HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF URBANIZATION: CITIES AS ARENAS OF POWER STRUGGLES

ІСТОРИЧНА СОЦІОЛОГІЯ УРБАНІЗАЦІЇ: МІСТА ЯК АРЕНИ БОРОТЬБИ ЗА ВЛАДУ

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The article examines the historical sociology of urbanization, which views cities as dynamic spaces where social, economic, and political processes intersect. The authors draw on key theorists of urban development such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Saskia Sassen, as well as on historical sociology theorists – Norbert Elias, Eric Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger. Particular attention is paid to Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city", which emphasizes the struggle of different social groups for resources and control over urban space. Spatial planning, zoning, transportation systems, and architectural decisions are seen as instruments of power that can either foster integration or reinforce social inequality.

A socio-historical approach to researching urbanization allows us to view cities not as static formations but as dynamic systems shaped and transformed by long-term social, economic, and political processes. Unlike purely descriptive or short-term studies, a historical perspective makes it possible to understand the causes and consequences of urban transformations, trace structural changes in space, and identify the deep-seated patterns of urban development. This approach shows that many contemporary urban problems – inequality, spatial stratification, infrastructural decline, and social conflicts – have roots in historical events and decisions.

One of the cities examined is Nicosia, which, following the conflict of 1974, remained divided between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot sections. The case of Berlin is also considered; for decades, it stood as a symbol of confrontation between two ideological systems. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the city became an experimental site for new development models, demonstrating the possibilities of transforming urban space under altered political realities. Another illustrative example is Detroit, which symbolizes the crisis of industrial capitalism and the consequences of de-urbanization.

Key words: *urbanization, power, symbolic space, commemoration, historical sociology.*

У статті проаналізовано історичну соціологію урбанізації, яка розглядає міста як динамічні простори, де перетинаються соціальні, економічні та політичні процеси. Автори звертаються до ключових теоретиків міського розвитку, як-от А. Лефевр, Д. Гарві, С. Сассен, і до теоретиків історичної соціології – Н. Еліаса, Е. Хобсбаума і Т. Рейнджера. Особливу увагу приділено концепції А. Лефевра про «право на місто», яка підкреслює боротьбу різних соціальних груп за ресурси та контроль над міським простором. Просторове планування, зони поділу, транспортні системи та архітектурні рішення розглядаються як інструменти влади, що можуть як сприяти інтеграції, так і закріплювати соціальну нерівність. Соціоісторичний підхід у дослідженні урбанізації дозволяє розглядати міста не як статичні утворення, а як динамічні системи, що формуються та змінюються під впливом довготривалих соціальних, економічних і політичних процесів. На відміну від суто описових або короткострокових досліджень, історична перспектива дає змогу зрозуміти причини й наслідки урбаністичних трансформацій, простежити структурні зміни в просторі та виявити глибинні закономірності міського розвитку. Такий підхід показує, що багато сучасних міських проблем – нерівність, просторове розшарування, інфраструктурний занепад чи соціальні конфлікти – мають коріння в історичних подіях і рішеннях.

Одним із розглянутих у статті прикладів є Нікосія – місто, яке після конфлікту 1974 року залишилося поділеним між грецько-кіпрською та турецько-кіпрською частинами. Також розглядається випадок Берліна, який упродовж десятиліть залишався символом протистояння двох ідеологічних систем. Після падіння Берлінського муру місто стало експериментальним майданчиком нових моделей розвитку, демонструючи можливості трансформації урбаністичного простору в умовах зміненої політичної реальності. Ще одним показовим прикладом є Детройт, що символізує кризу індустріального капіталізму та наслідки деурбанізації.

Ключові слова: *урбанізація, влада, символічний простір, комеморація, історична соціологія.*

Introduction. In contemporary social sciences, the city is perceived not only as a geographic or administrative unit but also as a complex social organism where various historical, economic, and political processes intersect. Unlike traditional agrarian communities, urbanized spaces are characterized by a high density of social interactions, multiple conflicts, and the continuous transformation of power structures. Cities create a unique environment where new forms of solidarity emerge, capitalist production develops, political ideologies are constructed, and public protests are manifested.

The historical sociology of urbanization focuses on studying the mechanisms of these changes, considering the city not merely as a place of residence but as an arena where social groups struggle for resources, symbolic control, and the right to access the urban environment. Modern megacities reflect inequalities and power structures, as evidenced by processes such as gentrification, the creation of financial enclaves, and the spatial segregation of residents.

Divided cities, such as Nicosia or Berlin, illustrate how urban space becomes both an instrument of political struggle and a physical manifestation of ideological conflicts. At the same time, cities that have undergone periods of rapid economic growth followed by crises, such as Shanghai or Detroit, demonstrate how urban-

ization is intertwined with global economic transformations and labor market shifts. Analyzing these cases allows us to identify patterns in the social evolution of cities and their impact on societal relations.

Urbanization significantly intensifies the politicization of the symbolic dimension of urban life. It sharpens and materializes discursive struggles over historicity to the point of tangible manifestations. Examples of Ukrainian cities, which since 2014 have become arenas of ideological battles in the fields of toponymy and commemoration, also serve as informative cases for the historical-sociological analysis (here and further, historical-sociological analysis is derived from historical sociology, not the history of sociology) of the symbolic dimension of transformations in the social space of the city.

Throughout history, cities have served as sites of social transformations, yet contemporary urban changes occur with particular intensity. Processes of globalization, migration, digitalization, and economic restructuring lead to cities becoming not merely centers of population concentration but spaces where new social identities are formed, economic inequalities deepen, and political movements unfold. Despite the extensive research in urban studies, the question remains: how can historical sociology and urban sociology explain the mechanisms of (re)distribution of power, including symbolic power, in urbanized spaces?

The goal of this article is to determine the explanatory potential and prospective directions of historical-sociological analysis of power processes in modern cities.

Methodology. This article employs an exploratory historical-sociological analysis based on a comparative study of cities and an interpretative approach. Special attention is given to transformations in cities such as Berlin, Nicosia, Shanghai, New York, Detroit, and Kharkiv, which represent different models of urban change: from ethnopolitical conflicts to crises of industrialization and financial capital. The study includes a comparison of various urban cases to identify general patterns and specific features of social transformations depending on the context. This approach makes it possible to determine which mechanisms of change are universal across all cities and which are shaped by particular historical and political circumstances.

The interpretative approach is implemented through an examination of social structures, which requires engagement with the theories of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey. Their frameworks help analyze the relationship between urban changes and power processes, capitalist production, globalization, and social mobility.

Theoretical Framework. Historical sociology, within the scope of this study, provides the most effective research strategy because it allows us to consider cities not only and not primarily as physical spaces but as dynamic social systems shaped by long-term historical processes. Unlike traditional urban studies, which focus on architectural and demographic aspects, historical sociology examines social conflicts, class struggles, mechanisms of power, economic evolution, and cultural transformations in cities, revealing structural patterns in their development.

This approach is particularly valuable because it bridges micro- and macro-analysis, explaining how global historical processes (industrialization, colonialism, migration, capitalist expansion) manifest in the local context of urban changes. Historical sociology as a research strategy also considers the role of memory, symbols, political mobilization, and urban ideology, helping to understand why cities become arenas of social protests, economic inequality, and spatial segregation.

The use of this approach allows for the analysis of divided cities, post-industrial crises, global financial centers, and peripheral urban zones, uncovering how historical forces shape the urban environment and social relations. Within this academic inquiry, several key authors have been identified whose ideas have facilitated a retrospective analysis.

Norbert Elias, in his work *The Civilizing Process* (2000), explores historical changes in social norms, forms of behavior, and power structures, analyzing how human communities have been transformed under the influence of state formation, economic development, and spatial organization. His concept of the “civilizing process” demonstrates how modernization brought about changes in everyday practices, control mechanisms, and forms of social interaction.

From the perspective of the historical sociology of urbanization, Elias’s ideas help explain the formation of “socially acceptable behavior” in cities, which necessitated the creation of new spatial structures such as public parks, boulevards, shopping arcades, and administrative buildings. Elias describes these changes and the broader dynamics of spatial control and socialization through the lens of state formation and bureaucratization.

Elias’s concepts are particularly useful for analyzing cities such as Berlin, London, and New York, where urbanization was accompanied by the establishment of new social norms and mechanisms of social stratification. His theory allows us to view cities as spaces where civilizational norms are both established and contested – especially in modern metropolises, where processes of gentrification and spatial inequality raise questions about how the urban environment structures behavior, access to resources, and mechanisms of social mobility.

Eric Hobsbawm, in his works *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* and *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), demonstrates that industrialization and capitalist development not only altered the economic structure of society but also actively contributed to the formation of new social identities, political ideologies, and national myths.

A key aspect of his research is the concept of “invented traditions”, which argues that many elements of national culture and collective memory were artificially constructed by elites during moderniza-

tion. In the context of urbanization, this theory helps explain how cities became spaces for constructing national symbols, historical narratives, and mechanisms of social mobilization.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, major cities in Europe and America became key sites where elites created and legitimized national identities, introducing new traditions and symbols to consolidate society. This is particularly evident in the example of Berlin, which, during the formation of the German Empire in 1871 under Otto von Bismarck's leadership, was reshaped to emphasize the power of a unified Germany. Monumental buildings, statues of national heroes, and large-scale architectural projects, such as the Reichstag, were constructed to reinforce this narrative.

However, as Hobsbawm illustrates, the process of inventing traditions was not always aimed at social cohesion – sometimes, it served as a tool for division and social segregation. Berlin, divided after World War II, exemplifies how urban space became an arena for ideological confrontation between the capitalist West and the socialist East. The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 physically entrenched the political conflict and became a powerful symbol of the Cold War. Thus, the urban boundary institutionalized the division of Germany, creating two distinct historical narratives that opposed each other.

Although **David Harvey** and **Henri Lefebvre** are not directly associated with the processual school of sociology, certain aspects of their work align with Hobsbawm's ideas. Their theories conceptualize urban spaces as platforms where political identities are constructed and contested through architecture, symbolism, and public spaces.

For instance, in 20th-century New York, the construction of skyscrapers, Central Park, and the transformation of Times Square into a center of mass culture played a crucial role in shaping American identity. In this sense, the concept of "invented traditions" provides a valuable analytical tool for studying urbanization as a process through which historical myths are embedded into architectural forms, monuments, street names, and urban planning projects – ultimately influencing collective memory and political consciousness.

This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding ideological struggles in the symbolic space of Ukrainian cities. The large-scale ideological shifts that began in 2014 intensified dramatically after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 – especially in the weeks following the initial phase of combat operations, when Russian forces retreated from cities like Kharkiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy. These transformations were not limited to military engagements but extended into the realm of symbolic urban space.

The historical sociology of urbanization requires not only theoretical conceptualization of urban transformation mechanisms but also an analysis of specific empirical cases that illustrate how social, political, and economic processes materialize within the cityscape. The following sections will examine key case studies representing different models of historical urban transformation: Nicosia as an example of a divided city where urban space institutionalizes conflict; Berlin, where urbanization has been inextricably linked to political confrontation and symbolic struggles over space; Shanghai, which illustrates how colonial and global economic processes shape urban structures; Detroit, embodying the crisis of industrial capitalism and the phenomenon of de-urbanization; New York, as a case of financial capitalism transforming the urban environment, deepening gentrification and social segregation; Kharkiv, as a site of intense ideological contestation over symbolic space, particularly in toponymy and commemoration.

Case Analysis. Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city", in which the city is framed as a contested space where different groups struggle for symbolic control [5], is particularly relevant for analyzing cities that have experienced political conflicts and the fragmentation of power within space. Urban environments serve as arenas where power is redistributed through architecture, transportation systems, zoning, and urban planning mechanisms.

A prominent example is **Nicosia**, the capital of Cyprus, which has remained divided between Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot sections since 1974 along the so-called "Green Line" This boundary is not merely a physical barrier but a structuring force that shapes parallel institutions, identities, and economic models within a single urban space [1].

Ledra Street, once a vital commercial artery, became a symbol of rupture, demonstrating how political decisions become entrenched in urban infrastructure. Despite efforts at reintegration, including the opening of a checkpoint on Ledra Street in 2008, division persists – not just physically but in the collective consciousness of the city's inhabitants.

Lefebvre emphasized that urban space is shaped through the everyday practices of its residents. In Nicosia, different ethnic communities have formed distinct models of spatial usage over generations: Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots have become accustomed to living in separate areas with different markets, economic systems, and public institutions. The spatial division does not simply reflect conflict; it reproduces it structurally and symbolically in daily life. The borders cutting through the city are not only consequences of political division but active elements in maintaining separation, reinforcing identity distinctions and controlling mobility.

However, the urban dynamics of Nicosia extend beyond territorial segregation. The boundaries do not just solidify past conflicts; they also create new sites of contestation and shape distinct models of social stratification. The northern (Turkish-Cypriot) and southern (Greek-Cypriot) sectors represent two parallel but unequal urban systems that have evolved over decades under different political-economic contexts.

The south, governed by the Republic of Cyprus and integrated into the global financial system and the

European Union, has enjoyed more stable economic development. Meanwhile, the north, recognized only by Turkey, remains a partially isolated entity, affecting its economic model, infrastructure, and attractiveness to investors. Even after some physical barriers were lifted, social mobility and economic interaction between the two parts of the city remain constrained. Residents continue to operate within separate economic systems, leading to persistent segmentation in labor markets, service sectors, and financial flows.

D. Harvey [3] notes that capitalist urban development is structured through uneven geographic expansion, making reintegration difficult without addressing institutional and economic barriers. The persistence of divided infrastructures underscores the resilience of social separation, even in the absence of direct physical constraints.

Applying Norbert Elias's "civilizing process" theory [10], one can argue that social behaviors formed in a particular urban environment become embedded across generations, producing stable patterns of urban life. In Nicosia, different ethnic groups not only reside in separate districts but also develop distinct patterns of movement, consumption, and cultural interaction. Even after travel restrictions between the two sectors were eased, crossing the boundary remains an exception rather than the norm.

This phenomenon echoes Cold War-era Berlin, where after the construction of the Wall in 1961, social practices in East and West Berlin diverged sharply. Even after reunification in 1989, urban researchers [4] documented persistent divisions in the city's social fabric.

In Nicosia, separation is reinforced through distinct educational systems, languages, cultural norms, and economic infrastructures. The architectural and infrastructural elements of the city are deployed as instruments of social control. For instance, monuments, public spaces, and symbolic landmarks reinforce separate national narratives: Turkish-Cypriot Nicosia is marked by symbols emphasizing its connection to Turkey, while Greek-Cypriot Nicosia is embedded in a historical memory that aligns with an independent Cypriot state. These spatial elements not only reflect existing divisions but actively reproduce them.

Thus, urban boundaries are not merely cartographic demarcations but mechanisms that govern everyday practices, entrench social structures, and perpetuate conflict. Lefebvre's theory underscores that checkpoints, barriers, and urban planning decisions serve as instruments of control that regulate mobility, economic activity, and social interactions. In this sense, space is not a neutral setting but an active medium for conflict management rather than conflict resolution.

Detroit represents a paradigmatic case of post-industrial urban decline, making it an illustrative example of broader trends across the "Rust Belt." In the early 20th century, Detroit symbolized American industrial strength, largely due to the automobile giants Ford and General Motors. However, beginning in the 1970s, deindustrialization, outsourcing, and automation led to mass job losses, rising unemployment, and urban decay.

Unlike cities such as Pittsburgh, which managed to transition towards a knowledge-based economy, Detroit remained mired in post-industrial stagnation [8]. Today, it serves as a case study of structural collapse within industrial capitalism, accompanied by radical transformations in social, political, and spatial organization.

A key aspect of Detroit's crisis is how economic inequality became spatially inscribed within the city's structure. The shift away from an industrial economy left entire working-class neighborhoods deserted, giving rise to "urban deserts" – zones of abandonment where economic and social activity virtually disappeared.

Like other cities in the U.S. Midwest and East Coast, Detroit experienced a sharp decline in industrial jobs, depopulation, and the intensification of socio-economic problems. However, unlike Pittsburgh, which successfully transitioned to a knowledge-based economy, Detroit remained trapped in post-industrial degradation for decades [8]. Today, it is not just a city that suffered an economic crisis but a unique case of the structural collapse of industrial capitalism, accompanied by radical transformations in social, political, and spatial organization.

A key aspect of Detroit's crisis is the spatial manifestation of economic inequality, which has become embedded in the city's structure. Detroit was rigidly dependent on the industrial development model, making it highly vulnerable to deindustrialization. When major corporations outsourced production abroad, working-class neighborhoods designed for industrial labor became deserted, creating vast "urban voids" – areas of mass abandonment where social and economic activity nearly disappeared.

Additionally, one of the most significant factors shaping Detroit's urban landscape in the 20th century was racial and class segregation. The process known as "white flight" was driven by a combination of economic and demographic changes: after World War II, white residents began to move en masse to suburban areas, while African American populations, facing labor and housing discrimination, remained concentrated in the inner city. This trend intensified in the 1960s and 1970s as industry suburbanized – companies, seeking to avoid high property costs and the growing influence of labor unions, relocated their manufacturing operations beyond the city limits. As a result, formerly thriving working-class neighborhoods deteriorated into economically depressed zones characterized by high unemployment, rising crime, and crumbling infrastructure.

Henri Lefebvre's concept of "the production of space" is highly applicable to Detroit's transformation. The division between "zones of wealth" and "zones of poverty" was not merely a consequence of deindustrialization but a direct result of spatial policies that redistributed resources between the suburbs and the inner city. If in the early 20th century, Detroit embod-

ied American industrial modernism, then in the second half of the century, it became a testing ground for neoliberal urban policies focused on privatization and the reduction of public spending.

David Harvey [3] argues that this shift led municipal governments, deprived of industrial tax revenues, to privatize urban assets, transferring public infrastructure into private hands and slashing investments in social services. Public transportation networks were downsized, isolating lower-income residents from job opportunities in the suburban economy. These changes resulted in an explosion of abandoned properties, which city authorities could no longer maintain, leading to widespread demolitions and the creation of "urban ruins" in the city center.

By 2013, the financial crisis had reached its peak, and Detroit officially declared bankruptcy, becoming the largest U.S. city unable to meet its financial obligations. This marked the symbolic collapse of the city's industrial model and its long-standing economic structure. The bankruptcy triggered massive cuts to social programs, the closure of public schools, and the disconnection of water services for thousands of residents unable to pay their bills. These measures reaffirmed Saskia Sassen's thesis that in a neoliberal economy, cities cease to be spaces of equal access to resources and become financial assets controlled by private interests [7].

However, despite the economic collapse, segments of Detroit's population remained and initiated grassroots transformations of the urban landscape. With little support from the state and surrounded by urban decay, local communities began developing alternative models of urban regeneration. In areas where abandoned lots replaced demolished buildings, residents organized urban farming cooperatives, an example of self-managed urbanization.

Today, Detroit is increasingly viewed as a potential hub for technology and creative entrepreneurship. The long-term effects of this shift remain uncertain, but a key question remains: Will these changes lead to a new wave of gentrification, further marginalizing Detroit's long-time residents?

Manuel Castells [2] theorizes that modern city function as nodes within a global network economy, where traditional industrial models are being replaced by flexible, digital ecosystems. While Castells is not directly affiliated with urban studies or historical sociology, his network society approach offers valuable insights into how cities integrate into global flows of information, capital, and power.

Detroit's transformation exemplifies this shift, but similar dynamics are even more pronounced in another global city – Shanghai.

Shanghai's trajectory over the last century illustrates how urban space is shaped by global economic and political processes. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Shanghai was a zone of imperial competition, where European colonial powers established foreign concessions that functioned as self-governing enclaves. These areas institutionalized asymmetrical social and economic hierarchies, separating Chinese residents from Western elites [6].

After the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, Shanghai emerged as a global financial center. The city's Pudong district became a showcase of global capitalism, characterized by skyscrapers, financial institutions, and luxury real estate. This transformation followed Castells' logic: Shanghai was integrated into transnational economic networks, attracting capital and foreign investment.

However, this rapid development also exacerbated social inequalities. The rise of Shanghai as a global city has been accompanied by spatial segregation, mirroring patterns observed in New York and London, where financial hubs are increasingly disconnected from the urban fabric surrounding them [7].

Harvey emphasizes that capitalist urbanization relies on mechanisms of spatial exclusion and dispossession. In Shanghai, real estate speculation and large-scale redevelopment projects have displaced low-income residents from city centers to peripheral zones with limited infrastructure and services. These processes, typical of neoliberal urban restructuring, reflect the use of space as a tool for economic and political control.

The historical trajectory of Shanghai demonstrates that urban space has always been a mechanism of social regulation and exclusion. During the foreign concession era, different parts of the city were governed by separate jurisdictions, reinforcing racial and class-based spatial divisions. This structure resembled European urbanization in the early modern period, where rigid spatial hierarchies restricted lower-class populations from accessing certain urban areas.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, socialist modernization attempted to dismantle these spatial hierarchies by implementing state-controlled urban planning. However, the post – 1980s economic liberalization reintroduced deep spatial inequalities, albeit under new capitalist structures.

The influx of migrant workers from rural China further intensified these divisions. Many migrants were pushed into informal settlements on the city's periphery, lacking access to public services and social mobility opportunities. This urban dynamic reflects Lefebvre's argument that the production of space is a fundamental tool of power and class struggle.

Norbert Elias's theory of civilization and social behavior also offers valuable insights into Shanghai's transformation. Social stratification in the city is not only economic but also cultural, as seen in class-based norms governing access to certain urban areas, modes of consumption, and everyday interactions. Elias's concept of social control through space helps explain how Shanghai's urban boundaries are continuously redrawn to enforce new hierarchies – just as historical European cities once used architectural barriers and administrative zoning to maintain social order.

Shanghai, like Detroit and New York, demonstrates that urban transformations are never purely economic but always involve political and symbolic dimensions.

The city's skyline represents global finance, but its peripheral neighborhoods embody the precarity of neoliberal urbanization.

The next case study, Kharkiv, illustrates a different but equally significant dimension of urban transformations: ideological struggles over symbolic space.

Kharkov, the center of one of the largest Ukrainian regions bordering Russia, has been a place of intense interaction and mutual influence of Ukrainian and Russian cultures since its foundation in the mid-17th century; according to the first census of the Russian Empire in 1897, 63% of the city's residents were Russian-speaking (while in Kharkov County as a whole, Ukrainian-speaking residents predominated). The diverse and contradictory processes of the Soviet period led Kharkov in the 1990s to become a major industrial and university center with a diverse ethnonational composition and a still predominantly Russian-speaking population (according to the 2001 census – almost 66%; in 2024, 37% used exclusively Russian in-home communication and another 48% used it equally with Ukrainian[1].

The city's toponymy and commemorative landscape extensively reflected its historical connections to Russian cities and the Soviet Union, with Kharkiv playing an active role in the major political, industrial, and military developments of both the Russian Empire and the USSR. However, Kharkiv also had a parallel history as a center of Soviet Ukrainianization in the 1920s and later as the birthplace of ultranationalist movements in the 21st century. Notably, the far-right group "Patriot of Ukraine", which later became part of the Right Sector and the Azov Regiment, originated in Kharkiv in the 2000s.

While Kharkiv could be analyzed through the lens of deindustrialization and its effects on urban space, its unique significance lies in the ideological struggle over its symbolic landscape.

The ideological contestation of urban space in Kharkiv became particularly pronounced in 2014, following the Euromaidan protests and the subsequent power shifts in Ukraine. One of the first actions of Euromaidan supporters in the city was the attempted demolition of the Lenin monument in the central square – a significant and highly symbolic act. Although this initial effort failed, a nationwide decommunization campaign soon led to the official removal of 173 Soviet-era toponymic objects in Kharkiv in 2015.

Parallel to these official measures, far-right nationalist activists took direct action, dismantling Soviet-era monuments and plaques – including those honoring Soviet partisans of World War II. However, these transformations were not universally supported by the population. Although some public discussions were conducted before the renaming of streets and squares, many decisions were imposed by regional authorities appointed from Kyiv without local input. Likewise, the removal of monuments occurred without any significant public debate.

Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city" is useful in analyzing these processes. The renaming and removal of Soviet symbols were not merely administrative decisions; they represented the symbolic consolidation of political dominance by the Euromaidan movement over its opponents. These actions sought to reproduce the new political hierarchy within the symbolic urban space, reinforcing the ideological victory of pro-European forces.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine further intensified Kharkiv's symbolic transformation. After surviving the initial assault and prolonged bombardment, the city expanded its renaming efforts, not only decommunizing but also derussifying its space. In addition to the removal of Soviet-era references, streets and metro stations named after Russian cultural figures – including Pushkin, Gagarin, and other historical figures – were renamed.

Unlike the 2014–2015 decommunization efforts, which faced public resistance, the post – 2022 derussification of Kharkiv proceeded without significant opposition. However, field observations suggest that residents continue to use previous names, not merely out of habit but as an implicit form of dissent. This phenomenon is particularly notable because it does not necessarily correlate with pro-Russian political attitudes. Instead, the continued use of former street names functions as a subtle form of resistance against top-down ideological imposition.

Applying Norbert Elias's theory of civilization, we can argue that these renaming efforts reflect an attempt to reshape urban norms and values. The initiators of these symbolic transformations frame them as a struggle against the so-called "Russian World", asserting an alternative civilizational trajectory for Ukraine. At the same time, David Harvey's concept of urban space as an arena of political identity formation is relevant: the renaming efforts explicitly seek to erase previous historical identities and construct new ones aligned with contemporary political imperatives.

While some aspects of Kharkiv's transformation are unique due to its geographic and historical circumstances, the broader phenomenon aligns with universal patterns of urban symbolic struggles. As seen in Berlin, Nicosia, and Shanghai, urban space is never neutral – it actively shapes and is shaped by political power struggles.

Conclusions. This exploratory analysis suggests that applying the conceptual and methodological tools of historical sociology to the study of power dynamics in contemporary cities reveals that both material and symbolic urban spaces function not just as arenas but as active agents of social struggles. The case studies demonstrate that the production and reproduction of economic, political, and social inequalities within urban environments occur through distinct mechanisms that cannot be reduced to direct economic or political confrontation and are not adequately captured under the broad label of "cultural conflicts".

Historical-sociological analysis allows us to uncover the social meanings and codes embedded

[1] Promoting Reunification: Recommendations for the Formation of a National Reintegration Strategy Based on the Experience of Kharkiv and Kherson Regions URL: https://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/research.pdf

within urban spaces, providing insight into the interplay between political ideologies and everyday life. The study of specific sociohistorical transformations of urban environments – including their interactions with economic and political forces – enables us to identify both macro- and micro-level patterns of urban development and their impact on social structures.

However, the findings presented in this article are preliminary and exploratory, serving more as a problem-oriented and illustrative framework rather than a definitive empirical analysis. To obtain scientifically robust conclusions, future research should involve broader and deeper investigations capable of systematically testing the hypotheses formulated here.

Nonetheless, it is evident that future research in this field should focus on two major thematic areas:

The organization and transformation of material urban space, including urban planning, spatial segregation, and the political economy of urban development.

The (re)definition of symbolic urban space, specifically the semiotics of toponymy, commemoration, and spatial narratives, which serve as crucial instruments in ideological and political struggles.

These areas represent promising directions for further studies in historical sociology and urban research.

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