

# **Litsa Front Memorials on the Battle for Zapolyarye: Developments in the Post-Soviet Period**

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## **Panel title**

War memories and memory politics of the Norwegian-Russian borderland:  
Commemorations, memorials, narratives

## **Abstract**

The paper observes the changes in the commemorative culture of the Battle for Zapolyarye by analysing the developments of war monuments in the Murmansk region in the post-Soviet period. These developments are examined in the context of Russian memory politics and its key trends, including the transformation and securitisation of the official narrative of the Great Patriotic War. Overall, the historical and cultural heritage dedicated to the Battle encompasses 520 objects, 75 of those were created in the post-Soviet time. The analysis demonstrated that the number of new monuments was increasing in the Soviet period twice as fast as in 1992-2020. The quantitative developments of post-Soviet years were marked by a strong decline in the 1990s followed by a comparative booming during the first Putin's decade that peaked in 2007 and 2008, which, however, was changed by a new ten years dropping lasting until now. Besides erecting new monuments, the regional officials and activists contribute a lot to the redevelopment and conservation of existing objects. Some of the reconstruction and conservation projects, for example, the redevelopment of the Valley of Glory memorial complex, cause heated debates. The paper concludes that the developments of Murmansk regional commemoration infrastructure can hardly be explained solely by the impact of federal memory politics. This is more likely that mnemonic actors rear new monuments to strengthen the regional identity and stress the role played by the region and its people in the Great Patriotic War.

## **Keywords**

Memory politics, Battle for Zapolyarye, Murmansk oblast, war monuments, Second World War, Russia

## **The Battle for Zapolyarye and its meaning**

The Battle for Zapolyarye – the military actions of the Soviet armed forces against Nazi Germany as well as Finnish troops in June 1941 – October 1944 – is considered as a central event in the WWII history of the Arctic. Its first stage was marked by the German-Finnish massive ground offensive undertaken as part of Operation Silver Fox by the Mountain Corps Norway on the Soviet positions at the Murmansk direction. The Soviet 14th army made up a stout resistance to the superior invasion forces and held back the enemy on the line along the Zapadnaya Litsa River, thereby destroying the plans of the German command to rapidly capture Murmansk. The Soviet Union also kept control over the railway connecting the city with the country's central part by holding off the Axis attempts to cut off this vital supply line.<sup>1</sup> During the defence operation, the Northern Fleet played a particularly significant role in supporting the ground troops and damaging the German supply lines. The Fleet's ships jointly with the Allies maintained the organisation of the famous Arctic convoys and shipments from Great Britain and the United States to the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup>

The next year, the Soviet command attempted to drive back the Germans from the Murmansk direction and forestall the enemy by attacking first. The offensive started on April 28 and initially went successful until it bogged down after stumbling on the German thick-lined defences and unforeseen bad weather. Besides, the Germans having a superior man- and gunpower had already accumulated a solid experience in defensive warfare to that moment.<sup>3</sup> The Soviet command did not achieve its initial objectives; still, the German strike on Murmansk was prevented.

The frontline along the Zapadnaya Litsa River became stable again. In the German documents, the Arctic front often appeared as “the front without (extensive) combat activity”.<sup>4</sup> To a great extent, such stability was due to the extreme weather conditions and difficult terrain that complicated maintaining large-scale operations. The trench warfare in the Zapolyarye was nonetheless accompanied by naval combats and constant bombing of Murmansk.

The general situation in the Eastern Front changed dramatically in 1944 when a row of Red Army decisive strategic offensive operations all over the Eastern Front put in place the necessity for the same one in the Arctic. On October 7, the Soviets began the Petsamo-Kirkenes operation during which the Soviet troops made multiple breakthroughs in the German defence. As a result, the Red Army completely seized the offensive initiative and proceeded with the liberation of Northern Norway. The German 20th Mountain Army and the German Navy were heavily defeated; Germany lost one of the most essential sources of nickel ore, a strategic raw material.<sup>5</sup> The Soviet troops took under control the town of Kirkenes and a vast area of the Norwegian province of Finnmark.

For describing the military actions at the Murmansk theatre of operations in 1941-1944, the Soviet and post-Soviet historiography uses several related terms such as *Битва за Заполярье*

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<sup>1</sup> Statyuk, 2006: 30.

<sup>2</sup> Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voyna 1941–1945 godov, Volume 2: 639, 660.

<sup>3</sup> Karel'skiy front, 1984: 83-4; Manninen, 2004: 105-6.

<sup>4</sup> Ziemke, 1959: 245, quoted after Kivimäki, 2020: 38.

<sup>5</sup> Velikaya Otechestvennaya Voyna, Volume 4: 329.

(the Battle for Zapolyarye), *Оборона Заполярья* (the Defence of Zapolyarye) and some other ones. The latter definition is also ingrained in the public context due to the campaign medal “За оборону Советского Заполярья” (“For the Defence of the Soviet Transarctic”) which was awarded to at least 350,000 people.<sup>6</sup> The Battle for Zapolyarye is chronologically subdivided into several periods of fierce battles and relatively stable situation:

1. 29.06.1941 – 10.10.1941 – Strategic defensive operation in Zapolyarye;
2. 28.04.1942 – 11.05.1942 – Murmansk offensive
3. 7-29.10.1944 – Petsamo-Kirkenes operation.

Norwegian historiography uses the terms *Murmanskfronten*<sup>7</sup>, *Nordfronten*<sup>8</sup> or *Litsafronten*<sup>9</sup>. On the contrary to the Russian and Norwegian contexts, the English-speaking literature has no similar denomination of the Battle. Instead, separate terms, as the Operation “Silver Fox” for the Soviet defensive and Petsamo-Kirkenes operation for the offensive parts, are commonly used. I prefer the Russian term in this article because it refers to the Russian conceptualisation of the war in the region as well as to its reflection in the Russian memory culture.

Alongside its considerable impact on WWII that is comparatively well-studied, the Battle has also gained a symbolic significance, especially for the Russian context. Unlike the rest Eastern Front, Zapolyarye was its only part where the German forces failed to advance far. The Soviet military historiography named the battle’s offensive part, the Petsamo-Kirkenes operation, as “the tenth Stalin’s blow”<sup>10</sup>, and highly evaluated its implementation by the army command from the point of the art of war.<sup>11</sup> Besides the Soviet, German, and Finnish troops as main fighting forces, the battle in the Arctic involved the contingents from the other Anti-Hitler coalition states as well as combatants from the local Norwegian and Sami population.<sup>12</sup> The extensive aid from Great Britain and the United States provides a strong reference to the tight cooperation between the Soviet Union and the other countries of the Anti-Hitler Coalition. The Soviet troops in Northern Norway greatly contributed to the reconstruction of the region devastated by the retreating Germans.<sup>13</sup> All these circumstances give more historical, cultural, and commemorative significance to the Battle as one of the high points in the history of Arctic Europe.

### Contemporary trends in the Russian memory politics

Continuing the topic of the past and its meaning for the present, one can refer there to the developments of **(collective) memory studies**, an academic tradition particularly interested in how the past is being used in society. The past makes an impact on society not only by becoming the present but also by being **reflected** by social consciousness and **translated** into

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<sup>6</sup> <https://victorymuseum.ru/about/museum-collection/numismatics/medal-za-oboronu-sovetskogo-zapolyaryya/>.

<sup>7</sup> Olsen, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Jaklin, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Gorter et al., 2005.

<sup>10</sup> In the late 1950s due to the campaign against the Stalin’s cult of personality, his name was deleted from the wording.

<sup>11</sup> Karel'skiy front, 1984: 291; Rummyantsev, 1955: 93.

<sup>12</sup> Kivimäki, 2020: 36-7.

<sup>13</sup> The Barents Region, 2015: 322.

symbols used by individuals and social groups for achieving their goals. These issues of reflection and translation of the past caused a flora of various explanations, conceptualisations, and discussions<sup>14</sup>, so it is quite complicated to synthesise a consensual term that would consider all accounts on social memory. Nevertheless, one can postulate that heterogeneity of social actors implies variety of interpretations of the past shared by these actors. These interpretations can and do serve as a powerful legitimising instrument, for that reason they are often used by various political actors to strengthen their positions.

The described process forms the basis for **memory politics**, or an organized and institutionalised activity of **mnemonic actors**.<sup>15</sup> To a large extent, mnemonic actors contend for dominance in the symbolic space, which manifests, in part, in creating **memory infrastructure**. According to Langenbacher, memory infrastructure performs as a “factor facilitating the longevity and continual re-creation of memory and its influence” and encompasses “memorials, museums, documentation, curricula, commemorations, and civil societal organisations”.<sup>16</sup> These objects are often tangible and empirically observable, so there is no coincidence that they often constitute scopes of case studies in the field of collective memory. For a scholar of social memory, it is quite reasonable to take memory infrastructure as a point of departure for at least one more reason. The developments of memory infrastructure can be extremely representative in terms of the dynamics of memory politics, its current trends, and possible implications.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by dramatic transformations of all spheres of Russia’s society; these transformations also had a reach in the sphere of memory politics. Some researchers distinguish four main periods in post-Soviet Russian memory politics, namely 1) general crisis of mass historical consciousness and dismantling of the Soviet ideological and political heritage in 1992-1994; 2) mobilisation of all available resources for legitimising the new regime in 1995-2000; 3) elaboration of priorities in 2001-2008; 4) development of a conventional and conciliatory strategy in official memory politics from 2009 onwards.<sup>17</sup> Others describe the process in terms of the transition from the official “critical narrative” towards the Soviet past that prevailed in the 1990s to the “eclectic narrative” of the 2000s and its subsequent development and consolidation in the 2010s that attempted to integrate various conflicting narratives.<sup>18</sup>

In any case, the analysis of dynamics in memory politics provides a certain differentiation between the period of Yeltsin presidency and Putin’s era. Yet one can hardly assume that intrinsic changes in regulating memory politics by the regime between the 1990s and 2000s took place; rather the Yeltsin’s and Putin’s memory politics are different in their attitude towards the Soviet period, with its delegitimization in the first case and its accommodation for the regime’s needs in the second one. This is one more reason why we can examine the said periods of the post-Soviet memory politics integrally.

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<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy presented a compendium of crucial literature on contemporary social memory studies. See Olick et al, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Bernhardt and Kubik characterise mnemonic actors as “political forces that are interested in a specific interpretation of the past” (2014: 4).

<sup>16</sup> Langenbacher, 2010: 29.

<sup>17</sup> Titov, 2017: 78-89.

<sup>18</sup> See Malinova, 2018.

Overall, one can mark several key trends in contemporary official Russian memory politics. The first trend is increasing involvement of the state and state-backed actors into the processes related to the articulation of collective memory.<sup>19</sup> The second one manifests itself in the state's unprecedented attention towards the memory of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. For the post-Soviet Russian state, the war has become a genuine "myth of origin"<sup>20</sup> due to its inexhaustible legitimising potential and unprecedented impact on Russian society. The other trend refers to attempting to create an official narrative of Russia's history that would reassemble various stories under one conceptual framework and reinterpret them in a patriotic and state-centric way.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the official Russian memory politics is particularly attentive towards the aspect of mediation and remediation of memories, i.e. dissemination of memories by the media and maintaining their circulation in the society by constant repeating and reusing them in the public space.<sup>22</sup>

Talking on to the Great Patriotic War and the central role it plays at the forefront of the Russian state's memory politics, one can observe a few implications in which such role is manifested. The narrative of the war was being established by the post-Soviet Russian authorities not only by providing outlay on modifying it and broadening of its outreach but also at the cost of absorbing and utilising the symbolic potential of the other narratives. The official narrative on the October Revolution, described by Olga Malinova as "the key element of the Soviet historical narrative, the "foundation myth" of the Soviet state"<sup>23</sup>, suffered this fate.<sup>24</sup> Also, during the last decade, the Russian officials made several attempts to provide legal and institutional protection for the memory of the Great Patriotic War. One can mention here the experience of the History Commission<sup>25</sup> existed in 2009-2012<sup>26</sup> and the Law Against Rehabilitation of Nazism adopted in 2014.<sup>27</sup> The Great Patriotic War is given a mention in

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<sup>19</sup> Mariëlle Wijermars sees a correlation between the raisings of protest level among the population and the peaks of state activity within the sphere of collective memory, explaining it by the regime's urgent searching for legitimisation resource during the periods of instability (Wijermars, 2018: 226).

<sup>20</sup> Kopusov, 2011: 163.

<sup>21</sup> A good example of such framework is the concept of a "Thousand-Year-Old Russian State" explained and analysed by Olga Malinova (Malinova, 2018: 93-7).

<sup>22</sup> On the Russian state's strategies of remediation in the sphere of cultural memory, see Wijermars, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Malinova, 2015: 32.

<sup>24</sup> The Soviet narrative of October Revolution combined a distinct class content referring to a violent struggle against the bourgeois government with the demonstration of might gained by the "world's first state of workers and peasants". For that reason, it was doomed for being dismantled after the regime changed. However, while the post-Soviet Russian regime studiously avoided the class content of the revolution trying to replace it by the message of "consent and conciliation", it adapted the "statist" elements of the former narrative on the revolution, namely its military, demonstrational and loyalist subcomponents; this endeavour partly resulted in the reestablishment of National Unity Day celebrated on 4<sup>th</sup> November, a holiday originating from pre-revolutionary times and emphasizing a "superclass" and traditional essence of the Russian state. Besides, the history of Red Square military parades is quite illustrative. During the Soviet period and until 1990, the yearly military parades in Moscow's Red Square were staged namely on 7<sup>th</sup> November, the Day of October Revolution – not counting the May Day parades ceased since 1969 and the jubilee Victory Day parades staged in 1965, 1985 and 1990. Since 1995, the parades are held on 9<sup>th</sup> May every year, and the Russian public consciousness henceforward associates military parades with the Great Patriotic War.

<sup>25</sup> The organisation's full name is the Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests (*Komissiya pri prezidente Rossiyskoy Federatsii po protivodeystviyu popytkam fal'sifikatsii istorii v usherb interesam Rossii*).

<sup>26</sup> On the Commission's activity, see Miller, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> The Law amends the Criminal Code with the article establishing a penalty for denying findings of Nuremberg Tribunal and spreading intentionally false information about the Soviet Union's activities during World War II. See Federal'nyy zakon ot 5 maya 2014 g. N 128-FZ..., 2014.

around 30 percent of all President Putin's commemoration speeches, which is more frequently than any other historical event.<sup>28</sup> The array of the commemorative culture dedicated to the Great Patriotic War scopes a colossal segment of the public space and fills it with solid symbolic content. The measure of societal and cultural impact made by the topic of the Great Patriotic War is comparable to no historical events and processes best-known by Russian citizens. This impact is strongly exemplified by the Immortal Regiment (*Bessmertnyi Polk*), an annual international civil commemorative march, whose geography scopes, besides Russia, more than eighty countries. No doubt that the commemorative tradition dedicated to the war has its rise in the Soviet epoch<sup>29</sup>; still, the current framework of Victory Day's public celebrations weaving together commemorative and entertaining activities was formed mainly in the post-Soviet period.

All these changes, alongside the bottom-up Great Patriotic War "memory boom" of the 2000s widely supported by the Russian officials,<sup>30</sup> also impacted the developments of memory infrastructure, namely war memorials. Mischa Gabowitsch points out that the establishment of Soviet war memorials passed in two waves. In the post-war period, memorials were mainly being erected outside the Soviet Union on the liberated territories, resolving the practical problem of burying the fallen Soviet soldiers and maintaining the Red Army's symbolic presence there. In the mid-1960s, after the state slightly adjusted the official cult of Victory, war memorials began to be actively installed in the Soviet cities and villages. Describing the post-Soviet era developments, Gabowitsch argues that contemporary Russian policy on war memorials is caused in many ways by "reminiscent of the Brezhnev era".<sup>31</sup> Nataliya Danilova highlights a significant role in developing memory infrastructure played by "search and recovery operations" (*poiskovye otriady, poiskoviki*) whose main purpose is to "find the remains of unburied soldiers, identify them and rebury them with respect". These operations are held since the late Soviet period and often result in establishing new "places of memory" such as memorial signs, obelisks, identified mass grave sites, etc. Interestingly, the Russian Orthodox Church is also involved in creating the memory infrastructure by installing objects with religious meaning near commemoration sites.<sup>32</sup>

In general, raising awareness towards the memory of the Great Patriotic War in post-Soviet Russia configures itself in many ways. The Russian state is engaged in transforming and securing the official narrative of the war as well as initiating new and administering existing activities related to the war commemoration. The production of commemorative culture involves various mnemonic actors and to a certain extent reflects changes in the distribution of power resources in Russian society. The ongoing process in the sphere of memory

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<sup>28</sup> Malinova, 2018: 96.

<sup>29</sup> In the literature, the opinion was established that there was no celebration of Victory Day in the USSR in the period of 1947-1964 (See e.g. Tumarkin, 1994: 104; Kuposov, 2011: 93; Malinova, 2018: 93). It was often explained by Stalin's suspiciousness towards the military elite and his misgivings about its possible growing influence because of the holiday. This opinion should be recognized as erroneous. Officially, May 9 was proclaimed a working day but remained a public holiday (*prazdnichnyi den*). In practice, this decision implied combining holiday events with working activities, which was impossible without compromising working hours; for that reason, the Victory Days during the period were de-facto half-time working days accompanied by vast public commemorative activities afternoons. More on the counterarguments to the aforementioned opinion and on the transformations of the Victory Day celebration in the Soviet period, see Gabowitsch, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Bernstein, 2016: 422.

<sup>31</sup> Gabowitsch, 2014: 7.

<sup>32</sup> Danilova, 2015: 151.

infrastructure development is of particular interest due to its high relevance to studying general dynamics of Russian memory politics and therefore demands an in-depth empirical inquiry.

From that point, the memory of the Battle for Zapolyarye viewed through the lens of an aspect of the Battle's monuments promises to reveal some features of the complex and multifaceted Russian memory politics, e.g., the peculiarities of its regional implementation. The geographic scope of this study grasps the Murmansk oblast as the Battle's operations and logistics took place almost exactly within this region's borders. Since only a minor part of the region was occupied by the German forces, the local war memorial culture experienced both waves of war memorialisation in the Soviet period. Additionally, this culture sensitively co-opts current memorialisation trends in this border region fulfilling, in a way, an internationally significant representational function.

### **The Battle in the Murmansk region's cultural memory**

Even though the study of cultural heritage of the Murmansk oblast is relatively well-developed in the research literature, some issues related to Great Patriotic War memorials still demand more scholarly attention. To a certain extent, this circumstance is due to war monuments were not examined in contexts that are beyond cultural and heritage studies, for instance, in the context of Russian memory politics.

This article aims to analyse the developments of memory infrastructure related to the Battle for Zapolyarye that occurred after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the Murmansk oblast. One small but empirically valuable research task in that point might be considering the whole scope of war monuments of the Murmansk oblast with tracing their development trends and patterns. If done so, one can verify some hypotheses propounded upon analysing nationwide Russian memory politics, such as officially supported "memory boom" in the sphere of the Great Patriotic War commemoration, as well as turning the narrative of the war into a form of "usable past".

To accomplish the said research task, I have gathered the data on the war memorials related to the Battle for Zapolyarye and brought it together into a single database. All the data was taken from open sources whose diverse profile includes academic articles, official documents, local reference literature, web materials, etc. Such an eclectic approach is grounded upon the necessity of getting a holistic perspective on the subject. The method of work with secondary sources is conditioned to some extent by the Russian specifics of work with cultural heritage. The protection and preservation of cultural heritage in Murmansk oblast is regulated according to one federal and one regional law<sup>33</sup> providing two respective categories of historical and cultural significance for recognised objects. A major part of cultural heritage does not fall into recognition of cultural significance and remains beyond the state protection: thus, according to some calculations, only 12 percent out of the overall number of heritage objects related to the Great Patriotic War enjoy the protected status.<sup>34</sup> This is generally due to that no less than forty

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<sup>33</sup> Federal Law 73-FZ, dated 25 June 2002, "On the objects of cultural heritage (monuments of culture and history)", and Law of the Murmansk Oblast 801-01-ZMO, dated 19 October 2006, "On the objects of cultural heritage (monuments of culture and history) in the Murmansk oblast". See also Svod pamyatnikov Murmanskoy oblasti, 2012: 4.

<sup>34</sup> Alekhin and Bertosh, 2017: 9-10.

years should pass since the object's moment of occurrence to put it under state protection.<sup>35</sup> It is worth pointing out that periodically local researchers conduct activities on identifying heritage objects and recommending them for some category of protection.<sup>36</sup> Anyway, none of the war memorials erected in the post-Soviet period were recognised as historically or culturally significant so far.<sup>37</sup>

Given all these facts, a difficult question of getting verified information about non-protected commemoration objects came up before me. A sheer lack of relevant information was not compensated even by the results of the cultural heritage inventory that was made by local experts in 2006-2007.<sup>38</sup> For instance, inventory operations did not concert the territory of the Lovozersky district.<sup>39</sup> Fortunately, the non-commercial fund "Schit" ("Shield") supporting the FSB RF's employees and pensioners has gone to great lengths to describe commemoration sites of the Murmansk oblast thereby providing the lacked information for this research.<sup>40</sup> The fund's resource is also crucial as it encompasses sites located in less popular destinations and abandoned settlements as well as those outside of settlements in remote and isolated areas.

The information regarding the objects put under the state protection was taken from the Ministry of Culture of the Murmansk oblast's website.<sup>41</sup>

### **Key quantitative changes**

The database I created scopes 520 commemoration objects. 59 of them are state-protected, one was categorised as having a monument of federal significance unlike the rest ones being recognised as regional cultural heritage. The commemoration sites of our interest belong to non-protected objects. The date of occurrence is unsure in case of 179 objects, so we cannot consider them in the context of post-Soviet war commemoration. Still, the number of monuments identified as those erected after 1991 is 75, sharing around 22 percent of object with a certain date of occurrence or 14 percent of all objects related to war commemoration. Interestingly, the Soviet-time war commemoration culture developed rather more extensive than afterward as the number of monuments was growing in 1941-1991 twice as fast as in 1992-2020. Another clear pattern is a strong decline in the number of new developments in the 1990s that was changed by vividly raised attention towards war memory infrastructure during the first Putin's decade peaking in 2007 and 2008, with seven and nine opened monuments. This Soviet-resembling growth pattern did not get a chance to extend itself onto the next ten years marked by even fewer erected monuments than under Yeltsin. Admittedly, the said quantitative dropping was partially reimbursed by some recent qualitative changes.

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<sup>35</sup> According to both laws.

<sup>36</sup> At the time of writing, three objects related to the Great Patriotic War were identified, one was recognized and put under state protection. See Perechen' vyyavlennykh ob'yektov kul'turnogo naslediya, raspolozhennykh na territorii Murmanskoy oblasti, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> One can consider the "Valley of Glory" memorial complex as an exclusion since it was constructed in the Soviet period but has been experiencing essential changes and redevelopments throughout the post-Soviet time up until the present time.

<sup>38</sup> General results of the inventory are available here: <https://helion-ltd.ru/murman-culture-18/>.

<sup>39</sup> Alekhin, 2018: 48.

<sup>40</sup> The resource is available here: [http://www.schit-gosbezopasnost.ru/?page\\_id=1318](http://www.schit-gosbezopasnost.ru/?page_id=1318).

<sup>41</sup> See Perechen' ob'yektov kul'turnogo naslediya, vkluchennykh v yediny gosudarstvennyy reyestr ob'yektov kul'turnogo naslediya (pamyatnikov istorii i kul'tury) narodov Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020.



The sample I focus on encompasses 75 monuments that appeared after 1991. Two-thirds of them belong to the urban area, the rest are situated on the territories where fierce battles were fought in 1941-1944, namely in the Zapadnaya Litsa valley, the Mustatunturi ridge, and on the Rybachy and Sredniy peninsulas. Since the sample contains objects of various kind, the question then arises as to how to categorise these objects to receive a representative general picture of war commemoration culture in the oblast. The required categorisation is bound to be manifold and take into account an array of characteristics referred to the objects' formal (type and visual features), substantive (subject of commemoration and its specifics) as well as some contextual (location, history, usage) aspects. On the contrary, in categorising objects, it is necessary to adhere to the principles of simplicity and representativeness. So, I decided to combine all the monuments into five categories: 1) objects related to remains of the fallen in the war, namely graves, obelisks, and memorial signs (25), 2) memorial plaques (13), 3) monumental architectural objects (34), 4) historic sites (1), and 5) other objects (2). The third group, which is the largest one, includes six memorial complexes that usually combine two or more types of commemoration objects. Most of the monuments glorify the deeds of valour of various military units whereas sixteen are dedicated to the memory of individual heroes. Five commemoration sites are related to non-combatant groups. What about monuments to military men, the distribution by armed service branch appears as: objects dedicated to land troops (33), navy (23), NKVD and border guard (5)<sup>42</sup>, air force (2) and foreign troops (1). Seven new monuments commemorate people of local background, both military and civil, emphasizing their belonging to a local community and contribution to the cause of victory in the war. Worth mentioning the fact that memory infrastructure in the Murmansk oblast is sensitive to the warriors who died of wounds as six objects have a bearing of this side of the Battle for Zapolyarye accompanied by significant losses on the Soviet part. Despite Communist party control got filed in history in the post-Soviet years, war monuments continue being designed in a strict and solemn style inspired by socialist realism. Perhaps this is more likely due to the adherence to the canon of commemorative culture, which took shape during the Soviet period.

As it is evident from the foregoing, the war memory in post-Soviet Murmansk oblast blends heterogeneous influences and trends set by federal memory-political juncture as well as local specifics. In quantitative terms, the development of regional memory infrastructure dedicated to the Great Patriotic War experiences a strong decline after 1991 followed by the 2000s comparative boom years. Although an average commemoration object of that period is dedicated to a certain group of the military, located in the urban area, and inspired by the similar works of the Soviet period, the memory infrastructure demonstrates a profound diversity and by no means can be reduced to such smoothed profile. To figure out more details on the contemporary developments of monuments in the region, a qualitatively focused analysis of the most representative cases is needed.

### **Remediation, Conservation, Urbanisation: main aspects of developing war memorials**

In his conceptualisation of social memory, Pierre Nora attributed it evolutionary, constantly changing nature<sup>43</sup>, so, naturally, monuments as explicit side of memory culture usually perform

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<sup>42</sup> Border guard was subordinate to the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), for that reason, I set the monuments to representatives of these services under single category.

<sup>43</sup> Nora, 1989: 8.

as indicators of dialectical processes related to social change.<sup>44</sup> Although the war memory culture in Russia does not tend to change substantially over time, there are several problems with conservation of heritage in the Murmansk oblast. The researchers usually refer to natural ones, such as harsh climate conditions of the Arctic zone<sup>45</sup>, or to the ones caused by societal factors, such as insufficient administrative efforts, imperfection of legislation<sup>46</sup> or private sector's claims on some lands where objects are located.<sup>47</sup>

Alongside with introducing new war monuments, the Murmansk officials, experts, and heritage activists work with already existing ones by conducting various conservation practices. Among these practices, the most common ones are reconstruction (complete or partial changing of composition, e.g., by or replacing old elements or adding new ones), restoration (renewing or returning commemoration objects to its original, normal, or unimpaired condition), identification and reburial of remains. As it follows from the available data, since 1991 at least seven monuments were reconstructed, six were restored (several times in some cases). Remains of the fallen soldiers were identified and reburied within the boundaries of six objects.

However, the list of heritage conservation practices does not end here as some objects had more substantial modifications combining all the already mentioned ones. Most particularly this is true of the "Valley of Glory", a renowned memorial complex sprawled in the valley of Zapadnaya Litsa River. The place became an arena of fierce combat between German and Soviet forces in 1941-1944 and was known unofficially as "the Valley of Death". The Valley of Glory, as an axial location of the Battle for Zapolyarye's geography, is also a popular tourist destination. Nowadays the memorial complex consists of two parts, the central "root" for official commemorative activities (e.g., the ones related to Victory Day) assembled by monuments, pieces of authentic war-era armaments as well as other venues, and the graves of the Soviet soldiers died in the Battle for Zapolyarye. Its history dates back to 1959 when the first war remembrance object, a pair monument "To the Fallen" was installed. The complex continued to develop in the ensuing years: since 1985, honourable reburials of the remains of fallen soldiers, found thanks to the *poiskoviki*'s efforts, regularly take place on the Valley's territory; from 2005 onwards, some objects have been reconstructed and restored.<sup>48</sup>

These processes had a normal course until recent years when the situation involving the redevelopment of the "Valley of Glory" came into focus. The memorial complex was recognised as an object of historical and cultural heritage in 2010, its territory was approved in 2014 and under that form the object was included on the unified state register of cultural heritage in 2015. However, three years later, the regional Committee on Culture and Art<sup>49</sup> adopted a new decision based on the expert opinion; in fact, the decision left the protection status intact only for the "To the Fallen" monument while removing it from the whole complex.<sup>50</sup> The probable rationale of this move emerged later in the year when large-scale reconstruction and improvement works were carried out and got a negative reception from the

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<sup>44</sup> For instance, James Mayo by analysing the American case illustrated how memorials can articulate the political change. See Mayo, 1988: 73-5.

<sup>45</sup> Alekhin and Bertosh, 2017: 14.

<sup>46</sup> Alekhin, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Shumkin, 2017: 288.

<sup>48</sup> Svod pamyatnikov Murmanskoy oblasti, 2012: 27.

<sup>49</sup> Transformed into the Ministry of Culture of the Murmansk Oblast in 2019.

<sup>50</sup> See Perechen' ob'yektov kul'turnogo naslediya, vkluchennykh v yedinyy gosudarstvennyy reyestr ob'yektov kul'turnogo naslediya (pamyatnikov istorii i kul'tury) narodov Rossiyskoy Federatsii, 2020.

part of local *poiskoviki* and heritage activists who blamed the officials in attempting to relocate the remains without legal permission. The situation attracted much attention being discussed over the media: negative voices protested strenuously by pointing at the decision's inconsistency with the law as well as wrongdoings and mistakes during reconstruction, some of the protesters particularly criticised the location and design of new tombstones.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, the officials and public organisations close to them explained the works by aesthetic considerations and needs of making the Valley more attractive for tourists.<sup>52</sup> The conflict ended up in a compromise; still, if being studied deeper, it can tell a lot about the configuration of the region's key mnemonic actors and patterns of relationships between them.

Murmansk oblast is a highly urbanised region, so no surprise is that two-thirds of new monuments were erected in cities and towns. The cities of Polyarny and Murmansk stand out against the general background by having 13 and 12 objects reared in the post-Soviet period respectively. In Polyarny, all the named monuments are dedicated to the Northern Fleet. A particularly interesting monument is the "Sea Soul" memorial complex installed in 2003 which is a piece of workmanship of Lev Kerbel', a famous Soviet and Russian sculptor also known abroad. Kerbel's last work, the complex pairs the same-name monument and a submarine's cabin, glorifying the Northern Fleet navy men who fought in the Battle for Zapolyarye and exemplifying the sheer socialist realist style.<sup>53</sup>

On the contrary, the monuments of Murmansk are dedicated to a wider range of groups that took part in the Battle's operations and dispersed over the period more equal, unlike it is in Polyarny having no newly erected monuments after 2010. One of the distinctive features of Murmansk is a good exposure of memory of non-military groups that contributed to the common cause of victory. Five out of twelve post-Soviet war memorials are dedicated to the city residents of non-military background, namely to the Murmansk policemen (2000), drivers (2005), war workers (2008), firemen (2008), and the people (2017). The military men are also variously represented by monuments commemorating border guards (2013), Northern Fleet commander, counter-admiral Aleksandr Shabalin (2018), and warriors of the Polar division (2020). Three memorial objects glorify the reconnoiters (1997, 2013, 2018). A very interesting monument reared in 2020 immortalises the feat of reindeer transport battalions that played a huge role in the difficult task of supplying the front and rescuing the wounded. The memorial has a complicated history since local Sami activists, who advanced the idea, campaigned for its installation for many years, according to the accounts in the media.<sup>54</sup>

Rural developments scope mostly the territories of Pechengsky and Kol'sky districts that lay along the Battle for Zapolyarye's most important Murmansk direction. Most of the mentioned objects contain remains of soldiers founded by *poiskoviki*. One of the most interesting objects that stands out of main patterns is the monument to the Norwegian participants of the Resistance movement funded by Norwegian citizens and installed in the settlement of Mezhdurechye in 1997 simultaneously with the similar monument erected by the Norwegian side in the village of Kiberg as part of trans-border cooperation initiative.<sup>55</sup> Another curious

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<sup>51</sup> SeverPost, 2018; Britskaya, 2019; Hraniteli nasledia, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Nord-News, 2018.

<sup>53</sup> See Nekommercheskiy fond podderzhki sotrudnikov i pensionerov FSB Murmanskoy oblasti "SHCHIT", 2015c.

<sup>54</sup> SeverPost, 2016; Britskaya, 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Nekommercheskiy fond podderzhki sotrudnikov i pensionerov FSB Murmanskoy oblasti "SHCHIT", 2015b.

cases are two intending crosses on the Sredniy peninsula and the Mustatunturi ridge, both reared in 2006 and remain the only commemorative objects of this kind created in the post-Soviet period.

To sum up, one should say that regional officials invest a lot in remediation of remembrance and conservation of memory culture. These efforts are not nonetheless comprehended unambiguously by the local people, as it is exemplified by the reaction on redevelopments in the “Valley of Glory”. A predominantly urban character of changes in commemorative infrastructure combined with raising attention to major cities may evidence of official endeavours to improve the region’s image as a tourist destination.<sup>56</sup> The recent trend on commemoration of non-military groups and their contribution to the common victory designates their descendants’ role in the region’s contemporary life.

## **Conclusion**

The Battle for Zapolyarye is extensively imprinted in the Murmansk oblast’s commemorative culture being a key theme of the regional historical memory, or perhaps a “founding myth” for the regional identity. It remains so despite essential changes that occurred after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The rising attention towards the memory of the Great Patriotic War in the 2000s also manifested itself in the increasing number of new war monuments in the Murmansk region that however reduced during the last decade. Also, a great effort to remediation of memorials combined with the allocation of new objects in major cities and along the popular travel routes demonstrates that the official engagement in strengthening the tourist appeal of the region supersedes other probable considerations, including the ones related to federal memory politics. Rather the Murmansk regional commemorative infrastructure is designed to strengthen the regional identity and stress the region’s role in the Great Patriotic War. In that sense, the cultural memory of the Battle assumes a multifaceted significance as it exerts several functions. First, it provides liaison with the grand narrative of the war, by so making regional memory contingent on the federal one. Second, it emphasises the region’s role in achieving victory and reserves a decent place for Zapolyarye in the Russian “league of regional war memories”. Third, the general memory of the Battle integrates contributions of certain social groups, military men and civilians, into the cause of victory, glorifying the past and highlighting the significance of the contemporary representatives of these groups. The last function refers to the region’s cooperation with the other countries that were part of the Anti-Hitler coalition during the war, especially with Norway. The described contents are also accompanied by other environmental influences that are out of the field of memory politics. The current developments of war monuments, albeit being slightly different from the prior Soviet-time ones, succeed to them and continue fulfilling the typical function of "places of memory" immanent to urban commemorative culture.

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<sup>56</sup> The Murmansk regional administration carries out a targeted policy in this process since 2013.

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