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INSTITUTIONS, STAKEHOLDERS AND THE CITY IN THE 2010S RENAMING POLICY IN RUSSIA

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Abstract

The article presents an overview of the renaming tendencies in Russia of the 2010s and the main stakeholders of the name changing. On the base of the administration websites, online media petitions and other open sources, three cases are examined in detail: 1) Perm, where half of Maksim Gorky street was renamed after the surgeon Sergey Sukhanov in 2015; 2) Kazan, where at the same time Esperanto street was renamed after Nursultan Nazarbaev, causing mass protests for several years; 3) Volgograd, with the discussions about returning to its older name Stalingrad being led for years. Based on the analysis of these cases, the following tendencies are identified: changes of stakeholders motivation for renamings, transfer of power to name from parliamentary institutions to administration, a new perception of the city center and distant districts; and, finally, the appearance of alternative mechanisms of social memory encouraged by the wiping out of older names.

Key words

political toponymy, memory culture, Russia, renamings.

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1. Introduction

The collapse of the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union initiated several waves of place names changing. These waves affected both Russia and all the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In Russia, the renamings were heterogenous in terms of typology, geography and chronology. There were examples of restoring of older place names, changing of names to completely new ones or simply adjusting the names to local languages. In big cities, the renamings affected central parts in the first place, while distant districts kept their Soviet toponymy.

On the other hand, some regions were not involved into renaming campaigns, and villages and smaller cities mostly ignored them. Finally, each Russian region has witnessed several peaks of renaming activity during the 1990–2000s depending on local politics.

This initial period of “toponymic cleansing” (Rose-Redwood et al., 2010) is relatively well described and researched in different aspects: political struggles for the renamings (Gill, 2005; Marin, 2012), discussions and popular responses (Nemcev, 2014;

Terentiev, 2015; Kangaspuro, Lassila, 2018; Nikitin, 2020), memory politics (Galaktionova, 2016; Thakakhov, 2019). These studies correspond to the studies of similar processes in Post-Communist Eastern Europe (Palonen, 2008; Light, Young, 2014; Crețan, Matthews, 2016). However, there seem to exist fewer studies of what is going on after the landscape has been considerably transformed and society has got tired of symbolical changes and discussions.

The 2010s witnessed the decrease of interest to the restoration of older names or “nation building” renamings both in popular discussions and in political milieux. The disappearance of one of the most famous ‘players’ in the field – Restoration Foundation in the early 2010s is an unmistakable sign of this process. During this period, political parties paid less attention to the topic, just rarely speculating on ‘loud’ renamings. The renamings became more individual and less paradigmatic. New stakeholders lobbied the memorialisation of a single person or (and) smaller corporate interests. In this article I will try to describe several features of this new period by analysing three cases of renamings from different cities of the Russian Federation: Perm, Volgograd, and Kazan. Examining these cases, I will reconstruct the chronology, logic and results of the decision-making process as well as the views and opinions of the main and secondary stakeholders. In conclusion, I will focus on institutional changes (changes in decision-making process), new stakeholders and the new perception of “palimpsest” urban space (a result of renamings of 1990–2000s) by stakeholders.

2. Methodology and sources

The cases from Perm, Volgograd and Kazan are reconstructed with the help of websites of local and federal media, social networks (Facebook, Vkontakte, Livejournal), official websites of administrative and representative bodies of the Russian Federation and its regional authorities. To provide background for these stories, the news aggregator platform Yandex. News was used. Using keywords like “renaming”, “street”, “square”, “station” I detected 111 more cases of urban objects renaming disputes in the Russian Federation in 2010–2020, among them 34 successive renamings. The disputes of 2011–2012 are covered by the project “Monitoring the Politics of History” (NGO International Memorial). This project gathered news of online and offline media dealing with the culture of memory and political debates about history. The archive of the project is available on Livejournal.com and contains 74 more news about renamings. Undoubtedly, it is the tip of the iceberg:

many renamings did not attract any attention of the media. But these stories help to understand the dynamics better.

In this article, I will follow the critical toponymy approach, which considers toponymy as a result of cultural, social and political interaction (Eller, Hackl, L’upták (eds.), 2008; Berg, Voulteenaho (eds.), 2009; Rose-Redwood et al., 2010) and focus on stakeholder analysis. I will proceed with three cases of renaming: in Perm in 2015, in Kazan in 2015, and discussion about the renaming of Volgograd in 2000–2010s.

3. Perm, 2015

Sergey Sukhanov, a famous cardio surgeon from Perm, founder and head of the public cardio surgery centre “The City of heart”, died of cancer on the 24th of July, 2015. He was known as one of the best surgeons in Russia and had performed thousands of heart surgeries. Since its opening in 2012, “The City of Heart” had a contradictory reputation. The centre was praised as one of the best of its kind in Russia and as a world-class Cardiology hospital (Zverintseva, 2013). However, there had been a series of scandals caused by several patients’ deaths of infections, by chasing off the number of surgeries to the detriment of their quality and by a patient being beaten by the doctor (Pleshakova, 2013; Federal’nyj centr..., 2019).

Being a famous surgeon, Sergey Sukhanov couldn’t avoid making himself a political career. Indeed, since 2013 he was a co-chair of the Permian branch of *All-Russia People’s Front* (an NGO coalition around Vladimir Putin and ruling *United Russia Party*) (Permskij kraj..., 2013). In 2014, the documentary “Cardiopolitics” (dir. S. Strelnikova (2014)) about “the political price” of “The City of Heart” was filmed: to get money for the construction, Sukhanov had to become the face of the pro-Putin local elite. Later, the film received several awards at film festivals.

The first measures to memorialise Sergei Sukhanov on city maps were taken right after his death. On the 1st of August 2015 (only a week after the surgeon’s death), local media announced the future naming of the garden in front of the “The City of Heart” after Sukhanov (Belkina, 2015). A plate on the wall of the hospital was to be installed sometime later.

The situation began to change rapidly after an initiative group for memorialisation of Sergey Sukhanov was created. It consisted of the widow of the surgeon, doctor Natalia Chernysheva, the secretary of the local branch of *United Russia* party Nikolay Demkin and the businessman Piotr Pavlov. The

initiative group set a new goal: to rename a street after Sukhanov. All negotiations of the initiative group with local authorities were conducted secretly. But in November 2016, Nikolay Demkin addressed a public speech to the city parliament. In this speech, he complained that the renaming decision was being slowed down because of formal obstacles. He argued that Sukhanov should be memorialised as soon as possible because of his reputation and his fame all over the world. No need to wait – “Always, there were and there are exceptions”, said the parliamentarian and mentioned two Permian streets named after famous Permian citizens right after their death. The head of the city seemed to be making excuses, confirming that the plate installation was already approved, and new more radical measures for memorialisation would soon take place (Emelianova, Sukhanov, 2015).

The “formal obstacles” mentioned by the parliamentarian were Permian Rules of urban objects naming (2013). According to them, streets could be renamed only to restore their older names or to avoid the duplication of names. Meanwhile, the head of the city ordered to find a street or an object to rename (the naming of a new street on the outskirts of the city was considered unsatisfactory by the initiative group). Some of the offers were rejected by the initiative group, and the consensus was finally reached on the idea to rename the Karl Marx square in the city centre. The square could be renamed because its name is hard to pronounce (according to the Rules, easy pronunciation is one of the criteria a place name should satisfy) (Emelianova, Sukhanov, 2015).

The fate of this idea is unknown, but soon a new way of renaming was invented. The Maxim Gorky street, which is located in the proximity of “The City of Heart”, was split into two streets, one of which was named after Sukhanov. The widow of Sukhanov presented this idea to the toponymic commission. While arguing for renaming, she mentioned that the prestige of all the doctors should be honoured by making the “right” decision. A representative of the government referred to a survey showing that 91% of citizens approved the renaming. The suggestion of commission members to wait for a little and name a new street after Sukhanov was rejected by the initiative group. Finally, on the 18th of February 2016, the decision was made and the renaming was approved (Chuvatova, 2016). The new name of the street appeared even before the memorial plate was installed on “The City of Heart”, which in the same month was also renamed in honour of the surgeon (Viktor Basargin..., 2016).

The renaming was criticised in the media, two members of the toponymical commission were also among the critics – the blogger and local activist Denis Galitsky and the head of the regional archive Andrei Borisov. Discussions took place on the pages of several Permian media (where comments were allowed) and in social networks (Emelianova, Sukhanov, 2015; Galitsky, 2015, 2016; Tolmachev, 2016). There were two points of criticism. Firstly, renaming (or naming) of a street after a person shouldn’t directly follow her/his death. Some commenters even mentioned the contradictory reputation of “The City of Heart”. Secondly – and this point was more popular – the renaming will be bad in any case. The initiative group should agree on the naming of a new street and stop lobbying the renaming of the already existing ones. This criticism was disregarded both by the toponymic commission and the initiative group.

4. Kazan, 2015–2017

The Esperanto Street, the only one devoted to this artificial language in Russia, existed in Kazan (capital of the Tatarstan Republic) between 1927 and 1949 and then from 1988 till 2015. The restoration of this older name in 1988 was one of the first renamings of the 1990s wave. In June 2015, the street changed its name again, adopting the name of Nazarbaev (in honour of the leader of Kazakhstan, on the eve of his 75th anniversary).

The first rumours about the renaming appeared on the 24th of June (Alexey, 2015), while the document establishing the new name of the street was published on the 26th of June. Despite them, no one was ready for such an extraordinary decision. Indeed, renamings were rather uncommon for the capital of Kazakhstan in 2010-s. From 2005 till 2018, there were only eight cases of renaming (Reestr..., 2016). Almost all of the renamed streets were located on the outskirts of the city. Thus, the renaming of a street in the centre seemed to be very unusual. Another uncommon thing was that Nursultan Nazarbaev was a still-living person, while “recommendations” (Reshenie..., 2015) for the street naming allow to name streets only after people who died 10 years ago or earlier. Finally, the last astonishing point consisted of a complete absence of discussion preceding the decision (Antonov, 2015a).

The process of decision-making remains unclear and can be reconstructed only in general terms. As most documents of the kind, the Act of renaming (Postanovlenije..., 2015b) referred to the recommendation of the city toponymic commission and was signed by the head of the city government,

Denis Kalinkin. However, the document contained an unusual trait, which was the motivation of decision. Indeed, instead of the standard mentioning of “a group of” petitioners, which is a formal requirement, it mentions only one petitioner, “the head of the national cultural autonomy of Kazakhs of Tatarstan S. Djaksybaev”.

On the 3rd of July, an opening ceremony of the new street name took place. At the beginning of the ceremony, the petitioner and head of Kazakhs of Tatarstan association Djaksybaev said that it had taken two months to consider his petition (V Kazani..., 2015). It means that the petition had to be sent to the authorities of Kazan not later than the end of April, while in his interview from early February 2015 the idea of renaming isn't even mentioned (Dzhaksybaev..., 2015). Therefore, the petition had to be written between February and April 2015.

It seems that the starting point of the renaming process was the visit of a Kazakh delegation led by the head of the Kazakh's Government Karin Masimov to Kazan on the 5th of February 2015. The delegates visited the Kazan IT-park, the University, the Helicopter factory, and had a meeting with Rustam Minnikhanov, the head of the Tatarstan republic. The speed of decision-making, as well as the neglect of formal rules and unwillingness of authorities to discuss the renaming, show that the real decision was made even before the petition of Djaksybaev was considered. The meeting on the 5th of February most probably was the starting point of the whole process.

After the petition for renaming was registered, there were only three steps left. On the next stage of the decision making, the authorities had to choose the object for renaming. It seems that they were bound by the initial arrangements. Although the street after Nazarbayev could be located on the outskirts of the city or in the new futuristic IT district (Innopolis), which was being constructed to the west of Kazan¹, they still opt for a street in the centre of the city. Esperanto street seems to have been chosen because of the strangeness of its name for the functionaries. The author of the language had never been to Kazan and had no connections to the city. «Esperanto is a nonsense name. I would reconsider the decision if the street in hand was named after a person. It is not, so the name change shouldn't insult anybody», pointed out Rasil Valeev, the head of the Committee of Culture and Nations of Tatarstan State Council (Antonov, 2015a). There were a couple

of additional arguments for the renaming of Esperanto street. Firstly, the Tatarstan Nations Friendship House is situated here, which allows to treat the street as a place of Friendship of Tatars and Kazakhs. Secondly, it was planned to install the sculpture in honour of Kazakhstan in the public garden nearby (Na ulice..., 2015). Some of these reasons were revealed by the government in the formal answers to the criticism (Alexey, 2015).

On the next stage, the recommendation from the toponymic commission had to be gained. In June 2015, the Commission consisted of 21 members, 11 of whom were delegates from the city government or parliament, while 10 others represented the academic community and Civil society (Reshenie..., 2014). To avoid tension, the head of the commission and vice mayor Liudmila Andreeva decided not to gather the commission and to vote via email. According to the interview of the commission member Farida Zabirova (Antonov, 2015a), members of the commission were not allowed to see the results of the voting, only the final decision: the commission recommended to rename Esperanto street. As Zabirova pointed out, at least four people (including her) voted against the renaming.

The final step was to sign the decree and to publish it on the governmental website. The interesting point here is that on the 4th of March 2015 the naming procedure was changed (Reshenie..., 2015). According to the former legislation, it was the city parliament who voted for (re) naming of urban objects. The new procedure didn't include voting in the parliament, the only decision-making institute was the city government. Changes in the legislation occurred after the supposed date of the agreement on Nazarbayev Street (the 5th of February), but obviously, we cannot be entirely sure whether these events are connected. Denis Kalinkin, the head of the city government, signed the document about renaming on Friday, 26th of June. The replacement of signs started immediately.

No one anticipated that instead of the benefits of making a present to the 75th anniversary of Nazarbayev, the authorities will gain a headache for several years ahead. The inhabitants were informed about the decision by the workers who installed new signs during the weekend. Very soon, an initiative group was formed to start the resistance activities. A few days after, several protest petitions were written and published online (Alexey, 2015; Ivanov, 2015), the most popular of which was signed by more than 5,000 people. The inhabitants brought a civil suit against the government because of multiple violations of the procedure and sent a letter to the embassy of Kazakhstan (Yankova, 2015). The

¹ This idea was proposed by one of the activists during the later discussions. It seems to be obvious that the authorities had to consider this option before.

extraordinary name changing of one of the central streets followed by the protests inevitably attracted the attention of the media. Since the 26th of June, the struggle for the name was covered by the local press. The oppositional parties “Yabloko” and “Parnas” issued statements supporting the inhabitants. On the 1st of July, the administration invited several members of the initiative group as well as journalists for the discussion. As “Vechernyaya Kazan” newspaper explains, the functionaries insisted that resistance is pointless as all the decisions have already been made, adding that the new name would attract investments from Kazakhstan and that the street will be decorated and repaired.

On the 3rd of July, a pompous opening ceremony was scheduled. This meeting gathered the first President of Tatarstan Mintimir Shaimeiv, the current President Rustam Minnikhanov, the ambassador of Kazakhstan Marat Tazhin and the mayor of Kazan. Curiously, the street opening ceremony was held indoors. As some of the newspapers pointed out, initially it was planned to be held in the square near the city Philharmonic. The organisers, however, feared that protesters would ruin it. As a result, the VIPs gathered in the House of Nations Friendship, while the protesters (eight people) stayed outside holding posters with anti-renaming slogans. Even after a short conversation with the mayor, who tried to calm them down, the protesters refused to leave the place. Later, four of them were arrested (and charged, with one person even sentenced to 20 hours of public work) (Antonov, 2015c; Grigorieva, 2015).

The campaign for returning the Esperanto name included the installation of self-made street-name signs, several meetings in public places, lots of petitions. According to some statements of the officials, the authorities even acknowledge that the renaming was a mistake, but could not take the decision back. During the talk with protesters on the 3rd of July, the mayor admitted “hastiness” and “bad work of the city government”, but insisted that the decision had already been made (Metshin izvinilja..., 2015). On the 22 of July, Farid Mukhametshin, the speaker of Tatarstan State Council, called the decision “premature” (Muhametshin nazval..., 2015). Still, the last hope for the inhabitants was the court. The claim was registered on the 21st of July.

The idea of a legal claim was to stress the violations of the formal procedure: indeed, there was only one petitioner (instead of a formally required group of more than 10 people), the street was named after a living person (which was prohibited), this person has no connection to the history of Kazan (while lots of Tatar men of culture were Esperantists). On the

12th of August, the court announced its decision: most of these arguments were inconsistent because they refer to the recommendations to the toponymic commission, not to the strict requirements; therefore, their violation can't be considered as a reason to cancel the renaming (Antonov, 2015d). Later, on the 3rd of December, the Supreme Court of Tatarstan repeated the arguments of the lower insertion court (Delo № 33a-15912/2015..., 2015). The court became a place where different approaches to the toponymic policy clashed. However, both sides just repeated the same arguments. The only new one was that, among other rhetorics, representatives of the initiative group stressed the fact that the government monopolised the right to name and rename the streets.

The promises to reconstruct the street and gain special attention of Kazakh companies to the inhabitants of the street came true later. In August 2015, some repair works were done. In February 2016, it was announced that the inhabitants of Nazarbaev street could attend the basketball match between the Kazan team Unix and the Kazakh Astana for free (by showing their passports with the registration on Nazarbaev street). In Spring 2016, a new monument in honour of the friendship between Kazakhstan and Tatarstan was erected. In March, discounts on an air-trip to Kazakhstan for all the inhabitants of Nazarbaev street were announced but were not confirmed later. However, all these efforts turned out to be in vain and did not change the attitude of the inhabitants towards the renaming. Indeed, the reparation works were claimed to be cheap and of low quality, the free basketball tickets were regarded as a joke, while air-discounts caused a scandal (Antonov, 2016; Yankova, 2016).

Surprisingly, the discussion about Nazarbaev street resulted in the modification of the naming procedure. The first changes were made in March 2015, when the city parliament refused to approve the names and handed this responsibility over to the government. In December 2015, a reform of toponymic commission was introduced: formerly part of the city parliament, it became henceforth a consulting body of the mayor. The prohibition of naming after living persons was abolished (Postanovlenie..., 2015a; V kazanskoj..., 2016).

This renaming has had a long echo. In 2019, a petition to name one of the streets after Vladimir Putin was published. According to its author, the Tatar capital already has a street named after a living head of state, so why not memorialise Vladimir Putin, who has done more than Nazarbaev for Kazan? (V Kazani..., 2019) In several petitions, the Kazan's inhabitants proposed to rename Nazarbaev street

after somebody else (V Kazani..., 2016) and to name some other object after Esperanto (Yankova, 2017). Every year, several actions of “symbolical renaming” (e.g. installing self-made street signs) take place. On the 26th of July 2016, the activists celebrated The Esperanto Day by projecting letters of the Esperanto alphabet (Ĉ, Ĵ, andŜ) on the walls of the former Esperanto Street.

5. Volgograd, 2003–2018

Volgograd is one of the biggest cities in the south of Russia and a place where one of the cruelest battles in the history of WWII took place. During the 20th century, the city changed its name twice: in 1921 Tsarisyn became Stalingrad, and in 1961 Stalingrad turned into Volgograd. The latter renaming was a part of the destalinisation company initiated by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956.

In the history of modern Russia, the debates about the name of the city are the most famous and most politicised toponymic topic (Kangaspuro, Lassila, 2018). The arguments for and against restoring one of the older names have remained the same for decades. The supporters of the name Tsaritsyn stress that it is the “original” name of the city, existing since 1589. Stalingrad, on the other hand, seems to be a significant name because of the heroic and most tragic battle. Stalinists regard this name as a way of commemorating Joseph Stalin. Antistalinists, from their part, ignore this connotation and emphasise the crucial role of the Stalingrad battle in the history of WW2. Their standard argument refers to toponyms outside the USSR named after Stalingrad battle, the most famous of them being a square in Paris. The name Volgograd is praised as a depoliticised one and a name that has existed for more than 60 years. Its supporters consider the renaming as a sign of restalinisation of the country. Still, the most pragmatic argument against renaming is the surveys. Since the 1990s, there has been no survey that would show the majority of renaming supporters in the city (Serenko, 2003; Ukolov, 2014).

The first discussions about renaming started in one of the crisis moments of federal policy, during the presidential election of 1996. The first President of Russia Boris Yeltsin started his campaign on a very low basis with almost no supporters in the country. In May 1996, the obvious leader was the head of the communist party Gennadiy Zyuganov. The campaign of Yeltsin started in Volgograd. Speaking with veterans of Stalingrad battle, he did everything to gain their hearts, in case of victory promising among other things to rename Volgograd (after holding

a referendum in the city). It seemed to be a good move because before that (and after) the idea of renaming was monopolised by the communists (Serenko, 2003). Yeltsin won the elections in Volgograd and the country, but no referendum was held.

The next attempt to rename the city was made by its governor, communist Nikolay Maksuta, who held the office in 1997–2010. In August 2001, Maksuta promised to return the name of Stalingrad before the 60th anniversary of the Stalingrad battle (2003). While proposing this, Maksuta admitted the possibility of a referendum (Gubernator..., 2001). The idea of renaming was supported by Zyuganov, the leader the communist party, but leaders of other parties were against it. Among them, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (Liberal Democrats) pointed out that “returning of the name Stalingrad is a justification of the Stalin regime” (Gubernator..., 2001). The reaction of federal authorities came much later. During the broadcasting “direct line” in December 2002, Vladimir Putin shared his negative attitude towards the renaming using the same argument as Zhirinovskiy (Prezident..., 2002). Meanwhile, Maksuta did not stop his attempts. On the 21st of January 2003, the Parliament of Volgogradskaya Oblast voted for the renaming bill. According to it, the renaming after voting in the State Parliament and the Council of Federation became possible, with no direct referendum needed (which violated federal legislation on the matter) (Svyatoslavskaya, 2003). The project was sent to the State Parliament, where it was lobbied by Alexey Mitrofanov, a member of the Liberal Democrats party. On the 5th of March 2003, the bill was rejected (Golosovanie..., 2003), having failed to gain the support of the ruling party *United Russia*.

On the 24th of July 2004, Putin ordered to change the name of the city on the main monument to the Fallen during WWII – the tomb of the Unknown Soldier under the walls of Kremlin. “Stalingrad” was to be written there instead of “Volgograd” (the monument dates back to 1967) (Vladimirov, 2004). This decision can be considered a model one for all the later cases of cancelled renamings. Here, a symbolical gesture was made instead of a full-scale renaming.

The next stage of discussions was initiated by the communist party together with their conservative allies Labor-union of nations of Russia and “The Nature of the Time” movement. In November 2012, several not very numerous demonstrations in Volgograd started a campaign of collection of signatures to rename the city (Filimonova, 2012). In January 2013, the leader of the communists Gennadiy Zyuganov stated that more than 100,000 signatures were collected and sent to the Presidential administration (G. A. Zyuganov..., 2013). The President

didn't react this time, but soon the Parliament of Volgograd (where United Russia party constituted the majority) issued a bill which allowed to symbolically rename the city on the fest days (Vneocherednoe..., 2013). This renaming means that every year, for six days Volgograd becomes the Hero City of Stalingrad.

On the 2nd of February 2013, Vladimir Putin demonstrated how this new symbolism works in practice. He visited Volgograd for festivities in honour of the 70th anniversary of the Stalingrad battle and made a speech, where Stalingrad was mentioned 14 times, while the name Volgograd wasn't mentioned at all (Putin, 2013). Alexander Strizoe, a political scientist from Volgograd, commented then that "personally for the President of Russia, the changing of names did take place" (Serenko, 2013). In general terms, Putin reacted to the starting discussion the same way as ten years before, i.e. by performing a symbolical action that partially made further discussion useless.

However, for most people, the question was not yet solved. In early February, the renaming was discussed on all the levels of state hierarchy and in all the media (Kuznetsova, 2013). Officials of higher-level (e.g. Valentina Matvienko, the head of the Federation Council) agreed that a referendum should take place shortly. Parties tried to take political advantage of the discussions (e.g. V. Zhirinovskiy, the head of the Liberal Democrats, stated once more that the renaming meant the justification of Stalin and his actions); there were political associations which became famous while discussing the toponymic. On local levels, the discussion revealed itself in bus branding (so-called Stalinobus) (The "Stalinobus"..., 2013) or "self-made" street renamings (Volgogradskaya street was unofficially renamed into Stalingradskaya in Ekaterinburg) (V Ekaterinburge..., 2013). After the 2nd of February, Kremlin officials commented on the situation only once: Dmitry Peskov, the press secretary of Vladimir Putin, stated that the renaming was now unnecessary (Lednev, 2013). After several months of discussions and PR companies, no referendum was organised.

A new wave of discussions rose in June 2014 after Putin's statement that he doesn't object to the renaming of Volgograd and supports the idea of a referendum (Putin predlozhil..., 2014). Later, the press-secretary of President specified that it shouldn't be considered as a demonstration of presidential support (Peskov: SMI..., 2014). Meanwhile, Putin's phrase initiated a new series of statements from political activists, representatives of parties, and church. However, the scale of the campaign was much smaller than the year before.

It seems that this wave as well as the approaching anniversary of the Victory inspired the communists

to a new initiative. On the 11th of February 2015, they introduced a project of a State Parliament statement: Volgograd must be renamed into Stalingrad, one of the central squares in Moscow must be renamed and decorated with a Stalin's monument (Projekt..., 2015). The project was doomed from the beginning and it is hard to believe that the communists didn't understand it. While the idea of renaming Volgograd could find supporters outside the party, the renaming of a central square in Moscow and the installation of a monument sounded so pro-stalinist that no other party or fraction in the State Parliament could support it. It seemed that the main purpose of the bill (rejected on the 25th of February 2015) (Rezultaty..., 2015) was to restore control over the idea of renaming the city (Pertsev 2015).

The last attempt to rename Volgograd was connected to a new anniversary of the battle in 2018 and the presidential election of 2018. While most politicians didn't use the opportunity to speculate on the matter, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the former opponent of the renaming, used the idea for his electoral campaign (Fest, 2017). Simultaneously, local authorities began to promote the idea of the renaming of the Volgograd airport. They insisted on changing the name of Gumrak into Stalingrad (Aeroport..., 2016; Markush, 2018). If the idea seizes the minds of the Russians once again, the renaming of the airport could become a new symbolical answer to it. In the meantime, Zhirinovskiy obtained 5.65% votes, and Gumrak was never renamed.

6. Comparison

In this paper, I investigated three cases of renaming from different regions, where different types of stakeholders took part and which had different results. The renaming in Perm, one of the main Russian cities in the Ural region, was initiated by a local (and yet influential) initiative group. Alliance with the ruling party and support of the administration of the city allowed it to rename one of the streets in the city centre. The new name caused almost no resistance because of the successful choice of the place, which is both central and unpopulated. On the contrary, the renaming in Kazan, the capital of the Tatarstan Republic, was lobbied by the government of another country. The unsuccessful choice of a street to rename combined with a short-sighted interaction with inhabitants caused protests and a wave of blaming the city administration, the aftermath of which is still visible. The last case has almost no connection to local communities and was included in the federal agenda by parties and federal functionaries to

speculate on painful topics of WWII and memory of repressions. Thus, it can be regarded as an example of the interaction of Moscow and regional elites.

Based on these three cases, we can identify different types of initiators and stakeholders of toponymic discussions and decisions. The Permian case shows the collaboration between the city government (the initiative to name a garden in the proximity of "The City of Heart"), individual initiative, and party leaders. It seems to be impossible to achieve the desired outcome (i.d. to rename a square or a street in the city centre) without such a collaboration. While arguing for renaming, its supporters refer to the ideas of local memorialisation (the Permian citizens memorialised in street names) opposing them to typical Soviet toponyms (e.g. Karl Marx square, Maksim Gorky street). The hastiness and persistence of the initiators reveal their mistrust of the procedure and the local government. They simply seize an opportunity when they have enough influence to memorialise their friend or relative and write them down in the history of the city.

The Kazan case presents a completely different situation. The decision about renaming and memorialisation of a living person was made against all formal recommendations and procedures. The task of the city functionaries was to find a street, the renaming of which would cause less protest. The choice was bad but it was the renaming procedure itself which made things worse. Indeed, by neglecting all preparation, failing to give explanations, and provide a satisfactory discussion, the administration did cause a conflict. But as this case shows, the main problem consists not in political mistakes, but in the very tendency to exclude non-governmental or representative bodies from toponymic discussions. In this case, for instance, the main argument of the authorities consisted of their right to make this decision regardless of other points of view. The changes made in the toponymic legislation after the renaming of the Esperanto Street also confirm this point.

It is hard to identify the initiators of discussions about the name of Volgograd. Sometimes, it seems that the discussion emerges "out of nowhere" (e.g. in June 2014), while in others it is initiated by a political party (communists or Liberal Democrats) and their local institutions. Surprisingly, the discussion on the federal level is much more competitive and at the same time more disposed to compromise. Here, the case of Volgograd shows how symbolical gestures can reduce tension.

Permian and Kazan cases reveal the organisation and tactics of protest against a naming decision. In both cases, the protest did not have any institution or organisation behind it. The initiative group

in Kazan was organised specifically to fight for the street name. No civil organisation openly supported the protesters, although the oppositional parties issued several statements in Kazan. This can be regarded as a determining factor in defining the resistance tactics.

In Perm, the website Livejournal became the main platform for discussions. In Kazan, the Internet also played a crucial role. Indeed, numerous petitions and publications issued by the protesters were used by the media to exert strong informational pressure on the administration. The unique trait of the Kazan case is its strong offline component: some discussions were set offline in the cafes or streets, there were also so-called "partisan" renamings, when people installed street-name signs with the name *Esperanto*. The most important platform, however, was the court. The decisions of local and supreme court revealed the absence of a unified procedure as well as the legal weakness of the "recommendations" to the toponymic commission.

Three cases demonstrate the key role of administration in decision making. The differences in the regional legislation do not affect this tendency: in Kazan, the Toponymic Commission was part of the parliament, but the decision was made outside the parliament. As the Volgograd case shows, no one but the President has enough power and influence to allow or to prohibit the referendum, which up to date remains a part of the formal procedure of renaming. In Perm, the parliament was used only as a platform for blaming speeches against the head of the city. The judicial authorities, such as courts in Kazan, just repeated the arguments already formulated by the administration.

The key role of the administration results in two features of decision making. Firstly, the decision is prepared and made in a non-transparent way. The logic, motivation and circumstances of the decision are not clear at first sight and have to be reconstructed in most cases and reveal themselves only in critical situations like the ones we have seen in Perm and Kazan. For the administration, this inner motivation is regarded as more important than the formal toponymic regulations. In Kazan, the "recommendations" were not treated as law and for this reason ignored. However, we can refer to several cases in Moscow toponymy where renamings were made against the law (e.g. renamings in honour of the writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn and the politician Akhmat Kadyrov).

Secondly, ordinary citizens do not have any influence on the decision. Although in the toponymic discussions both sides refer to the results of public surveys, no one explains the methodology used while conducting them. The cheapest way to understand

the public opinion is the Internet poll, which is frequently used both by the administration and local newspapers. However, there is no technology allowing to restrict the possibility of participation only to a specific region or audience, which hampers the conduction of such surveys online. Another way to show that public opinion has been taken into consideration is to refer to petitions signed by a group of people. As can be seen in Kazan, it is a standard preamble for all the (re)renaming decrees. This approach is more formal and seemingly more reliable than just citing survey results. Another way to determine what people really think of renaming is a referendum which, being very expensive, still remains a very rare procedure (in the 2010s Russia, the only referendum on the question of renaming was conducted in 2017 in Tutaev, where people voted against restoring the older name) (Tikhonov, 2017). However, we might see a much more intensive use of such referenda in the future, as, according to some analytics, they will attract voters to the polling stations when a federal election is held at the same time (Rozhkova, 2017).

The last important point concerns the semantics of space revealed in the discussions described above. First of all, both in Perm and Kazan, stakeholders were interested in renaming a street in the city centre and refused the opportunity to name a new street in a distant district. This attitude can be explained by the “palimpsest” state of the city centre toponymy. In Soviet cities, most central streets were named after core concepts or figures in the communist pantheon. Such naming practice protected the centre against the renaming and equalised the “prestige” of all other districts of the city (Efremov, 1985). The Fall of the Soviet Union and waves of place name changing disturbed this balance. The city centre became “available” for the renamings of all kinds. In practice, it meant that the groups seeking for the most prestigious place to name were primarily attracted by renaming Soviet or other “vulnerable” layers of toponymy in the centre. Naming a street on the outskirts was considered far less prestigious.

From this perspective, the choice to rename Esperanto street in Kazan is significant. In the 1990s and 2000s, Kazan street names experienced waves of nationalisation. For this reason, most streets were named after national heroes or kept their “Soviet” names. While deciding which street to rename, functionaries did not choose a Soviet toponym, but a “strange” international one. It can be considered as a demonstration of hierarchy: national toponyms are the most valuable, then go Soviet one, and only then get everything else.

7. Conclusion

Indeed, three cases are not enough to provide the full dynamics of discussions around the topic of toponymic changes, but they allow to at least trace some trends on the matter. The first of them is the appearance of new types of stakeholders in the renaming discussions, who are less politicised and paradigmatic than “players” of the previous period. The restoration of older names or nationalisation of the landscape cannot be regarded as motto anymore, while private and corporate interests are much more respected. The discussion around the renaming of Volgograd demonstrates the tiredness of society: in 2013, the renaming of Volgograd was a topic discussed all over the country, while in 2017 the same topic did not attract any attention of the media outside Volgograd. The second trend was revealed in the Kazan case. It shows that the power to name is gradually being transferred from parliamentary institutions to administration, which is secured by the changes in legislation. The decision-making process has thus become even less transparent. As the Volgograd case shows, it is only the president who can successfully lobby or prohibit renaming on the national level. The third trend concerns the city space. The city centre toponymy has become more prestigious and because of that changeable. For larger cities, it means that the city centre has become the most toponymically heterogeneous place, Soviet districts will keep their original toponymy while the newer ones will follow recent trends in commercial naming. Finally, the last trend shows that even discussions and fights brought to an end do not vanish without traces. For instance, the renaming of Esperanto street in Kazan has served as a stimulus for some people in Kazan to form a group with a purpose to preserve memory about the language. This is just one example of how wiping out older names encourages alternative mechanisms of social memory. Dememorialisation thus becomes memorialisation.

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