

Preparing Museums for a Crisis: Lessons from Ukraine

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Baltimore Sister Cities





Ihor Poshyvailo

Director General of the Maidan Museum, Co-
Founder of HERI and ACURE

THE HERITAGE WAR

Cultural Identity and the International Response in Ukraine

Ihor Poshyvailo,

PhD in History, Fulbright Scholar,
Co-founder of the HERI and ACURE,
Coordinator of the CER Black-Sea Regional Hub
Director of the Maidan Museum
(Kyiv, UKRAINE)

September 17, 2026, The Peale



NATIONAL MEMORIAL
TO THE HEAVENLY HUNDRED HEROES
AND REVOLUTION OF DIGNITY MUSEUM
(MAIDAN MUSEUM)



THE HERITAGE WAR

This is not only a war for territory.

It is also a war over

IDENTITY • MEMORY • HISTORY

Heritage becomes

A TARGET

A TOOL

A FIELD OF RESISTANCE



Collage by Yulia Vynohradka

UKRAINE'S CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM AT WAR

2,138

cultural heritage sites
damaged or destroyed

2,640

cultural institutions
damaged or destroyed

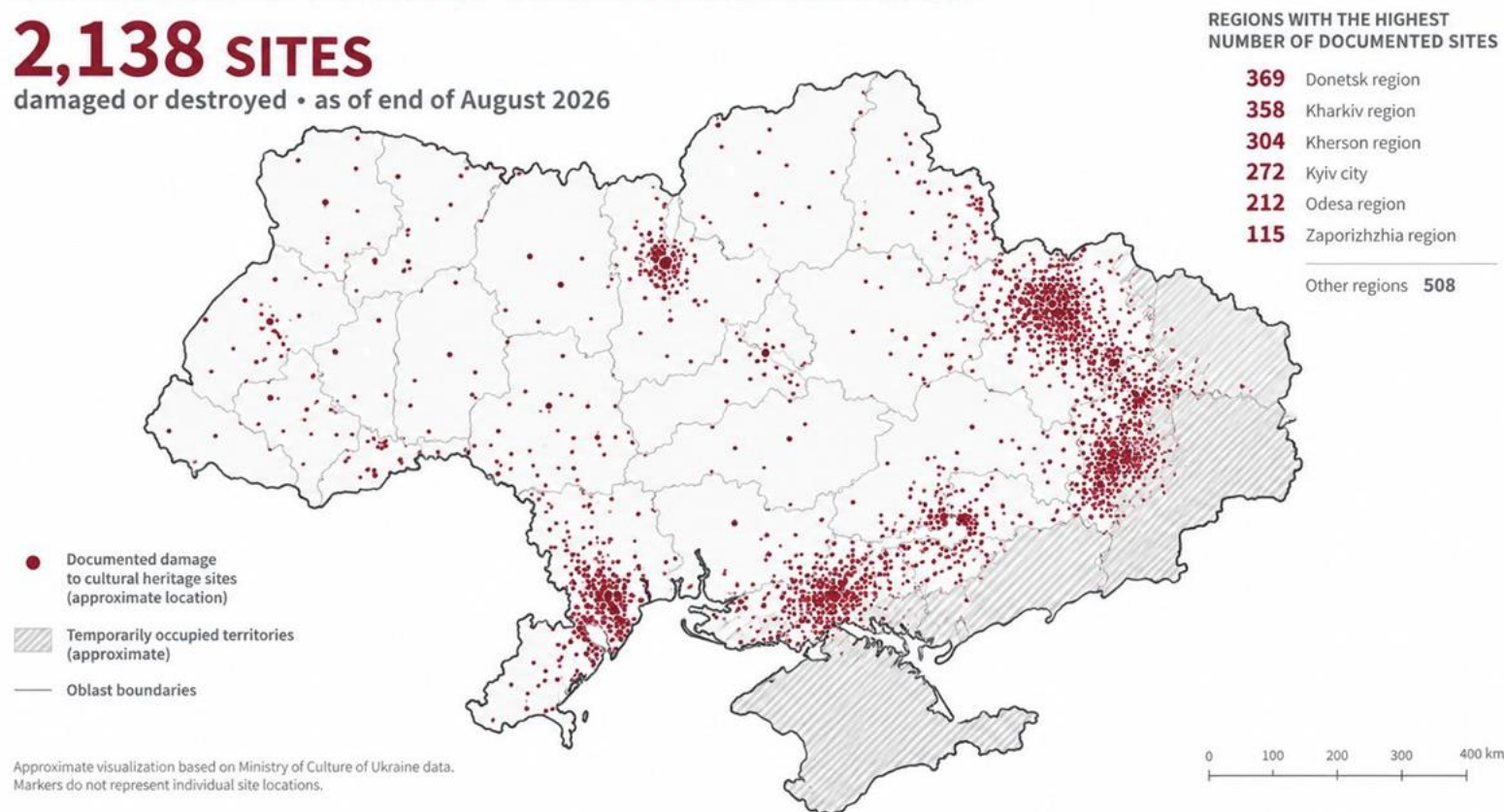
139

Museums and galleries
damaged or destroyed

DOCUMENTED DAMAGE TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

2,138 SITES

damaged or destroyed • as of end of August 2026



FULL SCALE UNKNOWN IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

THREE MUSEUM STORIES. THREE FORMS OF ATTACK



IVANKIV

DESTRUCTION

Maria Prymachenko +



KHERSON

LOOTING & APPROPRIATION

Museum collections



SKOVORODA & SHUKHEVYCH

TARGETING MEMORY

Memorial museums

DESTROY THE PLACE → REMOVE THE OBJECTS → ATTACK THE MEMORY → REPLACE THE NARRATIVE

TWO DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL LOSS

CULTURAL “CAPITAL”

People • Institutions • Communities

- Forced displacement
- Loss of life
- Mobilization
- Trauma & burnout
- Loss of expertise



CULTURAL HERITAGE

Movable • Immovable • Intangible

- Destruction & damage
- Looting & vandalism
- Illegal removal
- Appropriation
- Illicit trafficking



THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

From rescue to resilience

- Emergency supplies & evacuation
- Damage & risk assessment
- Cultural first aid & training
- Conservation & recovery
- Documentation & digitization
- Emergency stabilization
- Monitoring & countering illicit trafficking
- International networks & partnerships



KEY CHALLENGES

Responding while the crisis is still unfolding

SPEED

Rapid response to urgent needs

UNCERTAINTY

Constantly changing risks

COORDINATION

Multiple actors, mandates & priorities

PREPAREDNESS

Systems built while responding

LEADERSHIP

Need for trained crisis managers

EVACUATION

No completely safe solutions

CIVIL-MILITARY

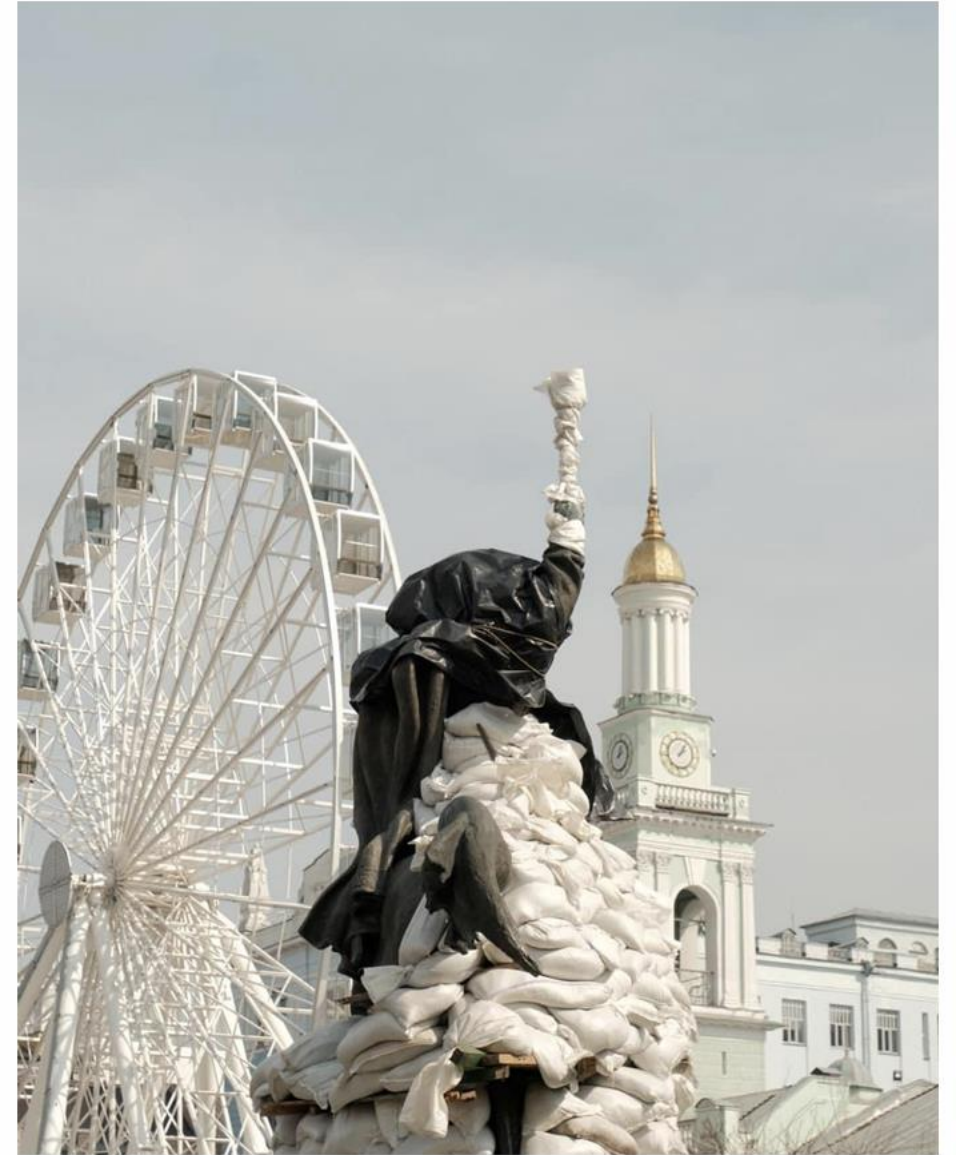
Heritage awareness & cooperation

SECURITY

Recognition of heritage as part of national security

WARFARE

New weapons challenge traditional heritage protection



EVOLUTION OF PARTNERSHIP

EMERGENCY AID

2022



CAPACITY BUILDING

2022–2024



PROFESSIONAL
NETWORKS

2024–2026



**NATIONAL CULTURAL
EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

A NATIONALLY OWNED AND SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM

- Clear mandates & responsibilities
- National–regional–local coordination
- Trained crisis leadership & first responders
- Tested emergency & evacuation protocols
- Risk assessment & documentation
- Secure emergency storage
- Civil–military–cultural cooperation
- Coordinated international assistance



LESSONS FROM UKRAINE

BUILD THE SYSTEM

before the crisis

TRAIN THE PEOPLE

who will make decisions

PLAN REAL EVACUATION

people • priorities • routes • storage

DOCUMENT & BACK UP

collections • inventories • sites

BUILD NETWORKS

before you need them

COORDINATE

culture • communities • authorities • security

PREPARE FOR LEGAL GAPS

documentation • tracing • recovery • restitution



THANK YOU!



www.acure.in.ua

www.maidanmuseum.org



NATIONAL MEMORIAL
TO THE HEAVENLY HUNDRED HEROES
AND REVOLUTION OF DIGNITY MUSEUM
(MAIDAN MUSEUM)

ACURE AGENCY for
CULTURAL
RESILIENCE

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Kateryna Kulai

Director of the Odesa National Fine Arts
Museum



ОДЕСЬКИЙ
НАЦІОНАЛЬНИЙ
ХУДОЖНИЙ
МУЗЕЙ

11 112

WORKS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION

DAY 1,667

OF RUSSIA'S FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

1,095

WORKING DAYS SINCE THE START
OF THE FULL-SCALE INVASION





Over the years, we have come to realize that a museum is not just a building, nor is it just a collection. A collection can be evacuated. A building can be damaged. An exhibition can be canceled. But a museum, as an institution, continues to exist as long as its community, its memory, and its ability to connect with people endure.





«IF THE MUSEUM HAS SURVIVED, THEN SO WILL WE»

The artist Boris Eisenberg died saving another man during the war. Upon arriving at the museum gates, his parents planted cedar trees in the courtyard—trees that had been grown at the Boris Nursery. Thus, the museum gained a living continuation of his legacy—and a symbol of our faith that we, too, will prevail.





KATERYNA KULAI

Director | Odesa National Fine Arts Museum

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Preparing Museums for a Crisis: Lessons from Ukraine



Milena Chorna

Co-Founder and Head of Association of
Ukrainian Museums



TARGETING MUSEUMS AND MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS: EVIDENCE AND COUNTERMEASURES

2026



**"And when they ask me
what war means to me, I
will answer without a
second thought —
names..."**

**MAKSYM KRAVTSOV,
Ukrainian poet and soldier,
killed in the line of duty on
January 7, 2024**

Ukrainian regions under drone and missile attacks (September 11, 2026)



- Over **13 000** missiles and over **142 000** drones launched
- **14 004** heritage sites are located in these air-stricken regions
- **11 334** heritage sites are located in the regions of heavy ground fighting
- At present - **2138** have suffered damages or destruction, **431** - in 2026

MELITOPOL MUSEUM OF LOCAL LORE

(Zaporizhzhia region)



Over **60 000** items -
archeology, numismatics,
ethnography, natural history
and art

A treasure trove (4th c. BE)
of Scythian gold - **198** items
looted by the Russian army.

At present part of the
collection is in Crimea

MELITOPOL MUSEUM OF LOCAL LORE (Zaporizhzhia region)



LEILA IBRAHIMOVA -
director. Crimean Tatar,
relocated from Crimea in
2014.

Kidnapped by Russian military
from her home on March 10,
2022 in order to identify the
location of the hidden
collection of Scythian gold

NATIONAL LITERARY AND MEMORIAL MUSEUM OF HRYHORIY SKOVORODA (Kharkiv region)



A direct missile strike hit the estate in a small village with no military infrastructure at night on May 7, 2022 during the **300-year anniversary** of this most favored Ukrainian philosopher (18th c.).

*Fortunately, the director **NATALIIA MYTSAI** had just enough time to evacuate the most valuable part of the collection

MEMORIAL MUSEUM OF LIEUTENANT-GENERAL OF THE UKRAINIAN INSURGENT ARMY ROMAN SHUKHEVYCH (Lviv region)



A direct Shakhed drone strike hit the estate with no military infrastructure at New Year's Eve, at night of December 31, 2023-January 1, 2024 on the **115-year anniversary** of his closest brother-in-arms S.Petlyura. Unfortunately, numerous memorial items were destroyed



LUHANSK REGIONAL MUSEUM OF LOCAL LORE

(Luhansk-Starobilsk-Lviv-Kyiv),

3 times relocated



The director **OLESIIA MILOVANOVA** fled with her 8-year old son after more than a month in occupation, when Russians traced her and were close to imprisoning

KHERSON REGIONAL ART MUSEUM

The city was occupied within days and the director **ALINA DOTSENKO** managed to mislead the Russian army for almost 6 months, stating that the collection has been evacuated.

After the deceit was discovered, she fled from Russian persecution, leaving a few colleagues including the chief custodian **HANNA SKRYPNYK** with a written clearance for them to collaborate with the enemy in order to document the looting of the collection.



BEFORE



AFTER

KUPIANSK MUSEUM OF LOCAL LORE (KHARKIV REGION)



BEFORE



AFTER



The city was occupied within a day and the director **IRYNA OSADCHA** chose to stay with the collection, imitating collaboration in order to hide the most valuable items.

After the de-occupation she evacuated “the first line” and was killed on April 25, 2023 at her workplace while preparing the evacuation of other artefacts



BEFORE

The Holy Mountains Lavra of the Holy Dormition / **SVYATOHIRSK NATIONAL HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL RESERVE** (17-18 cc., Sviatohirsk, Donetsk region) - a sacred heritage site of national importance



AFTER



May 4th, 2022 - one of the air-strikes hits close to The Holy Mountains Lavra of the Holy Dormition, damaging the building, wounding monks and refugees.

On June, 3 the director of the Reserve **SVITLANA SHARABAN** was slaughtered by the Russian military while trying to evacuate



THE DORMITION CATHEDRAL of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra was hit by drones twice at night, on June 15, 2026, few days after the Moskovite church was finally banned from the premises



THE DORMITION CATHEDRAL was blown up distantly by the NKVD (secret Soviet police) in 1941. Rebuilt in first half of the 2000s. The burial grounds of Prince Constantine Ostrozkyi, who defeated the 80 000 Moskovite army with 30 000 Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Polish soldiers and took Moscow under siege

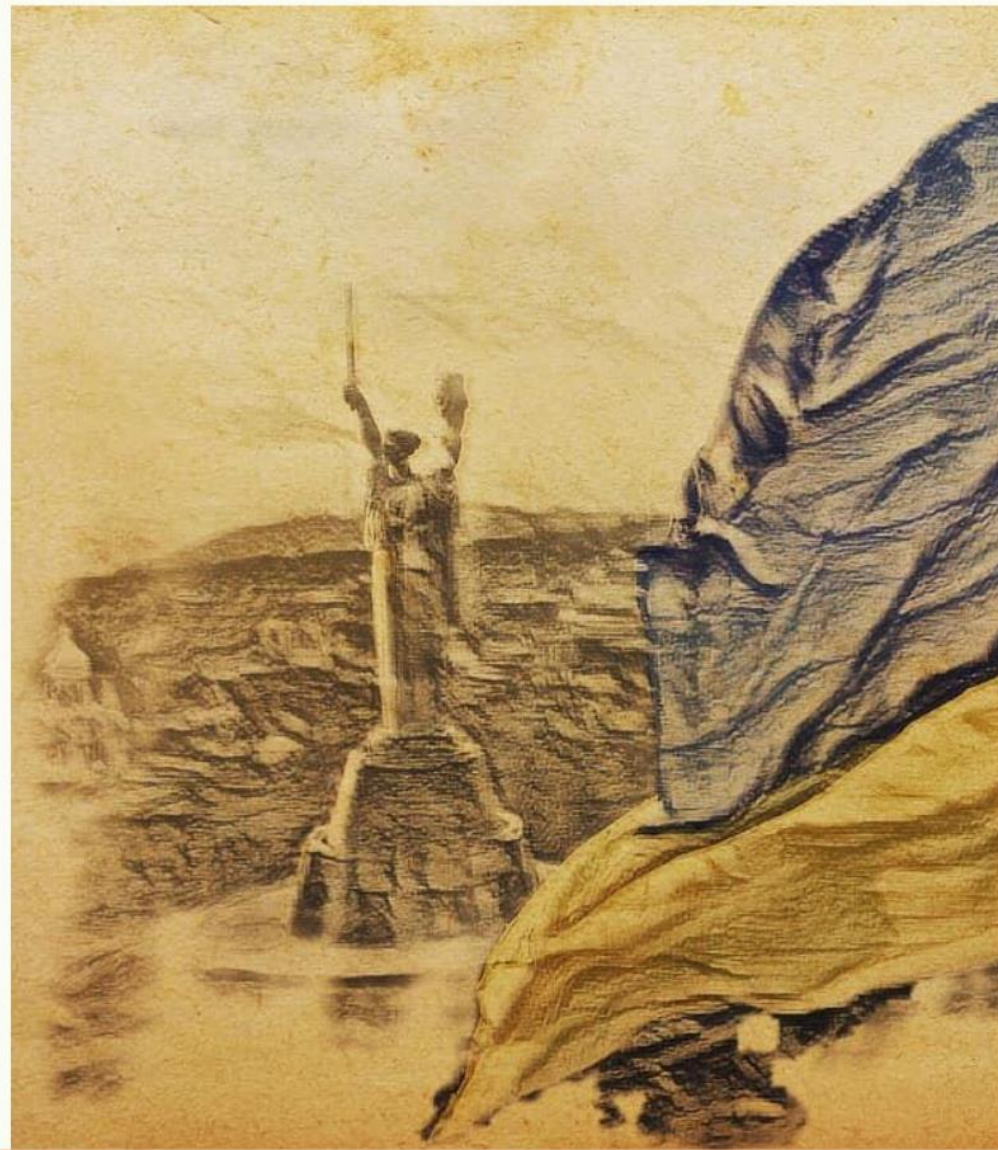
SLAVA UKRAYINI
AND
THANK YOU
FOR YOUR CONTINUOUS
SUPPORT!

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Arnoud Odding

Strategic Advisor for the Dutch museum and
cultural heritage sector











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Q&A

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