Memorials and Memory Management: Civic Participation and the Urban Politics of Memorialization in Post-2022 Irpin

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"The reality of the past is in the present"

— Barry Schwartz

"Memorialization… is the antidote to social amnesia"

— Anonymous respondent, author's research

CONTENT

Abstract. This thesis investigates how public memorialization is negotiated in the urban space of Irpin during the ongoing russian war against Ukraine. While national memory policies in Ukraine are increasingly structured, they remain top-down and detached from local realities. The study argues that, in practice, local memorialization unfolds in fragmented and improvised ways, shaped by a mix of grassroots initiatives, municipal responses, and political interests. Drawing on policy analysis, a questionnaire, and non-participant observation, the research reveals tensions between official narratives and community needs. Despite broad public support for memorialization, 86% of respondents report that the process lacks transparency or fairness. Memorials are expected to serve as tools for education, mourning, and identity formation, yet are often implemented without public input, risking political appropriation or emotional disconnection. The study calls for revising outdated procedures and embedding participatory frameworks in memory policy. Irpin's experience offers insight into how memory, governance, and space interact in post-conflict urban contexts and highlights the need for more inclusive, flexible, and locally grounded approaches to memorialization.

Number of words: 14980

INTRODUCTION

In the context of russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, questions of identity, memory, and belonging have become more urgent than ever. Cities that have experienced violence and destruction are now confronted with the complex task of processing these events. How should these experiences be remembered?

The pace of wartime memorialization has exceeded institutional capacity for planning. Cities confront decisions about memorialization without policy guidance or participatory mechanisms. Under such conditions, memory is created through *ad hoc* processes rather than systematic deliberation. This institutional vacuum produces fragmented decision-making patterns that reflect immediate pressures rather than long-term community vision.

Political instrumentalization becomes more likely when memorial decisions bypass public scrutiny, while time pressures encourage solutions that overlook local contexts and community dynamics. The absence of public participation in decision-making might produces monuments that residents find irrelevant or alienating, undermining their capacity to serve as sites of collective meaning-making.

At the same time, these pressures have created new approaches to memorialization. Alongside conventional monuments, communities are turning to temporary installations, digital tools and locally driven initiatives. Their appearance marks a shift in aesthetic choices and in the dynamics of authorship and authority over public memory.

One way to approach this challenge is by confronting traumatic experience collectively and embedding it in public space through memorials that allow for shared mourning and healing. As Ukraine continues to defend its sovereignty, coherent approach to memorialization could play a vital role in reinforcing national identity.

This thesis explores how memorialization is negotiated in urban space during the ongoing russian war against Ukraine. Focusing on the city of Irpin, it investigates the actors, dynamics, and spatial forms involved in the production of memory under conditions of trauma and uncertainty. It pays particular attention to how different stakeholders make decisions, how conflicts and competing demands emerge, and how formal and informal memorials are embedded in the urban fabric.

On February 24, 2022, russian forces launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including the Kyiv region and Irpin, which became a key site of resistance. The Battle for Irpin lasted 23 days. The city played a critical role in halting the enemy's advance toward Kyiv. However, this came at a high cost. As a result of the russia's war against Ukraine, Irpin lost 39 territorial defense fighters, 50 members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and 300 civilians. The city also sustained extensive infrastructure damage, with around 70% of its buildings affected (Irpin City Council 2025).

Given the rapidly evolving and under-researched nature of this topic, the study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design. A case study of Irpin allows for a contextualized examination of both formal procedures and informal practices through which memory becomes spatialized. This approach enables the identification of emergent patterns and tensions while acknowledging limitations in generalizability.

This research draws on theoretical perspectives from collective and cultural memory, as well as the concept of "sites of memory" . The analysis is grounded in a spatial approach to memory, drawing on notion of urban space as a product of social relations. In parallel, the study engages with theories of participatory governance to examine how decision-making about memorials unfolds at the local level.

The research seeks to answer the following analytical question:

How is public memorialization negotiated in urban space during an ongoing war?

Additionally, we will try to answer the following questions:

 1) Who are the key actors involved in decisions about memorials, and how do they assert authority or legitimacy?

 2) What forms of memorialization emerge, and how are they embedded in or challenged by the urban fabric?

 3) What kinds of tensions are created by memorialization and how are they expressed and managed?

Through the investigation of these questions, a deeper understanding of how memory, space, and governance interact in times of war is contributed to by the research, and how commemoration itself becomes a site where negotiation,

meaning-making, and civic identity are contested. Since the war is ongoing and similar devastation may be faced by other cities, valuable insights into how trauma, loss, and the reconstruction of meaning in the aftermath of war are dealt with by communities could be offered by Irpin's experience.

The structure of this thesis reflects a gradual narrowing of focus from broader theoretical and policy contexts to a grounded case study of Irpin. Following the introduction, the literature review explores debates on memory, spatiality, war memorialization, and participation. The analytical framework outlines the conceptual lens of the research, while the methodology section details the use of policy analysis, a questionnaire, and non-participant observation. The results are presented in three parts and are followed by a conclusion that synthesizes the findings and reflects on their implications.

On landscape of memorialization in Ukraine

To provide context and demonstrate how the issue of memorialization has been given increased urgency by russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, key developments within Ukraine's evolving memory landscape since the full-scale russian invasion in 2022 are outlined in this section. These examples highlight how growing societal engagement with memorial practices has been witnessed, with activities that have ranged from grassroots initiatives to state-led policies.

One of the most visible spontaneous memorials is the "National Memory Lawn," which emerged in the summer of 2022 on Independence Square in Kyiv. It began in June 2022 as a grassroots initiative organized by families of fallen Azov soldiers (Titorchuk, 2024). After that, others joined the effort by planting flags bearing the names of those killed by russian aggression. This growing sea of tributes gradually transformed the square into a powerful space of collective mourning. Over time, the practice spread to other cities across Ukraine, reflecting a widespread public need to grieve, remember, and honor the fallen.

In March 2023, a public petition titled "On the Creation of a National Pantheon of Heroes of Ukraine on the territory of Askold's Grave Park in Kyiv" gathered 27,288 signatures, surpassing the 25,000 required, and received a positive response from the

President the following month (Official Internet Representation of the President of Ukraine, 2023).

At the institutional level, the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance has played a key role in shaping public discourse on memorialization. In February 2024, two years after the full-scale invasion, the Institute published Methodological Recommendations for Local Communities on Preserving and Honoring the Memory of Participants, Victims, and Events of the Russian-Ukrainian War (Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, 2024).

Simultaneously, a pilot project to memorialize significant war-related sites in the Kyiv region was initiated by the head of the Kyiv City State Administration (Honda 2024). The working group includes representatives from multiple stakeholders: ministries, municipality representatives, civil society organisations, etc. According to the Deputy Head of the Kyiv City State Administration, public requests for memorial signs honoring fallen soldiers increased fivefold between 2021 and 2023, rising from 14% to 71% of all such requests (Honda 2024). During the first half of 2024, memorial signs for fallen soldiers dominated requests, accounting for over 90% of all applications (Honda 2024). This overwhelming proportion reveals how deeply the war has reshaped priorities around public commemoration.

In parallel, cultural and artistic platforms have also taken an active role. From February to July 2024, Past / Future / Art hosted "Memorialization Practices Laboratory", an educational and research initiative seeking new language and forms to commemorate the war (Past / Future / Art 2024). Earlier, between June 2022 and March 2023, the platform organized "Land to Return, Land to Care", a laboratory for artistic research into war experiences (Past / Future / Art 2024). This initiative illustrates how cultural and artistic platforms contribute to shaping memorial practices from the ground up, offering alternative forms of commemoration that complement or challenge official narratives.

In May 2025, a draft law titled "On the Principles of State Policy on National Memory of the Ukrainian People" was introduced (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2025). It marks a shift toward a more systemic and institutionalized approach to memory politics in Ukraine, where memorialization is increasingly integrated into official state policy. How memorialization is conceptualized by the state must be understood, as the

frameworks, priorities, and support mechanisms that shape local initiatives and decision-making processes will be directly influenced by this perspective.

Yet, in the absence of established frameworks or participatory mechanisms, decisions around commemoration often unfold in contested, fragmented, and improvised forms. As this thesis will explore through the case of Irpin, memorialization is not only a response to violence and loss, but also a dynamic process through which communities negotiate identity, meaning, and belonging amid uncertainty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review examines how scholars in memory studies conceptualize the relationship between collective memory, public space, and social inclusion. While existing research offers rich theoretical frameworks for understanding how memory is constructed and mediated, it offers limited guidance on a crucial question: how are decisions about memorialization made in real time, particularly amid ongoing war, institutional uncertainty, and collective trauma?

On memory

Memory is widely understood as a social phenomenon. Maurice Halbwachs theorized that memory is not individual, but rather shaped by our interactions with social groups. He emphasized that the greatest number of memories return to us when others recall them. Memory arises in response to communication and therefore cannot be considered purely private (Halbwachs 1992). According to Halbwachs, the mind reconstructs memories under the influence of social frameworks, suggesting that the past is always viewed through the lens of the present and memory can only exist in a society. If we accept Halbwachs' view, it becomes clear that memorials should not merely commemorate the past, but serve as tools that provoke dialogue, shape collective understanding, and engage communities in the ongoing process of and memory-making – an idea central to this research.

Pierre Nora expanded on these ideas with his concept of *lieux de mémoire* – sites of memory. These are not just physical locations but symbolic units that represent layered meanings and diverse interpretations of the past. Nora contrasts *lieux de mémoire* with *milieux de mémoire* – the natural, living environments of memory, such as

traditions and local communities. When such organic contexts fade, artificial supports such as monuments, museums, and anniversaries arise to preserve memory. These carriers of memory often function as "condensation symbols," distilling complex historical experiences and moral messages into forms accessible to public imagination (Nora 1989).

Precisely because carriers of memory simplify and condense meaning, they require careful interpretation and ongoing reflection. Memory is never static, and its relationship with forgetting is inherently intertwined. One cannot exist without the other. This research argues that when memory politics are handled openly and transparently, there is a greater chance of striking a meaningful balance between remembering and forgetting. In such conditions, the narrative embodied in a site or symbol is more likely to remain relevant and be reinterpreted meaningfully over time. Simply put, it increases the likelihood that the memory will prevail.

Building on these works, Barry Schwartz argues that collective memory, though rooted in individual memories, refers to how knowledge, beliefs, moral judgments, and emotional attachments to the past are distributed across a society. For Schwartz, the past becomes real not through direct access to historical events, but through how it is lived and interpreted in the present (Schwartz 2016). The researcher also emphasizes that collective memory is "path dependent" – shaped not only by current social and political contexts but also by previous representations. Once a particular version of memory is established within a community, it becomes difficult to alter, let alone rectify (Schwartz 2016).

This insight is relevant to the present study, given the risks observed in Ukraine's memorialization landscape. As the country processes the trauma of the ongoing war, there is a risk that facts may be distorted to serve particular narratives. When inaccuracies or biased interpretations are embedded in physical spaces, they risk becoming even more entrenched, complicating future efforts to challenge or revise them.

Since memory is always mediated and shaped by subjective acts of translation, the way historical meaning is anchored in the present matters greatly. This research investigates how memorialization is currently practiced in Irpin and explores how greater transparency and inclusivity might help ensure the integrity of collective memory.

Different nations remember historical events differently. Memory, therefore, is never singular or uniform. Rather, it is shaped by perspective, context, and power. Jeffrey K. Olick emphasizes that national identities are partly constructed through a shared lexicon of cultural references (Olick 2016). In the context of russia's war against Ukraine, memorialization has become a vehicle for reaffirming Ukrainian identity. These practices have the power to either strengthen collective memory and national cohesion or, if poorly handled, risk obscuring or erasing important truths.

Aleida Assmann furthers the research on memory by distinguishing between communicative memory (short-term, oral, generational memory) and cultural memory (sustained over time through institutions, images, objects, rituals, and texts). Cultural memory outlives direct witnesses, largely due to its reliance on stable carriers, often embedded in physical spaces (Assmann 2011). This aligns with Schwartz's view that nothing can be remembered without mediation: the past survives only through forms that allow its continued reinterpretation in the present.

The distinction between communicative and cultural memory offers a good framework for analyzing the memorialization practices emerging in Irpin. In the wake of collective trauma, communicative memory plays a central role in shaping immediate responses to loss. However, as time passes and generations shift, this memory fades unless it is stabilized through cultural forms. Cultural memory, sustained through memory carriers, enables a community to preserve and transmit collective experiences beyond the lifespan of witnesses.

For a city like Irpin the transition from communicative to cultural memory is crucial. The choices regarding what is commemorated, how it is framed, and who is involved will determine how the memory of this war is embedded in the urban landscape and carried into the future.

This research seeks to understand whether the current memorialization efforts in Irpin are creating inclusive, accurate, and durable forms of cultural memory or whether they risk imposing narrow or premature narratives that may distort the past and alienate parts of the community.

Ann Rigney expands this view by exploring how cultural memory is shaped by media technologies. According to Rigney, societies are increasingly relying on cultural artifacts such as monuments, films, and websites to preserve memory (Rigney 2016).

These artifacts do not merely reflect existing memories but actively shape what is remembered and how.

Rigney emphasizes that memory is not stored passively, but continually reproduced through repeated acts of remembrance. According to Rigney, there is no memory where there are no new acts of remembrance[1]. Repetition does not necessarily imply sameness, however. Rather, it can generate new meanings and experiences, especially in the context of memory and public space. Rigney argues that the forms and aesthetics of memorials have also evolved over time: contemporary memorials tend to focus on collective loss, abstract forms, and interactivity (Rigney 2016).

This perspective holds particular significance for Irpin, where new memorials are taking shape amid collective trauma. These monuments operate on two levels, as mirrors reflecting past events and as active instruments molding collective memory. Examining how they function reveals a crucial tension: do they foster genuine public dialogue, or do they cement rigid narratives that resist future reinterpretation? The answer carries weight for how communities process loss and construct meaning from devastation.

James E. Young contributes to this discussion through his concept of counter-memorials, defining them as structures that challenge official narratives and invite critical reflection. Subverting traditional forms of commemoration, such memorials engage the public in active interpretation. Rather than prescribing how the past should be understood, counter-memorials provoke questioning, discomfort, and dialogue (Young, 1993). Thus counter-memorials exemplify how repeated acts of remembrance can generate new meanings rather than reinforce fixed interpretations.

Irpin's emerging memorials sit at the heart of a dilemma: should they invite ongoing conversation or lock memory into place? Counter-memorials present a different path that welcomes questions rather than delivering answers, that invites participation rather than demanding reverence. This approach carries special weight in trauma's aftermath, where the full meaning of events hasn't yet crystallized and communities are still making sense of what they've endured.

This review shows that memory is a social, mediated, and often contested process. Foundational theorists emphasize that memory requires active

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[1] Ann Rigney, "Cultural Memory Studies: Mediation, Narrative, and the Aesthetic," in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, ed. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen (New York: Routledge, 2016), 65–77.

communication and symbolic forms to endure. Scholars such as Assmann and Schwartz highlight the transition from personal, short-term memory to durable cultural memory, an especially relevant dynamic in post-traumatic contexts. Meanwhile, thinkers like Olick, Rigney, and Young stress the political and aesthetic dimensions of memory, noting that the remembrance is shaped by power, technology, and public participation.

However, the literature offers limited guidance on how memorialization is shaped in real time amid war and institutional uncertainty. This research addresses this gap by exploring how memory is being constructed in Irpin of today and what this reveals about the future of collective remembrance in Ukraine.

On spatiality

Spatial practices play an important role in how collective memory is formed, expressed, and contested. Paul Connerton contends that memory lives not just in written records or monuments, but in the way spaces are arranged and rituals unfold. Public spaces transform into breathing archives where memory takes on physical form, where people gather, perform familiar gestures, and repeat meaningful acts. Through this lens, a city square becomes more than backdrop; it turns into a stage where collective remembrance plays out again and again, each performance adding new layers while reinforcing old ones. Importantly, space serves not just as a neutral container but as a medium (and often a battleground) for competing narratives of the past.

Building on this, Ann Rigney emphasizes that memory depends as much on form and media as on content. The shareability of memory, she suggests, is shaped by the availability or absence of established commemorative practices and spatial formats (Rigney 2016). This is particularly relevant in Irpin, where war has disrupted established forms of remembrance and new memorials are emerging in response. This research examines these memorials to assess whether their forms and functions allow them to fulfill the roles traditionally expected of memory sites: to support collective mourning, and community cohesion.

Further, urban theorists underscore the political character of public space. Don Mitchell frames space as a site of struggle, where memory is shaped not only by what is remembered but by who is allowed to participate in the process (Mitchell 2003). Fran Tonkiss adds that while public spaces are often idealized as inclusive, they can be regulated to exclude dissenting voices or marginalized communities (Tonkiss 2005). These insights guide this research into who participates in decision-making around

memorials in Irpin, whose memories are made visible, and who remains excluded. In doing so, the research considers memorialization not only as a cultural or aesthetic practice, but as a deeply political process embedded in urban space.

In the context of Ukrainian, scholars highlight public space as a key site for shaping urban identity and fostering citizenship. Monuments, they argue, have traditionally structured these spaces, influencing how history is encountered, interpreted, and performed in everyday life (Shlipchenko, 2016).

While many public spaces have lost their symbolic meaning over time, memorials hold the potential to reanimate them, transforming neglected areas into active sites of shared memory, dialogue, and civic engagement (Tyshchenko 2016). This research builds on these insights by examining whether contemporary memorials in Irpin are contributing to such a reactivation and fostering inclusive participation in public life.

This section emphasizes that memory is shaped not only by content but also by the forms, media, and spatial practices through which it is expressed. Public space, far from being neutral, emerges as a contested and performative arena where memory is enacted, negotiated, and often politicized, raising critical questions about whose narratives are represented, who is invited to participate in their construction, and how inclusive or exclusive these commemorative processes become.

On memorialization of war

The formation of memory during wartime fundamentally differs from memory in peacetime. As Roman Holyk argues, memory in times of peace tends to be structured and systematized, forming a relatively stable network of meanings (Holyk 2024). In contrast, wartime memory is volatile, emotionally charged, and shaped by vivid "afterimages" of traumatic events (Holyk 2024). It emerges not as a coherent narrative but as a dynamic and often contradictory construct. Influenced by the competing perspectives of citizens, wartime memory becomes a contested field – a terrain of struggle, vulnerable to manipulation. This understanding is crucial for analyzing how decisions about memorialization are made in cities affected by occupation or violence. When memory is unstable and politicized, efforts to create inclusive and representative memorials are complicated by emotional strain, social fragmentation, and institutional uncertainty, all of which directly inform the challenges examined in this research.

Natalia Mysak theorizes memorialization as a transformative social process that encompasses both material and immaterial forms of remembrance. Memorialization enables societies to revisit and reinterpret the past, transmit knowledge to future generations, and affirm evolving social values. The narratives chosen through this process, whether emphasizing tragedy, resilience, or reconciliation, contribute to shaping collective identities and guide the direction of social development (Mysak 2024).

However, Mysak warns that memorialization can also generate division. If commemorative practices fail to account for national context, cultural sensibilities, or local value systems, they risk being met with resistance or indifference. Imported models, if uncritically applied, can alienate rather than unite. What is needed, she suggests, is a distinct Ukrainian "language of memory", a set of principles, symbols, and approaches rooted in local realities. For this, memorial policy must be institutionalized and supported by legal, methodological, and cultural frameworks (Mysak 2024).

This perspective reinforces the central argument of this research: that meaningful and inclusive memorialization, especially in post-occupation contexts, must involve participatory processes. Involving local stakeholders ensures that memory practices resonate with the affected communities and reflect their values, rather than imposing abstract or externally derived narratives. This study critically examines who participates in official memorialization processes and how responsive these processes are to public sentiment. This helps assess whether current practices in Irpin reflect inclusive engagement or reinforce top-down narratives.

However, the process of memorialization within communities is rarely harmonious. Different groups propose different narratives and priorities for commemoration, which can lead to tensions over whose losses should be acknowledged and how. In such contexts, sensitivity to audience and clarity of communication are critical (Olena Dovgopolova at at a panel hosted by Cedos 2023). Memorialization must engage people in ways that are not only linguistically but also culturally accessible.

Sklokina argues that memorial projects should be grounded in the actual capacities of communities, taking into account human, financial, and spatial resources. Unrealistic projects risk generating frustration or rejection (Iryna Sklokina at at a panel hosted by Cedos 2023). Shlipchenko echoes this concern, cautioning against rushed

decisions or top-down impositions. Instead, she calls for time and space for dialogue, reflection, and education. Communities must understand what a memorial is and can be, and what forms are possible. Temporary memorials, while imperfect, can fulfill the urgent need for physical markers of grief and remembrance, offering a first step in a longer process of engagement (Svitlana Shlipchenko at at a panel hosted by Cedos 2023).

Liagusha asserts that memory work is a necessary response to collective catastrophe. Memorialization, therefore, must begin "here and now." It should be rooted in individual stories, not abstractions, and be both humane and humanizing (Anton Liahusha at a panel hosted by in Ukrainian Institute of National Memory 2024). Gumenyuk underscores the importance of ideological neutrality and factual accuracy. Rather than imposing rigid interpretations, memorialization should create space for multiple voices and perspectives. It must not serve merely as a decorative background to political agendas, but as an active, participatory process of shaping collective memory (Nataliia Humeniuk at a panel hosted by Ukrainian Institute of National Memory 2024).

Lauda elaborates that commemoration should not aim for closure, but for continuity. It is not about "honoring and forgetting," but about coexisting with grief, sharing experience, and claiming visibility (Liera Lauda at a panel hosted by Ukrainian Institute of National Memory 2024. A memorial, she argues, is a demand to be seen, to be heard, and to be recognized. Miloshevych-Beylefeld adds that memorialization is inherently unfinished: it must be approached as a process, not a product. As part of transitional justice, it should provide safe spaces for survivors and victims. Artistic practices, workshops, community dialogues, and public hearings can facilitate the inclusion of diverse voices and foster mutual understanding (Sofiia Miloshevych-Beylefeld at a panel hosted by Ukrainian Institute of National Memory 2024). Intergenerational dialogue, in particular, is vital to the sustainability of memory. Without it, collective memory becomes fragile and fragmented.

In sum, memorialization in communities affected by war should be understood not as the erection of static monuments, but as a living, evolving process. It is a space for empathy, co-creation, and ethical engagement with the past. Successful memorialization requires inclusivity, time for reflection, and a commitment to truth without oversimplification. It demands a balance between the personal and the political, the symbolic and the material, the past and the future. When embedded in

dialogue and rooted in lived experience, memorialization becomes a powerful democratic and healing practice, an act of remembrance that affirms dignity and justice.

On participation

Public participation is a critical element in ensuring that urban decision-making processe are transparent, inclusive, and responsive to community needs. Participation, as defined by the Center for Urban History (2023), refers to the mechanisms and processes that enable direct involvement and influence of local residents and other stakeholders in shaping decisions that affect the life and development of the community.

Such engagement strengthens both the legitimacy and sustainability of decisions. Participation is not only a foundation of public transparency but also a key motivator for civic involvement and a driver of stronger local identities (Helashvili et al. 2023). This is especially important in the context of memory politics, where decisions about the approach to commemoration can affect the healing process and the accuracy/fairness/equity of representation of diverse war experiences.

From an urban planning perspective, public participation offers numerous benefits, including introducing valuable local knowledge, facilitating the early identification of potential conflicts, and supporting more informed decision-making outcomes (Levchenko, Velychko, and Kovshun 2018). Participatory processes enhance transparency and accountability while fostering broader acceptance of planning outcomes through collective deliberation. This also helps ensure that recommendations are both justified and defensible, particularly critical in contexts where the issue is politically and emotionally charged (memorialization is one example).

Effective participation, however, must meet specific principles. Key components of meaningful engagement include safety guarantees for participants, early and consistent involvement, informed participation, transparency, accessibility, equity, and positive participatory experiences (Helashvili et al. 2023). These principles become even more crucial when dealing with sensitive themes such as memorialization, where inclusion, recognition, and respect for different memories and identities are at stake.

To evaluate the depth and impact of public involvement, frameworks such as Arnstein's Ladder of Participation can be used effectively. This particular framework categorize participation levels, ranging from mere information-sharing (which actually

represents exclusion from the decision-making process) to full empowerment, based on the influence granted to participants (Arnstein 1969). Applying these to the Irpin case allows for a critical analysis of who is consulted or included, at what stage, and with what actual decision-making power.

Furthermore, memorialization processes must be sensitive to intersectional perspectives, including gender. As noted in the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory's guidelines, it is vital to recognize the diverse contributions of men and women, civilians and military personnel, across different age groups (Ukrainian Institute of National Memory 2024). Integrating this lens ensures that memory practices do not reinforce dominant narratives alone but reflect the multifaceted nature of war experiences and resistance.

In sum, participation in memorialization processes is not only about formal inclusion but also about who shapes memory, whose voices are legitimized, and how public space reflects the pluralistic experience of war. This research investigates to what extent these participatory standards are applied in Irpin and how they influence the formation, acceptance, and symbolic meaning of memorials in a post-occupation urban environment.

This literature analysis showed that memorialization of war is not merely a matter of historical recording. Rather, it is a deeply political, emotional, and spatial process shaped by contested narratives, institutional conditions, and community capacities. Wartime memory is volatile and often contradictory, formed amid trauma, urgency, and competing truths. As this research shows, attempts to fix memory into permanent forms must account for this fluidity.

To be meaningful, memorialization must move beyond abstract or imposed narratives and emerge through participatory processes that center local voices and lived experiences. This involves not only engaging diverse stakeholders early and systematically but also ensuring that the methods, language, and forms of commemoration are accessible, culturally relevant, and emotionally resonant. As many scholars argue, memorialization must not be rushed or reduced to a single gesture. Instead, it must be viewed as an ongoing process of negotiation, reflection, and community building.

In contexts like Irpin, where social fragmentation, institutional gaps, and unresolved grief shape the memory landscape, memorial practices must tread carefully

between immediacy and sustainability, the personal and the collective. Acknowledging the complexity of memory and embracing its unfinished nature opens the way for forms of remembrance that are democratic, healing, and future-oriented. When rooted in dialogue and shaped with empathy, memorialization becomes not only a response to loss but a practice of reclaiming agency in the wake of destruction.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

To better understand the dynamics explored in this research, this section introduces the key concepts and theoretical assumptions that underpin the study. It outlines how memory, space, and participation are conceptualized and interconnected in the context of postwar urban environments. These frameworks help explain how public memory is shaped, contested, and negotiated, providing the basis for analyzing memorialization practices and their social and political implications.

In this research, memory is understood as a social and cultural process rather than a static entity. Following the ideas of Maurice Halbwachs and Aleida Assmann, memory is formed within collective frameworks, such as institutions, spatial practices, and narratives that give meaning to the past and shape the present. Memory is never neutral; it is selective, strategic, and often used to legitimize political projects or reinforce national identity. Significantly, memory is mediated through various vessels, including physical space, which makes it a central arena where memory is performed, contested, and transmitted.

Public space is not only a physical setting but also a dynamic social construct, as explored in the work of Don Mitchell. It is a site of expression, negotiation, and conflict, where different actors contest meanings and assert claims. In the context of postwar cities, public space becomes a platform for both healing and confrontation, making the spatialization of memory an inherently political process.

Memorialization is defined here as the set of social, cultural, and institutional practices through which individuals and communities engage with the past. Drawing on both cultural memory theory and architectural perspectives, this research treats memorials as discursive constructs – material forms (such as sculptures, installations, and digital platforms) designed to evoke emotional responses and shape collective experiences. Memorials convert temporal events into spatial arrangements by

"emplotting" memory, shaping how societies understand time, trauma, and belonging. Memorialization can also involve strategic forgetting, the privileging of certain narratives over others, and the stabilization of meaning in times of contestation.

Participation is understood as the active involvement of residents and local actors in decision-making processes related to public space and memory. Drawing on Arnstein's "ladder of citizen participation" and participatory planning literature, this research assumes that inclusive memorialization processes are more likely to produce meaningful, context-sensitive, and accepted memory forms. In conditions of trauma and transition, participatory practices may contribute not only to democratic governance but also to social healing and the legitimacy of commemoration.

This research assumes that memory, as a public and political practice, is shaped through spatial, institutional, and symbolic mechanisms. Public space functions both as a container and a producer of memory, mediating whose stories are told, how they are represented, and by whom. Memorials are not neutral reflections of the past but tools of interpretation and meaning-making that can exclude, silence, or amplify certain voices (Mysak 2024; Holyk 2024; Lauda 2023). They actively participate in shaping collective identity and guiding societal values.

In contexts marked by institutional uncertainty or the absence of a cohesive national memory policy, local memorialization often becomes an improvised and negotiated process. This involves municipalities, cultural institutions, civil society actors, artists, and residents, each navigating material constraints, aesthetic considerations, and political narratives. This reflects Sklokina's argument that memory work must align with local capacities, and Mysak's call for a "Ukrainian language of memory" rooted in local context and experience (Sklokina 2023; Mysak 2024; Shlipchenko 2023).

The research further assumes that participatory forms of memorialization, especially in cities that experienced occupation and/or destruction, can challenge traditional top-down models of memory-making. Participation may democratize the production of public memory, foster community ownership, and enhance legitimacy (Helashvili et al., 2023; Liagusha, 2023; Miloshevych-Beylefeld, 2023). However, such processes also risk generating new tensions, as competing narratives and political agendas come into play. As Dovgopolova (2023) notes, memorialization in pluralistic societies must remain sensitive to audience, language, and local symbolism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the memorialization of russia's war against Ukraine in the city of Irpin. The research draws on three complementary methods: policy analysis, structured questionnaire, and non-participant field observation.

The policy analysis of national and local regulations, programs, and initiatives sheds light on the institutional frameworks that shape decisions about memorials and the politics of memory. This top-down perspective provides insight into how memory is regulated, formalized, and instrumentalized by authorities.

The questionnaire, comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions, captures the public's perspectives on memorialization. While closed questions allow the identification of general trends in attitudes and preferences, open-ended responses provide space for personal reflections, motivations, and concerns. This method offers the advantage of reaching a broad range of respondents, thereby helping to capture a diverse range of viewpoints. However, the sample has limitations in terms of representativeness, with potential biases related to gender and territory. Additionally, the reliance on personal and professional networks for recruitment may introduce selection bias.

The non-participant observation of selected memorial sites in Irpin contributes insight into how memorials are encountered in daily urban life. It allows for the analysis of spatial integration, visibility, and the emotional or symbolic resonance of these sites. Observations focused on how often people engage with the memorials, how they interact, and for how long they stay. The strength of this method lies in its ability to trace behavior and spatial practices that might not be expressed in interviews or surveys. Yet, the limited number of sites and the short observation period restrict the generalizability of the findings and should be viewed as illustrative rather than comprehensive.

The use of a multi-method design is particularly suited to studying a topic that is emotionally charged, politically sensitive, and deeply embedded in both institutional and everyday practices. Combining policy analysis, survey data, and spatial observation enables a multi-scalar perspective: examining memorialization from above (as policy), from below (as public sentiment), and *in situ* (as lived experience). Anchoring the

research in a specific city further enhances its relevance, allowing attention to the social, spatial, and historical specificities of a community directly affected by the war.

In sum, while the study is constrained by issues of scale, representativeness, and time, it nonetheless offers a valuable triangulated approach. The combined strengths of the selected methods compensate for individual limitations, providing a more holistic understanding of how war memory is negotiated, contested, and spatialized in Irpin.

Policy analysis

Policy analysis serves to situate local memorial practices within the broader institutional and normative context. By examining relevant national and municipal laws, policies, and official statements, this method sheds light on how memory is governed, structured, and potentially instrumentalized by the state. Legislative documents were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify the regulatory framework governing memorialization processes. Particular attention was paid to existing regulations on the establishment of memorials, forms of public participation, and potential gaps in the current legislation.

This policy analysis focused on two interrelated areas: the legislative framework for memorialization and the legal basis for constructing new commemorative structures, such as monuments and memorials.

First, to understand the general framework of memorialization in Ukraine, a number of official documents recommended by the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance were reviewed.

These include:

1. The Cabinet of Ministers' Resolution "On the State Interagency Commission for the Commemoration of Participants in the Anti-Terrorist Operation, Victims of War, and Political Repression", 1996

2. The Law of Ukraine "On Burial and Funeral Services", 2004

3. The Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status and Honoring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the 20th Century", 2015

4. The Verkhovna Rada's Resolution "On Perpetuating the Memory of the Heroes of Ukraine Who Gave Their Lives for the Freedom and Independence of Ukraine", 2015

5. The Presidential Decree on measures for establishing a memorial to Ukrainian heroes, 2020

6. The Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine 'On the Statute of the Garrison and Guard Services of the Armed Forces of Ukraine'" (regarding military funeral rites), 2021

7. The Cabinet of Ministers' Resolution "On Approval of the Procedure for Organizing Honorary Burials at the Military Cemetery and Commemorating Memory in the Museum Complex of the National Military Memorial Cemetery", 2022

8. The Presidential Decree "On a Nationwide Minute of Silence for Victims of Russian Armed Aggression Against Ukraine", 2022

9. The Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the National Military Memorial Cemetery", 2023

10. The Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Ensuring the Construction and Operation of the National Military Memorial Cemetery", 2024

Together, these legal acts and government resolutions form the normative foundation for memorialization in Ukraine. While the earliest legislation dates back to the 1990s and early 2000s, a significant shift occurred following russia's aggression in 2014, which prompted the adoption of new laws addressing the memory of fallen soldiers. This process intensified after the full-scale invasion in 2022, leading to the introduction of more detailed legal instruments governing burial procedures, commemorative practices, and the creation of national memorial infrastructure.

While these documents establish a comprehensive legal foundation for memorialization, they are broad in scope and address a range of topics, not solely the current war waged by russia against Ukraine. Given the specific focus of this study, a

more targeted normative document was selected for in-depth analysis: the draft law "On the Principles of State Policy on the National Memory of the Ukrainian People."

Although still under development, the draft law's significance lies in its potential to shape future memorialization policies. Despite its preliminary form, the draft law provides insight into the evolving legislative vision for how the state seeks to institutionalize and regulate national memory, including commemorative practices related to the current war. The analysis concentrated on key definitions, the rights and responsibilities of involved actors, funding mechanisms, and available instruments for memory governance.

Second, to understand the practical aspects of managing memorialization in the public realm, particularly the construction of memorials, a second set of regulatory documents was reviewed. These include:

- The Law of Ukraine "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine", 1997 (with changes up until 2025)
- The Law of Ukraine "On Architectural Activity", 1999 (with changes up until 2024)
- The Law of Ukraine "On the Regulation of Urban Development", 2011 (with changes up until 2025)
- The Law of Ukraine "On the Improvement of Settlements", 2005 (with changes up until 2024)
- The Law of Ukraine "On the Protection of Cultural Heritage", 2000 (with changes up until 2024)
- The Cabinet of Ministers' Resolution "On the Approval of the Procedure for the Construction (Creation) of Monuments and Memorials", 2004

Together, these documents define the legal and institutional frameworks within which commemorative objects are created and integrated into the urban environment. They specify who has the authority to initiate and approve memorial projects, how public consultations or architectural competitions should be conducted, and what protections or standards apply to cultural heritage. This regulatory framework is essential for analyzing how local memorialization processes unfold in practice, what constraints or opportunities actors face, and how communities can (or cannot) participate in shaping the commemorative landscape – issues central to this study's focus on postwar cities like Irpin.

The documents were analyzed through qualitative content analysis, with attention to both explicit content and notable omissions. The analysis focused on key categories relevant to the research, including references to memorials and monuments, the principles and procedures for their establishment, the division of responsibilities across institutional levels, and the rights of citizens in commemorative practices. While the term "memorialization" rarely appeared explicitly (except in the draft law on national memory), the analysis traced how commemorative functions are embedded within broader legal and institutional frameworks. Special attention was given to how different actors (state bodies, local authorities, civil society) are positioned within these texts, and how their roles in shaping public memory are articulated or left undefined. This approach enabled the assessment of the normative architecture of memory politics in Ukraine, particularly in terms of whose perspectives and agency are emphasized or omitted.

This analysis provides a structured overview of existing mechanisms for implementing what remains a fragmented policy on memorialization in physical space. It also highlights areas where current legislation lacks clarity, which can result in uncoordinated or unsuccessful memorialization efforts. These gaps and ambiguities will be explored in greater detail in the "Results" section.

Questionnaire

To better understand public perceptions of memorialization in Irpin, an online survey was conducted between April 25 and May 16, 2025, resulting in 115 responses. While the primary target group was residents of Irpin, the survey also welcomed responses from individuals who previously lived in the city or continue to visit it regularly. This allowed the inclusion of both internal and external perspectives on the memorialization process.

To increase reach and contextual relevance, a mixed distribution strategy was used. However, several limitations should be noted. The questionnaire was circulated online only. No targeted outreach was conducted in public spaces, such as libraries or administrative service centers, nor were physical posters or QR codes distributed throughout the city. Respondents were recruited through personal contacts, social media platforms, professional and volunteer networks, as well as during field visits to Irpin.

As a result, the sample skews toward a more digitally active population. Additionally, women made up 66% of respondents, and individuals aged 60+ were underrepresented, which somewhat affected the demographic balance of the sample. The questionnaire was completed by individuals from various age groups (in the range from under 18 to over 60), with no restrictions on gender. The primary selection criterion was a demonstrable connection to the city of Irpin, whether through permanent or temporary residence, or regular visits. While the sample is not statistically representative, efforts were made to capture a diversity of perspectives. Each new response is considered valuable for enriching the understanding of public attitudes toward memorialization in Irpin.

The sample primarily consists of individuals currently residing in Irpin (62%), along with a smaller proportion who either visit the city occasionally (23%) or have previously lived there (7%). In terms of wartime experience, approximately one-quarter of respondents (25%) were present in Irpin during the russian occupation in February–March 2022, while the majority (59%) were not in the city at that time. This composition presents a diverse range of perspectives, encompassing both direct witnesses of the occupation and those whose connection to Irpin is shaped by post-occupation return or continued affiliation with the city.

The questionnaire consists of closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions provide quantitative data that can be analyzed using Excel, while open questions allow respondents to express their opinions, concerns, and motivations for supporting or opposing various forms of memorialization. Closed questions provide a basic understanding of general trends (e.g., level of support for memorialization, attitudes toward destroyed buildings), while open-ended questions provide a deeper understanding of motivations, doubts, and arguments. The collected responses will be analyzed manually using elements of thematic analysis.

The analysis prioritized open-ended responses and followed an inductive thematic coding process. All answers were read manually, and recurring themes, motives, and expressions were grouped into semantic categories. Codes were not predefined but emerged organically from the data, allowing the structure of the analysis to reflect the most salient concerns, perceptions, and contradictions raised by respondents. Google Docs and Google Sheets were used to organize, cluster, and trace patterns across the answers.

Direct quotes from respondents are included in the results to illustrate key themes. These excerpts convey not only the content of opinions but also the emotional tone and narrative strategies people use to express themselves. Particular attention was paid to the form of responses as part of the interpretive process. For instance, responses written in all capital letters, with excessive punctuation, or unusually formal or informal grammar were treated as indicators of emotional intensity, distancing, or other forms of engagement. These textual features were considered meaningful elements in the analysis.

The primary aim of the questionnaire is to understand how Irpin residents and other stakeholders perceive the memorialization of russia's war against Ukraine. It explores whether people consider memorialization meaningful, and asks them to reflect on the appropriate timing for such efforts. The questionnaire examines the perceived purpose of memorials, including why they are needed, the social and emotional functions they serve, and the meanings they convey. Respondents are also asked about their preferred forms of memorials and invited to evaluate how well the existing memorials in Irpin reflect the memory of the war.

In addition, the survey examines personal experiences with memorials, including whether respondents visit them, which ones they find meaningful or problematic, and the reasons behind their perceptions. The questionnaire also seeks to identify opinions on public participation in the memorialization process. Specifically, how the society would like to be included, which aspects of decision-making they believe should be open to public input, and how such involvement might be structured. Finally, it asks whether respondents think the memorialization process is being conducted in a fair and inclusive way.

Sample of memorials

To assess public perceptions of existing memorials in Irpin, a focused sample of sites was selected from a broader list provided by the City Council. This list had been compiled based on the Council's vision and outcomes of public hearings held in August/September 2024.

The full inventory of memory sites in Irpin comprises 21 locations of diverse nature, including a military cemetery, damaged infrastructure (such as the Romanivsky bridge and checkpoints), cultural institutions, parks, educational facilities, temporary and permanent memorials, street art, and a digital memorial platform.

Given the diversity and complexity of the identified memorial sites, a smaller, more focused sample was selected for in-depth analysis. From the comprehensive list of sites, the following were chosen (the rationale behind their selection is explained in the subsequent section):

1. Na Shchyti ("On the Shield") Memorial

The "Na Shchyti" ("On the Shield") was unveiled in Irpin in April 2025 to mark the third anniversary of the liberation of the municipality. The central figure of the composition is a boy holding a military award that belonged to his father, who gave his life for Ukraine. Behind the boy stands a coffin supported by six columns. The memorial was funded by socially responsible local businesses and developed in cooperation with representatives of the nearby church, on whose grounds it is located. An inscription on the monument reads: "A monument in memory of war losses and care for our loved ones." (KyivVlada 2024)

Informal conversations revealed that representatives of the church participated in public consultations regarding the project. However, members of the broader public expressed dissatisfaction with the architectural design, though they appreciated the idea behind the memorial.

2. Romanivsky Bridge ("Road of Life")

Conflicting narratives have begun to emerge around the history of the Romanivsky Bridge. According to the platform Kyivshchyna. Places of Memory, Ukrainian forces were reportedly compelled to destroy the bridge on 25 February 2022 (Kyiv Region Tours 2025), the second day of the full-scale invasion, in an effort to halt the advance of russian troops – an action that, while strategic, reportedly complicated the evacuation of civilians from Bucha and Vorzel. In contrast, Suspilne News attributes the bridge's destruction to a strike by russian forces (Suspilne 2023).

While the precise circumstances remain subject to clarification and further historical verification, the Romanivsky Bridge has come to hold powerful symbolic meaning. It functioned as a key evacuation corridor during the initial phase of the invasion and has since become a focal point of memory.

3. Suprotyv ("Resistance") Memorial

The *Suprotyv ("Resistance")* memorial was unveiled in August 2023 and is dedicated to those who defended Irpin from russian occupation in February–March 2022 (Volodymyr Karpliuk 2024). At the center of the sculpture are two figures: one, having lost its identity, attempts to strip the individuality of the other by placing a faceless mask over their features. The opposing figure, with a distinct and expressive face, resists this act.

However, in practice, the design solution leaves ambiguous who is removing the mask from who, or whether the figure is attempting to put it on. Without reading the accompanying explanation, it is difficult to grasp the intended meaning of the monument, which in turn hinders the possibility of forming an emotional connection with it. The composition was conceived to symbolize the contrast between the dehumanizing force of the russian aggressors and the resilient, freedom-loving spirit of Ukrainians, but failed to do so.

The memorial was a gift to the Hero City of Irpin from the development company *Vidvazhni* ("The Brave"), as announced by Volodymyr Karpliuk, co-founder of the Irpin Reconstruction Fund and CEO of the company.

4. Volia ("Freedom") Memorial

The Volia ("Freedom") memorial was unveiled in 2024 to commemorate the second anniversary of Irpin's liberation. Initiated by resident Mykhailo Oheruk, the concept emerged when he discovered a shell fragment in his son's bed following the city's de-occupation (Volia Digital 2024). The sculpture is composed of over two tons of deactivated munitions collected from across Kyiv Oblast, including Irpin, Bucha district, Makariv, and Borodianka. It symbolizes the resilience and unbreakable spirit of Ukrainians in the face of russian aggression.

An inscription on the monument reads: "No iron is enough as our will is tough" (displayed in both Ukrainian and English). A QR code installed on-site links to a digital platform that offers a 3D model of the memorial and an option to explore the installation in augmented reality (AR).

According to its creators, the project was implemented without diverting any resources from Ukraine's defense efforts.

5. Alley of Memory of the Heroes of Irpin

The Alley of Fallen Heroes in Irpin serves as a commemorative space dedicated to honoring the city's defenders who lost their lives during the ongoing war. The first section of the Alley was unveiled on March 28, 2024, marking the second anniversary of Irpin's liberation from russian occupation. A second segment was inaugurated on August 24, Ukraine's Independence Day, continuing the broader effort to recognize and memorialize the city's defenders. The third section was opened on December 6, the Day of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. On that occasion, 22 additional portraits were added, bringing the total number displayed to 166. Each portrait represents a life lost on various fronts of this brutal war. Ahead of the Easter memorial days, the Alley was further adorned with live flowers, symbolizing both remembrance and renewal.

6. Book of Memory (Digital Platform)

The Book of Memory of the Irpin Community is a digital memorial initiated to honor and preserve the memory of every local resident, both civilian and military, whose life was taken by russian aggression since 2014. Supported by the Irpin City Council, the platform shares stories of heroic resistance in the face of war and serves as a lasting historical record of the names of Irpin's fallen. It also documents evidence of numerous russian war crimes committed on the community's territory and will continue to do so until Ukraine's victory (Irpin Memory 2025).

7. Banksy Mural

In November 2022, renowned British street artist Banksy painted a mural on a heavily damaged residential building in Irpin. The artwork features a young girl performing rhythmic gymnastics with a ribbon, symbolizing resilience and the enduring power of beauty in the aftermath of war (Kyiv Region Tours 2023).

As the building was slated for demolition due to severe structural damage sustained during the occupation, a special commission decided to preserve the mural. The section of the building containing the artwork was carefully dismantled by hand over five days. To protect the mural during this process, it was first shielded by a temporary concrete structure and then encased in a metal frame for added stability. The preserved mural was relocated to a new site where a Contemporary Art Square is planned for future development.

8. Military Sector of the Cemetery

The military sector of the cemetery in Irpin has become a significant site for honoring fallen Ukrainian soldiers. As of February 2023, it includes the Alley of Heroes, where relatives and visitors pay their respects to those who died defending the city. It was created with a high degree of participation in the form of consultations with the families of the fallen (Hrynenko 2024).
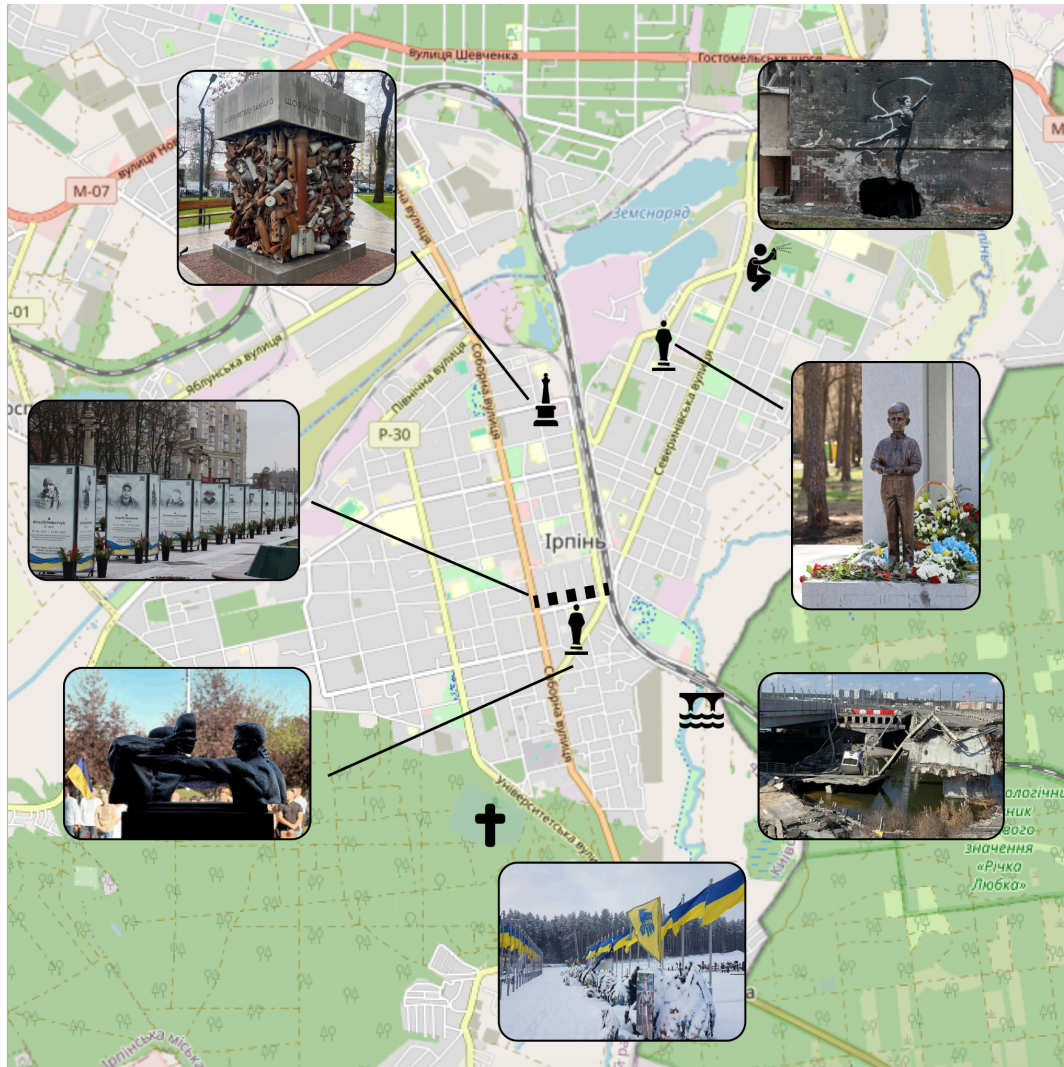

Figure 1. Map of Selected Memorial Sites in Irpin

Source: compiled by the author based on field observation, 2025.

This sample was formed with the aim of analyzing memorials that differ by type, origin, and spatial characteristics. The selection includes memorials:

a) By form: physical (Na Shchyti, bridge, Volia, mural), digital (Book of Memory), and temporary (Alley of Memory).
b) By initiator: municipal authorities (Na Shchyti, Suprotyv, military sector, Alley of Memory), volunteer groups (Volia), and individuals (Banksy mural).
c) By method of creation: newly built (Suprotyv, Na Shchyti), preserved destruction (Romanivsky Bridge), or creative reinterpretation (Volia, Banksy mural).
d) By degree of community involvement: no involvement (Suprotyv, Banksy), limited involvement (Na Shchyti, Volia), broad involvement (Military sector of the cemetery), with the extent of involvement in other cases remaining unclear.

Spatial characteristics were also taken into account. Some memorials are located in central urban areas (e.g., Suprotyv, Alley of Memory), while others are more remote (e.g., cemetery, Romanivsky Bridge, Na Shchyti). Moreover, some are situated in transit zones with high visibility (e.g., The bridge, Alley of Memory, Suprotyv), whereas others occupy more secluded or contemplative settings (e.g., Volia, Banksy mural, cemetery).

Additionally, the military sector of the cemetery was purposefully included in the sample as a comparative site, despite not being a conventional memorial or monument. Its primary function is burial, which may initially suggest it falls outside the scope of this research. However, its inclusion is justified on several grounds. First, the creation of this space involved significant public engagement: the families of the fallen were consulted in the development of the site, their views were integrated into the design process, and expert input was also sought. As such, the site reflects a high degree of participatory memorialization, and it was anticipated that respondents would view it as a respectful and well-received place of remembrance.

Second, the cemetery was included to examine whether residents perceive it solely as a place for private mourning or whether it also serves a broader public function. We were particularly interested in whether some respondents might indicate that they visit the cemetery not only to commemorate family members, but also to mourn collective loss, thus positioning the site as both a cemetery and a form of public memorial space. This enables a deeper understanding of how Irpin residents navigate the boundary between private grief and collective memory within urban spaces.

Overall, this sample is considered appropriate for capturing a diverse range of public perspectives on memorialization in Irpin. It allows for the comparison of different memorial formats and helps identify which features (design, location, origin, form, or engagement strategy) resonate most with residents. The anticipated outcome of the survey is to distill characteristics of both successful and less effective memorials and to develop recommendations for future commemorative practices in post-conflict urban settings.

Non-participant observation

To complement the questionnaire data and gain a deeper understanding of how memorials are experienced in everyday urban life, a limited non-participant observation was conducted at three memorial sites in Irpin. The selected sites include:

1. The Alley of Heroes – a temporary memorial initiated by the city council, located in a central and high-traffic area;
2. The "Sprotyv" (Resistance) Memorial – a permanent installation initiated by a former head of the community, also situated in a central transit space;
3. The "Volia" Memorial – a creatively reinterpreted site using remnants of destroyed buildings, initiated by activists and located in a quieter residential area.

These three memorials were chosen primarily due to their accessibility and proximity to the city center, which made regular observation feasible within the time and resource constraints of this research. While the selection was guided by convenience, it nonetheless offers a valuable cross-section of memorial types differing in their initiators, spatial context, level of permanence, and modes of expression.

During the observation, attention was paid to how frequently passersby engaged with the memorials, the duration of their interactions, and specific actions such as photographing, pausing, or laying flowers. The findings offer preliminary insights into the visibility, emotional resonance, and spatial integration of these memorials within the urban landscape.

It is essential to acknowledge that this observational component has limitations. Due to time constraints, the scope of observation was restricted to a small number of sites and cannot be considered representative of all memorials in Irpin. However, these

observations still provide valuable insights into how different types of memorials function in public spaces and elicit engagement from the public.

In addition to structured observation, a short field visit was conducted during a public event in Irpin focused on memorialization and memory management. This provided the opportunity to engage in discussions and informal conversations with participants, including city council representatives, individuals involved in public participation, and community members. It enabled access to first-hand perceptions of specific memorials and nuanced perspectives that would have been difficult to capture through structured questionnaires alone.

These interactions offered valuable contextual insight into local discourses around memorialization. They facilitated a deeper understanding of how different stakeholders interpret specific memorials, the concerns or hopes they associate with them, and how public memory is negotiated in practice. Although the data from this visit are not systematically recorded or generalizable, they serve as contextual background supporting the interpretation of more formal data collected through questionnaires and site observations.

RESULTS

1. Policy analysis findings

1.1. Memory Policy Framework

As Ukraine continues to defend its sovereignty in the face of full-scale war, questions of collective memory have never been more urgent. In this context, the 2025 draft Law "On the Principles of State Policy on National Memory of the Ukrainian People" marks the state's first attempt to codify its approach to memory policy in a single legislative act. While this move signals a long-awaited recognition of memory as a political and social priority, it also exposes deep tensions between declarative intentions and practical implementation, especially for war-affected communities like Irpin.

The draft law performs a foundational role by defining key concepts, setting guiding principles, and outlining broad areas of memory policy. It highlights the importance of involving multiple actors (local authorities, civil society, educators, cultural institutions, and archivists) in shaping collective memory. It also identifies potential funding sources, ranging from state and local budgets to international assistance and public-private partnerships.

On paper, this inclusive and multi-level approach seems promising. It opens the door for municipalities and grassroots initiatives to contribute to the evolving national memory landscape. Yet, what the law offers in vision, it lacks in clarity. Crucial details, such as how responsibilities are divided between national and local actors, or what mechanisms will ensure accountability, are missing. The result is a document that gestures toward decentralization while leaving much of the decision-making and coordination infrastructure undefined.

For this research, the draft law provides more than a legislative backdrop — it exposes the tensions between national frameworks and local realities. Irpin, like many Ukrainian cities, finds itself at the intersection of symbolic urgency and institutional uncertainty. While the law recognizes the need for local participation, it does not specify what decision-making powers local authorities will actually have, nor how their efforts will be supported or coordinated with national structures.

This ambiguity creates a precarious situation: local governments are expected to implement memory policy without the legal or financial instruments to do so effectively. Community-driven memorial initiatives risk being excluded from official channels, not because of a lack of relevance, but because of the absence of formal pathways for inclusion. In practice, this could lead either to over-centralization, where decisions are imposed top-down, or to fragmented practices that lack coherence or sustainability.

In conclusion, the analysis of the draft Law "On the Principles of State Policy on National Memory of the Ukrainian People" reveals both the ambitions and limitations of Ukraine's emerging framework for national memory. While the law signals growing recognition of memory policy at the national level, emphasizing inclusivity, financial support, and international cooperation, it remains declarative mainly. Its lack of concrete mechanisms, clearly defined responsibilities, and implementation tools leaves local authorities without the necessary support to effectively realize memorial

initiatives. In this light, the case of Irpin becomes crucial: by examining how memory is negotiated and enacted locally, this research sheds light on how national policy gaps are addressed in practice, and why bottom-up experiences must be taken seriously in shaping a more responsive and grounded memory policy in times of war and recovery.

1.2. Legal regulation on spatiality of built structures

While the draft Law "On the Principles of State Policy on National Memory of the Ukrainian People" outlines symbolic and ideological frameworks for memory policy, these principles take tangible form through decisions about space.

Memorials do not exist in abstraction. They must be designed, approved, and constructed within specific legal and planning frameworks. In practice, decisions about what is built, where, and by whom are made at the intersection of urban planning, architectural norms, and local governance. The following section reviews the legal framework that structures this process, highlighting how national objectives are mediated through regulations and procedures.

Land use planning is primarily regulated by the Law of Ukraine "On the Regulation of Urban Development", which defines procedures for developing master plans, detailed land use plans (DPTs), and establishing urban development conditions and restrictions (UMOs).

The Law on Architectural Activity outlines requirements for design documentation, the roles and responsibilities of architects, and the importance of author's supervision throughout construction.

Broader policy principles are established by the Law on the Fundamentals of Urban Development, while technical and safety standards are set by the system of State Building Codes (DBNs).

The Law on the Improvement of Settlements governs the arrangement of elements in public spaces, including memorial signs, which are often classified as small architectural forms (MAFs).

For memorials located in or near heritage-protected zones, the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage defines the procedures for obtaining approvals and ensuring compliance with preservation guidelines.

While this legal framework covers all key aspects of urban construction, including design and placement, it remains highly fragmented, with overlapping jurisdictions and scattered provisions across various laws. It completely overlooks the involvement of the public.

This makes the process of initiating and approving memorials complex and challenging to navigate, especially for civic actors or smaller communities. The following section will outline the step-by-step procedure for initiating and constructing a built structure. This practical overview will help clarify how these legal norms are applied in real cases.

1.3 Procedure for the construction of monuments and memorials

In practice, the process of memorialization in Ukraine unfolds through several consecutive stages, as outlined in the Procedure for the Construction (Creation) of Monuments and Memorials, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on December 15, 2004. This document regulates the legal steps for initiating, approving, and implementing memorials and monuments at both the state and local levels.

The process begins with the initiative, which may come from local authorities, civil society organizations, private individuals, or state institutions. Some communities permit formal submissions through participatory budgeting or public petitions, but these mechanisms remain limited in scope and are not uniformly applied.

The next stage is site selection and planning, which must align with existing urban development documentation. If the proposed site lies within a protected zone or historical area, approval from the cultural heritage authorities is required. According to the Procedure, memorials of national importance must undergo an architectural or urban planning competition; however, for memorials of local significance, these requirements are absent.

Critically, the procedure does not require public consultation for either local or national-level memorials. While local councils and cultural heritage bodies are consulted, the broader public is effectively excluded from the formal decision-making process. This absence of participatory mechanisms creates a structural gap in democratic oversight.

The final decision rests with the local council, and in protected zones, with the relevant cultural heritage authorities. After approval, project implementation proceeds with the selection of a designer, approval of project documentation, and integration into the territory's improvement plan.

Financing may come from local budgets, charitable donations, international aid, or grants. Once completed, the memorial is typically transferred to the balance sheet of a municipal enterprise for ongoing maintenance and protection.

While this system may have been sufficient in 2004, its limitations have become increasingly apparent in the context of russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. The lack of mandatory public engagement or open competition for local-level memorials creates space for political instrumentalization and private self-promotion under the guise of commemoration. In wartime, when symbolic acts carry heightened emotional and political weight, this regulatory gap can erode trust and diminish the legitimacy of memorials.

A case in point is the monument Sprotyv in Irpin. Donated to the city by a former mayor and developed by his affiliated construction company, the monument was installed without broad community involvement. Its location is arguably marginal, its design lacks interpretive clarity, and its inscription includes references to the donor's private enterprise, blurring the boundary between remembrance and personal branding. As confirmed by questionnaire responses, this top-down approach has resulted in a weak integration of the monument into the city's fabric and a failure to resonate meaningfully with the local population.

This example underscores the urgent need to revise the 2004 Procedure, rather than merely introducing temporary wartime adjustments. Given the profound and lasting impact of war-related memorials on collective memory and urban space, all such commemorative projects, regardless of their scale, should be subject to stricter procedures. These should include mandatory public consultation, transparent design competitions, and stronger oversight mechanisms to prevent symbolic co-optation. Only through such reforms can the process of memorialization fulfill its democratic, commemorative, and healing potential in postwar Ukraine.

2. *Questionnaire findings*

The following sections present the core themes identified in the responses, each introduced with a brief analytical framing and illustrated with selected quotes from respondents. The thematic subsections are: 1) Timing and Ethics of Memorialization, 2) Form, Function, and Perception of Memorials, 3) Public Participation and Ownership.

2.1. Timing and Ethics of Memorialization

One of the key questions explored in the survey was whether it is appropriate to memorialize a war that is still ongoing, and how respondents perceive the emotional, ethical, and political risks of doing so prematurely, or not at all. This issue of *temporal appropriateness* emerged as a significant point of contention, reflecting broader dilemmas surrounding resource allocation, collective grief, and the politicization of memory.

While an overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) agreed that it is essential to preserve the memory of russia's war against Ukraine through the creation of memorials, only 66% supported the idea of starting this process immediately. Those who opposed immediate memorialization most often cited practical concerns, including the need to prioritize military funding, reconstruction, or social welfare; fears that new memorials might be damaged if attacks resumed; and a lack of trust in how the funds would be distributed.

> *"This is not a top priority. First, schools, roads, and hospitals—then memorials."*
> *"Any memorials now will be used to funnel money and play political games. We should focus on the army and providing people with housing."*

At the same time, a significant number of respondents advocated for beginning the memorialization process now. Their arguments emphasized the fragility of memory, the importance of documenting lived experience, and the urgency of integrating trauma into public space in meaningful ways.

"The further we get from events, the more memory becomes distorted and replaced by ideology, politics, and expediency. Like in the Soviet Union: the monuments stayed, but the pain and compassion were erased."

"Memorialization now is not only appropriate, it's necessary. It's a powerful antidote to social amnesia."

Interestingly, several responses emphasized *how* memorialization should be approached, rather than *whether* it should happen. These respondents advocated for trauma-informed, soft interventions, avoiding political spectacle or emotional overload. Some warned that poorly timed or overly visible memorials could act as stressors, particularly while the war continues and people live under constant threat.

"If we start building memorials now, they might reopen trauma. The war is still happening, we still hear air raids, we're still living in fear. Placing large memorials in public places may be too much until the danger has truly passed."

"It would be more appropriate to begin memorializing a few years after active hostilities end—once society has had time to process grief, reflect, and develop a conscious memory culture."

These findings suggest that while there is broad agreement on the *value* of remembering, the timing and form of memorialization remain highly sensitive issues. In particular, many who expressed reluctance to begin memorialization now did so not because they opposed remembrance itself, but because they questioned the use of public resources in a time of crisis. This highlights the importance of transparent communication and alternative funding models, such as partnerships, donations, or international support, that might help depoliticize or destigmatize early commemorative efforts.

Finally, the issue of timing also connects to deeper emotional and psychological dimensions: whether memorials will offer healing or retraumatization depends not only on when they are built, but on *how* thoughtfully they are designed. This question will be explored further in the next section, which focuses on the forms, visibility, and spatial integration of memorials in Irpin.

2.2. Form, Function and Perception of Memorials

Forms & Function of Memorials

Another major theme that emerged from the survey concerned the material and symbolic forms of memorials: what types of memorials residents consider appropriate, what emotional and social functions they expect these spaces to fulfill, and how they perceive the memorials that already exist in Irpin.

A key finding is that respondents overwhelmingly understand memorials not as static monuments, but as spaces of meaning and memory transmission. Among the most frequently cited functions of memorials were:

- to convey knowledge about the war (84%),
- to honor the memory of the fallen (83%),
- to shape collective memory (82%),
- to help form shared civic values (71%).

This suggests that residents see memorials as part of a broader educational and value-forming infrastructure, not simply as symbolic decoration. Many emphasized that memorials should foster emotional connection, collective reflection, and transmission of experience across generations.

"I lean toward the idea that there should be at least a temporary place to bring flowers and honor the fallen on anniversaries. Also, memorial plaques with QR codes at the sites of tragic events."

"Monuments will be appropriate only with time and distance. They require more reflection."

When asked to identify the most appropriate forms of memorialization, respondents showed a clear preference for contemporary and less intrusive formats. The most frequently supported options included artistic objects (73%), memorial parks and green spaces (72%), digital memorials (64%), and memorial plaques (63%). In contrast, traditional monuments were seen as the least appropriate form, receiving support from only 40% of respondents.

This pattern reflects a broader cultural shift: from monumentalism associated with post–World War II commemoration to more personal, reflective, and accessible

approaches. Several respondents emphasized the need for spatial forms that allow for both individual mourning and collective reflection, rather than imposing a fixed or impersonal narrative.

"Monuments require a kind of distance from the events. They are more appropriate when we've had time to process everything."

"Memorials should radiate empathy and respect, not just be symbolic objects no one notices."

Temporary or flexible memorials (such as installations, banners, or artistic interventions) also received strong support (73%). Digital formats were often praised for their accessibility and ability to preserve memory while minimizing spatial or emotional pressure.

These findings reveal a clear shift in public expectations regarding memorialization in Irpin. Residents overwhelmingly view memorials not as static structures, but as dynamic spaces for education, reflection, and the transmission of memory and values. Preferred forms include artistic objects, memorial parks, digital memorials, and temporary installations – formats that emphasize empathy, accessibility, and adaptability over traditional monumentalism. This points to a growing public desire for memorials that foster emotional connection and collective meaning-making, suggesting that future commemorative practices should prioritize participatory, flexible, and context-sensitive approaches.

War Ruins as Memorials

One of the most debated topics was the question of whether war-damaged buildings and infrastructure in Irpin should be preserved as memorials. Respondents were split: 49% supported the idea, 20% opposed it, 17% were unsure, and 13% provided alternative or qualified responses.

Supporters of this approach argued that physical remnants of destruction serve as authentic, unfiltered evidence of war and suffering—more powerful than any reconstructed narrative.

"These sites remind us of the cost of freedom. They are artifacts of time – direct witnesses. No replica will ever capture that."

However, even among those who supported preserving ruins, many emphasized that this must be done selectively, intentionally, and with care. Several suggested integrating ruins into broader memorial ensembles, supplementing them with navigation tools, signage, or digital layers to ensure they are not mistaken for neglected structures.

"It must be clear that this is a memorial, not just an abandoned ruin."

"There needs to be a balance – some ruins preserved, but not too many, and only if properly contextualized."

Opponents cited emotional risks, potential retraumatization, and aesthetic or safety concerns.

"When you see destruction every day, you begin to feel destroyed yourself."

"These are wounds on the city's body – not something I want to be reminded of constantly."

This ambivalence reflects a deeper ethical and emotional dilemma: how to memorialize suffering without overwhelming daily life, and how to preserve memory without paralyzing recovery.

Perception of memorials

A significant insight that emerged from the survey is the unclear or fragmented perception of memorials among Irpin residents. While some memorials are highly recognized and visited, others remain unnoticed or underused. This uneven visibility suggests that many commemorative objects are not fully integrated into either the urban environment or public consciousness, which could lead to tensions in the future, both regarding the perceived excess or scarcity of such spaces.

When asked about the number of memorials currently present in the city, only 2% of respondents felt there were too many. In contrast, 44% believed there were not enough, 36% considered the number sufficient, and 18% found it difficult to answer. Those who could not provide a definitive opinion often cited reasons such as not noticing any memorials, not spending much time in the city, or not having previously thought about the issue.

These results point to several underlying dynamics. First, they suggest that memorialization has not yet become a dominant theme in public discourse in Irpin, which leaves room for future development. Second, the fact that many respondents struggle to recall or locate memorials points to problems of visibility, spatial integration, and perhaps even symbolic accessibility. Nevertheless, this lack of recognition indicates a broader challenge in embedding memory into everyday life.

Recognition levels also varied significantly between memorials. The Romanivsky Bridge was known to 96% of respondents, while the Alley of Memory of the Heroes of Irpin was recognized by 93%. In contrast, newer or more abstract sites such as the physical memorial "On the Shield" and the digital memorial "Book of Memory" were mentioned far less frequently (32% and 26% respectively). The visibility of the Romanivsky Bridge and the Alley of Heroes likely stems from their prominent physical location, powerful symbolism, and media coverage.

This contrast raises questions about the spatial and symbolic integration of different memorials. While certain sites have become touchstones of collective memory, others remain on the margins.

Visitation patterns reinforce these trends. The Romanivsky Bridge and the Alley of Heroes are the most frequently visited sites, while 40% of respondents reported that they do not intentionally visit any memorials. These divergent behaviors reflect not only varying degrees of awareness, but also different personal strategies for dealing with memory and trauma. Some residents may seek out commemorative spaces for reflection or mourning, while others may avoid them as emotionally overwhelming or disconnected from their daily routines.

These findings suggest that the effectiveness of memorials depends not only on their physical presence but on their symbolic resonance, spatial accessibility, and degree of public engagement. Without clear narratives, emotional relevance, or active visibility, even well-intentioned memorials risk becoming overlooked fragments in the urban landscape.

The overall findings demonstrate a strong preference for contemporary, flexible, and emotionally resonant forms of memorialization. Irpin residents expect memorials to educate, commemorate, and emotionally engage (not just to occupy space). While some traditional formats are still accepted, particularly when thoughtfully integrated,

the dominant mood supports more participatory, artistic, and trauma-informed approaches.

The preservation of war ruins remains a polarizing issue, underscoring the need for inclusive decision-making and contextual sensitivity. A clear theme throughout is the desire for meaningful design: memorials should speak to personal and collective experience, offer opportunities for reflection, and communicate intentionality — not abandonment.

This diversity of opinion highlights the importance of ongoing dialogue. Memorials, as many respondents noted, must be co-created with the community, not imposed. They must respond to lived experience, historical trauma, and everyday urban life — and this requires careful listening, creative interpretation, and thoughtful mediation.

2.3. Public Participation

The importance of memory as a social phenomenon has already been emphasized in the previous sections. Here, this research reiterates a key aspect: public participation is not just desirable, but essential for legitimizing memorial practices in shared space. In contexts marked by trauma and ongoing conflict, such as current russia's war against Ukraine, transparency and inclusion become even more critical.

Memorialization during wartime is not only about honoring the past, but also about shaping present and future narratives. When decisions about the agency and form of memorialization are made without participation, the risk of exclusion, alienation, and contested memory increases. Participation is therefore not merely a procedural step, but a mechanism for societal cohesion.

This section examines public participation in Irpin's memorialization processes by analyzing how actively residents were involved in decision-making, whether there is a desire to participate and in what forms, and how the overall process is perceived in terms of transparency and fairness.

Level of participation

The questionnaire analysis revealed that only 7% of respondents reported active involvement in discussions related to memorials, while an additional 20% stated they passively followed such discussions. The largest proportion (41%) indicated a willingness to participate but cited a lack of opportunity to do so.

This disparity suggests a notable gap between willingness and access. While there is evident public interest in the subject of memorialization, participation is constrained by the absence of enabling conditions, such as transparent information, accessible and inclusive formats, and confidence that one's input will have tangible impact.

Demand for structured participation

All proposed stages of participatory engagement, ranging from public consultations to the development of technical specifications, received majority support (over 50%). The most widely supported forms of participation were: online surveys (69%) and consultations with experts (64%), public discussions (59%) and the formation of working groups (57%), illustrating support for institutionalized and dialogical modes of participation and reflecting trust in professional expertise and a desire for a substantive approach.

These findings indicate that local community is not only open to participation, but expect a transparent, multi-stage process that incorporates both professional insight and community voice.

Perceived transparency of memorialization

Only 7% of respondents described the memorialization process as both open and transparent. In contrast, 23% characterized it as closed and unfair, while a significant majority – 64% – were unable to provide a definitive answer.

This widespread ambiguity and critique point to shortcomings in communication, lack of procedural transparency, and insufficient avenues for meaningful involvement. These factors collectively undermine public trust and legitimacy of memorial initiatives, and may generate conflict, particularly over whose narratives are prioritized or excluded in public space.

These results lead to believe that participation is a mechanism of recognition, not merely procedure. When absent or limited, it can be interpreted as a disregard for public sentiment, thereby weakening support for even well-executed projects.

There is significant untapped potential for participation. Most respondents either engaged passively or expressed willingness to be involved. This represents a clear opportunity for future initiatives to enhance inclusivity through thoughtful process design.

Legitimacy depends on both content and process. Beyond symbolic representation, memorialization requires a decision-making framework that is perceived as transparent, inclusive, and fair, particularly in contexts marked by collective trauma.

3. Non-participant observation findings

The non-participant observation findings reinforce and complement the results of the questionnaire, offering a grounded, experiential perspective on how Irpin's memorials are used and perceived in everyday life.

Observations were conducted at three memorial sites: the Alley of Heroes, the Sprotyv (Resistance) Monument, and the Volia Memorial, over the course of three to four visits each. Each visit lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was conducted during daytime hours, with a few observations also made in the early evening. Fieldnotes and photo documentation were used to record behavior and spatial interactions. Analysis focused on the frequency of interactions, types of interaction (active vs. passive), maintenance signals, and spatial integration.

Alley of Heroes

Among the three sites, the Alley of Heroes was by far the most visited. Its high level of interaction is likely due to its opportunistic location on a busy pedestrian route. Most people passing by did not intentionally visit the memorial, but many paused briefly or looked attentively at the banners while walking. Signs of care and engagement were evident: candles and flowers were regularly present, and passers-by were observed adjusting fallen items, such as repositioning flowers or straightening candles. These small but meaningful acts suggest that the memorial has been integrated into the collective routines and affective landscape of the city.

This pattern confirms the questionnaire findings, which indicated that the Alley of Heroes is the most appreciated and widely recognized site of remembrance in Irpin.

Sprotyv (Resistance) Monument

Despite being located just a few meters away from the Alley of Heroes, the Sprotyv Monument attracted far less attention. During all observation periods, only one group of passers-by stopped to engage with the monument, likely seeing it for the first time. This strongly supports questionnaire responses describing the monument as confusing and inauthentic. Several respondents attributed this perception to its origin: it was installed as a political gesture by a former mayor, which some view as undermining its commemorative value.

Moreover, the monument appears poorly integrated into the surrounding public space, both visually and spatially. These findings reinforce the criticism raised in the questionnaire, positioning the Sprotyv Monument as a contested and largely rejected object of memory.

Volia Memorial

The Volia Memorial is located near a main road, but slightly off the central pedestrian route, adjacent to the local police station. One respondent noted this placement as symbolically appropriate. During the observation periods, few visitors were seen, which might appear to contradict the more favorable perception of this memorial expressed in some questionnaire responses. However, this discrepancy may be due to the timing and frequency of the observations (mostly during working hours) which limits the ability to fully assess patterns of visitation.

Despite limited foot traffic, the site shows signs of being a space for mourning and reflection. Flowers were observed, and its layout, with benches facing the memorial on three sides, invites quiet engagement and social interaction. From the observer's perspective, this is a successful example of how a memorial can be integrated into the everyday urban landscape. Residents running errands or walking nearby are subtly confronted with the memory of war through its unobtrusive yet meaningful presence.

That said, some safety concerns should be noted. The memorial's sharp edges could pose a risk to unsupervised children, raising questions about its accessibility and inclusiveness.

The observation period coincided mostly with daytime hours during weekdays, which may not capture peak visitation times such as weekends, holidays, or commemorative events. This is particularly relevant for assessing the Volia Memorial, where low foot traffic might not reflect broader patterns of use.

Nevertheless, these observations help triangulate questionnaire data: they confirm the popularity of the Alley of Heroes, reinforce the marginalization of the Sprotyv Monument, and offer a nuanced, spatial perspective on the role and perception of the Volia Memorial.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how public memorialization is negotiated in urban space during an ongoing war, using the case of Irpin, a city profoundly affected by Russia's war against Ukraine. Drawing on legal analysis, field observation, and interviews, it demonstrates that the memorialization process in Irpin is fragmented and inconsistent.

While national legislation sets a general framework, it remains mainly top-down and poorly adapted to local realities. As a result, the implementation of memorial projects falls to a mix of actors, including local officials, individual activists, civil society groups, and private donors, each asserting authority in different, often informal ways.

Memorials in Irpin range from official monuments to grassroots artistic interventions and temporary installations. These forms are variably embedded in the urban landscape, with some aligned with public needs and others sidelined or contested.

The success of a memorial often depends not on a coherent strategy, but on the initiative of particular individuals or institutions, as well as the absence of resistance from city officials. A lack of mandatory public consultation or competition procedures for local-level memorials has created space for political actors to promote their own interests through commemorative objects, such as in the case of the controversial "Sprotyv" monument gifted by a former mayor. This results in uneven integration into the symbolic and physical fabric of the city.

The tensions surrounding memorialization in Irpin reflect broader challenges of navigating memory during war: how to commemorate while violence is ongoing, who gets to decide what is remembered, and what forms memory should take. These tensions manifest in public disagreement, unclear authorship, and the exclusion of community voices from official processes. Notably, 86% of survey respondents stated they could not describe the current process of memorialization as fair or transparent. This undermines the legitimacy of commemorative efforts, suggesting that memorialization, rather than reinforcing identity and justice, often fails to fulfill its intended social function.

Importantly, residents do not see memorials as mere markers of loss but as emotionally resonant spaces that help transmit memory, foster civic values, and create room for reflection. Survey results reveal a clear public preference for participatory, flexible, and contemporary forms of remembrance, such as memorial parks, artistic installations, and digital formats, over static, monumental symbols. This shift reflects a need for memory practices that are empathetic, processual, and adaptable.

The findings suggest that memorialization should not be rushed. It must begin with broad community engagement, starting from the justification of the need for a memorial, rather than from a predetermined design. Temporary, digital, and artistic memorials can offer meaningful ways of working with memory during wartime, while allowing for reflection and change over time.

There is an urgent need to revise the 2004 Procedure for the Construction of Monuments and Memorials to ensure that even local memorials are subject to transparent planning, inclusive decision-making, and alignment with a national memory strategy.

In conclusion, this thesis proposes a more inclusive and responsive approach to memorialization that values community voices, accounts for evolving emotions and meanings, and treats memory as a living process integrated into the everyday urban experience.

This study contributes to the growing body of work on memorialization in conflict-affected societies by focusing on a city still in the midst of recovery. Unlike post-conflict contexts, Irpin illustrates how commemorative practices emerge in real-time, shaped by uncertainty, emotional urgency, and fragmented institutional

support. These dynamics underline the need to understand memory not as a fixed narrative, but as an evolving, negotiated process embedded in everyday space.

A key finding – that 86% of respondents view the process as neither fair nor transparent – points to a legitimacy crisis in current memorial practices. This undermines the potential of memorialization to serve as a tool for justice, collective identity, or healing. It also reinforces the argument that how memory is institutionalized, through inclusive, participatory methods, is as important as what is remembered.

The preference for flexible, artistic, and digital forms over traditional monuments reflects shifting public expectations. These emerging formats, often more personal and adaptable, suggest new directions for both urban design and commemorative policy, especially in societies where memory is politically sensitive or contested.

Future research could apply the actor-centered and spatial lens developed here to other communities in Ukraine or similar contexts globally, comparing how memorials are negotiated during and after conflict. Longitudinal studies may also examine how temporary or grassroots memorials evolve over time, and whether they are later formalized, removed, or integrated into broader national narratives.

Ultimately, this study shows that memorialization during wartime is not only about preserving the past, but also about shaping the civic identity and spatial future of cities marked by violence. As Ukraine continues to rebuild, the challenge is not just what to remember, but how to do so in ways that foster social cohesion, reflect public values, and support democratic participation in shared space.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Questionnaire

Attitudes of Irpin residents towards the memorialization of Russia's war against Ukraine

This is a survey form for a master's research by a student of the Kyiv School of Economics, Urban Studies and Postwar Reconstruction Program.
Research topic: "Memorials and memory management: civic participation and urban memorialization policy in Irpin after 2022"

This is an independent initiative that does not involve government or political structures. The survey is conducted underline exclusively as part of an academic study and will only serve to analyze, generalize and draw conclusions in the master's thesis.

The purpose of the survey is to find out the attitude of Irpin residents to war memorialization: what forms of memorials they consider appropriate, how they assess the memorialization process and their participation in it. The study also covers the challenges associated with the creation of memorials and places of remembrance.

Memorialization is the process and practice of preserving memories of people and events. This study examines the preservation of memories of the events of Russia's war against Ukraine (since the full-scale invasion in 2022).

The survey consists of 4 blocks and takes up to 10 minutes to complete. Answers are **anonymous**.

Your participation will help us better understand the needs of Irpin residents in the context of war memory. **Please share this survey with your friends.**

Section 1: General information

1. **Please indicate your gender** (Male / Female / Other / I do not wish to answer)
2. **How old are you?** *(under 18 / 18-29 / 30-44 / 45-59 / 60+)*
3. **Do you live in Irpin?** (Yes / No, but I used to live there / I temporarily left because of the war, but I plan to return / I do not live there, but I visit regularly / Other)
4. **Did you stay in Irpin during the occupation?** *(Yes / No / I do not want to answer / Other)*

Section 2: Attitudes towards memorialization

6. **In your opinion, is it important to preserve the memory of the events of Russia's war against Ukraine by creating memorials?** *(Yes / No / Hard to answer)*

7. **In your opinion, when will it be appropriate to start memorializing the events of Russia's war against Ukraine (in particular, in Irpin)?** (Right now / After the official end of the war / Some time after the end of the war, when society is ready / Hard to say / Other)

8. **If you think that memorialization is inappropriate now, please tell us why.**

9. **In your opinion, why do you think memorials to the Russian-Ukrainian war are needed? (Select all that apply)**
    - As a reminder of important events and shaping ~~people's~~ memory
    - To transfer knowledge about events (educational component)
    - To support residents in coping with loss
    - To build common values
    - To create a meeting place
    - Hard to answer

- Memorials are unnecessary
- Other

10.In your opinion, what forms of memorials are most appropriate for memorializing the events of the war in Irpin today? (Please select all that apply)

- ○ Monuments
- ○ Memorial plaques
- ○ Art objects (murals, graffiti)
- ○ Digital memorials (websites, digital archives, augmented reality)
- ○ Temporary exhibitions and installations
- ○ Memorial parks or green areas
- ○ None, memorials are inappropriate now
- ○ Hard to answer
- ○ Other

11.Do you support the preservation of war-damaged objects in the city as part of the memorial space? (Support / Do not support / Hard to answer / Other)

12.Explain why you support or do not support the preservation of war-damaged objects as part of the memorial space.

Chapter 3: Attitudes towards memorials

13.Rate the number of memorials to the war of Russia against Ukraine in Irpin *(Too many memorials / Enough memorials / Not enough memorials / Other)*

Temporary memorials are objects or installations that create a space of memory about a particular event or person, have a limited lifespan, and can be changed and dismantled.

14. **How do you feel about the creation of temporary memorials in Irpin?** (Support /
    Do not support / Hard to answer / Other

15. **How long do you think temporary memorials can exist in public space and remain
    relevant?** *(Less than 1 year / 1-3 years / 3-5 years / 5+ years / Other)*

*Digital memorials are forms of commemorating events and people created using digital
technologies (websites, social media, interactive maps, 3D models, video archives,
augmented/virtual reality). Usually available 24/7, they are interactive and allow users
to participate in the process of memory creation. They may or may not have a physical
component.*

16. **How do you feel about the creation of digital memorials related to Irpin?**

    (I support / I do not support / I find it difficult to answer / I am not aware, I am not
    familiar with this concept / Other)

17. **Among the memorials and places of remembrance related to Russia's war against
    Ukraine, select the ones you have heard of:**

    - Memorial "On the Shield"
    - Romanivskyi bridge
    - Monument "Resistance"
    - Memorial "Volya"
    - Book of memory of Irpen's fallen
    - Alley in memory of Irpin's Heroes
    - Banksy Mural
    - I have not heard of any of the following
    - Other

18. **Do you visit any of these (or other) memorials on purpose?**
- Memorial "On the Shield"
- Romanivskyi bridge
- Monument "Resistance"
- Memorial "Volya"
- Book of memory of Irpen's fallen
- Alley in memory of Irpin's Heroes

- Banksy Mural
- I do not visit memorials on purpose
- **-** Other

19. Please tell us why you purposefully visit this memorial/these memorials

20. In your opinion, which memorials in Irpin are the most successful examples of memorializing Russia's war against Ukraine? Please explain your point of view.

21. In your opinion, are there any examples of unsuccessful memorialization of Russia's war against Ukraine in Irpin? Please explain your point of view.

Section 4: Involvement of residents in decision-making

This is the last chapter, there's just a little bit left

22. What formats of involvement of residents do you think the decision-making process for the memorial should include? (Select all that apply.)

- Alignment with the memorialization strategy at the local or national level
- Consultations with experts (architects, historians, activists)
- Taking into account public opinion through online surveys
- Public discussion
- Establish a working group that will include all stakeholders (local authorities, residents, experts, cultural and public organizations)
- Developing the terms of reference and holding a competition for the best memorial concept
- None of the above, a decision of the local authorities is sufficient
- Hard to answer
- Other

23. Did you participate in public discussions about the memorialization in Irpin?
- Yes, actively
- Only followed the discussions
- No, but I would like to
- No, and I am not interested in this issue
- Other

24. Do you think that the process of memorializing Russia's war against Ukraine in Irpin is open and fair and takes into account the views of all stakeholders? *(Yes /*

No / Hard to say / Other)

25. **If you know of any cases of misunderstandings or conflicts related to the memorialization in Irpin, please share.**

    If possible, provide the following details:

    - Cause of the conflict
    - Participants of the conflict
    - Resolution of the conflict

26. **This study will also include in-depth interviews with residents of Irpin.Would you like to participate in the interview**?

27. **Please leave your e-mail for feedback on the interview if you would like to participate.**

Thank you for your time!

If you have any questions about this study or need feedback, please contact vpopova@kse.org.ua.

Annex 2: Responses