Decolonizing knowledge
A perspective from the Ukrainian community

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Colonization

as a term

[Also] Colonization may be used as a method of absorbing and assimilating foreign people into the culture of the imperial country. One instrument to this end is linguistic imperialism, or the use of non-indigenous colonial languages to the exclusion of any indigenous languages from administrative (and often, any public) use

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonization
Chronology of Ukrainian language suppression

19th century

1863 – Circular issued by Russia's minister of internal affair Pyotr Valuyev prohibiting censors from giving permission to the publication of Ukrainian spiritual and popular educational literature.[18]

1861 – a July 26 resolution by the Austrian State Ministry allows reading instruction in the native language[19]

1864 – Adoption of the Charter of the primary school at which education was to be conducted only in Russian.[20]

1866 – the December 31 Diet of Galicia and Lodomeria resolution gives the right to decide on the language of instruction in elementary schools to the people and institutions that maintain the school. In the case of public schools, this decision was made by the local authority, when the composition of the school was mixed the school had to be bilingual (the resolution was introduced on June 22, 1867)[21]

1867 – Austrian December Constitution guarantees all residents of Cisleithania the right to education in their native language[22]

1869 – Polish language replaces German as the official language of education and of the administration in Austrian Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria.[20]

1876 – Alexander II's Ems decree banning the printing and importing from abroad of any text in Ukrainian, with exceptions of belles lettres and historical records, it also banned stage performances, public recitations and schooling in Ukraine, as well as it ordered removal of all Ukrainian book from school libraries, teachers that were suspected of Ukrainophilism were to be transferred outside of Ukraine[23]
Empires have resources to create reliable sources – not just pure propaganda that can be easily refuted, but respectable scholarly works. These sources outlive empires themselves, shaping how the rest of the world sees former colonies.
Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 prompted a wide reevaluation of Ukrainian cultural legacy that had previously been viewed through colonial lenses.
Decolonizing?

what we* tried to do

* Ukrainian Wikimedia community + in some cases Wikimedia Ukraine as an organization
Example 1 – Renaming toponyms: building awareness among stakeholders

- Wikipedia doesn’t set linguistic rules & norms; we depend on reliable sources like media & research works
  - To rename a toponym (#KyivNotKiev), start with media & other sources; Wikipedia will follow, creating a virtuous circle
- We know that, but external stakeholders likely don’t => there’s a lot of explaining to do
There's one biggest success story & many smaller ones
KyivNotKiev is an online campaign to persuade English-language media and organizations to exclusively use Kyiv (derived from the Ukrainian-language 'Київ') instead of Kiev (derived from the Russian-language 'Киев') as the name of the Ukrainian capital.[1][2] It was started on 2 October 2018 by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and StratCom Ukraine, and it is run by the MFA's Department of Public Diplomacy.

It is part of the wider CorrectUA campaign, which intends to internationally assert a Ukrainian identity and remove linguistic relics of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union by promoting the exclusive use of Ukrainian-language transliterations for Ukrainian place names.[3][4][5]
This article has previously been nominated to be moved.

Move logs: Kyiv · Kiev

Discussions:

- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, Not moved, 9 July 2019, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, Not moved, 26 October 2019, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, Moved, 16 September 2020, discussion

Older discussions:

- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, No consensus, 30 July 2007, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, No consensus, 5 September 2007, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, No consensus, 11 September 2007, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, No consensus, 10 February 2008, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, Not moved, 23 September 2008, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, Not moved, 29 October 2009, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, No consensus, 18 November 2012, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, Snow close, not moved, 7 November 2013, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, Snow close, not moved, 3 October 2017, discussion
- RM, Kiev → Kyiv, Snow close, not moved, 12 October 2018, discussion
But there’s still a lot of work to do
This article is about the city. For the nuclear accident, see Chernobyl disaster. For the nuclear power plant, see Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. For other uses, see Chernobyl (disambiguation).
Example 2 – Work with institutions to develop Crimean Tatar Wikipedia

● It’s not only the Ukrainian language that has been suppressed by Russian empire. Crimean Tatars – indigenous people of Crimea – also suffered (among with many other ethnicities).

● A few years ago Ukrainian government started wide work to invest in development of Crimean Tatar language. We’ve worked to make Wikipedia part of that.
In 1992, a Latin alphabet based on Common Turkic Alphabet was adopted by the decision of the Qurultay of the Crimean Tatar People, which was formally supported by the Supreme Council of Crimea in 1997 but never implemented officially on practical level. However, in 2021, the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine has announced it begins the implementation of the decision, with vice premier Oleksii Reznikov supporting the transition by stating that Latin corresponds better to Turkic phonetics. The ministry revealed it plans to finish the transition to Latin by 2025, which was supported by the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People. The alphabet is co-developed by A. Yu. Krymskyi Institute of Oriental Studies, Potebnia Institute of Linguistics, Institute of Philology of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and Tavrida National V.I. Vernadsky University.
Common project by a Ukrainian government agency & Wikimedia Ukraine — a month-long contest / marathon
Short-term goal – create articles on key topics (like “internet”, “forest”, “Crimean Tatar music”)
Long-term goal – build awareness & give a push to the project’s development
Questions?

This is a short presentation, just to get a feeling. We would like to hear if you have any thoughts!
Thank you! Дякуємо!

If you want to know more – find us to talk about it!