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Studies on St. Petersburg monuments: mapping historical memory

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Abstract. The research is dedicated to the problem of mixed memories in single urban space on the example of St. Petersburg. It covers the idea of silenced memory, especially represented in a fixed form such as monuments, is problematic for the future development of the society. The research highlights the importance of studying this issue and a deep explanation of the controversial memory of historical events. The paper presents the possible suggestion in visualizing history through digital tools and explains the opportunities of this methodology.

Methodological approach. The issue of contested memory and the coexistence of different perspectives on historical events becomes more and more important in the modern world. In general, modernity proved to be the era of rethinking memory. It touches any type of physical representation of memory, e.g., memorials. Nowadays, we see cases of debates around historical memory representations. It is important to consider the visual representation of memory for several reasons. Firstly, it inevitably influences society. The memorial shows that the event it commemorates is needed to be remembered. Secondly, the meaning of the monument might be far from the truth. Confederate monuments in the U.S., being intentionally propagandistic, still remain relatable for people who were influenced by still existing Southern ideology. St. Petersburg had multiple important and memorable historical events, which are now represented and fixed in monuments. It is important to study the memorial map of the city. The idea is to show all the represented memorial layers and to go in historical details to prevent societal clashes. The potential solution will be a digital map of sites of memory in the city. The aim of the map is to combine historical, cultural, and urban data, systematize it, and provide access to it through interactive visualization.

The relevance to the cultures of dissent in Eastern Europe 1945-1989: monuments are one of the many ways a society commemorates its past. However, the main issue with monuments is that most of the time the government dictates their appearance and meaning. The modern times showed to be an era of society's attempt to reclaim its power over public commemoration. It is believed that in the past of monuments, in their history and in the history they tell, key aspects of how monuments should work for society are hidden. Deconstructing monuments' meaning is the key to official narrative deconstruction, which can help in understanding the history of governmental politics of commemoration more.

Obtained data and further research development. The basis of the research is the dataset collected from open resources like Open gov. data of St. Petersburg, OSM, and Encyclopaedia of St. Petersburg website. The dataset provides information about historical events and different personas linked to a particular monument. It contains data about geolocation, history, appearance specifications, commemoration topic, etc. The pilot analysis highlighted further potential. Firstly, the city contains a big amount of monuments dedicated to certain people. The most portrayed groups are military and politicians. Secondly, the dataset showed that the main commemorated event is WWII. Further research will focus on these issues.

Timeline. In December 2020, the data was finalised and the key visualisation needed to construct an interactive map were selected, and by the mid-January 2021, were brought together in the first prototype.

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