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City-Text as Mapping a Territory: "Polish" Streets in Berlin

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Abstract
The aim of the article is to analyse, in a diachronic perspective, the street names in today's Berlin whose bases are geographical names referring to places in contemporary Poland. The analysis reveals a purposeful city-text that supports the nation-building narrative: either by mapping the state's actual geography at the moment of the name's bestowal, or by including the territories claimed (literally or metaphorically), beyond the current borders at the time of the naming. However, the degree to which these street names and the intention behind them are decipherable today remains questionable. Once meaningful for their original creators, today they are partly or completely semantically oblique to the general public, as evidenced by their contemporary reception.

Keywords: city-text; geographical street names; commemorative street names; Berlin; Poland

Introduction

The article aims to analyse and compare contemporary Berlin's street (and square) names whose bases are the geographical names of places situated in contemporary Poland, such as *Stettiner Strasse, Breslauer Platz.* These names of streets have grown in the cityscape over decades of the long 19th century, as well as in the interwar period and even after 1945. Street names whose bases are geographical names are sometimes called geographical street names, and I will henceforth use that term, specifying them as "Polish", since they refer to places within the confines of contemporary Poland.

It is sometimes said that naming is claiming, in other words – it is an act of symbolic appropriation. More specifically, for well over two decades scholars interested in the field known as critical toponymy have focused on how the governments in many countries "have manipulated place names – particularly commemorative street names – to advance reinvented notions of national identity and history" (Alderman 2008). Although geographical street names are not typically regarded as commemorative, they frequently serve that function. Thus a close analysis of the successive sets of Berlin's geographical street names at pivotal points in history reveals a symbolic appropriation that started well before the First World War and continued even after the end of the Second World War. At the same time, it is also a story of how the reflection in street names of Prussian (and later German) history is by some forgotten, by others misrepresented, even though to some section of the society the reality behind them – the lost German East – is still readable and vivid as part of their personal or their family's history (Borchardt and Patzke 2018).

All this will be shown as "readable" in the Polish geographical street names of Berlin. Since street names, also known in onomastics as *hodonyms*, "confer meaning on urban space" (Ferguson 1988, 386), they jointly form a city-text that can be "read". The present article is thus also an attempt at a geopolitical reading of the commemorative city-text in a diachronic perspective. The choice of Berlin is not accidental: as the capital of Prussia and later of the unified German Empire, it epitomized the power of the state and therefore it was the most deserving venue for the mapping of the national geography in street names, the idea popular in Europe since the 19th century (cf. Benjamin 1999, 519-520; Kooloos 2010, 31-36).

First I will briefly discuss commemorative urban naming, effected first and foremost via the names of streets. I will then deal in more detail with the concept of geographical street names. Afterwards, the historical background will be outlined to aid the reader in understanding the context. Next the methodology adopted will be presented, followed by the results of the analysis. Finally, these results will be discussed and conclusions presented. A reference will also be made to a German-Polish artistic project implemented in 2015, which highlighted the existence of nine streets in Berlin referencing towns in contemporary Poland that before WW2 belonged to Germany. A glaring discrepancy between this number and the actual number of such street names will be revealed and commented upon.

Commemorative Street Names in the City-Text

Defined as early as 1990 by Maoz Azaryahu as "any set of street names in a particular city" (1990, 33), the notion of "city-text" has been present in literature for well over three decades now. As Rose-Redwood observed, "[t]he metaphor of the city-as-text, or the *city-text*, has become one of the mainstays of works on the political geography of street naming, and the notion of 'reading' a city's politics through its street names has acquired an almost canonical status within the literature on street naming" (Rose-Redwood 2008, 882). The scope of the term varies, with some scholars focusing chiefly on the names of streets (Ferguson 1988; Azaryahu 1996; Oto-Peralías 2018), and others including all sorts of memorials erected in the city (Palonen 2008, Šakaja and Stanić 2018), or even the aural aspects of naming (Kearns and Berg 2002). An important aspect of the interpretation of urban signage as text is related to the idea of city-text as a palimpsest, one which is constantly rewritten and reinterpreted (Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu 2018b, 8). Finally, the city-text metaphor could be understood in a very literal sense: thus a textual approach to place is advocated by Düzgün (2021, 5-6), who discovers the increasing prominence of the reader – in the face of "the death of an author", famously announced by Roland Barthes in the 1960s – as applicable also to the reader of the city-text.

Traditional names of streets (including also squares and bridges) once used to be anchored in the surrounding urban reality, jointly forming a "guide to the city" (Samsonowicz 2001). Thus *Baker Street* would inform one where the bakers were living; *Church Street* would lead to, or pass by, a church; *Stinky Street* might, perhaps, forewarn one in advance of the likely unpleasant smells in the vicinity.

By contrast, commemorative naming of city streets and other urban objects is a relatively recent phenomenon, located on the timeline – dependent on a country – between early 17th and 20th centuries (Bouvier 2007, 80-81; Handke 1992, 72-74). It basically started with the advent of more or less officially appointed name-regulating bodies, instead of the earlier usage-governed naming, and constituted one of the attempts to create "a legible people" (Scott 1998, see also Mask 2020, 6-9, 81-85). It is hardly surprising that its beginnings coincide with the invention of nations, nation-states, and nationalism in the modern sense of the word (Anderson 2006). Thus it became possible to use arbitrary street names, unrelated to urban reality, for the purposes of political representation and nation-building (Azaryahu 1996, 313-314).

The study of commemorative street naming may be conducted within the framework of various disciplines, including (though not limited to) urban studies, cultural geography, policy studies,

history proper, or cultural and memory studies. Last but not least, it might be one of the research topics for onomastics – a study area understood either as a sub-field of linguistics, or of other scholarly disciplines, such as history or historical geography. Due to their obvious educational function in the service of the state, commemorative names also constitute signs that, ideally, should be relatively semantically transparent to their recipients if they are to perform their function satisfactorily – thus also semiotics might be called into question. In brief, the multitude of ways in which urban naming might be seen today is directly related to the fact that place ceased to be a neutral "unproblematic geographical concept" as it once seemed to be (Azaryahu 2011a, 32; see also Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu 2010). The ideological load implicit in urban naming is widely recognized now, as well as studied in the spirit of critical toponymy (see among others Azaryahu and Kook 2002; Eller, Hackl, and L′upták 2008; Palonen 2008, 2015; Berg & Vuolteenaho 2009; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu 2018a; Mácha, Krtička, and Lassak 2018; Basik 2020; Rusu 2020 and 2021; Buchstaller et al. 2023). Commemorative street names most often honour individuals, but they might also immortalize historic events, or whole groups of people, such as organizations or military units. As indicated by Gärtner et al. (1995, 8-9), while commemorating people in urban names began in Berlin relatively early (on the city map of 1737 three streets reference members of the royal family of the time), street names that feature the dates of historic events appeared in Germany's capital only after the end of WW2.

Geographical Street Names: Overlooked, Yet Potent in Nation-Building

Geographical names comprise the names of cities, towns, even small villages, as well as regions, countries, rivers, seas, islands, or mountains. Consequently, street names that refer to such geographical objects, such as *Oxford Street*, *Waterloo Bridge*, *Michigan Avenue*, *Kongostrasse*, *Place des Alpes*, *Via Trento*, etc., might be called geographical street names. While Gnatiuk and Melnychuk (2020) use the term geographical urbanonyms, it must be remembered that urbanonyms are by some scholars, especially Slavicists, understood as an umbrella term for all names in urban space, i.e. not only street names (hodonyms[1]) but also those of districts and housing estates, squares, cemeteries, bridges, monuments, even bus or tram stops, as well as individual buildings, both residential and public, e.g. shops, cinemas, churches, institutions, etc. (Kalousková 2021, 190-191).

Street names have the potential "to incorporate an official version of history into such spheres of human activity that seems to be entirely devoid of direct political manipulation" (Azaryahu 1997, 481). This is especially true of geographical street names. A few scholars acknowledge their ideological load. Dieckmann (1995, 11) invokes an opinion that streets commemorating people are as prone to renaming as those named after a distant geographic location. Post and Alderman (2014, 84) draw attention to US streets such as Berlin Street or Bremen Street, renamed during WW1 in reaction to anti-German sentiment. Gnatiuk and Melnychuk (2020), on the one hand, note a higher presence of geographical urbanonyms in Ukraine than in former socialist countries of Central Europe, on the other – they discover in the mapping of the foreign places referenced by street names in three Ukrainian cities (Lviv, Kyiv and Dnipro) a clear indicator of the de-Russification process or its absence.

Nevertheless, the commemorative potential of geographical street names generally tends to be overlooked (even where they are commemorative explicitly), and this is perhaps due to their presumed *a priori* political/ideological "innocence". In consequence, such names frequently remain intact in turbulent times, while other types of commemorative names undergo renaming – especially those that honour individuals. In relation to Berlin, the focus of the research done so far was mostly on the commemoration of persons (Azaryahu 1988), on post-WW2 renamings (Azaryahu 2011b) or on Communist propaganda (Azaryahu 1986, 1997), not on geographical street names. Their potential in Berlin thus remains largely untapped.

There is an inherent ambiguity about geographical street names, concerning their relationship to commemorative naming (cf. Handke 1998, 322). On the one hand, many indeed are ideology-innocent: rooted in the idea of street directionality (they lead to the place that their names reference), immortalizing settlement names from the time prior to the incorporation of a particular area into the city, or following geography-based theme naming, where a number of streets close to one another are all consistently named e.g. after a country's cities, rivers, mountains, etc. (cf. Verheyen 1997, 46; Perono Cacciafoco and Tuang 2018, 16-17, 19; Kooloos 2010; Jacobs 2016). On the other hand, however, a certain proportion might be understood as explicitly and purposefully commemorative. They might, for instance, refer to the sites of battles or other historic events, such as peace treaties, a case in point being Versailles streets in several cities of Europe. *Islandijos gatvė* ('Iceland Street') in Vilnius owes its moniker to Iceland being the first country to officially recognize the independence of Lithuania after the dissolution of the USSR. *Place des Vosges* in Paris immortalizes not merely one of France's departments, but specifically the one whose inhabitants were the first to pay taxes to finance a campaign of the Revolutionary army. The 1938 bestowal of *Braunaer Strasse* in Berlin commemorated the birthday of Hitler, born in Braunau (Meyer 2006, 130). The very name of a Parisian bridge, *Pont du Jena* (occasioned by the 1806 French victory over Prussian forces), provoked in July 1815 an attempt to blow it up on the orders of Feldmarschall Blücher (Gärtner et al. 1995, 22).

The implicit commemorative role of many geographical street names is also revealed in the case of renamings. After the end of WW2, the streets of Breslau previously named after the German towns that in 1945 became Polish had their names merely translated (thus, for instance, *Schweidnitzer Strasse* became *ul. Świdnicka*, since the Polish-language equivalent of Schweidnitz was Świdnica), while those named after a town or city in post-war Germany, such as *Berliner Strasse*, *Greifswalder Strasse*, disappeared altogether (Thum 2003). Another similar example is offered by Fabiszak et al. (2021), who describe the 1920 renaming of a street in Zbąszyń (a town in the west of Poland) – from German *Neutomischlerstrasse* 'Nowy Tomyśl Street' (after a town of Nowy Tomyśl, 17 km away from Zbąszyń) to *ul. Warszawska* ('Warsaw Street'). In contrast with the nearby Nowy Tomyśl, Warsaw – the capital of Poland – is nearly four hundred kilometers away. "In this sense, the name change can be considered ideological as it inscribes a new national geography into the cityscape", the authors conclude, explaining: "Before 1920, Warsaw was in the Kingdom of Poland, part of the Russian empire, while Zbąszyń was in Provinz Posen, part of Prussia, and thus in a different state altogether" (Fabiszak et al. 2021).

Geographical street names may even have their economic dimension. Thus the divide between low-income residents and the well-to-do ones in Cosmo City, a large housing development in the Greater Johannesburg area (South Africa), is matched by the street naming scheme that to the former assigns the streets named after cities or states of Africa, whereas the latter reside on streets that commemorate the states of the USA. While the intention of the developer may well have been the reinforcement of local identity, the side effect appears to be the idea that Africa equals poverty (Williams 2016, 72-73). In a similar manner, geographical street names might promote the gentrification of an area, as was probably the case with the streets of a pre-WW2 social settlement for the unemployed in Poznań, which only in the 21st century, in a bout of wishful thinking perhaps, acquired monikers related to affluent regions in France, Italy and Spain.

Street names jointly form a dense *city-text* (Azaryahu 1990; Palonen 2008); this is why in studying geographical street names, in many cases a larger part of the onomasticon should be considered rather than an isolated name, so as to fully identify the context of naming or renaming. Geographical street names, considered jointly (at least within one theme area), form a kind of mental map, not only by virtue of what they include, but also of what they *do not*. Mental maps thus created might differ from city to city within the same state (as aptly shown for the Netherlands by Kooloos 2010). The structure of such a map is not identical with that of the original territory that it maps, but, rather, constitutes its enhanced, condensed hyper-version, concentrated around the

iconic foci of remembrance, and forsaking the redundant unnamed (or not sufficiently cogently named) space between them.

The very choice of these foci – that is to say, of the places to be commemorated in street names – speaks volumes about the narration woven by the name-givers. These foci enjoy double onomastic status: on the one hand, as worthy of naming *per se*, in contrast with the multitude of nameless entities on the territory; on the other, as worthy of being singled out from among other named spaces from the territory and then being transferred onto the map as a meaningful representation of that territory. Moreover, I argue that these foci may represent the territory in two functions, depending on the status of the territory at the moment of "extracting the map from the territory" (that is to say, of naming a street): either as building blocks of a nation-building (or nation-reinforcing) strategy – if the territory in question belongs to the state (especially as a new acquisition), with an imagined community (Anderson 2006) as its target; or as loci of memory of lost lands (nostalgic naming), if the territory in question belongs to the state no more.

Historical Background

The city of Berlin has long been a palimpsest[2], onto which successive eras continued to superimpose further layers of meaning. As such, it serves as a prime example of a city in which "urban namescapes – the 'city-text' – are written, erased, and rewritten to reflect the shifting political powers" (Rusu 2021). First it was the capital of Prussia, since the 1870s – of the unified German state. Until the end of the 18th century the responsibility for street naming in Berlin rested generally with the real estate owners, with the process supervised by the Magistrat of Berlin. The names thus produced may have been descriptive, directional, randomly chosen, or occasionally related to the names of the proprietors or their family members – but seldom controversial (Verheyen 1997, 45-46; Demps 1995, 18-19). At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, however, these modes of naming were felt by many to be outdated and not in keeping with the spirit of the times, nor reflecting the increasing importance of the bourgeoisie. At the same time, the end of the Napoleonic era was also the time of the heavier politicisation of urban naming:

> From then on the magistrate, together with the city's Police Presidium (*Polizeipräsidium*), could only make suggestions and submit these to the Prussian Interior Ministry. The minister, in turn, had to obtain the monarch's approval. So it is not surprising that royal and princely names, as well as those of military heroes and others who had rendered significant service to the state began to appear as street names with much increased frequency. (Verheyen 1997, 46)

Even though the homeowners and residents could – and in fact did – effectively influence street naming choices (cf. Demps 1995, 19-23), the final decision in the form of a *Königliche Kabinettsorder* (Royal Cabinet Order) was nevertheless necessary. In the Weimar Republic, the final decision in urban naming remained the prerogative of the Minister of the Interior. In 1920 a considerable enlargement of the city took place, with the incorporation of several former satellite townships, which resulted in some renamings to avoid name doubling.

Under the Nazi dictatorship, when the National Socialist party took over the role earlier played by the Ministry of the Interior, street-name changes that took place were considerable. However, these changes were also relatively short-lived and were mostly reversed after the end of WW2, at least in East Berlin (Ladd 2018, 208-215; Lietz 2005), even if the details of these reversals may have been complex:

> It is difficult to revive historical German street names without raising delicate foreign-policy issues. In the case of Dimitroffstrasse, named after Georgi Dimitroff, […] later head of the Comintern and of Communist Bulgaria, [Christian Democrat politician, Herwig Erhard] Hasse decreed a return to the old name of Danziger Strasse, one of many streets named after

formerly German cities now in Poland (and now known by their Polish names). The GDR had officially acknowledged the loss of this eastern territory in 1950; the Federal Republic did so in 1990. Citizens of Gdansk might not see the distinction between the desire to restore a traditional street name and a desire to regain the city once known as Danzig. When Hasse changed the name of Wilhelm-Pieck-Strasse in 1994, he had more cautiously declined to restore the previous names of the street's two segments, which had honored Germany's annexation of the French provinces Alsace and Lorraine in 1871. […] Did French sensibilities weigh more heavily than Polish ones? More likely, Hasse had an ear for the sensibilities of nationalist voters still bitter over the loss of Germany's eastern territories. (Ladd 2018, 212-213)

The renamings in the first post-war years in Berlin were far more modest than originally envisioned. For instance, the original list of renaming proposals, discussed in a city government meeting on 28 September 1946, suggested that as many as 1795 streets out of the total of nearly nine thousand should be renamed (including the 576 new street names motivated by geographical names). Eventually, however, the actual number of renamings was under ten per cent of what had been planned (Azaryahu 2011b, 489, 490; Meyer 2006, 132–136). The East and West Berlin since 1948 diverged in their geographical street renaming politics (Azaryahu 1986, 589-593), with the East Berlin authorities effecting far more street-name changes. In 1951 street renamings in East Berlin impacted chiefly the Prussian, militaristic commemorations, of which geographical street names – e.g. those referencing the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 – were only a part. In 1974, eighteen East Berlin streets that had been named after places east of the Oder-Neisse Line acquired names commemorating anti-Nazi heroes, perhaps under the pressure of the Polish government (Azaryahu 1986, 601) and in line with the redefined territory of post-war East Germany.

Data and Method

The names of streets of contemporary Berlin have been analysed with regard to the presence of geographical names in their bases, searching specifically for those geographical names whose referents are to be found in contemporary Poland. The date of name bestowal has been established, sometimes also additional information concerning e.g. a particular reason for naming (such as an anniversary related to a battle site), as well as the theme nest within which the street name is contained, wherever applicable. There are more than 9,500 streets and squares in Berlin and the selection had to be painstakingly done by hand, especially considering the structure of a German street name (for example, *Königsteinstrasse* might reference either one of many places named Königstein, or a person by the surname of Königstein). Data collection was done using the online database (Kauperts…) in 2022–2023, and the literature on the topic (Mende and Lais 2004; Gärtner et al. 1995; Gauglitz 2016) was consulted too in case of doubt.

Sorted into groups according to the year of their first bestowal, the findings were next depicted graphically on maps which visualise the geographical location of the referents of contemporary Berlin street names: those bestowed pre-WW1, in the interwar period (WW2 including), and post-WW2. I decided to present graphically mostly the settlements and individual mountain peaks (which were the most numerous, but also the most unambiguous with regard to their inclusion in a particular state), to the exclusion of some rivers, mountain ranges and regions that transcend state boundaries. A separate map (Fig. 4) visualises the places referenced in street names according to their location in either former East Berlin or West Berlin.

Results

There are jointly as many as 336 names of streets in contemporary Berlin that reference place names in today's Poland. Most commemorated locations are big cities (Wrocław, Katowice, Szczecin,

Koszalin, Tarnowskie Góry) and their parts (such as a street in Gdańsk, a housing district in Tczew, a part of Szczecin), as well as smaller towns (Sopot, Kwidzyn, Elbląg, Kołobrzeg, Starogard Gdański, Połczyn Zdrój), villages (Dusocin, Zbrachlin, Nowa Wieś Pałucka, Rąbiń, Hopowo, Wieleń Północny) and even individual buildings (such as Dwór Srebrniki 'Srebrniki Manor' in Gdańsk). Occasionally street names are also motivated by the names of rivers (10 rivers in Poland), lakes (Śniardwy), or mountain peaks (Śnieżka, Szrenica). Sometimes the type of object is not clear – for instance, Chojnik might be both a mountain peak and a castle atop it. Some locations appear in street names twice, a case in point being Kołobrzeg in Bezirk Mitte (1875) and in Marzahn-Hellersdorf (1920), or Tychy in Pankow (1926) and in Marzahn-Hellersdorf as a partner district (2002) – the latter, i.e. a celebration of partnership with a Polish town or city, is an absolute exception in Berlin's cityscape. It must be remembered that before 1920 Berlin was composed of six inner districts only, while Schöneberg, Köpenick, Neukölln, etc. were independent towns with their own network of street names, which resulted in some street-name doubling, sometimes later corrected by the city authorities. It also happens that a location is honoured more than once: as a city and as one of its districts or even streets, since at the time of nomination it was a separate settlement.

Seventy of these streets first obtained their contemporary names before WW1 (see Fig. 1). While the reason behind their naming in the case of some of them might have been related to the origin of economic migrants to Berlin of the time (Silesia, East Prussia and other regions), it should be borne in mind that it is rather anachronistic to apply the standards of today's democratic name-giving to them. The naming process at the time was typically top-to-bottom, approved by the Royal Cabinet Order, corresponding to the state priorities. For instance, the small village of Dłużek in Low Silesia was commemorated as the birthplace of Empress Auguste Viktoria von Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg (Rada 2015). Evidently, as Dieckmann (1995, 10) will have it, whether somebody (in this case: a settlement) receives a street in their honour, and whether they retain it, is a matter not only of history but also of chance, albeit of an often significant chance.

In Fig. 2, the Polish locations are mapped that survive to this day in 220 street names bestowed in Berlin in the interwar period. (It must be remembered that the locations that apppear in street names bestowed before WW1, which were presented in Fig. 1, as a rule do not reappear in Fig. 2, except only for the few cases when a new street referenced the same location as in the pre-WW1 period; the same principle governs post-WW2 names in Fig. 3 *vis-à-vis* all previous bestowals visualised in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.) The places commemorated in interwar street name bestowals often map the territories that Germany lost in the aftermath of WW1. A direct consequence of the peace treaties of Versailles, Saint-Germain, and Trianon, as well as of the new borders, was the emergence of bigger or smaller German-speaking minorities in Poland, the Baltic states, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, Belgium, Denmark, France, and Italy, though disintegration of the originally culturally, later also ethnically defined nation of the Germans and their state system was already a controversial topic in Germany in the first half of the 19th century (Münz and Ohliger 2003, 370).

All this shows in Berlin's urban naming of the time. Thus in the district of Köpenick, for instance, over twenty streets named in 1928 and in the 1930s were reminiscent of the places lost to Poland after the end of WW1. The abundance of new "Polish" monikers was matched by the big numbers of those referring to German-populated territories in other European countries.

Of note is also the area in and around the city of Danzig. Even though in the interwar years this area, known as the Free City of Danzig, was not part of the German state but a formally independent territory under the auspices of the League of Nations, there are about thirty references to the area in contemporary Berlin's street names. Twenty-two of these names were bestowed in the years 1918-1945. The 1940s bestowals in Reinickendorf, which account for approximately a half of those referencing places in the Free City of Danzig, are especially interesting, since some of them immortalise even very small places, such as Rosenort (Rakowe Pole), today a settlement of 140 inhabitants, or Nickelswalde (Mikoszewo), an otherwise obscure village, with a population of under eight hundred.
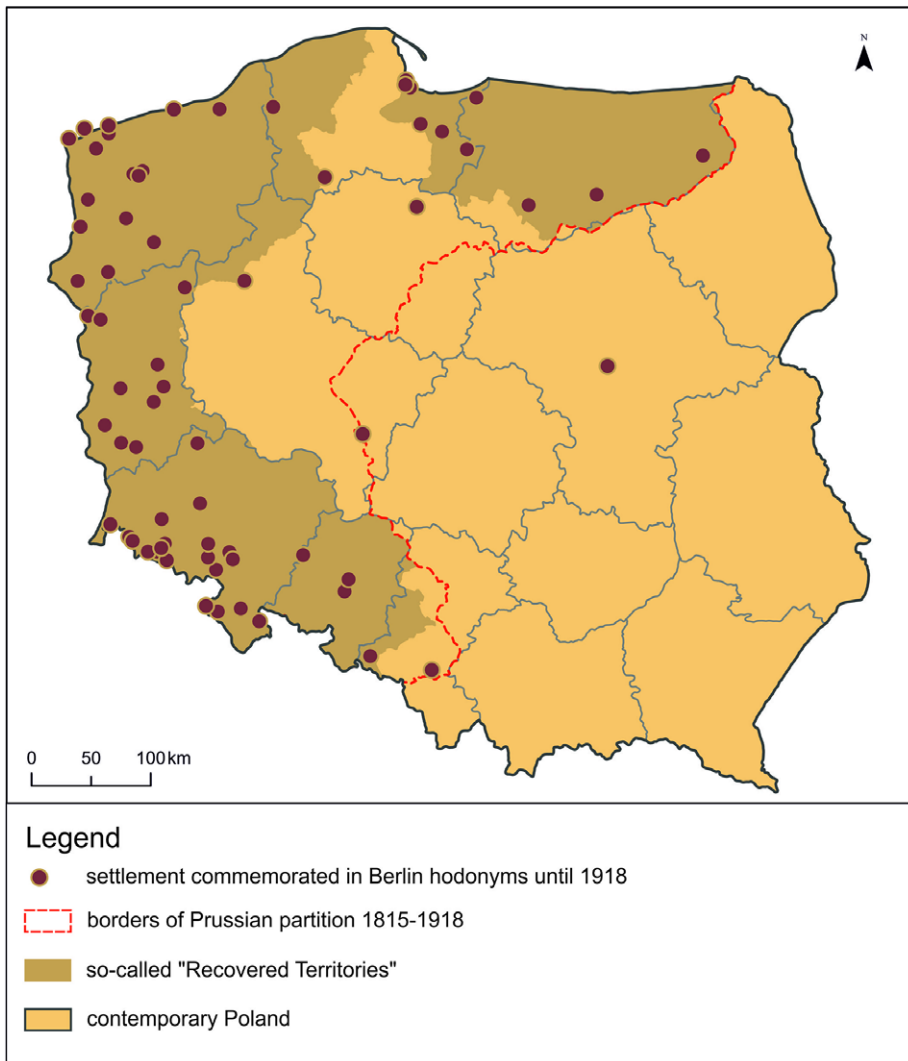
Figure 1. Settlements Commemorated in Berlin Street Names (Hodonyms) Bestowed until 1918.

The remaining "Polish" bestowals present in today's Berlin go back to post-WW2 years. There are 47 of them (see Fig. 3). Interestingly, some reiterate earlier, to this day existent commemorations, such as Sopot, Wałbrzych, or Legnica, which leads to naming doublets (i.e. nowadays there are two streets in Berlin in whose base there is the same locality found in contemporary Poland). Sometimes they add as a namesake a smaller location included within the present city (Jelenia Góra, Szczecin) – or, conversely, add as a namesake the whole city where the earlier commemoration referenced its part only (as in the case of Elbląg). Among the post-WW2 bestowals, only one was made in former East Berlin, and it honoured a partnership with the Silesian town of Tychy (2002). Interestingly, this street name was based on the Polish form of the placename (Tychyerstrasse), while there also exists in contemporary Berlin (in the district of Pankow) a street by the name Tichauerstrasse, going back to 1926, where the German-language form of the placename is used. Tychyerstrasse is in fact the only "Polish" street in contemporary Berlin which makes use of the Polish-language geographical name.
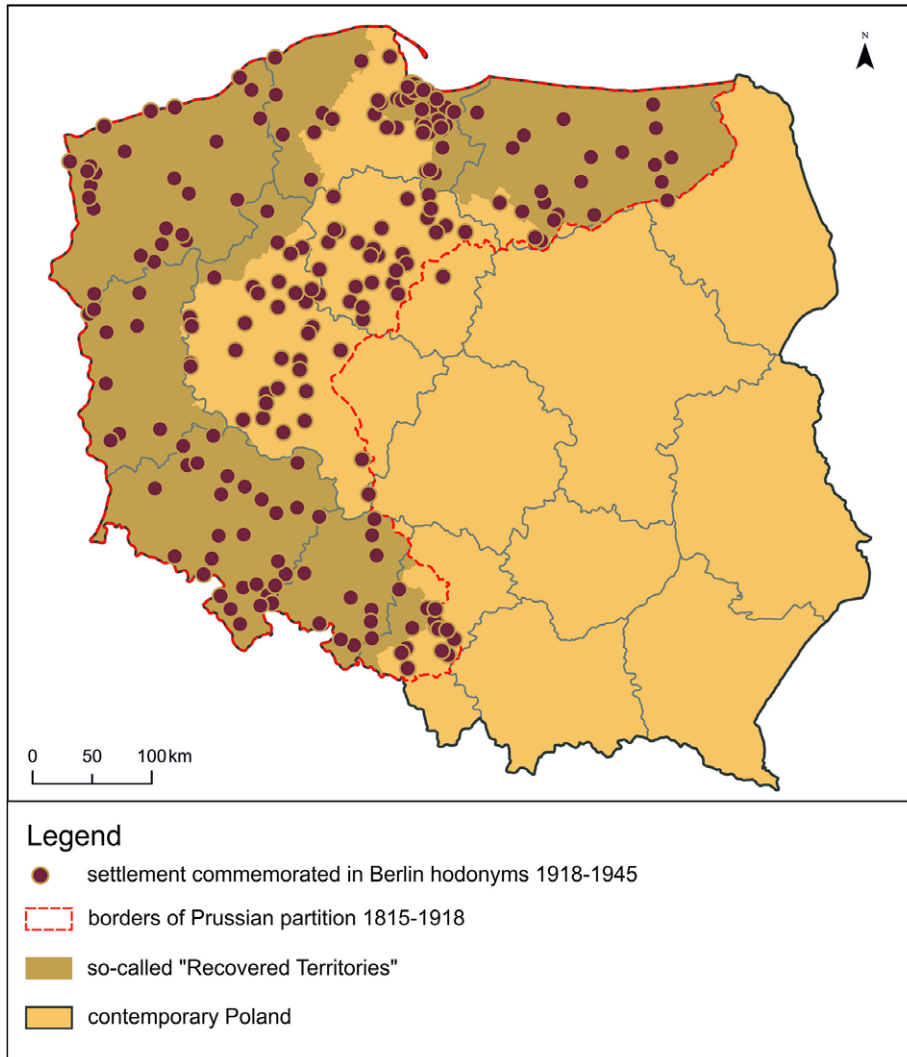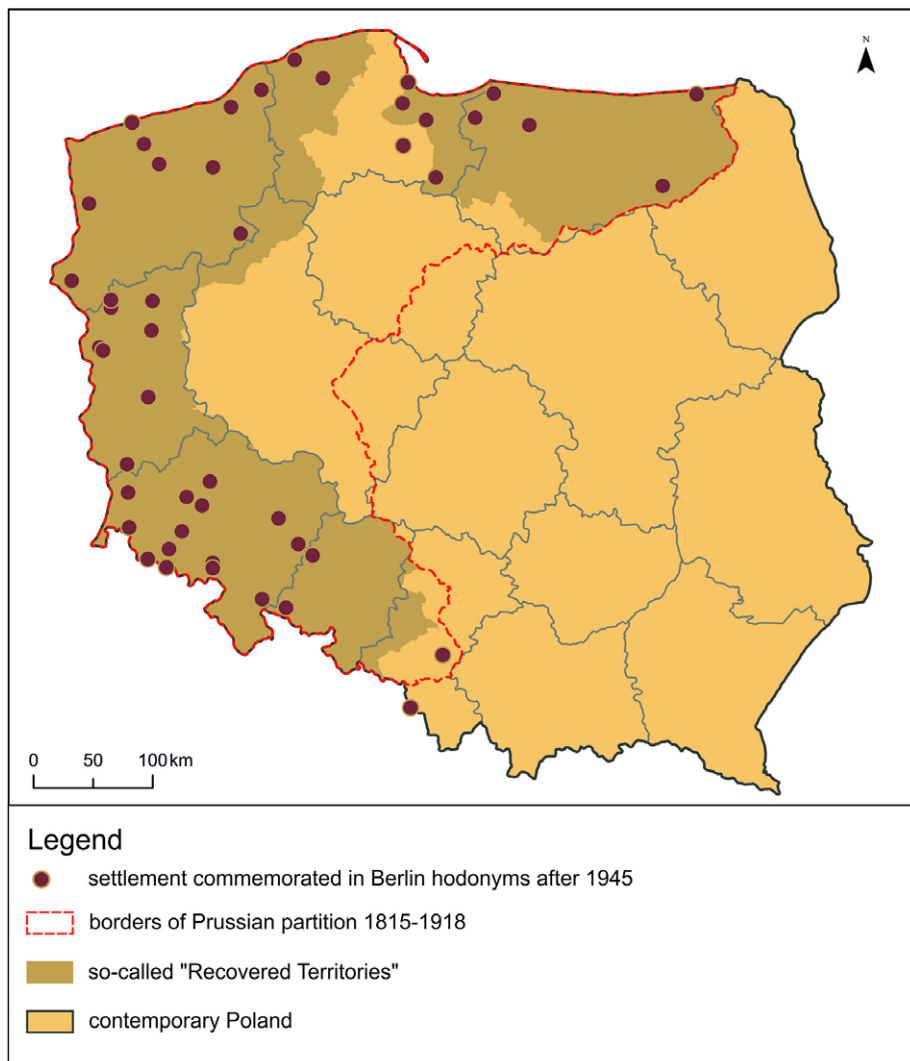
Figure 2. Settlements Commemorated in Berlin Street Names (Hodonyms) Bestowed in the Years 1918-1945.

Overall, the emergence of these new street names in West Germany followed the suggestions formulated in 1953:

Manches veränderte die deutsche Erinnerungslandschaft nachhaltig, wie etwa die in Folge der Richtlinien des Deutschen Städtetags vom 13. 12. 1953 für die Pflege ostdeutscher Kulturwerte und für die kulturelle Betreuung der Heimatvertriebenen umbenannten Straßennamen: In jeder Gemeinde sollte „wenigstens eine bedeutsame Straße oder ein bedeutsamer Platz oder ein öffentliches Gebäude (insbesondere Schulen) oder ein Teil eines öffentlichen Gebäudes (Säle) einen an Ostdeutschland erinnernden Namen tragen (Namen einer ostdeutschen Persönlichkeit, Namen eines ostdeutschen Ortes oder einer ostdeutschen Landschaft)".

Some things permanently changed the German landscape of remembrance, such as the street names renamed according to the guidelines of the German Association of Cities of 13 December 1953 to maintain the East German cultural values and to offer cultural support

Figure 3. Settlements Commemorated in Berlin Street Names (Hodonyms) Bestowed after 1945.

for those displaced: In every community there should be "at least one significant street, square or public building (especially a school) or some part of a public building (a hall) that would bear a name reminiscent of East Germany (name of an East German personality, of an East German place or an East German landscape)". (Hahn and Hahn 2003, 344, own translation)

The implementation of these recommendations was swift in the 1950s and 1960s, with the proliferation of symbolic commemorations in the cityscape, in line with the observation by Alderman that "[b]y expanding the scale of memory or increasing the geographic extent of commemoration, social actors and groups hope to make images of the past retrievable or available to a larger array of publics" (Alderman 2003, 165). These bestowals had a pronounced aim:

Kaum eine Stadt oder Gemeinde verzichtete auf die Benennung der neuen Straßen nach Städten, Regionen oder Landschaften, die ehemaliges deutsches Siedlungsgebiet waren (Danziger Straße, Breslauer Straße, Masurenweg, Schlesische Straße, Ostpreußen-allee

etc.). Diese Namensgebung im öffentlichen Raum diente in der Regel nicht bloß der Erinnerung an territoriale Verluste und an die Vertreibung, sondern konnte auch als Anspruch auf eine spätere Revision gesehen werden. Doch zugleich manifestierten die Siedlungen, in denen diese Straßen und Plätze lagen, mehr als alles andere die anfangs eher unfreiwillige, später kaum noch diskutierte Akzeptanz des Status quo. […] Das Verschwinden der realen Orte aus dem erfahrbaren Raum der Deutschen wurde durch ihre Symbolisierung und Erinnerung im öffentlichen Raum kompensiert. Parallel dazu verschwanden in den Städten der DDR fast alle Straßennamen mit Bezügen zu Danzig, Schlesien, Ostpreußen oder Siebenbürgen.

Hardly any city or municipality refrained from naming the new streets after cities, regions or landscapes that were former German settlement areas (Danziger Straße, Breslauer Straße, Masurenweg, Schlesische Straße, Ostpreußen-allee, etc.). This naming in public space usually served not only to commemorate territorial losses and expulsions, but could also be seen as a claim for later revision. But at the same time, the settlements in which these streets and squares were located manifested more than anything else the acceptance of the status quo, which was initially rather involuntary and later hardly discussed. […] The disappearance of real places from the experiential space of Germans was compensated for by their symbolization and memory in public space. At the same time, almost all street names with references to Danzig, Silesia, East Prussia or Transylvania disappeared in the cities of the German Democratic Republic. (Münz and Ohliger 2003, 381, own translation)

This might imply that after WW2 "Polish" street names were typical of West Germany only, whereas in East Germany the names reminiscent of Ostgebiete underwent renamings. It may indeed have been so in the case of the few biggest cities (Breslau, Danzig) as the basis for street names. There were also specific renaming waves – as, for instance, in 1974 in Prenzlauer Berg, when the street names disappeared that were referencing former East Prussian and West Prussian localities, after 1945 taken over by Poland, including Bartenstein (Bartoszyce in Polish), Goldap (Gołdap), Rastenburg (Kętrzyn), Deutsch-Krone (Wałcz), Schneidemühl (Piła), Schönlanke (Trzcianka) and others (Wolterstädt and Zech 1995, 335). The majority of geographical street names nevertheless remained. In fact, as the present research indicated, more than a half (180 names) of the contemporary total are still found today in the former East Berlin, though none of them were given after WW2 (see Fig. 4).

Discussion
93 Street Signs: Ostensible Oblivion and Ostensible Discovery

An artistic initiative "93 Straßenschilder" (Rada 2015) raises questions about the contemporary visibility of the "Polish" street names in Berlin, as well as about the public awareness of their very existence. According to the authors of the project, it was triggered by their accidental discovery that "Zielona Góra", the name of a shop located at Grünberg Strasse in Berlin, in fact referred to the street's original namesake – the city of Grünberg that until 1945 belonged to Germany, and since then has been Zielona Góra in Poland. The artists from the group Büro "Kollegen 2,3" identified nine such streets in the Berlin district of Friedrichshain, photographed all the 93 street signs referring to these streets, and organized an art exhibition presenting their findings (*93strassenschilder.de*). As can be read on the project's website, "Jointly 9 streets in Friedrichshain – and many more in Berlin – refer to towns that were once German and today are Polish" (Waldmann 2015).

As explained in the German-language[3] online commentary by Nancy Waldmann that accompanies the exhibition, after WW2 Friedrichshain was part of East Berlin, and at that time had other streets that referred to places in Silesia, Pomerania, Neumark, Greater Poland, West or East Prussia. Waldmann asks: Why was a Memeler, a Tilsiter, a Posener and a Breslauer street renamed? Why not
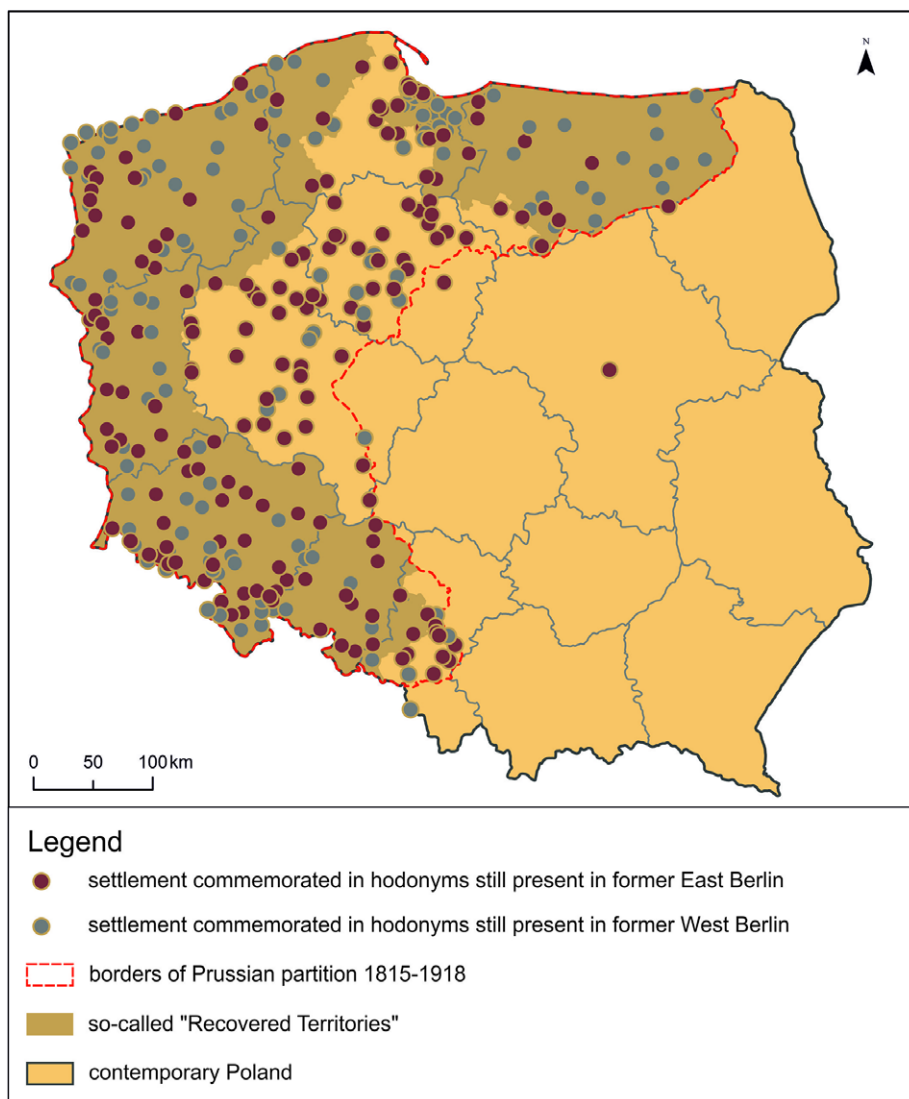
Figure 4. All Settlements Commemorated in Street Names (Hodonyms): East Berlin vs. West Berlin.

a Glatzer, a Proskauer, a Graudenzer and a Krossener Straße? She goes on to clarify that in the early 1990s these street names still represented German claims to Polish territory, while today they perhaps have reached the level of memory politics. These inconspicuous names preserve the memory of a multicultural Central Europe that was destroyed in the 20th century, she concludes (Waldmann 2015).

In fact, such memory politics produces – perhaps unwittingly – the oversimplifications and reticences that permeate the project. Not all towns whose German names the streets in Berlin bear to this day "were once German and today are Polish": for the towns of Wielkopolska (Greater Poland), the Prussian/German 1793–1918 rule was merely an interlude in their otherwise Polish history and identity – or, at best, multicultural identity within the framework of the Polish statehood until 1793. Nor do the names in question "preserve the memory of a multicultural Central Europe that was destroyed in the 20th century". This idyllic image of a lost multicultural paradise is in stark contrast

to the fact that with one exception (out of 336), geographical names preserved in the names of streets are German, not Polish: multicultural German-language names is a contradiction in terms.

What is more, Friedrichshain, which after the end of WW2 became part of East Berlin and at that time "had other streets that referred to places in Silesia, Pomerania, Neumark, Greater Poland, West or East Prussia" (which misleadingly implies that today it does not have them any more), is not representative of the whole Berlin. Neither is the origin of the nine street names in Friedrichshain:

> [D]ie Friedrichshainer Straßennamen, die auf einmal etwas Verlorenes repräsentierten, [erinnerten] an untergegangene deutsche Städte […]. Schon nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg rückten die Namen teilweise in diesen gedanklichen Kontext vom „verlorenen" oder „bedrohten deutschen Osten", als Teile des Reichsgebiets mit Städten wie Posen und Graudenz an Polen abgetreten worden waren und andere näher an die Grenze zu den damals verfeindeten polnischen Nachbarn rückten. Im Zusammenhang mit dem verhassten Versailler Vertrag standen die deutschen Namen im öffentlichen Raum auch für die Machtoption auf die Revision des Vertrags.
> Ursprünglich taten sie das nicht, sondern sie waren den Herkunftsregionen ihrer Bewohner entnommen. Ab den 1870ern strömten massenhaft Einwanderer in die rasant wachsende Metropole Berlin. Die Friedrichshainer Mietshausquartiere, nach dem Hobrechtplan von 1862 erbaut, schufen Wohnraum für hunderttausende Neuankömmlinge aus den Ostgebieten des Deutschen Reichs. Die neun Straßen entstanden zwischen 1881 und 1912 und erhielten ihre Namen wie damals üblich per Königlicher Kabinettsorder.
>
> [T]he street names in Friedrichshain […] suddenly represented something lost, reminiscent of lost German cities. Already after the First World War, some of the names moved into this conceptual context of the "lost" or "threatened German East", when parts of the Reich area with cities like Posen and Graudenz were ceded to Poland and others moved closer to the border with their Polish neighbors, who were hostile at the time. In connection with the hated Treaty of Versailles, the German names in public space also stood for the power option to revise the treaty. Originally they didn't do that, but were taken from the regions of origin of their inhabitants. From the 1870s, masses of immigrants flocked to the rapidly growing metropolis of Berlin. The Friedrichshain tenement quarters, built according to the Hobrecht plan of 1862, created living space for hundreds of thousands of newcomers from the eastern regions of the German Reich. The nine streets were created between 1881 and 1912 and were given their names by royal cabinet order, as was customary at the time. (Waldmann 2015, own translation)

In fact, while the nine streets in question may indeed have moved conceptually from innocent nostalgia of economic migrants to a political statement, many more were named in the interwar period with precisely a political agenda in mind. In effect, the project "93 Schilder" promotes and perpetuates the shallow, romanticized concept of the original street names arising bottom-to-top as a memory of the 19th-century economic migrants' little *Heimats* left behind, and only later misappropriated in the service of the state narration. In fact, most of over three hundred "Polish" street names present to this day in Berlin's cityscape were bestowed as a top-to-bottom decision in the 20th century, with many of them named after WW1, in whose wake Poland regained the region known as Greater Poland (Wielkopolska).

Owing to the selection of the district where the bestowals were made in the 19th century rather than in the interwar years, or even after WW2, there emerged a narrative in which the nine street names symbolized the multicultural character of the contested area. This was contrary to the street namers' original idea, especially considering that German-language or simply Germanised names of towns were hardly indicative of the migrants' multiculturality. Moreover, only one district with merely nine streets was selected, with this modest number becoming for the general public a kind of take-home message – much more so than the "many more streets" in Berlin, vaguely mentioned in passing.

The present analysis considers street names in terms of their role in state nationalism. Interestingly, Post and Alderman (2014) find such a perspective not necessarily mutually exclusive with the 'toponym-as-commodity' perspective. For contemporary readers of Berlin's city-text, though, the latter might be more attractive. No more legible in their original, intended sense, and thus somehow deprived of their nation-building potential, today the enigmatic names can only help stimulate interest – of the residents, but also of tourists – in the area, which may have been a factor in organising the exhibition.

German East beyond Berlin

The phenomenon of street-name celebration of the lost German East is by no means limited to Berlin. As Borchardt and Patzke (2018) have found, over 1.2 thousand streets in today's Germany commemorate Breslau (today Wrocław), over 1.1 thousand commemorate Danzig (now Gdańsk), nearly a thousand commemorate Stettin (contemporary Szczecin). Probably the most surprising is the fact that the numbers of streets that reference Breslau, Danzig and Stettin are comparable in size only to those referring to Berlin (about 1,5 thousand). None of the following seven biggest cities of Germany (Hamburg, München, Köln, Frankfurt/M, Stuttgart, Düsseldorf, Leipzig) merited so many streets devoted to them in the whole country. The record-breaking Leipzig can boast nearly 6 hundred streets and squares named after it, while both Frankfurts jointly hardly reach 4 hundred, with the remainder within the range of 95-262 streets each (*Zeit*).

Smaller towns, such as Oppeln (now Opole), Schneidemühl (Piła) or Kattowitz (Katowice) and many more, are represented in contemporary Germany's streets in smaller numbers – 113, 56 and 37 respectively. As keenly observed by a historian active in the Polish-German dialogue,

Und so leben hunderte, ja tausende einstiger deutscher Siedlungsorte weiter in den deutschen Stadtlandschaften, werden täglich von Millionen von Menschen zur Kenntnis genommen. Viele dieser Bezeichnungen sind im ersten Vierteljahrhundert nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg vergeben worden, nicht wenige aber schon nach den Gebietsabtretungen des Ersten Weltkriegs oder in der NS-Zeit, und nicht immer wurden letztere rückgängig gemacht. […] In den 1960er Jahren wurden auf ministeriales Geheiß einige Autobahnparkplätze nach ostdeutschen Städten benannt, weshalb man etwa bis heute auf dem Weg von Wiesbaden nach Köln in Landsberg an der Warthe einkehren kann. Im Lauf der Jahrzehnte verlor sich aber der offenkundige Erinnerungsauftrag der Namensgeber, und in der Gegenwart nehmen viele in Deutschland lebende Menschen diese Ortsnamen nicht mehr als Teil deutscher Vergangenheit, sondern als Verweis auf die polnische Gegenwart wahr.

And so hundreds, even thousands, of former German settlements continue to live in the German urban landscape and are noticed by millions of people every day. Many of these designations were given in the first quarter of a century after the Second World War, but quite a few were given after the cessions of territory in the First World War or during the Nazi era, and the latter were not always reversed. […] In the 1960s, at the behest of the minister, some motorway parking spaces were named after East German cities, which is why on the way from Wiesbaden to Cologne you can still stop off in Landsberg an der Warthe [today Gorzów Wielkopolski]. Over the decades, however, the name-givers' obvious remembrance mission was lost, and today many people living in Germany no longer perceive these place names as part of the German past, but as a reference to the Polish present. (Loew 2018, own translation)

Berlin's Geographical Street Names beyond the German East

At the same time, the cities, towns and villages outside the contemporary German borders that are remembered to this day in Berlin's street names can be found not only in Poland. The localities

commemorated are situated, for instance, in today's Lithuania (Usėnai), Latvia (Liepaja), Estonia (Tallinn), Czechia (among others Jičín, Skalice, Liberec, Hanusovice, Hlučín, Jihlava, Plzeň, Trutnov), Slovakia (Veľké Pole), the Kaliningrad Oblast (Baltiïsk, Bagrationovsk, Kamenka), Switzerland (Graubünden, Neuenburg), France (Huttendorf, Habsheim, Hirsingue), Belgium (Bülling, Elsenborn, Honsfeld), Austria (Eschelberg, Horstein, Kumberg, Wolfsberg), or Denmark (Sønderborg). While the bases of most geographical street names are names of settlements, there are also whole historical regions (such as Banat), passes (Simplon), rivers (the Vltava), mountain peaks (Isel, Buchberg) or islands (the Saaremaa Island) that appear in this function. The motive for a nomination might have been the fact that an area was a German-language island (such as Zips), but also an event in history. Thus Berg Isel (Mount Isel) in Austria in a street name was a reference to Austria's annexation by Nazi Germany in 1938, whereas the island of Tromsö in Norway became a namesake because of the landing of Wehrmacht troops there in June 1940. Interestingly, both street nominations were made in the same years as the events they commemorated. All these names outlined very broadly the territory that the state of Germany considered to be the sphere of its political or cultural influence.

Interestingly, also the erstwhile African colonies of the German Empire found their reflection in urban naming. As of 2024, the so-called Afrikanisches Viertel in Berlin remains largely intact in the *city-text*, with only a few renamings done. For instance, even though Nachtigalplatz and Lüderitzstraße – both named after prominent figures of German colonialism – disappeared at the end of 2022, with Mohrenstrasse 'Moor Street' (which in contemporary German parlance denotes offensively any person of colour) following suit in 2023, several street names that reference geographical locations in former German colonies (such as Dualastraße, Togostraße, Kameruner Straße) nevertheless remained in the cityscape. The persistence of "colonial" street names certainly does not imply that the contemporary German society might be likely to support the idea of reclaiming colonies in Africa. This notwithstanding, in 2004, when several non-governmental organizations called for the renaming of the "colonial" streets in Berlin, protests were vocal (Förster et al. 2016).

Conclusion

Through the analytical lens employed in this paper, using the example of Berlin, it has been highlighted how geographical street names may contribute to the city-text. From the point of view of the name-giver, two trends can be identified in the commemoration that uses geographical street names as its vehicle. The first trend simply relates to the localities within the state borders of the time. Thus, as early as 1861, Stettinerstrasse received its name, while Stettin (today Szczecin) was a city in Prussia. This was followed in 1864 by Katzbachstrasse, in memory of a battle in the vicinity rather than as a geographical object – but still after a river within Prussia. The same circumstance concerned the next street nominations: after Soldin (today Myślibórz, 1873), Danzig (Gdańsk, 1874) and the isle of Wolin (1874).

In the same year 1874, however, Warschauerstrasse was named, referring to Warszawa – the city that by force of the third partition of Poland (1795) had been annexed to Prussia, but in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna (1815) was lost to the Russian Empire. This marked the onset of the second trend within the analysed data: honouring places that the state staked claims to and perhaps hoped to regain in the future. With time the state nationalism of the "hot" type (Billig 1995) gradually transformed into the "cold" one, so that today the names – if recognized properly – are not "read" with the same intensity. In the words of Alderman (2022, 32):

> [p]lace naming is intertextual in nature, defined in part by how it works with or against master-narratives of national, regional and local history. Toponyms are not static vehicles for narratives but in a state of doing; they participate in *narrating* commemorative messages and converting memories into public historical knowledge.

In the preceding sections I have also shown how the seemingly forgotten past still lives in street names that reference places. They contribute to the city-text in a way that underscores their semantic opacity and even banality today. Only a chance discovery, such as the one made by the artists of the "93 Schilder" initiative, may lead to their deciphering – but even so, still only a tiny fraction of the total of the enigmatic city-text becomes decoded. It would seem that the actual scope and extent to which the former German Empire is mapped onto the cityscape of Berlin is somehow overlooked by the contemporary "reader" of the city-text, prone to reinterpret the names as simply witnesses of the city's multicultural past (as suggested by Waldmann, and also in alignment with today's emphasis on multiculturalism in the public debate).

The long duration (*longue durée* – cf. Braudel 1958) of urban naming might certainly be attributed to some kind of inertia: what has once been named, remains named. At the same time, such elements of city-text might indeed be perceived in terms of banal nationalism (Billig 1995). As cogently argued by Azaryahu,

> the reading of a city-text is embedded into everyday activities. Furthermore, reading street signs or referring to street names, as is repeatedly practised in the context of everyday life, mainly involves their function as markers of location and ignores the history which they introduce. Only in exceptional cases […] does it amount to a reading of (a version of) history. (1996, 324)

Notes

1 The term commonly accepted in onomastics and reccommended by ICOS (https://icosweb.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ICOS-Terms-en.pdf), while the term recommended by UNGEGN is odonyms (https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/glossary.pdf).
2 Considering the immanently written nature of a palimpsest as the source of the metaphor, A. Huyssen's (2009) concentration on Berlin's architecture only, to the neglect of urban signage, is remarkable.
3 The site of the exhibition being Berlin, I take as authoritative the German version of the commentary, since its translation into Polish is sometimes incorrect and thus distorts – or at best dilutes – the bottomline message.

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