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Original Theoretical Research



Pragmatics of Memory in the City Space

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Abstract

Introduction. The relevance of the study is due to the continued interest of the scientific community in commemorative practices. Symbolic significance of memorable places of Rostov-on-Don dedicated to military discourse, identification of their pragmatic orientation in formation of historical memory and preservation of cultural heritage are of particular importance. The purpose of the study is to identify symbolic significance of the memorable places of Rostov-on-Don associated with military discourse, and their pragmatic functions in preserving collective memory and forming a cultural code.

Materials and Methods. Memorable places of Rostov-on-Don associated with the military history of the country, in particular with the Great Patriotic War and the Special Military Operation, are analyzed. Semiotic, functional, systemic methods, pragmatic description method are used.

Results. The symbolic content of the war monuments of Rostov-on-Don is described. The analysis of pragmatic orientation of memorable places was carried out: formation of collective memory, consolidation of historical narratives; creating continuity in the ongoing struggle for the nation's survival; formation of public sentiments and emotional resonance; legitimization of state actions justifying the conflict; uniting the nation and creating a local and national identity; transforming urban space projecting power in a global and transnational dimension.

Discussion and Conclusion. This study provides better understanding of how memory is formed in a city and how it shapes urban space. Military monuments play a large pragmatic role in this process. They preserve and broadcast cultural codes and narratives that reinforce national identity.

Keywords: commemorative practices, collective memory, cultural memory, pragmatics of memory, city, semiotics, military discourse, monuments

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Оригинальное теоретическое исследование

Прагматика памяти в пространстве города

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Аннотация

Введение. Актуальность исследования обусловлена неослабевающим интересом научного сообщества к коммеморативным практикам. Особое значение приобретает символическое значение памятных мест г. Ростова-на-Дону, посвященных военному дискурсу, выявление их прагматической направленности в формировании исторической памяти и сохранении культурного наследия. Цель исследования – выявить символическое значение памятных мест г. Ростова-на-Дону, связанных с военным дискурсом, и их прагматические функции в сохранении коллективной памяти и формировании культурного кода.

Материалы и методы. Анализируются памятные места г. Ростова-на-Дону, связанные с военной историей страны, в частности, с Великой Отечественной войной и Специальной военной операцией. Применяются семиотический, функциональный, системный методы, метод прагматического описания.

Результаты исследования. Описано символическое содержание памятников войны Ростова-на-Дону. Осуществлен анализ прагматической направленности памятных мест: формирование коллективной памяти, закрепление исторических нарративов; создание преемственности в продолжающейся борьбе за выживание нации; формирование общественных настроений и эмоционального резонанса; легитимация действий государства, оправдывающих конфликт; объединение нации и создание местной и национальной идентичности; преобразование городского пространства, проецирование силы в глобальном и транснациональном измерении.

Обсуждение и заключение. Настоящее исследование позволяет лучше понять, как формируется память в городе и как она формирует городское пространство. Памятники военной тематики играют в этом процессе большую прагматическую роль. Они сохраняют и транслируют культурные коды и нарративы, подкрепляющие национальную идентичность.

Ключевые слова: коммеморативные практики, коллективная память, культурная память, прагматика памяти, город, семиотика, военный дискурс, памятники

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Introduction. Commemorative studies that actualize images of the collective past and modern practices play an important role in scientific philosophical and humanitarian discourse. This is primarily due to the “memorial turn” [1] towards memory studies.

A number of studies are devoted to the phenomenon of memory [2–7]. In the works [8–11], the regularity of the existence of “collective memory” is scientifically grounded. This kind of memory is formed from the memories of a particular community within the framework of cultural memory. We also note the increased importance of research on the semiotic aspects of the city cultural memory functioning. In this direction, the city with its historically and socially significant objects (loci, signs) is considered as a special “text”, as a sign phenomenon, a symbolic construct, as a guardian of collective memory and a translator of cultural meanings [12–14].

The purpose of this study is to reveal the symbolic significance of Rostov-on-Don memorial sites related to military discourse and their pragmatic functions in preserving collective memory and shaping cultural code.

Materials and Methods. Memorial sites of Rostov-on-Don associated with the military history of the country, in particular with the Great Patriotic War (WWII) and the Special Military Operation (SVO), were chosen as the empirical base of the study.

To achieve this purpose, the following general scientific methods were used: observation, analysis and description of memorable places in the urban space of Rostov-on-Don dedicated to military topics; synthesis and interpretation of the obtained data. The private scientific corps consisted of semiotic method which was used to analyze the symbolic resource of monuments and their pragmatic description; functional method when studying the role of memorable places in the formation of collective memory; systematic method that ensures the complex nature of the study.

Results. Memory is the most important marker of modernity. The very fact of turning memory “into the most important point of crystallization of modern scientific knowledge and the exit of discussions about memory far beyond the academic community to the vast expanses of public life, domestic and foreign policy, the involvement of memory in conflicts of different levels and degrees of acuity, is beyond doubt” [15, p. 31].

In scientific researches, memory is considered to be a part of community culture. According to J. M. Lotman, culture within the framework of semiotics is collective intelligence and collective memory, i. e. “over-individual mechanism” of production, storage and transmission of messages (texts). Memory as such is always relative like the values of any society. Each culture determines what should be remembered and stored, and what can be forgotten [11, p. 200]. According to the scientist, memory is “a tool of thinking in the present, although its content is the past” [16, p. 384]. Cultural memory is based on a matrix of memories constructed by a group of people, whether it is a country, ethnos or city, decorated in various symbolic means storing and broadcasting images of the collective past.

The cultural memory of the city can become the most important symbolic resource providing at the local level attachment to the territory as a condition for the formation of patriotic feelings among the townspeople both for the city and for the state and nation. Especially important is the thesis of J.M. Lotman that the city in the present is largely a projection of the past which makes it a generator of new meanings formed in synchronous and diachronous interaction: the city plan, architectural structures, objects of past eras, streets, as well as city rites and ceremonies “act as code programs that constantly re-generate texts of the historical past” [12, p. 334].

It is important to note that the images of the urban past are those symbolic guides that connect past and present of the city and allow you to keep in memory especially valuable fragments for citizens, for example, fragments of memory about its foundation, military victories, trade unions, etc.

Memory pragmatics in urban space refers to practical, functional, and often contested ways of implementing, and managing collective memory. In this sense, it is important how memory forms the urban environment and how it is formed by it in real conditions.

Memory in Rostov-on-Don, a historically rich and strategically significant city in southern Russia, is embodied in various ways. The city's layered history, spanning the imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet eras, offers fertile ground for exploring how memory materializes, is contested and functions in urban space. The part of the city's space are objects and memorable military loci.

The question of monuments dedicated to military discourse is quite complex in the context of scientific research interest. The article deals with the study of this problem in the focus of the semiotic aspect where these monuments are considered in their symbolic meaning.

In Rostov-on-Don, as a city with a deep historical connection with wars, there are a significant number of monuments and memorials dedicated to military discourse.

Monuments dedicated to the Great Patriotic War

The Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) occupies a central place in the collective memory of Russians and Rostovites as well. The city with great military heroic glory, twice liberated from Nazi invaders, plays a significant role in this narrative. These places function as spaces for collective mourning and national pride, performing both memorial and ideological functions. Let's name only a few such memorable places in Rostov.

The "Stella" Memorial Complex is one of the most famous war memorials in Rostov-on-Don dedicated to the victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War. The towering obelisk symbolizes sacrifice and triumph. Its pragmatic potential is that it is used for official ceremonies such as Victory Day (May 9) reinforcing the state-approved message of heroism and unity. It also serves as a place for public mourning, reflection and memory of the heroes who gave their lives for the peaceful existence of the city and country.

The monument "To the Heroes of the First and Second Liberation of Rostov-on-Don" eternalizes two liberations of the city from Nazi occupation (1941 and 1943). It highlights the resilience of the city and the sacrifice of its defenders. Its pragmatic potential aims to cement the city's identity in military history highlighting its strategic importance and the bravery of its inhabitants.

The "Zmievskaya Balka" memorial complex is a locus for eternalizing the memory of the tragic deaths of more than 27,000 people, mostly Jews, at the hands of fascist invaders. This is one of the largest Holocaust memorials in Russia. The pragmatic significance of this memorial is that it serves as a reminder of the atrocities of war and the suffering of civilians, and also integrates the history of Rostov into wider narratives about World War II and the Holocaust.

Monuments reflecting the Special Military Operation

With the beginning of the special operation in 2022, Rostov-on-Don, due to its proximity to the border of hostilities, became a key logistical and symbolic place. Monuments and memorials associated with the SMO appear as part of the city's military discourse:

A memorial in memory of the dead fighters of the SMO was installed on the territory of the 103rd motorized rifle regiment in the Oktyabrsky district of Rostov. Images of all military branches on granite slabs symbolize the unity, power and spirit of the army in the struggle for the security of the Motherland.

The permanent exhibition "Alley of Heroes" in the center of Rostov consists of stands with portraits of heroes of the North-West Military District and a description of their exploits. Memorial plaques appear in honor of the soldiers who died in the special operation. They include names, photos and personal stories emphasizing individual sacrifice. This is how the modern image of the hero is formed [17, p. 30]. These memorials serve to legitimize the SMO presenting it as a continuation of the legacy of the Great Patriotic War to protect the Motherland. They also foster a sense of unity and patriotism.

In addition, temporary installations, exhibitions, events, actions are organized in the city. In public places of Rostov-on-Don, pro-military symbols associated with the SMO ("Z"), flags and banners in support of the military are installed. It creates a visible daily reminder of the ongoing conflict reinforcing state narratives and galvanizing public support.

Military monuments in Rostov-on-Don are not static; they are activated through rituals such as flower-laying, military parades, and public speeches. These actions reinforce the emotional and ideological focus of the monuments. Symbols of war often draw clear lines between "us" (heroes, protectors) and "them" (enemies, aggressors) strengthening social cohesion and justifying opposition to external threats.

As the study shows, the pragmatic aspect of the loci, where the memory of the war crystallizes, is associated with their impact on the audience, on the social, political and cultural life of the city. The following influencing components of the pragmatic force were identified:

- The formation of collective memory which consists in consolidating historical narratives that emphasize the heroism of the soldiers and residents of the city, their sacrifice and resilience.
- Creating continuity: Symbols of the Great Patriotic War and the SMO create a sense of historical continuity presenting current conflicts as part of the ongoing struggle for the nation's survival.
- Shaping public sentiments and emotional resonance: War symbols evoke strong emotions such as pride, sorrow, solidarity that can galvanize public support. The actualization of symbols turns abstract narrative into life experience amplifying their emotional and ideological impact.
- Legitimizing state actions that justify conflict: symbols of war are used to position current hostilities as a liberation, defensive, morally justified struggle.
- Uniting the nation: emphasizing shared sacrifice and heroism, symbols of war promote national unity.
- Creating a national identity: symbols of war help define what it means to be Russian highlighting traits like resilience, patriotism and victimhood. The formation of local identity is highlighted by the city's unique contribution to national history contributing to local pride and a sense of ownership.
- Transforming urban space: war symbols reshape the physical landscape transforming streets, squares and parks into places of memory that amplify certain narratives and attract visitors.
- Global and transnational dimensions: force projection. Symbols of war convey national strength and determination to both domestic and international audiences. Thus, the memorials of the Great Patriotic War in Rostov-on-Don emphasize the historical role of Russia as a world power.

Discussion and Conclusion. The pragmatic power of war symbols lies in their ability to shape collective memory, influence social behavior, and strengthen political and ideological narratives. In the context of Rostov-on-Don, symbols of war, whether associated with the Great Patriotic War or with the Special Military Operation, serve as powerful tools for mobilizing public sentiments, legitimizing state actions and building identity. They strengthen state narratives and promote national unity, solve the problems of education of younger generations, reflect the historical and strategic importance of the city in both past and present military conflicts.

The pragmatic power of the city's military symbols lies in their ability to shape how history is remembered and interpreted. They construct collective and individual identities turning urban spaces into places of memory. In Rostov-on-Don, these symbols are especially strong due to the historical and strategic importance of the city. They serve as a kind of chronicle of centuries reflecting cultural codes and reinforcing the narratives that underlie Russia's national, including local, and military identities.

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