



Documentation and registration of damages and destructions of cultural heritage objects during the armed aggression of Russia against Ukraine

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is to highlight the main aspects of accounting and registration of national cultural heritage of Ukraine, to describe the current state of documentation of crimes committed by the Russian Federation against Ukrainian cultural heritage on the territory of Ukraine, and to outline the prospects for digitisation and creation of an online register of cultural heritage of Ukraine. The methodological approach of the study is based on the use of both general scientific and specific methods of cognition. These include: terminological analysis, systems analysis, as well as methods of analysis and synthesis, logical analysis, and visualisation of research results. The scientific novelty of this work lies in the systematisation and analysis of methods for documenting and registering damages and destructions of cultural heritage objects caused by Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, which allows for a deeper understanding and assessment of the scale and consequences of such actions on cultural heritage. Conclusions. The protection and preservation of unique cultural heritage during the war have become priority tasks for cultural institutions across Ukraine. Currently, the documentation of destruction and damage caused by Russian occupying forces is particularly critical. Cultural values are always at high risk during armed conflicts. The military actions of the Russian Federation have led to horrific crimes against cultural heritage, including the destruction and mass exodus of cultural values, the scale of which is shocking. Fully assessing the damage in combat zones and occupied territories remains impossible. Active evidence collection of Russia's war crimes against Ukrainian culture is ongoing. The situation in the war with Russian occupiers highlights a blatant disregard for international norms and UNESCO conventions concerning the protection of cultural objects and art collections, as well as violations of all established laws and customs of war, which constitute a large-scale military crime

Keywords: accounting and registration of cultural heritage objects; historical and cultural heritage; cultural monuments; historical monuments; archaeological monuments; documentary monuments; war crimes

Relevance of the research topic

In the long history of Ukraine, our historical and cultural heritage serves as an extraordinarily valuable spiritual, economic, and social asset, which constitutes a key element of national pride and an important aspect of our country's international representation. The attitude of a society to its cultural heritage becomes a measure of its social maturity and orientation towards democratic development. Crimes against cultural heritage, which are unfortunately relevant for Ukraine today, have a very complicated procedure for proving them,

and therefore require careful, timely accounting, registration, and documentation of damage and destruction.

Analysis of research and publications

Many provisions of international treaties, in particular the Hague Conventions on the Law of War on Land and Sea of 1899 and 1907, the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions of 1977, and the Rome Statute, are devoted to the protection of cultural heritage. In particular, Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International

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Criminal Court qualifies direct attacks on buildings related to religion, education, art, science, or charity, as well as historical monuments, as war crimes. And in 1954, a separate Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was dedicated to the protection of the cultural heritage of mankind. Ukraine acceded to the Convention on the basis of the Law of Ukraine No. 30 (2020, April). The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 12 August 1992 created a register of national cultural property (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 466 (1992, August)).

Documentation of crimes against cultural heritage began with the annexation of Crimea, where 534 crimes were recorded, according to the Crimean Institute for Strategic Studies, a non-governmental organisation. According to periodic reports by the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, the relevant committee of the Verkhovna Rada, a number of news outlets and agencies, the number of crimes reaches several thousand (from 2014 to August 2023, 1624 cultural heritage sites were damaged) (Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, 2022). According to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, from February 24, 2022, to January 25, 2024, the Russian Federation destroyed or damaged 902 cultural heritage sites in 17 regions of Ukraine (Karandiev, 2023).

The problems of destruction of cultural heritage were discussed at a number of scientific conferences, including an international conference held in Lviv on 18 May 2023. United for Heritage, dedicated to the investigation of crimes against Ukraine's cultural heritage, the head of Eurojust, Ladislav Hamran, stressed that through crimes against Ukraine's cultural heritage, Russia "is trying not only to destroy Ukrainian traditions and culture, but also the right of Ukrainians to exist" (Hamran, 2024).

UNESCO also records, registers, and documents cultural heritage sites, implementing a number of protection and restoration projects. As of 18 December 2023, the list compiled by UNESCO totalled 863 sites (Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, 2022). Scholars, cultural figures, publicists, etc. pay great attention to the accounting of aggressor crimes and damage to cultural heritage. First of all, we should mention L.A. Dubrovina (2020), O. Zbanatska, & V. Dobrovolska (2022), H. Mamedov (2023), M. Kabatsii (2023), R. Karandiev (2023), V. Troian (2024), O. Shchur (2021). According to K. Busol, the authors of the publications consider the problems of accounting, registration, and documentation "is now being carried out not only for litigation, but also for art projects, for a potential truth commission, for nuanced educational programmes, for Ukrainian and international academic research and media publications" (Shchur, 2021).

The purpose of the Article is to highlight the main aspects of accounting and registration of the national cultural heritage of Ukraine, to describe the current

state of documentation of crimes committed by the Russian Federation against Ukrainian cultural heritage on the territory of Ukraine, and to outline the prospects for digitisation and creation of an online register of Ukraine's cultural heritage.

Summary of the main material

Cultural monuments are the core of memorial culture, which characterises the intellectual and spiritual state of society. They require special attention and organisation not only of state accounting, but also of examination of cultural values and involvement in socio-cultural activities.

The Ministry of Culture has created the State Register of the National Cultural Heritage of Ukraine (hereinafter – the SRNCHU), launched by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 12 August 1992 No. 466, which aims to conduct state accounting and create an electronic resource of monuments of exceptional historical, artistic, scientific, or other cultural value, objects of material and spiritual culture that are important for the formation of the national identity of the Ukrainian people and determine its contribution to the world cultural heritage. Such registration allows to activate the significant potential of cultural and artistic monuments stored in national memory institutions: museums, libraries, archives (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 466, 1992).

The rules for registration, protection, restoration, and use of national cultural heritage objects are established by the current laws on historical and cultural monuments, legislative and regulatory acts related to the archival, library, and museum funds of Ukraine, as well as directives from central executive authorities. These rules are mandatory for all institutions, enterprises, organisations, and citizens who own cultural heritage objects. They are closely linked to the broader cultural legislation, including the Law of Ukraine No. 1068-XIV "On the Export, Import, and Return of Cultural Values" (1999); Law of Ukraine No. 39 "On the Protection of Cultural Heritage" (2000); Law of Ukraine No. 2778-VI "On Culture" (2010). On April 30, 2020, the Law of Ukraine came into effect, which confirms Ukraine's accession to the Second Protocol of the Hague Convention of 1954 on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (Law of Ukraine No. 39, 2020).

In 1997, the State Register of Scientific Objects of National Heritage was established, ratified by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on February No. 174 (1997), with subsequent amendments. In 2001, a separate State Register of Immovable Monuments of Ukraine (SRIMU) was formed, created by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1760 (2001), which approves the procedure for determining the categories of monuments for the inclusion of cultural heritage objects.

These approaches are also based on key UNESCO normative documents: Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954); Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970); Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), etc., which define the concept and composition of cultural property.

It should be noted that Ukraine has joined these international agreements and developed a series of national laws and regulatory acts that form the legal foundation for the operation of archives, libraries, and museums as cultural institutions within the legal framework of cultural values and heritage. Although these concepts are not identical, they are closely interconnected.

Cultural values, the creative component of the cultural process, and cultural products as documents from the sphere of cultural heritage and cultural values, which are also under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and create the space of national culture, have also become the object of official registration. In addition, the undoubted achievements of cultural management include the regulation of the concept of cultural monuments, cultural property and their typological and species composition, as defined by the Regulation on the State Register of Cultural Monuments:

- historical monuments – buildings, structures, memorials, and objects associated with the most important historical events in the life of the nation, the development of science, technology, culture, and the life and work of prominent figures;
- archeological monuments – settlements, mounds, remains of ancient settlements, fortifications, industries, canals, roads, ancient burial sites, stone sculptures, rock images, ancient objects, areas of the historical cultural layer of ancient settlements, and archaeological finds that are outstanding monuments of national culture and characterise certain stages of historical development;
- monuments of urban planning and architecture – unique ensembles and complexes, individual architectural objects, as well as related works of monumental sculpture and painting, decorative and applied arts, gardening and parkland, and natural landscapes;
- monuments of art – outstanding works of monumental, fine and decorative and applied art;
- documentary monuments – unique acts of statehood, other important archival materials, film, photo and audio documents, ancient manuscripts, rare printed publications. Other objects of exceptional value in terms of history, culture, ethnology or science may also be included in the ICHA (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 466, 1992).

The Russian invasion caused significant destruction of not only infrastructure but also cultural monuments.

Protecting and preserving the unique heritage during the war has become one of the main tasks of cultural institutions in all parts of our country. Currently, it is crucial to document and register the damages and destructions of cultural heritage sites caused by Russian occupying forces in Ukraine.

Since the beginning of the Russian aggression on the territory of Ukraine in 2014, Ukrainian cultural heritage sites have been under constant threat and vandalised by the invaders. Since 24 February 2022, the enemy has been shelling peaceful cities in Ukraine and destroying the cultural heritage of an entire nation. The situation with the preservation of Ukrainian cultural heritage became particularly acute when the regular army units of the Russian Federation started a large-scale war in Ukraine. War always means losses: human, material, and cultural.

In different regions of our country, numerous architectural monuments have been damaged or completely destroyed, including those that house museums, libraries, university faculties, and other cultural and educational institutions, and sacred architecture has been destroyed. On April 30, 2020, Law of Ukraine “On the Accession of Ukraine to the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 1954” (2020) came into effect. According to the Hague Convention, cultural properties include:

- objects that hold significant value for the cultural heritage of any people, including architectural, artistic, or historical monuments, both religious and secular; archaeological findings; building complexes that possess historical or artistic interest; art objects, manuscripts, books, and other items of artistic, historical, or archaeological significance; scientific collections, significant collections of books, archival materials, or reproductions of the aforementioned property;
- buildings whose primary purpose is the preservation or display of the aforementioned movable cultural properties, including museums, large libraries, archival storage facilities, and shelters designed to protect these values in the event of armed conflict;
- locations where a significant number of the aforementioned cultural properties are concentrated, known as “centers of concentration of cultural properties” (Ministry of Culture..., 2022).

Ukraine’s accession to this document was extremely important, as Ukraine has a vast and diverse cultural heritage that reflects its complex history and the civilisational influences that have been directed at it at different times, and monuments and memorial complexes are a symbol of a particular event or era.

The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine has initiated data collection and created a platform for the systematic registration of relevant information. The website features examples of war crimes, including the destruction of historical buildings

(architectural monuments), ancient cemeteries, monuments, religious buildings, art objects, and natural landmarks, as well as buildings of cultural institutions such as theaters, museums, and libraries. The website also documents the destruction of archaeological sites, including burial mounds, ancient earth fortifications, and excavations; incidents of injury or death of civilians due to the use of force and weapons by occupying forces during attacks on cultural objects; and the looting and robbery of property from museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions by the occupiers (Ministry of Culture..., 2022).

The destruction of cultural heritage objects is classified as a war crime. The actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine have been properly documented. In particular, the Human Rights Committee keeps track of platforms engaged in documenting and investigating crimes by Russia against the civilian population of Ukraine. As of April 22, 2022, there are 19 such platforms operating both in Ukraine and abroad. Among them, there is a specialised resource that provides detailed documentation of war crimes against humanity and cultural heritage committed by the Russian military (Official website of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2022).

On March 9, 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine initiated a process to collect data on the damage and destruction of cultural heritage objects caused by Russian occupying forces in Ukrainian territory, and developed a special resource for their systematic documentation. The Ministry called on witnesses of such acts in all regions of Ukraine to send photos and videos documenting the destruction directly through this online resource to the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. (Ministry of Culture..., 2022).

To record a crime, you need to leave information about yourself; describe the violation with the exact location and all the details (victims, damage, etc.); upload photo or video evidence. Next, you need to fill out a questionnaire in which you indicate:

1. Your contacts (full name of the witness, date of birth, phone number, e-mail, alternative channel of communication with the witness (link to Facebook, Instagram, Tik-Tok, etc.).

2. Information about the event: Source of information (A – personally discovered, B – discovered on the Internet, C – discovered by another person); name of the object; region; place of the event; date of the event; date of recording of the testimony; list of objects (old buildings; historical monuments, historical cemeteries; archaeological objects – mounds, ramparts of ancient earthworks, etc., excavation sites; religious buildings; works of art (paintings, frescoes, etc.); theatres; cinemas; libraries; monuments (memorials, obelisks, plaques); cultural heritage sites (history, architecture and urban planning, monumental art, landscape art, science and technology); museums and reserves; natural monuments, etc.); information about the event; photos or videos of the crime.

The losses can be divided into two blocks: physical damage to buildings and losses related to movable cultural heritage, such as museum archival and library values that were damaged and destroyed, or taken from the occupied territories and actually stolen. These areas form the two main projects that the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy is currently working on: the digitisation of all immovable heritage, and an online register that will include a list of all architectural and archaeological heritage sites.

Another important project currently being worked on by the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy is the digitisation of Ukraine's museum collection. Today, there are more than 12 million museum objects in Ukraine. The main problem is that all museum records are kept in the museums themselves in paper form (Ministry of Culture..., 2022).

The creation of a unified register of electronic records of museum collections will allow for quick reference to the number, list and condition of all objects in all museums. Thus, it will not only allow for control and monitoring of the state of cultural heritage in Ukraine, but also for the return of exhibits stolen by Russia. The international community helps implement projects to preserve Ukraine's cultural heritage. International partners offer not only financial assistance but also advice and share their experience.

Ukraine enjoys strong support from museum colleagues and monument conservationists around the world. In particular, all the leading associations, including intergovernmental ones, and professional networks – UNESCO, the International Committee of the Blue Shield, the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Council on Archives, the International Council on Libraries, charitable foundations, individual institutions – museums and others – have offered assistance. This support is expressed in various forms – from statements and museum flash mobs to financial or organisational assistance, offers of internships or scholarships for professionals, etc. (Official website of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2022).

The Association of Architects of Lithuania has launched an international European cultural project titled "UREHERIT. Architects for Heritage in Ukraine: Recreating Identity and Memory". The project involves collaboration between European and Ukrainian experts in the fields of heritage, architecture, design, and engineering, as well as with local authorities and communities of Ukrainian cities to preserve and restore Ukrainian cultural heritage.

An consortium of 11 organisations has joined in the implementation of the project, including the Association of Architects of Lithuania as the project coordinator, Architects of Sweden, the Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineering Consultants of Austria (BKZT), the Institute of Technology and

Architecture of the Royal Danish Academy (IBT), the Romanian Union of Architects, the National Council of Architects, Planners, Landscape Professionals, and Environmentalists of Italy (CNAPPC), the Federal Chamber of German Architects (BAK), the Estonian Association of Architects, the National Union of Architects of Ukraine, the Ro3kvit Urban Coalition, the Kharkiv School of Architecture, and the Architects' Council of Europe as an associated partner.

The program encompasses scientific research, seminars, public discussions, various events, and the development of professional development programs and educational courses for architectural schools. The project will last 36 months, until April 2026, and it is anticipated that the following recommendations will be developed:

- methodologies for assessing the value of heritage and damage assessment;
- strategies for revitalising valuable heritage in a sustainable, economically beneficial, and culturally significant manner;
- a comprehensive approach to the reconstruction of Soviet-era housing in Ukraine;
- methodology for organising public participation in heritage protection, including city forums and workshops on "Healing through Heritage Restoration";
- conducting architectural competitions with accompanying financial consultations;
- application of cutting-edge technologies in heritage conservation;
- updating curricula of architectural schools;
- content and organisation of continuous professional development programs to facilitate sustainable heritage restoration.

An important role is played by Ukrainian civic initiatives that protect cultural heritage in wartime and

support professionals who find themselves in difficulty due to hostilities or occupation. Among them are the Heritage Rescue Headquarters, whose members are members of the specialised working group under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, the Museum Crisis Centre, and the Ukrainian Emergency Art Fund.

The scientific novelty of this work lies in the systematisation and analysis of methods for documenting and registering damages and destructions of cultural heritage objects caused by Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, which allows for a deeper understanding and assessment of the scale and consequences of such actions on cultural heritage.

Conclusions

War inevitably leads to casualties. People die, cities suffer destruction, and cultural heritage becomes a target for annihilation. Russian occupying forces commit horrific crimes against humanity and mercilessly destroy Ukraine's cultural wealth. The scale of destruction and removal of cultural values from Ukraine by Russian occupiers is shocking. Currently, it is difficult to fully assess the extent of damage and destruction of cultural heritage objects located in combat zones and temporarily occupied territories.

Currently, the collection of evidence of the Russian Federation's crimes against Ukrainian cultural heritage continues. In the war with the Russian occupier, we have witnessed not only the disregard for international norms and UNESCO conventions in the context of preserving cultural heritage sites and art collections, but also violations of all possible laws and customs of war, which is a large-scale war crime. A clear state position on crimes against cultural heritage should be developed and cooperation with international organisations should be strengthened on this basis.

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