

Roman Slyvka, Liubov Slyvka, Yaroslava Atamaniuk

## **Transformations of the cultural landscape of Donbas during the armed conflict 2015–2017**

The main objective of the article – to show the different trajectories of the cultural landscape in controlled and uncontrolled parts of the war-torn Donbas. The cultural landscape of Ukraine significantly changed during the twentieth century. The main factors of these transformations were ideological, military and geopolitical. The sub-ordinate position of Ukraine within the USSR allowed communist leaders to enforce sovietisation of the cultural landscape. This policy was especially noticeable in the great industrial region of Donbas. Achievements of independence by Ukraine and democratization of country' public life have led to transformation/conservation of the cultural landscape, which corresponded with political culture of individual regions. The war in the Donbas has become a catalyst for the processes of creating different types of cultural landscape on the different sides of the contact line. The policy of creating a cultural landscape has become an instrument of political socialization and mobilization of the population. This process is not complete, and can contribute to the crystallization of new subregional identities on different parts of contemporary Donbas.

**Keywords:** Donbas, cultural landscape, post-soviet city, military conflict, decomunisation, renaming, monument, policy of memory.

### **1. Introduction**

The conflict in Donbas deepened those political divisions that began to be observed in Ukrainian society since the 1990s. There are a number of visible elements of Donbas' cultural landscape, which indicates the drastic changes. The region subjected to normatively regulated, as well as spontaneous transformations. The production of cultural landscapes has attracted growing interest in human geography, humanities, and social sciences, linking space with discourses on identity, memory, signification, and symbolic power (Gerlach, Kinossian, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. The role of the state in creating landscapes that yield attachment to places (including symbols, images, etc.) and the place of different groupings in

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<sup>1</sup> For example, as number of reports in the “The 7<sup>th</sup> International Urban Geographies Conference: a view on cities from elsewhere” (Kyiv, Dnipro, 2017).

the recognition of meaning of territory in nation building and state formation are very interesting in post-Soviet space.

In fact, Donbas is a vivid example of a region in which new cultural landscapes are produced. Modern researchers witness various trajectories of the development of key regions (both controlled and uncontrolled by the government) in Ukraine. In Donbas there is a manifestations of process called Newman and Paasi “the construction of sociospatial identities, socialization narratives in which boundaries are responsible for creating the ‘Us’ and the ‘Other’” (Newman, Paasi 1998).

Donbas is a historical and geographical region, most of which is in Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk regions); but a smaller part of Eastern Donbas is in Russia (Rostov region). Before the violent conflict in 2014, it was the most industrialized and urbanized region in Ukraine and one of the oldest still operating industrial zones in Europe. Donbas went across all stages of development during 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries: from a rapid increase to the state of economic maturity after the Second World War, post-Soviet stagnation with a number local manifestations of depression. Dnipropetrovsk (contemporary name *Dnipro*) and Donetsk competed for the title of “economic capitals” of the Ukrainian SSR in the Soviet past. The leading role of Donbas in the Ukrainian economy was critically important during the biggest economic crisis in the 1990s. According to Topchiev (Топчієв 2001, p. 427), in 1997 Donetsk region produced 21% of industry in Ukraine, and “regions outsiders” of Transcarpathia, Volyn and Bukovyna each produced only 0,5-0,6%. Consequently, the amplitude of the inequality of regional development reached a ratio of 1:40. According to Shablii (Шаблій 2004, p. 187), the main characteristics of Eastern social-geographical region at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were as follows: 8% of the country's territory, 15.2% (2003) of the population, 28.8% (2001) of industrial production and 23% (2001) of agricultural products of Ukraine. In Ukraine, and in particularly Donbas, the extensive orientation of the economy has intensified during the last decades (Підгрушній та ін. 2015, p. 6). In such preconditions, large industrial-financial groups of Donbas established control over “recourse economy” and significant financial flows. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, they began to realize their ambitions for coming to power on the national level. They were well equipped with powerful economic resources, media tools, electoral support in Donbas and beyond. Pro-Russian slogans, nostalgia for Soviet times, opposition to political opponents from Western and Central Ukraine, popularization of regionalism, manipulations based on the status of the Russian language and brilliant financial benefits and social growth promised to supporters – all contributed to the successful political mobilization of electorate. The victory of

the Party of Regions' leader Yanukovich in the 2010 presidential campaign was the culmination of the struggle for a power of Donetsk financial and industrial groups. However, his abuse of authority, external pressure of Russia and the EU, as well as inconsistent foreign policy have caused a political crisis. The tragic consequences were the Revolution of Dignity, the military aggression of Russia and separatism in Donbas.

There is a violent conflict burning in Donbas from 2014 until today. The intensity of armed confrontation corresponds to the level of "war". The subject of the conflict is separatism, and the main feature is the active direct and indirect participation of Russia in it. The war in Donbas should be considered not only in the context of internal political struggle of political opponents within Ukraine and as an effect of the Revolution of Dignity of 2013–2014, but also in the broad sense as the part of Russia's long-term strategy aimed at restoring international influence in the post-Soviet space.

More than 90% of the population of Donbas live in urban settlements. Thereby, representative type of the cultural landscape of Donbas is the urban landscape. It was originally constructed under the dictates of central planners and designed to serve the demands of command economies. Now post-socialist urban centres currently develop at the nexus of varied and often competing economic, cultural, and political forces A.C. Diener and J. Hagen (2013). Transformation of the planning structure and cultural landscape of the post-socialist countries became the subject of research of K.E. Foote et al. (2000), M. Koter (2007), M. Czepczyński (2008, 2010), L. Sýkora (2009, 2015), D. Light and C. Young (2010, 2013).

The formation of Donbas settlement system has been investigated by Drobyshvskaja (Дробышевская 1993), Melnyk (Мельник 2006, 2017). Kulchyt'skyi (Кульчицький 2015) in his prominent investigation reflects the process of development of industry and the working class of Donbas during the first wave of Soviet industrialization. Afanasiev (Афанасьев 2012) describes peculiarities of Donbas formation as a frontier region. Haidai (Гайдай 2013) analyzes the representation of the Soviet past in the space of the Ukrainian city; the similar study of the Russian city was provided by Anikin (АНИКИН 2015). Savchuk (Савчук 2013) described the neo-liberal modernization of Donetsk and its new symbols of cosmopolitical socio-cultural environment. Mezenceva (Мезенцева 2017), Zelenska (Зеленська 2017), Niemec et al. (Німець та ін. 2017) pay special attention to changing looks of Ukrainian industrial cities.

Kolosov and Vendina (Колосов, Вендина 2002), Zhurzenko (2010) describe the peculiarities of ethno-cultural environment of Ukrainian eastern border regions and their "transit" Ukrainian-Russian character. A new scientific discourse

appeared “that the South East of Ukraine serves as a frontline in the historical and socio-geographical dimension between powerful civilized worlds” (Афанасьев 2012). Kyselova and Kyselov (Кисельова, Кисельов 2015), Kyselov (Кисельов 2015) evaluate cultural landscapes of Donbas from the point of view of Ukrainocentrism. Hnatyuk (Гнатюк 2013) explores the urban areas of Ukraine as a marker of territorial identity. Adamovich considers problems of the regional political culture of Donbas (Адамович 2009). Кононов (Кононов 2014) illustrates socio-cultural similarities and differences between Western and Eastern Ukraine. Rovenchak та Дькуї (Україна. Донбас 2015) map Donbas in the context of a continuing conflict. The change of the cultural landscapes of Donbas is also carried out through military destruction of heavy weapons (Slyvka and Zakutynska 2016).

Article objective – to show the different ways of shaping the cultural landscape of Donbas in controlled and uncontrolled by Ukrainian government territories. Cultural landscape, as social construction, is a form of spatial and cultural negotiation between representation of the past and imagination of the future. Past is mainly facilitated by histories and memories, whereas future is conditioned by contemporary managing powers. Interpretations of history, together with past and present depictions are integral part of landscape discourse (Czepczyński 2008). Cultural landscape of the modern post-Soviet city is formed by various social practices; an important role being played by practices aimed at emphasizing the role of the past in the formation of a modern collective identity. Social memory, from this point of view, represents the realization of the attitude to the past in the aggregation of social practices, formed by the intersection of different contexts – strategies of ideological processing, the inertia of previous interpretations of the past, and finally, convenience and comfort of combining with the routine of everyday life (Аникин 2015). In regions under the Ukrainian control and in uncontrolled regions of Donbas, these practices differ significantly depending on the value of orientations of the authorities. The radical change of structures of powers results than in similarly radical transformations of their products, especially symbolic representations such as icons. Landscape iconoclasm has followed many of the conflicts and wars, when destroying important symbol was aimed to break the spirit and changed representations, but the destroyed icons were not images of “our”, but “their” gods (Jencks 2005).

## **2. Historical-geographic preconditions of Donbas cultural landscape development**

Modern Donbas is located in the East of Ukraine and administratively covers Donetsk and Luhansk regions; the total area of these two regions is 53 200 km<sup>2</sup> (8,8% of the country's area). However, Kyseliova and Kyseliov (Кисельова, Кисельов 2015, p. 37) believe that in the historical-geographical context, its territory is smaller. Donbas includes the northern part of the modern Donetsk region (except for the Slobozhansky extreme north and the Azov south) and the southern part of the modern Luhansk region (separated by the Siversky Donets river from the north, which enters Slobozhanschyna). The population of the region is almost 8 million people, it is one of the most densely populated regions of the country (139 per./km<sup>2</sup>) (Чумаченко 1989).

The region is diverse in terms of cultural landscape. Northern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk regions form an agrarian province and belong to the Slobozhanschyna historical and geographical region with its low-lying relief. The western part of Donetsk region is a part of the historical and geographical region of Zaporizhia, and the southern part belongs to Pryazovia region with a central city of Mariupol. The most urbanized areas are located in the southern part of Luhansk region and in the central parts of Donetsk region. They are located in Donetsk highland area with its dismembered relief, and huge deposits of coal. In the Ukrainian Donbas more than 8 000 km<sup>2</sup> or 31% of the area is occupied by mine fields (Кисельова, Кисельов 2015, p. 39).

The industrial complex of Donbas was created in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the time of the last wave of European industrialization. Coal mining was not profitable here until the construction of railways. There are qualitative deposits of iron ore in the area of the city of Kryvyi Rih at a distance of 500 km to the west from Donetsk. The same course made unpractical exploitation of these resources. In the 1880s, French entrepreneurs received the permission of Russian government to construct railways, which merged these two regions, thus creating the world's first metallurgical complex, which worked on the supply of raw materials from distant fields. The attractive economic conditions helped government in joining Belgian, French and British investments, as foreign engineers, employers and qualified workers. That is why to honor John Hughes, businessman from Wales, present Donetsk was firstly named Yuzovka.

During the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the national liberation struggles of the Ukrainian people (1917–1922), the territorial base of Bolsheviks in Ukraine was in the industrial cities of Donbass – Yuzovka, Luhansk and

Mariupol. The group of local revolutionaries headed by Artem popularized the idea of creating a separate Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Republic not on an ethnic basis, but on an economic basis. However, Lenin did not support the idea of Donetsk regionalism and separation from Ukraine; the Soviet government included the region into the composition of the semi-independent Ukrainian SSR. During the Soviet period, Moscow mostly directly monitored most of the economic and political processes in Donbas, bypassing the administrative structures in Kyiv.

According to Kulchytskyi (Кульчицький 2015), communist transformation pursued two main goals: the industrialization of the country and the creation of fully controlled large farms in the countryside, in which former peasant owners had to work as a hired workforce. Communist modernization did not resemble the same process in the West, which was a means of establishing a democratic society. It was similar to the Westernization carried out by autocratic Russia, which gave the emperors the military-industrial potential to implement imperialist policies on the world stage.

The main features of the cultural landscape development of the Soviet Donbas were as follows:

1. Socialist industrialization, which resulted in the establishment of a huge heavy industry that influenced the multidimensional configuration and physiognomic characteristics of cities.

2. The rapid growth of the coal industry contributed to the formation of typical slagheaps in the region (3–5 thousand).

3. Around the numerous mines, there were “posiolki”, settlements in which workers not only from Ukraine, but also from all the republics of the USSR used to live. Rural areas, mostly populated by Ukrainians, simultaneously were affected by social marginalization.

4. A small amount of pre-revolutionary period buildings has set the quite typical Soviet facades of the cities.

5. Campaign of massive changing old toponyms and emergence of new ones, related to the history of the Bolshevik regime. Donetsk and Luhansk regions were characterized by the largest number of renaming urbanonyms in Ukraine of the Soviet period (Donetsk – 82 urbanonyms, Lugansk – 69) (Україна. Оглядова мапа 1994).

6. A powerful policy of collective memory creation of autochthonous and recent migrants in order to construct a new “Soviet people”, an important component of this “new politics of memory” has been the numerous communist monuments of the war, the events of the Civil War and the Second World War. In the 1970s, the memory of the Great Patriotic War found its reflection in objects of non-material culture (songs, films), as well as in the form of memo-

rials or monuments, symbolically referring not to the “memory places” of the wartime, but to cultural representations of historical memory (АНИКИН 2015). Dominance of symbols related to the communist ideology (memorable signs, symbols, ideological slogans, portraits of functioning communist leaders) in the cities and villages is characteristic for the Soviet period.

Table 1. Changes in urbonyms in Donbas of Soviet and post-Soviet periods

Specification	Donetsk region	Lugansk region
Artem (Sergeev)	Artemivsk (Bakhmut), Artemove (Zalizne)	Artemivsk (Kipuche)
Biriukov		Biriukovo (Krynychne)
Voikova	Voikovskiy (Copani)	
Volodarskyi	Volodarsk (Nikolske)	Volodarsk (Vedmezhe)
Dzerzhynskiy	Dzerzhynsk (Toretz)	Dzerzhynskiy (Lyubymivka)
Dymytrova	Dymytriv (Myrnograd)	
Engels		Engelsove (Buran)
Zhdanova	Zhdanov (Mariupol)	
Karl Marx	Carlo-Marksove (Sofiivka)	
Kirov	Kirove (Pivnichne), Kirovske (Khrestivka)	Kirovsk (Holubivka)
Komsomolskyi	Komsomolskyi (Hrafskyi)	Komsomolskyi (Dubove)
Krasnyi Luch		Krasnyi Luch (Khrustalnyi)
Krasnoarmiisk	Krasnoarmiisk (Pokrovsk)	
Lenin		Leninske (Valianivske)
Petrovskiy		Petrovske (Petropavlivsk)
Proletarske	Proletarske (Piatypillia)	Proletarske (Kartushyne)
Rykov	Rikove (Yenakiieve)	
Ordzhonikidze	Ordzhonikidze (Enakiieve)	
Sverdlov		Sverdlovsk (Dovzhansk)
Stalin	Stalino (Donetsk)	
Chervonohvardiiske	Artemivsk (Bakhmut)	Chervonohvardiiske (Krynychanske)
Frunze		Frunze (Sentyanivka)
Yunokommunarivsk	Yunokommunarivsk (Bunhe)	

Source: own elaboration on the basis of *Україна. Оглядова мапа* (1994).

As Zhurzhenko notes, Eastern Ukrainian cities referred proudly to the legacy of Soviet urbanization and the Ukrainian modernism of the 1920s and early 1930s. In Donbas, industrial culture and the working class ethos formed in the Soviet era were a source of collective pride and a cornerstone of local identity (Zhurzhenko 2014). “The city of mine wastes and roses”, was an epithet used to form the image of an industrial city. Shablii called Donetsk “Mont Blanc” of the Ukrainian economy, the name reflecting not only the economic potential of the state as a whole, but also significantly affecting its political climate (Шаблій 2004, p. 199). Describing his impression of Donetsk at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he writes: “If you look from the outside, you will see mine wastes arising almost from the center of the city, and next to them is the sea ... of red roses. In fact, contrasts bear primarily a social content. Restaurants of fantastic architecture, night clubs, a five-star hotel, and so on capture your eyes in the city center. And quite near are deaf, deprived of light streets. More than half of the city are typical working villages” (Шаблій 2004, p. 199).

It means that the actual level of urbanization is lower due to the growth of small urban settlements with a low level of improvement. Many of them do not meet the criteria according to which the status of urban settlement is granted in Ukraine. The absolute majority of cities and towns of the urban type in the region have acquired their status in the Soviet times. The modern urban settlement map reflects the geography of the industrial development of Donetsk coal basin (Мельник 2017).

Several researchers single out an incomplete nature of urbanization, particularly A.L. Osipian and A.L. Osipian (2006) indicate that living conditions are not much different from those in the countryside and are often lower, depending on environmental conditions. The majority of the population in cities and towns live in private houses with small backyards and kitchen gardens. In miners' settlements, living conditions are especially poor. Cities lack well-developed architectural planning. The history of cities in the region started from building of a plant or a mine where the workers were settlers from nearby settlements. Gradually, the construction of multistory apartment complexes began to replace neighborhoods with private housing, and settlements transformed into towns.

Most of the cities are young and do not have metropolitan features. This explains why the people in the most urbanized region have features similar to rural areas as far as living standards and culture are concerned (Лозинський 2008, p. 497).

According to most researchers, the main characteristic features of Donbas cities are architectural monotony, chaotic placement of city functional zones,

a large area of industrial territories, significant areas of contact zones between industrial and residential regions, separation of the city territory with transport infrastructure. Industrial enterprises and technogenic landscapes (opencast mines, barrows, collapse zones, slurry pits, underground caves of artificial origin) have become an integral part of the cultural landscape of the region (Melnyk 2017).

The urban infrastructure is obsolete and local mayors are considered successful when they provide some cosmetic improvements to city centres. The European football championship of 2012 left behind a few stadiums and hotels in Donetsk, but had nothing like the impact on the economy promised by the Yanukovych government (Zhurzhenko 2014).



Fig. 1. Entrance to the city of Artemivsk in Lugansk region. Monument to Artem  
Source: Артемівськ <https://uk.wikipedia.org>

The region's cultural landscape is complemented by small of conservation areas, such as the Ukrainian steppe reserve “Chalk flora” and the national park “Holy Mountains”. According to Ivanenko (Іваненко 2013), the area of conservation district of Lugansk region is less than 1%, and in Donetsk region is not more than 3%. Certain sacral objects, such as the Sviatohirsk Assumption Monastery (Donetsk region) and majestic monuments devoted to the events of the Second World War, such as the memorial complex on Savur-Mohyla, are of great importance.

As Melnyk suggests (Мельник 2017, pp. 125–128), the most prominent results of the development of urban settlements in Luhansk region (this also pertains Donetsk region) in the post-Soviet period were:

- demographic transformation of urban settlements and loss of human potential;
- deindustrialization and loss of traditional functions by many settlements;

- socio-economic differentiation of settlements and the gap in living standards of their inhabitants have intensified<sup>2</sup>;
- new environmental problems of anthropogenic nature;
- particularly acute social problems.

The collapse of the Soviet Union served as a catalyst for the processes of fragmentation and decentralization of social memory. Regions were left to themselves in choosing strategies for the representation of the past, building new and transforming existing social memory strategies. In such a situation, regions tested their individual ways of correlating the past and present, incorporating already familiar experience of historical representations into a new social and political context, as well as the emergence of new models of the past and ethno-political myths (Аникин 2015). In Donbas, the Soviet political system has left significant material and cultural artifacts, which haven't been alienated for a long time by the new Ukrainian political system. In conditions when the majority of population did not have a clear ethnic identity, nostalgia for Soviet times persisted; monuments of the communist era symbolized the old regime<sup>3</sup>.

Monuments with the ideology of the Soviet period can be divided into two groups: 1) monuments to the Soviet political statesmen of the October Revolution and its heroes; 2) military. Military monuments devoted to the events of the First and Second World Wars caused less antagonism in the society, whereas monuments of the first type divided the society into those who considered them as the evidence of crimes during the totalitarian era and those who perceived them as a part of their world outlook and the place of political (laying wreaths and flowers, participation in meetings) and family rituals (taking pictures during ceremonial events). De-communization of cities and villages was accompanied by “memory conflicts” and often took place through the automatic replacement of one monuments by others, related to the Ukrainian historical mythology (most often in Western Ukraine). A sort of compromise to which the representatives of regional elites resorted was the removal of controversial monuments from city centers to specially designated places. The task of common urban place-names elimination appeared due to the significant proportion of ideologically colored place-names of Soviet origin (Гнатюк 2013, p. 147). The scale of this phenomenon reflects figure 2.

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<sup>2</sup> Donetsk, Luhansk have rapidly adapted to the conditions of a market economy, so as other large and medium-sized cities, while smaller towns continued to decline.

<sup>3</sup> More in: Workers of the Donbas speak: Survival and Identity in the New Ukraine, 1989–1992. Lewis H. Siegelbaum, Daniel J. Walkowitz. State University of New York Press, New York, 1995.

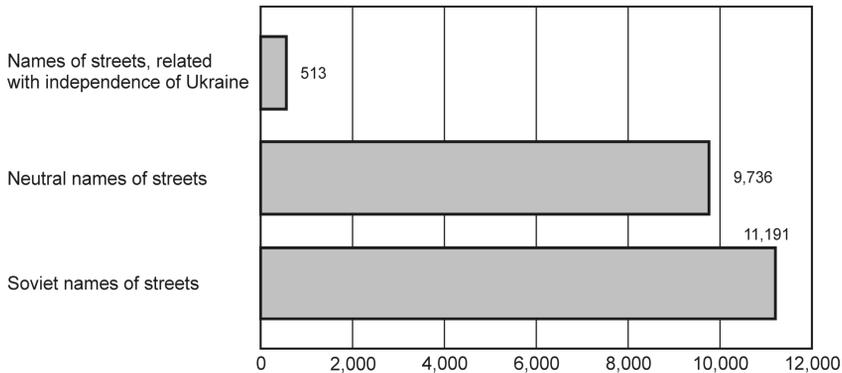


Fig. 2. Names of main streets in Ukraine in 2012

Source: [http://texty.org.ua/pg/blog/infoviz/read/37059/Navit\\_pisla\\_dvadcaty\\_rokiv\\_nezalezhnosti\\_sovok\\_prodozvhuje](http://texty.org.ua/pg/blog/infoviz/read/37059/Navit_pisla_dvadcaty_rokiv_nezalezhnosti_sovok_prodozvhuje)

Western Ukraine had the highest expectations for de-communization. It was well organized here with the help of local political and cultural activists and regional authorities. Majority of ideological monuments were removed, names of streets were changed in the early and mid-90s. Other regions of Ukraine faced resistance to de-communism from the side of pro-communist politicians and a part of their electorate. That's why, decommunization lacked a stable nature and a clear political objective, being largely depended on political preferences of local authorities and the population. There was a consensus regarding the preservation of the toponymics, most monuments and other symbols of the communist era between the authorities and the majority of the population in Donbas.

First steps towards decommunization were undertaken during Kuchma's and Yushchenko's presidency, but they lacked systematic character. However, over time, there have been changes noted in electoral preferences in Ukraine, strengthening of civil society and reappraisal of the past in the official interpretation of Ukraine's history during Yushchenko's presidency (2004–2009); creation of a new national identity has led to gradual elimination of communist monuments in certain regions of central (Kyiv and Cherkasy regions) and north-eastern Ukraine (Sumy region). However, President Yushchenko's initiative to commemorate the victims of manufactured famine in Ukraine did not find a noticeable response in Donetsk region, where the political power belonged to the Party of Regions led by Viktor Janukowicz. At the same time, after President Putin came to power in Russia, the latter began to impose its political discourse on Ukraine through massive propaganda. The main means were the media and a variety of cultural events. They were supported at the local and national levels

by the Party of Regions ruling until 2014, and were aimed at reviving Russian Soviet myths, constructing an idea of a special mission of Donbas in Ukraine, special (but in fact controlled) relations with Russia, cultivating Russian-soviet holidays and ideology. Russian realia were implemented in Donbas in their Soviet reception. The identity of Donbas is not Russian, but Soviet one. That is why, cultivation of Soviet symbols, cultural codes, red flags, sickles and hammers, Soviet heroes, traditions, customs, etc. used to be observed there (Лосев 2009). After winning the 2010 presidential election, Viktor Yanukovich began to renew the cult of a pompous celebration of the USSR victory in the Second World War. This corresponded to the pro-Russian orientation of Yanukovich and was an attempt to pursue the policy of historical memory carried out by Putin's regime in Russia. Thus, the subordination of Ukrainian political discourse to the Russian one took place. According to Czepczyński, power over historical memory can be an important tool in historical politics, used to legitimate present actions (Czepczyński 2010). It resembled the restoration of old Soviet traditions, which, in terms of growing authoritarianism and total corruption, caused the rejection of a large part of the society in Western and Central Ukraine.

The events of Majdan initiated uncontrollable destruction of monuments erected to honor Bolshevism leaders all over Ukraine. During the Revolution of Dignity on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013, a monument to Vladimir Lenin was overthrown in Kyiv. That caused a chain reaction called “Leninopad”, during which the monuments to Soviet state figures and Soviet symbols were massively destroyed. During the first year, monuments to Lenin were dismantled in all district centers under Ukraine's control, except Zaporizhia. The process of decommunization was legalized through a legal package by the Parliament of Ukraine on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Thus, as of December 2016, 51,493 objects of toponymics in cities, micro districts and villages, including 32 cities, 955 micro districts, 25 districts, 51,493 streets, squares, etc. lost their totalitarian names in Ukraine. 1320 monuments to Lenin and 1069 monuments to other totalitarian activists were disassembled. According to Vyatrovich, director of the Institute of National Remembrance, who implements the policy of de-communism, toponymic names are markers for what is really important for the people of the country<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://day.kyiv.ua/uk/article/podrobyci/dekomunizaciya-yak-na-praktyci>

### 3. Different ways of shaping Donbas cultural landscape during the war in 2014–2017

The integration of Donbas population to Ukrainian political nation, which had received a stimulus in the early 90s, turned out to be only partial, inconsistent and unstable. When Russian military expansion started in the spring of 2014, the region filled up with separatist tendencies, which provoked current Ukrainian-Russian war and the formation of pro-Kremlin puppet “people's republics”, where, in their opinion, order and stability prevailed (Кисельов 2015, p. 263). The military-political conflict has made a completely new line, “demarcation line” or “contact line”, which leaves the part of Lugansk and Donetsk territory beyond the control of Ukraine. According to Melnyk (Мельник 2017, p.128), this requires a spatial reformatting of any scientific reconnaissance in Donbas. The Decree of the Government of Ukraine (Розпорядження Кабінету Міністрів України... 2014) establishes two groups of settlements: 1. Settlements beyond Ukrainian authority control; 2. Settlements on the collision line (special danger class for living). Logically, the third group of settlements under the control of Ukraine should be added to these legally defined groups. Somewhat different processes of cultural landscape formation occur in all three groups of settlements.

Table 2. Change of toponyms resulting from decommunization in Donbas (2015–2016)

Specification	Cities	Urban-type settlements	Villages	Townships (selyshche in Ukrainian)
Total in Donbas	19	27	92	28
Total in Donetsk region	10	12	63	18
Part of Donetsk region controlled by the Government	6	5	43	12
Part of Donetsk region beyond the Government control (ORDO)	4	7	20	6
Total in Lugansk region	9	15	29	10
Part of Lugansk region controlled by the Government		1	20	4
Part of Lugansk region beyond the Government control (ORLO)	9	14	9	6

Source: own elaboration on the basis of List of Ukrainian toponyms that were changed as part of decommunization in 2016: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Ukrainian\\_toponyms\\_that\\_were\\_changed\\_as\\_part\\_of\\_decommunization\\_in\\_2016](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Ukrainian_toponyms_that_were_changed_as_part_of_decommunization_in_2016)

**Settlements under the control of Ukraine.** All in all, on the territory of Donetsk region controlled by Ukraine, 6 cities, 5 urban-type settlements, 43 villages and 12 townships have been renamed. In total, on the territory of Luhansk region controlled by Ukraine, 1 urban-type settlement, 20 villages and 4 townships have been renamed. In addition to dismantlement of monuments to communist leaders, there were external changes in the cultural landscape that were reflected in the spread of national Ukrainian symbols, coloration of information signs<sup>5</sup>, houses, bridges, public transport stops, pillars in blue and yellow, creation of thematic murals<sup>6</sup>, etc. There is a large number of monuments and memorials established to honor ATO dead servicemen (Volnovakha, Dobropillia, Kostiantynivka, Kramatorsk, Lyman, Severodonetsk, Starobilsk, Slaviansk, etc.) and civilian victims of the conflict (Volnovakha). Global technological and communication transformations have led to the formation of new ways of representing the past, visualization and interactivity of social memory. Numerous murals typical of the Soviet city multistory dwelling houses are the examples. Their main plot is the patriotic pro-Ukrainian theme. There are all grounds for creating a memorial complex on the mountain Karachun near the city of Sloviansk as the center of honoring Ukrainian patriots<sup>7</sup>. Among these, nationalist aspirations, previously simmering beneath the official rhetoric of communist fraternity and veneer of architectural conformation, have emerged as the dominant factors shaping the urban landscape (Diener and Hagen 2013). A major challenge for the Ukrainian authorities is to ensure conditions not only for the external change of the cultural landscape, but also for stimulating the socio-economic development of the region. This will contribute not only to patriotic measures agreed with the authorities, but to the spontaneous formation of a new cultural landscape, deprived of symbols of totalitarianism. In the meantime, till the population of this zone is not provided with the basic needs for protection and livelihoods, it will be difficult to talk about a new quality of the cultural landscape.

**Settlements on the collision line.** This zone is shown on the map in the report of the HMRRU (Report on human rights... 2016, p. 5). The confrontation line has 800,000 civilians physically, politically, socially and economically isolated, affecting all their human rights and complicating the prospect of peace and reconciliation (Report on human rights... 2016, p. 5).

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<sup>5</sup> <https://ukr.segodnya.ua/regions/donetsk/zhiteli-kramatorska-priznalis-v-lyubvi-k-ukrain-534567.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://znaj.ua/news/regions/15679/u-slovyansku-namalyuvali-pershij-mural-foto.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://112.ua/obshchestvo/v-doneckoy-oblasti-na-gore-karachun-otkryli-pamyatnik-geroyam-nebesnoy-sotni-415092.html>

There are 62 settlements in Donetsk region, which are located on the demarcation line. Among them are two cities of regional significance Bakhmut and Toretsk, settlements of Debaltsevo City Council and Artemivsk, Volnovakha, Mariinskyi and Yasinuvatyi districts. In Luhansk region, this group includes four small towns: Shchastia, Popasna, Hirske, Novotoshkivka and 42 villages. This is the most problematic category of cities and villages, which have a high level of danger for living. During the active phase of hostilities, a large number of objects of industrial and social infrastructure were destroyed, roads were damaged. The outskirts of the front-line settlements require demining. These settlements have lost a significant part of their population. Localization of the military here, on the one hand, protects local population, and on the other, increases the risk of shelling (Мельник 2017, p. 135). Nowadays, major fights are for gaining control over the industrial zone of Avdiivka, resulting in its significant destruction. In the case of a frozen conflict in Donbas, the further outflow of population from the frontline zones will strengthen the process of de-industrialization and decline of the urban network of this zone (Slyvka and Zakutynska 2016, p. 107). This will create a special type of destroyed cultural landscape. At present, its symbol is the remains of Donetsk airport, which, due to the reconstruction for the European Football Championship, used to be the symbol of Donetsk. During the war in Donbas, Ukrainian military units had been heroically protecting major structures for 242 days during 2014–2015. During the battle, the word *cyborg* was used to refer to the Ukrainian defenders of the airport. It refers to the way that the airport defenders were able to fend off constant attacks by DPR forces in close quarters with little sleep or support, just as science-fiction cyborgs are “indestructible half men, half machines” or “superhuman”<sup>8</sup>. Thus, they became part of the Ukrainian heroic ethos of the struggle against the pro-Russian forces.

**Settlements beyond the control of Ukraine.** As a result of the military-political confrontation, a smaller in size, but larger in terms of demographic and settlement potential part of the region with major agglomerations their centers in Lugansk and Donetsk, remained on the territory beyond the control of Ukraine. Most of urban settlements had a complex of problems typical of “old industrial settlements” before the conflict. In self-proclaimed republics, partial transport, economic and humanitarian integration of temporarily lost territories into the space of Russia is carried out (Мельник 2017, p. 133). In the DNR and LNR, unlike in other Ukrainian regions, Soviet-era symbols, monuments, and place names are still very visible, if not dominant. Monuments dedicated to Lenin, the October Revolution (1917), and the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) continue to

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<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Battle\\_of\\_Donetsk\\_Airport#Symbolism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Battle_of_Donetsk_Airport#Symbolism)

occupy public spaces. Under war conditions separatist governments need political mobilization of the population to guarantee the legitimacy of their activities. Reformatting the memorial space of cities and villages is carried out in order to complement the space formed in Soviet times with the system of new symbols, which will determine the new policy of memory of the so-called “Donetsk” and “Lugansk” peoples. It is very similar to the Transnistrian governmental policy over the past 25 years.

Information warfare is an integral part of the hybrid war that Russia is leading against Ukraine in Donbas. It is not only about the behavior and development of the Soviet and pseudo-radical culture in the region, but also about the creation of a new heroic myth that is reflected in the filling of the urban landscape with monuments of military character. In Lugansk, participants of Donbas department of the motorclub “Night Wolves” (they work under the patronage of Putin) installed signs that symbolize the freedom of “LNR”<sup>9</sup>, as well as 8-meter star symbol of invincible Russia and Donbas<sup>10</sup>. In Donetsk, separatists installed a monument to a field service cap of a Soviet soldier, as well as to a general of the Soviet Army Mergelov, and in Amvrosievka – to a Soviet soldier. The fourth monument to Lenin was installed in Krasnyi Luch<sup>11</sup>. The monument to Stalin was established in Lugansk<sup>12</sup>. The monument to the truck “White KAMAZ”, designed as a symbol of gratitude for help of “humanitarian convoys” (Ilovaïsk, Donetsk region)<sup>13</sup>. Memorial monuments to deceased separatists were built in Alchevsk, Debaltsevo, Ilovaïsk, Krasnodon, Makeïevka, Lugansk. New military equipment monuments were installed in the LNR, i.e. four armored vehicles settled on the pedestals in Luhansk, Alchevsk, Krasnyi Luch and Kosiora. Monuments that symbolize military threats to civilian population were established in Donetsk, for example, a monument to the Children of Donbas, and a similar memorial sign in Lugansk<sup>14</sup>. At the same time, the militants of the terrorist “DNR” decided to “clear” the occupied territories from monuments to the victims of manufactured famine and political repressions. Instead, a mili-

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ostro.org/lugansk/society/news/486530/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://miaistok.su/v-luganske-poyavilas-8-metrovaya-zvezda-simvol-nepobedimoj-rossii-i-donbassa>

<sup>11</sup> <https://sng.com.ua/archives/tag/%D0%B4%D0%BD%D1%80/page/2>

<sup>12</sup> <http://yadocent.livejournal.com/744916.html>

<sup>13</sup> Campaign of material and technical assistance of the Russian Federation to population of the so-called “DNR” and “LNR” during the war in eastern Ukraine during 2014-2017, provided under the cover of humanitarian aid, but not controlled by OSCE or Ukrainian authorities.

<sup>14</sup> <http://yadocent.livejournal.com/744916.html>

tary memorial complex Savur Mohyla (part of Donetsk region beyond the control of Ukraine), for which Ukrainian government units and pro-Russian militants were struggling in 2014, has been turned into a tourist pilgrimage center and one of the central elements of the modern policy of the memory of the separatist republics.

#### 4. Conclusions

Thus, noticeable changes of cultural landscapes took place in Ukraine during 2014–2017. These changes are characterized by a remarkably rapid nature, which can be explained by the influence of political, geopolitical and military factors. Transformation of Donbas' cultural landscape is not only a direct consequence of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, but also an instrument of domestic policy. The ruling elite of Ukraine is aware of the fact that one should not underestimate the influence of communist symbols on mass culture and formation of geopolitical stereotypes in the society. Soviet symbols are perceived as part of the “Russian world”, that world, in which one of the most extensive social experiments on constructing a totalitarian society of the present day was embodied. Russia's attempts to restore hegemony in the post-Soviet space is accompanied by glorification of the Soviet past. On the other hand, the creation of a new Ukrainian-centered cultural environment on the territory of Donbas under the government control occurs. This is a response to the consequences of the conflict and an attempt to launch a new political discourse in the region. Landscape icons are anchor national, regional and local traditions of patriotism and commemoration, especially during periods of political change (Foote, Tóth and Arvay 2000).

On the Ukrainian territories beyond the Government control an opposing process takes place, since here Soviet and pseudo-Soviet cultural landscape is both preserved and developed. A characteristic feature of socio-political discourse in DNR and LNR has become the desire of the authorities to socialize and mobilize the society by referring to the heroic and tragic individual and collective symbols of the Second World War (Титаренко 2016).

In case of transformation of the conflict in Donbas into a protracted one, settlements near the collision line will become a kind of the “zone of exclusion”, the main symbols of which will be the ruins of residential buildings, infrastructure and enterprises. Some of them will be physical or virtual symbols of forced depopulation and de-industrialization. They will resemble a buffered demilitarized zone between the Greek and Turkish parts of present-day Nicosia

on Cyprus, that is, they will become what D. Newman and A. Paasi (1998) call “transition zones”. Transition zones can equally be places in which the contact between different groups (ethnonational in the case of DCOs, socio-economic status in the case of high tech zones) strengthens the notion of border as a barrier despite and, despite that, the contact that takes place in these new spaces. They do not constitute a transition between one side and the other, but rather exclaves of transition, which themselves are demarcated by hard lines separating them from the surrounding world around them (Newman and Paasi 1998).

Nowadays, we are able to witness different trajectories of the cultural landscape formation in the region. An example of Donbas consisting of three conventional cultural landscapes illustrates D. Newman and A. Paasi's (1998) idea that the newly established military boundaries are thus one part of the discursive landscape of social power, control and governance, which extends into a whole society and which is produced and reproduced in various social and cultural practices.

New monuments in the DNR and LNR have appeared in a very short period of time during 2014–2015, which suggests a purposeful policy of memory. A large number of military equipment that has become monuments serves as evidence of the readiness of separatist-led Kremlin to cultivate the spirit of militarism among Ukrainian citizens in areas uncontrolled by government. It is obvious that the memory of tragic events of 2014–2017 will be transmitted for more than one generation, accompanied by various myths, glorifying or demonizing various parties to the conflict.

Similar processes are initiated by the Ukrainian authorities in the part of the Donbas controlled by Ukraine, though not so obsessively as on the area occupied by separatists (less pomposity and militaristic content of monuments). A peculiar competition, the fight of war memory models can be observed.

What is the future of the new cultural landscape? Freezing of the conflict will lead to crystallization of a sense of “difference” between the inhabitants of Ukraine and separatist republics. In case of force reintegration, the new elements of cultural landscape that glorify militants are more likely to be destroyed. In case of peaceful reintegration under the conditions of the Kremlin, preservation and even the development of a cultural landscape rising a new “Donbas identity” is possible. This scenario includes the threat of terrorist activity against the monuments of both sides of the conflict. The question remains whether military memorials such as Savur Mohyla will be able to become a symbol of memory of common tragedy of Ukrainians, or they will cause future disagreements as it happened with the Valley of the Fallen in Spain.

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## **Transformacje krajobrazu kulturowego Donbasu w czasie konfliktu zbrojnego w latach 2015–2017**

### Streszczenie

Głównym celem artykułu jest pokazanie różnych trajektorii krajobrazu kulturowego w kontrolowanych i niekontrolowanych częściach rozdartego wojną Donbasu. Krajobraz kulturowy Ukrainy znacznie się zmienił w XX w. Główne czynniki tych przemian mają charakter ideologiczny, wojskowy i geopolityczny. Podporządkowana pozycja Ukrainy w ZSRR pozwoliła przywódcom komunistycznym na egzekwowanie sowietyzacji krajobrazu kulturowego. Polityka ta była szczególnie widoczna w wielkim przemysłowym regionie Donbasu. Osiągnięcia niepodległości przez Ukrainę i demokratyzacja życia publicznego w kraju doprowadziły do transformacji/zachowania krajobrazu kulturowego, który odpowiadał kulturze politycznej poszczególnych regionów. Wojna w Donbasie stała się katalizatorem procesów tworzenia różnych typów krajobrazu kulturowego po różnych stronach linii styczności. Polityka tworzenia krajobrazu kulturowego stała się narzędziem politycznej socjalizacji i mobilizacji ludności. Proces ten nie jest kompletny i może przyczynić się do krystalizacji nowych subregionalnych tożsamości w różnych częściach współczesnego Donbasu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Donbas, krajobraz kulturowy, miasto post-sowieckie, konflikt militarny, dekomunizacja, przemianowanie, pomnik, polityka pamięci.

Roman Slyvka, dr  
Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Shevchenka St. 57, 76000 Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine  
e-mail: romanslyvka@i.ua

Liubov Slyvka, dr  
Ivano-Frankivsk National Medical University, Halytska St. 2, 76018 Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine  
e-mail: lubovslyvka@i.ua

Yaroslava Atamaniuk, dr  
Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Shevchenka St. 57, 76000 Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine  
e-mail: jaroslava@i.ua