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**RURAL CINEMA NETWORK OF CENTRAL UKRAINIAN REGIONS
IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD (1943 – 1953) AND THE USE OF CINEMA
AS A MEANS OF IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE**

Abstract. The article focuses on the analysis of the state and functioning of the rural cinema network in the regions of Central Ukraine during the post-war period (1943 – 1953). Cinema is considered an important cognitive and educational tool and a form of leisure for the rural population. It turns out that due to its imagery, the combination of motion effects with sound, cinema, even with the straightforwardness and platitudes characteristic of most films of that time in revealing the theme, made it possible to emotionally perceive the screen action and made it understandable and accessible to everyone. The purpose of the article is a comprehensive analysis of the state, the restoration features and functioning of the cinema network of Central Ukraine during the post-war period (1943 – 1953), as well as to clarify the role of cinema as a tool of ideological influence and the official historical memory formation under the conditions of the Soviet cultural policy. The methodological basis of the study is the principles of historicism, objectivity and systematicity. In the study there has been used a complex of general scientific and special historical methods, in particular: historical genetic – to trace the process of restoring the cinema network; historical systemic – to analyze its

organizational structure; problem-chronological – to highlight the dynamics of development; source analysis of archival documents and statistical materials. The methodological approach is also based on modern concepts of the history of everyday life, cultural policy and the study of historical memory. The scientific novelty of the study consists in the fact that: for the first time, the rural cinema network functioning of Central Ukraine during the post-war period has been comprehensively analyzed; new archival materials on the organization of cinema services for the population have been introduced into scientific circulation; the mechanisms of party-state control over the formation of the film repertoire have been revealed; the role of cinema as an effective tool for ideological mobilization and the construction of official historical memory under the conditions of post-war Soviet society has been proven. Conclusions. It has been determined that the restoration of the rural cinema network of Central Ukraine during the post-war period took place under the conditions of significant material and technical difficulties, personnel shortages and weak infrastructure. Despite this, the state gave priority to the development of film services as an important tool of ideological influence on the population.

The formation of the film repertoire was under strict party and state control and was aimed at popularizing official historical narratives, glorifying Soviet reality and forming loyalty to the authorities.

Documentary and feature films served as a means of political socialization, contributing to the spread of standardized models of historical memory and ideological attitudes among the rural population.

Key words: cinema network, post-war period, Central Ukraine, ideological influence, historical memory, Soviet propaganda, film repertoire.

СІЛЬСЬКА КІНОМЕРЕЖА ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОУКРАЇНСЬКИХ ОБЛАСТЕЙ У ПОВОЄННИЙ ПЕРІОД (1943 – 1953) ТА ВИКОРИСТАННЯ КІНО ЯК ЗАСОБУ ІДЕОЛОГІЧНОГО ВПЛИВУ

Анотація. У статті досліджується стан і функціонування кіномережі в областях Центральної України у повоєнний період (1943 – 1953). Проаналізовано процеси її відновлення, матеріально-технічне забезпечення, кадрову політику та організаційні особливості кінообслуговування населення. Особливу увагу присвячено механізмам партійно-державного контролю над формуванням кінорепертуару. **Метою статті** є комплексний аналіз стану та функціонування сільської кіномережі у повоєнний період (1943 – 1953), а також з'ясування ролі кіно як інструмента ідеологічного впливу та формування офіційної історичної пам'яті в умовах радянської культурної політики. **Методологічну основу** дослідження становлять принципи історизму, об'єктивності та системності. У роботі використано комплекс загальнонаукових і спеціально-історичних методів, зокрема: історико-генетичний – для простеження процесу відновлення кіномережі; історико-системний – для аналізу її організаційної структури; проблемно-хронологічний – для висвітлення динаміки розвитку; джерелознавчий аналіз архівних документів і статистичних матеріалів. **Методологія** дослідження також спирається на сучасні концепції історії повсякденності, культурної політики та дослідження історичної пам'яті. **Наукова новизна** дослідження полягає у тому, що: уперше комплексно проаналізовано функціонування сільської кіномережі Центральної України у повоєнний період; введено до наукового обігу нові архівні матеріали щодо організації кінообслуговування населення; розкрито механізми партійно-державного контролю над формуванням кінорепертуару; доведено роль кіно як ефективного інструмента ідеологічної мобілізації та конструювання офіційної історичної пам'яті в умовах післявоєнного радянського суспільства.

Висновки. Установлено, що відновлення сільської кіномережі Центральної України у повоєнний період відбувалося в умовах значних матеріально-технічних труднощів, кадрового дефіциту та слабкої інфраструктури. Держава надавала пріоритет розвитку кінообслуговування як важливого інструмента ідеологічного впливу на населення.

Формування кінорепертуару перебувало під жорстким партійно-державним контролем і спрямовувалося на нав'язування офіційних історичних наративів, героїзацію радянської дійсності та формування лояльності до влади. Документальне та художнє кіно виконувало функцію засобу політичної соціалізації, що сприяло поширенню стандартизованих моделей історичної пам'яті й ідеологічних установок серед сільського населення.

Ключові слова: кіномережа, повоєнний період, Центральна Україна, ідеологічний вплив, історична пам'ять, радянська пропаганда, кінорепертуар.

Problem Statement, Review of Recent Research and Publications. The topic of cultural and educational processes in the Ukrainian village during the period of post-war reconstruction, and in particular the place and role of cinema in them, remained out of researchers' focus for a long time, and if it was covered, it was only tangentially and from the perspective of communist ideology. Only in the era of Ukraine's independence there were conditions created for a comprehensive study and objective understanding of this sphere of the spiritual life of the Ukrainian peasantry.

It was found that the topic of filmization in researchers' studies is present only tangentially and, as a rule, in the context of studying other aspects of the history of the Ukrainian post-war village. In particular, B. Romanyuk in his research, showing the role of cinema in the socio-cultural life of the collective farm peasantry, focused on the material and technical base of the rural cinema network (Romanyuk, 2019, pp. 211–219). Through the prism of peasants' everyday life, who lived in the central regions of Ukraine, T. Nagaiko studied the film service in 1941 – 1945 (Nagaiko, 2009, pp. 5–12). The topic of the rural cinema network functioning in the post-war period was briefly analyzed by T. Tereshchenko (Tereshchenko, 2004, pp. 354–362), S. Kalibovets (Kalibovets, 2010, pp. 6–13), V. Michuda (Michuda, 2004, p. 355), N. Kovalenko (Kovalenko, 2017, pp. 8–18) and the others. Some methodological aspects regarding the cultural and everyday aspects of Ukrainian village life are revealed in the works of V. Ilnytskyi and M. Haliv (Ilnytskyi, & Haliv, 2019; Ilnytskyi, & Haliv, 2020; Haliv, & Ilnytskyi, 2023).

Analysis of recent studies on the issue gives grounds to assert that, despite the availability of thematically diverse publications, the topic of rural cinema and its use as a means of ideological influence in the post-war period has been developed rather superficially and fragmentarily. They only outline possible directions for researching the problem and highlight only its individual aspects, which does not provide a holistic and objective vision of cultural and educational processes in the Ukrainian post-war village.

The purpose of the study is a comprehensive analysis of the state, the restoration features and functioning of the cinema network of Central Ukraine during the post-war period (1943 – 1953), as well as to clarify the role of cinema as a tool of ideological influence and the official historical memory formation under the conditions of the Soviet cultural policy.

Research Results. In the system of cultural and educational work in the villages of Central Ukraine in the post-war period (1943 – 1953), cinema occupied an important place as a cognitive and educational tool and a form of leisure for the population. Due to its imagery, combination of motion effect with sound, cinema, even with the straightforwardness and platitude characteristic of most films of that time in revealing the theme, provided the opportunity for emotional perception of the screen action and made it understandable and accessible to every person. For the inhabitants of the village, where there was not such a variety of types of leisure as in the city, cinema had a special meaning.

Cinema was considered an effective means of agitation and propaganda informing the rural population in the spirit of the then dominant ideology and a tool of political agitation and the prompt dissemination of the communist party information. Therefore, the restoration and expansion of the pre-war rural cinema network began immediately after the liberation of settlements from the Nazis.

The starting document in organizing this work was the resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR of March 14, 1944 "On Measures to Improve Film Services for the Population of the Ukrainian SSR" (Postanova, 1961, p. 21). The

resolution reflected the specifics of the cultural policy of the Soviet government at the stage of liberating the territory of Ukraine from the Nazi occupation and was part of a large-scale campaign to restore ideological influence through cinema, a powerful tool of propaganda.

The main goal was the forced restoration of the cinema network. Since there were not enough stationary premises and halls, the emphasis was placed on mobile cinema installations that could serve villages and military units. The organization of courses for the training of projectionists was to alleviate the problem of personnel, which was catastrophically lacking. The film repertoire was oriented towards films with a high patriotic and mobilization content.

When developing the village cinema network, the party-Soviet authorities assumed that cinema was the fastest way to convey to people the official version of events on the fronts of the still ongoing war and to tune them in to the “correct” political slogans. And the resumption of screenings in villages was to be psychologically perceived by the population as a sign of a return to peaceful life and as a demonstration of the superiority of the Soviet system over the occupation system.

In order to implement the government resolution, numerous decisions were made at the regional and district levels. Thus, in May 1944, the issue of film services for the population was considered by the Poltava Regional Executive Committee. Among the approved measures to improve the work of the rural cinema network of the region, which at that time consisted of 14 stationary and 27 mobile (of which 12 were “silent”) cinemas, the disintegration of the existing inter-district film departments and the organization of such departments in each district was of great importance.

In order to stimulate and consolidate the staff of rural projectionists, it was also planned to include them in the supply according to the norms of the second category determined for industrial workers (SAPR, f. 4085, d. 3, c. 2, pp. 5–7; c. 3, pp. 85–97). Such measures were taken in other regions as well.

However, in practice, progress in providing cinema services to the rural population was slow. Therefore, on October 11, 1944, the RNK of the Ukrainian SSR and the Central Committee of the CP (b) U adopted another, more specific resolution “On Improving the Work of Rural Cinemas” (Postanova, 1961, pp. 67–69).

At the beginning of the reconstruction period, the rural cinema network was in a depressing state. In 1944, in 64% of Ukrainian villages, films were not shown at all or villagers watched them no more than 1–2 times (Рибак, 1997, с. 89). In the villages of Poltava region, there were only 47 stationary and 15 mobile cinemas, of which 5 were wide-screen, 1 was narrow-screen and 9 were “silent”. In Dnipropetrovsk and Kirovohrad regions, there were 12 mobile cinemas, and in Kyiv – 7 (Postanova, 1961, p. 229).

In the following years, despite all the shortcomings and difficulties of a material and financial nature, certain changes took place in the rural cinema network. If at the beginning of 1945 there were only 158 cinemas operating in the villages of the Central Ukrainian regions, then at the beginning of 1950 their number increased 6 times and amounted to 974 (in Dnipropetrovsk – 317, Kyiv – 241, Kirovohrad – 188, Poltava – 228) (Narodne hospodarstvo, 1957, p. 364).

However, despite the positive dynamics of the increase in the total number of cinemas in rural areas, by the end of 1953 the rate of cinematography in villages still remained too low. There were 5,697 cinemas operating in villages, of which 2,769 were mobile horse-drawn and 860 were drive-in cinemas, which was an average of one for every 3–4 villages. There were still over 1,500 villages in Ukraine where there were no clubs suitable for showing films

at all (CSAPAU, f. 5116, p. 1, c. 12, pp. 183–185). At the same time, only 12.1% of rural and collective farm clubs were equipped with stationary cinema installations (Tereshchenko, 2004, pp. 354–362). In Dnipropetrovsk region, even at the beginning of 1950, there were only 155 of them. Other villages were served by 98 cinema trailers, of which 91 (93%) were horse-drawn (Dovidka, 1989, p. 503).

Existing village cinemas were often idle due to organizational problems, lack of fuel, generators, and other reasons. Violations of the schedules for the delivery and screening of films became systemic. New films arrived in the village with great delay, sometimes they were in such a condition that it was difficult to watch them. And in the villages that were part of Yuriev village council of Tsarychansky district of Dnipropetrovsk region, the peasants in 1947 did not see films at all for almost six months (Shyriaiev, 1948, p. 4).

The quality of the film screenings was also very low. A typical story for that time was described in a regional newspaper in January 1946 by a moviegoer M. Kovalenko from the village of Velyka Bahachka, Poltava region: “The projectionists and the head of the cinematography are “telling fortunes” near the camera. This is called a “test”. After discussion, the “technical commission” gives a conclusion: “Maybe it will make it”. And the film began.

You can see something on the screen. As if in a fog, various figures emerge and suddenly disappear. A quiet rustling is heard from the screen, which suddenly turns into terrible explosions. The audience instinctively moves away from the screen. And not in vain – the screen falls from the strong sound. After that, there is an enthusiastic excitement in the hall, which turns into a “roaring ovation”. The resourceful projectionist, taking advantage of this, announces a break. After the break – another break: the film has torn ... ” (Kovalenko, 1946, p. 4).

A contributor to the Kirovohrad regional newspaper “Kirovohradska Pravda” I. Haichuk from the village of Pavlyshi, Onufriyiv district, wrote in a letter to the newspaper: “The film “The Power of Life” was supposed to be shown in the village club. Tickets were sold. People waited for several hours for the screening to begin. Only at 12 o’clock in the morning were they told that the motor was faulty and the screening of the film would be postponed until tomorrow. This is how the film was “shown” on August 14 and 16. This is where the unworthy practice has taken root – they will take money from the viewer and then announce: “The film will not be on again” (Povnistiu zadovolniaty, 1948, p. 2).

The most characteristic shortcomings in the restoration of the rural cinema network and the organization of cinema services for the rural population in the post-war years can be traced on the example of Poltava region, where in 1946 the plan for the restoration and development of the state cinema network was fulfilled by only 80.1%. In 1947, even in 22 district centres and urban-type settlements of this region, as immediately after the war, there were no stationary cinemas (SAPR, f. 4085, d. 3, c. 285, pp. 85–87).

The rate of cinema downtime was slowly decreasing and remained high. Thus, in 1948 it amounted to 4124 screen days or 13.7% of the planned number of days of operation of the regional cinema network. The main reasons for disruptions in film screenings were: breakdown of cinema equipment – 41.9%, non-delivery of films – 14.7%, absence of a projectionist – 9.6%, power outages – 8.9% (SAPR, f. 4085, d. 3, c. 635, pp. 52–57).

One of the main problems of the rural cinema network was considered to be the work of projectionists, who were responsible not only for screening films, but also for transporting cinema installations, selling tickets, and other organizational issues. At the same time, projectionists received a salary of 280–450 rubles (cleaners received 300 rubles) with 27 working days and showing 58 screenings. Low wages, poor living conditions, and

management's indifference to the problems and needs of cultural and educational work in the countryside led to a high turnover of projectionists, as well as other categories of rural cultural workers (Baytsym, 2021). In many cases, rural projectionists performed their duties on a temporary or part-time basis and were not distinguished by technical training, education, or culture of behaviour.

Typically, films were on in village clubs, but in the post-war years, many clubs were used for other purposes – mainly for storing grain and other agricultural products, while others were destroyed.

In many villages, film screenings were held in adapted premises that did not meet the basic requirements of cultural and educational work. Thus, in the village of Krutki, Irklyiv district, Poltava (nowadays Cherkasy) region, films were shown in the premises of a horse farm until 1951 by a mobile cinema installation that arrived from the district centre. It was powered by a dynamo, which was manually turned by those who wanted to watch mostly “silent” films (Kippa, 2003, p. 114). In the summer, films in rural areas were often on outdoors on white canvas screens attached to the premises, or simply on whitewashed walls.

But despite a low level of cinema service, film screenings were always an event in a village cultural life, and the number of viewers attending film screenings grew constantly. And the dynamics of the increase in the audience in rural areas was significantly higher than in cities. If the attendance of film screenings by urban viewers in Poltava region increased by 154% in 1947–1950, then the attendance rate in rural areas increased much more and amounted to 406 (SAPR, f. 4085, d. 3, c. 743, p. 92).

Under the conditions of post-war reconstruction, cinema, subordinated to the Communist Party ideology, acquired a special mobilizing and informational and agitational significance and became an important component of mass political work among rural residents. At the initial stage of the restoration of the rural cinema network, when the war was still ongoing (1943 – 1945), films were aimed at maintaining fighting spirit, forming hatred for the enemy and heroizing the Soviet soldier. The period of post-war Stalinism (1946 – 1953) in cinema was marked by a total ideological offensive in the humanitarian sphere (“zhdanovshchyna”) and the glorification of J. Stalin as a victorious leader.

Compliance with ideological criteria for the content of films was ensured by strict censorship by the security agencies, the Main Film Committee, the State Film Commission and party bodies even at the stage of creating film production and its release on the screen. In the fields, party policies were implemented through a repertoire policy regarding the selection of films for the mass audience. The film repertoire for the rural cinema network was formed by district film departments under the control of district party committees, and directly in the villages it was coordinated with party organizations.

The repertoire plans of rural cinemas included traditional “ideologically sound” films for that time, among which military patriotic themes prevailed, which were supposed to support the moral optimism of the rural population and its willingness to live and work in difficult conditions to build a “bright future”.

An idea of the repertoire of the rural cinema network in the central Ukrainian regions is given by the example of the districts of the Kirovohrad region in 1947. Thus, in Kompaniyiv district, rural viewers were offered films “Two Fighters”, “Cruiser “Varyag””, in Ustymivskiy – “Sons”, “Admiral Nakhimov”, “Stone Flower”, in Malovyskivske – “Alexander Parkhomenko”, “Stone Flower”, in Oleksandrivske – “Two Fighters”, “A Man with a Gun”, “Our Heart”, in Kamianske – “Shchors”, “Ivan Hrozný”, “Cinderella”. Before

the feature films, such chronicle-documentary films, marked by the influence of the then dominant ideology, were necessarily shown, such as “Our Soviet Motherland”, “Soviet Estonia”, “Court of Nations”, “Hello, Moscow”, “Bulgaria” (CSAPAU, f. 4623, d. 1, c. 39, pp. 48–53).

Despite limited information and access to artistic values, villagers viewed the screening of films with interest. Tired of constant ideological indoctrination, villagers enjoyed watching entertainment and comedy films that were free from ideological bias and closer to real life. A resident of the village of Zhuravka, former Zlatopilskyi district, Kirovohrad region, O. I. Prysiazhny, recalls that pre-war films “Funny Guys” and “Volga-Volga”, and also the rare American film “Tarzan” were particularly popular among his fellow villagers at that time (Spohady Prysiazhnoho, 2006). These same films were also called popular by a resident of the village of Drabivka, former Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi district, Kyiv (nowadays Cherkasy) region, H. M. Velychko (Spohady Velycka, 2006). Films of this genre served as a kind of psychological relief for the rural population in conditions of hard and unenlightening collective farm labor and material hardship.

Given the popularity of cinema and the high attendance of film screenings by rural residents, party organizations, as a form of ideological influence, widely practiced combining film screenings with lectures, conversations, and amateur performances. The propaganda and information role was also strengthened by chronicle-documentary film magazines, which, although rarely, began to appear on rural screens. One of them was the magazine “Soviet Ukraine”, which with pathos informed viewers about events in the republic and abroad.

The spread of newsreels, including on rural screens, was facilitated by the return of the Ukrainian Studio of Chronicle Films and the Ukrainian Film Studio of Popular Scientific and Educational Films from evacuation in the summer of 1944. The documentary film by O. Dovzhenko and Yu. Solntsev “Victory in Right-Bank Ukraine and the Expulsion of German Invaders from the Ukrainian Lands” was popular among rural viewers. The documentaries “Kyiv”, “Dniprohes”, “Nash Kharkiv”, “Na Donbas”, “Odesa” were also released on the screens, which were about the reconstruction work (Rozvytok kultury, 1967, p. 227).

Popular feature films among the rural population were incorporated into complex agitation and propaganda events, during which party propagandists conducted lectures, held discussions on labour and military patriotic topics, performed by amateur art groups, and used visual agitation. One of such forms in the central regions, as well as in other regions of Ukraine, was collective farm film festivals, which were held during the most intense periods of agricultural work.

In Kyiv region from March 15 to April 6, 1947, during the spring sowing campaign, a collective farm film festival was held in 25 district centres of the region, during which 194 film screenings were held, which were watched by 22.3 thousand viewers. As part of the film festival, lecturers and agitators from among the party and Soviet activists conducted 60 lectures. In Bila Tserkva, Cherkasy, Uman and Brovary, 4 agitation film tours were operating at that time.

However, this film festival practically did not reach the villagers directly, since it was held in district centers and provided for transportation of collective farmers from the villages of the district. Thus, in Vasylkiv district, despite the preparatory work carried out by a commission headed by the secretary of the district committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (Bolsheviks), only 580 collective farmers from 7 collective farms adjacent to the district centre attended the several-day festival events in the district centres.

Similar events that were aimed directly at rural settlements were more popular. The collective farm film festival in Kyiv region during the harvest preparation period from June

19 to 29 was much more successful that year. The main part of its events was held in 33 villages and only 10 in district centres. 27 thousand spectators attended 175 film screenings and 50 amateur concerts dedicated to them (CSAHAGU, f. 4623, d. 1, c. 39, pp. 33–34).

In rural areas, film workers, like workers in other humanitarian institutions, were tasked not only with showing films, but also with performing other mass-political work tasks that were not their own. For example, Dnipropetrovsk district film department reported in 1946 that “the film department wrote 307 slogans, posters, quotes, and panels,” and other agitation work was carried out (CSAHAGU, f. 4623, d. 1, c. 31, p. 6).

The Soviet authorities and the ideological apparatus of the Communist Party under the conditions of reconstruction focused on the adaptation of film propaganda to target audiences. In particular, a prominent place in the repertoire of rural film distribution, along with chronicle and documentary films, was occupied by popular science and educational and technical films, the specific weight of which in the rural cinema network was higher than in cities. For example, in the first half of 1946, such films in rural areas of Poltava region accounted for 1043 screen days, while in cities – 861. Accordingly, they were watched by 226.6 thousand rural and 97 thousand urban viewers.

In addition to popular science and educational and technical films on agricultural topics, a special place was given to medical topics, since medical care and sanitary and hygienic conditions in the post-war village were at a very low level. The chief focus in the topics of sanitary and educational films was on the prevention of epidemic diseases – typhus and typhoid fever, dysentery, the measles, influenza, venereal diseases. Fire-fighting films were also on, to help the organizers of pre-conscription training, films of popular science content (CSAPAU, ф. 1, d. 23, c. 2824, pp. 44–45).

Part of the general policy of ideological influence in 1943–1953 was the Russification of the film repertoire, characterized by the displacement of national content and the introduction of Russian as the main language of cinema. By the beginning of 1953, out of about 50 thousand copies of films available in Ukraine, only 2,650 (5%) were dubbed in Ukrainian (CSAPAU, f. 1, d. 1, c. 1120, pp. 324–325). All popular science and chronicle-documentary films and newsreels “News of the Day”, “News of Agriculture” and “Science and Technology” produced outside the Ukrainian SSR were also shown in Russian (Kaganov, 2019, p. 283).

Conclusions. The conducted research gives grounds for the conclusion that cinema in the post-war period was a significant factor in organizing the free time of rural residents of central Ukrainian regions and satisfying their spiritual, artistic, educational and informational needs. With its accessibility, this type of art attracted viewers and enjoyed great popularity among them. However, the level of cinema service was low and improved very slowly, since the functioning of the rural cinema network was hampered by unsatisfactory material and technical support, personnel problems and performance discipline.

During the post-war period cinema was actively used by the party-Soviet apparatus as a means of ideological influence on the formation of the consciousness of the rural population and the mobilization of its efforts to implement the policy of the ruling party. Chief focus was on controlling the formation of the film repertoire and filling it with artistic films that showed military victories and labour enthusiasm, and the official film production included in the repertoire of rural cinemas in every possible way embellished real reality.

A common form of ideological influence was the combination of film screenings with lectures and conversations by party agitators, and amateur performances. Thematic film festivals were held, subordinated to the ideological processing of the rural population. The

propaganda and information role was also played by chronicle-documentary newsreels, which were necessarily shown before feature films, informing the rural audience with pathos about events in the republic and abroad.

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