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REBUILDING UKRAINE BY PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: METHODOLOGY, CASE STUDIES, AND EXPERIENCE

ODBUDOWA UKRAINY W OPARCIU O ZACHOWANIE DZIEDZICTWA KULTUROWEGO I TOŻSAMOŚCI NARODOWEJ: METODOLOGIA, STUDIA PRZYPADKÓW, DOŚWIADCZENIA

Abstract

Historical and cultural heritage is considered a resource for the reconstruction and renewal of communities in Ukraine. Heritage shapes the face of the country, becoming part of the national identity. The losses of historical and cultural heritage resulting from Russian aggression are significant. Therefore, the question arises of developing a strategy for urban renewal based on the preservation of historical and cultural heritage. The beginning of the restoration process involves assessing sites, determining priorities of significance and formulating a strategy. Urban planning principles for preservation and restoration, ecological renovation, and revitalization of disturbed territories are also important. The author considers the principles of restoration of small rivers as the basis for sustainable development using the example of the regeneration of the Lybid River in Kyiv. The restoration of heritage sites is a testament to resilience and restores history and identity to communities.

Keywords: *city regeneration, cultural heritage preservation, ecological renovation, national identity*

Streszczenie

Dziedzictwo historyczne i kulturowe jest postrzegane jako zasób służący odbudowie i odnowie społeczności na Ukrainie. Dziedzictwo kształtuje oblicze kraju, stając się częścią tożsamości narodowej. Straty dziedzictwa historycznego i kulturowego w wyniku agresji rosyjskiej są bardzo znaczące. W związku z tym pojawia się pytanie o opracowanie strategii odnowy miast opartej na zachowaniu dziedzictwa historycznego i kulturowego. Początek procesu renowacji obejmuje ocenę obiektów, określenie priorytetów i sformułowanie strategii. Ważne są również zasady planowania urbanistycznego dotyczące zachowania i renowacji, ekologicznej odnowy i rewitalizacji zdegradowanych terenów. Autor rozważa zasady odnowy małych rzek jako podstawę zrównoważonego rozwoju na przykładzie regeneracji rzeki Łybid w Kijowie. Renowacja obiektów dziedzictwa jest świadectwem odporności, przywracania historii i tożsamości społecznościom.

Słowa kluczowe: *odnowa ekologiczna, rewitalizacja miasta, tożsamość narodowa, zachowanie dziedzictwa kulturowego*

1. INTRODUCTION

The special attention paid to cultural heritage as a resource for recovery is motivated by its ability to strengthen local communities and engage people both locally and internationally. At the local level, this encourages the care and preservation of neglected tangible heritage, which helps to restore social ties in communities and the history of Ukraine. At the international level, it promotes a positive image of Ukraine and raises awareness of the country's rich cultural heritage.

It is precisely this historical and cultural heritage that is now being considered as a resource for the reconstruction and restoration of communities in Ukraine. This, in particular, was the goal of the project "UREHERIT – Architects for Heritage in Ukraine: Recreating Identity and Memory" (2023–2026)[1].

Monuments are primary sources of authentic (genuine) knowledge, repositories of historical, aesthetic, and technological information, and effective means of shaping people's worldviews[2].

Heritage is a marker of territory, determined by its inseparable connection with its place of origin and its ability to convey information through external forms. It materializes in spatial objects: architectural monuments, natural landscapes, cultural traditions, and artifacts. Each territory has its own unique set of heritage objects that serve as the "calling card" of the area. Such objects not only attract tourists but also strengthen the connection between modern society and its roots.

Given the unique features and properties of heritage, its interpretation takes on special significance.

2. FINDINGS

2.1. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND ROLE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS

Ukraine's cultural and historical memory is closely linked to immovable heritage sites that carry the ethnic codes of the nation and embody its identity, ideals, and achievements. Heritage has significant economic potential, driving the development of tourism, creative industries, and regional branding. This is especially important for Ukraine, which is currently fighting for its independence and territorial integrity, as the experience of European countries can serve as a valuable guide for building national identity and strengthening its international standing.

By starting an illegal war against Ukraine Russia has set itself the goal of not only killing Ukrainian citizens, but also destroying Ukrainian culture. According to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (of May 14, 1954), "damage to cultural property belonging to any people means damage to the cultural heritage of all humanity, since every person contributes to the culture of the world"[3].

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[1] *UREHERIT. Architects for Heritage in Ukraine: Recreating Identity and Memory*, "Ro3kvit", https://ro3kvit.com/projects/project-ureherit (access: 14.06.2026).

[2] O.V. Zhukova, *Historical and cultural monuments of Ukraine as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon*, "Bulletin of the Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts" 2010, no. 7, pp. 107–110.

[3] O.P. Oliynyk, O.P. Chyzhevsky, *Principles of cultural heritage restoration in the conditions of post-war reconstruction of Ukraine*, "Theory and practice of design" 2024, no. 1(31), pp. 53–60.

According to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, as of the end of June 2026, 1,949 cultural heritage sites and 2,576 cultural infrastructure facilities had been damaged or destroyed as a result of Russian aggression in Ukraine[4].

However, the total losses of material cultural heritage are actually much greater. For example, among the large number of apartment buildings destroyed in Kyiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, and other cities, there are many historic buildings and Soviet modernist buildings that do not have the status of registered monuments. The loss of urban heritage, landscape objects, and parks is devastating. Although many of these objects remain inaccessible due to ongoing hostilities, preparations for interaction with them must begin now.

2.2. THE STATE OF PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN UKRAINE

At the same time, the state of preservation of historical and cultural heritage, even in the pre-war period, remained extremely unsatisfactory.

Of the more than 140,000 cultural heritage sites registered by the state, only 1% have designated territories[5].

Only 9% of cultural heritage sites have boundaries and modes of use for monument protection zones that have been developed and approved in accordance with the established procedure.

34% of historical settlements (136 out of 401) have defined and approved boundaries and modes of use for historical areas.

Over 90% of information about cultural heritage objects is stored in fragmented paper records, and related administrative processes remain paper-based.

The low level of penalties for violations in the field of cultural heritage protection has remained unchanged since 2000. This leads to constant losses of historical and cultural heritage, as well as its ongoing destruction in the process of targeted aggression by the Russian Federation.

2.3. ANALYSIS OF LOSSES AND ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGE

International experience shows that in cases of armed conflict, post-war restoration of monuments and reconstruction of cities require a delicate approach that combines preservation, cultural sensitivity, and architectural refinement. The restoration process must begin with careful assessment and documentation, a comprehensive survey of the damage caused, and the creation of a basis for further restoration efforts.

The skillful use of traditional methods and materials, combined with conservation principles, strikes a balance between preserving historical integrity and necessary reconstruction.

The process of restoration and reconstruction of lost cultural heritage sites involves several key stages and is based on certain principles.

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[4] *V Ukraini cherez ahresiiu RF poshkodzheni 1949 pamiatok kulturnoi spadshchyny*, "UKRINFORM", 30.06.2026, https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-culture/4139219-v-ukraini-cerez-agresiu-rf-poskodzeni-1949-pamatok-kulturnoi-spadsini.html (access: 14.06.2026).

[5] *Concept of National Policy on Cultural Heritage Development in Ukraine (draft)*, EU Project "Reginal Cooperation for Cultural Heritage Development", O.P, Olynyk (ed.), Arkhitektura I Prestizh, Seredniak T.K., Kyiv 2014, p. 14.

2.3.1. DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

a. *Visual surveys:* (a visual inspection of the building to identify areas of serious damage, and determining the extent of destruction).
b. *Structural analysis:* assessing the load-bearing stability of the remaining structural elements.
c. *Documentation of damage types:* it is necessary to distinguish between direct damage caused by explosives, fire, or other factors related to war, and secondary damage such as weathering, corrosion, or looting that occurred after the cessation of hostilities or conflict.
d. *Mapping and recording:* detailed mapping of building locations and existing conditions, mapping debris and identifying displaced or fragmented elements that may contribute to future restoration efforts.
e. *Risk assessment*: assessing the risk of potential collapse, environmental threats (e.g., weather conditions), and looting or vandalism. This assessment helps to prioritize urgent stabilization and protective measures.

2.3.2. DOCUMENTATION

a. *Photographic documentation:* high-resolution photographs from different angles capture the current state of the object, including damage and existing features. These photographs serve to compare the object's condition before and after destruction.
b. *Comprehensive assessment:* thorough documentation and analysis of the condition of the object to determine the extent of damage and identify elements that require conservation or reconstruction.
c. *Architectural drawings and plans:* detailed drawings, including floor plans, elevations, and cross-sections, which help to understand the original design and guide the restoration work.
d. *Historical research and records:* archival research and the collection of historical documents, old photographs, and other records contribute to an understanding of the site's history, cultural significance, and original construction details.
e. *Digital technologies:* the use of advanced technologies such as 3D scanning, laser scanning, and photogrammetry helps to create highly accurate digital models and reconstructions of the site, contributing to its preservation and future reconstruction. During devastating wars, it is necessary to implement preventive policies for surveying historical and cultural heritage and using various technologies to preserve it.
f. *Community involvement in information gathering*: involving local communities in gathering oral histories, traditions, and personal stories related to the object adds valuable context and cultural significance, complementing official documentation.

These careful assessment and documentation processes not only serve as key guidelines for restoration, but also contribute significantly to the preservation of the heritage, cultural significance, and historical context of the object.

2.3.3. ASSESSING THE VALUE OF A SITE AND SETTING PRIORITIES

a. *Assessment of heritage importance:* conducting a detailed analysis to determine the historical, cultural, architectural, and social significance of each affected site and to prioritize restoration efforts.

b. *Categorization of sites:* classification of sites based on the degree of damage, urgency of intervention, and their role in cultural and historical contexts.
c. *Consultation with stakeholders:* Engaging with stakeholders, including local communities, cultural experts, historians, and government agencies, to gather diverse perspectives and ensure their participation in decision-making.

2.4. STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES TO PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION

2.4.1. PRESERVATION STRATEGIES

a. *Preservation philosophy*: defining general principles and a philosophical approach that guide restoration efforts, such as minimal intervention, reversible actions, and respect for the authenticity of the original building.
b. *Adaptive reuse planning:* exploring opportunities for adaptive reuse while preserving the authenticity and historical integrity of the property.
c. *Documentation standards*: Establishing standardized documentation protocols to support consistency and accuracy throughout the restoration process, ensuring that records serve as reliable references for future work.

2.4.2. TECHNICAL ASSESSMENTS AND EXPERTISE

a. *Expert consultation*: collaborating with interdisciplinary experts, including architects, engineers, archaeologists, and conservationists, to assess technical aspects and develop appropriate restoration methods.
b. *Research on materials and methods*: conducting research on traditional building materials and methods used in the original structures. This will enable decisions to be made regarding the sources of the necessary materials and their use in restoration.
c. *Technical and economic justifications*: assessment of the feasibility and practicality of the proposed restoration methods, taking into account factors such as available resources, environmental impact, and long-term sustainability.

2.4.3. LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

a. *Compliance:* ensuring compliance with local and international laws, regulations, and ethical principles of heritage preservation.
b. *Ethical decision-making:* striking a balance between the need for restoration and ethical considerations regarding authenticity.

2.5. URBAN PLANNING PRINCIPLES FOR CITY REGENERATION

Today, the task of preserving the environment is not limited to the primitive protection of monuments, but mainly to its harmonious sustainable development.

Ukraine's national cultural heritage policy strategy should be determined by several factors: on the one hand, the implementation of European democratic values through a monument protection doctrine and, on the other hand, the strengthening of the national, patriotic component and national identity.

Violation of the conditions for the preservation of Ukraine's historical and cultural heritage is a violation of our state's international legal obligations to the world community.

The requirements for the sustainable development of historic cities today are based on the concept of cultural landscapes, where monuments and landmarks are viewed as a contextual whole (European Landscape Convention). This means a shift from the ideology of protecting individual monuments to preserving and developing the environment as a whole.

Existing historic cities, especially those included in the World Heritage List, require a special city planning and management policy, for which the preservation of cultural heritage is the main goal. The main methods of monument preservation should be the establishment of general urban planning restrictions, rather than the development of separate local monument protection zones.

An important aspect of urban planning is also taking into account the principles of sustainable development, in particular creating a comfortable environment, developing public spaces, and improving the environment.

2.6. ECOLOGICAL RENOVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF DISTURBED AREAS

The basic principles of sustainable revitalization of disturbed areas include assessing the condition and safety of degraded land, restoring natural processes, studying flora and fauna and other environmental factors, and continuously monitoring and adapting revitalization measures.

2.6.1. PRINCIPLES OF REVITALIZATION OF DISTURBED AREAS

The principle of functional expediency is based on determining which type of transformation is most promising for a particular type of disturbed land.

The principle of complexity and integrity – the renovation process should be multidimensional, taking into account both all natural components of disturbed areas (climate, nature of the underlying surface, water bodies, flora and fauna) and man-made formations in a given area.

The principle of sustainability defines the balanced coexistence of nature, society, and the economy. The issue of revitalizing disturbed areas falls under the UN concept of sustainable development and is considered one of the main directions of environmental protection[6].

The principle of rational use of land resources considers quarries as degraded areas that modify the urban integrity of a city.

The principle of systematicity and consistency: ecosystem restoration is a long process that requires phased intervention.

The principle of predictability involves identifying trends and predicting the likelihood of disturbed land development, provided that various types of renovation are implemented.

The principle of interaction between the anthropogenic and natural environments consists in the harmonious restoration of natural resources and, at the same time, the expansion of the anthropogenic structure.

The principle of participation – community involvement ensures social support and long-term sustainability of restored areas.

[6] V.A. Nikolayenko, M.O., Rudenko *Principles of architectural and planning organization of public buildings and structures in conditions of complex terrain (on the example of quarries)*, "Bulletin of the Donbas National Academy of Construction and Architecture" 2014, no. 2, pp. 159–162.

The principle of ecological and landscape integration is an important aspect of the revitalization of disturbed areas. Disturbed lands undergoing revitalization should interact with the surrounding natural environment, creating continuous ecosystem connections and forming ecological corridors that enable species migration. Avoiding landscape fragmentation is key to maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem health.

The principle of socio-economic feasibility stipulates that all measures for the revitalization of disturbed lands must be not only ecologically sound, but also economically viable and socially beneficial. Its ultimate goal should be to improve people's lives and increase their well-being.

The principle of using creative economy tools includes the use of new technologies, creative solutions, and the integration of different disciplines to achieve effective and sustainable results.

2.6.2. RESTORATION OF SMALL RIVERS

Coastal areas are a valuable natural element of the city that has been gradually lost. Due to their isolation and neglect, small rivers have been overlooked as important historical objects of natural heritage and identity. Therefore, the organization of small river territories will contribute to the return of the historical context to the city. The example of the *Lybid River in Kyiv* shows the consequences of the negative impact of human activity and helps to identify appropriate measures for the spatial planning of its coastal areas.

2.6.3. PRINCIPLES OF REGENERATION OF THE LYBID RIVER[7]

1. *Organization of convenient and accessible public space.* Currently, the Lybid River has limited accessibility, i.e., the embankment areas are almost completely disconnected from the city's pedestrian paths, other public spaces, and green areas.
2. *Restoration of the linear connecting element of urban infrastructure*. The restored transit pedestrian and bicycle space along Lybid will become a connecting link between existing green areas, significant public spaces, and facilities.
3. *Elimination of illegal construction within the embankments.* The 25-meter coastal protection strips along the banks of the Lybid River have gradually been built up with industrial enterprises and other structures. Clearing the area of buildings will allow for the creation of public space.
4. *Barriers between embankments and transport routes*. Most of Kyiv, and in particular the area around the Lybid River, is crossed by motorways and railways. This creates uncomfortable conditions for pedestrians.
5. *Opening up collectors where possible*. At the end of the 1980s, a 3 km section along Saperno-Slobidska Street was diverted into an underground collector. The river's concealment has severed its connection with the city. Collectors also have limited capacity, which often leads to flooding in the city during heavy rains.
6. *Removal of waterproof materials at the bottom of the riverbed and in the floodplains*. Due to the large amount of concrete paving, there is a problem of excess water runoff during rain and snowmelt, which causes severe flooding. In addition, the river is cut off from its

[7] O. Oliynyk, D. Akopian, *Research of problems of revalorization of small rivers of Ukraine. National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture Collection of Scholarly Works*, "Ukrainian Academy of Art" 2025, no 38, pp. 26–34.

natural floodplains, which absorb and purify a portion of the water from precipitation. Natural absorbent materials will ensure plant growth and restoration of the river's ecosystem.

7. *Giving the riverbed a more natural shape*. A straightened riverbed accelerates the flow of the river and hinders the formation of an ecosystem. Fast currents can also be dangerous for people and surrounding buildings.

2.6.4. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE RESTORATION OF SMALL RIVERS

1. *Creating accessible pedestrian spaces along the river that are connected to the city.* Embankment areas are unique natural elements that is often isolated from the city. The result of successful spatial planning is the restoration of the integrity of the urban structure, the return of the lost historical context, and the combination of significant public spaces and objects along the linear space of the river.
2. *Creating conditions for flood prevention*.
3. *Ecological restoration.* Small rivers in cities are often heavily regulated: their beds and floodplains are paved, straightened, enclosed in concrete collectors, and dams and locks are built on the waterways. By restoring nature, it is possible not only to create comfortable conditions for people, but also to reduce pollution and overheating in urban areas.

2.7. RESTORATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF MONUMENTS

2.7.1. PRINCIPLES OF PRESERVING HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

1. *Minimal intervention:* adherence to the principle of minimal intervention, which emphasizes the preservation of as much of the original fabric and historical integrity as possible.
2. *Reversibility:* use of reversible restoration methods that allow future generations to reverse or modify interventions without causing irreversible damage to the heritage object.
3. *Understanding cultural significance:*
   a. *Historical and sociocultural context*: understanding the significance of a site for religious, social, or traditional practices helps inform restoration decisions.
   b. *Symbolism and identity*: recognizing the symbolic value of heritage sites in shaping community identity and pride.
4. *Respect for authenticity and integrity:*
   a. *Authenticity in restoration:* striving to preserve the authenticity of the original building during restoration.
   b *Avoiding cultural appropriation:* ensuring that restoration efforts respect and do not appropriate the cultural heritage of communities and avoiding changes that distort or diminish the original cultural significance of the property.
   c. *Ethical intervention:* this includes distinguishing between original elements, later additions, and damage caused by conflict.
5. *Inclusiveness and community involvement:*
   a. *Consultative approach*: involving local communities in decision-making processes regarding restoration plans.
   b. *Skills development and employment opportunities*: providing training and employment opportunities for local artisans and craftsmen in restoration techniques.
   c. *Education and awareness:* implementing educational programs and interpretive materials that highlight the cultural significance of restored sites.

6. *Sustainability and long-term respect:*
   Sustainable management and maintenance: creating sustainable management plans for the ongoing care and maintenance of restored sites. Ensure that the community remains engaged in the long-term preservation of its cultural heritage.
7. *Use of traditional techniques and materials:*
   a. *Historical research:* conducting thorough research to understand the traditional construction methods, craftsmanship, and materials originally used to build the heritage site.
   b. *Documenting traditional methods:* documenting and cataloging traditional methods and materials, including construction methods, carpentry, masonry, and decorative elements, to ensure their accurate reproduction during restoration.
   c. *Preservation of skills:* encouraging the transfer of traditional skills and craftsmanship by involving local artisans and masters who possess knowledge of these techniques.
   d. *Training and skills development:* providing training programs to preserve and transfer traditional building skills to younger generations.
   e. *Resources:* identifying and sourcing local natural materials that have traditionally been used in the construction of the site.
   f. *Adaptation of methods:* adapting traditional methods to modern restoration requirements without compromising authenticity
   g. *Aesthetic and finish consistency:* ensuring that restored elements match the aesthetics, texture, and finish of the original building.
   h. *Cultural continuity*: using traditional techniques and materials helps maintain cultural continuity by respecting and preserving the community's heritage. This fosters a sense of pride and identity among local residents.
   i. *Authenticity and durability:* authentic restoration using traditional methods increases the durability of restored structures, as they are more likely to stand the test of time due to the inherent durability of these materials and techniques.
8. *Assessment of the degree of intervention:*
   a. *Assessment of necessity:* assessment of the need to reconstruct severely damaged or lost elements. This involves assessing the feasibility of recreating elements based on available historical documentation and materials.
   b. *Justification:* implementation of reconstruction based on historical evidence, archival records, and detailed documentation to ensure the accuracy of the reproduction of the original design, materials, and craftsmanship.
   c. *Harmonious integration of old and new:* ensuring the seamless integration of reconstructed elements with the existing historical fabric without compromising the overall authenticity and visual appearance of the property.
   d. *Separation:* properly distinguishing original and reconstructed elements using subtle markings or techniques that allow visitors to distinguish the historical fabric from new additions.
   e. *Ethical decision-making:* making ethical decisions that balance the needs of restoration and preservation of the cultural significance of the property.
   f. *Compatibility of materials and methods:* ensuring that the materials and methods used in the reconstruction are compatible with the original ones in order to preserve structural integrity and prevent future deterioration.

3. CONCLUSION

The post-war reconstruction of historical and cultural heritage sites is of great importance for the restoration and preservation of Ukraine's cultural identity. The approach to restoration must be multifaceted, combining careful assessment, restoration and preservation planning, cultural sensitivity, and a delicate balance between preservation and reconstruction.

The restoration process begins with a thorough assessment and documentation to determine the damage caused and prepare the basis for further restoration measures. Restoration planning is the foundation that combines site assessment, prioritization of significance, and strategy formulation, while complying with regulatory requirements and engaging communities. Central to this idea of restoration is an unwavering respect for the cultural significance of the damaged heritage. This involves preserving authenticity, involving local communities in decision-making, preserving traditions, and fostering a sense of ownership. The integration of traditional techniques and materials connects the past with the present, reviving historical craftsmanship while adhering to conservation principles that preserve inherent historical integrity. The essence of restoration lies in striking a delicate balance between preserving authenticity and the need for reconstruction. This equilibrium ensures the stability of the restored building while honoring the historical fabric of each site. Ultimately, the restoration of heritage sites is a testament to humanity's resilience and determination to preserve its historical legacy. It embodies the desire to revive the spirit of history, preserve identity, promote cultural continuity, and remain a beacon of hope for future generations. These restoration efforts overcome the scars of war, restoring and preserving history and identity.

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