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Public Responses to the Renaming of Commemorative Street Names in Post-Communist Poland: Daily Lives, Experiences of Change and Sense of Place

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The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe did not bring about widespread destruction of the material heritage of communist dictatorships in the region. In fact, given that – on the whole – public acceptance of the regime change has been high, the process of de-commemoration has been more contested than anticipated. This paper focuses on the process of de-commemoration after the fall of communism in Poland. It examines urban residents' responses to the renaming of streets, paying close attention to the practices and discursive strategies they adopted to resist change. Investigating these responses provides a means of understanding the multifaceted aspects of the contested nature of de-commemoration and sheds light on the ways in which the top-down remaking of urban streetscapes affected local residents. It also enables us to better understand the nature of the post-communist transition in the region and provides insights into the everyday conflicts that underlie symbolic change.

The de-communisation of public space began in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism in 1989. The first toppled were the statues of the key figures associated with the communist past. The monument to Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the first Soviet secret police organisation, the Cheka, was demolished in Warsaw in 1989. The statue of Lenin was removed from Riga's Freedom Boulevard in 1991. In the same year, Budapest's statues of Marx and Engels disappeared from Jászai Mari Square. A renaming of streets followed. The list of banned street names included top politicians, revolutionaries and Red Army commanders, along with contentious events venerated by communist historiography. This was a remaking of public space typical of periods of regime change. It reflected new power relations and provided mechanisms for symbolic justice. It also played an essential role in affirming new notions of national histories and was a means of conducting symbolic warfare to legitimise ethnic divisions.[1]

The process differed across the region, conditioned by national trajectories of transition and historical legacies. The universal characteristic of this process was its contested and protracted nature.[2] Given

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[1] See Sarah Gensburger and Jenny Wüstenberg, eds., *De-Commemoration: Removing Statues and Renaming Places* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2023); Sergei Basik, ed., *Encountering Toponymic Geopolitics: Place Names as a Political Instrument in the Post-Soviet States* (London: Routledge, 2022); John Czaplicka, Nida Gelazis, and Blair A. Ruble, eds., *Cities after the Fall of Communism: Reshaping Cultural Landscapes and European Identity* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Mariusz Czepczyński, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities: Representation of Powers and Needs* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

[2] See, for example, Kornelia Kończal, 'Persistent Legacies of Communism, or the Ongoing Purification of Public Space in Post-1989 Poland,' *European Review* 30, no. 4 (2022): 490–504; Aleksander Kuczabski and Alina Boychuk, 'Decommunization of Urban Toponymy in Ukraine: Causes and Consequences,' *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society* 10, no. 4 (2020): 8–16; Laura Šakaja and Jelena Stanić, 'Other(Ing), Self(Portraying), Negotiating: The Spatial Codification of Values in Zagreb's City-Text,' *Cultural Geographies* 18, no. 4 (2011): 495–516; Duncan Light, 'Street

that, on the whole, the acceptance of regime change has been high in Eastern Europe, the protracted nature of the de-communisation of public space appears puzzling. What's more, over two decades after the fall of communism, some countries, such as Hungary, Ukraine, Poland, and more recently, the Baltic States, turned to legislative means to make the removal of Soviet-era monuments and street names mandatory.[3] The question then arises as to why the de-communisation process was so protracted. In this paper, I will examine the opposition to street renaming among urban residents almost thirty years after the collapse of communism in Poland. Accounting for this opposition provides a means of understanding the contentious issues surrounding symbolic change and transition processes in Eastern Europe.

Research to date on post-communist transition in Eastern Europe has recognised several factors that affected the process of de-commemoration. First, the process was hindered by the former communist parties, which retained a position of influence, especially in earlier years of transition.[4] There was also no consensus between different political groups that emerged after the fall of communism regarding the value system that should underpin the new commemorative practices. Palonen shows in her detailed study on changing street names and memorials in Budapest that the process of revising the city's symbolic urban landscape was marked by ongoing conflicts between various levels of administration and political groupings. These conflicts were not necessarily about what should be de-commemorated but what should be publicly commemorated.[5] Likewise, Ochman argues that disagreements among former Solidarity elites over transitional justice issues, such as how to deal with the former communist regime functionaries and secret agents, slowed down the de-communisation of public space in Poland.[6]

The existing research has also examined how the historical legacies of the Second World War affected the official approaches to de-commemoration, especially in countries with significant Russian-speaking minorities like the Baltic States and Ukraine. Brüggemann and Kasekamp's study of the removal of Tallinn's Red Army monument in 2007 shows that the conflicts primarily centred around the Soviet liberation narrative and memories of the Nazi and Soviet occupations.[7] There is a debate, however, on the extent to which historical legacies continue to impact on the

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Names in Bucharest, 1990–1997: Exploring the Modern Historical Geographies of Post-Socialist Change,' *Journal of Historical Geography* 30, no. 1 (2004): 154–72; Kenneth E. Foote, Attila Tóth, and Anett Árvay, 'Hungary after 1989: Inscribing a New Past on Place,' *Geographical Review* 90, no. 3 (2000): 301–34.

3 See Emilia Palonen, 'Rewriting the National Past in Contemporary Budapest: Populism in Action,' in *The City as Power: Urban Space, Place, and National Identity*, eds. Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 141–3; Georgiy Kasianov, *Memory Crash: Politics of History in and around Ukraine, 1980s–2010s* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2022), 291–318; Mariusz Rutkowski, 'Urban Toponymy and Collective Memory: A Case of Law-Enforced Decommunization of Street Names in Poland,' *Lege Artis* IV, no. 2 (2019): 261–300; Dovilė Lisauskaitė, 'New "Desovietisation" Law Takes Aim at Lithuania's Remaining Soviet-era Signs,' Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT), 6 June 2022, available at: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1711669/new-desovietisation-law-takes-aim-at-lithuania-s-remaining-soviet-era-signs (last visited 25 Apr. 2024).

4 See, for example, Georgiy Kasianov, 'In Search of Lost Time? Decommunization in Ukraine, 2014–2020,' *Problems of Post-Communism* 71, no. 4 (2023): 326–40; Brett R. Chloupek, 'Public Memory and Political Street Names in Košice: Slovakia's Multiethnic Second City,' *Journal of Historical Geography* 64 (2019): 34; Graeme Gill, 'Changing Symbols: The Renovation of Moscow Place Names,' *The Russian Review* 64, no. 3 (2005): 480–503; Maoz Azaryahu, 'German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names: The Case of East Berlin,' *Political Geography* 16, no. 6 (1997): 479–93.

5 Emilia Palonen, 'The City-text in Post-communist Budapest: Street Names, Memorials, and the Politics of Commemoration,' *GeoJournal* 73, no. 3 (2008): 219–30.

6 Ewa Ochman, 'The Legacies of Transition, Street Renaming and the Material Heritage of Communist Dictatorship in Poland,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 59, no. 1 (2024): 68–90.

7 Karsten Brüggemann and Andres Kasekamp, 'The Politics of History and the "War of Monuments" in Estonia,' *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 3 (2008): 425–48. See also David J. Smith, '"Woe from Stones": Commemoration, Identity Politics and Estonia's "War of Monuments",' *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39, no. 4 (2008): 419–30; Marko Lehti, Matti Jutila and Markku Jokisipilä, 'Never-Ending Second World War: Public Performances of National Dignity and the Drama of the Bronze Soldier,' *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39, no. 4 (2008): 393–418; Stuart Burch and David Smith, 'Empty Spaces and the Value of Symbols: Estonia's "War of Monuments" from another Angle,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 6 (2007): 913–36.

de-communisation processes. Kovalev, among others, argues that opposition to the 2015 de-communisation laws in Ukraine resulted from political actors pursuing their own present-day agendas rather than conflicts around interpretations of historical events and regional divisions within Ukraine.[8] Taken together, these findings provide valuable insight into the political and ideological resistance against de-commemoration efforts in post-communist societies.

What's less understood is the opposition of urban populations to the erasure of the material legacy of communist dictatorship. Existing research recognises the critical role played by nostalgia in attempts to come to terms with the communist past as well as disenchantment with the post-communist present experienced by many citizens of the region.[9] Post-communist nostalgia was prevalent in Eastern Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s and, as Nadkarni and Shevchenko argue, manifested itself in various nostalgic practices that were underpinned by generation-specific experiences of life under communism and also during the early transition period.[10] Quantitative studies conducted more recently in Romania and Ukraine have shown that three decades after the fall of communism, generational differences continued to matter, even if the specific attitudes to removing monuments or renaming streets in each country differed considerably.[11] Yet, little is known about why respondents continue to resist symbolic change.

Light and Young studied mundane, habitual practices that shaped everyday responses to street renaming in Bucharest. They argue that people often resisted toponymic change and used the original name due to habit rather than political opposition to new commemorative narratives.[12] Crețan and Matthews expanded on this research and advocated a better understanding of 'everyday difficulties' that lead to conflicts over the symbolic transformation of public space.[13] Using data collected from Timișoara in 2014, they argue that the city's residents and service workers were against the new commemorative street names mainly because of the financial and practical costs of renamings. At the root of this negative reception, according to Crețan and Matthews, were the earlier experiences of the Romanian economic transition. Lazarenko problematises the issue further by focusing on internally displaced people and showing how the renamings in Ukraine that followed the 2015 de-communisation law have led to the displaced people's sense of 'placelessness and existential

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[8] Maksym Kovalov, 'When Lenin Becomes Lennon: Decommunisation and the Politics of Memory in Ukraine,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no. 5 (2022): 709–33. See also on this point Denys Kutsenko, 'Experience of Implementing Decommunization Laws in Eastern Ukraine: A Kharkiv Case,' *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society* 10, no. 3 (2020): 55–64.

[9] On the critical role played by nostalgia in attempts to come to terms with the communist past, see Maya Nadkarni, *Remains of Socialism: Memory and the Futures of the Past in Postsocialist Hungary* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020); Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn, 2010); Mitja Velikonja, 'Lost in Transition: Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-socialist Countries,' *East European Politics and Societies* 23, no. 4 (2009): 535–51; Neringa Klumbytė, 'Post-Soviet Publics and Nostalgia for Soviet Times,' in *Changing Economies and Changing Identities in Postsocialist Eastern Europe*, eds. Ingo W. Schröder and Asta Vonderau (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008), 27–45; Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 57–71.

[10] Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko, 'The Politics of Nostalgia in the Aftermath of Socialism's Collapse: A Case for Comparative Analysis,' in *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, eds. Olivia Angé and David Berliner (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 61–95.

[11] Rusu's and Croitoru's quantitative study conducted in Romania in 2021 shows that those who lived under communism were far more supportive of the de-communisation of public space than those born after 1989. See Mihai Stelian Rusu and Alin Croitoru, 'Memorial Ambivalences in Postcommunist Romania: Generational Attitudes towards the Symbolic Legacy of Communism,' *Societies* 11, no. 3 (2021): 99. [This journal uses article numbers instead of page numbers], 8 out of 15. In contrast, surveys conducted in Ukraine in 2017 show that older respondents – age 60 and over – were more opposed to the country's new comprehensive de-communisation policy than young people (18–29 years old). See Aleksander Kuczabski, 'Communist Markers in the Information Space of Post-Communist Society: The Case of Ukraine,' in *Encountering Toponymic Geopolitics: Place Names as a Political Instrument in the Post-Soviet States*, ed. Sergei Basik (London: Routledge, 2022), 92.

[12] Duncan Light and Craig Young, 'Habit, Memory, and the Persistence of Socialist-Era Street Names in Postsocialist Bucharest, Romania,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 104, no. 3 (2014): 668–85.

[13] Remus Crețan and Philip W. Matthews, 'Popular Responses to City-Text Changes: Street Naming and the Politics of Practicality in a Post-Socialist Martyr City,' *Area* 48, no. 1 (2016): 92–102.

outsideness'.[14] She argues that these feelings were exacerbated by the ways in which the law was introduced and the choice of new names. As she puts it: 'decommunization that was supposed to be de-ideologization of space, de facto turned out to be re-ideologization'.[15] However, despite frequent calls from scholars for more research, a systematic investigation of the wide-ranging and intersecting factors engendering resistance to symbolic change among urban residents is still lacking.[16] This paper attempts to address this gap. It discusses how urban residents understood and articulated their opposition to the de-communisation of public space and what discursive strategies they adopted to resist the change. It demonstrates that thirty years after the fall of communism in Poland, the top-down and mandatory renaming of commemorative street names did not sit well with a significant section of the urban population, who expected that the de-commemoration processes would reflect their views and priorities.

Research Approach and Sources

The paper investigates urban residents' responses to the de-communisation of public space through the lens of the mandatory renaming of commemorative street names. Critical literature theorising the connections between the politics of memory and (de)commemoration and regime change informs the approach employed in this study.[17] Scholarship developed by urban and cultural geographers on toponomy (critical study of place naming) is the key tool used to explore everyday and routine responses to the remaking of public space.[18] The paper is also informed by the work developed by environmental psychologists and gerontologists and their multidisciplinary interest in a sense of place as well as ageing in place.[19] The primary evidence comes from responses to formal public consultations on street renaming conducted by Polish municipal authorities following the 2016 de-communisation law, which made the renaming of streets commemorating the communist regime mandatory. Most town councils tried to engage their electorate in the process of the implementation of

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[14] Valeria Lazarenko, 'Renaming and Reclaiming Urban Spaces in Ukraine: The Perspective of Internally Displaced People,' *Nationalities Papers* 50, no. 3 (2022): 445.

[15] Ibid.

[16] See, for example, Duncan Light and Craig Young, 'The Politics of Toponymic Continuity: The Limits of Change and the Ongoing Lives of Street Names,' in *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes: Naming, Politics, and Place*, eds. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu (London: Routledge 2018), 195–9; Danielle Drozdzewski, 'Using History in the Streetscape to Affirm Geopolitics of Memory,' *Political Geography* 42 (2014): 77; Rusu and Croitoru, 'Memorial,' 13.

[17] Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, eds., *Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7–34; James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution. Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 61–92; Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson, 'Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 3 (2002): 524–47; Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[18] See Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, eds., *The City as Power: Urban Space, Place, and National Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018); Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu, eds., *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes: Naming, Politics, and Place* (London: Routledge, 2018); James Duminy, 'Street Renaming, Symbolic Capital, and Resistance in Durban, South Africa,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32, no. 2 (2014): 310–28; Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman and Maoz Azaryahu, 'Geographies of Toponymic Inscription: New Directions in Critical Place-name Studies,' *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 4 (2010): 453–70; Maoz Azaryahu, 'The Power of Commemorative Street Names,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14, no. 3 (1996): 311–30.

[19] See Lynne C. Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright, eds., *Place Attachment Advances in Theory, Methods and Applications* (London: Routledge, 2014); Maria Lewicka, 'Place Attachment, Place Identity, and Place Memory: Restoring the Forgotten City Past,' *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 28, no. 3 (2008): 209–31; Maria Lewicka, 'Place Attachment: How Far Have We Come in the Last 40 Years?' *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 31, no. 3 (2011): 207–30; Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low, eds., *Place Attachment* (New York: Plenum Press, 1992); Gavin J. Andrews and David R. Phillips, eds., *Ageing and Place: Perspective, Policy, Practice* (London: Routledge, 2005); Yi Sun, Mee Kam Ng, Tzu-Yuan Stessa Chao, Shenjing He and Sze Hin Mok, 'The Impact of Place Attachment on Well-being for Older People in High-density Urban Environments: A Qualitative Study,' *Journal of Aging & Social Policy* 36, no. 2 (2022): 241–61.

the de-communisation law by conducting public consultations.[20] The existing legislation on local government gives the power to name a street to town councils and there is no duty on them to hold public consultations.[21] However, as acceptance for street renaming amongst those directly affected was low, many councils in Poland tried to increase the legitimacy of the process by holding formal consultations on new street names.[22] The paper uses content responses from consultations held by the municipal authorities of Warsaw, Łódź and Katowice, collated by the respective local government offices and published on their consultation websites. All content responses submitted to these consultations have been consulted: 118 responses from Warsaw, 477 responses from Łódź and 66 from Katowice.[23] The length of the responses varied, ranging from just one sentence to a half-page long statement. Textual analysis was employed to identify recurring themes. The three case studies and the quantitative results of the consultations will now be presented to provide context for the respondents' comments, which will be analysed later in the paper.

Warsaw, a capital city with a population of nearly two million, conducted its consultation in June 2017. Targeting city residents, it asked whether, in their view, the twelve streets identified for renaming in the de-communisation process indeed commemorated people and events symbolising communism.[24] The consultation form asked whether the residents were in favour or against renaming these streets, asked for suggestions for new names and provided space for additional comments. 124 consultation forms were collected at five open meetings; 3,333 residents completed online forms and 605 paper forms.[25] Table 1 presents the quantitative results of the consultations.

Łódź is the capital of Łódź province in central Poland, with a population of nearly 660,000. The consultation was conducted in January 2018 following the renaming of twenty-six streets and

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[20] For newspaper articles discussing public consultations on street renamings in Polish towns and cities see, for example, *Gazeta Wyborcza*'s tag 'Dekomunizacja ulic', available at: https://wyborcza.pl/0,128956.html?tag=dekomunizacja+ulic (last visited 10 Mar. 2024).

[21] See Dziennik Ustaw 1990 nr 16 poz. 95, 'Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 r. o samorządzie gminnym,' Art 18, ust. 2 pkt 13. There is no duty on councils to hold public consultations on street name alterations. However, the existing legislation on public consultations lacks precision and is open to contradictory interpretations. The legislation stipulates that local authorities can carry out public consultations in matters important to local communities. At the same time, residents and business entities have the right to appeal against a council resolution changing a street name that was adopted without consultation. Thus, some councils adopted resolutions making public consultations mandatory to ensure that the procedures for changing street names are more consistent. See, for example, the resolution passed by Cieszyn City Council: 'Uchwała NR XLII/430/18 Rady Miejskiej Cieszyna z dnia 22 lutego 2018 r. w sprawie określenia zasad nadawania nazw ulic, placów, parków, skwerów, rond i innych terenów obiektów publicznych położonych na terenie Miasta Cieszyna,' *Dziennik Urzędowy Województwa Śląskiego*. Available at: https://dzienniki.slask.eu/legalact/2018/1438/ (last visted 25 Apr. 2024).

[22] Information about the public consultation process regarding street renaming is usually available on the consultation website of councils. See, for example, the information for the city of Wrocław: *Konsultacje projektów uchwał Rady Miejskiej Wrocławia z zakresu nazewnictwa ulic na terenie Wrocławia*; available at https://bip.um.wroc.pl/artykul/127/26804/konsultacje-projektow-uchwal-rady-miejskiej-wroclawia-z-zakresu-nazewnictwa-ulic-na-terenie-wroclawia (last visited 25 Apr. 2024).

[23] The Warsaw consultation report includes 118 content responses (detailed summaries of views expressed at the open meetings and responses submitted by e-mail and by letter). See Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących potencjalnych zmian 12 nazw ulic w Warszawie w związku z tzw. ustawą dekomunizacyjną*, Warszawa, 1 sierpnia 2017 r, 1–128. Available at: https://konsultacje.um.warszawa.pl/processes/konsultacje-zmian-nazw-wybranych-ulic; The Łódź report reproduced all 450 content responses submitted on online forms and provided 27 summaries of views expressed at open meetings. See Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących zmian nazw łódzkich ulic i placu Zwycięstwa dokonanych zarządzeniami zastępczymi Wojewody Łódzkiego*, no date, 1–48. Available at: https://uml.lodz.pl/konsultacje/zakonczone-konsultacje/2018-rok/zmiana-nazw-ulic-i-placu-zwyciestwa/; The Katowice report reproduced all 66 content responses submitted in online forms and paper forms. See Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących zmian nazw ulic 9-go Maja, Brunona Jasieńskiego, Leona Kruczkowskiego, Oskara Lange, Włodzimierza Stahla i Lucjana Szenwalda*, no date, 1–13. Available at: https://www.katowice.eu/Konsultacje/Strony/Zmiana-nazw-ulic-.aspx (all last visited 25 Apr. 2024).

[24] For the consultation documents, see Urząd Miasta Warszawa, 'Dekomunizacja ulic w stolicy – konsultacje,' 14 June 2017, available at: https://um.warszawa.pl/-/dekomunizacja-ulic-w-stolicy-konsultacje (last visited 25 Apr. 2024).

[25] See Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 8.

Table 1. Respondents' views on street renaming, Warsaw, 2017[a]

Name of the street to be renamed	Number of respondents	Do you favour the renaming of the street?					
		Yes		No		Difficult to say	
Julian Brun	3,716	1114	29.9%	2215	59.6%	387	10.4%
Józef Ciszewski	3,665	1116	30.4%	2275	62.0%	274	7.4%
Jan Kędzierski	3,687	1171	31.7%	2025	54.9%	491	13.3%
Anastazy Kowalczyk	3,613	1143	31.6%	1994	55.1%	476	13.1%
Helena Kozłowska	3,632	1154	31.7%	2036	56.0%	442	12.1%
Zygmunt Modzelewski	3,647	1113	30.5%	2243	61.5%	291	7.9%
Gustaw Reicher	3,614	1173	32.4%	1931	53.4%	510	14.1%
Lucjan Rudnicki	3,622	1122	30.9%	2101	58.0%	399	11.0%
Wincenty Rzymowski	3,649	1093	29.9%	2317	63.4%	239	6.5%
Wacław Szadkowski	3,690	1098	29.7%	2111	57.2%	481	13.0%
Jan Szałek	3,608	1044	28.9%	2041	56.5%	523	14.4%
Związek Walki Młodych	3,681	1203	32.6%	2209	60.0%	269	7.3%

[a]See Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych zmian nazw 12 ulic w Warszawie*, 10–12.

one square by the Łódź provincial governor.[26] The consultation form asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the new street names. It also sought suggestions for alternative names to those the governor chose and provided space for additional comments. The consultations were open to all residents of the city of Łódź. They were conducted in two open meetings, an online consultation, a discussion forum and an internet voting app (the Vox Populi). The organisers received 3,366 consultation forms (89 paper forms and 3,277 completed online).[27] Table 2 presents the quantitative results of the consultations.

Katowice is the capital of the Silesian province in southern Poland, with a population of nearly 300,000. The public consultation, held in September 2017, sought views on the six replacement street names proposed by the local authority.[28] The consultation was opened to residents of the six streets and owners of businesses, institutions and churches located on these streets. Consultation documents were distributed directly to the residents' home addresses and could be completed online. A total of eighty-four people took part in the consultations. One question was asked: What is your opinion on the proposed street name? The report from consultations reproduced all individual responses to the above question submitted on the sixty-eight consultation forms.[29] Table 3 presents the quantitative results of the consultations.

These three consultations varied in scale, methods and scope. Warsaw and Łódź councils sought views from the wider community, while Katowice consulted only those directly affected. This differing approach gave prominence to different stakeholders: those incurring the financial and practical costs of renaming, those using the renamed spaces in everyday life, and those with emotional ties to neighbourhoods. Moreover, these consultations were organised to seek views on different aspects of the de-communisation law (on street names that potentially could be renamed, on those already renamed, and on propositions for new street names).[30] As seen in Tables 1–3, despite variations across different

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[26] For the consultation documents, see Urząd Miasta Łodzi, 'Zmiana Nazw Ulic i Placu Zwycięstwa,' available at: https://uml.lodz.pl/konsultacje/zakonczone-konsultacje/2018-rok/zmiana-nazw-ulic-i-placu-zwyciestwa/ (last visited 25 Mar. 2024).

[27] Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 1.

[28] For the consultation documents, see Urząd Miasta Katowice, 'Zmiana nazw ulic,' available at: https://www.katowice.eu/Konsultacje/Strony/Zmiana-nazw-ulic-.aspx (last visited 25 Mar. 2024).

[29] See Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 3.

[30] The official justification for the consultation in Łódź was that the governor did not consult either the residents of Łódź or the council when choosing replacement names. See: Zarządzenie Nr 7550/VII/17 Prezydenta Miasta Łodzi z dnia 22 grudnia 2017 r., available at: https://bip.uml.lodz.pl/samorzad/akty-prawne-i-projekty-aktow-prawnych/akty-prawne/ (last visited 25 Mar. 2024).

Table 2. Respondents' views on street renaming, Łódź, 2018[a]

1. The original name of the street renamed by the governor	Number of respondents	Do you favour the renaming of the street?					
2. The new street name given by the governor		Yes		No		Difficult to say	
1. Dąbrowszczacy 2. Jacek Bierezin	3,303	619	18.7%	1951	59.0%	733	22.1%
1. Hanka Sawicka 2. Czesław Miłosz	3,303	1534	46.4%	1425	43.1%	344	10.4%
1. Lucjan Rudnicki 2. Karl Dedecius	3,306	841	25.4%	1791	54.1%	674	20.3%
1. Przodownicy Pracy 2. Romskie Ofiary Getta Łódzkiego	3,304	1030	31.1%	1864	56.4%	410	12.4%
1. Michalina Tatarkówna-Majkowska 2. Anna Walentynowicz	3,303	954	28.8%	1907	57.7%	442	13.3%
1. Rodzeństwo Fibaków 2. Strajk Łódzkich Studentów w 1981 r.	3,303	888	26.8%	1963	59.4%	452	13.6%
1. Lucjan Szenwald 2. Mieczysław Hertz	3,301	770	23.3%	1753	53.1%	778	23.5%
1. Salomon Jaszuński 2. Mieczysław Siewierski	3,302	743	22.5%	1681	50.9%	878	26.5%
1. Franciszek Prożek 2. Wojciech Kilar	3,301	1261	38.2%	1568	47.5%	472	14.2%
1. Szymon Harnam 2. Herman Konstadt	3,304	628	19.0%	1935	58.5%	741	22.4%
1. Wincenty Pstrowski 2. Zbigniew Herbert	3,303	1463	44.2%	1418	42.9%	422	12.7%
1. Leon Kruczkowski 2. Konspiracyjne Wojsko Polskie	3,302	613	18.5%	2255	68.2%	434	13.1%
1. Batalion Platerówek 2. Bułat Okudżawa	3,302	745	22.5%	2016	61.0%	541	16.3%
1. Helena Wolff 2. Rodzeństwo Schollów	3,301	616	18.6%	1948	59.0%	737	22.3%
1. Stanisław Działek 2. Jan Nowak-Jeziorański	3,302	1212	36.7%	1537	46.5%	553	16.7%
1. Stanisław Stande 2. Mała Piętnastka	3,302	703	21.2%	1790	54.2%	809	24.5%
1. Stanisław Tybura 2. Generał Tadeusz Kutrzeba	3,301	750	22.7%	1887	57.1%	664	20.1%
1. Tekla Borowiakowa 2. John Wayne	3,303	658	19.9%	2157	65.3%	488	14.7%
1. Wiceadmirał Zdzisław Studziński 2. Gustaw Herling-Grudziński	3,304	985	29.8%	1713	51.8%	606	18.3%
1. Zula Pacanowska 2. Eliasz Chaim Majzel	3,302	548	16.5%	2199	66.5%	555	16.8%
1. Bronisław Zapała 2. Solidarność Walcząca	3,302	824	24.9%	1916	58.0%	562	17.0%
1. Witold Wandurski 2. Leopold Tyrmand	3,302	857	25.9%	1799	54.4%	646	19.5%
1. Gwardia Ludowa 2. Kazimierz Dejmek	3,300	1358	41.1%	1505	45.6%	437	13.2%
1. Eugeniusz Ajnenkiel 2. Ira Aldridge	3,363	639	19.0%	2002	59.5%	722	21.4%
1. Maria Wedmanowa 2. Ferdynand Ossendowski	3,302	636	19.2%	1974	59.7%	692	20.9%
1. Maksym Gorki 2. Andrzej Sacharow	3,302	585	17.7%	2176	65.8%	541	16.3%
1. Zwycięstwo (square) 2. Lech Kaczyński	3,246	206	6.3%	2934	90.3%	106	3.2%

[a]Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących zmian łódzkich ulic i placu Zwycięstwa*, 2–9.

Table 3. Respondents' views on the proposed new street names, Katowice, 2017[a]

1. Name of the street to be renamed 2. The proposed new name	Number of respondents (only valid responses)	What is your opinion on the proposed street name?		
		Disagree with the mandatory renaming	Positive	Different suggestions for a new street name
1. 9 Maj 2. mjr Henryk Dobrzański 'Hubal'	0	0	0	0
1. Bruno Jasieński 2. Czesław Miłosz	26	7	5	14
1. Leon Kruczkowski 2. Zbigniew Herbert	16	15	0	1
1. Oskar Lange 2. Gwarecka	2	0	0	2
1. Włodzimierz Stahl 2. Liliowa	8	2	6	0
1. Lucjan Szenwald 2. Bolesław Prus	26	19	6	1

[a]See Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących zmian nazw ulic*, 4.

street names, the overall trend was clear: the renaming was not popular with respondents. The majority of respondents in Warsaw (53 per cent to 63 per cent, depending on the street) rejected the renaming, while between 28 per cent and 32 per cent of respondents favoured the change. The results in Łódź were less uniform than those in Warsaw. The renaming of two streets was narrowly accepted, with *yes* votes ranging from 16 per cent to 46 per cent. However, the majority of respondents rejected the renaming of twenty-four streets, with *no* votes ranging from 42 per cent to 68 per cent depending on the street. Equally, the renaming of Zwycięstwo Square was opposed by over 90 per cent of the respondents. Even in Katowice, where the consultation concerned only the proposed replacement names and not the de-communisation process itself, the majority of respondents used the consultations to express their objection to the mandatory renaming of streets.

To be sure, the use of data from these consultations has limitations. First, demographic information such as age, gender, education level and occupation was not collected (though some respondents volunteered this data), making it impossible to systematically compare responses by demographic variables. Second, the consultation took place during the intense political conflict between opposition parties led by the centre-right Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*; PO) and the national-conservative Law and Justice party government (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*; PiS) over the implementation of the de-communisation legislation. Thus, the lack of information on how the respondents' opinions correlate with political orientation makes it more difficult to discern whether those opposing the de-communisation of public space were automatically hostile to any policies proposed by the PiS party. Third, considering those who chose not to respond to consultations, the results cannot be seen as representative of the urban population at large. For example, they do not align with a national opinion poll conducted by Poland's Public Opinion Research Centre in 2018, which shows that Poles were more equally divided on the de-communisation law, with 43 per cent of respondents supporting it and 44 per cent stating they were against it.[31] At the same time, residents are more inclined to reject the renaming of streets when it involves their public space. Results from consultations (some with very high response rates) organised over the last three decades in different Polish localities consistently showed a similar result: most

[31] See Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (CBOS), 'Stosunek do Dekomunizacji Nazw Ulic,' KB/18 (2018), 2, available at: https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_018_18.PDF (last visited 25 Mar. 2024). These views correlated with political orientation: street name changes were supported by 63% of respondents identifying with the right, for those with left-wing views the figure was only 21% and respondents with centrist political views were divided on this issue. Those who were opposed to renaming (46%) outweighed the supporters (36%).

respondents rejected the renaming of their own street.[32] Finally, the study is limited by the absence of comments from those who supported the renaming. The overwhelming majority of respondents motivated enough to submit a comment in the consultation process were against the renaming. Additional quantitative interviews and records from councils' street naming teams would have been useful for gaining a further understanding of the popular reception of street renaming. Notwithstanding these limitations, the qualitative data emerging from the three consultations allows for a deeper exploration of the practices and discursive strategies urban residents adopted to resist change. It also offers detailed insights into how residents perceived the impact of top-down changes to urban streetscapes on their lives.

Semantic Displacement, Ideological Monopoly and De-communisation Procedures

The renaming of streets in Poland peaked in 1990 and began to decline noticeably after 1993. According to the administrative legislation regulating the functioning of local governments in Poland, local councils are responsible for naming (and renaming) public space.[33] Thus, the process was uneven geographically as local authorities adopted differing approaches to toponymic change.[34] Whether a street name was removed depended mainly on the political composition of councils and the number of post-communist councillors. They usually voted against any street renaming resolutions. An additional obstacle to street renaming was the 'electorate' itself, as councils were wary of making changes unpopular with residents. In 2016, around 1,200 to 1,400 street and square names 'symbolising communism' were still in use, according to official estimates.[35] To address this problem, the ruling PiS party proposed a de-communisation law, passed by the Polish parliament in 2016. The law obliged local authorities to rename public spaces (streets, bridges, squares), buildings and objects that commemorated people, organisations, events and dates 'symbolising the repressive, authoritarian and non-sovereign system of power in Poland in the years 1944–1989'.[36] If local governments did not make the required changes, provincial governors – who are appointed by the national government – were mandated to issue administrative decisions that enforced the law (i.e. themselves renaming the 'communist streets' in their provinces). The Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*; IPN), the state-sponsored centre that investigates Nazi and communist crimes and preserves the memory of these crimes, was the primary facilitator of the renaming process. The institute prepared in advance a list consisting of over a hundred names that the law applied to and provided

[32] See Ewa Ochman, *Post-Communist Poland – Contested Pasts and Future Identities* (London: Routledge, 2013), 81–5; Joanna Kałużna, 'Dekomunizacja przestrzeni publicznej w Polsce – zarys problematyki,' *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne* 2 (2018): 160; Bartłomiej Różycki, 'Dekomunizacja przestrzeni publicznej w Polsce, 1989–2016,' in *Rozliczanie totalitarnej przeszłości: instytucje i ulice*, ed. Andrzej Paczkowski (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2017), 151–6.

[33] See Dziennik Ustaw 1990 nr 16 poz. 95, 'Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 r. o samorządzie gminnym,' Art 18, ust. 2 pkt 13.

[34] See Bartłomiej Różycki, 'Renaming Urban Toponomy as a Means of Redefining Local Identity: The Case of Street Decommunization in Poland,' *Open Political Science* 1, no. 1 (2017): 20–31; Elżbieta Hałas, 'Polityka symboliczna i pamięć zbiorowa. Zmiany nazwy ulic po komunizmie,' in *Zmiana czy stagnacja?*, ed. Mirosława Marody (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2004), 128–52; Ewa Kaltenberg-Kwiatkowska, 'O oznaczaniu i naznaczaniu przestrzeni miasta,' *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 60, no. 2/3 (2011): 135–65; Kwiryna Handke, 'Warstwy chronologiczne w nazewnictwie obszaru Pragi,' in *Warszawskiej Pragi Dzieje Dawne i Nowsze* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Jeden Świat, 2006), 29–42.

[35] Robert Mamątow (PiS), Senat Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, IX Kadencja, 'Pierwsze czytanie projektu ustawy o zakazie propagowania komunizmu lub innego ustroju totalitarnego przez nazwy budowli, obiektów i urządzeń użyteczności publicznej (druk senacki nr 47),' Wspólne posiedzenie Komisji Samorządu Terytorialnego i Administracji Państwowej (19) oraz Komisji Ustawodawczej (25) w dniu 17 lutego 2016 r., Zapis Stenograficzny, 1–14 (3), Druk nr 47. Draft bills, documents produced for legislative scrutiny and minutes from parliamentary committee and plenary session debates are available at the Sejm and Senate online archives: http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/page.xsp/archiwum and http://www.senat.gov.pl/poprzednie-kadencje/.

[36] 'Ustawa z dnia 1 kwietnia 2016 r. o zakazie propagowania komunizmu lub innego ustroju totalitarnego przez nazwy jednostek organizacyjnych, jednostek pomocniczych gminy, budowli, obiektów i urządzeń użyteczności publicznej oraz pomniki,' Dziennik Ustaw, 2016, poz. 744. The full name of the act in English is as follows: 'Law of 1 Apr. 2016 on Prohibiting Propagation of Communism or Other Totalitarian Regime Through Names of Buildings, Objects, and Public Service Devices'.

advice to local authorities and governors on street name changes.[37] It also prepared biographies of top communists and revised interpretations of historical events previously endorsed by communist historiography; these were to be used in the renaming process and justify its mandatory character.[38] The IPN expected that once people become aware of the actual biographies of the commemorated officials, they would be willing to accept the street renaming. The belief was that, by and large, people pay attention to street names and value their commemorative significance. And if they do not, they should be educated accordingly.[39]

In contrast, cultural geographers researching toponymic change draw our attention to urban residents' unreflective and commonplace relationship with commemorative street names. People's attitudes to streetscapes are shaped by daily routines and activities that occur in a specific space as well as at a specific time. As the memory of historical figures and events fades away, the meaning of commemorative street names is lost too. Consequently, 'street names often become empty signifiers to many urban residents who use them as spatial identifiers on a daily basis'.[40] One of the more interesting effects of this 'unreflective relationship' is people's resistance to the remaking of their everyday space. As mentioned earlier, Light and Young show that twenty years after renaming took place, residents of Bucharest still used the communist-era names. They argue that this occurred because of everyday habit and inertia rather than 'conscious resistance' against the new hegemonic version of the national past.[41] They explain habit formation in the following way: 'The practice of using a particular name can be treated as a form of behavior, and once the association between a name and a location is learned, the use of that name quickly becomes habitual. Like any habit, use of that name will be resistant to change while the context in which the name is being used is stable.'[42] By the context here, they mean a location – a market or a street – used for the same everyday purposes. Light and Young admit 'the shift from socialism to postsocialism represents a dramatic change of context' but argue that this change is of secondary importance when it comes to habit.[43]

In Poland, the de-communisation law came into force almost thirty years after the fall of communism. Therefore, the 'context' in which a street name was being used was stable on both accounts identified by Light and Young. Hence, it is no surprise that many respondents who participated in the consultations in Warsaw, Łódź and Katowice argued that the street names from the communist era did not offend anyone. One of the respondents explained: 'It didn't bother me for forty years and it doesn't bother me now either.'[44] Street names were just orientation points in the topography of

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[37] The exact criteria for identifying names symbolising the communist regime in Poland were not specified by the IPN. However, essentially, the list included any name, event, or date that commemorated a) the Polish or international communist movement; b) the establishment and consolidation of the communist dictatorship in Poland; c) the presence of the Red Army on Poland's territory; d) any military organisations and armed forces sponsored and controlled by the Soviets (even if it contributed to the effort of ending the Second World War). See Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN), 'Nazwy do zmiany'. Available at: https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/upamietnianie/dekomunizacja/zmiany-nazw-ulic/nazwy-ulic/nazwy-do-zmiany (last visited 25 Apr. 2024).

[38] It has been estimated that by the end of 2017, between 60% to 70% of street names affected by the 2016 law had been renamed by local authorities. See Ochman, 'The Legacies,' 77.

[39] Maciej Korkuć, the chief coordinator of the IPN programme on the de-communisation of public space, 'Historia na cokole czy historia cokołu? Pomniki z lat PRL w przestrzeni publicznej - dyskusja na kanwie sporu o "Czterech Śpiących",' IPN TV, Mar. 2014. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQWhieMGJbI (last visited 25 Apr. 2024).

[40] Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu, 'The Urban Streetscape as Political Cosmos,' in *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes: Naming, Politics, and Place*, eds. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu (London: Routledge, 2017), 8.

[41] Light and Young, 'Habit,' 676–83.

[42] Ibid., 681.

[43] Ibid., 681.

[44] [Nie przeszkadzało mi przez czterdzieści lat i teraz też nie przeszkadza.], 'Dane jakościowe pozyskane w konsultacjach dotyczące zmiany nazwy ulicy Lucjana Szenwalda na ulicę Bolesława Prusa,' Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących zmian nazw ulic 9-go Maja, Brunona Jasieńskiego, Leona Kruczkowskiego, Oskara Lange, Włodzimierza Stahla i Lucjana Szenwalda*, no date, 1–13 (10). Available at: https://www.katowice.eu/Konsultacje/Strony/Zmiana-nazw-ulic-.aspx (last visited 25 Mar. 2024). All quotations from the Polish language have been translated

their city, an integral part of its built environment, and a location in daily life. 'A street is just a street, no one who lives on a given street identifies with the person whose name the street is named after.'[45] Moreover some respondents suggested that the entire de-communisation effort would inevitably fail: 'The change will only introduce chaos […] and residents will still use the familiar terms [street names] out of habit.'[46] This apparent loss of the commemorative meaning of street names may explain the widespread popularity of a renaming mechanism that implemented the de-communisation law while preserving the original name. According to this mechanism, 'the former denotation was "removed" and replaced by a new one, while the name form was kept intact'.[47] For example, many respondents taking part in the Warsaw consultation proposed that a street named after Józef Ciszewski (a member of the interwar Communist Party of Poland) should be changed to Józef Ciszewski (an interwar football player) or Jan Ciszewski (a sports commentator).[48] After such a renaming, Ciszewski Street would remain Ciszewski Street, allowing residents of the affected street to keep their old address. The fact that local authorities frequently employed such a renaming mechanism shows that they themselves recognised the limited significance of commemorative street names.[49]

Maoz Azaryahu argues that the erosion of the historical meaning of street names is unavoidable as commemorative toponyms are affected by 'semantic displacement' the very moment a historical name is given to a street. In his words: 'Naming a street after a historical figure or event triggers a fundamental semantic displacement as a result of the change of referential framework that occurs when a historical name becomes a spatial designation.'[50] The process intensifies over time but to a different degree; this is because a name will be affected by several factors such as 'reputations, mythologies, images, and sociospatial practices'.[51] After all, there are commemorative streets that can retain their symbolic power for a long time. For example, some communist-era streets were renamed immediately after the fall of communism, without protest, as they were commonly associated with the Soviet subjugation of Poland. What's more, almost thirty years later, these long-gone street names were still being used to justify the mandatory renaming. Although there were no more Dzerzhinsky Streets in Poland, politicians and memory activists supporting the 2016 law repeatedly demanded that Polish streetscapes be cleansed of Dzerzhinsky.[52] This discursive device was also deployed during the consultations.[53]

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by the author into English. The reproduced Polish quotations retain the original spelling and punctuation. The English version follows the Polish punctuation.

[45] [Ulica to ulica, nikt się nie identyfikuje z daną osobą od której imienia pochodzi nazwa ulicy przy której się mieszka], 'Zestawienie zgłoszonych przez mieszkańców miasta Łodzi innych propozycji i opinii dotyczących przedmiotu konsutacji,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych dotyczących zmian nazw łódzkich ulic i placu Zwycięstwa dokonanych zarządzeniami zastępczymi Wojewody Łódzkiego*, no date, 1–48 (42). Available at: https://uml.lodz.pl/konsultacje/zakonczone-konsultacje/2018-rok/zmiana-nazw-ulic-i-placu-zwyciestwa/ (last visited 25 Mar. 2024).

[46] [Zmiana wprowadzi tylko chaos [...] a mieszkańcy i tak będą posługiwali się dotychczas znanymi określeniami z przyzwyczajenia.], 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 24.

[47] Mariusz Rutkowski, 'Urban,' 279.

[48] See, for example, 'Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 26 June 2017 /Ursynów (uwaga szczegółowa nr 32),' Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 28. Also, several hundred residents signed a petition to rename the street to Józef Ciszewski (footballer). The petition was submitted to the Municipal Naming Committee. The council changed the name to Jan Ciszewski Street in 2017.

[49] For example, in Warsaw six streets were renamed using this 'replacement' method. See Miejskie Centrum Kontaktu Warszawa 19115, Urząd m.st. Warszawy, 'Zmiany nazw ulic w procesie dekomunizacji', available at: https://warszawa19115.pl/-/zmiany-nazw-ulic-w-warszawie-ustawa-o-zakazie-promowania-komunizmu (last visited 25 Apr. 2024).

[50] Azaryahu, 'The Power,' 322.

[51] Ibid., 321.

[52] See, for example, Jarosław Krajewski (PiS), Sejm Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, VIII Kadencji, 'Projekt ustawy o zakazie propagowania komunizmu lub innego ustroju totalitarnego przez nazwy budowli, obiektów i urządzeń użyteczności publicznej,' Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 15 posiedzenia Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w dniu 1 kwietnia 2016 r. (Warszawa, 2016), 248–9 (249).

[53] One of the Warsaw respondents argued that '... no one would like to live on Dzerzhinsky Square [... nikt nie chciałby mieszkać na Placu Dzierżyńskiego]', in defence of the renaming of The Union of Youth Struggle Street (Związek Walki Młodych Street, abbreviated as ZWM Street). ZWM was a communist youth organisation active during the

At the same time, renaming processes can renew public interest in the symbolic significance of street names. After all, renaming is directly concerned with the historical referent of toponyms and the meaning imposed on them. Moreover, renaming does not happen in a vacuum. The meaning of many streets identified by the IPN as 'glorifying communism' became the focus of heated public debates, political disagreements and acts of resistance.[54] Local authorities used the biographical notes written by the IPN in the consultation process. This was done either to justify the street renaming or to confront residents with the IPN's version of national history. The latter – as in Warsaw – was done to defend a council's objection to implementing the law. In this context of polarisation and conflict, some participants in the consultations chose to argue for retaining the old street names primarily because of their commemorative function rather than their role as spatial designators. Their argumentation followed three lines of reasoning. First, the reliability and integrity of the system assessing street names were questioned. The IPN was portrayed as a politicised institution that advanced its own commemorative agenda and prepared biased biographies of historical figures and partisan explanations of historical events. These views questioning the IPN's professionalism and trustworthiness were especially prevalent in Warsaw, as here respondents were directly asked about their opinion on whether the street banned by the IPN glorified communism. For example, one of the Warsaw respondents observed: 'The IPN should either provide all the facts or none at all, because if it selectively chooses what fits into a pre-established theory, it is propaganda.'[55] Second, it was argued that no political group should ideologically monopolise public space. The assessment of the Polish People's Republic should be more balanced and consider the post-war geopolitical situation, the Polish communist regime's modernisation achievements and the communists' contribution to the fight against Nazism.[56] Third, there was the contentious issue of streets named after writers, poets and scientists. Many respondents felt that these figures were remembered for their artistic or scientific achievements, not because they belonged to a communist party. As one Katowice resident explained with respect to the writer Kruczkowski: 'He was not a torturer, he did not work in the Security Service. Above all, he was a writer and a playwright.'[57] This resistance to the mandatory renaming had less to do with nostalgia for communist-era job security and social welfare provision (as seen in the 1990s) and more to do with distrust of top-down revisions of the past and objection to the political instrumentalisation of history. This lack of confidence in the de-communisation procedures was summarised by one Łódź inhabitant as follows: 'To me it's simply a witch hunt, I believe

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Second World War. Memory of its significance in Polish history has largely faded away. Thus, it was down to the rhetorical power of Dzerzhinsky as a symbol of totalitarian crimes to justify the banning of ZWM Street. 'Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 28 June 2017 /Mokotów (uwaga szczegółowa nr 28),' Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 28.

54 See, for example, Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej Samorządu Województwa Śląskiego, 'Jerzy Ziętek powinien zostać na 97%,' 8 Nov 2017, available at: https://www.slaskie.pl/content/9216_2017-11-08?t=marsza%C5%82ek; Tomasz Częścik, 'Robert Biedroń chce się poskarżyć w Trybunale Konstytucyjnym. Chodzi o nazwy ulic,' *Wyborcza PL Trójmiasto*, 5 May 2016 and Paulina Siegień, 'Tak mieszkańcy walczą z nowymi nazwami ulic. "Zakleiłem tabliczkę, bo mi się treść nie podoba",' *Wyborcza PL Trójmiasto*, 28 Feb. 2018, both available at: https://trojmiasto.wyborcza.pl/ (all last visited 25 Apr. 2024).

55 [IPN powinien podawać wszystkie dane albo nie podawać ich wcale, ponieważ jeśli tendencyjnie wybiera to, co pasuje do z góry założonej teorii, jest to propaganda.], 'Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 28 June 2017 /Mokotów (uwaga ogólna nr 20),' Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 16.

56 See, for example, 'Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 20 June 2017 /Bielany (uwaga ogólna nr 23, 24),' 17; 'Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 28 June 2017 /Mokotów (uwaga ogólna nr 29),' 18; 'Uwaga zgłoszona mailowo (uwaga ogólna nr 35),' 19; Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 26 June 2017 /Ursynów (uwaga szczegółowa nr 31),' 28 in Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*. See also 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 26, 29, 35, 37.

57 [Nie był oprawcą, nie pracował w UB. Był przede wszystkim pisarzem, dramaturgiem], 'Dane jakościowe pozyskane w konsultacjach dotyczące zmiany nazwy ulicy Leona Kruczkowskiego na ulicę Zbigniewa Herberta,' Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 8. For the IPN's biographical note on Leon Kruczkowski see: IPN, 'Nazwy do zmiany'. Available at: https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/upamietnianie/dekomunizacja/zmiany-nazw-ulic/nazwy-ulic/nazwy-do-zmiany/40207,ul-Kruczkowskiego-Leona.html (last visited 18 Mar. 2024).

that if I persevered, I could find a counterargument that would demonstrate that every single street is named improperly, it's a matter of perspective'.[58] Thus, it is unsurprising that several respondents expressed concern that the 2016 renaming might not be the final one, given regimes' tendency to employ streetscapes for self-legitimisation despite the impact these revisions have on people.[59]

 Clearly, the symbolic value of commemorative street names was often lost on urban residents. At the same time, as we have seen, a commemorative dimension that had faded was sometimes rediscovered, and the historical meanings of street names were reinterpreted. In both instances, however, the respondents used the consultations to question the very premises of the 2016 legislation. They contested the right of the authorities to make the renaming mandatory and demanded that local communities be involved in decision-making. Even when the respondents objected to the renaming because of practical costs – discussed in the next section – they often framed their argument in terms of democratic rights. They expected public officials and governing bodies to recognise their concerns and used the consultations to insist that no changes were made without their consent.

'Nobody Cares about Us'[60] – the Everyday Impact of Street Renaming

The issue of practical costs when it comes to street renaming has attracted little scholarly interest. The existing research on toponymic change acknowledges that this is a crucial factor shaping urban residents' responses but this topic is usually considered only in passing. Likewise, Polish politicians, IPN officials and public history consultants – while admitting that practical costs affected local communities' attitudes to street name changes – did not seriously engage with this issue. Over two decades, when different versions of the bill on the de-communisation of public space were debated in the Polish parliament, the topic did not provoke any substantial exchanges either in the parliamentary commissions scrutinising the various de-communisation bills or plenary sessions.[61] It was treated as an unavoidable consequence of dealing with the material heritage of communist dictatorship. Even when, in 2016, legislators finally tried to mitigate the problem, this was done with half measures and without careful consideration of the everyday impact of name-changing.[62] And yet, the consultation responses show that the practical costs are of primary concern to residents. The issue arose in multiple contexts in consultations in Katowice, Łódź and Warsaw. Changing a street name requires updating an address with banks, hospitals, schools, utilities and shops, and other official bodies.

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[58] [Dla mnie to zwykłe polowanie na czarownice, sądzę, że gdybym się uparła znalazłabym kontrargument, który wykazałby, że każda, każda ulica nazwana jest niewłaściwie, jest to kwestia optyki], 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 40.

[59] See, for example, 'Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 26 June 2017 /Ursynów (uwaga szczegółowa nr 34),' 29; 'Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 21 June 2017 /Targówek (uwaga szczegółowa nr 39),' 30 in Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych* and 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 14, 28, 39, 40.

[60] [Nikt nie liczy się z nami […]], 'Dane jakościowe pozyskane w konsultacjach dotyczące zmiany nazwy ulicy Leona Kruczkowskiego na ulicę Zbigniewa Herberta,' Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 7.

[61] See Sejm Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej (RP), III Kadencja, 'Poselski Projekt ustawy o dekomunizacji życia publicznego w Polsce' (1998 r.), Druk 553; Sejm RP, III Kadencja, 'Rządowy projekt ustawy o miejscach pamięci narodowej' (1999 r.), Druk nr 1268; Sejm RP, V Kadencja, 'Poselski projekt ustawy o usunięciu symboli komunizmu z życia publicznego w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej' (2007 r.), Druk nr 2027; Sejm RP, VI Kadencja, 'Poselski projekt ustawy o usunięciu symboli komunizmu z życia publicznego w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej' (2007 r.), Druk nr 1212; Sejm RP, VII Kadencja, 'Poselski projekt ustawy o usunięciu symboli komunizmu z życia publicznego w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej' (2011 r.), Druk nr 283; Senat RP, IX Kadencja,'Projekt ustawy o zakazie propagowania komunizmu lub innego ustroju totalitarnego przez nazwy budowli, obiektów i urządzeń użyteczności publicznej' (2015 r.), Druk 47. Draft bills, documents produced for legislative scrutiny and minutes from parliamentary committee and plenary session debates are available at the Sejm RP and Senate RP online archives: http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/page.xsp/archiwum and http://www.senat.gov.pl/poprzednie-kadencje/. Documents can be conveniently searched in the archives by print number (Druk nr).

[62] See the information for residents regarding the exchange of documents prepared by the Institute of National Remembrance: IPN, 'Informacje dla mieszkańców'. Available at: https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/upamietnianie/dekomunizacja/zmiany-nazw-ulic/informacja-dla-mieszkan/36943,Informacja-dla-mieszkancow.html (last visited 25 Apr. 2024).

All this demands time and effort and many respondents resented having to deal with it. The group that felt particularly affected were the owners of businesses and tradespeople. Rubber stamps, promotional brochures, business cards, and headed paper need to be replaced, to mention the most obvious examples. After making a list of things that had to be taken care of, one Katowice respondent concluded: 'we don't care who W. Stahl was, to me, it's some nonsense and more money thrown down the drain, both MINE and the COUNCIL's.'[63] Capital letters and exclamation marks signalled the strength of feeling here. The respondent also claimed that he did not care who a street was named after. This was not an unusual response. In the 2007 national survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre, 65 per cent of respondents said it did not matter to them who a street was named after (it did matter to 30 per cent of respondents).[64] However, what is more interesting here is that the respondent felt angry not only about the personal inconvenience but also about the cost incurred by the local administration.[65] This shift from individual to collective concerns and focus on the shared life in a local community was a strategy frequently used by respondents who objected to new street names. They contrasted the effort that went into renaming with the authorities' disregard for the physical environment of their cities. The subjects of, above all, potholes, lighting and unsafe road infrastructure were focused on by respondents to portray the authorities as neglectful and incapable of taking care of local matters: 'My street has needed repairs for years, and not a single know-it-all has lifted a finger to make things move forward. Instead, we, together with our neighbours, have repeatedly had our cars' suspension damaged.'[66]

    Moreover, respondents often discussed the renaming in the wider context of public dissatisfaction with the local services. They questioned the authorities' spending priorities, with some respondents demanding that taxpayers' money be channelled into hospitals, orphanages and childcare facilities rather than on the symbolic remaking of public space.[67] What's more, once the street renaming was discussed in the context of low trust in the competency of those holding power, the entire de-communisation process became suspect. As one Łódź respondent explained: 'There's no asphalt here, only potholed concrete slabs that can damage your car. […] Currently, *the state of this street rather than its name reminds me of the communist times*, personally the name doesn't bother me, it's short and easy to remember [emphasis added].'[68] Here, the respondent referred to wider political disagreements over the post-communist transition in Poland to discredit the de-communisation of

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[63] [nie interesuje nas kto to był W. Stahl, dla mnie to jakaś bzdura i kolejne pieniądze wyrzucone w błoto MOJE jaki i URZĘDOWE!], 'Dane jakościowe pozyskane w konsultacjach dotyczące zmiany nazwy ulicy Włodzimierza Stahala na ulicę Liliową,' Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 8–9.

[64] CBOS, 'Opinia Społeczna o Nazwach Ulic,' KB/38 (2007), 2–3, available at: https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2007/K_038_07.PDF (last visited 25 Mar. 2024).

[65] See, for example, this response from one Łódź resident: 'No changes, as they are too costly for our budget, which, by the way, is spent on thoughtless projects reorganizing everything. Meanwhile, important aspects for the residents of Łódź, such as improving the punctuality of public transport vehicles arriving at stops, potholes in roads worse than in Ukraine, and many others, are left unaddressed, causing this city to increasingly encourage people to move away' [Brak zmian, ponieważ są one zbyt kosztowne dla naszego budżetu, który z resztą jest wydawany na bezmyślne projekty reorganizacji wszystkiego. Zostawione są natomiast tak ważne aspekty dla łodzian jak poprawa terminowości przyjeżdżania pojazdów MPK na przystanki, dziury w drogach gorsze niż na Ukrainie i wiele wiele innych które powodują że to miasto coraz bardziej zachęca do wyprowadzki], 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 32.

[66] [Moja ulica od lat wymaga remontu i żaden mądrala nawet palcem nie kiwnął, by coś ruszyło w tym kierunku. Zamiast tego pernamentnie niszczymy, wraz z sąsiadami, zawieszenie w naszych pojazdach], 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 15.

[67] See, for example, 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 16, 18, 20, 25, 33; 'Dane jakościowe pozyskane w konsultacjach dotyczące zmiany nazwy ulicy Lucjana Szenwalda na ulicę Bolesława Prusa,' Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 10; 'Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 19 June 2017 /Białołęka (uwaga szczegółowa nr 52, 53),' Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 32.

[68] [Nie ma tu asfaltu, a jedynie dziurawe betonowe płyty, przez które można sobie uszkodzić auto. […] Na ten moment z komuną kojarzy mi się stan ten ulicy a nie jej nazwa, która mnie osobiście nie przeszkadza, jest krótka i łatwa w zapamiętaniu'], 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 23.

public space.[69] The proponents of mandatory street renaming positioned themselves as the only 'truly Polish' force in the country trying to deal with the historical legacies of the communist past.[70] The final disappearance of the communist material heritage was to be a sign that Poland was, at last, a sovereign state. By juxtaposing the dilapidated infrastructure with the politicians' symbolic posturing, the respondent questioned the *actual* post-communist transformation of Poland.

The framing of the de-communisation of public space as evidence of the authorities' limited understanding of people's everyday lives was particularly noticeable when respondents discussed the effect the street renaming would have on the elderly and vulnerable. Two themes were prominent: the loss of toponymic familiarity and challenges related to health and disability. Concerns were expressed about older people's sense of security and stability and the impact on independent living.[71] One respondent observed: 'When street names are changed there will be total chaos in Łódź. Older people won't know how to navigate […]. Things are good as they are. Why change them?'[72] The fear of losing control over the physical environment was felt more strongly in cities, which seemed particularly affected by the renaming. In Łódź, twenty-six streets were listed on the consultation form. In the context of the size of the Łódź streetscape, this number might not appear high, but still, the possibility of 'chaos in the city' was brought up by several respondents.

The view that the elderly, vulnerable and frail had not been taken into account in the renaming process also emerged in comments related to updating the address on official documents.[73] In Warsaw, during an open meeting in the Mokotów district, a simple question was posed: '[…] will someone from the City Council come to their homes with a photographer and all the necessary forms?'[74] Here, the anger and frustration were directed at the local council, even though the Warsaw authorities were against the mandatory street renaming and tried to use the consultation process to legitimise their objections to the de-communisation law. Moreover, according to the 2016 law, updating ID cards was unnecessary. This limited understanding of the practical implications of the law only further increased the already low popularity of street renaming.[75] Clearly, some of these anxieties could have been alleviated in advance with effective communication that would increase trust in local systems responsible for the practical aspect of the renaming. Yet, the authorities did not formulate a clear strategy to mitigate the practical costs. There was little reflection on what street alterations meant in practice for urban residents, particularly marginalised and vulnerable groups.[76] The respondents

[69] On the political disagreements with respect to the post-communist transformation in Poland, see Aleks Szczerbiak, *Politicising the Communist Past: The Politics of Truth Revelation in Post-Communist Poland* (London: Routledge, 2018); Kate Korycki, 'Memory, Party Politics, and Post-Transition Space: The Case of Poland,' *East European Politics and Societies* 31, no. 3 (2017): 518–44; Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik 'Roundtable Discord: The Contested Legacy of 1989 in Poland,' in *Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, eds. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60–84.

[70] See, for example, Senat Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej, IX Kadencja, 'Drugie czytanie projektu ustawy o zakazie propagowania komunizmu lub innego ustroju totalitarnego przez nazwy budowli, obiektów i urządzeń użyteczności publicznej,' Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 11 posiedzenia Senatu w dniach 17, 18 i 19 lutego 2016 r. (Warszawa, 2016), 88–111.

[71] The issue of restricted mobility often appeared in the context of public transport. See 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 33.

[72] [Kiedy nazwy ulic zostaną zmienione zapanuje totalny chaos w Łodzi. Starsi ludzie nie będą wiedzieli jak się poruszać. […] Jest dobrze jak jest. Po co to zmieniać?], 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 42.

[73] See, for example, 'Dane jakościowe pozyskane w konsultacjach dotyczące zmiany nazwy ulicy Leona Kruczkowskiego na ulicę Zbigniewa Herberta,' Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 8.

[74] [[…] czy ktoś z Rady Miasta przyjdzie do ich domu z fotografem i z wszystkimi formularzami?], 'Uwaga zgłoszona na spotkaniu 28 June 2017 / Mokotów (uwaga ogólna nr 3),' Urząd m. st. Warszawy, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 13.

[75] See, for example, 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 32.

[76] The matter of ID cards and driving licences best illustrated the problem. Many residents thought these would need to be changed and, generally, there was a lot of confusion among the decision makers and various officials too as to which documents required changing. The IPN on its website stated that ID cards and driving licences would stay valid after renaming (IPN, 'Informacje dla mieszkańców'). The advice provided by local authorities was often confusing, especially in relation to driving licences and car registration documents. Some local authorities stated they would not have to be changed, for example in Ostrołęka, whereas others stated the opposite, for example in Katowice.

overwhelmingly mentioned practical costs as the key factor shaping responses to the de-communisation of public space. However, the literature on streetscapes also shows that practical costs are sometimes used as a pretext for concealing other objections to renaming.[77] In the case discussed in this paper, it was clear that residents found it easier to raise the issue of time and effort costs than to express personal and subjective feelings about street renaming.

A Sense of Self, Life Trajectory and Ageing in Place

A great deal of recent research into street renaming in Western societies has focused on marginalised groups and their social and racial struggles for the right to have their histories and memories inscribed into the commemorative landscape.[78] Commenting on urban streetscapes as sites of socio-political resistance, Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu remind us that 'a city's road network is not simply a set of abstract spaces and flows but also the vehicle for emotions, memory, and a sense of place'.[79] After all, names of urban spaces are essential for group self-definition, collective identities and the politics of belonging and exclusion. Much less is known, however, about the everyday aspects of emotional engagement with street names. Why do some people feel emotional about street names? To probe this type of engagement, I draw on Low and Altman's concept of place attachment, defined as the emotional bonds people develop with the physical environment.[80] Among the many functions that place attachment fulfils in people's lives (and which are summarised by Law and Altman as various 'self-definitional processes'), the preservation of a person's self-identity through a connection to an 'everyday physical setting' is of relevance to this paper.[81] How does a sense of self and personal memories of life experiences that have occurred in a particular physical setting become affected by the alteration of this setting?

The renaming of streets alters people's relationship with their everyday space. Although the actual physical space does not change, the alteration of the name that denotes this space is often experienced as a difficult-to-explain loss. Only a handful of respondents commented on this more personal and subjective area of street renaming. When this occurred, the disappearance of the name was usually discussed in the context of past lived experiences. For example, the issue came up in Katowice in a comment concerning the renaming of Szenwald Street (a poet and Communist Party activist) to Prus Street (one of the most influential writers in the history of Polish literature). An older respondent who had lived on Szenwald Street for most of his life observed: 'If it makes the government happy, please change it. It's a shame: I've spent most of my life on Szenwald Street, and I will die on B. Prus Street. I know the biographies and works of both gentlemen.'[82]

The comment, though concise, effectively communicates a sense of sadness about the renaming felt by the respondent. The change affected his most private space: the street where his home was located, which had witnessed the major events in his life. The street name framed the narrative of his life, gave contours to it. The literature on place attachment shows that the strength of emotional bonds with

[77] See, for example, Derek H. Alderman and Joshua Inwood, 'Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging: Spatial Injustices in the Toponymic Commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr.,' *Social & Cultural Geography* 14, no. 2 (2013): 226.

[78] For a discussion of grassroots activism aiming to confront residents of Berlin with Germany's colonial history see, for example, Christiane Steckenbiller, 'Berlin's Colonial Legacies and New Minority Histories: The Case of the Humboldt Forum and Colonial Street Names in the German Capital,' *Monatshefte* 111, no. 1 (2019): 99–116 and Susanne Förster, Sybille Frank, Georg Krajewsky and Jona Schwerer, 'Negotiating German Colonial Heritage in Berlin's Afrikanisches Viertel,' *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 22, no. 7 (2016): 515–29. See also Idesbald Goddeeris, 'Colonial Streets and Statues: Postcolonial Belgium in the Public Space,' *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 4 (2015): 397–409.

[79] Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu, 'The Urban,' 12.

[80] Setha M. Low and Irwin Altman, 'Place Attachment: A Conceptual Inquiry,' in *Place Attachment*, eds. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 1–12.

[81] Ibid., 10.

[82] [Jeżeli ma to uszczęśliwić rząd proszę zmienić. Szkoda: większość życia spędziłem przy ul. Szenwalda, a umrę przy B. Prusa. Znam życiorysy i twórczość obu Panów],'Dane jakościowe pozyskane w konsultacjach dotyczące zmiany nazwy ulicy Lucjana Szenwalda na ulicę Bolesława Prusa,' Urząd Miasta Katowice, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych Katowice*, 10.

places is relative to time. As people live and age in the same location, they develop a sense of continuity in their lives 'by connecting certain places with specific past experiences'.[83] Consequently, any change to one's physical environment is experienced as a loss of personal control over one's life. Research conducted by environmental psychologists suggests that the elderly cope with this loss of control in one of two ways. Either they take direct action to regain control or accept that realities cannot be changed and try to restructure 'the meaning of the situation' to avoid feeling powerless.[84] Overall, the latter response is more common. Here, the respondent from Katowice resigns stoically from battling the de-communisation law. However, by distancing himself from the renaming process – 'If it makes the government happy, please change it.' – he shifts the balance of power in his favour and regains control over the situation. He feels his loss, but above all, he pities the irrational and immature PiS government.

However, the impact of street renaming on a sense of self-identity and preservation of this identity is not restricted to older people. As Lewicka demonstrated in her landmark study on the relationship between place attachment and place identity in urban areas, 'the most consistent predictor of place attachment was residence time'.[85] During the consultations, one thirty-six-year-old respondent who lived all her life in Łódź explained: '[...] Łódź will lose its character and identity. [...] I went to high school on Zula Pacanowska Street, in my consciousness and memory it's my time on Zula Pacanowska [Street], if you change the name, you will completely destroy it.'[86] The respondent had attended a high school on this street, developing strong bonds with it, and associating it with past experiences during a formative period of her life. Thus this street name was integral to a biographical narrative of her adolescent years and served as a trigger for personal memories of her past self. Once the name was changed, these experiences would be – to use her own words – destroyed: 'If you change the name, you will completely destroy it.'

Tellingly, the respondent, while defending the name 'Zula Pacanowska Street', mentioned not only the disruption to the narrative of her own life but also the disruption to the place identity of the city of Łódź itself. The respondent valued the street name because it was also part of the local heritage and served as a form of public memory. Zula Pacanowska was a pre-war communist activist who died in the Chełmno extermination camp in 1942.[87] As Low and Altman remind us: 'individual self-definitions often incorporate group and cultural processes, meanings, and values'.[88] The self-definitional processes are intertwined. Places represented by specific names become integral to growing up as we invest our neighbourhoods with social and personal meaning. This overlapping of individual and collective levels of attachment was very much visible in another comment contributed by the resident from Łódź: 'it is best to stick to the original nomenclature [...] what is crucial for us residents is that we all identify with a place that we know well (many street names have existed since the beginning of the housing estate), with the place where we were raised and grew up, with a name that has been with us forever and does not trouble us in any way'.[89]

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[83] Jan Sýkora, Marie Horňáková, Kirsten Visser and Gideon Bolt, '"It is natural": Sustained Place Attachment of Long-term Residents in a Gentrifying Prague Neighbourhood,' *Social & Cultural Geography* 24, no. 10 (2023): 1944. See also György Málovics, Remus Crețan, Boglárka Méreiné Berki and Janka Tóth, 'Urban Roma, Segregation and Place Attachment in Szeged, Hungary,' *Area* 51, no. 1 (2019): 72–83.

[84] Robyn Findlay and Deirdre McLaughlin, 'Environment and Psychological Responses to Ageing,' in *Ageing and Place: Perspective, Policy, Practice*, eds. Gavin J. Andrews and David R. Phillips (London: Routledge, 2005), 125.

[85] Lewicka, 'Place,' 221.

[86] [[…] Łódź straci swój wyraz i tożsamość […] ja chodziłam do Liceum na ul. Zuli Pacanowskiej, w mojej świadomości i pamięci jest to mój czas na Zuli Pacanowskiej, jak zmienicie nazwę to zupełni zniszczycie.], 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 36.

[87] For the IPN's biographical note on Zula Pacanowska see: IPN, 'Nazwy do zmiany'. Available at: https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/ upamietnianie/dekomunizacja/zmiany-nazw-ulic/nazwy-ulic/nazwy-do-zmiany/41538,ul-Pacanowskiej-Zuli.html (last visited 25 Mar. 2024).

[88] Low and Altman, 'Place,' 11.

[89] [Najlepiej jednak jest pozostać przy pierwotnym nazewnictwie […] bardzo ważne dla nas mieszkańców jest to, że wszyscy utożsamiamy się z miejscem które doskonale znamy (wiele nazw ulic istnieje tu od początku istnienia osiedli), z miejscem

People's memories of places rely on physical traces of the past, or 'urban reminders', which include street names. Lewicka argues that 'urban reminders' play a more significant role in attachment to places with local significance than national ones.[90] The above-cited respondent drew on localised knowledge about the area to explain their position. This street is located on the Bolesław Chrobry housing estate in Widzew, one of the industrial districts of Łódź. The estate was built by the workers' housing cooperative in the years 1974–81. While explaining that the street name has existed 'since the beginning' of the estate, the respondent manages to convey their sense of pride in and emotional bond with the place. The name fosters a connection among the residents and creates a shared sense of belonging. Once this connection is severed, the authenticity of past experiences becomes somehow less certain. Thus, changing the names of places should not be taken lightly. Yet, the perception was that the authorities were unconcerned with the effect renaming would have on people's daily lives. The respondent concluded their comment with: 'The idea [the renaming] is a sign of immense ignorance on the part of the governor and other people ruling over us.'[91]

Conclusion

The fall of communism in Eastern Europe did not bring about widespread destruction of the material heritage of communist dictatorships in the region. Given that public acceptance of the regime change has been high, the process of de-commemoration has been more protracted than anticipated. One of the key factors contributing to this slow pace of change was urban residents' opposition to street name changes. This paper investigated why this was the case by analysing responses from public consultations conducted in Warsaw, Łódź and Katowice following the introduction of mandatory street renaming in 2016 in Poland. The consultations varied in terms of scope, scale and method. Despite these differences, the same concerns and issues emerged from the responses.

Most importantly, what stands out from the analysed material is the extent to which a combination of interplaying causes has shaped urban residents' reception of the de-communisation of public space. If we discuss these causes in isolation, we will fail to grasp the complexity of urban residents' relationships with places and the different functions that commemorative street names simultaneously serve in people's everyday lives. Focusing on a single cause contributing to urban residents' resistance to de-communisation of public space, such as habitual practices or ideological resistance, can imply that these causes are mutually exclusive. This can prevent us from recognising the dynamic and evolving nature of different local populations' responses to symbolic change. We also risk overlooking the degree to which the social and political specificity of the de-commemoration process shapes the discursive strategies residents adopt to oppose toponymic change. In the case of Poland, thirty years after the fall of communism, the perceptions of the de-communisation of public space were affected by the democratic back-sliding during the PiS's time in power. The IPN was seen by many sections of Polish society as a biased institution that served the political purpose of the government in power. Once trust in public institutions that campaigned for the remaking of streetscapes had eroded, it was harder to persuade local communities that commemorative renaming was a transitional justice mechanism rather than partisan commemorative politics.

However, the results from the consultations also confirm the continued relevance of practical issues when it comes to street renaming, which is in line with earlier findings from Romania and Ukraine. The most frequently raised concerns focused on the financial costs, time and effort renaming entails, and the possible disruption to daily routines that changes to a local streetscape might bring. The consultations in Poland, however, also shed light on the impact renaming had on elderly and vulnerable citizens, who have largely been neglected in discussions on post-communist symbolic change. What's more, the responses raise new questions about the connection between resistance to street renaming

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gdzie się wychowaliśmy i dorastaliśmy, z jego nazwą, która towarzyszy nam od zawsze i w żaden sposób nam nie przeszkadza], 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 36.
[90] Lewicka, 'Place,' 227.
[91] [Pomysł zmian nazw ulic jest przejawem ogromnej ignorancji ze strony wojewody i innych rządzących nami osób.], 'Zestawienie,' Urząd Miasta Łodzi, *Raport z konsultacji społecznych*, 36.

and place attachments people form with their everyday space. Names play a critical role in the formation of a wider communal sense of place identity. However, they also contribute to a sense of stability, security, and familiarity with one's physical surroundings. They play an essential role in preserving personal memories and providing coherence to the narrative of one's life. Judging from the consultation material, respondents found it difficult to talk about street renaming and their personal and emotional bonds with places. Clearly, more research is warranted to explore how emotional attachments to the names of streets affect public responses to the removal of the material heritage of communist dictatorships.

The Polish case also underscored how the very process of the de-commemoration of public space (how it is implemented) affects the reception of change among urban residents. The consultation responses analysed in this paper provide insights into people's understanding of their democratic right to be meaningfully consulted on renaming (beyond mere formality or tokenism). The respondents were not afraid of expressing their disapproval of the top-down toponymic change and the entire renaming process regarding its transparency and implementation. The discursive strategies employed to discredit the de-communisation law focused on the issue of trust in the authorities' competence, general dissatisfaction with public services and the allocation of resources. The common thread connecting the different responses to street renaming in all three cities was a lack of trust in the authorities' capacity to understand the local community's needs and the everyday challenges residents face. Once the authorities have been portrayed as neglectful and ineffective in addressing community needs, they lose the right to control and shape people's everyday space. The removal of the material heritage of communist dictatorship was supposed to reflect a rejection of the undemocratic communist past. Thirty years after the fall of communism, the top-down and mandatory renaming of street names did not sit well with many Poles who expected the de-commemoration process to reflect their views and wishes.

Finally, the paper also offers insights into de-commemoration as a form of social control and brings the issue of consent mechanisms for street renaming to the fore. How should national and local authorities respond to the refusal of residents to accept changes to urban streetscapes? Should democratic states have the right to enforce top-down control over local heritage? Which modes of action and discourse engender resistance and foster conflict? These questions warrant attention not only in post-communist Eastern Europe. As Western societies debate how to deal with colonial street names, they also face the question of how to effectively engage local residents in the process of renaming and symbolic decolonisation.[92] At issue is how to resolve the tension between local residents' emotional attachment to the space they live in and the street name changes that occur as part of a broader struggle for racial equality and social justice.

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[92] For a critical reaction to the street name alterations proposed by councils in the UK see, for example, a policy paper by Policy Exchange, a British conservative think tank: Zewditu Gebreyohanes, 'Protecting Local Heritage: How to Bring Democracy to the Renaming of Streets' (London: Policy Exchange, 2021), 1–21. See also a copy of public consultations on new legislation regarding procedures for changing street names in England: 'Technical Consultation on Street Renaming' by the UK Government: Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, 5 July 2022, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/technical-consultation-on-street-naming/technical-consultation-on-street-naming (last visited 25 Apr. 2024).