist vehicle with his jeep, sacrificing his own life in the process and thereby saving the passengers.³³ This act evokes parallels with the wartime of pilot Nikolai F. Gastello, who, on 26 June 1941, directed his burning aircraft into enemy convoys at the cost of his own life. Thus, from 1951, the street bore the name of a pilot credited with ramming a column of German vehicles in July 1941,³⁴ whereas in 2024 it was renamed in honour of a soldier whose heroism took the analogous form of a vehicular sacrifice. From 1983 onwards, one of Kharkiv's streets bore the name of Lieutenant General Volodymyr Kashuba, Hero of the Soviet Union and former head of the

27 *Harkovchanam ostavili...*

28 M'iasnikova A. 2025.

29 Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 437/23.

30 Rozporyadzhennya no. 120.

31 Rozporyadzhennya no. 513V.

32 Rozporyadzhennya no. 120.

33 Larin Yu. 2023.

34 *Nikolai Gastello*.

Kharkiv Tank School.³⁵ By the order of Mayor Ihor Terekhov of 26 April 2024, the street was renamed in honour of Captain Oleksandr Lavrenko, Hero of Ukraine and alumnus of the Kharkiv Institute of Tank Troops.³⁶ During the Anti-Terrorist Operation in Donbas, Lavrenko commanded a tank company of the 93rd Separate Mechanised Brigade. In 2014, he was killed in action during the battle for the village of Pisky in Donetsk Oblast. The anthroponyms of these streets may be interpreted as thematically consistent: in the first instance, both figures were associated with acts of ramming, whereas in the second, both were tank officers linked to the same tank training institution.

On 6 January 2025, the ‘decolonisers’ expanded their register with additional hononyms, among which those connected to the designated theme included 23rd of August, Hvardiitsiv-Shyronintsiv (Shyronin Guardsmen), Andrii Oschepkov, Oleksandr Zubarev and Hryhorii Rudyk.³⁷ Andrii Oschepkov was posthumously awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union for his actions in August 1943, when, during combat near the settlement Budi outside Kharkiv, he covered the embrasure of a German bunker with his body, thereby enabling his battalion to advance. The full designation of Rudyk Street commemorates Guards Major Hryhorii Opanasovych Rudyk, commander of the 285th Guards Regiment of the 93rd Kharkiv Guards Rifle Division, who was killed during the liberation of Kharkiv from German forces.³⁸ As indicated earlier, Hero of the Soviet Union Oleksandr Zubarev served as head of the Kharkiv underground regional Komsomol committee. The official rationale for the necessity of renaming these streets was not provided; however, it may reasonably be inferred that the decision was motivated by a broader effort to de-commemorate the memory of figures associated with the German-Soviet War.

The case of the 23rd of August carries particular historical significance. The date is traditionally recognised as the day of Kharkiv’s liberation from nazi occupation and, since 1997, has simultaneously served as the city’s official holiday. In the present context, however, the ‘decolonisers’ have called for a revision of the City Day celebration, contending that its observance on this date diverts the public³⁹ from the Day of the National Flag, commemorated in Ukraine on 23 August, and from Independence Day, observed on the following day.

‘Furthermore, 23 August is observed as the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinist Terror (and one might also note, the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition)’, stated Milla Denchuk, co-founder of the project ‘Decolonisation. Ukraine.’ ‘It appears profoundly cynical that in Ukraine this

35 Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 2011, 125–126.

36 Rozporyadzhennya no. 120.

37 *V Harkove...*

38 Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 2011, 274.

39 M’yasnikova A. 2025.

day is framed as a festive occasion, while internationally it is marked by commemorative practices honouring the victims annihilated by Stalin's regime.⁴⁰ In addition, the 'decolonisers' consistently emphasise that Kharkiv's definitive liberation occurred approximately ten days later, in early September. On these grounds, the activists have advocated for the rescheduling of the City Day celebration to a different date.

The activists acknowledge that on 23 August 1943, a red flag was raised as a symbol of victory over the adversary, yet they disregard the fact that the flag was hoisted not on the outskirts, as they claim in their publications and petitions, but in the very centre of the city, on the Derzhprom building, located on Kharkiv's main square. It is true that on that day the city had not been fully liberated and fighting persisted on the outskirts, which, in contemporary terminology, may be described as the 'mopping-up' of the city. Moreover, it should be recalled that in the postwar period, Kharkiv expanded through the incorporation of nearby settlements, which indeed had been liberated somewhat later than the city proper.

It is noteworthy that the 'decolonisers' have left outside the scope of their attention such designations as *Armiiska* (Army Street), *Artyleriiska* (Artillery Street), *Hvardiiska* (Guards Street), *Zviazku* (Signal Corps Street), *Serzhantska* (Sergeants' Street), *Ofiterska* (Officers' Street) and similar examples. These toponyms emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War and likewise bear a direct connection to the events of that period.

The official stance on the history of the German-Soviet War at the higher levels of government remains ambivalent. On the other hand, contemporary attempts have been made to reconfigure its representation, including the substitution of the designation 'Great Patriotic War' with 'German-Soviet War' or 'Second World War.' Nevertheless, emphasis continues to be placed on the fact that Ukraine incurred immense losses in the struggle against Nazism — losses which, it must be underscored, were intrinsically tied to the broader project of restoring Soviet power in Ukraine.

Conclusion

The analysis of urbanonymic transformations indicates that in Kharkiv, the systematic renaming of streets and related toponyms operates as an instrument for the re-configuration of historical memory. Proponents of the prevailing state ideology, who advocate for a revised interpretation of Ukraine's past, anticipate that such changes will gradually reshape the commemoration of the German-Soviet War. It is expected that this process will, over time, attenuate the respectful collective attitude towards this period of the nation's history and reframe public perceptions of its veterans, thereby diminishing the heroic status traditionally ascribed to them.

40 M'yasnikova A. 2025.

At present, a pantheon of new defenders of state sovereignty is in the process of formation in which a central place is assigned to individuals who, in one way or another, engaged in the struggle for Ukraine's independence in the XX century, as well as to those who participated in the ongoing War of Independence of Ukraine. The latter, in accordance with the Law of Ukraine: On the Principles of State Policy of National Memory of the Ukrainian People, is officially recognised as having commenced on 19 February 2024.

Exploring the de-commemoration of the German-Soviet War reveals the growing extent of state intervention in the sphere of geographical nomenclature. Archival evidence concerning the naming and renaming of the street and road network under Soviet rule indicates that such decisions were predominantly taken at the municipal level, albeit under the discernible influence. In present-day Ukraine, by contrast, a series of normative legal acts prescribes which narratives are to be embedded in geographical names and which are to be proscribed. The ideological dimension has thus been formally institutionalised at the legislative level, authorising the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory and other state bodies to intervene directly in the process of naming and renaming, even when doing so contravenes considerations of historical appropriateness.

An analysis of the commemoration and de-commemoration of the German-Soviet War in Kharkiv indicates that members of the NGO 'Decolonisation. Ukraine' play a substantial role in shaping the city's new toponymic landscape. Their activities are directed toward redefining public memory of the Soviet past, which in turn affects the remembrance of those who fought in the ranks of the Red Army during the Second World War, as well as the events that took place in the Kharkiv region between 1941 and 1945.

References

Published works

- Alina Alina [=Shulga Alina]. 2017. *Dekomunizaciya onlajn: u Harkovi zapracyuvav servis proti serpiv ta molotiv* In: *Nakipelo*. 4 serpnja: <https://nakipelo.ua/ru/dekommunizatsiya-onlajn-v-harkove-zarabotal-servis-protiv-serpov-i-molotov>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Antill P. *Stalingrad 1942*. 2007.
- Dekolonizaciya: yak ochistiti prostir vid rosijskogo*. 2023. In: *Ukrainer*. <https://www.ukrainer.net/dekolonizatsiia>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Diakova O. 2010. *Vidobrazhennya istoriyi Velikoyi Vitchiznyanoyi vijni u toponimici Harkova*. In: *Voyenna istoriya Sivershini ta Slobozhanshini*. ed. V.V. Karpova. Kiyiv, 327–330.
- Dmitrieva E., Diakova E., Harchenko N. (eds), 2011. *Harkov: spravochnik po nazvaniyam: 7000 ulic, ploshadej, skverov, rajonov...* Kharkov.

- Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 156/16 vid 24 lyutogo 2016. 4 sesiyi Harkivskoyi miskoyi radi 7 sklikannya Pro vporyadkuvannya najmenuvan ob'ektiv toponimiki. <https://doc.city.kharkiv.ua/uk/profile/document/view/id/647480>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Dodatok 1 do rishennya no. 437/23 vid 18 serpnia 2023. 18 sesiyi Harkivskoyi miskoyi radi 8 sklikannya Pro vporyadkuvannya najmenuvan ob'ektiv toponimiki. <https://doc.city.kharkiv.ua/uk/profile/document/view/id/708533>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Erickson J. 1983. *The Road to Berlin*. London.
- Harkovchanam ostavili chetyre varianta nazvaniya dlya Moskovskogo prospekta. 2022. <https://2day.kh.ua/kharkow/kharkovchane-mogut-predlozhit-novye-nazvaniya-ulicam-kotorye-svyazany-s-rossiey>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Hryhorenko Petr Hryhorevich 1907–1987 general-maior, pravozakhysnyk. 2011. In: *The Online Library of Alexander Belousenko*. <https://vgulage.name/authors/grigorenko-pjotr-grigorevich/>
- Iz-za pereimenovaniya prospekta Zhukova gorsovet Harkova podal v sud na Ukrainiskij institut nacpamyati. 2019. <https://gordonua.com/news/politics/iz-za-pereimenovaniya-prospekta-zhukova-gorsovet-harkova-podal-v-sud-na-ukrainskij-institut-nacpamyati-1459042.html>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Khandozhko R., Lastouski A., Sklokina I. 2012. *Rethinking the Memory of the “Great Patriotic War” from the Local Perspective: Stalinism and the Thaw: 1943–1965*. Kharkiv. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Kotubej-Gerucka O. Vulici Zatisna i Solov'yina, a Zhovtneva — na chest misyacya ‘zhovten.’ Drazhlivi pitannya dekomunizatsiyi i perejmenuvannya. 2022. In: *Suspilne. Kultura*. <https://suspilne.media/culture/285781-vulici-zatisna-i-solovina-a-zovtneva-na-cest-misaca-zovten-drazhlivi-pitanna-dekomunizatsii-i-perejmenuvanna>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Larin Yu. 2023. *U Harkovi mozhe z'yavitsya vulicya na chest bilyca CAHALu, yakij cinoyu vlasnogo zhittya vryatuvav shkolyariv*. In: *Dumka*. 7 July: <https://dumka.media/ukr/suspilstvo/1688711325-u-harkovi-mozhe-z-yavitsya-vulitsya-na-cest-biytsya-tsahalu-yakiy-tsinoyu-vlasnogo-zhittya-vryatuvav-shkolyariv>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- M'yasnikova A. 2025. *Kult 23 serpnia, abo Sho v Harkovi varto dekolonizuvati* In: *Nakypilo*. <https://nakypilo.ua/novyny/kult-23-serpnia-shcho-v-kharkovi-dekolonizuvaty>. Available online: 5 April 2025.
- Metodichni materiali do vidznachennya dnya pam'yati ta primirennia ta 70-yi richnici dnya Peremogi nad nacizmom u Drugij svitovij vijni (8–9 travnia 2015). <https://old.uinp.gov.ua/news/metodichni-materiali-do-vidznachennya-dnya-pam-yati-ta-primirennia-ta-70-i-richnitsi-dnya-perem>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Nikolai Gastello. (n.d.) In: *GlobalSecurity.org*. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/gastello.htm>. Available online: 21 March 2026.
- Ponad 500 vulic u Harkovi potribno perejmenuvati pislya vijni (spisok). 2022. In: *Kharkiv today*: <https://2day.kh.ua/ua/kharkow/ponad-500-vulyts-u-kharkovi-potribno-perejmenuvaty-pislya-viyny-spysok>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Rishennia Kharkivskoi miskoi Rady narodnykh deputativ no. 258/22 vid 11 travnia 2022. Pro vporyadkuvannya naimenuvan obektiv toponimiky. <https://doc.city.kharkiv.ua/uk/profile/document/view/id/704888>. Available online: 4 April 2025.

- Rozporyadzhennya Harkivskogo miskogo golovi Igorya Terehova no. 120 vid 26 kvitnya 2024. Pro perejmenuvannya ob'yektiv toponimiyi mista Harkova: <https://www.city.kharkiv.ua/ru/document/pro-pereymenuvannya-obektiv-toponimii-mista-kharkova-70792.html>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Rozporyadzhennya no. 181 vid 17 travnya 2016. golovi Harkivskoyi oblasnoyi derzhavnoyi administraciyi Igorya Rajnina Pro perejmenuvannya ob'yektiv toponimiki m. Harkova: <https://kharkivoda.gov.ua/content/documents/808/80788/files/160517-01-11-zagal-181-rozp.pdf>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Rozporyadzhennya no. 513V vid 26 lipnya 2024. nachalnika Harkivskoyi oblasnoyi vijskovoyi administraciyi Olega Sinyegubova Pro perejmenuvannya ob'yektiv toponimiyi mista Harkova: <https://kharkivoda.gov.ua/dokumenti/rozporyadzhennya/3521/3555/127689>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Spisok osib, yaki pidpadayut pid zakon pro dekomunizaciyu. <https://old.uinp.gov.ua/publication/spisok-osib-yaki-pidpadayut-pid-zakon-pro-dekomunizatsiyu>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- V Harkove mogut pereimenovat eshe 9 ulic.* 2025. In: *StrojObzor*. <https://stroyobzor.ua/ru/kharkov/news-city/v-kharkove-mogut-pereimenovat-eshe-9-ulic>. Available online: 4 April 2025.
- Zakon Ukrayini no. 3005-IX vid 21 bereznia 2023. Pro zasudzhennya ta zaboronu propagandi rosijskoyi imperskoyi politiki v Ukrayini i dekolonizaciyu toponimiyi (Iz zminami, vnesenimi zgidno iz Zakonom no. 3097-IX vid 3 travnya 2023). "Vidomosti Verhovnoyi Rady Ukrayini" 2023(65), 221.
- Zakon Ukrayini no. 314-VIII vid 9 kvitnya 2015. Pro pravovij status ta vshanuvannya pam'yati borciv za nezalezhnist Ukrayini u XX stolitti, "Biuleten Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy" 2015(25), 190.
- Zakon Ukrayini no. 315-VIII vid 9 kvitnya 2015. Pro uvichnennya peremogi nad nacizmom u Drugij svitovij vijni 1939–1945 rokiv. "Vidomosti Verhovnoyi Rady Ukrayini. 2015(25), 191.
- Zakon Ukrayini no. 317-VIII vid 15 lipnya 2015. Pro zasudzhennya komunistichnogo ta nacional-socialistichnogo (nacistського) totalitarnih rezhimiv v Ukrayini ta zaboronu propagandi yihnoyi simboliki. "Vidomosti Verhovnoyi Rady Ukrayini" 2015 (26), 219.
- Zakon Ukrayini no. 4579-IX vid 21 serpnia 2025. Pro zasadi derzhavnoyi politiki nacionalnoyi pam'yati Ukrayinskogo narodu: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/4579-IX#Text>. Available online: 30 August 2025.