MAKING SENSE OF THE PAST: (RE)CONSTRUCTING THE LOCAL MEMORIAL LANDSCAPE IN A POST-SOVIET BASE IN POLAND

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ABSTRACT
The article focuses on (re)constructing the local memorial landscape in a post-Soviet military base in Poland and the process of forging the local identity of its new inhabitants in the years 1993–2015. These processes, which occurred after the withdrawal of Russian Federation forces from the base and the establishment of a civilian town, find their reflection in the urban space of Borne Sulinowo and are written into a broader context of state policies and national debates about the past. The aim of the article is to present how the initiative in these processes has gradually shifted from the national level to the local, causing fragmentation and pluralisation of the collective memory. In this context certain significance can be attributed to the need to comply with EU standards, and to the progress of commercialisation of the past related to the development of tourism.

KEYWORDS: collective memory • memorial landscape • post-Soviet base • post-communist Poland • urban space

INTRODUCTION

A contemporary *flâneur* strolling about the town of Borne Sulinowo encounters signs and symbols which at almost every turn testify to the town's complicated past. The efforts undertaken by the Poles since the early 1990s to 'domesticate' the urban space, together with the development of new social and cultural practices and gradual transformation and reinterpretation of the cultural landscape of Borne Sulinowo, bear testimony to an attempt to put down roots and construct a local identity,[1] combined with the need for locals to create their own place within the world, as "no one lives in the world in general" (Geertz 1996: 262).

People construct, cultivate and preserve both their personal and collective identities as they remember and forget (Connerton 1989; 2009; Wertsch 2004), commemorate and repress the past and present narratives. In the process of constructing a local identity, what matters greatly is the history of urban landscape and the configurations of the 'things' that fill places and change over time. The space of this post-Soviet base contains multiple material traces of the past presence of Soviets and Germans in the area. The presence of these traces is not indifferent to the shaping of the identity of the local community and its attitude to the past. The foreign material and symbolic legacy, to the same

extent as new symbols and practices of commemoration, which have been developing in Borne Sulinowo since the beginning of the 1990s, are employed in numerous ways to update and re-negotiate the past. Choices the contemporary inhabitants of the former military base are making that relate to selecting these elements (symbolic and material) from the past, together with 'disputes' concerning this topic that emerge locally, become part of a wider social and political setting. The founding of Borne Sulinowo as a civilian town was closely related to the fall of communism and the transformation processes in Poland. The town's uniqueness results from, among others, the fact that both the process of (re)construction of the local memorial landscape and the related process of forging the local identity have not been completed yet and are observable *in statu nascendi*. Such an opportunity is not available in towns where the sense of belonging has been anchored in the past of the previous generations. In the urban space of the former military base, the functioning of competing agencies[2] of memory[3] articulation is revealed. In this sense, one of the key issues is the question of who controls the debate.

> How this orchestration of mythic history plays out is reflective of the particular configuration of power relation operative in society at a specific moment in time. These types of relations are constantly shifting, following the processual nature of hegemony which is never complete, or predictable, but always (re)constituted in particular contexts. (Katharyne Mitchell, quoted by Ochman 2010: 511)

Linking the social construction of the space and the manners in which it is experienced to the practices[4] undertaken by diverse agents allows a look at the town (in a physical and metaphorical sense) as if it were a 'stage' where social and cultural meanings are communicated. It is not only the mutual relations between individuals that are significant here, but also the ways in which places and space are used, as well as the everyday experience of the 'things' which fill them. The metaphor of a town as a stage allows the perception of things amassed within its boundaries as landmarks. On the basis of these landmarks the given communities construct their own identities and establish their own places in the world. Urban space concentrates configurations of things (including signs and symbols) that change over time and are later used in the process of symbolic manipulation and management. Moreover, urban space becomes an arena for political, social and cultural discourse. Borne Sulinowo, due to its complex past, is a perfect place to examine such mutual interplay between history, memory and politics.

The present text constitutes a continuation and a development of the issues addressed in two other papers on Borne Sulinowo.[5] The first of these papers, entitled "Mapping Meanings in the Post-Soviet Landscape of Borne Sulinowo", revolves around deciphering meanings within the cultural landscape of the former Soviet base. The cultural landscape is treated as a source of knowledge on the subject of the local community. At the same time, the analysis was performed on the basis of the town's four characteristic aspects: urban arrangement, architecture, statues and toponymy (Demski and Czarnecka 2015). The forthcoming article entitled "Coping with the Difference: 'Practices of Recreating the Town and Making it Become Known' in a Post-Soviet Military Base in Poland" discusses contemporary social and cultural practices which came into being in Borne Sulinowo between 1993 and 2015. The text examines the emergence of new practices in relation to various types of resources (human, tangible, and intangible). Within the whole array of practices, the practices of commemoration comprise one of

numerous subcategories. The present text takes up new problems and aims to demonstrate the process of forging the local identity in the context of (re)constructing the narrative about the past and shaping the memorial landscape at the local level. The use of the metaphor of urban space as a stage enables us to present the process of the clash of visions and the projects undertaken by a variety of agents of memory articulation, whose activities either directly manifest themselves in the street space or leave their distinct impression on the town's material tissue. In order to achieve this, the text explores the role of various practices and politics of memory both in coping with/re-negotiating the local past, produced by locally conscious individuals. This study investigates local responses to a 'foreign' and difficult past in an attempt to reflect the complexities and contradictions of the post-1989 Polish memorial landscape, while presenting the specificity of the former post-Soviet base against such a background. The time frame of the analysis covers the period of 22 years since Borne Sulinowo began to function as a Polish civilian town (1993–2015).

BORNE SULINOWO – THE PLACE WHERE THE PAST IS DIVIDED

Borne Sulinowo (located in north-western Poland) was officially taken over by the Polish authorities in October 1992. It was formally granted a town charter and opened for the civilian population on June 5, 1993.[6]
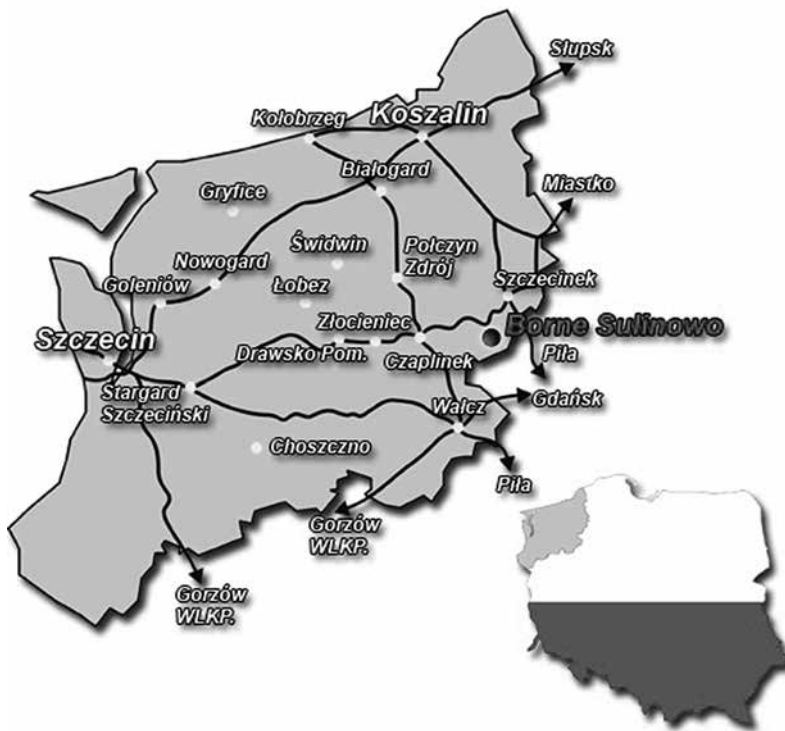

Photo 1. Borne Sulinowo on the map of Poland. Image by the Borne Sulinowo Society of Military History (Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Militarnej Historii Bornego Sulinowa).

The period in which Borne has functioned as a civilian town is a short one, especially when seen against the history of settlement in this area, which dates back to the 16th century. The region formerly belonged to Germany; it was then that German civilian settlers founded a small farming and fishing village on the shore of lake Pile, naming it Linde ('linden tree'). The village functioned until the 1930s, when the local inhabitants were relocated on Hitler's orders. Linde, its surrounding villages and the whole vast area covering over 18,000 hectares were transformed into one of the Third Reich's most modern military training grounds. The base was officially opened in 1938. During the Second World War, the Germans established a transitory camp for Polish soldiers and civilians there. In November 1939 the camp's name was changed to Staalag II E, and in 1941 it was transformed into Oflag II D, where French, Polish, British and, later on, Italian officers were imprisoned. In 1945 the garrison was abandoned without resistance by German forces and taken over by the Red Army, whose soldiers – within the structures of the Northern Group of the Soviet Army – officially installed themselves there in 1947. The Soviets were stationed in the military base for over 40 years.[7] During that period Borne was an extraterritorial area, meaning that despite officially being included in Polish territory as a result of the Second World War, it was practically excluded from the control and jurisdiction of the Polish authorities.[8] Polish tourist guidebooks said that the area near lake Pile is inaccessible, unattractive, and surrounded by forests (Moreny 1994). In 1993, after the final withdrawal of the military forces of the Russian Federation from Poland, which was related to the fall of the communist system in Central and Eastern Europe, the new Polish authorities, faced with a choice between several alternative solutions, decided that the area of the former garrison would be transformed into a civilian town.[9] People from all over Poland began to arrive in Borne Sulinowo (Moreny 1993). A new community, deprived of centuries of natural growth, was slowly coming into existence. In many respects the early 1990s in the town of Borne Sulinowo resembled the process of settlement of Poles in the Recovered Territories[10] in the 1940s.

BORNE SULINOWO AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE POST-1989 POLISH MEMORIAL LANDSCAPE

The fall of communism in Poland in 1989, in combination with the multiannual processes of transformation, initiated a multidimensional process of post-communist identity formation. The key element of this process was the reorganisation of the public memory space, and its significant aspect was the appearance of new narratives about the past, unrooted in the classic division into 'us' (the nation) and 'them' (the communists and their supporters). The official debate related to the post-war past, led in Poland after 1989 by those at state level, oscillated between two competing narratives, the first one of which aimed to discredit the People's Republic of Poland in its totality, while the second attempted to recognise at least some aspects of Polish communist history. Yet, "the reorganization of public memory space does not only involve contesting the Soviet past or affirming independence traditions but is rather the outcome of multilayered processes rooted in particularities of time and space" (Ochman 2010: 511). On the national level, the debate on the subject of the post-war past was mainly influenced, apart from the political parties, by the nationwide media (for example *Gazeta Wyborcza*),

new legal regulations (for example the Criminal Code of 1997, penalizing public promotion of totalitarian systems and their symbolism), national institutions (among others, by the Institute of National Remembrance, established in 1998), and by academic papers published after the archives were opened and censorship abolished.

Timothy Snyder (2002) distinguished two types of collective memory with regard to Eastern Europe: *national memory*, defined as "the organisational principle, or set of myths, by which nationally conscious individuals understand the past and its demands on the present" (ibid.: 50) and *mass personal memory*, defined as "the recollection of the large number of individuals of events in which they took part" (ibid.: 39). However, after 1989 an additional, third type of collective memory – *local memory*, based on a local past and produced by local agents, began to emerge in Poland (Ochman 2010: 511). This process was closely connected with the decentralisation of power and the emergence of self-government structures whose representatives gained significant room for manoeuvre in the context of (re)constructing the local memorial landscape. The three types of collective memory mentioned here are mutually interrelated and, at the same time, their relationships are continually changing, which finds its reflection in the ongoing debates and cultural practices (especially in the practices of commemoration) undertaken in the urban space.

Borne Sulinowo, compared to the rest of Poland, is a unique town not only due to its complicated history, recent inauguration as a town, and new settlement structure in its totality based on the migrant background. When Borne was transformed into a civilian town, the garrison, which had remained a blank spot on the map of the country until the final withdrawal of the Russian Federation's military forces, became an important symbol in the context of the process of (re)constructing the narrative about the past and the future of the country. Within the official debate conducted at the national level, the history of the former post-Soviet base was recalled to contest the Soviet past, to discredit the Polish communist state altogether and, finally, to emphasise the significance of the liberation breakthrough of 1989. Moreover, the total exchange of inhabitants, the change of the settlement's character from military to civilian, the take-over of the former exterritorial zone by the Polish government and the gradual inclusion of the town in a network of state, regional and local connections, all formed a part of the process of establishing a new regime and its legitimisation. To a large extent, this process was based on representing itself as a discontinuation of the past.

Meanwhile, at the local level, first the self-government representatives and then other entities that had active agency engaged themselves in the (re)construction of the local memorial landscape and the creation of the local community (apart from representatives of local self-government, the entities that hold active agency comprise: the manager of the Cultural and Educational Centre, in whose building the Museum Room is located, private investors, members of the local associations, for example the Society of the Military History of Borne Sulinowo, members of the Local Organisation for Tourism LOT, old-age pensioners united in the Polish Association of Pensioners and Disabled and around the Third-Age University. In the 1990s a vital role was also played by the local newspaper *Moreny*, which created a forum through which the local authorities and the town's inhabitants could present their opinions). Even if the local initiatives and activities undertaken in the urban space were not distinctly opposed to the narratives about the past shaped at the national level, they aimed to compose their own local

history narratives as it related to the inhabitants of Borne Sulinowo and were based on their own commemorative work. The new settlers initially possessed some chances to make a name for themselves, starting with a *carte blanche*, as it were, but at the same time they were arriving in Borne with their own experiences, ambitions and problems. During an interview, one of the inhabitants stated that, "We used to laugh and say that we were creating new history here. We were creating a history here that was born in 1992".[11] Apart from people engaged in the struggle against the system during the communist period, there were also the system's former beneficiaries (who frequently wished to create a secure old age for themselves in a new place, without suffering any consequences for their past deeds); the representatives of the Northern Group of the Soviet Army who managed to return to Borne after a period of several years (the Russians, the Ukrainians); civilians who inhabited the surrounding settlements during the period when the Soviet forces were stationed at the base, and who supported themselves, to a significant extent, by trading with the soldiers; and, lastly, citizens who avoided participation in the public life. Nevertheless, in the context of reconstructing the local memorial landscape and forging collective identity, agency is not only a matter of personal choice or will, but also an achievement and a matter of recognition, in which not everybody's voice is listened to. It turned out soon enough that in Borne Sulinowo active agency went into the hands of the representatives of political power who supported the changes taking place in the country, of economically successful entrepreneurs who contributed to the town's development, local associations (often founded or managed by private investors), and to a lesser extent the pensioners who have represented a significant proportion of the town's inhabitants ever since it was founded as a civilian settlement. However, some voices were inaudible, for example the voice of former German inhabitants of the settlement (Germans do not live in Borne Sulinowo and do not participate in the debates on the subject of its past) and of the few Russian-speakers who returned to the former base after the withdrawal of Russian Federation forces (this group of inhabitants stays out of the way and as a rule does not participate in the life of the local community).

A town should be the 'voice' of its inhabitants. Material objects and events gain status only when significance is assigned to them by that which is contemporary. At the onset of the 1990s, Borne Sulinowo 'spoke' solely with a foreign voice – unintelligible and, for a number of reasons, unacceptable to the new settlers. This is reflected in the memories of the first inhabitants, which were published at that time in the local press: "It was a strange town, completely different from what it is now. Empty, alien and menacing! This dread and strangeness was enhanced by street names, written in the Cyrillic alphabet, foreign to us all" (*Moreny* 1995). Such descriptions were aimed at emphasising the differences – "[t]o construct the barrier between the new beginning and the old tyranny is to recollect an old tyranny" (Connerton 1989: 10) – and at stressing the importance of the early inhabitants' efforts in laying out the foundations for the new town. "All beginnings contain an element of recollection, especially when a social group makes a concerted effort to begin with a wholly new start. There is a measure of complete arbitrariness in the very nature of any such attempted beginning" (ibid.: 6). The multi-annual process of adapting the post-Soviet space by civilians and transforming it into a place is reflected both in the contemporary urban landscape and in the narratives which the inhabitants construct more than 20 years after the town began to function

as a civilian settlement. Much information present in the early memories repeats itself contemporarily, although now they are interspaced with evaluations of achievements and errors made by new inhabitants:

> We have irretrievably lost something that we could have showed off here. Something that would stir interest. And we have less and less of that. As you can see, those objects over there […] it was impossible to save them. Someone, somewhere made a mistake. (An interview extract)

This does not only testify to adapting the military space, recognising its potential and gradually putting down roots by the new inhabitants, but also to attempts to accept the complicated past of the place and the efforts towards integrating the things that fill the space into narratives that are directed at a quest for continuity.

In the early 1990s, the new authorities first of all needed to restore the town's existence in the cartographic sense because during the communist era the garrison was unmarked on the maps of Poland and Europe (for decades, the Soviets hid the existence of the base). It was also necessary to take over and organise the space in its physical and administrative aspects. Active agency belonged at that time to the state or local government bodies. Thanks to their activities general frames were established, indicating the direction of later operations and enabling the development of new initiatives.

THE URBAN SPACE OF BORNE SULINOWO AND RESCALING MEMORY

After 1989, forces related to the Solidarity movement, which gained a majority in local and central government in most regions of Poland, led to a serious change in the Polish urban landscape over a short period of time. This change reflected the rapid postcommunist transformation in the country.

Against this background, the former military base formed a unique case, as for over 40 years its cultural landscape had been shaped solely by the citizens of the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s there was no physical evidence testifying to this area's affiliation with the Polish state. Street names, monuments, commemorative plaques constituted a cultural imaginarium reflecting Soviet visions and values, shaped during the communist era. Additionally, although the Soviets removed almost all symbols and signs left by the Germans,[12] their presence in that area was still reflected in the town's landscape via its urban layout and architecture. The Soviets adapted garrison buildings almost in their totality, and over time they extended only the infrastructure and the training ground. Thus, the traces of the presence of former inhabitants (not only the Wehrmacht soldiers but also German civilian settlers who left behind the town's oldest street and surrounding buildings) were not entirely removed from the space, although the Soviet authorities strove to eradicate their memory by way of guidelines from the dominant discourse, a change in the base's 'ideological costume' and cultural practices undertaken in the public space.

After the military forces of the Russian Federation had left the base, new bodies of political authority initiated the process of inscribing the space with new meanings through changes in toponymy, erection of monuments and other transformations of

the urban iconography. It is worth pointing out that after the fall of communism in Poland, authority in the local organisations was as a rule taken over by politicians from right-wing parties or, sometimes, independent candidates. The authority handed over to local governments by law comprised the right to change street names and to construct, move or disassemble monuments. There was no central institution at that time to control the changes taking place all over the country.

In an instant, further to a top-down political decision, all the Russian names of streets, squares and institutions were removed and replaced with Polish ones. Such practices of commemoration within the public space revoke the old order, contributing to the accumulation of the symbolic capital and to the struggle for cultural recognition in the process of constructing collective identity. Some of the new street names were related to characteristics of the natural environment. The authorities introduced a set of names alluding to the liberation and pro-independence movements which were routinely duplicated in the majority of Polish towns after the fall of communism. New names did not only perform the practical function of making it easier to orient oneself in space, but also a symbolic one. The new toponymy removed the symbolic presence of the former inhabitants together with their own narrative about the past. The change of names was not only related to commemoration, but also to active forgetting. The period of the People's Republic of Poland was completely wiped from the local urban landscape. Assigning new names was also important in the process of the domestication of space and transforming it into place by the new settlers.

Photo 2. Monument in the form of an outstretched hand holding a papasha at the nearby cemetery. Photo by Dominika Czarnecka, 2015.

As regards the statues, the situation in Borne Sulinowo in the early 1990s was uncomplicated inasmuch as the Russians took nearly all the monuments with them when they left the base (for example, a statue of Lenin, a Soviet tank). They left only a monument in the town centre in the form of an outstretched hand holding a *papasha*, which crowned the tomb of a Red Army soldier, Ivan Poddubnyy.

The new inhabitants did not destroy it but moved it to the nearby cemetery, located outside the town, where it can still be seen today. The relocation of the monument signified not only the process of constructing a new, symbolic map of the town but also the revocation of the Soviet narrative about the past. During the communist period Poddubnyy was honoured as a Hero of the Soviet Union who died in battle for a just cause, whereas in 1993 his death was described for the first time in a different context in the local press:

There was a local Polish–Soviet war, caused by instances of criminal offences and rape. The army moved into Borne, there was gunfire. People were shot dead on both sides. For political reasons this fact was concealed by the People's Republic of Poland. The Battle of Borne Sulinowo fell into oblivion. Such tragic events ought to be revealed. (*Moreny* 1993)

The decision to move the statue was undertaken by the local authorities, which at that time had significant leeway in that regard. The above example illustrates the fact that in the early 1990s the narrative about the past was only beginning to take shape at the local level and was dominated by the official, nationally conducted debates on the post-war past. In effect, the Soviet past was often contested and there were attempts to discredit the Polish communist state in its totality. On the other hand, efforts to better understanding the local history of the place have been apparent since the beginning, which testifies to the fact that the new inhabitants have performed, among other things, their own commemorative work.

After 1993, only a couple of monuments were erected in the town centre (a few monuments were erected outside the town, in the forests where the cemeteries are located). All of the town centre memorials are quite modest: rocks and plaques rather than monumental statues. On the one hand:

It seems that the inhabitants still do not possess their 'own' past which they could commemorate in the form of monuments. This initiative, in its basic meaning, has not materialized so far and at present it is realized on the level of events and practices instead. (Demski and Czarnecka 2015: 110)

However, on the other hand, new places of commemoration play an important role in transforming the symbolic map of the town, constituting one of the most important landmarks in the process of reconstructing the local memorial landscape. The rock that commemorates the opening of the civilian town is one of the new elements of the cultural landscape of Borne Sulinowo, signifying the beginnings of the contemporary inhabitants' root-making and their attempts to form a local community.

As mentioned earlier, numerous traces and material remains left by the former inhabitants of the base are also visible within the urban space. Apart from the urban arrangement, various buildings were preserved in Borne Sulinowo, buildings that had a huge impact on the process of reconstructing the memorial landscape at the local level. Some of them were renovated and adapted for use, others are gradually falling into ruin, changing some fragments of the town into 'cemeteries' filled with architectonical skeletons from the past. "'Ruin' literally means 'collapse' – but actually, ruins are more about remainders and reminders. [...] Ruins embody anxieties about human aging, commemorating our cultural endeavours and their failures." (Boym 2011) The ruins remind the contemporary inhabitants of the town about the complicated history of this place and its former inhabitants. Dilapidated buildings co-create the *genius loci*, which is not without significance from the point of view of the development of tourism. One of the town's largest events, an international rally of military vehicles, is organised in the vicinity of the ruins. Tourists come sightseeing at the ruins and there is a recreational path established by the town authorities consisting of 21 elements. Moreover, these ruins are used by the inhabitants of Borne Sulinowo as material signs around which the narrative of the past is being constructed. The ruins of the Officers' Club, the

Photo 3. Unreconstructed buildings. Photo by Dagnosław Demski, 2015.

most prestigious building in town during German and Soviet times, is mentioned by many inhabitants of Borne Sulinowo as an important symbol. It not only reminds the inhabitants of the past, but also appears to them as evidence of errors and these goals which they failed to achieve after the fall of communism.

What is significant, those slowly decaying buildings perform an important role despite their pathetic state: "The preserved damaged object, in its own material being, signals both its predamaged state – a different past, with potentially different cultural, political, and social meanings – and its new or altered state" (Jaś Elsner, quoted by Ochman 2010: 520). The presence of such a diversity of things amassed in the urban space makes it possible to perceive and interpret the town as a palimpsest of many different times and histories.

An element that singles out the local memorial landscape in Borne Sulinowo is also the need to seek continuity with reference to the past of the place. In the urban iconography the local authorities 'discovered' the town by referring to the first stage of settlement in this area. Although the whole vicinity belonged to Germany then, German settlers were, just as the Polish were, civilians. The process of negotiating the past in the present led to an observation that all the civilian inhabitants, as opposed to soldiers, share certain common values. Such a strategy underlay the creation of Borne Sulinowo's coat of arms (a green linden tree against a yellow background, from the original civil name of the town Linde) and the symbolic 'anchoring' of the new community in the 'past' of the place.

Photo 4. The Officers' Club. Photo by Dominika Czarnecka, 2015.

MULTITUDE OF AGENTS, MULTITUDE OF NARRATIVES

Soon enough new agents of memory articulation appeared on the urban stage – after a general framework was worked out by the representatives of the local government, individual investors, entrepreneurs and members of numerous newly established societies became active. All the entities equipped with active agency began to search through the material remains and the history of the place for facts that would best support their particular agendas. Borne Sulinowo, with its complicated past, quickly became an arena for competition. Apart from the local narrative on the subject of the past, constructed within the urban space by power-holding entities, additional narratives began to spring up, constructing the town in other ways: "collective remembering is a matter of agents using cultural tools, especially narratives" (Wertsch 2004: 2). Thus, remembering is understood as an activity and process whereby the memorable takes shape and is continuously reshaped, questioned, affirmed, etc.

An interesting example of this phenomenon are the museums and similar projects which function in Borne Sulinowo. The first mention of the need to create a museum appeared in the second year after the town was established (*Moreny* 1994). Initially, setting up a Museum of Totalitarianism was discussed, although the idea was never actually implemented. The initiative was introduced by the local authorities. According to the official debate conducted at the national level, German and Soviet military periods were to be presented from the perspective of the victims of both totalitarian systems. The historical politics behind such a solution, implemented by the authorities after the

fall of communism in Poland, was *de facto* aimed at condemning all things related to communist history, not unreasonably equated to fascism.

This is roughly the same period during which the local authorities in Borne Sulinowo decided to move the statue of Ivan Poddubnyy to the cemetery. The local debate on the subject of the post-war past was dominated at that time by the narratives constructed on the state level, which were based on a dichotomy of 'liberators versus occupiers' with regard to the Soviet soldiers. These tendencies were revived after the centre-right Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) won the elections in 2005. One of the main goals of the PiS was to lead the total de-communisation of the country.

In this context, the efforts undertaken at the local level, among others, by the municipal elites of Borne Sulinowo, to compose their own narratives, become visible once more. The local narratives quickly began to go beyond the binary oppositions reconstructed at the central level. The black and white picture of Soviet soldiers as liberators–occupants was gradually filled coloured in, for example from the personal accounts and memories of people who inhabited the surrounding villages during the period when the soldiers were stationed at the base, and lived with them in a constant symbiosis. After the civilian town was established, many people from the surrounding villages moved to Borne Sulinowo, due to availability of all kinds of public amenity (housing, for instance), co-creating the newly established community.

It seems worthwhile to mention here the process of pluralisation and fragmentation of the collective memory, which was related to Poland's accession to the European Union.[13] In Poland the EU tendencies towards pluralisation appeared among the Polish intellectual and cultural elite, which did not eliminate simultaneous dissatisfaction on the part of the more traditional and conservative part of the Polish society. It cannot be ruled out that the changes which are noticeable in the reconstructions of the narrative of the past and the approach to the material relicts of the 'others', manifested at the local level, were to some extent linked to the changes in historical narratives regulated on a top-down basis in those countries of the Central and Eastern Europe which applied for accession to the European Union. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, in order to demonstrate an appropriate level of democratisation, the associated countries were supposed, among others things, to adapt the narrative of the past – the 'memory expectations' – to the key values of liberal democracies, such as openness, tolerance and human rights. This was related to constructing future-oriented memory that would account for the perspective of the 'other'. Although the notion of European common memory is strongly criticised, for instance because, "Eastern European historical experiences have not yet been incorporated into the broader European memory" (Ochman 2014: 221), this does not mean that 'memory expectations' did not affect the (re)construction of the narrative of the past in the countries which applied for accession to the Union.

An important initiative exemplifying this fact is the attempt to create a Three Cultures Park, included in the Local Revitalization Programme for Borne Sulinowo and spanning the years 2004–2020.[14] With reference to the history of the place, the project looks at the three cultures (German, Soviet, Polish) through the lens of coexistence. The project to create the Three Cultures Park as a branded product of tourism in Borne Sulinowo was intended as a long-term undertaking (as it is a group of investment- and program-oriented tasks, consistent with the direction of the town and municipality development, which is to be created on the basis of the town's historical specific-

ity). The plan should be fully realised by 2019. The Local Revitalization Programme for Borne Sulinowo for the years 2004–2020 assumes that three different but historically essential segments will be created in Borne Sulinowo – a German one, referring to the atmosphere of the 1930s, a Soviet one from 1945–1992 and a Polish one, which is a contemporary vision of use of the area from the point of view of tourism, while taking into consideration the historical elements and trends in the contemporary global tourism. Every segment will be unique and characteristic, with the view of combining the past, the present and the future. The Park will also include the Three Cultures Centre, whose function will be to cultivate the tradition and culture of the three nationalities that inhabited Borne Sulinowo across the centuries (through language teaching, film shows, theatrical activities, cultural events, exhibitions, youth exchange assistance) (see Strategia Rozwoju Miasta i Gminy Borne Sulinowo na lata 2004–2019). The project is generally accepted by the town's inhabitants, who place their main hope for the future in the development of tourism. On the other hand, many people doubt whether it will be possible to finalise the project (financial issues form the major obstacle).

After 2000, the first 'museum' in Borne Sulinowo was established through a private initiative. The appearance of such a facility in the urban space signified the rise of new agencies of memory articulation. Its founding was directed at attracting an increased number of visitors, as the town's potential in the context of tourist industry development had already been recognised by that time. The complicated history of Borne Sulinowo and its surroundings became a resource which the museum's owner decided to draw on fully: "The past of this place is what it is, it won't be different" (interview extract). The exhibition is displayed in a backyard storehouse (located on a narrow side street) and supplemented with a couple of artefacts that are placed outside the building. It is divided into Soviet and German sections. Compiled from a variety of objects found by the owner on the site of the post-Soviet base or received from 'friends', the continually expanding collection is not claimed to fulfil any educational function. The museum's founder, whose main aim is to arouse tourist interest, recounts the history of the place and its inhabitants in his own way, sometimes, unfortunately, embellishing the facts. On the one hand this is an example of the commercialisation of local history. On the other hand, the fact that this facility functions in Borne Sulinowo shows the pluralisation and fragmentation of collective memory on the local level.

In 2009, after many years of endeavour, the Museum Chamber was opened on the initiative of the local authorities. The exhibition is presented chronologically. Its largest part is devoted to the German civilian settlement and POW camps that operated during the Second World War. The history of the German garrison and the Soviet military base does not take much space. The chamber is located in a building situated in the very centre of the town, which makes it easily accessible to the visitors. The exhibition strongly emphasises the threads related to the search for continuity with regard to the history of the place. The exhibition's organisers do not try to hide the fact that it is their goal to construct the local identity and to realise educational and promotional objectives.

In 2015 a private Museum of Military History in Borne Sulinowo was registered. Similarly as in the case of the first private initiative, the museum is owned by a local entrepreneur. The offer is first and foremost directed at the enthusiasts of military vehicles and equipment. Within the narrative about the past, it emphasises the military periods, both German and Soviet, although this is accomplished in the very specific context

Photo 5. The first private 'museum' in Borne Sulinowo. Photo by Dominika Czarnecka, 2015.

of military paraphernalia. In comparison to the two previously mentioned museums, this facility stands out due to a high level of specialisation, which is significant, as "[e]very choice – to show this rather than that, to show this in relation to that, to say this about that – is a choice about how to represent" (Hall 1997: 8). Every choice is related to *what* and *how* meanings are produced. Placement of emphasis on the military past of the place is not only related to the orientation at tourist industry development but also to an attempt to include in the narrative the past military period which stands in opposition to the idea of the civilian settlement. This does not, however, alter the fact that in this case, too, the past is becoming commercialised and one of the goals of the private owner is to create a tourist attraction.

Borne Sulinowo's inhabitants rarely visit the museums described above, although in the local environment it is the Museum Chamber that forms the best known and most frequented facility of this type. Every museum attracts a slightly different type of visitor, whereas the exhibition organisers compete rather than cooperate, which is mainly the result of their different aims. Private facilities are mainly directed at profitability; they offer titbits interspersing the narrative about the past much more often, titbits that are not necessarily genuine or verifiable, while the Museum Chamber places emphasis on the presentation of all the periods of the town's history and on providing information which is confirmed by source materials.

The fact that museums function in the urban space of Borne, presenting the local past of the base in various ways, testifies to the multiplicity of intentions, fears, aspirations and visions of numerous agents of memory articulation. Borne Sulinowo's past

and its related material forms, apart from the unique natural and landscape resources, the greatest potential of the town in the context of tourism development.

DIVERSIFICATION OF COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES IN THE STREET SPACE

In the street space treated as a stage, certain narratives are continuously presented, acted out and organised. Due to the short period of time during which Borne has functioned as a civilian town, efforts and aspirations of its young community are best reflected in the annual events and celebrations organised in the public urban space. These celebrations and events written into the annual calendar allow the inhabitants of Borne Sulinowo to renegotiate the narrative about the past actively and to reorganise the public memory space in the process of re-imaging the local community. The history of the former base, its architectural layout and the built environment are elements that influence the formation of practices, their shapes, and the strategies of commemoration and active forgetting.

At the beginning of the 1990s activities in the street space were initiated by the representatives of the local authorities. On the very day when the civilian town's opening was first celebrated, a linden tree was planted on the main street. The gesture was meant to support the strategies hidden behind the choice of a coat of arms for Borne Sulinowo. There was also an allusion to the German civilian settlement with an attempt to discover continuity and an element of symbolic regaining of the town through a return to its civilian beginnings. Over the next two decades public tree planting (of linden, especially) took place repeatedly. In 2014 The Oak of Freedom[15] was planted in Borne Sulinowo as a symbol of longevity and everlasting memory. It was planted to commemorate the first free elections of 1989 and further democratic transformations in Poland. The action was a direct reference to the spontaneous planting of Independence Oaks in the years 1918–1928 to serve as testimonies to Poland winning back its freedom. The reference to the Second Polish Republic period (1918–1939), the traditions of which the communists relentlessly fought against, constituted a symbolic eradication of the communist system. This example demonstrates that although the practices of remembrance occur independently at local and national level, they are often intertwined. In this case, an event that occurred in the local space, reflected the official debate on the post-war past conducted at the national level.

In 1994 the first anniversary of the opening of the civilian town was celebrated on the streets of Borne Sulinowo (*Moreny* 1994). The event was initiated by the town authorities. A year later, the occasion was celebrated jointly with surrounding towns, under the banner "We Have Been Here for 50 Years" (*Moreny* 1995). The event's slogan, referring to the situation of new settlers on the Recovered Territories, was an attempt to inscribe Borne into the narrative of the past, referring to the history of the whole region and an effort to include the young town in regional networks. This type of activity was undoubtedly related to the active agency of those people who moved to Borne Sulinowo in the early 1990s, and who before then had lived in the settlements surrounding the base. In contrast to the newcomers from other parts of the country, they were strongly connected to the region and, moreover, had different experiences and

memories related to the presence of Soviet soldiers in Borne Sulinowo. After the fall of communism, many of those people gained significant influences, both in the context of political and of economic power, and played an important part in the reconstruction of the local memorial landscape and the shaping of the new community. It is largely due to them that creating the local identity and memorial landscape was written into the regional networks and related to the regional identity.

Over time, annual celebrations ceased and were replaced by celebrations of only the round anniversaries.

Gradually, an increasingly large number of entities equipped with active agency began to appear on the urban stage. They often turned out to be more effective than the representatives of the authorities in the process of reformulation of the local calendar of celebrations and events significant for the inhabitants. Thus, in Borne Sulinowo, apart from the state and religious holidays celebrated nationwide, the street space began to witness new events, of a strong touristic and promotional potential. It appears that the specificity of the town and its history had an enormous impact on their creation. As many of this type of event actively and creatively use threads related to the past; such cultural practices serve its continual (re)negotiation.

From among a vast catalogue of events two are worth mentioning as they make Borne Sulinowo stand out from other Polish towns and are organised by entities other than the political authorities. Both events are for the most part organised by local investors. They cooperate with members of local associations (and frequently they are also members of such associations).

At present, the largest event is the summer International Rally of Military Vehicles. It was organised for the first time in 1994.[16] The rally is held on the site of the former military training ground. During the event, references are made to German, Soviet and Polish history. The active (re)negotiation of the narrative about the past during these rallies is demonstrated, for instance, in complaints addressed to the organisers:

> There were a lot of such situations. For example, there was a time when we were playing Russian melodies on stage, songs from the war period. A man in a German uniform came up, produced a pen drive and said: "These are German marches, please play them for me". The guy who was the stage manager said sorry but not during our event. And that man says: "You know your history, don't you? What period do these Russian melodies come from? The 1940s. Weren't the Russians our occupiers?" And, so sorry, we had to find some solution, better or worse, because this gentleman was right in a way. (Interview extract)

The past – thematically limited to the elements of military history – is treated, in accordance with the organisers' intentions, as a tourist attraction, including its commercial and promotional functions. On the other hand, such an event reveals the ambiguity and transformability of meanings, contributing to the (re)construction of the local memorial landscape.

A similar meaning needs to be ascribed to the Labour Day parades, organised in the recent years in the form of satirical events.

Photo 6. The Labour Day parade in the form of a satirical happening. Photo by Dominika Czarnecka, 2015.

In contrast to rallies, the marches take place in the central urban space, mimicking the routes of the former Soviet parades. Because Labour Day with its related street spectacles occupied one of the most important places in the annual calendar of state celebrations during the communist period, after 1989 this tradition was radically abandoned. Borne Sulinowo is presently the only town in Poland that organises Labour Day parades in a new formula.[17] Tourists from various regions of the country participate in this irreverent event, which is also greatly enjoyed and supported by Borne Sulinowo's inhabitants, although Russian-speakers do not participate in Labour Day parades and generally do not get involved in local initiatives.

CONCLUSION

Borne Sulinowo is a special place on the map of Poland. In its initial period, when the history of the place was little known to new settlers, the urban space had to be first 'domesticated' and, as a nationwide, multilevel process of post-communist identity formation was beginning, the local narrative about the past and commemoration practices related to this past were to a significant degree grounded in the official debate on the post-war past conducted at the national level. At the same time, as a result of the decentralisation of power in Poland after 1989, apart from national memory and mass collective memory, in Borne Sulinowo, practically from the moment when the civilian town was established, a third type of collective memory began to take shape. Local memory centres on the local past and is produced by locally conscious individuals who have

the active agency of memory articulation. The process of (re)constructing the memorial landscape at the local level is not combined with an amnesia related to difficult elements of the Polish communist past but rather with emphasising the ambiguity and transformability of meanings, embodied in the practices of commemoration and the related practices of active forgetting. Additionally, the uniqueness of Borne Sulinowo against the background of the post-1989 Polish memorial landscape results from the necessity to take into consideration the 'foreign' elements (German and Soviet), often challenging, in the narratives about the local past. It forces, in a sense, attempts to construct the narrative in the spirit of openness and tolerance, with consideration for the perspective of the 'other'. Diversification of cultural practices at a local level constitutes not only a necessary counterbalance but also a serious challenge to the black and white narratives about the past constructed on the national level. Initiatives and activities of the new inhabitants of the former post-Soviet base, influencing the construction of the local memorial landscape, form a part of the foundation for forging local identity. In Borne Sulinowo both these processes are observable *in statu nascendi*.

NOTES

1 Collective or community identity is understood as the image that a group has of itself and with which its members associate themselves (Assmann 2008 [2005]: 146).

2 Agents are the subjects of action, and the agency is defined as the capability to be the source and originator of acts (Rapport and Overing 2000: 1).

3 Memory is understood as "a culturally mediated material practice that is activated by embodied acts and semantically dense objects" (Nadia Seremetakis, quoted by Svašek 2007: 246).

4 Practice – a non-ritual action that is understood "to be the expression of intentional states arising from the performing agent" (Whitehouse 2005: 91).

5 I conducted field research in cooperation with Dagnosław Demski from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The field research was conducted in Borne Sulinowo in February, May and August 2015 (in total, over a month in the field). Over a dozen in-depth interviews and numerous conversations were conducted with the town's inhabitants. The respondents were, among others: representatives of the local self-government; private investors; organisers of museums, Labour Day parades, military rallies; members of the Pensioners Association; inhabitants of the surrounding villages who remember the stay of the Soviet soldiers at the base. The interviews were conducted in offices, pubs, museums, and private homes. New respondents were recruited through the technique of snowball sampling. Apart from the interviews, participant observation was used (for example, the author visited the museums, participated in the Labour Day parade and in the summer military vehicles rally). Research into the local press was conducted in the town library. Additional data was collected from the materials collected from a private archive made available to the author by the manager of the Museum Room.

6 Much information quoted in this subsection has been also mentioned in Demski and Czarnecka 2015: 98–101.

7 Officially, the process of withdrawal of the Russian Army began with the exit of the tactical ballistic missile brigade from Borne Sulinowo on April 8, 1991. The last Russian soldiers left Poland on September 18, 1993.

8 The model of independent, secret settlements connected to military garrisons originated in the Soviet Union. They were called ZATO (*zakrytye administrativno-territorial'nye obrazovaniya* – 'Closed Cities').

9 In the period when Soviet forces were stationed at the base, it was inhabited by approximately 15,000 people in total. Staff turnover was regular: privates every two years, officers every five years, civilian employees every five years or more often. Since 1992 there were several phases of immigration. In 1993 the number of the town's inhabitants amounted to 376, in 1998 – 2,870, in 2000 – 3,768, in 2003 – 4,031 (Strategia Rozwoju Miasta i Gminy Borne Sulinowo na lata 2004–2019). From 1993 on, people from various regions of Poland began to settle in Borne Sulinowo. The majority of the settlers came from the western and northern provinces. The major reason for moving to Borne Sulinowo was economic in nature (mostly cheap housing) or related to its natural and landscape assets. In 2014 Borne Sulinowo was inhabited by a total of 4,903 people (Borne Sulinowo w liczbach). At present, the town's main problem is the high unemployment rate. Tourism forms the fastest developing sector of economy.

10 'Recovered Territories' is a term used to denote north-western parts of Poland that were included as part of the Polish territories following the Potsdam Conference in 1945.

11 All interview fragments quoted in the text come from the interviews conducted with the inhabitants of Borne Sulinowo in 2015.

12 The symbol of the swastika has survived to the present day on the front wall of the Officers' Club. One of the formerly most beautiful buildings, the Club gradually fell into ruin during the period of Polish rule. As the Germans had partly obscured the symbol with a bas-relief of a horseman, at first glance the symbol is not easily visible from the perspective of the passer-by. This was the only swastika not destroyed by the Soviets, who routinely covered them with plagues bearing their own symbol of the hammer and sickle.

13 Poland joined the European Union in 2004.

14 For detailed information on the subject of the town's revitalisation programme, including the Three Cultures Park, see Lokalny Program Rewitalizacji Bornego Sulinowa na lata 2004–2020. The fact that the Three Cultures Park project is realised with the use of European Union funds is not without significance.

15 It is no coincidence that Borne Sulinowo was among the 25 Polish towns chosen by the state authorities to implement this action.

16 In 2014 the summer rally had approximately 50,000 participants. At present it is the largest rally of military vehicles in Poland.

17 In August 2015, during further interviews, some inhabitants of Borne Sulinowo admitted that more and more neighbouring villages were beginning to imitate the formula of Labour Day parades initiated in the former post-Soviet base. The main reason for the increasing popularity of this type of event in the region is their attractiveness for tourists.

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