

СОЦІОЛОГІЯ

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CONFLICT AND REVIV: URBAN TRASFORMATION IN MARIUPOL AFTER 2014

The present article introduces the conceptual background and the main arguments of my PhD research about the urban transformation that has taken place in the East Ukrainian city of Mariupol following the start of the Donbas conflict in 2014. The starting hypothesis of the research is that the outbreak of war in Eastern Ukraine and the temporary occupation of Mariupol by the separatist military groups had brought about an unexpected positive change in the cultural life and urban development of the city, bringing new ideas and new sources of investment to the formerly isolated industrial town. My research builds on a one year ethnographic fieldwork in Mariupol including interviews, participant observation and archival materials, in order to explore the ongoing changes as they unfold in time. The first part of the article introduces the theoretical and historical background of the case, while the second part discusses the main factors which contributed to the aforementioned urban change.

Key words: *Ukraine; Mariupol; urban anthropology; sociology; Donbas conflict; urban transformation; culture; art; memory politics; decommunization.*

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Mariupol is a city of half a million inhabitants on the South Eastern border of Ukraine. Situated on the coast of the Azov Sea, it had functioned as a port city since its foundation in 1778, serving as a meeting point for different nationalities and cultures, including Ukrainian, Russian, Greek, Jewish and Italian people. During the 20th century, the city became an important centre of the Donbas steel production: the Azovstal and Ilyich steel plants were among the largest steel producers in the Soviet Union, determining the urban development of Mariupol until the present day. As the majority of its urban structure originates in the Soviet times, Mariupol is a typical example of middle size Soviet industrial towns: the urban space is organized in a way to facilitate production, and the residential and public sectors are constructed according to the logic of Soviet urban planning. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of independent Ukraine in 1991, the city experienced a period of economic stagnation: while the two local steel plants managed to survive the transition, a large proportion of workers was downsized and the number of new investments decreased. In

a similar manner, construction of new buildings and renovation of public space also slowed down, resulting in the preservation of the majority of pre-independence urban structure. In order to understand the historical context that shaped the urban life in post-Soviet Mariupol, I outline the main tendencies of post-transitional Ukrainian society relevant to the question: the East-West divide within the country, the conflicting views of collective memory, and the economic situation after 1991.

Historical context. As the territory of Ukraine has been ruled by various different empires and political formations during the previous centuries, each empire had left their trace on the different geographical localities. The indefinite legacy of changing regimes what Tanya Richardson characterizes as the “afterlife of the state” (Richardson, 2008) is one of the main factors behind the contemporary fragmentation of Ukrainian society, an issue that heavily determines the national discourse about the future of the country. Most commonly, the problem is articulated as a cultural divide between West and East Ukraine. Tatiana Zhurzhenko refers to this phenomenon as the “Huntingtonization of the Ukrainian political discourse”, that leads to the interpretation of the regional differences as a clash of civilizations (Zhurzhenko, 2002). Scholars of the region repeatedly challenge this dichotomy as reductionist, proposing more nuanced category systems to comprehend the diversity within the Ukrainian nation (Portnov, 2013; Richardson, 2008).

The second tendency is related to the previous problem: different local historical experiences and identity constructions resulted in different attitudes towards the collective memory of the Ukrainian nation, making it impossible to produce a narrative that unites everyone in the country (Portnov, 2013; Yekelchik, 2015). This means the most important questions of Ukrainian memory discourse as the Holodomor, the Nazi collaboration and the Soviet past are constantly reinterpreted in the official narratives according to the current position of the country in the system of international relations (Himka, 2015; Menon & Rumer, 2015; Yekelchik, 2015). The lack of consistency on the part of political leaders does not facilitate historical reconciliation on the level of the population; moreover, identity conflicts are used to mobilize the population in the political fight of the regional elites, and recently, in Russian power politics (Zhurzhenko, 2002). After achieving independence, a significant tendency of the Ukrainian discourse was the nationalist re-writing of history, a strategy used by most of the countries of postsocialist Central Europe and the Baltic States. However, for a considerable group of society the Soviet past did not feel like an external force that can or should be disposed of, but a basic component of their memory and everyday reality. Many of the citizens in East Ukraine inhabited “a shared Soviet history, with its hopes, failures, horrors and crimes, where Ukrainians were not just victims of an imposed external power but also active agents of their own history” (Zhurzhenko, 2002). Among the nationalizing efforts of the Ukrainian state, these groups of the population experienced an additional sense of disorientation on top of the general uncertainty of the transition: “many who live in Ukraine but were socialized into Soviet culture feel themselves to be citizens of a nonexistent state, the products of a system now in free fall” (Wanner, 1998, p. 73). This tendency is also significant in Mariupol, where different parts of the population evaluate questions of the past differently. The recent decommunization law accepted in 2015 displayed this conflict on the level of urban space: Soviet street names and monuments were dismantled and replaced with Ukrainian national symbols, adding new historical interpretations to the city as a part of Ukrainian national space.

The last problem concerns the economy. Economic transition of Ukraine has been determined by the same forces as the politics of remembering: the radically different interests of the various political actors resulted in a vague and unfinished situation which bore the qualities of the previous and the new system in a fuzzy combination. “As a result, while

Eastern Europe's post-communist countries moved toward the market, Ukraine remained mired in a no man's land between a centrally planned economy that no longer worked and a market economy that did not yet exist" (Menon & Rumer, 2015, p. 26). The unfinished and contradictory character of economic transition is relevant for my analysis of postsocialist urban change, as it helps to understand the financial and managerial strategies that shaped the materiality of the city starting from the 1990s.

Discussion of the case. In the spring of 2014, after the Revolution of Dignity at the Maidan in Kiev, and the subsequent start of military actions in the Donbas region, Mariupol also became a hotbed of conflict. The city was occupied by the DNR separatist forces in 2014 May, and retaken by the Ukrainian military in June. As a consequence of these events, Mariupol faced a number of new circumstances that together served as a catalyst of a profound urban change. In the following section, I describe the different factors behind the transformation, and discuss their effect on the cultural life and urban environment in the city.

The first factor is related to the formulation of DNR and the long term occupation of Donetsk by the separatist forces. With the occupation of Donetsk, Mariupol became the administrative centre of Donetsk oblast, obtaining the government functions, institutions and the respective financial resources. This change in the official status of the city resulted in a lot of new investment from the local and national governments, as renovation of public buildings, the creation of new institutions for helping the internally displaced persons (IDPs), and investment in public transport, parks and leisure activities.

Beside administrative changes, the occupation of Donetsk and Lugansk regions led to an unforeseen level of internal migration: a large proportion of citizens from the occupied parts left in order to find a new home in government controlled territories for security reasons. Besides Kyiv and Western Ukraine, a significant part of these people resettled in Mariupol, the closest city to the occupied areas. This unexpected movement of people brought a lot of new labour power and new enterprises to the city. Many of the new cultural spaces that appeared after 2015 are initiated by refugees from Donetsk and Lugansk regions, including IZBA Café and Платформа ТЮ. The creators of these places represent an example of strong regional identity: among their motivations to work in the cultural sphere, they mention their local patriotism towards Donetsk and their firm belief in a Ukrainian cultural movement. The arrival of similar people presented a new source of creative labour in the local cultural scene, generating new places, ideas and activities in cooperation with local citizens of Mariupol.

The third factor is related to the Revolution of Dignity and the nationwide socio-cultural revival that followed as one of its consequences. The Maidan Revolution generated a new wave of self-consciousness among the citizens of Ukraine, also reflected in the growing number of new social projects and civil organizations founded with the goal to improve the country. Many of these projects addressed the problems of Eastern Ukraine as a reaction to the ongoing conflict, including financial and psychological help for the refugees, rebuilding programs in the areas destroyed by the war, and cultural exchanges. As a part of this tendency, a lot of different projects arrived to Mariupol as well, providing another source of new ideas and inspiration for locals. At the same time, the citizens of Mariupol were themselves also part of the post-Maidan national revival, and started to take initiatives on their own and in co-operation with outsiders.

The fourth factor concerns another external influence: as a consequence of the Donbas conflict, international organizations for development and humanitarian aid appeared in the East Ukrainian region, with a significant presence in Mariupol. The arrival of organizations as OSCE, USAID, UNHCR, Danish Refugee Council and International Red Cross had multiple influences on the local society: first, they provided a new form of financial investment in the form of development grants. Local citizens and organizations can apply to these grants in

order to found their own enterprise or cultural project. Practically all of the new urban spaces born after 2015 are financed by international grants at least partly. Second, the organizations themselves created a number of workplaces for an educated middle class part of local society, offering a new alternative on the local job market. Third, the staff of these organizations created a small but substantial new market for the local economy, including the housing market and the service sector. In summary, the presence of international aid organizations, however tragic the apropos be, serves as a new form of connection to the outside world and within that, Western Europe and the United States.

The fifth factor can be identified as the war itself: the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the resulting physical and mental damage served as a kind of turning point in the self-consciousness of the city, forcing the citizens as well as the authorities to reflect on the question of local identity and reconsider the possible future scenarios in the development of the place. The temporary occupation by the separatists, the shelling of Vostochny district in 2015 January, and the constant threat presented by the vicinity of the frontline caused a collective shock that became a catalyst of self-reflection. In this view, the tragic event of war had an unexpected positive influence on the life of Mariupol, generating new ideas, new forms of solidarity between the citizens and external actors, and new opportunities to develop.

Conclusion. The article discussed the ways how the Revolution of Dignity and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine contributed to the cultural revival and urban renewal in the city of Mariupol. The present urban revival can be understood in the context of contemporary Ukrainian history, characterised by an East-West cultural divide exploited by political interests, a lack of compromise regarding the evaluation of the Soviet period, and the complexities of economic transition from a centralized plan economy to free market. My research explores how the urban transformation of Mariupol is implemented among these conditions, providing an insight to the wider social transformation that is taking place in contemporary Ukraine.

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КОНФЛІКТ: ВІДРОДЖЕННЯ М. МАРИУПОЛЯ ПІСЛЯ 2014

У статті наводиться концептуальне обґрунтування та основні аргументи аспірантського дослідження з теми «Трансформація міської середовища, яка відбулася у місті Маріуполь на Сході України після початку конфлікту на Донбасі у 2014 р.». У дослідженні висувається гіпотеза про те, що початок війни на Сході України та тимчасова окупація Маріуполя сепаратистськими військовими групами призвело до неочікуваних позитивних змін у культурному житті та урбаністичному розвитку міста, привносячи нові ідеї та нові інвестиційні ресурси до раніше відособленого промислового міста. Стаття спирається на річне етнографічне польове дослідження у Маріуполі (включаючи інтерв'ю, спостереження учасників та архівні матеріали) націлене на вивчення поточних змін з часом. Перша частина статті презентує теоретичні та історичні основи цього питання, у другій частині обговорюються основні фактори, які зробили свій внесок до вищезазначених урбаністичних змін.

Ключові слова: Україна, Маріуполь, міська антропологія; соціологія; Донбаський конфлікт; міське перетворення; культура; мистецтво; політика пам'яті; декомунізація.

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ЦЕННОСТНЫЕ ПРИОРИТЕТЫ И РЕАЛЬНЫЕ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ ТРУДОВОЙ ЖИЗНИ НАСЕЛЕНИЯ УКРАИНЫ

В представленной статье авторы анализируют ценностные характеристик социальных практик людей, что является неотъемлемой частью исследования институционального механизма формирования социального поведения. Принято говорить о ценностно-нормативной системе координат, в рамках которой осуществляются все социальные взаимодействия. Как утверждают авторы, само словосочетание «ценностно-нормативная» подчеркивает тесную связь между собой ценностей и норм как базовых регуляторов поведения (по происхождению, функциональному предназначению и по форме проявления). В реальной жизни человек, как правило, ориентируется на ценности и нормы одновременно, в «нераздельно-смешанной» форме. В статье проводятся сравнительные характеристики удовлетворения населения Украины, выполняемой работой, денежным вознаграждением и желанием карьерного роста.

Ключевые слова: ценностные приоритеты, трудовая жизнь, социальные практики, базовые регуляторы поведения, жизнедеятельность.

Ценности и нормы являются базовыми регуляторами поведения, но регуляторами разного рода. Норма – это правило поведения, императивно предписывающее и требующее в конкретных ситуациях действий определенного типа. Она задает некие пределы, границы допустимых вариаций, в которых социальное поведение сохраняет свои качественные характеристики и установленную упорядоченность. Ценностью является то, что обладает значимостью для субъекта, смыслоопределяющим началом его жизнедеятельности. Ценностью может быть предмет любой природы, материальной или идеальной, идея, качество какого-то объекта или субъекта и т. д. – все, что играет