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Title: Memory and Politics: The Soviet Era as Represented in Ukrainian Museum Exhibitions

Abstract:

In 1991, when Ukraine gained its independence, a rethinking of history and the creation of a "new memory" became one of the main topics of Ukrainian politics. As memory storage facilities, history museums play a major role in memory policies by the way they present exhibition narratives. In this context, museums dedicated to the Soviet era are by far the most interesting examples of how political influence affects the display of information.

This study examines government museums at national, regional and local levels, and independent museums devoted to the memorialization of the Soviet era which have been in operation during the last two decades. I will analyze how the changing memory policies determine the creation and function of museums, and how they reflect or oppose government policy and public opinion. The research will describe the main themes and narratives currently dominant in Ukrainian museumification of the Soviet past and their relationship to politics. The museums about occupation and various memorials for terror victims, as well as the Holodomor, represent memories that are under government control and attempt to portray communism as being "alien." The experiences of "later Soviet trauma" are represented in such museums covering topics of the Afghan War, Chernobyl and portraying communism as being "imperfect." The museums about resistance implemented narratives of bravery which were regionally based and portrayed communism as being "hostile." Independent museums staying mostly apart from government trends in politics, view communism as being "moderate" and something to be contemplated and studied.

In summarizing this analysis of museums, I will focus on how chronology and typology of the Soviet era events serves to affect the perception of those events by the public. I will explain how a variety of narratives became an illuminating example of dissensus which manifested itself through museumification of those events.