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VISUALISING HISTORY AND MEMORY: A CASE OF ST. PETERSBURG

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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 visualising history through digital tools and explains the opportunities of this methodology.

Introduction. The issue of contested memory and coexistence of different perspective on historical events becomes more and more important in the modern world. In general, the modernity proved to be the era of rethinking memory. This process required new politics of memory, new discussions over past events and their importance. Also, this issue inevitably touches any type of physical representation of memory, for example, memorials and monuments. In the modern world, we see several cases of debates around monuments and historical memory representations: Soviet monuments in Baltic countries, Confederate monuments in the United States, etc. Case of the modern world is when there are too many memories and society cannot effectively navigate among them. Some of these memories are silenced and do not influence directly current discussion within the society, however, some of them are still in the centre of heated debates.

It is important to consider the visual representation of memory for several reasons. First of all, it inevitably influences society. By portraying specific historical episode or person memorial shows that this part of the past is important is needed to be remembered. At some point, through the process of rethinking the history, the society might change their perspective, however, the monument cannot change by itself, fixing the idea it was created with initially. Second of all, this idea, which the monument fixes in people's minds might be far from the truth. The example of Confederate monuments in the United States shows that the majority of memorials were created by propagandistic Southern ideological organisations. They supported their claims of Confederacy being the right side in the Civil War with monuments glorifying their leaders. To these days, the monuments still remain relatable for people who were influenced by still existing Southern ideology and see not the true picture of Confederacy but see a harmless symbol of theirs and their ancestors history.

St. Petersburg in Russia is an extremely rich region in terms of history. The city had multiple important and memorable historical events, which are now represented and fixed in monuments, buildings and other community spaces. Looking at the examples of Western memorial conflicts and how easily they are escalating, it is important to study the memorial map of the city and to make an attempt to predict the potential problems if they are discovered.

Research purpose. What the case of the United States shows us is that usually memorial conflicts are based on opponents having completely different knowledge of the historical event. So the idea is to show a full picture, meaning all the represented memorial layers to the audience and to go in-depth into explanation and historical details to prevent this clash of knowing different things about one event or person.

The potential solution and the provider of such deep analysis of urban memorial landscape will be a digital visualisation of sites of memory in the city. The aim of such map is to combine historical, cultural and urban data and through information technologies present memorial heritage data of the monuments of St. Petersburg. The map will systematise memorial data and provide access to it through interactive visualisation.

The vital base for such map is a dataset of sites of memory in St. Petersburg. The dataset provides information about different historical events and different personas who are connected to a particular monument or, potentially, any other landmark. It contains the data about the geolocation of a monument (address and coordinates), its history (date of creation, the historical period of commemoration, etc.), specifications of its appearance (a type of monument and the material it is made of) and commemoration topic (primer classification of events and people into groups). The dataset also helps researchers analyse the memorial stamp of the city and which monuments currently influence the society the most and how.

Primer results. Currently, the primer results are the test dataset which highlighted important topics that are needed to be studied further. Firstly, the dataset showed that the city contains a big amount of monuments dedicated to certain people. The most portrayed groups are military representatives and politicians. It is important to look closely on both of these groups to identify ideologically charged monuments and their potential harm. Secondly, the dataset showed that one of the main events which are represented in the form of a monument is WWII. The aim of the research is to study these monuments and find how to classify them and is there a difference between their meanings and the way they display the event.

Results. The visualisation of the primer dataset showed several important tendencies for the city, at the same time showed several outliers that need to be explained in further research. Also, the primer visualisation showed the huge potential of the digital method in classification of sites of memory and the process of selecting those sites of memory which might become a centre of social debate in the nearest future.

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Подпись

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