DECOLONIZATION OF URBAN SPACE OF ZAPORIZHZHIA (2014–2023 PP.): INFORMATIONAL AND COGNITIVE DYNAMICS OF SOCIETY

Viktor Burenkov

Candidate of Historical Sciences, Doctoral Candidate at the Department of Modern History Ukraine, Zaporizhzhia National University, Ukraine
e-mail: wiktorburenkov@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-9632-3781

Viktoriia Kovpak

Doctor of Science in Social Communications, Professor, Professor at the Department of Social Communications and Information Activity at the Faculty of Journalism, Zaporizhzhia National University, Ukraine
e-mail: Kovpak.viki@ukr.net, orcid.org/0000-0001-9461-0536

Nataliia Lebid

Candidate of Philological Sciences (Ph. D.), Associate Professor, Associate Professor at the Department of Publishing and Editing at the Faculty of Journalism, Zaporizhzhia National University, Ukraine
e-mail: lebidnataliia2019@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-7227-6597

Summary

This article examines the processes of decolonization, derussification, and decommunization of urban space of Zaporizhzhia from 2014 to 2023. The influence of public sentiment, cultural changes, and legal acts on the transformation of urban objects is analyzed with special attention. During the study, there are under consideration the dynamics of toponym renaming, the dismantling of Soviet-era monuments, and the overcoming of imperial heritage in public space. Special attention is paid to the relationship between the processes of decommunization and national security, since the decolonization of the urban environment is an important element in countering Russian propaganda and restoring national identity. The article contains an analysis of the legal framework, including laws adopted in 2015 and 2023, which contributed to the purification of public space from totalitarian symbols, along with monitoring of the information space with the help of the Brand24 program regarding indicators of representation and popularization of this topic in the media. In the conclusions, the authors emphasize the importance of decolonization processes for the formation of a new national memory and restoration of historical justice in the context of European integration aspirations of Ukraine. Prospects for further research are focused on the analysis of social and cultural changes caused by these processes.

Key words: renaming, public space, toponyms, symbolic decolonization, national identity, Soviet heritage.

1. Introduction

The processes of decolonization, derussification, and decommunization have gained special relevance in the context of political and social transformations,are which taking place in

Ukraine after 2014. Zaporizhzhia, as one of the largest cities in the country, became an important center of these changes, which affected its the urban space and cultural heritage. For several decades, Soviet authorities and Russian imperial policy shaped the city identity through the imposition of toponyms, monuments, and symbols that emphasized colonial status of Ukraine. Clearing the public space of these markers has become an integral part of the struggle for national identity and independence.

The novelty of this research lies in the comprehensive analysis of decolonization processes in one specific city – Zaporizhzhia. Special attention is paid to the role of these processes in the formation of a new national memory and their influence on cultural and social changes. The relevance of the scientific approach is justified by the need to study not only political, but also symbolic changes taking place in the public space of Ukrainian cities in the context of the escalation of the conflict with Russia.

The decolonization of urban space of Zaporizhzhia is an important step on the way to overcoming the Soviet and imperial heritage, which makes this research relevant for the study of contemporary social processes in post-colonial societies.

The aim of this article is to study the processes of decolonization, derussification, and decommunization of the urban space in Zaporizhzhia during 2014-2023. Emphasis is placed on the study of the dynamics of social moods and cultural changes that contributed to the rethinking and renewal of the urban space in the context. The object of this study is the urban space of Zaporizhzhia and its transformation as a result of decolonization processes.

The objectives of this study are to conduct a detailed analysis of the legal framework that regulates the processes of decolonization and decommunization in Ukraine, with a special emphasis on the laws adopted in 2015 and 2023 and their implementation in the urban space of Zaporizhzhia. One of the key goals is to study the social and cultural changes that took place in Zaporizhzhia and the impact of these changes on the renewal of urban space. In this context, the dynamics of public sentiment and attitudes towards the Soviet heritage are analyzed, as well as the creation of new national symbols in public space.

Special attention is paid to the role of civil society and local authorities in the processes of decommunization and derussification, including the renaming of toponyms and the dismantling of monuments. It is also examined how these processes affect national security, in particular through countering Russian propaganda and protecting the information space of the country. Finally, the research is aimed at evaluating how the decolonization of urban space contributes to the formation of a new national memory and identity of Zaporizhzhia, especially, in conditions of active participation of cultural institutions and civil society.

2. Literature review

To study the processes of decolonization, derussification, and decommunization of the urban space of Zaporizhzhia, an interdisciplinary approach was used, which combines the methods of historical, sociological, and socio-communication studies. The main methodological principles were the systematic approach, comparative analysis, historical-chronological method, document analysis method and using the Brand24 Internet space monitoring program.

The applying of the system approach made it possible to consider decolonization processes as a complex phenomenon affecting various aspects of the social and cultural life of the city. The comparative analysis provided an opportunity to compare changes in Zaporizhzhia with other regions of Ukraine and post-Soviet countries, which made it possible to identify common features and unique features of these processes.

The historical-chronological method was used to track the dynamics of changes in top-onymy, the dismantling of monuments and other symbols of the Soviet era, as well as to analyze the legal framework regulating these processes. The analysis of documents made it possible to examine official documents, statements of state and public organizations, as well as media materials related to decolonization processes. The Brand24 Internet space monitoring program made it possible to analyze online media for the popularization of investigated topic in the information field.

3. Historiographic analysis (Literature review)

The study of the processes of decolonization of the urban space of Zaporizhzhia in the period 2014-2023 is based on the historiographical tradition, which considered both theoretical and practical aspects of decolonialism, derussification, and decommunization in the urban environment.

The groundwork on basis of which the intellectual current of postcolonialism and decolonization studies was built was laid by the Western Edward Said *(Said, 1995)*, Gomi Bhabga *(Bhabha, 1994)*, Gayathri Spivak *(Spivak, 1988)*. These theories were further developed in the scientific studies of the modern colonial school («the modernity/coloniality school») of sociologist Anibal Quijano *(Quijano, 2007)*, philosopher Maria Lugones *(Lugones, 2007)* and semiotician Walter Mignolo *(Mignolo, 2002)*. An important phenomenon of foreign historiography is the work by Paul Connerton «How societies remember», in which the scientist tries to reveal the mechanisms of memory preservation and transmission to the next generations. According to him, this process takes place through structures of social memory, commemoration ceremonies and body memory *(Connerton, 1989)*.

In the Ukrainian context, important historiographic assets are works those, which, after the restoration of Ukrainian independence in 1991, focus on the study of the politics of memory. It is during the transformation of the memory policy that «textbooks are "rewritten", memory locations are changed, etc.» *(Kyrydon, 2015: 247)*. The reinterpretation of the imperial and Soviet past has actualized the issue of cleaning the national grand-narrative from colonial stratification.

Post-colonial studies in Ukraine started to be formed with particular intensity after gaining independence in 1991, although the theoretical understanding of colonial policy was also in the Soviet period, when Ukrainian intellectuals and dissidents criticized the Soviet policy of Russification and cultural unification *(Dziuba, 2005)*. In modern terms, postcolonial studies cover a wide range of issues related to decolonization, derussification, and decommunization as central issues of national politics of memory and cultural transformation. An important area of post-colonial researches in Ukraine is the analysis of the formation of national identity in the conditions of the colonial past. Mykola Ryabchuk in his book «Postcolonial syndrome. Observation» analyzes the origins of Ukrainian political problems, which are related to colonialism and its consequences, in close relationship with cultural and psychological problems *(Riabchuk, 2011)*. One of the most problematic points in the development of historical politics and politics of memory in Ukraine, according to Ukrainian historian Heorhiy Kasyanov, is the confrontation between the Soviet-nostalgic and nationalist versions of history, which, in his opinion, divided Ukraine and weakened it before the Russian invasion in 2014 *(Kasianov, 2022)*. Ukrainian historians Alla Kyrydon *(Kyrydon, 2016)*, Oleksandr Hrytsenko *(Hrytsenko, 2014)*, Larisa Nahorna *(Nahorna, 2012)*, Yuriy Shapoval *(Shapoval, 2021)* also made an important contribution to the study of the politics of memory and commemorative practices of Ukraine.

We cannot overlook the coverage of decommunization processes in the historiography. One of the leading Ukrainian inspirers and leaders of decommunization in Ukraine is Volodymyr Viatrovych. In his articles and public speeches he characterizes the course, main shortcomings and consequences of the decommunization process he launched, draws attention to the symbolic aspect of cleaning (renaming streets, dismantling monuments) of public space from Soviet markers and considers this as an important step in the restoration of national memory *(Viatrovych, 2015)*. Critical remarks regarding the legal aspects of the «decommunization laws» appeared almost immediately in the publications of the following researchers, such as: K. Dronova and E. Stadny *(Dronova, K., Stadny, Y., 2015)*, G. Koinash *(Koinash, 2015)*, V. Kulyk *(Kulyk, 2015)*, O. Motyl *(Motyl, 215)*, A. Umland *(Umland, 2015)*. The non-acceptance of these laws was gradually being replaced by the inclusion of the public of the regions in the process of cleansing the symbolic space from imperial, Russian, and communist symbols. With the spread of decommunization processes in the regions of Ukraine, there was a natural demand for a scientific analysis of regional features of this process, as well as the development of certain scientific recommendations *(Butko, S., Horobets, S., Karetnikov, I., Korolenko, B. & Maiorov, M. (Eds.), 2015; Takhtaulova M. (ed.), 2023)* for committees and the public who were directly involved in decommunization processes at the local level. This demand was covered by a number of scientific publications that reflected regional features of decommunization *(Males, 2016; Lisovskyj, A.S., Prydetkevych, S.S., Matuz O.V., 2024; Vodotyka, S., Savenok, L., 2017; Hnatiuk, O., Melnichuk, A., 2020)*. One of these works is the book by Oleksandra Haidai *(Haidai, 2016),* who investigated the fate of the Soviet symbolic heritage after the collapse of the USSR using the example of Central Ukraine. O. Haidai shows how different views of Soviet history coexisted in this region, competing with each other. It demonstrated the variability of local historical politics and ways of overcoming the Soviet past, including the dismantling of Lenin monuments. This study reasonably proves the need to take into account the regional features of historical memory during decommunization processes.

Scientific papers devoted to the analysis of the decolonization of the urban space of Zaporizhzhia are important for our research. There are still quite a few studies devoted to Zaporizhzhia in this context, among which we can single out two articles: Iryna Pavlenko «De-Sovietization and decommunization of the Ukrainian urban icon (on the material of the names of the objects of the urban space of Zaporizhzhia)» *(Pavlenko, 2020)* and Oleksii Shteinle «The German Question in Zaporizhzhia Decommunization» *(Shteinle, 2018)*. Both articles create a general picture for understanding the processes of decommunization and de-Sovietization in Zaporizhzhia as components of the broader decolonization policy of Ukraine. Iryna Pavlenko demonstrates the evolution of city titles in Zaporizhzhia, emphasizing two interrelated stages: de-Sovietization and decommunization, while Oleksiy Shteinle focuses on specific aspects of decommunization of Zaporizhzhia connected with the German community, which had a significant impact on the development of the region. These works highlight the complexity of decolonization processes in a region where economic, cultural, and national factors are intertwined.

4. Results and discussion

One of the important tasks of decolonization in Ukraine is cleaning the public space of cities from Russian and Soviet toponyms (urbanonyms). For a long time, the Russian and Soviet authorities tried to undermine, enslave or completely destroy the historical, cultural and linguistic identity of Ukraine, replacing autochthonous names with their own, which marked the colonized space with distinctly Russian/imperial/communist symbols, thereby distorting the

cultural landscape of the urban space. That is why «the issue of overcoming imperial myths, saying goodbye to hostile narratives and markers not only in the public space, but also in the minds of Ukrainians, is a matter of national security. And the current rethinking of the past, which we can call the de-occupation of consciousness or the demining of memory, is a significant part of our mental resistance to the aggressor» *(Takhtaulova, 2023: 5).*

The first thing to pay attention to is the removal of markers of imperialism and superiority of the «elder brother» from the public space. After all, as we noted earlier, an important component of establishing the political and symbolic power of the Kremlin over the conquered territories was the establishment of a common cultural space, in particular by erecting monuments and memorial signs that were imperial (Russian and Soviet) symbols. Such markers are also toponyms, particularly the names of settlements, streets, squares, alleys, etc., as well as corresponding images in the exteriors and interiors of public buildings and structures» *(Takhtaulova, 2023: 8).*

The first impulse for the de-occupation and decolonization of the space of Ukraine was provoked by the socio-political processes launched by the Revolution of Dignity. The revolutionary processes of that time determined the further political and cultural development of Ukraine, which was connected with the European future, which should not be burdened by the colonial legacy. The pressure of civil society on political elites made it possible to create a legislative framework that helped to get rid of the imperial heritage in a legal way. For this, the Supreme Council of Ukraine adopted a package of laws, which were immediately called «decommunization laws». The main purpose of the adopted Law of Ukraine «On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine and the Prohibition of the Propaganda of Their Symbols» *(Pro zasudzhennia komunistychnoho ta natsional-sotsialistychnoho (natsystskoho) totalitarnykh rezhymiv…)* was the condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine, as well as the determination of «the legal basis for the prohibition of the propaganda of their symbols and establishing the order of liquidation of the symbols of the communist totalitarian regime» *(Pro zasudzhennia komunistychnoho ta natsional-sotsialistychnoho (natsystskoho) totalitarnykh rezhymiv…).* At the request of this Law, on July 2, 2015, Mayor of Zaporizhzhia O. Sin issued a decree No. 180r «On the creation of a working group on the preparation of measures related to the implementation of the Law of Ukraine dated April 9, 2015 No. 317-VIII «On the condemnation of communist and national of socialist (Nazi) totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and the prohibition of propaganda of their symbols» and the order of this group is determined *(Pro vnesennia zmin do rozporiadzhennia miskoho holovy…).* This committee included representatives of local authorities and management, researchers and scientists, representatives of public organizations and cultural figures. In fact, the formation of this committee marked the beginning of the process of decommunization in Zaporizhzhia. The newly created committee had to analyze the large number of names of objects that fall under this law and start the process of renaming. According to estimates of Serhiy Surchenko, the responsible secretary of Zaporizhzhia NGO NULHU, on July 1st, 2015, there were 1,070 streets, 268 alleys, 7 boulevards, 5 avenues, 5 highways, and 5 driveways in Zaporizhzhia *(Surchenko, 2015).* The researcher carried out laborious work on the analysis and systematization of city street names, as it turned out in Zaporizhzhia: 13 streets are named after Cossack otamans, 5 streets remind of the Cossack past (Baydy, B. Khmelnytskyi, I. Bohuna, P. Doroshenko, P. Kalnyshevskyi, I. Kochubey, S. Nalivaiko, I. Sulima, P. Sagaidachnoy, S. Palia, F. Tryasil and tentatively Taras Bulba; Zaporizka Sich, Sich, Sichovy lane, Kozacha, Zaporizhzhia Cossacks); 10 streets are named in honor of Ukrainians during the civil war, 20 streets reflect the events of the war with fascism;

24 names are associated with representatives of the creative intelligentsia (writers, actors, scientists) before the revolution and 15 – up to the present day. In addition, the researcher found streets that are directly related to geographical objects of Ukraine, namely: 27 names derived from the names of rivers, mountains, seas and 86 ones from Ukrainian cities *(Surchenko, 2015)*. To illustrate the dominance of Russian/Soviet urbanonyms in the urban space of Zaporizhzhia, the following data will be indicative: in honor of pre-revolutionary figures – 32 names; revolutionaries and builders of socialism – 61 names; participants in the war against fascism – 60 names; 23 Comintern members; 63 Russian creative intellectuals; revolution and social construction – 77 streets; the industrial component of the city is represented by 207 names; 40 are derived from geographical objects and 103 are Russian cities *(Surchenko, 2015)*. Simple mathematical calculations indicate the obvious dominance of Russian/Soviet names in the urban space of Zaporizhzhia and are markers of the imperial colonial policy of national equalization, as well as the Soviet policy of forming a «new Soviet man» («homo sovieticus»), who was not supposed to have special sentiments towards his homeland and could quickly change his place of residence.

This law became the key to dismantling monuments and renaming streets that were symbols of Soviet ideology. In the first years after the adoption of the law, large-scale work on changing toponyms was carried out in Zaporizhzhia, in particular, more than 100 streets and squares, including central city objects, were renamed.

The process of decommunization/derussification of the urban space, which began in 2015, stretched over time, which is due to the peculiarity of the formation of local political elites, which for a long time were under the influence of communist/Russian standards and did not easily give in to their «ideals». It was possible to overcome the resistance of the local elites and start changing the symbolic space of the city thanks to the active public position of the citizens, local researchers, the regional mass media, which actively covered the process of decommunization in the city on their resources, as well as the passionarity of the reformed Ukrainian Institute of National Memory.

It should be noted that Zaporizhzhia faced a difficult task, because at the beginning of the decommunization process in the city, as we testified above, there were more than a thousand objects with names related to the Soviet past. Among them there were streets, squares and monuments dedicated to Soviet figures, revolutionaries and events that are one way or another related to the Soviet era.

To understand the pace and dynamics of this process at the all-Ukrainian and local level, it should be said that in 2016 alone, «987 settlements and 25 districts were renamed. Almost 51,500 toponyms were renamed in Ukrainian settlements and 2,389 monuments and memorial signs that contained propaganda of the totalitarian regime were dismantled» *(Zvit Ukrainskoho instytutu natsionalnoi pamiati…)*. Zaporizhzhia did not lag behind the all-Ukrainian process, for example, during the second session of the Zaporizhzhia City Council held on February 19, 2016, the deputies, guided by the law on decommunization, made a number of decisions on the dismantling of monuments, the renaming of some districts, more than a hundred streets , avenues, squares of the city of Zaporizhia *(Druha sesiia miskoi rady…)*. One of the stumbling blocks during this phase of decommunization was the issue of dismantling the Lenin monuments that had dominated the city public space for a long time. As of 2024, the monument to the «leader of the proletariat» is in storage at the municipal utility of the city, although a petition has been created that proposes to sell it and direct received funds to the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine *(Petytsiia «Pro dotsilne vykorystannia pamiatnyka leninu»)*. An important role in this process was played by representatives of local public organizations, scientific and cultural

institutions of the city, which took an active part in renaming streets, squares and parks *(Pro vnesennia zmin do rozporiadzhennia miskoho holovy…)*. For example, due to the activity of local activists, a number of public discussions were held *(Konsultatsii z hromadskistiu)*, where city residents could express their opinions on new names and symbols. This made it possible to take into account different views and make the process of decommunization more open and democratic. One of the most revealing and anticipated cases of renaming in Zaporizhzhia, initiated by local activists, was the renaming of Lenin Square to Zaporizhia Square *(Rozporiadzhennia miskoho holovy №85r)* and Zhovtneva Square to the Maidan of Heroes, who were «decommunized» «in order to perpetuate the memory of the citizens of Ukraine who gave their lives for the freedom and independence of Ukraine» *(Pro pereimenuvannia ploshchi Lenina…)*.

Summarizing the results of the first stage of decommunization, the former head of the Institute of National Remembrance, Volodymyr Viatrovych, noted that «2016 was the year of decommunization in Ukraine. During the period of validity of the Law, Ukraine has done more to overcome the heritage of the totalitarian past than during the entire period of independence. The changes that are easy to see on the map of the country or individual settlement are irreversible, they are a necessary element of our integration into democratic Europe» *(Ponad 50 tysiach vulyts zminyly nazvy…)*.

The cleaning of the symbols of the totalitarian era in Zaporizhzhia is an example of how changes in public space affect the transformation of the socio-political attitudes of the citizens. This process is confirmed by the results of a sociological study conducted by the Sociological Group «Rating» in November 2016, which showed that «almost half of the respondents (48%) supports the idea of banning communist ideology in Ukraine, 36% are against, 16% are undecided» *(Stavlennia do okremykh istorychnykh postatei)*. Sociology has also recorded that in the South of Ukraine (including Zaporizhzhia region) only a third of the residents of the region is in favor of banning communist ideology, which is significantly less than in the West of Ukraine, where this figure reaches 78% *(Stavlennia do okremykh istorychnykh postatei, 2016: 3)*. A similar attitude of the population was recorded regarding the dismantling of Lenin monuments – «In the West, the majority (72%) supports this idea, in the Center this figure is almost two times lower – 41%, in the South in almost three times (26%), and in the East – four times lower (18%)» *(Stavlennia do okremykh istorychnykh postatei, 2016: 3)*. Sociologists also studied the attitude of the population of Ukraine to the initiative of renaming the Soviet names of cities and streets in Ukraine. In this case, we see that the attitude of the population is ambiguous – 57% of respondents do not support it while just 35% of those surveyed do. Renaming is perceived mostly positively in the West, while in the East and South it is mostly negatively taken *(Stavlennia do okremykh istorychnykh postatei, 2016: 3–4)*. The results of this study are correlated with the population support of pro-Russian parties at the time, such as «For Life» and «Opposition Bloc». It is possible to trace a clear relationship between the support of pro-Russian, populist parties in the East and South of Ukraine and the low support of residents of these regions of the processes of decolonization / decommunization *(Stavlennia do okremykh istorychnykh postatei, 2016: 18, 20)*. With the beginning of the full-scale military invasion of the Russian Federation in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, sociology changed significantly.

In the conditions of the enemy's armed intervention, Ukrainian society and political elites united not only to repel the occupier on the battlefield, but also reached a consensus on the need for the final decolonization of the symbolic space from Russian imperial and communist Soviet influences. From this moment on, it is recorded an avalanche-like collapse of the level of Ukrainians' perception of ideological theses related to the «common» Soviet-Russian history. A clear example of this process is the dynamics of the decline of nostalgia for the USSR – in

Russia, over the past ten years, this nostalgia has mostly increased (since 2010 the indicator has increased from 55 to 63%), while in Ukraine, on the contrary, it has sharply decreased (from 2010, from 46 to 11%) *(Desiate zahalnonatsionalne opytuvannia, 2022: 4)*. As the Ukrainian historian Iury Shapoval appropriately points out: «The neo-imperial policy of the Kremlin (which actively uses Soviet symbolic capital and Soviet historical mythology), Russian armed aggression and the occupation of 7% of Ukrainian territory ultimately led to the fact that the «nuclear» pro-Russian electorate in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and in Eastern Donbas ended up outside the Ukrainian political field. Pro-Russian parties lost the significant part of voters, their influence on politics, including the politics of memory, significantly decreased. This opened up additional opportunities for decommunization in all spheres of social life: lustration (politicum), prohibition of communist symbolism and toponymy (socium), change of value orientations in historical education, cultural revolution – from a priori complimentary perception («common history») to construction of national grand narrative» *(Shapoval, Y., Vasylieva, I., Matviienko, I., 2020: 111)*. The historian's conclusions are confirmed by sociology, because as of April 2022, more than 65% of the population of Ukraine support the renaming of streets containing Russian/Soviet names, and 71% are in favor of dismantling monuments related to Russia. In addition, 62% of citizens are in favor of banning the broadcasting of Russian musical productions on radio and television *(Desiate zahalnonatsionalne opytuvannia, 2022: 28)*. Such transformation of public consciousness and the beginning of a full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine created conditions for the transition to the next stage of social changes – derussification.

On March 21, 2023, the Supreme Council of Ukraine adopted amendments to the Law of Ukraine «On Geographical Names» regarding the decolonization of toponymy and regulating the use of geographical names in settlements of Ukraine *(Pro heohrafichni nazvy shchodo dekolonizatsii toponimii…)*. The main goal of making changes to this law «is to purify and improve the domestic public space from the imposed communist-foreign ideologues, to ensure the influence of Soviet-Russian narratives on the worldview of Ukrainians, to establish historical justice and to fully restore Ukrainian historical-national toponymy modernizing it with the names of the latest Heroes in the fight against the enemy» *(Mokan, 2023)*. Having declared such an ambitious goal, the legislators expanded Article 5 of the Law of Ukraine «On Geographical Names», stating that «it is forbidden to assign to geographical objects: names that glorify, perpetuate, promote or symbolize the occupying state or its significant, memorable, historical and cultural places, cities, dates, events, its figures who carried out military aggression against Ukraine and other sovereign countries, figures who carried out state totalitarian policies and practices related to the persecution of the opposition (opposition figures), dissidents and other persons for criticism of the totalitarian Soviet and totalitarian Russian regimes, including citizens of Ukraine who live on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine or were temporarily on the territory of the occupying state and became victims of persecution by Russian repressive bodies» *(Pro heohrafichni nazvy shchodo dekolonizatsii…)*. This Law and its amendments ensure the continuity and consistency of the policy of decommunization, which has been actively implemented since the Revolution of Dignity.

The next step of the legislators was the adoption of the Law of Ukraine «On Condemnation and Prohibition of Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and Decolonization of Toponymy», which entered into force on July 27, 2023 *(Pro zasudzhennia ta zaboronu propahandy rosiiskoi…)*. In order to prevent the spread of Russian propaganda symbols, the Law establishes certain restrictions and prohibitions, in particular, regarding the following positions: 1. Assigning to geographical objects, legal entities and objects of the right of ownership:

names containing the symbols of Russian imperial policy, as well as glorifying, perpetuate, promote the terrorist state (aggressor state) or its memorial, historical and cultural places, settlements, dates, events; 2. Production and distribution of symbols of Russian imperial policy; 3. Public use of symbols of Russian imperial policy *(Takhtaulova, 2023: 14)*. The legislator also determined that village and city councils, military administrations of settlements, military-civilian administrations of settlements, or village and city mayors are responsible for changing toponyms and memorial signs within named settlements until January 27, 2024 *(Pro zasudzhennia ta zaboronu propahandy rosiiskoi…)*. In order to implement these requirements of the Law, the local authorities of Zaporizhzhia derussified almost 70 streets and alleys, the names of which were associated with Russia or the former USSR *(U Zaporizhzhi pereimenovano…)*. Commenting on this decision, the secretary of the Zaporizhzhia City Council, Anatoliy Kurtev, notes that «as a result of the decisions taken in Zaporizhzhia, there are now the streets named after Prince Volodymyr, Ataman Ivan Pidkova, the regiment of Black Zaporozhians, etc. » *(Vidteper bez Moskovskoi, Kurskoi ta Pushkina…)*. Names dedicated to settlements or regions of Russia (Moscow, Kursk, Smolensk, Rostov), as well as a number of other names, have disappeared from the city map. *(Perelik aktualnykh pereimenuvan…)*. Also, by decision of the Zaporizhzhia City Council No. 2 dated 12.10.2022, Pushkin Square became Volodymyr Vernadskyi Square, and Lermontov Street was renamed in honor of Viacheslav Zaitsev, a Zaporizhia historian, a participant of the Russian-Ukrainian war, who died during the full-scale Russian invasion in Ukraine *(Perelik aktualnykh pereimenuvan…)*.

To a large extent, the decolonization process in Zaporizhzhia reflects a nationwide trend to avoid symbols associated with the Soviet and Russian imperial past. City toponyms, streets and squares, which were named after Soviet figures and Russian imperial figures, are gradually being replaced by Ukrainian symbols. This process had not only a political, but also a cultural and psychological impact on the local population, as the reinterpretation of Soviet history became an important component of the formation of a new national identity. According to the results of the study, which was conducted as part of the «Transparent Cities» program, it was found that in the process of decolonization of names in 83 cities of 23 regions of Ukraine in the period from March 2022 to May 28, 2024, 7,800 toponyms were renamed. Among the cities-leaders of derussification is Zaporizhzhia, in which 303 toponyms were renamed during the period from February 24, 2022 to May 28, 2024 *(Onyshchenko, 2024)*.

One of the vivid examples of the implementation of decolonization in Zaporizhzhia was the creation of new memorials dedicated to Ukrainian soldiers who died during the Russian-Ukrainian war (information stelae near the city council with information about the defenders of Ukraine, the «Iron Throne» in Prykordonnyky Square, etc.). Such memorials not only replaced Soviet monuments, but also reflect the process of decolonization, transformation of historical memory, and become an integral element of the formation of the citizens' national identity.

Evaluating the successes of decolonization and analyzing the processes launched by the Law of Ukraine «On Condemnation and Prohibition of the Propaganda of Russian Imperial Policy in Ukraine and Decolonization of Toponymy», the Head of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINM) Anton Drobovych emphasized that these processes are natural and useful «for the understanding of who we are, and also useful for the emergence of a new symbolic space associated with the own past of specific settlements, which was distorted, erased under the layering of imperial myths, forgotten» *(Derusyfikatsii bude potribna dodatkova…)*.

Thus, from 2014 to 2023, Ukraine was renamed: about a thousand settlements and 26 districts, almost 52 thousand other toponyms, 75 educational institutions, 33 railway facilities,

2 sea ports, about 2.5 thousand monuments and memorial signs, which contained the propaganda of the totalitarian regime, were dismantled *(Mokan, 2023)*. Such a significant number of renaming and dismantling of symbols of the imperial and Soviet totalitarian past can testify to the organic nature of the processes of derussification and de-Sovietization in Ukraine. The legislative framework adopted after 2015, including the Law «On Condemnation of Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes in Ukraine», has become a powerful tool for the implementation of decolonization processes. Particularly important are the changes to the Law adopted in 2023, which expanded the boundaries of decolonization to the level of not only communist, but also Russian-imperial symbols, which had an impact on the formation of the cultural and social identity of local communities. But at the same time, we cannot talk about the final completion of the processes of decolonization, decommunization and derussification in Ukraine, because the following factors slow down this process: criticism of both the process itself and new names; the need for clarifications from specialized institutions (UINM, MCIP) regarding whether the name is the subject to the law on derussification of toponymy; a long search for new names or the discussion of individual options; the desire of residents to use depersonalized names (decolonization aims not only to abandon imperial markers, but also to create new social patterns); illogical choice of names or reasons for decolonization; neutral names or assignment of meaningful names to objects on the outskirts of cities; limited time for public discussion of new titles *(Onyshchenko, 2024)*. And also insufficient discussion of decolonization processes in Ukraine in the media space – with an expert explanation of the relevance and necessity of these initiatives, interpretation of implementation tools, explanation of specific cases.

Thus, according to the indicators of the monitoring Internet resource Brand24, a review of the Ukrainian legislation on decommunization, its implementation, removal from circulation of communist symbols in the national information space from 2015 showed the following data: coverage in the information space (reach) – 59 thousand, share of voice (share of voice), which is measured with a percentage of publications about the concept from the total amount of mentions of the discourse, in other words, the «media visibility» of the concept is 57.35% (fig. 1). It is interesting that the «linguistic/mood/connotative» tone of mentions in the media on various platforms has the following indicators: 11% – positive, 63% – neutral, 26% – negative. In general, discussions about decommunization processes in Ukraine, including the renaming of public space due to the removal of references to Russian political and cultural figures, are represented in the media (websites, forums, podcasts, certain social networks, etc.) with the following data: coverage in the information space (reach) – 44 thousand, «media visibility» – 42.65%, the tone of mentions in the media is either neutral (45%) or negative (55%) (fig. 1).

Zaporizhzhia became a vivid example of a city that actively accepted the challenges of derussification and decommunization. Over 300 streets and public places have been renamed in recent years, and dozens of monuments devoted to Soviet figures have been dismantled or replaced with new symbols reflecting Ukrainian statehood and national identity. In the context of the intensification of processes after the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014, special attention was paid to the creation of new national symbols in the public space, which became an important element in the formation of a new Ukrainian identity. This process was accompanied not only with the renaming of toponyms, but also with the opening of new memorials that immortalize the heroes of modern struggle of Ukraine for independence, including the participants of the ATO/JFO and the national liberation movement.

The informational and cognitive dynamics of society in the context of the discourse of decolonization, derussification, and decommunization of the urban space of
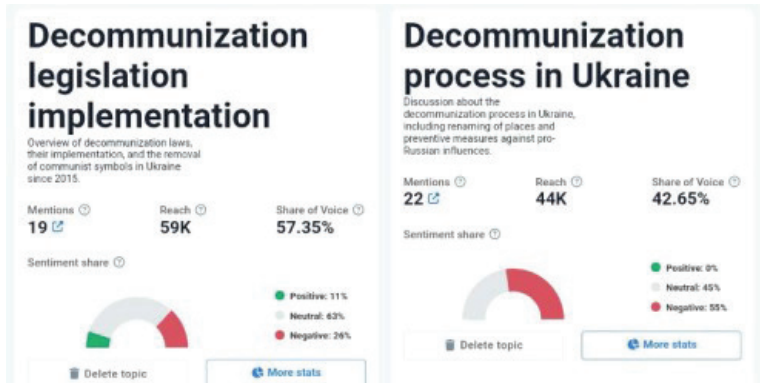
Fig. 1. Media mentions of decommunization legislation and decommunization processes in Ukraine (since 2015). Screenshots of infographics of the monitoring online resource Brand24

Zaporizhzhia in the period from 2014 to 2023 is also evidenced by the actualization of media coverage, and the possibility of involving citizens in the decolonization processes of their settlement by sending appeals to the website of the Government Contact Center. Among the institutionalized telegram channels dedicated to the issue of decolonization in the regions, it is worth mentioning «Decolonization. Ukraine» that is «a project to clean our country of occupation markers and street names» *(Telehram-kanal «Dekolonizatsiia. Ukraina»)*, which has 6,924 subscribers on October 9, 2024. The ideology of the project «Decolonization. Ukraine» was based on the personal experience of co-founder Vadym Pozdniakov, whose relatives suffered from the Holodomor and dispossession by the Soviet authorities, «so he did not want to see the names of streets and monuments in his hometown in honor of executioners, such as Hryhoriy Petrovskyi, Stanislav Kosior, Vlas Chubar and etc... in order to clean up the public space of his city, in 2017, together with like-minded people, he launched an initiative called "Decommunization. Kharkiv"» *(Mazepa, 2023)*, which eventually scaled to all-Ukrainian. Therefore, the website, Telegram channel and Instagram channel (1465 readers) of the project are information and communication platforms, where not only the community is informed about changes, but also citizens' reflections are collected in the form of comments, reactions, hashtags, reposts, etc. In an interview with the «Ukraïner» project, Vadym Pozdniakov outlined ways to involve citizens in the decolonization process, in particular by joining the project, namely by sending information about the object, filling out a form on the website, contacting on Instagram or sending information via e-mail (photo (from afar and up close); the location of the object that needs to be renamed or dismantled; a brief description). This information the project team processes and contacts in the future with the citizen who filled the form *(Mazepa, 2023)*.

In particular, the Telegram channel of the project uses public relations for the implementation of special projects, for example, the «great derussification of bookshelves». It offers addresses, data of contact persons in the cities of Ukraine, including Zaporizhzhia, who deal with the collection of waste paper, the funds from the processing of which were aimed at the vehicle for the mobile fire group of air defense in those directions where the routes of the Shaheds most often intersect (publication dated March 10, 2023).

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An interesting case is the one of spread of the option of an active Google form for choosing new street names in Zaporizhzhia, which is active for channel subscribers, makes it possible to rally around the issue a passionate part of citizens who are interested in this topic, as evidenced by their presence on the channel, and statistics infographics, expert reposts articles increase awareness in order to make the most optimal decision by the community (e.g., we are talking about V. Viatrovich's article «Renaming Zaporizhzhia: Incompetence or Sabotage» (fig. 2).
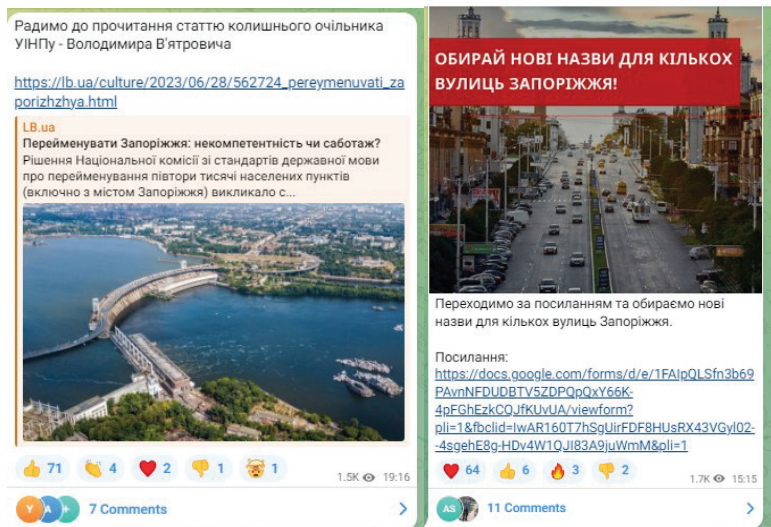

Fig. 2. Screenshot of posts of the official Telegram channel «Decolonization. Ukraine» (publications dated August 23, 2023 and June 29, 2023)

With the help of the Internet space monitoring program Brand24, we were able to trace the indicators of popularization of this topic in the media over the last year (from October 9, 2023 to October 9, 2024). Taking into account the previous indicators, in particular, the destructive trend in the tone of mentions (and this includes comments, and forums, and sites, etc.), which, in our opinion, is caused by insufficient popularization, limited time for public discussions, etc., it is important to identify context field of the concept «decommunization/decolonization» using the Brand24 (09.10.2023 – 09.10. 2024): «Ukraine without shit», «derussification», «renaming», «sovok», «Pushkin», «empire», «war», «monuments», Odesa as the most often mentioned settlement in the context, etc. The data is also confirmed by the hashtag trends (Trending hashtags) detected by the monitoring program (the first ten in the order of the rating constructed by the program are record; in brackets – the number of mentions in the media during the period 09.10.2023-09.10. 2024): #decommunization (60), #Ukraine (36), #decolonization (30), #empire (23), #sovok (23), #Ukrainebezlaina (23), #Odesa (13), #Odessa (9), #Pushkin (8), #renaming (7).

Among the information platforms, the program found the most mentions on Tik-Tok and YouTube, where, in fact, «Odesacity» also prevails with the hashtags #сноспамятников (in Russian), #пушкин (in Russian), #shadowofpushkin, #Odesa is reviving, decommunization is flourishing (fig. 3).
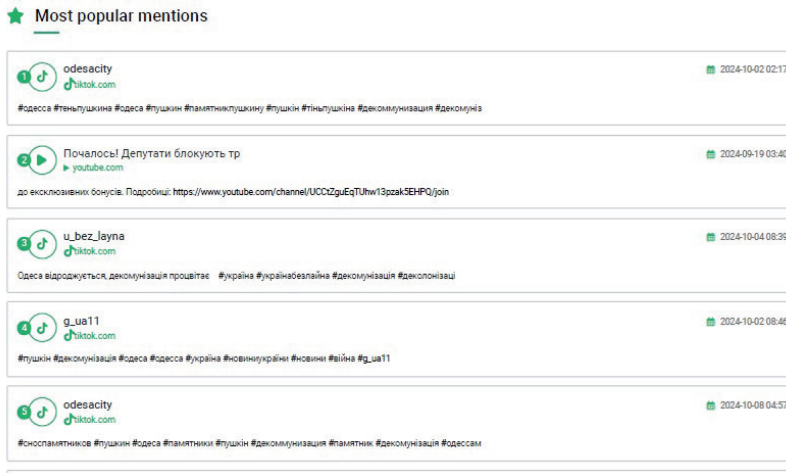
Fig. 3. The most popular mentions of the concept of decommunization in Ukraine (October 9, 2023 – October 9, 2024) according to Brand24

It should be noted that Odesa, among the settlements mentioned in the context of decommunization processes, prevails, which, in our opinion, is connected with pro-Russian political and ideological stereotypes about Odesa, on the one hand, which provokes discussion in the media, and, on the other hand, with the large-scale project «Odesa Decolonization», launched in February 2024 by the Odesa Business Club in cooperation with USAID, where the main goals are stated to be «the study of existing myths about Odesa and the creation of a platform for communication: involving everyone who cares about the topic of rethinking national identity and mental decolonization from further public discussion» (*Dekolonizatsiia pochynaietsia z tebe*). And this again proves that the informational and cognitive dynamics of society in the context of rethinking values and national identification practices depends, among other things, on the «agenda» of public initiatives, their communication capabilities, media visibility of the topic in the information space

5. Conclusions

The conducted study of the processes of decolonization, derussification and decommunization of the urban space of Zaporizhzhia in the period of 2014–2023 made it possible to draw important conclusions. The adoption of laws in 2015 and 2023 became a powerful tool for cleaning the public space of the city of Zaporszhzhia from totalitarian symbols. These regulations provided the legal basis for the dismantling of Soviet monuments and the renaming of toponyms associated with the Soviet and Russian imperial heritage. Sociological studies confirm that the initial ambiguous attitude towards the decommunization processes in Zaporizhzhia gradually transformed into significant support from the population, especially after the beginning of the Russian large-scale invasion in 2022. This indicates deep changes in public consciousness and rethinking of national identity. The active participation of public organizations and cultural institutions played a key role in the implementation of decolonization processes. Working groups engaged in the inventory of Soviet objects and public discussions contributed to the formation of new toponyms that reflect the modern Ukrainian identity.

Apart from the dismantling of Soviet symbols, derussification, which intensified after 2014, became an important step on the way to overcoming the imperial legacy. The renaming of streets and squares in honor of modern heroes of Ukraine became a powerful symbol of the new national identity. Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 became a catalyst for accelerating the processes of decolonization and derussification in Zaporizhzhia and other regions of the country. The increasing level of support for the dismantling of Soviet monuments and the replacement of toponyms indicate the importance of breaking with the colonial past. However, in the national context, the level of informational and cognitive dynamics of society as a whole is also evidenced by destructive facts – rather low visibility of the topic in the media, still quite high indicators of mentions in the media with negative connotations (according to Brand24 monitoring data), the absence of sustainable media mentions of Zaporizhzhia in the associative context with decommunization. Although hashtag trends testify to the conceptual field of decolonization, which consists of processes of derussification, renaming, dismantling/changing of monuments, removal of «sovok» and «empire» markings, reinterpretation of Russian culture in the person of «Pushkin» during war.

Further researches may focus on studying the social and cultural consequences of decolonization in different regions of Ukraine, as well as comparing the experience of Zaporizhzhia with other post-Soviet countries. In addition, it is worth investigating the role of new national symbols in public space and their influence on the formation of public consciousness.

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