

# **Preservation Amidst Destruction: Architectural Preservation Activism in Kyiv**

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Submitted to Central European University - Private University  
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*In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts*

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Vienna, Austria  
2025

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Kokhan, O. (2025). MA, Preservation amidst destruction: architectural preservation activism in Kyiv, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Central European University, Vienna.

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<sup>1</sup> Icon by Font Awesome.

## **Author's declaration**

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Vienna, 28 May 2025

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis, I engage with architectural preservation activism regarding the historical center of Kyiv during the third year of the full-scale Russian invasion, 2024. This thesis seeks to explore the strategies of architectural preservation activism in Kyiv historical centre amidst the ongoing destructive war, highlighting the link between private property and heritage. How does preservation happen amidst destruction?

Based on three-month fieldwork from July to October 2024 in Kyiv, during which I have done participative ethnography and in-depth interviews with Kyiv architectural preservation activists, I argue that buildings in the historical Kyiv center are preserved not only from the war, but also from developers. Architectural preservation activism can be characterized as the process of negotiation for building's preservation through the claim that it should be treated as heritage without abolishing the idea that it is a private property. With this thesis, I aim to contribute to the value anthropology and post-socialist studies by developing the idea of value-making through the construction of private property-heritage axis during war. My findings suggest that architectural preservation activism can be understood as a contestation of the ultimate value that private property has had in post-socialist property regimes and neoliberal tendencies, as war induces a need for an alternative value expressed through heritage.

## **Acknowledgments**

To the city I was so afraid of losing that I needed to write down on paper what I could ever know about it. To the people in that city that could never leave me indifferent and always left me wondering. To both of my supervisors, Violetta Zentai and Judit Bodnár, for helping me get my thought on track and to so many more professors, with whom I have consulted throughout those two years. And to the IUFU community that made me feel seen.

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## Introduction

I went to Kyiv with a vague idea how my fieldwork would go – and it did not go like that at all. Kyiv is the capital of Ukraine that now endures the fourth year of full-scale Russian invasion. The full-scale Russian invasion has been bringing a lot of destruction and decay to Ukraine as whole, especially to towns and cities. The Russian aggression destroyed a lot of buildings all over Ukraine, sometimes burning the whole towns to the ground. Thus, my initial puzzle was – what do Ukrainians rebuild now and how? As I barely saw any rebuilding plans coming to life, I switched the question – what do Ukrainians preserve then?

When I came to Kyiv, the first thing I noticed was the new skyscrapers. They were springing like mushrooms in the quite unexpected places throughout the historical center of Kyiv, where old buildings used to stand.



*Image 1: photo taken near the Kyiv center, summer 2024*

For the first month of my fieldwork, I had been wondering about the visions of Europeanness and Sovietness that, as I had assumed, guided different preservation initiatives. Yet, when I came to the first court hearing, while waiting for the case, I looked out the window and all I saw were once again skyscrapers. Then, while I volunteered in different architectural preservation initiatives, most of the activists seemed to be indifferent towards my questions about the idea of Soviet architecture or European one: activists would shrug

shoulders, provide me with a general phrase or sometimes contest the importance of this line of thought.



*Image 2: a view from the window of the court building*

The Sovietness and Europeanness were not relatable to what most of the activists were thinking about – they cared much more about the practicalities of making the preservation happen and were not content with outcomes of the similar cases and what might happen to the case they work on. It is because even after a few years of dedicated activism, the building could still turn into a ruin due to the missile attack or become a new skyscraper or shopping mall.

When I would repair windows or mosaics with different activists, I experienced both the physical labor of scratching off the paint and mental labour of researching techniques, trying to agree on timing and instruments. That made me want to explore and offer a perspective on activists' engagement in such effortful work: why are they fighting for heritage sites and negotiating them in any accessible way during the war? I saw a city falling apart into different buildings, which are maintained by the will of the owner. This urban development trait is part of the general trends, where post-socialist property regimes (Gorbach, 2024) meet the neoliberal tendencies in a city space, yet here it gets complicated by the war. I saw how activists try to save a door handle with an account that it can be used to restore a heritage, which made me question what is at stake for them. I saw people's desire to



preserve the city that has been losing its coherence, while the bigger disaster is going on. This led me to the question: “what are the strategies of preservation that architectural preservation activists implement during the war?”



*Image 3: a photo of preservation of wooden windows by activists*

To answer this question, I first set the scene and introduce the main concepts: private property and heritage. I engage with literature on post-socialism and neoliberalism, situating traits of recent Kyiv urban development within the theory. Next, I show how the activist engagement with historical center looks on the ground, and what are the strategies with which architectural preservation activists negotiate the private property-heritage axis, as both of the concept reflect a value. To conclude, I focus on their vision regarding Kyiv’s future that explains why they their activism is conducted through strategies described earlier.

## **Chapter I “Shaping Kyiv’s urban environment”**

In this chapter I set the scene by analyzing the factors that form Kyiv’s urban environment during the full-scale Russian invasion. While engaging in the debate regarding post-socialism, I try to understand the legal and infrastructural systems on which Kyiv rests. In this chapter I show neoliberal influences in Kyiv, which was shaped by post-socialist systematic factors, and now has been impacted by the full-scale Russian invasion. After that, I introduce the main concepts of private property and heritage, which are essential for understanding the current Kyiv urban development. To show this, I engage with post-socialist theory and interviews, which were recorded with legal architectural preservation activists. While I break down the ways private property and heritage are conceptualized, and underline war’s influence on previous arrangements, I situate it within the systemic factors of Kyiv urban development.

### **1.1 Post-socialism and neoliberalism**

Since the fall of the Soviet Union there has been an undoubted development of Kyiv urban environment. This development has largely not been reflected in the flourishing of social infrastructure, meaning the public transport, public facilities, streets and places which are created to sustain a city. Rather, the development in Kyiv is usually a part of a district densification – dozens of skyscrapers or an expansion upwards on the previously low-rise building in the center of the city – the images of districts built on top of previous ones comes to mind. Throughout 30 years, there has been limited growth of social infrastructure. New stations of the metro have been built, new routes developed, and new parks constructed – yet it remains rather based on an urgent need, sporadic and case dependent. Being in the field led me to observe – the Kyiv government mostly comes up with small amendments, like a new bus station or a transport route. To put it into context, since the fall of the Soviet Union in Kyiv there has been significant deconstruction of tram lines, (Matveichuk, 2020) which have

been replaced by marshrutkas (private buses), shrinkage of green zones, and a lack of follow up on the social infrastructure promised by local government. Those infrastructural changes have happened gradually, disguised as renovation, development and so on. For instance, the deconstruction of tram lines on Kyiv's Left Bank in 2004 (Matveichuk, 2020) happened due to the need to repair the bridge, but then the tram lines were never reconstructed. As for now, most of the city continues to rely on the social infrastructure built during Soviet times with some recent repairs.

This relationship to the city and private property has been largely shaped by state actions. In this context, the post-socialist property regimes have arisen, which I define as a system of established norms regarding the different types of property. I draw on Gorbach's (2024) idea of post-socialist property regimes, where he shows how the populations 'relation to private, public and personal property is shaped by privatization laws as well as further relation of government to infrastructure. This work uses the term 'private property' where Gorbach uses 'personal property,' given this work's alternate conception of private property. While I derive my contextual understanding from Gorbach (2024), I narrow private property to a privatized building, be it residential housing or not, for which the owner has the primary right, in most cases given by law. As Gorbach notes, private property is also imagined through the idea of having the right to profit off it, its sacredness from state intervention (Gorbach, 2024). I would also like to advance the following common thread that both Gorbach and I have highlighted as specifics of post-socialist property regimes: no consistent engagement or budget planning for social infrastructure from government authorities exists, be it at local-level or nation-level.

These traits of urban development – neglect of social infrastructure, sporadic development based on profit and heightened protectiveness towards private property – are often attributed to a post-socialist property regime. Post-socialist as a description of property

regimes means that it is understood through the lens of post-socialism studies. Post-socialism studies emerged after the dissolution of the USSR, focusing on the continuities the post-Soviet region has been experiencing since the fall of the Soviet Union (Humphrey, 2002; Collier, 2011; Moore, 2001; Chelcea & Druță, 2016). The effectiveness of post-socialism as a framing has received mixed reviews in academic literature, since post-socialist studies cover a large part of the world. While some research underlines how this overarching term simplifies and pushes researchers to neglect important local specifics and years of state-formation (Chelcea & Druță, 2016), others would say that it is useful to sharpen the eye for continuities from such a vast long-lasting project. The debate about post-socialism as a research framework hinges on causality: what matters more for operation of post-Soviet states – Soviet legacy or recent/local factors? As Kyiv has developed as an urban environment for these 30 years, both continuities and changes can be found. Yet, Kyiv's city planning is mostly a legacy of Soviet planning with minor adjustments. For this work, post-socialism as a framework has evident strength and subtler deficiencies.

The advantages of applying post-socialism to Kyiv's urban environment is that it helps to focus on the systematic and rigid structures that are adapted for current circumstances in Kyiv. Changing the infrastructure of a city takes enormous amounts of time, labour and resources. Kyiv's post-socialist property regimes emerge out of big transition in relation to property. It can be traced through actions taken after the fall of the Soviet Union. The post-socialist regimes allow for the neoliberal reforms, privatization as one of them, which are directed at managing existing resources in city. It should be pointed out that in Ukraine housing was privatized through a "free mass privatization" (Gorbach, 2024. p.97), which meant that residents who underwent through certain legal procedures could receive a flat they had inhabited. Contrary to the private property, which has been guarded carefully by residents, most of the urban public property was left for situational privatization and

decision-making which are out of focus in this thesis. Due to post-socialist property regimes and neoliberal development, a lot of post-socialist cities could, and in some cases did, gradually become a scattered set of houses, all barely connected to one another and standing on decaying gas and water pipelines. The reason for that was both the lack of resources and planning, but also the general tendency of residents to take more care the private property.

The post-socialism framework could be a rational epistemological choice that shifts the focus onto the circumstance that enabled neoliberal (Harvey, 2007) tendencies of development seeping through the bits of previous planning. Speaking simply, Kyiv might be formed in such a way because of the neoliberal conditions and influences enforced on the preexisting structures. For instance, developers in Kyiv have been building up areas that used to be green zones or low-rise buildings, while increasing the district's density without any new transport infrastructure. Without the renovation or high-quality sustainment of Soviet-era housing, these newer buildings prove to be a more attractive investment than the rest of Kyiv – even while the street gradually becomes an ensemble of buildings. When referring to neoliberal tendencies in Ukraine, I find Harvey's (2007) definition of neoliberalism helpful: "a theory of politico-economic practices proposing that the human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade." (Harvey, 2007, p.22) In the case of my thesis, neoliberalism is mostly noticed through the privatization in urban environment, which has been a part of neoliberal tendencies throughout the post-Soviet region since the 1990's (Harvey, 2007).

However, there is a risk of attributing false causal ties when reviewing Kyiv's urban development over the last 30 years as reducing it to post-socialism. Based on post-socialist structures, the neoliberal tendencies shaped the cities in different ways. While I claim that neoliberalist tendencies have common traits for most post-socialist cities, I agree with Harvey

(2007) that neoliberal practices can diverge greatly. As post-socialism looks different in every locality, it can also be sensible to focus on the adaptation of neoliberalism to post-socialist cities by observing transnational corporations, informal economies existing in previously set urban planning etc. From this angle, Kyiv has much in common with other post-socialist cities like Warsaw or Tbilisi, which also have had to rethink the state's involvement in urban environment shaped by economy.

Having elaborated on post-socialist lens and neoliberal tendencies formed in it, in this thesis I look at Kyiv property regimes as post-socialist and neoliberal due to a few factors. Firstly, as for the post-socialist, the development in the last 30 years largely rests on the urban planning and infrastructure developed throughout the years under the Soviet Union. Secondly, the strategies of reorganizing and adapting the city infrastructure are close to what some post-Soviet and post-socialist cities have experienced: sporadic development of residential complexes and little to no new infrastructural rethinking. As for the neoliberal influences, I argue that the neoliberal urban development happens on the resting post-socialist urban structures. Having said that, I intend to leave some space for other causal ties.

## **1.2 Legal provisions in post-socialism: on rigidity during rapid shifts**

In this subsection I focus on the legal provisions influencing Kyiv urban environment during the war. I understand legal provisions as law and governmental decisions, which set up the scene of possible lawful action in the city. Legal provisions hold a certain space for lawful action, where through the mechanisms of accountability and legitimacy, one can either obtain property or lose it to the developer, government etc. Legal provisions, especially laws, are a crucial factor in defining the boundaries of post-socialist property regimes, and in formation of urban planning itself – legal aspects influence the relation towards property and regulate the way property is kept in the city.

The post-socialist property regimes are mediated by laws and legal provisions, which continue to be legitimate nowadays. The privatization laws as a state-led initiative mediated by law since the fall of the Soviet Union have been crucial for boundary making between possible and non-possible relations towards property in post-socialist regimes (Benda-Beckmann, 2006, p.5). In this text, I contextualize housing privatization laws, as they relate to the buildings, while keeping in mind the large-scale privatization as a larger process. It should be noted that housing privatization laws operate within the larger civil law, for instance the laws in the Housing Code of Ukraine. Although there have been waves of laws regarding different types of privatizations, the law that concerned the indirect aspects related to property sometimes would not be changed for years. This gradual legal transition to an updated view on property sometimes created legal collision and confusion within court cases. Even in the spheres of privatization, where in the 1990s laws came out almost instantly, some parts of it have been updated sporadically and based on needs, or perceived needs of the citizen. The privatization as a larger process that was happening at a nation-level came in parts (Commons, 2014) – this shows both the gradual legal adaptation in the sphere of property rights and the overall unpredictability of privatization process.

The range of possible legitimate actions towards Kyiv's urban environment is formed not only by privatization laws, but by various nation-level laws and legal provisions issued by various institutions. Besides laws that regulate the whole Ukrainian territory, Kyiv's urban planning is based on other official documents: region, city and district-level laws, decrees in addition to Kyiv governmental decisions. The General plan of Kyiv and the detailed territory plans (DTP) seem to be crucial legal provision for Kyiv, as they were often mentioned throughout the field. The General plan of Kyiv had expired in legitimacy in 2020, and there was no new plan created until now. (Construction Chamber in Ukraine, n.d; Cedos, 2020). The General Plan of Kyiv till 2040 has been developed, but it was not agreed upon for

uncertain reasons (Cedos, 2020). From 2020 on, Kyiv urban development has been based on DTP, a legal document that is designed for planning detailed parts of the city. DTP does not help in the creation of coherent development throughout the Kyiv urban environment and is often criticized as a mechanism of urban environment formation within the architectural preservation activists.

Although the urban development happening before 2020 was not always in accordance with the existing General plan of Kyiv (Construction Chamber in Ukraine, n.d;), at least it used to be a point of departure for resistance in legal sphere. The legal provisions for Kyiv urban development can be enhanced or put aside to some degree through the several institutional structures. The institutional structures directly influencing development in the historical center of Kyiv are Ministry of Culture (a nation-level institution), Kyiv City State Administration (KCSA) and Kyiv City Military Administration (city-level institutions). In addition to them, the question of heritage is often raised through the Department of saving cultural heritage (DOKS), which is a part of Kyiv City State Administration. Those seem to be the main state representatives that influence the reshaping of the legal provision for actions towards the historical center of Kyiv.

Although often criticized by architectural preservation activists, Kyiv local government represented by Kyiv City State Administration (KCSA) and DOKS, as a specialized department within it, never completely withdrew from protection of architectural heritage. There are laws and decrees which they enforce, but those oftentimes end up not executed. Even when there is a public attention and advocacy towards a specific building, it can still be demolished. After the demolition had already happened and there was some voiced resistance from the Kyiv residents, mayor of Kyiv or other governmental officials can post something on his Facebook where they condemn the happened. Yet, there are numerous investigations of Kyiv government officials profiting of the way urban environment has been



handled for now (BIHUS.Info, 2025; Ukrainska Pravda, 2025). It would be hard to speculate on the relation between legal provisions, governmental power and capitals used for the development of Kyiv historical center, as I did not gather enough information throughout the fieldwork. Yet, I assume, that the tie between local Kyiv government and developers could largely affect to which degree legal provisions are respected.

Having described legal provisions forming the Kyiv urban environment, I would like to articulate courts as a legal tool for contestation of the urban development in Kyiv. Legal tools protect a large sphere of property rights and regulate boundaries of state interventions (Riles, 2004; Benda-Beckmann, 2006). Court cases serve as a place of contestation within the state-made boundary. They can be understood as knots of tension in legal sphere – they show the disagreement in visions of what is a rightful usage of property. In this thesis, I focus on the courts related to the buildings which are disputed as historical sites in the center of Kyiv. During my fieldwork, court cases were seen by parts of the process as a contestation of a specific way of relation to private property. As I have discovered, challenging the right to property through court has been a strategy for a group of architecture preservation activists in Kyiv at least since the mid 2010s. The law is a state mechanism, which creates grounds for challenging one's opponent in court. The reason for that is possibility of satisfactory outcome: courts are likely to disapprove developers, although it takes them years. However, the courts have been also quite popular with developers. The reason is quite the same to their court opponents – it takes years to resolve a case of a building, and it takes an enormous amount of stamina and pro bono activist labour to hold on, which is why the developer can win some time by opening a court case. When the court case is open, it is legally prohibited to do anything with the building – that could mean winning time on developers' side or at least some legal support from the state for the activist side.

Previously, I described the legal provisions that have been shaping up Kyiv's urban environment. Here, I would like to connect aforementioned legal provisions to the war. I look at Kyiv's urban development in the Russo-Ukrainian war from post-socialist perspective, which I derive from systematical structures largely existing up until now. While there were already legal provisions shaping the scene as I have previously outlined, since 2022, the full-scale Russian invasion became a complicating factor for the Kyiv urban development. In the legal sphere that shapes Kyiv urban environment, war is most clearly expressed through martial law, although not limited to it. It is important to note that war has been happening since 2014, but as my research tackles Kyiv, the war has begun to target Kyiv as an urban environment directly since 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022. In my thesis, when I talk about the Russo-Ukrainian war, I refer to the stage of the full-scale Russian invasion of the war, when Ukrainian government introduced martial law. The reason for my decision is the informants' temporalities: when they refer to war, this is the periodization they usually have in mind. The war adds another layer of complexity to the legal provisions and intervenes with the previously existing structural factors through martial law and consequences I plan to describe later.

Martial law has been reshaping the power balance previously existing within the city. One of the ways is the creation of another local government, Kyiv Military City Administration, which, as the mayor of Kyiv has mentioned during one of his public speeches, "is aimed at disbalancing the power in Kyiv" (Kyiv 24 TV channel, 2025). The latter administration was created with a decree declaring martial law all over Ukraine for a more efficient defense of the capital. (On the Legal Regime of Martial Law, 2025) The tension between local government and nationally appointed war-time government has been an urban myth I have encountered in my fieldwork. When I refer to an urban myth, I usually mean a certain assumption I have heard from various informants during the fieldwork. As

those assumptions are usually voiced “as a matter of fact”, I take them as a part of convictions that reflect on informants’ position, but I do not aim nor to approve or disapprove those. However, this urban myth rests on the growing discontent of citizens with the local government and the inability to change it for uncertain amount of time. The martial law forbids elections on the city level (On the Legal Regime of Martial Law, chapter 19, 2025), which means that as long as war is legally declared through martial law, there can be no election for the Kyiv government. Thus, martial law reconfigures and challenges existing structural factors, adding war into the reading of current laws that shape the urban environment.

### **1.3 Private property and heritage in the war**

Defined by the systematic factors, such as legal provisions and results of previous urban planning, buildings that the architectural activists defend can be seen through two concepts: private property or heritage.

Private property is a fragmentalizing lens to look at the buildings, it does not cherish commonality and feeling of common duty towards space as such. Revised by Gorbach (2024), post-socialist property regimes are evident in relations towards property – the hostility and alarm regarding the private property and a mild carelessness towards the commons. This carelessness, I argue, can help developers to advance the new housing projects, still should be seen as a symptom of economic conditions and exhaustion throughout the Ukrainian society, reflected in Kyiv residents as well. The war is targeting the overall common level – it destroys on the level of commonness, the Ukraine. Even if a missile hits a building, in the rules of war it hits a property of Ukraine, although in reality it is a certain building with certain owners. In this sense, it is Ukrainian heritage that is destroyed by both war and development projects, but not every private property is affected. The war and developers use different logic to destroy the buildings: developers act as if it is just a

place to take profit, Russian army shoots missiles against Ukraine as an entity, ignoring the fact that it falls on the civilians' land and property. The war is fast in destroying, and so are developers, but law cannot adapt swiftly towards the realities.

An alternative way to look at the buildings in the center of Kyiv is heritage. The heritage in my thesis is usually “*reified in buildings*” (informants quote), which highlights the materiality of heritage (Lowenthal, 1989; Cloonan, 2015). The definition that draws attention to the materiality comes into interesting tension with Harvey's (2001) definition of heritage as not a “simply as a physical artefact or record, by advocating an approach that treats heritage as a cultural process” (Harvey, 2001, p.335). I heard legal activists adopt the word heritage a lot, when they reflect on the importance of not giving up a building for the development, be it a few floors or a complete makeover. In the case of urban development that often tackles buildings in the center of Kyiv, the notion of heritage is often voiced by architectural preservation activists as an antithesis to the neoliberal ways of developing the property: why are developers destroying our heritage like Russia does? This implies a link between destruction of heritage and construction of new private property. Those might be city malls, residential complexes or sometimes simply a place where the developers can profit. Moreover, the architectural preservation activists highlight the “creative destruction” in Harvey's (2007) terms that this development brings, changing the materiality of heritage (Lowenthal, 1989; Cloonan, 2015). This helps me advance my claim for seeing the current development tendencies as neoliberal in post-socialist circumstances. In this case, activists' claims show the tension that between heritage and private property development. In this context, heritage can be understood as a cultural process (Harvey, 2001) of rethinking the material circumstances of Kyiv and acting upon it.

When architectural preservation activists evoke the notion of heritage regarding a building, the notion of private property is not completely erased. It is not contradicted

completely, rather there are attempts to negotiate it through the legal framework. In courts, one of the things activists and developers would debate about is whether a building is a pam'yatka (heritage site) or not. Pam'yatka is a legal term that defines a building as something that cannot be changed without a governmental permission. There are different categories of pam'yatkas that a building can be: cultural, architectural and so on. If for some reason a historical building in the center can not be claimed as pam'yatka, it is possible to try to refer to laws regarding areal protection, or even vaguer concepts like Venice Charter.<sup>2</sup> But reasoning for building becoming a pam'yatka can be also vague: there is a record of Kyiv city council meeting, where invited personas were debating for 20 minutes whether they should give a pam'yatka status to one mansion, regarding that it was a Russian who ordered to build it in 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the end, the decision was to award the pam'yatka status, but one must keep in mind that this building has been already destroyed weeks ago.

Together, both concepts of private property and heritage are a part of the post-socialist property regimes. In the following chapter I will focus on how they create an axis through which one could negotiate. Those property regimes are built upon systematic factors, urban planning and law. Urban planning already sets the structure of the city and the building, defining the material reality. Law defines possible ways to act towards property, if one is regarded heritage or not in the material reality set by the city structure.

Law is rigid in its formulation, but the situation can abruptly change. The war creates a lot of challenges, starting from martial law and internal power shifts in city governance and till the mass missile attacks that rearrange the city landscape. This need for rapid decisions regarding the development is countered by the drowning bureaucracy, when one court or city council decision can take ages, while the buildings deteriorate. One case can go through all

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<sup>2</sup> The Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites is a set of guidelines, drawn up in 1964 by a group of conservation professionals in Venice, that provides an international framework for the conservation and restoration of historic buildings.

three stages of court, getting declined or redirected a few times, while sometimes during that process the building cannot be changed in this time – it is under warrant until the case is closed.

Although law is rigid, it is possible to contest it through other laws. The law operates as a scene where one could act, but it does not necessarily help in winning in practice. The architectural preservation activists have encountered a problem, where one has to choose methods of counteraction of architectural heritage decay. One group focuses mainly on the courts, while second, which is often juxtaposed to the first, works through the material preservation, focusing on the parts of which building consists, repairing doors, windows or decorations with the permission of owners. Those two groups are aware about each other's activism, yet they disagree on the effectiveness of each other methods. The activists that go to court emphasize that while one can restore doors and windows for years, the building is legally not protected and thus could be demolished or restored in a way it would lose its "historical accuracy". The activists that restore manually parts of building they gain access to emphasize the contrary: if one waits until the court case is over, the building could completely decay, thus becoming beyond any restoration. In both cases, there is a chance of not saving despite dedicating a lot of time and effort into one building.

The feeling of powerlessness is felt not only regarding specific buildings but to the whole city, a landscape where buildings are not interchangeable. Kyiv development poses a bigger question of how a city could evolve, whether it could develop into not only residential complexes. I claim that the developers' efforts to build up in the center of Kyiv, without creating any new infrastructure, nor caring for the idea of a heritage, raises a question of public and private in the city. Architectural preservation activists express dismay with the "private property above all" property regime. It is most evident through court cases, where they oppose neoliberal development in Kyiv and try to prove it illegitimate. Constructing 10-

floor buildings instead of 3-floor buildings in the center of Kyiv is seen by architectural preservation activists as a destruction and stripping away of architectural heritage.

Neoliberal tendencies of developing a specific piece of land without any recognition of buildings as heritage causes discontent among Kyiv residents. Some Kyiv residents believe they are stripped of their access to the heritage, when the war is already stripping away so many fundamental rights. Either decay or destruction can happen to almost every building in the center of Kyiv, as renovation without an expansion upwards does not generate as much profit. Especially if the developer will restore a building while maintaining close to historical accuracy, that will probably generate no profit at all. The history and heritage of buildings which activists try to preserve here is understood as a material heritage that does not have to be valuable through the idea of generating profit. It is understood as something to be saved against the costs, a way to contest the current route of development. In this situation war figures mostly as the factor of intensification or counter position against developers, showing that the destruction from war is logical during war, while the construction of new project involves destruction of older buildings and should not be happening. As one of the activists has reflected in the interview, *“the \*developer’s surname\* has not mobilized to fight in the war, nor had Klitschko<sup>3</sup>, but the people who were fighting them did”*.

To conclude, the developmental projects in the center of Kyiv are a part of systematic factors like the law and urban planning. The implementation of those projects is possible also due neoliberal tendencies (Harvey, 2007) and post-socialist property regimes (Gorbach, 2024).<sup>4</sup> Those factors have been noticeable in Ukraine since the fall of the Soviet Union, but the current situation is complicated by the full-scale Russian invasion.

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<sup>3</sup> Vitaliy Klitschko is a Ukrainian statesman and politician. He has been the Mayor of Kyiv since June 5, 2014 and probably will be one till the end of martial law. Additionally, he governs the Kyiv City State Administration

<sup>4</sup> From here on, when I use neoliberal tendencies, I am informed by Harvey, while when I use post-socialist property regimes I do so in conversation with Gorbach’s definition

#### 1.4 Acting upon the contradiction of war-time construction

In previous parts of this chapter, I have delineated the main systematic factors of Kyiv urban environment (legal provisions and urban planning) and main concepts (property and heritage) in the legal debates regarding Kyiv historical center. Consequentially, I will dedicate this subsection to the main actors in the legal part of architectural preservation activism. To this end, I define them and attach some ethnographic descriptions of the actions undertaken by different actors.

To map out the main actors in the shaping of Kyiv urban environment, there is the nation-level government, activists and developers, and the local Kyiv government. The urban development is usually developed through interaction of at least two out of these actors: developers, Kyiv local government, Kyiv residents and activists. In this chapter I have been mostly focusing on the activism, which is done through the courts and protests, interfering with the legal boundaries of understanding property and heritage. I unite those two types of activism in the category of legal, as they are creating a direct contestation of developer's action either through primarily referring to law or directly addressing the government. While others also criticize governmental politics through their action, they tend to act through the situational alliance with owners or "more conscious" developers without highlighting the illegitimacy of development. In my thesis I distinguish two types of activities within the architectural preservation activists: focused on legal provisions and focused on restoration. In the subsequent chapter I will also explore restoration as a way of conducting architectural preservation activism.

While defining actors, I have to note that, like any other category group, they are not homogenous. Most of the activists do not consistently represent one group. Almost all activists engage with both activities, however depending on the case, one activity is chosen as the main one by an activist individually. Often defending what they call Kyiv heritage,



activists might not necessarily even consider themselves a Kyivite – some of them saw it as a part of “*citizen’s duty*”. Architectural preservation activists come from different work spheres, although most of them hold a university degree. They tend to join one or other movement, as most of them are a single-issue or case movements. Oftentimes, the participants or supporters of a movement are the official members of another organization.

For instance, the protest for one building is joined by official members of another initiative group that defends building against development in another district. Legally, to form a group, it has to be at least two people – for the practical efficiency some groups limit their legal official count to that. But usually on the organized events of an activist initiative there is much more people, unofficial members and recurring comers. Although previously I have defined the actors with clear group distinction, in practice it is much harder: there is a lot of fluidity within the movement. For instance, the developers are rumored to have strong ties in local government, the activists are sometimes in direct cooperation with different levels of government, some even become part of the government out of practical reasons etc. If the architectural preservation activists contest the developers plans, they sometimes do it through looking for support in nation-level government and contesting local-level government, as they are perceived as someone who is for developers.

The tensions between the actors, most notably between activists and developers, have been there before the full-scale Russian invasion. Additionally, some of the legal preservation activists would also condemn local government. I explain this through the fact that the causal ties of who is in power to enable development over the historical center of Kyiv differ. While some attribute this problem only to developers, other activists are more ambivalent – they are against developers, which are in their understanding nevertheless acting upon tacit agreement from local government, and some activists criticize local government harshly, attributing the problem of development to incorrect usage of power in hands of Kyiv administration and

most notably in the hands of mayor, Klitschko. This goes to show how Kyiv urban environment is shaped by different actors, who are operating with boundaries of legal provision.

As the legal provisions set the scene for further action, the legal decision leaves a lot of space for the movement. For instance, the case of the “Flying Saucer”<sup>5</sup> (Schwartz, 2024) has been quite famous in Kyiv: the activists have been fighting against redevelopment of a music hall built in 1971, yet the city mall is about to surround the “Flying Saucer” completely (Gryshenko, 2025). The development is proceeding partly because of the discrepancy between one agreement issued and the following agreement – the Ministry of Culture claimed it to be a cultural heritage, and State Inspection of Architecture and Urban Development gave permission to build all around it. Judging from the court outcomes or local government decisions regarding the Kyiv urban development, activists can win the case. Yet the legal definitions allow for loopholes that developers or activists can take advantage of. While resorting to legal authorities in any disputes regarding property is generally a popular choice within both developers and activists, the legal decision might not result in practically implemented guarantees. Although most of the story regarding the Flying Saucer has been happening before the full-scale Russian invasion, a few activists recalled it as an example of a quite successful case this summer. Yet, as the autumn came, it became apparent that de facto the building is swallowed by nearby development (Prokopenko, 2025).

Decisions regarding new developmental projects do not always follow straight line of formal and informal approvals, it depends on a lot of factors like the building itself, the

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<sup>5</sup> The Flying Saucer House is a building located at 180 Antonovycha Street, Kyiv, built in 1971 by architects Florian Yuriev and Lev Novikov. A representative of the architecture of the second wave of Soviet modernism. It has been one of the prominent cases, where activists have fought for its preservation since 2016. They have conducted Kyiv Biennale in 2017 there. Currently (spring 2025), although the court satisfied the demand of assigning it as a heritage site on the national level, it has active unfinished development just near it, in its guarded zone. The Flying Saucer has been one of the most famous cases regarding the opposition to Kyiv urban development.

timing where the documents were approved, what was the legal provision for land and building renting etc. As Shnaider (2023) and I have observed, a lot of the activism against the earlier approved developmental decisions is voiced by activists as the voice of *hromada* (community). The *hromada* seems to be a quite fluid term, which tends to represent the public concern and oftentimes to contest the decisions regarding the building and land. Unless there has been public attention to the place, the decision regarding the building gets carried out invisibly for most of Kyiv residents. However, the activists know that the decisions regarding the land and rent are usually carried out every month by Kyiv city council during plenary meetings (Kyiv City Council, n.d). On the webpage there is the next meeting date and a word document with the questions which are supposed to be raised during this meeting. Some of the activists mentioned that before the full-scale Russian invasion one could watch a Youtube - livestream of the decision-making. With the war the livestreams stopped, officially due to safety reasons, but activists suspect that this is just a comfortable excuse to limit the access to decision-making for *hromadas*. If the case has received wide public attention, the developers can try to negotiate privately or semi-privately with the activists, as it was the case with the Flying Saucer. In the film piece about this building, called “Infinity according to Florian”, one can see how the developer representatives try to convince the *hromada* who has gathered of the value of his project. Likewise, there have been cases, for instance Rihert and Park development project from “A development”. As one of the informants has reflected, after rounds of negotiations with *hromada*, partially represented by architectural preservation activists, the developer decided to stop the project, as it could cause unwanted reputation risks. Thus, the decision-making happens firstly through the Kyiv city council adopting a decision regarding the land, but then it is sometimes revoked because of the public dissatisfaction it causes.

When it comes to architectural preservation activism, most of the activists reflected that the full-scale Russian invasion did not create the sharp before/after regarding their perception of activism. This stage of war rather added a sense of urgency and need to protect what is left. Although war might not seep into the architectural preservation activism overbearingly, it is still there, directing existing feelings and taking resources away from activism. One of the activists has highlighted numerous times that the amount of people, specifically men involved in preservation activism is getting smaller, as a lot of them are mobilized. That changes the range of actions that can be taken, making him redirect his activism more into “*paperwork*”, meaning courts, as there is “*no one with whom you could tear down a fence nowadays*”. The martial law challenges where one can protest and against whom one can direct criticism. For instance, the anti-development protests in 2024 had a defined anti-Klitschko sentiment. As one of my informants has explained to me, it is also because he will be there until the martial law is over, and it is hard to predict for how long that can last. The anti-development activism in Kyiv tend to tackle capital-level institutions like the Department of saving cultural heritage (DOKS) and Kyiv courts with little target on Ministry of Culture, which is national level. For instance, all the protests happen under Kyiv City State Administration (KCSA) instead of Ukrainian Government or Office of the President, as the martial law does not allow any gatherings under them. Also, the curfew, which starts at 23 o’clock, largely challenges the timing of the protests, making it shorter and making people reconsider their participation, as they worry about getting home at time.

Yet, the physical obstacles and redirection of dissatisfaction towards a smaller-scale government is one part of the story. The photo posted on one of the activists Instagram shows a group of people gathering near the half-destroyed housing, where there is already no doors and no windows. This post’s caption says, “Those are not russian missiles, those are Kyiv developers”. The war creates a bigger question, it highlights the inequalities existing before

and aggravates them. The war adds up the layer of expectation of saving the heritage that does not correlate with the reality. The destruction of buildings by “your own” people is felt even sharper in a juxtaposition with the outcomes of war destruction. Whereas before in Kyiv it could have been only developers, now there is more variation, which highlights the few sources from where loss of control over urban environment might be coming from. What a Kyiv resident can see as a historical heritage, developers can see as a place worth enlarging, a residential complex to-be, and Russian army sees as a legitimate war target.

There is a fragility of future – the war can be used as a reasoning to delay certain planning while sustaining other. While martial law prohibits the elections on any level (On the Legal Regime of Martial Law, 2025, chapter 19), a legal activist mentioned in the follow-up interview that all the aggravated tensions between nation-level and capital-level is because those entities are keeping the elections in mind. It remains unclear when they will happen, but that line of reasoning shows that the war does not suspend future planning completely – it just alters it and creates reason to favor some planning while halting other, like coherent urban plan of Kyiv. The martial law has shaken up the previous power balance within the urban development: another urban myth I have encountered is on the inducement of development within Kyiv’s historical center and loss of legal preservation activists to war, be it through mobilization or other means. This urban myth can be understood as an acknowledgement of war’s impact on local government dynamics and possibilities of governing Kyiv’s urban environment. The consequences of martial law are not limited to the shift of power balance. They include the impossibility of elections that induce discontent with current state of the city between Kyiv residents. “*There will be a Kyiv-level Maidan at some point*” – one activist jokes in the interview.

## Chapter I conclusion

In this chapter I have shown the legal and infrastructural systematic factors that have been shaping Kyiv. I focused on the systemic factors such as legal provisions (law and urban planning) through the lens of post-socialist studies. From that I have concluded that the systematic factors are shaping the boundaries of post-socialist property regimes (Gorbach, 2024).

Building up on the post-socialist property regimes, I have defined two main concepts within my field: private property and heritage, which are often tackled by legal architectural preservation activists in their actions, including courts and protests. Having built up on the systemic factors and main concepts, I situate it within the full-scale Russian invasion, a part of Russo-Ukrainian war tackled directly in this thesis.

By analyzing the systematic picture of Kyiv urban environment during the war, I argue that the war has challenged the previously existing power balance within the city governing structures, influenced the need for the preservation of buildings considered to be a heritage by Kyiv residents and raised a wave of discontent over the way the city has been developing. It has aggravated previous dissatisfaction within legal architectural preservation activists and created an arguing point for Kyiv residents against the development in Kyiv historical center. Posters on one of the anti-development protests say, *“our cultural heritage has two enemies: Russians and Kyiv government”*, *“don’t destroy Kyiv”*, *“if not a missile, then the mayor Klitschko”* etc.

## Chapter II “Negotiation of the property-heritage axis”

In the summer 2024, I visited an old mansion somewhat distanced from the center of Kyiv which housed an exhibition of old Kyiv doors. I was enticed by the Instagram advertisement for the exhibition: “Old doors are silent witnesses to the change of epochs. They have seen the traditions of the past give way to new trends, and buildings fade into the past, but today, despite their silent observation, they will tell us their story.” Once you go in, you can see the orange-tinted wallpapers, partially degraded, with old ceramic tiles the floor and somewhat disintegrating roof. Apart from that, there is a QR-code with a link for donations, so that the team could restore the doors of this mansion. In a large room that functioned as an exhibition hall there stood four doors, some of them leaning on a wall, and a few appended in the air. The exhibits were accompanied by photos and detailed descriptions of the buildings where they had been previously used as doors: things of practical value now turned into objects of refined appreciation for the aficionados of local history.

After the end of the exhibition, one of them remained inside in the non-display rooms. In a dull dusty room “full of treasures”, as Dima and Denys, the activists running the exhibition, put it, the doors for some time. They were bright green; the only colorful thing in a room built in 1911 to be servants’ kitchen.

Over the following weeks, as I spent more time in this mansion, I found out that the doors, just doors without a house, were to be returned to their collector. Maria, the leader of this NGO, asked Yevhen to return them with his car sooner: the collector had hinted his suspicion that those doors were not going to be returned. The organizers of the exhibition had relied on the collector's courtesy to lease the objects, and it would be bad to create tensions in a relationship like that, Maria underlined.

While listening to Maria's reasoning and looking at this door, Yevhen pitifully reflected that he and this collector both wanted those types of doors, but he was one day late to the dismantling of the doors like that in one old house in Kyiv. I felt as if someone opened a door into the new world for me: I had never thought about the fate of old doors of Kyiv, nor had I presumed that there could be a competitive hunt after them. As they are quite old, those emerald doors seem to have experienced a shift between being private in a collective building, collectivized, then privatized, then thrown out (things that are in trash are communal), then privatized as an art object, and shown off in an exhibition as something that reflects a common heritage: Kyiv history.

As I found out this summer, to repair one door takes a great amount of labour, coordination and faith. It is not only expensive, but also costly: the hard work, how we are carefully trying measure and capture doors that we have now in order to restore them, how we try to understand who does what and how, how we try to squint our eyes to see something from the blurry photos Dima has dug out from the archives of this house – month of regular work and it is all to preserve one door. One door in this city.

In this chapter of the thesis, I explore how the ideas of heritage and property are intermingled in neoliberal capitalist post-socialist state in a war. Having described the systematic factors, I outline how concepts of property and heritage are utilized to fragment and develop a strategy towards architectural preservation of buildings on a case-by-case basis. I present the cases I have witnessed in the Kyiv restorational architectural preservation activism. Tying cases to the post-socialist neoliberal property regimes, I present the tension between concepts of private property and heritage on the ground. Through elaborating on property-heritage axis as a negotiation of value regime, I streamline how strategies of value-making are central to this process in architectural preservation activism.



## 2.1 Materiality of heritage

There are few ways activist can preserve a building: to ensure it is legally protected or to try to preserve or restore it close to the original state. Even when the court case is undecided, or there is no direct threat of development looming over the building, the decay of building remains possible. In order for building to be suitable for being considered a heritage legally, the decision needs to be carried out by one of the institutions – then it is a pam'yatka (heritage site) of national or local level. But activists consider a building to be a heritage for various reasons and oftentimes it is related to preserved “historical” details. For such details like wooden frames to stay, they need to be well-kept and sometimes restored. Having talked about legal provisions and legal architectural activism in the previous chapter, I shift my attention to the materiality of architectural preservation, which is needed for the building to be acknowledged as a heritage.

Restoring even one door or one window is a fundamental work, which relies on many coinciding factors, such as communal work, economic possibilities of the team, accessibility of needed materials, weather conditions, etc. Even if the act of preservation seems small, the preservation in current Kyiv conditions can take a year of dedicated teamwork. Cloonan (2018) rightfully notes that historical preservation is a monumental work that “implies a vastness or extensiveness that is far-reaching” (Cloonan, 2018, p.7). Every doorhandle or window frame of restored building needs a lot of dedicated attention, so that it could stand there for a long time, continuing the feeling of monumentality. The finished preservation projects, although modest in scope, appear to be quite monumental because of the materiality. The material resources of activists are scarce and limited. Because of that, although some of them have reflected in interviews about almost everything in the center being a heritage, activists tend to choose several or one building to preserve. The mansion from the vignette has been cared by a group of activists, as they consider it to reflect “true Kyiv”, which also

means reflecting the history of Kyiv. When I ask in detail about the choice of this mansion, some have said that they preserve it because it is what they can preserve now.

The fact that heritage is a building impacts how one can preserve it – architectural heritage is oftentimes private property. Thus, it is not only about the heritage policies, but the property rights and Kyiv residents’ consensus to the post-socialist property regimes which shape the idea of private property and who and in which form has the right to it. While neoliberal post-socialist property regimes contextualize struggle for heritage preservation, this type of activism can be situated within a broader history: Cloonan (2018) describes Chicago’s 20<sup>th</sup> century struggle that appears close to the current Kyiv one. Architectural preservation in both Kyiv and Chicago cases borders between a fight for private property and heritage. Due to that, the question of private property is central to the question of saving heritage in Kyiv, as I will delineate shortly.

## **2.2 On the relationship between property and heritage**

It was a warm September, a time when it is still enjoyable to sit in the garden for hours – that is what we have been doing with the restoration team. Galyna, the owner of this mansion, cuts Napoleon cake, as we gather for someone's birthday in the backyard, a place inaccessible for the visitors. She smiles cheerfully and pours the beverages for her “*zaichiki*” (meaning “bunnies” in Russian language) as she calls some of us. It would be truthful to tell that the team sustained a deeply warm connection with her, but also it is a given that without her agreement the restoration of this door could not advance. The team has been redoing the doors in her mansion for a year now, while also restoring within the mansion here and there, starting from fixing the roof to organizing the family archives that were found here and investigating further in the history of both building and a family. Once during backyard gathering reflected that although there is a queue from developers for this piece of land, she is adamant of not selling it and would much rather let us do the restoration. Looking back at

those memories, I think that it was her decision to let her private property become somewhat more of a communal preservation project – that made the work possible. For activists it has been a work on Kyiv heritage, yet everyone accepts that it is a consistent repairing of private property.

In this part, I explore the relationship between private property and heritage, while inquiring into categories of common and private. The common and private is what distinguishes the attitude towards a building: heritage is common, but private property is private. A house in the center of Kyiv that is older than 50 years can be seen from both sides: on one side, it is a private property with the owners that have rights to sell it or even destroy it, but on the other side a lot of activists consider it to be a heritage, as they are fighting for it and it could be legally approved to be a *pam'yatka* (heritage site). As Carman (2005) highlights that the issue of property relations is entangled in the understanding heritage, and there are other types of property as well (Carman, 2005; Beckmann-Beckmann, 2008). While in this thesis I purposefully limit it to private property, there is the spectrum that exists between common and private. It points to a space where the activists are operating by engaging with heritage as a private property and vice versa.

The question of acting towards Kyiv historical center building as a heritage or as a private property is on the forefront of Kyiv residents' concerns. Throughout the summer of 2024 there had been regular protests opposing destruction created by developers. Importantly, people focus on what is destroyed rather than what kind of private property is planned to be built. On one of the protests there was a public speech, and it said that in the current legal circumstances we, Kyiv residents, are to negotiate and expand on what is a heritage site. I have observed this summer relentless activists trying to negotiate every building they could through various actions: starting from tour guides and finishing with courts.

In the cases I have witnessed, the private property as a concept and legal private property rights are largely accepted. As I observed, in the case of a heritage that is also a private property, activists do not oppose the property rights that tackle ownership. They focus on having the right to alter it and decide building's fate on owners own. As heritage becomes way of seeing building as a reified shared history, the decisions regarding heritage should not be decided by private property owners, even if the heritage is not legally recognized as a *pam'yatka*. Cloonan (2018) notes on this that "the key difference between heritage and a resource is that one is not used, but the other has to be. It is this use as a resource which dictates it that it must also be some form of property – since for it to be used someone must have a right of such use" (2018, p.59).

The buildings in the center of Kyiv are understood as both heritage and private property, but to a different degree: activists are okay with someone owning their heritage if the building is sustained close to its historical form. However, oftentimes if the whole building was bought by a developer, developers treat it just as a private property, destroying heritage in the name of economic gain, putting profit as buildings main value.

The reason why a building can be viewed as a private property or as a heritage is built on how it is valued. In case of architectural preservation activism, property regimes are part of "value regimes" (Appadurai, 1988) regarding the Kyiv urban environment. Having talked about post-socialist property regimes in neoliberalism, through observations I conclude that the way buildings are treated as a private property or heritage is related to which "bundle of rights" (Beckmann-Beckmann, 2008) the actors find more valuable. In this research, I follow Appadurai's (1988) "value regime" as a "cultural framework that defines the commodity candidacy of thing" (Appadurai, 1988, p.14), while slightly expanding the definition by adding the fact that this cultural framework is tightly tied to economic circumstances and legal provisions defining the pool of possible actions.

Private property and architectural heritage both make a claim towards a set of values recognized within the current circumstances: post-socialist property regimes, neoliberalism and the war. Some activists would not contest the absolute right for the private property but would like to somewhat negotiate way the outer part of the building is treated, while some are against private companies owning the building overall. It is the claim for the value that makes activists negotiate their terms and visions.

Value-making is an expression of property regimes negotiation on a case-by-case basis. Through finding and claiming value of a building as a heritage, activists find their ground to challenge current untouchability of private property, which has been part of consensus in post-socialist property regimes and neoliberal urban development tendencies. Yet, it is usually not that the building is either heritage or private property – activists work through the construction of the private property-heritage axis. Within a case, they tend to claim a right to decide about some parts of building or whole if possible. Consequently, the outcome of value-making, as part of value regime, can justify contestation of what is up to the private owner to decide.

### **2.3 War and value**

In this subsection, I explore the notion of value in construction of private property-heritage axis during the war. To this end, I turn my attention to the ethnographic data. Subsequently, I break down how the notion of values in property and heritage are negotiated through concrete bricolage strategies of value-making.

The construction of property-heritage axis has been influenced by the full-scale Russian invasion. The war influenced both the materiality of the preservation activism and the Kyiv residents' broader ideas about what is valuable in a city. While using the term value, I stick to Graeber's interpretation of Munn's work: "value as the power to create social relations, a matter of making visible" (Graeber, 2001, p.47). I argue that the architectural

preservation work during war is about fighting the value of profit generating by private property development by counterpointing it with another type of value: shared history or antiquity that is understood through architectural heritage. As some activists noted, the war put the question of saving heritage more in focus within the public. While noting the growing demand for heritage preservation since the full-scale invasion, preservation activists continue to work in precarity and scarcity of material resources available for restoration.

The war affects not only the materiality of the architectural preservation activism, but also creates feeling of urgency. The vast number of buildings that could be considered architectural heritage but also could become another residential complex at any day also adds up to this feeling. The feeling of a fleeting moment pressed me while I was on the fieldwork – there is a monumental work to do with architecture that is carried out within the precarity of Russo-Ukrainian war, when the whole near future is uncertain. The feeling of monumentality in preservation (Cloonan, 2018) is especially evident when opposed to uncertainty. The preservation process seems never-ending, it is larger than us, larger than one space and larger than a human life – Ukrainian activists are in constant dialogue about saving and destroying. War, as I argue, brings in major shifts in organizing architectural preservation activism and the sense of urgency. For instance, the mansion from vignette was familiar to this group of activists for a long time, but it was the missile strike near it that made them contact the owner and offer a restoration. As Dima claimed, otherwise the windows could have been changed to plastic ones, or it could lead to the slow but sure decay of the building. There is a necessity of preserving what one can, even if in this case creating monumentality is like building the bridge into the void. It is better than not acting upon current situation, but it is still a work that might result in little to nothing for a few reasons: no one can predict what will happen within this war and what will be the architectural heritage policies.

There is a tension between the vast amount of work that is needed to preserve at least a piece of building and the impossibility to save as much as activists would aspire to. This tension is expressed through the negotiation of private property-heritage axis. It can be noticed on the ground through the debate around “background architecture”, a term that a lot of activists operate with. Recently, it has become a common term in preservation activist circles that usually means the buildings in the center of Kyiv that lack credentials to become *pam'yatka* legally. Term “background architecture” comes from architectural theory, where during street planning there usually was the most exquisite building – a “dominant” building and “background architecture”, regular buildings, against which the dominant would stand out. The usage of this term for advocating for the buildings reflects a shift in understanding of value in architecture, that shows that even “unremarkable” older buildings can be negotiated as a heritage rather than a private property. As one of the activists explained to me, “the main building on the street is the pearl, but the pearl does not shine in solitude, it needs a sophisticated silver to enhance its beauty. The same goes for the building – it does not shine alone”.

As it usually goes, not every building in the historical center has stunning architectural decisions or national heroes who used to reside there, but there is a need to preserve and save it from developers expressed by the architectural preservation activists. For instance, the article from Village (2024), when pinning down exact buildings which are considered background architecture, refers to their legal premises to be heritage and a contrast of future demolition that awaits them. I assume that the reason for framing and advocating for a building as a background architecture is to underline the coherency and the view on the city as something whole. I argue that this can be recognized as a beginning of rethinking post-socialist property regimes, where private property is understood by Ukrainians as most important. Nowadays activists highlight that Kyiv center cannot be

divided piece by piece and evaluated building by building, for it is the historical heritage – a prominent 19th century cafe looks better with 19th century residential buildings rather than a newly developed skyscraper.

On 20.12.2024 Russian Armed Forces shelled Kyiv, and central district, where St. Nicholas Cathedral stood, was damaged. After the shelling, there were dozens of messages in the chat – volunteers started to wonder about the fate of old windows nearby and debate who will have some kind of support and who should be contacted, because if no one will help with restoration of the low-store buildings near the Cathedral, the old windows are going to be changed to plastic ones. They took photos of the district and sent them in the chat and discussed the aftermath of the shelling. In this chat Dima, Denys and other preservation activists appeared to be less worried about the main building, the St. Nickolas Cathedral, shown on the national news, but about the smaller, less noticeable buildings near it and its windows and doors. As they continued the dialogue, I understood that is because this is “less noticeable heritage”, which is also private property, so no one is sure if the owners want to or can afford to restore the doors and windows close to their initial form. So, they hoped to contact the people from those houses, offer them help with restoration and preserve what they can preserve.

In the mansion, where the doors exhibition has been happening, if you turn to a room that is currently utilized as a kitchen, surrounded by antique cups and pieces of clay ornaments, on left to you above the coffee machine there will be a portrait of a bearded smiling man with an information about him: “Danylo is the soul of Kyiv. He has dedicated the most of his life to his hometown... Danylo contributed to preserving Kyiv's historical heritage by doing restoration of old doors and entrances of tsarist buildings from his own pocket and by his own initiative... From the first day of the full-scale invasion, Danylo volunteered to Kyiv Territorial Defense... He was fighting in the war, learning the war and



writing about war...His life was cut short while he was on a fighting mission under Bakhmut.”

War has been reshaping the resources an activist group is able to mobilize. Although most of the activists I have encountered have been doing this activism before full-scale invasion as well, but I felt the heightened urgency of preserving. Danylo was the one who has registered this NGO before full-scale invasion, but his death mobilized a dozen of people, who have been indifferent to his activism long before.

War creates an exacerbated fragility of life, where the fight for the architectural heritage gains bigger recognition of its value, even if the preservation work is so vast and monumental. Most people on the field were painfully aware that their work for years might go to waste: a missile will tear it down or the developer will buy it out and create whatever is on his mind. The activists continue to negotiate the value of certain building because the outcome of negotiation might change the fate of the building. As Cloonan (2018) sums up: “it is the values the material carries that determine which is the appropriate institution to determine its fate, that is to exercise the rights of ownership over the object. It is the value that determines how the object is treated” (Cloonan, 2018, p.60). In this case the material, the house in the center of Kyiv, does not have a one-sided interpretation, it can be seen as both heritage and property, but that would challenge the understanding of how to act towards it, what degree of commonality in decision-making is acceptable. Can a community repair the doors, or protest the ugly pink on the facade? Or do not permit a balcony, although it is not their property? So, the question of how to view a building in a center in Kyiv, as a property or as a value, and how this framing will shape the future of the building, and consequently districts and Kyiv arises.

In the beginning of September, a carpenter came to the mansion and together with Ivan, another man caring for the mansion, they discussed the details of restoring the door.

The problem voiced was that the girder was 5.5 cm, and in shops you could only buy 5 cm girders, so they carpenter would need to cut it manually. They have discussed what kind of door would be better, and when I ask why they just won't stick to the one they previously had, they explained that they want the one that would last longer. Overall, during the time I was volunteering in this mansion, we had several carpenters coming over and giving slightly different advice. The team was seeking a balance between price, attainability, own labour force and “historical accuracy”, because the latter is the main point of preservation work. And everything besides historical accuracy was dependent on the war and its further development.

On one protest during July under the Kyiv City State Administration the organizers of the protest brought a brick laced with a red plastic ribbon. This brick was found in the rubbles of the building that was destroyed probably for development of residential complex in the center of the Kyiv. As activists have mentioned, this brick was to symbolize a “gift” from the Kyiv government, the only thing they are leaving us with. The protest was majorly against the local Kyiv government who are accused of being in cahoots with developers. During the protest the architectural preservation hope to gain attention of other actors, to signal that the dissatisfaction is shared among Kyiv residents.

Those vignettes showcase the materiality of war in the architectural preservation activism: the ways of trying to advocate for preservation and value of heritage, which can be used later while negotiating the private property-heritage axis. The war highlights the need to continue doing so. As I would suggest, the reason for that is a large restructuration of the material resources created by the full-scale Russian invasion. By that I mean two things: the way money distribute within the architectural investment (the amount of development projects seems to grow at the expense of the historical buildings) and human resources

meaning people that could counteract developers (some were killed, some have become refugees).

The negotiation of private property-heritage axis is happening where the activists see the chance of change against the bigger feeling of loss. As an activist interviewed for Village (2024) has noted, “with the loss of background architecture we are losing history”. Losing heritage to development feels somewhat even more bitter during the war, so the work to prove the value of every building in the center of Kyiv when it is possible happens relentlessly. The negotiation in both formal and informal ways regarding the private property - heritage axis is the most common way of conducting architectural preservation activism in Kyiv. This preservation activism is also enriched with a broader context of capital urban development within a neoliberal post-socialist country at war – monumentality of buildings matters precisely because there is a need to preserve something material and lasting when almost daily Russians shoot missiles on buildings and whole towns collapse. Thus, the war adds another possible reason of losing the architectural heritage and creates a sense of urgency, which amplifies previously existing need to preserve the historical center of Kyiv against developers.

## **2.4 The strategies of value-making**

In this subsection I focus on breaking the property-heritage axis down through looking the strategies of value-making. I offer analytical framework of bricolage to explain the character of value-making strategies employed by architectural preservation activists. The strategies of architectural preservation value-making I describe in this chapter are tour guides, collections, protests and exhibitions. I consider those strategies to be ground-up value-making, that is to end up in renegotiating the axis of private property and heritage.

Value-making is an action that can create, induce or reduce the value of objects within a “value regime” (Appadurai, 1988), a set of established understandings of values. In this

case, it is the property-heritage axis that is negotiated through activists' strategies of value-making. The strategies of value-making are adopted in alignment with the case activists work on. Yet, there is a common tendency within the value-making strategies, the usage of small objects to recreate a vast narrative. The reason for that is because in order to negotiate the private property-heritage axis, one needs to support the negotiation with a narrative, a line of claim about why it is exactly should be seen closer to heritage or not.

I describe this tendency through the notion of bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966; Phillimore & al., 2016), focusing on the creation of something big and monumental out of pieces available. As I am aware now, this concept is widely used in postmodernist discourses, but by summoning it I rather want to highlight the usage of small particular objects that compile the general and perceived-as-whole object : one redoes the door handle to prove the historical monumentality of Kyiv, and this door is also compiled out of details found, ordered from professional artisans or bought. Objects become crucial in the saving heritage: they are the material for the development. As Turkle (2007) in the book "Evocative objects" describes, objects can be about something bigger or purely mental, like memory, that we collect in the object. Continuing this thread, I would say that physical objects are viewed as something more permanent, although in the circumstance of war and neoliberal urban development the monumentality of materiality is challenged.

The bricolage character of value-making strategies is noticed in the article of Village (2024). When creating an exhibition about background architecture the people use collage, a technique that takes different elements and creates a new picture – because the creation of valuable urban landscape anew is not an option in Kyiv. That greatly showcases the fact that bricolage is tied to environment and scarcity of certain kinds (Phillimore, 2016, p.16). Architectural preservation activists exhibit collage in the flat in old historical building they managed to rent as a space they plan to "preserve". There is no end and no predetermined

outcome to the preservation, and it remains uncertain whether they will save this apartment in the “original” condition and to which extent – and there is a looming risk of this building being bought over by developers or ruined by missiles. Bricolage as a character of value-making strategy helps one to save whatever you manage to persuade others as valuable and whatever the materiality of resources allows for. So, there is a tension: to save an environment, yet the impossibility to do so, thus the need to preserve the most. Usually, it comes down to practical decisions: what is already “on fire”, be it because of the trial decisions or dubious owners or being hit by a missile. etc But the question of Kyiv as a coherent space is never out of question – this building never is just a building in the field, it matters precisely because it is or used to be a part of something bigger, on which the value of heritage is based. In this research I regard bricolage to be a strategy of value-making that utilizes small objects to claim a bigger notion or idea that can be seen as valuable.

### **Tour guides**

One type of tour guide that has been happening approximately once a month, organized by a Soviet architecture researcher and defender. It cost around 10 euros and last around 4 hours, and after the excursion we could have an “afterparty” together with the organizer – we stayed at the cafe talking about life. Yet, when I was on the tour guide, I have sharply noticed by how one third of the excursion was a campaign against unlawful building and glazing the balconies. In addition to this, we have stopped and listened to the tour guide talk about a cover of the building with corrugated sheets, where the mosaic used to be placed. The crowd of 10 people seemed to be quite interested in what he was saying, while I was puzzled – by visiting the tour guide, I learned what has been destroyed or illegally built up rather than the classical story of the district I had been promised to understand. Yet the way of creating value through showing the disadvantages of current Kyiv and focusing on the advantages of older urban planning and buildings is not the only way to negotiate the private

property-heritage axis. As there is no uniform way to negotiate the value of building, it is based on the information available to the activists working on the tour. For instance, the team of the mansion from the vignette chose a different approach to narrating a heritage value. Having listened to an excursion developed by the team, as a volunteer I have been conducting tour guides around the mansion and the garden for the people who would donate. There, while focusing more on the historical continuity of the life of the mansion, the story of the family that lived there was central. Besides showing the mansion itself and explaining how rooms used to function in different periods, I have also shown them the rusty garage, where one of the owners used to invent and work with apparatuses and his light gray car, Volga. Thus, through carefully managing the details of the everyday life that used to boil in this mansion, I was emphasizing the value of this place through its tie to real personal histories. Once, during exhibition of doors I overheard Maria in a conversation with a visitor:” We want to name the streets of heroes of Ukraine, but what exact heroes are we talking about, do we know them?”.

### **Forming collections**

After finishing the basic cleaning in the mansion, I came to the back room, the one where the doors were stored, to watch Dima carefully organizing the “archive”. His sinewy fast hands rummaged through a few boxes with pictures, old bills and even medicine prescriptions. Sometimes he would find some piece of information that would make him giggle or even call for Maria to tell her a freshly discovered part of the story. But photos and doors were not the only objects that mattered for preserving history. While having expeditions to old and mostly abandoned houses, activists were saving small tiles and everything they could get their hands on. The purpose was not to save it for oneself just to have it at your own disposal, but to use it when needed to restore another building or house. As I was resting on the porch in the break, I saw Dima approaching the mansion. He was

coming with some nails, because he was coming from his hunt for the antique brass nails at Petrivka, a local flea market. He wanted to find nails that would match door or window that was about to get restored.

A few weeks before that, Danylo and Dima texted in the chat that in nearby housing there was a renovation happening and they threw out the old windows in a garbage bin. The whole group started packing up to go to the garbage bin. There they were, around four windows with partly peeled off paint and loose cracks. Danylo took the screwdriver he had with him and started to unscrew the window furniture. In the end, a handful of screws and other brass configuration was lying in my hands. The team saved them for a better use, until the moment comes. They also took the windowsills in and placed them in the backyard. Collecting for architectural preservation activists can be interpreted as taking heritage into private hands so that it would not be lost or forgotten. Yet, in case of activism in Kyiv, it usually awaits an appropriate moment to become a common heritage once again. It is an essential part of the bricolage value-making strategies.

### **Protests**

From July 2024, every week over the rest of summer there were mass protests happening under the Kyiv City State Administration led by an architectural preservation NGO. During one of the protests, Yevhen, a well-known Kyiv activist was doing a speech with a microphone. As a part of the talk, he said:” ...cultural heritage sites are immovable cultural heritage sites for which we came here [on the protest]. These are buildings, monuments that we see in urban space. And these are also movable monuments, but here [in the law] ... it is also not specified, but it is stated that movable monuments are only musealized. But we also have movable monuments in objects, in collections, in private collections, and they are not covered by this law, so they are not protected either. This is a real gap, a gap in our legislation that needs to be improved, just as it needs to be improved”.

With this speech the legal blind spots between objects and heritage sites, as objects are constituting it, are evident. And, as we have seen earlier, to conduct a monumental preservation, objects are required. It is the bricolage of bricks, window furniture, wallpapers and so on that make a building that can be framed as valuable somewhere between the private property and heritage. The protests as a strategy of value-making show how the current treatment of buildings in historical Kyiv center is unsatisfactory to some Kyiv residents and should be renegotiated.

### **Exhibitions**

The whole room with a dimly lit light smelled of dark red roses. I have been tying a dozen of roses to a big branch, thus creating a part of art installation. The exhibition was about to be open an hour, and the last preparations were yet to be concluded. The guests who would come would have to pay for the exhibition a 10-euro charge that would go to the restoration fund of this mansion. The artistic measures, which the team has been applying, rather succeeded in attracting attention to the mansion: a lot of visitors seemed to enjoy the art and experience that hinted how history is close to art through turning a historical space, as activists alluded to this mansion, into an art space. As Ivan said a few times within my volunteering time “people are paying for the emotions we give” – and during exhibition openings there were usually more people, which led to more donations and our capabilities to restore. By exhibiting art objects or turning a mansion into one for a month, the value was negotiated as well: it was added, and it was not a dusty private property, but a hidden Kyiv heritage gem.





*Image 4: the photo of the roses from the vignette, a preparation for the opening of an exhibition*

## **Chapter II conclusion**

In this chapter, I showed the construction of private property-heritage axis and its further renegotiation on the ground through the ethnographic data I have collected during the summer of 2024. I have tied the post-socialist property regimes that were explored in chapter I to the value regimes, showing how activists negotiate the value of the buildings through the private property-heritage axis. The war induces the need present before to preserve something vast, something that would hold on. Yet, due to the scarcity of material resources and state of urgency that war creates, the negotiation and preservation of heritage can happen through saving the particular private property or pieces of it, rarely more. War necessitates the renegotiation the private property-heritage axis with an emphasis on value the building can hold as heritage, opposed to private property. Architectural preservation activists work with the private property-heritage axis through contesting the neoliberal post-socialist private property regime; meaning they work in a larger background of a post-socialist country with neoliberal tendencies at war.

The private property-heritage axis is renegotiated through the strategies of value-making, which are chosen on a case-by-case basis. Strategies of value-making are tangible and are grounded in the way activists see opportunities to oppose the development / endorse restoration. I claim that redoing one window for 4 days instead of buying a new plastic one is

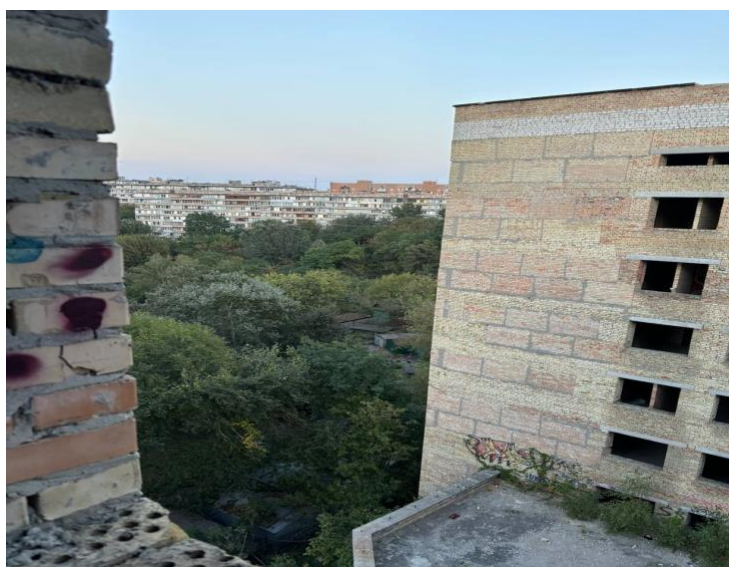
a contestation of a value in current post-socialist property regimes by putting an emphasis on heritage value of a building thus contesting an ultimate right of private property, characteristic for post-socialist property regimes. Architectural preservation activists negotiate the value of building by claiming it as heritage and redefine the degree of the right to the common. I have observed the strategies of value-making that I described as bricolage, as they focus on saving or restoring a bigger idea through the tying together the material resources available. The bricolage strategies of value-making through which activists are renegotiating value of a building are tour guides, forming collections, protests and exhibitions.

### Chapter III “Seeing beyond the horizon”

*“Disappointed expectations of progress and looming fears of decline and impending catastrophe feed all these attachments to the past” (Lowenthal, 1989, p.67)*

We walk to the building one of the activists regularly visits and to which he alludes to as “Kupol” (The Dome). On this 8-store building rooftoppers gather and climb during the sunset. Myroslava, an activist, who focuses on Ukrainian Soviet architecture, wants to take photos of this building before it gets too dark, and I am just curious what attracts people to the building that has been abandoned for around 30 years. Walking through the very long grass, as it is already early September, we come to the unfinished building made from light yellow bricks with a vast rusty dome – hence the name. While taking the stairs up the dark dusty space with empty bottles and scattered unidentifiable objects and lighting our way with phones, Myroslava talks how in the late 1980s it was planned to be a high-tech outpatient hospital, and there would be a pool with the glass dome. In the Myroslava’s words I hear light dreamy regret, she says something how before there used to be construction projects focused on people’s well-being in a solid, beautiful manner.

And when the Soviet Union fell apart, the project of the hospital was left unfinished, building started to slowly fall apart – as Myroslava alludes, it is because there was no profit to finish it. Now it became a place for people who rooftop or for drinking youngsters. I think to myself that they, whoever they were, could not even finish this project, and we, whoever we are this time, might not even be capable of saving the ruins of it.



*Image 5 and 6: images of the “Kupol” (the Dome) from the vignette*

Having engaged with the systematic factors and value-making strategies within the negotiation of private property-heritage axis in previous chapters, I want to explore the crucial question – what motivates the architectural preservation activists to continue their activism. It is about the outlook on new development projects and heritage I have encountered during the fieldwork within architectural preservation activists, and not about the personal motivation of every activist. Having described previously the Kyiv urban development and the war’s impact on it, in this concluding chapter I focus on the visions of the future of Kyiv the architectural preservation activists from different initiatives have voiced and their reasoning for action.

### 3.1 On durability of development and heritage

The architectural preservation activists preserve the old building not only because they see the value of it as a heritage, but also because they do not see any value beyond the commercial profit in new developmental project offered instead of old buildings. When asked about the timeline of Kyiv architectural heritage, most of the activists that defend different types and periods of buildings, generally voiced an opinion that buildings starting from 1990-2000s are not heritage and will not become one. That shows a complicated tension between past and future envisioned as materialized in buildings in the eyes of architectural preservation activists independently of their architectural focus. Buildings that they perceive as heritage play a linking role, creating value and seeming continuity of this city, carving out something that has been here before.

The decisions concerning the Kyiv development from both local government and developers reflect visions within the post-socialist property regimes combined with neoliberal tendencies regarding what forms of city are acceptable and desirable. As city is a daily environment that cannot be avoided by Kyiv residents, the frustration with Kyiv urban development is not only a political, but a deeply social and personal question. From the fall of the Soviet Union in Kyiv there have been numerous changes in the urban environment that architectural preservation activists criticize. They show approval through the idea of value, contrasting the construction projects older than 30 years to new ones, and highlighting the value of former. The idea of value is mostly expressed through the idea of heritage, but it could also be about the visions those buildings embodied or simply aesthetics. It has been hard to come up with examples of recent development projects that most of architectural preservation activists would see as valuable. This adds to the complicated relation between the decay and neglect towards the buildings that were built before, the overall developmental neoliberal tendencies, and the restorations of Kyiv historical center that do not live up to the

standards of architectural preservation activists. This dissatisfaction leads to the examination of previous city development Kyiv had already had with nostalgia. As Myroslava has reflected: *«It's fantastic what we're seeing [Soviet buildings]. It's not the low-grade story we see already now in the new age. Why did they do that? It was... Why weren't we afraid to dream back then? No matter how much we talk about oppression, an architect could f\*cking realize things that were unimaginable, because there were other mechanisms, there was no purpose... Although economy was also important, everything, but it's really an unsolved story. Attention was paid then to the fact that architecture still has an educational function and the function of shaping the environment. And that's why it was important how the building looked».*

The visions of Kyiv future that are reflected in new developmental projects are rejected by many activists as invaluable because of the seeming impossibility of those buildings to become an architectural heritage. Reflecting on the expression of Ukrainian history in Kyiv architecture, Andriy, one of the activists, notes: *“Well, we should have invested more in preserving the architecture. Yeah. Well, and then it would certainly represent it better. When they try to rebuild every other building into a business center, it will no longer have any intangible value. It will have some commercial value, but clearly not cultural.”*

Buildings in the center of Kyiv are often seen as not representing any heritage at all after the change, be it the tearing down or a major change on the existing building. The visions of new and modern that are put further by developers are not perceived by architectural preservation activists as valuable. It is partly because new urban development projects are not seen as durable – mostly in their materiality, from what and how the new buildings are constructed.

As one activist has claimed, the materials used for the projects are calculated to last an amount of time, which would be approved by construction norms – if a building was built to last 200 years, it would be very expensive. The aim of new construction project lies not in making Kyiv last forever, it is more about providing a service for a certain amount of years. This quality of urban development critically perceived by activists is not unique to Kyiv, it reflects a major shift in mass building in a lot of countries. Vlad, an architectural preservation activist, shared a dialogue he once had with a Ukrainian founder of urban development company: “*\*developer’s surname\* once told me that:*

- *You will later run around defending what I am building now.*
- *The operational life of all your buildings does not exceed 50 years, we will not see them because they are self-destructing.*
- *This one has an operational life of 49.”*

Vlad continues to explain to me:

*When these buildings were built [old ones], there was no such thing as an operational lifetime. It was built to last...nowadays, according to the service life, it should be at least 49 years, maybe more. But when you do more, you have additional costs for construction and materials. That's why everyone, including \*development company name\*, builds for 49 years. What does this mean? That they are going to demolish the house on Hrushevskoho Street, and that what they build will not even last 50 years”*

The concern for material durability of the buildings can be understood as the concern for the future of Kyiv. The question of having architectural heritage becomes more crucial with full-scale Russian invasion – the war is a pressing concern for the future of Kyiv. The buildings in the historical Kyiv center can be destroyed by the war or replaced with new urban development projects that do not cherish the value reflected in architectural heritage.

The full-scale Russian invasion puts pressure on the questions about future: what kind of city should we preserve, what kind of city is worth the effort?

Myroslava: *“So, I heard a thought somewhere, and I agree with it, that against the background of the danger that is looming, because the war has started, there is a question of rethinking what is valuable. That's what we have, isn't it? Because we're thinking, f\*ck, well, it smells like war, and our life is short, so this fairy tale of the 2000s [meaning buildings built in 2000s], it's ending, we need to think about what we have around us, what we have? That's the kind of thought I like, by the way. What do you consider to be the fairytale of the 2000s? Well, it's this caprom [capitalist romantic] notion that only we have, all this tinsel, all this high-tech, all this trendy cool stuff, like Globus or Mandarin Plaza [two shopping malls in the center of Kyiv]- the heyday of these oligarchs with their real estate development”.*

Thus, the renegotiation of private property-heritage axis happens against the vision of future that urban development brings, because it seems not durable. The fact that architectural heritage is embodied and material adds to the feeling this type of heritage could last longer, it is present physically. As Oleksandr, an activist working on the Flying Saucer case, has reflected *“We preserve it, so that the Russians could not claim that there was nothing here before they came”*. Materiality of architecture creates a feeling that if it stood still, it would have been harder to erase compared to songs or books. The need for preserving the “reified heritage” is heightened during the war, as it becomes evident how easily heritage is destroyed overall. On the contrast to the Russian aggression that destroys purposefully, the developmental projects offered “creative destruction” (Harvey, 2007) instead of proper restoration. Those projects are not planned to last longer than needed for it to be approved by the government according to construction norms. This concerns not only the residential complexes, but the small restorations and repair as well. The urban development projects do not seem to focus on the construction of buildings that could become heritage as time passes.



This points to the dissatisfactory result as well – gradual but sure decay of urban environment after 50 years. As new buildings in the historical center are constructed with alignment to commercial value, they are often criticized by the activists. Activists juxtapose the value of profit to the value of shared past embodied in building, while adding the concern for durability of Kyiv overall.

### 3.2 Acting towards the unpromised “after”

Having described the vision, which raises the question of future through the preservation of past, I would like to explore the tie between the outlook on Kyiv future and actions taken by activist during the war.

The full-scale Russian invasion made some activists question what should be erased and preserved in Kyiv urban environment. The line between preserving heritage and preserving something ideologically opposed to current Ukrainian national project is not set in stone, however during the war some of the architectural heritage became more widely contested. Dima, an architectural preservation activist from the mansion described in chapter II, has an Instagram page dedicated to Kyiv’s history. There he shared Myroslava’s story about a process of mosaic preservation with his text, where he says *“I understand why you would take the [communist] stars down. But can someone tell why would you take down the mosaic? Like, do we need to decommunize the red? And what’s the most important – what will be there instead of it?”*. As one can observe from the post, it is about the degree of preservation: where to stop and let it be changed or decay, because this should not be considered a heritage. Decision-making regarding the line of preservation is induced by the question of the future of Kyiv urban environment that the war brings. It is unclear what kind of future waits for this city, and on which terms: what would fit into accepted framework of national heritage and what will last long enough to be heritage.

Having said that, a lot of activists are voicing the idea that negotiation with both developers and local government is possible and can be more beneficial towards their vision of Kyiv. The activists 'renegotiation of value in architecture is not radical in its conduct, as it is adaptive to the case and resources available. The ways of making or inducing the value through bricolage or legal activism is showing that activists negotiate without expecting that heritage they fight for will be completely preserved. The activism is seen as the right choice because there has been at least a decade of previous experience of activism and development outcomes. The legacy of projects that were built instead of buildings like ones they are trying to preserve did not hold up to the standard of possible future heritage. The materiality that feels like a lower quality compared to previous constructions 30 and more years earlier is noticed in both new residential complexes and disappointing changes in mosaics, tram stations etc.

As Myroslava has recounted on the question of motivation to continue the activism:

*“That there will be nothing beautiful left, it may be my taste, but we will have nothing beautiful, nothing that brings me pleasure, for example. I like to go and look at the Rus Hotel<sup>6</sup> as it is. And not if it had some blue, modern mirror glass. I like mosaics, I'm very offended by them, because instead of them there are fucking mural-like things. So I just feel bad for them. It just happens to be my hobby. I like it very much, I like this aesthetic, I like to live in a city where there is bare concrete, so ...It's just necessary to create such conditions that the owner himself, he has to, I think that's how it's done in Europe, to act within the*

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<sup>6</sup> Here, the informant probably meant this: The Kyivska Rus Cinema is a cinema with the largest auditorium and screen in Kyiv, located at 93 Sichovykh Striltsiv Street. The history of the Kyivska Rus cinema dates back to 1961, when the Kommunar cinema was built in Lukianivka. In 1982, to celebrate the 1500th anniversary of the founding of Kyiv, a new cinema was built on this site, which was named Kyivska Rus. Its opening was tied to the celebrations. The Kyivska Rus cinema quickly gained a following among cinema lovers and became one of the best cinemas in Kyiv. Currently, it is not working and there is a chance that something is going to be built instead of it.

*framework. In Paris, you can't f\*cking glaze a balcony, no, in its historical center, right? Why? So it's acting within the framework”.*

The activists want to preserve as much as possible, but due to power shifts in Kyiv government induced by the war, it seems unclear what is even possible. The war is acknowledged by activists as a factor that has been reshifting influence and power dynamics within the Kyiv, but that did not change the overall activists view on importance of their actions on negotiating further development in the Kyiv urban environment. They rather see war as a factor that adds chaos and unpredictability, which reshuffles power within the Kyiv, but does not change the core of the struggle, which has been here for quite a long time. Even if there is some limited success from activists' point of view on a specific case, the war induces a chance that this could change anytime. Yet, as Oleksandr observes, it is not only activists who are “upended in the air” – the developers in this specific case seem to also struggle to finish their project as for now. As noticed from the quote, there is a vision of uncertainty regarding the rights to heritage and private property within the current post-socialist property regimes and neoliberal influences at the war. Because of the uncertainty, the decay of the few historical buildings left in favor of residential complexes is perceived as stripping people of both heritage and right to a coherent city development as well.

Architectural preservation activists see their activism as taking a moral stance, which becomes more crucial during the time of crisis. It is backed up by a vision of future where profit from development instead of preservation does justify it, and the war aggravates previous struggles in urban environment. The property-heritage axis negotiations during the war, as a state of crisis, highlights the moral nature of architectural preservation activism. This relates to broader body of research about post-socialism during the state of crisis. As Humphrey has been doing her fieldwork in post-socialist Russia in the 1990s, she explored the intermeshed political and economical in moral economy that builds the collective during

the crisis (Humphrey, 2002). Although her research is about post-socialist Russia, it is the state of ultimate irreversible change that is felt collectively, that, I argue, resembles current situation in Kyiv. In the light of the material scarcity induced by full-scale Russian invasion, activists still try to “create a barrier” for developers in their action through filing lawsuits and strategies of value-making. The reason for this is that they have seen some slow progress within the decade, and they consider it to be a necessary moral stance especially during the war. As Nazar has concluded in the interview: *” In the format of an advice or an appeal to everyone: do not be silent. Learn. It is long and difficult, but worth it. There are enough means to change what is happening, but we need more people and time. Contrary to frequent populist statements, there are no quick fixes, but that's okay.”*

As Vlad recalls his activists beginnings: *“For some protest actions, you could get a f\*cking punch in the face from the cops. And now you can go out and protest without fearing for your life. It's true that these actions have little influence on the decision-making of the city authorities or the state authorities, but the fact that those actions are taken is already something. We started with the fact that no one had the right to have a say in those matters. They have started to listen to our opinions, and in another 10 years the problems of destroying cultural heritage will start to disappear.”*

*“We still have to demand the impossible”* – says Oleksandr.

Architectural preservation activists often regard their activism as a necessary moral stance that is backed by previous activist experience and vision of the future development in Kyiv. They try to preserve a building by showing its value as a heritage before it is ruined through destruction or decay. They continue contesting the private property – heritage axis on possible stages with acknowledgement to the rights to private property. There is a conviction that buildings should not exist only if they are profitable to someone – activists insist on values like shared past that should guide policies regarding the whole historical center, as

private property and heritage as ideas are embodied in the same buildings in the Kyiv center. Architectural preservation activism is seen as a set of actions that could challenge the current post-socialist property regimes and neoliberal tendencies that worked in Kyiv urban environment to some extent.

### **Chapter III conclusion**

In this chapter I have researched the vision that guides activism and its relation to the way architectural preservation activists conduct the action. The activism is carried out during the war, when is a need to see the future ahead, and there is a need for something lasting, for instance reified heritage, historical center of Kyiv, and there is a need for having past embodied in materiality, like buildings. Both of those notions coexist in the concept of heritage that is negotiated without complete debunking of private property. As there are systematic factors like the post-socialist property regimes and neoliberal influences, during the war their influences has been noticed sharper. The feeling of urgency during the war, which is a type of state of crisis, contrasts against the need to have a reified past that can last. The architectural preservation activists estimate current urban development projects as not durable, seeing it as another method for city's "creative destruction" (Harvey, 2007). That overlaps with the war, which destroys buildings as material, reified heritage unpredictably.

Some of the activists estimate that current type of dealing with Kyiv historical center could lead to Kyiv having lack of historical or possible future heritage. Grounded in previous experience and their vision of further Kyiv development, architectural preservation activists nevertheless see possibility of minor positive changes, although not anticipating any big improvement. They think most one can do is firstly to take the moral stance against the way Kyiv urban environment has been developed, secondly, prove the buildings value through the strategies of value-making and thirdly, hope for a better change, because some of them already happened.

## Conclusions

To conclude, in this thesis I have analyzed architectural preservation activism in historical center of Kyiv during full-scale Russian invasion in conversation with post-socialist studies, value and urban anthropology. I have explored how preservation of Kyiv historical center carried out by architectural preservation activists happens amidst destruction from a both full-scale Russian invasion and developmental projects, expanding on the relation between neoliberalism and post-socialism in Kyiv urban environment during the war. Throughout the chapters I have moved from bigger picture to activist strategies, concluding with the analysis of their voiced visions on Kyiv future. To this end, I have relied on the data I have largely gathered during the fieldwork in Kyiv dated July to October 2024.

Firstly, I have outlined main systematic factors that influence Kyiv urban environment development. Legal provisions and urban planning as systematic factors were discussed within the context of post-socialist property regimes (Gorbach, 2024) and neoliberal influences in Kyiv. While describing the main framework that sets the scene for further Kyiv urban development, I have defined main concepts: private property and heritage which I continue to focus on throughout the thesis. After elaborating on the systemic factors that have been shaping the Kyiv urban environment for more than a decade, I show the war's influence on the way Kyiv urban development has been handled by main actors: local governments and architectural preservation activists.

Secondly, I explored how the concepts of private property and heritage are reflected in the architectural preservation activism case by case. I tie the theoretical idea of private property-heritage axis, through which the concept of private property and heritage are situated and negotiated by activists within the Kyiv urban development, to the way activism is conducted. From that point, I show how post-socialist property regimes (Gorbach, 2024) play out as a type of value regimes (Appadurai, 1988). To contest those regimes, activists that preserve Kyiv's historical center employ different strategies of value-making, which

resemble bricolage in their nature. I showcase those strategies through ethnographic descriptions and argue that those strategies are chosen due to the material scarcity that the war induces.

Thirdly, I have focused on the activists' vision regarding the future of Kyiv in terms of urban development and their outlook on their activism. Centering interviews from the architectural preservation activists from different initiatives, I highlighted the need for having a tangible, material heritage, induced by war, as a type of state of crisis. To add up on that observation, I pointed out that this vision is grounded not only in the circumstance the war has created, but in the systematic factors that have been described in chapter I and chapter II. The need to fight for having a city that can last through the decades, which is valued not only through commercial profit, is a struggle that can be traced in a lot of neoliberal cities. For Kyiv it gets complicated by the war, as the war acts as a reshuffling factor for previous power within the main actors: developers, local government, Kyiv residents and activists. Architectural preservation activists raise the question of materiality and durability not only of heritage, but of urban development projects, which are offered instead of heritage. The architectural preservation activism is fueled by the previous somewhat positive experience in activism, absence of perceived value or possibility of becoming a potential heritage in newer urban development projects and the urgency to preserve what is left for now.

Finally, in this thesis I have covered the strategies of architectural preservation within the war and the visions that guide this activism. Thus, I regard current architectural preservation activism as a continuation of previous contestation of post-socialist property regimes and neoliberal tendencies noticed in Kyiv urban environment. Yet, the previous ways of developing Kyiv urban environment are challenged by the power shifts full-scale Russian invasion has been bringing. The war has induced the question of value in the existing urban environment, raising concern towards preservation of architectural heritage within the Kyiv

residents as well. Property regimes are perceived as a type of value regimes that influence the development and handling of Kyiv urban environment. Through the notion of heritage architectural preservation activist question the ultimate right of private property to some extent, without complete abolition of private property. The contestation of handling the historical center of Kyiv happens through the contestation of private property-heritage axis as the theoretical framework. It guides strategies of value-making in architectural preservation activism. The activism, which works with the materiality of heritage that can be destroyed or led to decay at any day, is grounded in visions of Kyiv future overall. In this thesis I show that the Russo-Ukrainian war does not give benefits to exclusively one actor – it is an overarching chaotic factor that complicates the picture.

This thesis could be expanded further by focusing more on private property relations between Kyiv residents, developers, and local government, spending time on how buildings and land under them gets obtained and what are the types of legal procedures that form those relations. Another possible way is to talk about theory of architecture: how architectural environment is perceived by activists as forming society and reflecting “the right way of city development”. Connected to the idea of a “right city”, I have not described visions of Kyiv and nationalization of an architecture: nation-formation through urban heritage during the war. Unfortunately, although I had some data on all those directions, I was unable to fit it here.

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