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Documentary On-Line Exhibitions of the Central State Archives of Ukraine as a Way to Commemorate the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45

Abstract

The article deals with virtual exhibition activities of the central state archival institutions of Ukraine associated with the anniversary of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45. The authors acknowledge that archives are an important institute of memory for Ukraine, and therefore they

attempt to assess the impact of the official Ukrainian historical and political policy on the exhibition activities in the central state archives, using on-line exhibitions dedicated to the anniversary of the Victory of 1945 as an example. The Great Patriotic War is one of the most contradictory elements of the Ukrainian national historical narrative and one of the most conflictogenic elements in the Ukrainian historical policy (in the so called “wars of memory”), hence the choice of the topic. The authors have studied the webpages of the archives’ official sites, their structure, design, and content. They focused on the digests of on-line exhibitions, i.e. texts located on the home page of the archive, which reveal theme, concept, purpose, and objectives of the exhibition. The authors have tried to identify the patterns in using the concepts of the 1941–45 events, assuming that vocabulary and definitions contain most important information on the influence of the official historical and political policy on the work of archival institutions. The authors have also studied the thematic design of on-line exhibitions, in particular, the military symbols used in web design. The research has showed that the concept of the Great Patriotic War was persistently changed to the concept of World War II in all five exhibitions, although some sections of the exhibitions featured both. The article notes that design of at least two exhibitions used the European symbol for victory over Nazism: red poppy instead of red carnation and St. George’s ribbon usually used in the USSR. Use of the poppy image and substitution of concept of the Great Patriotic War with non-synonymous concept of the World War II is a shining example of the influence of Ukrainian state historical and political policy on the work of archives. The researchers argue that it is impossible to deny the significant influence of the controversial official Ukrainian historical and political narrative on the nature of the expositions. However, in general, the exhibitions are characterised by moderate political engagement, demonstrating a certain scientific independence of the Ukrainian state archives.

Keywords

Ukraine, politics of memory, central state archive, documentary exhibition, Great Patriotic War, World War II, anniversary of the Victory of the Soviet people.

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