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Memory Sphere in Ukraine after 2014:
New Challenges or Possibilities (The Case of Mykolaiv)

Mykolaiv is a 500-thousand Russian-speaking city in the south of Ukraine. In the past, the city did not enjoy positive media coverage. When I started this research, my impressions about Mykolaiv consisted of the notorious crimes, first of all Vradivka case[1], corruption scandals[2] and flagrant appointment of a state official[3]. Of course, scandals and crimes attract a lot of attention, while positive developments rarely make their way to the headlines of the national news. However, the absence of success stories that might form an attractive image of the city is particularly evident in Mykolaiv case.

Over the course of Russian aggression, the city became one of the primary targets of Russian propaganda and subversive activities. Mykolaiv could have shared the fate of Crimea, Donetsk, or Lugansk. For decades, the Party of Regions, headed by the ousted president Viktor Yanukovych, dominated the political landscape here[4]. In the 2004 presidential election, 67% of those who voted in the Mykolaiv region saw Viktor Yanukovych as their president; therefore, they did not support the Orange Revolution.[5] In 2015, only 14% of the residents of Mykolaiv region supported Euromaidan protest movement (also referred to as the Revolution of Dignity), while 58% did not[6]. In the documentary «Mykolaiv. Chronicles of protests» (2018) a few dozens of city activists describe how difficult it was to organize Euromaidan in Mykolaiv[7], partly because of the political orientations of the population, but also because of their indifference and

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[1] In 2013 in the town of Vradiivks, Mykolaiv region, Iryna Krashkova was raped by two policemen, the attempt of local police to cover up the case led to a huge unrest in region. The year before in 2012 in Mykolaiv Oksana Makar was brutally murdered, and police also did not act effectively and arrest the suspects. The corruption and circular bail of the police as well as local authority caused anger and protests across Ukraine.

[2] In 2018 the head of the local airport, pilot, Vladyslav Voloshyn committed suicide in connection to dubious corruption deals on the airport's reconstruction. The 29 year-old Voloshyn had fought in the ongoing Ukrainian-Russian war and was awarded for his courage.

[3] In 2016 Oleksiy Savchenko, member of the pro-president political force, was appointed as a head of Mykolaiv regional administration in spite of a number of procedural violations and clear evidence that he does not meet the requirements for civil servants.

[4] After the elections of 2010 "Party of Regions" had 60 seats (out of 90) in the city council and 66 seats (out of 96) in the regional council. Their alien Communist party was the second in rating with 6 seats in city council and 11 seats in regional council http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vm2010/wp001

[5] Access: https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2004/wp0011

[6] The question in the survey of 2015 was "What is your attitude toward the Maidan events of November 2013–February 2014?" Source: http://harvard-cga.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2fa308aa641d43139d3a5b5b59081a5a

[7] Directed by Zhanna Maksimenko-Dovigich in 2018

incomprehension of protest movement. Despite low support for the Revolution of Dignity, there were no major pro-Russian rallies in Mykolaiv, as in Odesa or Donetsk.

History played a key role in reviving the concept of "Novorossiya" that served as an ideological cover for Russian aggression. In the fight for "hearts and minds" of the residents of Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine, Russia relied heavily on their Imperial and Soviet heritage, striving to prove Russian character of this part of Ukraine. As a result, the past or more precisely its interpretations became also a battleground of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, as well as a hot topic of the discussions within the Ukrainian society and political elites. "History is too important to be left to historians" – this assumption was voiced strongly in the curse of military aggression by the Ukrainian politicians. Although framing of the certain events and historical figures had been an element of government policy before, in 2015 the Ukrainian Parliament took unprecedented step introducing extensive legislative procedures in the memory sphere (so-called "de-communization laws"). Ukrainian lawmakers declared the need to protect the rights of Ukrainians and to restore the historical truth. The laws banned the Soviet symbols from the public space of Ukrainian cities, evoking the question on the place of the contested Russian imperial and Soviet heritage in contemporary Ukraine. This question is particular relevant to the cities like Mykolaiv that was established by the Russian Empire and flourished in the Soviet state.

In March of 2019, I visited Mykolaiv and conducted five interviews with the scholars of the Petro Mohyla Black Sea National University and civic activists. Over the course of my interviews, I received insight into the political and cultural life of the city. Also, I visited major museums in the city[8], analyzed available sociological data and local studies. It should be noted that often we have the data not from the city itself, but from the region. While the city is predominantly Russian-speaking and industrial, the region is more Ukrainian speaking and agrarian. However, over the last decades the city grew substantially due to the internal migration; so the attitudes of the people from countryside started to shape the city.

In the paper, I will present certain important features, which I will argue are crucial for understanding the situation in the sphere of memory in Mykolaiv. This sphere is formed by the more or less successful actions of the memory actors (official and non-official) who promote certain interpretations and approaches to the past. It involves a broad range of tools from writing history books, creating museum exhibitions to erecting monuments. Based on the analysis of memory sphere, I will try to answer the question: how the past of Mykolaiv should (or could) be narrated? Mykolaiv which stays outside major political and memory battles might serve as a good starting point for dispassionate research of the complexity of memory politics in the South of Ukraine. Later this year I am planning to visit the city of Kherson for my further research work on the topic. I should mention that last year my colleagues and I have done a research on the politics of memory in the big industrial centers[9], and the findings of that research will be included in a final report.

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[8] Mykolayiv Regional Museum of Local History, The Mykolaiv Art Museum named after Vereshchagin, Museum of Partisan Movement in Mykolayiv in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1944 (in the house of the Hero of the Soviet Union Victor Lyagin, head of the Mykolayiv underground resistance during the war), Museum of Shipbuilding and the Fleet

[9] Політика і пам'ять. Дніпро - Запоріжжя - Одеса - Харків. Від 1990-х до сьогодні. Львів, 2018.

Regimented City – the Legacies of Russian Empire and Soviet Union

Unlike many cities, the exact date of the beginning of Mykolaiv is known. The governor-general Prince Grygoriy Potemkin founded the city in 1789 between two rivers Ingul and South Buh. The city was named after Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors and merchants[10]. Having the longest beach line, the city grew literary between two shipyards: Mykolaiv Admiralty established in 1788 on the banks of the Ingul River, and Naval Shipyard, founded in 1897 on the banks of South Buh River. The city port was opened to foreign ships in the middle of the 19th century, and by the end of the century, Mykolaiv's port was third after Saint Petersburg and Odessa in terms of trade with foreign countries.

In 1897, the population of the city reached 92,000, and half of them were the military men. In the Russian Empire, Mykolaiv was not only the center of the ship building industry, but also the base of the Russian Navy. In 1826, the Russian Naval Headquarters were moved to Mykolaiv, after the Marine Astronomical Observatory was established. A prominent reminder of those times is a distinguished collection of exotic souvenirs and minerals from the Cabinet of Curiosities, opened by Black Sea Fleet Admiral and Mykolaiv Military Governor Jean Baptiste de Traversay. Now the collection is on display in Mykolaiv Regional Museum, founded in 1913.

However, the most interesting place in the city is the Regional Art Museum named after famous artist Vasily Vereshchagin. Although the artist had never lived in the city, he was a close friend of influential Mykolaiv resident Vice-Admiral Stepan Makarov. Ten years after their death, during Russo-Japanese war in 1904, Mykolaiv Society of Fine Arts decided to collect Vereshchagin`s paintings, personal belongings and family photos and open the museum. Devastating war images, the main topic of Vereshchagin art, were very close and familiar to the residents of the city, as they were constantly involved in the military campaigns of the Russian Empire.

Mykolaiv was an important city in the South of Russian Empire – the military city with the strong fleet and at same time the city of exploiters and influential merchants. In the late Soviet period, that imperial heritage was actualized with erection of the monuments to Admiral Stepan Makarov (1976)[11] and to Shipmen and Fleet Managers (1989). The last one was opened during the celebration of the centenary of shipbuilding industry in the city.

After Ukraine regained independence, the city authorities continued to stress the role of Russian Empire in development of the city; however, it was not until 2000s when the first initiatives in memory sphere appeared. In 2000s, Mykolaiv City Council erected the monuments to Mikhail Faleev (2002)[12] and Gryhoriy Potemkin (2007)[13], and a sculpture of St. Nicholas (2005). The primary focus of local historians was the foundation of the city and on its growth in

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[10] Due to another legend Potemkin named the city in the memory of the capture of Turkish fortress – Ochakiv by Russian troops on the Saint Nickolas Day the year before.

[11] Stepan Makarov (1849 – 1904) lived in Mykolaiv, was a Russian vice-admiral, commander of the Imperial Russian Navy, an oceanographer, awarded by the Russian Academy of Sciences.

[12] Myhaylo Faleev (1730 - 1792) – a merchant, so called "the first citizen of the city of Mykolaiv". He played a major role in the construction of a shipyard and of the Admiralty in Mykolaiv.

[13] Gryhoriy Potemkin (1739 – 1791) was a Russian military leader and statesman. In 1774, Potemkin became the governor-general of Russia southern provinces. He founded the towns of Kherson, Mykolaiv, Sevastopol, and Yekaterinoslav.

the beginning of 20 century. At the same time the fragmentary actions of local elites do not form any coherent narrative, as in Odesa, Dnipro, and Kharkiv, Mykolaiv authorities must have used the topic of city foundation as a political resource.

Russian imperial legacy in Mykolaiv is simplified and limited to a beautiful architecture and a few prominent historical figures. The urban images from early 20th century became the most trendy and recognizable images of the city past. These photos of the state buildings and churches often with encyclopedia style information dominate the on-line city guides, albums, and rare publications on the history of Mykolaiv. And apart from magnets, the city visitors could buy as a souvenir a collection of vintage postcards with the greetings from Mykolaiv one hundred years old. Multinational character of the city of 19 century is reflected in photos of various prayer houses – Roman Catholic Church, orthodox churches, synagogue, and Lutheran kirkha – or in the thematically designed showcases in the local museum.

Soviet authorities continued shipbuilding tradition in the city, turning Mykolaiv into one of the most important centers of shipbuilding industry in the Soviet Union. Yury Kryuchkov, most prominent historian of the city, noted that almost whole Black Sea military fleet and Soviet trade ships were built in 61 Communards[14] Shipyard (formerly Mykolaiv Admiralty) and the Black Sea Shipyard in Mykolaiv.[15] In the period of 1948—1997 the Black Sea Shipyard built a slightly more than thousand different ships, including Soviet aircraft carrier cruisers and aircraft carriers. Shipyard was highly recognized by the Soviet authority, it got two Orders of Lenin – the highest civilian decoration bestowed by the Soviet Union. Due to arms industry, during the Cold War the city was closed for foreigners and a number of restrictions were placed on its residents.

Built as a monolistic city, fully depended on certain branch of industry, Mykolaiv had devastating times with the decline of shipbuilding industry in independent Ukraine. According to my responders, Soviet times remain a period of glory in the collective memory of city residents. The permanent exhibition of the Mykolayiv Regional Museum of Local History as well as rare publications on the city history fosters the interpretation of the Soviet period as a time of the biggest industrial achievements and rapid urban development. For instance, museum hall devoted to the period of 1950s-1980s tells nothing except the work of the shipyards and state enterprises, conveyed in the biographies of their directors and local officials. The hall resembles a Board of Honor of the Soviet Union and Socialist Labor that is still standing on the central square of Mykolaiv. Focusing on production, the museum ignores other layers of Soviet experience in 1960-1980s. It seems that daily ordinary life in the Soviet period with all its problems and limitations was not worth of attention, unlike industry.

While the images from the Imperial period are promoted for tourists, the Soviet one is for internal use only. In independent Ukraine, the city lost its status as a major center of shipyard industry which formed its identity for almost a century. In Mykolaiv, the presentation of the contested Russian Imperial and Soviet heritage is intervened with preservation of the industrial heritage and, broadly speaking, the industrial identity of the city. The focus on architecture and culture nurtured in the western Ukrainian cities doesn't work in Mykolaiv that developed in

[14] Due to the legend in November 1919 soldiers of White Army shot 61 communars near the shipyard

[15] Being the author of numerous books on city history and architecture, Kryuchkov was mechanical engineer by training and worked at the Admiral Makarov National University of Shipbuilding.
https://web.archive.org/web/20071025091620/http://vn.mk.ua/stories.php?id=1515 The whole list of his works
https://web.archive.org/web/20091031160736/http://www.e-catalog.mk.ua/npb/exbt/2009/krutchkov.php

different political and cultural context. All my respondents mentioned that today the city is looking for its new identity. But I would suggest that it is about looking for another positive and successful image of the city, as mostly people dissatisfied with the current situation. As a regiment city tries to become a resort, Mykolaiv experiences a state of melancholia and confusion.

The Tale of Two Lions: Between Multinational and Ukrainian City

Walking down the central street Soborna, you cannot miss two marble lions on the granite stairs, leading to the park. In the past these sculptures stood in front of the palace of Mykola Arkas[16] that was demolished in the 1930s. But as a regular city visitor, you would hardly get to know this as there is no information signs nearby. Like these two visually misplaced lions, the city heritage is mistreated. It is a direct result of the Soviet memory policy, aimed at cleaning up and unifying the historical narrative and city space. Over the last 30 years, Mykolaiv memory actors (official and non-official) have demonstrated little interest to the restoration of suppressed heritage and memory. Instead they tend to focus on simple narratives and so-called safe topics, avoiding discussion of the contested and ambivalent topics

The figure of Mykola Arkas is one of such topics, although he is presented as a Ukrainian patriot, his identity cannot be defined in strict national terms. He supported the Ukrainian culture, even wrote a history of Ukraine, but at the same time he served for the Russian Empire as well as his father – the Admiral of the Black Sea Fleet. In 1992, Mykolaiv City Council installed a small plaque to Mykola Arkas on the sidewalk of the location, where his palace decorated with mentioned lions once stood. Later, in 1996 the Regional State Administration has introduced an annual award named after him for contribution in the development of the Ukrainian culture. These actions assured that Mykola Arkas name is known to the city residents, but that is all. .

Mykolaiv local officials preserve much of the Soviet practices and approaches in their politics of memory, including the way national question is discussed. From the beginning Mykolaiv was a multinational city, but in the regional museum this diversity is expressed through statistics and national costumes. Ukrainian and other nationalities (and their cultures) are stereotypically presented through language, customs and religion. The current policy towards nationalities in Mykolaiv region is based on the same limited approach. Although today the city is not as multinational as it used to be. The only national community, which survived in the city from the 19 century, is a Bulgarian settlement Ternivka[17].

In the sphere of culture and memory the city authorities are rather a keeper of status quo then an active player. A lack of any concrete policy explains the absence of common historical heroes in the city. The people with whom I spoke often named Soviet leader Lev Trotskyi who started his revolutionary career in Mykolaiv; or local celebrities like sportsmen – high jumper

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[16] Mykola Arkas (1853-1909) was born in the noble family of the Admiral of the Black Sea Fleet, Mykola Arkas became famous for writing of a popular book *History of Ukraine* (1908) and the melody to the opera «Catherine» based on the Shevchenko lyrics. http://history.org.ua/JournALL/kraj/kraj_2013_1/12.pdf

[17] 6 thousand people openly acknowledge their Bulgarian nationality. Гамза Володимир Тернівка. Історико-етнографічний нарис. Миколаїв: Іліон, 2013.- 535 с.

Inga Babakova and sabre fencer Olga Kharlan. Importantly, all mentioned as heroes the Ukrainian soldiers, who fought or still are fighting in the East of Ukraine, first of all – based in the city the 79th Air Assault Brigade, which defended the Donetsk Airport.

It is not like Mykolaiv forgot about its past or does not care about it. I would rather say that the city does not know how to narrate it, peaking up different narratives of memory on various occasions and even combining them. The practical and formal approach to the past dominates politics of memory, although it does not help to resolve the main problem: how to include Mykolaiv and the South in general into the history of Ukraine? This has been an extremely tough question not only for the regional intellectual elites, but also to those Ukrainian intellectuals and scholars, who do not see the solution in simple denial of the contested Imperial and Soviet heritage.

Ukrainian scholar Oleksandr Galenko argues that the history of Ukraine starts in the South, and its history should be re-written[18]. The region has a long history, but it is not studied and presented properly. The remains of an ancient settlement dated as far as XII century BC were discovered on the territory of the Wild Garden in Mykolaiv. But the most famous archeological site in Mykolaiv region is Olbia – a city founded in the 7th century BC by Greek colonists on the shore of the Southern Bug. However, till now these sites were not turned into tourist attraction. The first one is closed for visitors, as it waits for resumption of the archeological excavations. The other one is unreachable, as the only road to Olbia was damaged by heavy trucks and has not been repaired yet.

Mykolaiv Regional Museum of Local History, much Soviet in the storytelling, shows us how fragmentary is local historical narrative. The museum exhibition moves from first settlements on this territory right to the 17 century, a Cossacks' period, briefly presenting the history of nomadic tribes who lived in the region, first of all Scythians. Presentation of the region past jumps from one topic/period to another without, showing connections between them. Moreover there are a number of blind spots. The most striking is that Tatars are not mentioned at all, although this territory was a part of Crimea Khanate for 300 years.

Till 2014 and Russian attempts to fuel separatism in this region, the Ukrainian authority has done little to understand the past of the South, focusing merely on the history of Ukrainian nation and its struggle for own state. The history of Southern region consists not of the isolated in time and space cultures, different ethnic groups and states, but is a result of their interactions and often confrontations.

@cards_mk – Initiative From Below

Postcard project started in 2015, when local artist Svitlana Chebanova, wanting to send her friend a postcard from Mykolaiv, could not find one with the Ukrainian flag on it. Let's remember it was 2015, a year of still intense fighting in Donbas, and mere presence of the Ukrainian flag signified the Ukrainian character of a certain place. So people handled the Ukrainian flags over balconies of their apartments, put it inside their cars or just painted the fences with blue and yellow colors.

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[18] Олександр Галенко. Історія України починається з півдня, там її кульмінація, і з півдня вона має бути переписана. Access: http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/en/dyskusiya/1297-oleksandr-halenko-istoriia-ukrainy-pochynaietsia-z-pivdnia-tam-ii-kulminatsiia-i-z-pivdnia-vona-maie-buty-perepysana

Failed to find a postcard with Ukrainian flag, Svetlana painted one. Over next four years, the idea grew into a large diverse project. The artist has already sold or gave as a present approximately 7 thousands postcards, donating the money to the Ukrainian army. Moreover, Svetlana encourages people to take a photo of postcard somewhere abroad or in other Ukrainian places, and then to post them on the Instagram. It's her way to open Mykolaiv to the world and vise versus, thus overcoming the legacy of the Soviet closed city.

Svitlana creates not only the image of modern Ukrainian Mykolaiv, but also tries to create the image of the city, as she experiments with the composition, and puts images of prominent city buildings and monuments on the postcard.   One of the buildings that appeared on her postcards is a Yacht Club, built in 1904. Mykolaiv Yacht Club was founded in 1887 what makes it the oldest yacht club on the territory of Ukraine. A century later, in 1987 the yacht "Icarus" from Mykolaiv was the first in the USSR to make a round-the-world trip. Today there is a plan to cultivate the image of Mykolaiv as a city of yachts.

It is worth noting that the artist refers to civic not ethnic nationalism in her works. Svitlana believes that the city needs modern fashionable Ukrainian culture, not the Soviet version of it. However, not all artifacts of traditional culture are abandoned. In the past the parade of the vyshyvanka was not popular in the city, but recently that has changed. Although the war with Russia lead to the rising of patriotic feelings in the country, it is also important that traditional Ukrainian clothing became fashionable. Svitlana recalled the first time when she saw T-short with trident – Ukrainian coat of arms – on the local market that was just unimagined before 2014.

After 2014, the political landscape of the city did not change significantly, but this might be just a result of the lack of new faces in politics. Being elected as a city mayor in the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity, local businessmen Oleksandr Senkevych faced strong opposition from the political party "Oppositional Block" (former Party of Regions). In the regional elections of 2015 "Oppositional Block" won 26 out of 54 seats in the City Council[19]. On the regional level, it was less successful – only 17 out of 64 seats in the Regional Council – but pro-government forces did not get the majority as well[20].

According to the latest opinion polls, the residents of Mykolaiv region have more trust in local authorities then in central government. The geopolitical orientations of the population are not clearly defined. For 48% of the respondents the cooperation with EU is important, but only 39% supports the idea of Ukraine's integration into the EU and 27% to NATO.[21] 23 % of the responders prefer to cooperate more with Russia, then with the EU. Majority of the responders do not see any positive developments in the region, however as we look at the sphere of business, there is some growth. In 2017 Mykolaiv Sea Port became a leader in grain exports from Ukraine. Company Nibulon, established in 1991 in Mykolaiv, is the only agricultural company with own fleet and shipyard, that gives her advantages compare to other companies in the field. Also Mykolaiv Alumina Plant is the largest in Ukraine. There is a question of the share

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[19] Rest of the seats was equally distributed among three parties: presidential party "Solidarity", "Samopomich" and party "Our region"

[20] Access: http://www.cvk.gov.ua/vm_2015/

[21] Sociological agency "Rating" did project "Portraits of Regions" from 16 November to 9 December 2018. 1600 people took part in the survey. Access: http://ratinggroup.ua/research/regions/portrety_regionov_nikolaevskaya_oblast.html

of Russian capital in those companies, as well as their connections to the politicians from the Party of Regions. Big Mykolaiv business support different cultural events and historical projects in the city, and often sponsoring projects of local political elites.

Within the unfold of de-communization process, Mykolaiv authorities made certain changes in the urban space like re-naming of the central streets and changing the name of the shipyard named after 61 Baku Communards to "Mykolaiv Shipyard. The Lenin monument in Mykolaiv was dismantled on 22 February, 2014 on the wave of public outrage over mass shooting of protestors in Kyiv. In 2015 following the example of other cities, city authority erected the monument to the Haven Hundred (2015) on the square of the Council of Europe. At the opening ceremony the local officials described Mykolaiv as a protector of the South, pointing to the strategic importance of the region.

Holidays from the Soviet times still have higher level of support among residents of Mykolaiv region, then Ukrainian ones. In 2013, Soviet holidays index in Mykolaiv region – created as a sum of 5 ex-Soviet holidays: February 23rd, March 8th, May Day, Victory Day, and Great October Revolution Day – was 3,31%. Two years later, the index went down to 2,42%. However, the decrease in support for the Soviet holidays has not lead to increase for the Ukrainian ones. In Mykolaiv region the Ukrainian holidays index (created as a sum of 5 holidays Unification Day, Shevchenko's birthday, Constitution Day, Independence Day, and the Day of Commemoration of the Famine Victims) almost had not changed from 2013 to 2015 (0,66%, 0,67%)[22]. So, the support for Soviet heritage declined a little, but that is all. The people in general do not ready to dismiss Soviet holidays completely, and remain cautious towards Ukrainian heroic narratives. In 2015 the population of the region did not support the demolition of Lenin statues (66%)[23] as well as street renaming in 2013 (77%)[24].

Now only the black square marks the place where the Lenin monument once stood. That reminds me of an art installation "The Square" showed in the Swedish satirical film of 2017. After removing of bronze statue, the vacant place was marked with the light strip – symbolically presenting a place of thrust and caring which is constantly challenged during the film. Like that art installation, the black square in Mykolaiv – all what has left from the Lenin statue – for many in the city serves as a reason for wishful thinking about the developments in Mykolaiv after 2014.

Limited changes that happened in the city over last few years do not bring us closer to understanding why Mykolaiv demonstrated pro-Ukrainian position in the time of crisis. There are several opinions. According to some, Mykolaiv made a conscious choice to remain with Ukraine. Due to the others, it had been a pure coincidence that the city avoided major bloodsheds and resisted Russian propaganda. Following the developments in the neighboring cities, first of all in Odesa, and Crimea, Mykolaiv elites might have decided that they did not want such kind of scenario in their city. Of course, these two main narratives only partly explain what had happened in 2014, but both of them make sense to the people in Mykolaiv. We might even say

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[22] Access: http://harvard-cga.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2fa308aa641d43139d3a5b5b59081a5a

[23] Question: "What is your attitude toward the demolition of monuments to Lenin or other Soviet activists in your city/village?" 17,00% of those, who took part in the survey, support demolition of Lenin statues (March 2015)

[24] Question: "What is your attitude toward renaming streets in your city/village?" 16,00% of those, who took part in the survey, support street renaming (March 2013).

that in general the majority of the population felt detached from the politics and all what they wanted (as well as local authorities) is to retain stability and status quo. The levels of political participation and civic engagement have been always low among the city residents. So, without major outside interference Mykolaiv was able to live relatively peacefully through turbulent times of 2014.

Conclusion

Lately the Ukrainian authority and memory warriors, using Jan Kubick' definition, started to develop regional memory politics in response to Russian actions. The primary goal is to stress the Ukrainian roots of a certain region and to rewrite its history according to Ukrainian historical narrative. The problem is that this binary approach to the past is not always working in the South of Ukraine. Mykolaiv is the most prominent example. Writing Ukrainian history here means to re-think the concept of Ukrainian history itself. The topics and historical figures that matter to Mykolaiv residents have to find their way to the all-Ukrainian narrative.

However, we face several obstacles here. On the one hand, the regional history should not be written in the capital; on the other, the local scholars often lack intellectual and financial resources to develop new approach to the past beyond Soviet, Russian, and Ukrainian narratives of memory and stereotypes. On its turn, Mykolaiv local authorities demonstrate very pragmatic approach to the past, supporting some initiatives in the sphere of memory if they help to promote their political image. Outdated simplistic narratives and formality of memory activities lead to the situation when city residents are not interested in the narrative imposed upon them by the authorities. Over the curse of de-communization the local authorities renamed the central streets, and dismantled the most contested monuments, accepting the decisions of Kyiv, but did not go further. Concerning remembering of the Soviet past, it's not surprise, that the Soviet period evokes nostalgia with slight feeling of sadness among senior residents. The feeling of a lost purpose and economic hardships were reinforced by public resentment over the large-scale corruption and despoliation of state property in the city.

Preliminary results of the presidential election of 2019 already show resistance of the Ukrainian South to the current politics, including in memory sphere. The Revolution of Dignity as well as on-going war in Donbas and annexation of neighboring Crimea had a strong impact on the residents of Mykolaiv region. In 2015, Mykolaiv residents in the mayoral elections voted for the person from IT-sphere and in the first round of 2019 elections a newcomer without any political experience – comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyi – won in the all districts of the Mykolaiv region. By the way, Zelenskyi`s team openly declared the intention not to discuss any historical issues till the war is over[25]. With the Donbas and Crimea under occupation, the political voice of South is growing, and might become a decisive in the current Presidential elections.

In the past there was a tendency to talk about Ukraine's East-West divide that was most prominent in the memory sphere. Criticized over the years, this approach completely ignored the distinct features of the South, and as a result the need for more precise studies of that region. Today we cannot ignore the fact that in Ukrainian politics and memory sphere (as it continues to be an important part of political debates), we have a new prominent player – the South of Ukraine.

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[25] Access: https://zbruc.eu/node/88220

Postscript

On March 15, 2019 the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance organized a round-table on the issue of de-colonization in Ukraine. Pointing to the success of de-communization, Volodymyr Viatrovych, head of the Institute, stressed that Ukraine should do the next step and fight with the Russian imperial heritage[26]. Viatrovych justified this step by the on-going war with Russia, which uses the imperial legacy to prove the Russian character of this part of Ukraine and promote separatism there. The new policy predominantly targets the southern regions of Ukraine and any top-down attempts to make this region more Ukrainian could provoke a conflict and undermine a slight progress that has been reached in the region after 2014. Even the most pro-Ukrainian people in Mykolaiv have problems in identifying city past with solely Ukrainian narratives and heritage.

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[26] Access: https://uinp.gov.ua/pres-centr/novyny/u-kyyevi-govoryly-pro-impersku-spadshchynu-v-ukrayini-ta-shcho-z-neyu-robyty?fbclid=IwAR1mKt7M8CPTtYnBvhysCCNjwk2g5uw_RQm5trqOb0uRNSENTYI07_Vakc0