

Decommunization of Symbolic Urban Space of Ukraine's Megalopolises: Effective Local Government Capacity Building

Abstract:

The decommunization of urban symbolic space through the renaming of streets and settlements commemorating communist figures (toponymic remapping) has become a characteristic feature of the decommunization process across Eastern Europe.

This paper provides an overview of the vigorous discussions over the toponymic remapping of urban space in the Ukrainian megalopolises of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro and Odesa. These case studies illustrate the important role of symbolic efficacy in consolidating Ukrainian society around the idea of democracy and the country's aspirations for European integration.

The main focus of our research was to analyse the actions taken to fulfil Ukraine's decommunization laws, particularly with regard to the renaming of streets and settlements. We focus on the actions taken by local governments, the content of public debates, the decisions taken by regional authorities to step in if local outcomes did not fulfil the stipulations of national decommunization laws, and litigations initiated by local community groups aiming to push back against the changes. Our analysis of these debates allowed us to identify four key models of discourse, namely: case-law or litigation; the use of open letters; the Deputy's address; and recommunization.

We also consider how demographic characteristics of cities (especially age and ethnicity) affect the decommunization process, and look at how attitudes towards decommunization varies across the regions of Ukraine, finding.

We argue that a multiperspective approach to Ukraine's history, leading to a shared vision of its past, is vital in order to promote social cohesion, peace and democracy, whilst building the capacity of individual cities.

Keywords: *Ukraine, decommunization, local government, megalopolises, symbolic urban space, communist legacy, spatial patterns of toponymy*