| Ber. z. dt. Landeskunde | Bd. 82, H. 1, 2009, S. 47–64 | Leipzig |
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Mariusz CZEPCZYŃSKI, Gdynia

# Reminiscence and oblivion of the socialist past: The re-positioning of Central European landscape icons

**Zusammenfassung**
Der Aufsatz liefert einen Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Umgang der ehemaligen „Ostblock-" und heutigen EU-Staaten in Mitteleuropa mit der sozialistischen Vergangenheit. Hintergrund der Überlegungen bildet die Frage nach dem Prozess der Neuordnung und Neuinterpretation ideologisierter Kulturlandschaften. Der Autor thematisiert am Beispiel verschiedener mitteleuropäischer Städte konkrete Praktiken des Erinnerns und Vergessens sowie die damit verbundenen Auswirkungen auf die urbane Kulturlandschaft. Grundlage für den Aufsatz bilden sowohl Interviews, regionale Medienstudien, Internetforen, Publikationen als auch eigene Vergleiche, Beobachtungen und Interpretationen des Autors.

## 1 Introduction

Memory and memorising policy can be seen as a way to represent the past, and often becomes an important political resource. Memory can be also, as FOUCAULT (1975, 25) says, an important factor of social negotiations: "if one controls people's memories, one controls their dynamism. (…). It is vital to have the position of this memory, to control it, administer it, tell it what it must contain" (FOUCAULT 1975, 26). ORWELL (1949) points more firmly that someone who controls the past commands the future; someone who commands the future controls the past. Power, control, history and memory become *core foci* of struggle over past and historical policies. Commemoration as well as oblivion is part of the historical policy, which finds its materialising form in cultural landscape features. Landscapes, as mélange of form, function and meaning, contain traces of past activities, and people select the stories they tell, the memories and histories they evoke, the interpretative narratives they weave, to facilitate their activities in the present and future (CZEPCZYŃSKI 2008).

Central European countries have been undergoing a vast reinterpretation and reposition of the 'recent past'. Eighteen years after the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, nations like Hungarians, Czechs, Romanians or Poles are still confronted with their communist legacy. The reinterpretation of the socialist past is an integral part of social and cultural transformation, in many cases as important as political or economic change. For most of their time, communist regimes and their

leaders were most active in an ideological 'place making', based on the creation of significant structures and coding ideas into architectural shapes. Communism celebrated the city and its landscape as the ultimate expression of political life and of national spirit. The cultural landscape was the result of those constant negotiations and actions. Many major landscape features became political statements and proclamations. As cultural declaration, a landscape icon carries values and ideas implied into it throughout the attached texts, memories, connotations and implications, as long as the allegation is being important. The collapse of communism left highly ideological landscapes and thousands of icons to be reinterpreted. This paper aims to present the iconic landscape re-positioning practices of post-socialist nations in Central Europe, defined as former members of the so called Eastern Bloc, and now part of the EU. The process of icons' re-arrangement is being facilitated by politics and practices of reminiscence and oblivion and will be exemplified by a set of examples from various cities around Central Europe. The study is based on interviews, regional media studies, internet discussion groups, a variety of published and dispersed materials as well as the author's own comparisons, observations, and interpretations.

## 2 Historical policies and institutionalised memories

Societies can be analysed as communities connected by memories and obliviousness. Every community needs some emotional binders, incorporated into its institutions, symbols and narrations. A socially produced and constructed cultural landscape, as much as any other political statement, can be seen as "centres of human meaning as well as mode of social control and repression" (TILLY 1994, 19). Mechanisms of restrain are usually rooted in the past, while the interpretation of the past frequently is a political assignment. At the same time artificial materialisations of the past produce meanings and construct reality. For ORWELL (see 1949), the past manifested in memory practices of commemoration and rejection influences contemporary identities and, to a further extent, future opportunities and developments. BAKER (2003) argues that the past influences or even determines the present. He also points to the fact that the representations of the past tent to minimize diversity and complexity, bestowing on past experience as overriding sense of unity (BAKER 2003).

There is a tendency to discuss the supremacy of one track of memory over the other, but recently many researchers rather try to find the differentiations between the tracks and understand them (MASSEY 2006). The typical 19th and 20th century one meta-narration is being replaced by polyphonic memory, consisting of few corresponding and supplementary interpretations and memory traditions (TRABA 2006). This concept of *lieux mémoire* or memory places, introduced by NORA (2006), suggests an interpretation of 'history of second degree'. Linear and neo-positivistic factual description is being replaced by scores of symbolic spaces and landscapes. *Lieux mémoire* is not only constantly present in social memory, but also facilitate and enhance local and regional identity and consciousness. Memory, either collective or individual, does not seem to be the only true record of past events, but a kind of text which is worked upon in creation of meaning. Personal

memory is often facilitated by a much more stable and collective memory, enhanced by media, education and print materials. Both personal and collective memories can be manipulated for various, mainly political reasons. Identities are continually crafted and re-crafted out of memory, rather than being fixed by the 'real' course of past events (THOMAS 1996). The power over the historical memory can be an important tool of historical policy, used to legitimate present actions. Each social group has constructed its cultural landscape out of specific tracks of memories, which becomes *memorabilia* and rather *believabilia* (DE CERTEAU 1985).

The political control over memories can be institutionalised and facilitated by special historical institutions, established to explain, interpret and disseminate real/ preferred/ factual/ chosen or favoured history. Institutions like the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission of the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej) or the Institute for the Investigation of communist Crimes in Romania (Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului) were established to clear and adjust the ambiguous communist period. The process of reminiscence and recognising has been facilitated by a set of political decisions, procedures and bureaucratic practices (CZEPCZYŃSKI 2008). Officially approved memories sometimes, particularly in total states, become a law and 'legitimate truth', multiplied and propagated by media and other institutions.

Memory is not only being put into national archives, and kept in people's minds, what can be very changeable and unstable, but also in written forms, as well as in material artefacts, like landscape features. The cultural landscape can be analysed as an icon of memory, but we must remember about the weaknesses, threats and subjectivities, implied by its human character, very clearly visible in a selective process of recalling. The process of selection of memories is conditioned or determined by several factors, which most of it related to the past. The result of recalls and remembering is visualised and infixed in material and mental features of the cultural landscape, facilitated by political and economic powers. Both burdens and glories of history have their landscape representations, and can be read, if someone finds the decoder and reader. Materialised and institutionalised features of memories become authorised elements of memorial policy, sometimes, especially in authoritarian regimes, aimed to abusively control memory (see ORWELL 1949). Those include teaching programmes, historical listed buildings, publications and the celebration of historical events, all of them based in landscape settings, where both forms and meanings of landscape play an important, sometimes crucial role. Places of memories, commemoration, forgiveness, pride, dignity, shame, infamy and blame create a mental map of every society, where treasured sacrum often neighbours dishonourable profanum.

History and heritage – that what we opt to select from the past – are used everywhere to shape emblematic place identities and support particular political ideologies (GRAHAM 1998). What to keep and what not to keep is an indicator of ambitions, desires and aspirations. The cultural and political history of the nation, society and city has been constantly negotiated and materialized on the physical surrounding as an identity, based on what is remembered or rather recalled. "Even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product" (SCHAMA 1996, 9). The landscape is read and

appreciated through the cultural and historical memory, which the people bring to pass. “Vast and seemingly impersonal historical and/or economic ‘forces’ have always been the aggregate products of the choices that were made by individuals” (RYKWERT 2000, 9). The process of reinterpretation of memories is most clearly visible in transitional societies, where political, economic and cultural factors enhance re-definitions of the past.

The urban cultural landscape can be perceived as a visual scheme illustrating the relationship of power and control out of which it has emerged (ROBERTSON and RICHARDS 2003). The core meaning of landscape is coded through symbols written into the setting. Power, control and resistance, as well as needs, lifestyles and values are foundations of cultural landscapes debate. The city scenery reflects powers, needs, aspirations, as well as glorious and tragic history, written into the symbols and signs. Urban landscape projects communicate the view of the dominant element of society to the remainder, through the symbols scripted into the setting (ZUKIN 1993). The iconographical comprehension of the cultural landscape is based on re-interpretation of landscape features as icons or visualised ideas. Symbolic images are turned into solid rock / brick / concrete / steel features, while cultural icons become landscape icons through the process of conceptualising and signifying the world. The power written into the visible forms of urban structures was particularly strongly featured in any totalitarian regime, especially communist ones. In consequence, the place – memory discourse – becomes more noteworthy in transitional societies, when a changing political and social system implies changing reminiscence and recollection of the past (CZEPCZYŃSKI 2006).

## 3 Icononoclasm and forgotten landscapes

Cultural landscape icons of Central Europe, like monuments, places and names are being re-negotiated and re-interpreted, as much as the communist past and memories. The changes were sometimes spontaneous, sometimes well planned and designed. The process of re-positioning the past and its regional and national differentiations in Central Europe is most clearly visible and exemplified by three main memory policy techniques, based on forgetting or elimination, reminding as forewarning and recalling positive meanings of communist period social life. ORWELL (1949) predicted constant transformation of old, documentary photographs and texts, to reflect ‘the truth of the moment’, and to some extent the process of reshaping and re-documenting the past is still going on in many of the Central European countries (HENNELOWA 2007). Technically speaking, it is not very difficult to change the functions, meanings and even forms. Since most of the re-codifications and re-interpretations have started 17 or 18 years ago, the former, ideological meaning has frequently been forgotten, but cultural landscape still carries many features, often deeply coded, which correspond to communist powers, structures and procedures, represented by buildings and urban settings.

The elimination of unwanted values of cultural landscape has been the first step in post-socialist landscape cleansing, which went through all Central Europe in the early 1990s. The landscape has been very much cleaned from unwanted elements and qualities, to make cities more habitable and acceptable for the liberalized

societies. The oblivion technique incorporates the implementation of new vital functions and meanings into the former communist icons. The additional strategy to deal with negative aspects of the past is blocked memory (RICŒUR 2004), often used in post-traumatic societies, as a remedy to deal with a distressing and hurtful past. This segment of reinterpretation of the post-socialist icons involves mostly omnipotent mercy of oblivion. Since most of the humans are inclined to keep positive memories and forget the traumatic ones, a hefty part of former communist landscapes and icons are more then less forgotten by now. Old icons either disappeared or are bashfully hidden. Left over landscapes of emptiness or silence can be meaningful only for those who dare or care to remember. Many of the unwanted codes and symbols, names and labels had been eliminated by physical destruction and demolishing of features and are hard to reinterpret.

Fig. 1: Forgotten and hidden icons: Left-over icon in the city park, Miscolc, Hungary, 2006

The central part of the transition is based on rejection of many aspects of the 'recent past'. Almost all revolutions begin with the idea of the year zero: a new beginning founded upon the eradication of what went before. The collective voluntary amnesia become an ultimately untenable position and return either to conciliated versions of old pasts or feel the need to create a new past in support of new identities and aspirations (ASHWORTH and TUNBRIDGE 1999). All new governing ideologies recast heritage, and communism had left an enormous legacy of public iconography. The removal, renaming, rededication or just reuse of the symbolic

heritage of a discredited regime was, in itself, simple enough, 'a new onomatology of places' (WĘCŁAWOWICZ 1997). More generally, the question is raised whether a past should and could be publicly ignored. There are many arguments in favour of an official policy of collective amnesia. It may aid to recover from the past trauma and also permit the healing of social divisions, especially when those who benefited from, and those who suffered under, the old regime must coexist in the new. Against this is the argument that it has never proved possible in practice to eradicate a past through coercion in the long term: it tends to return at some future date, as it has been the experience of a number of Western European countries with their Second World War heritage (TUNBRIDGE and ASHWORTH 1996). The concept of 'thick line', introduced by the first non-communist Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki in 1989, was to put the history aside, to look ahead and together, despite differences of political opinions, to build up an independent country. The 'thick line' has been implemented not only in political life, but also in process of post-socialist memorising policy. It seems as if significant parts of some societies, like Bulgarians, Romanians or East Germans, would rather 'put history aside' and not evoke most painful memories (CZEPCZYŃSKI 2008).

Generally speaking, since the early 1990s the political aspect of cultural landscapes in post-socialist cities began to disappear. Political functions of grand open spaces had been replaced by car parks, open-air markets or unofficial skate-parks. Such a landscape can be easily degraded, and then often redeveloped and forgotten (see NAWRATEK 2005). The early landscape transformation tactic has been based on the reflective or mimetic approach of representation (see HALL 2002), derived from believes that meaning remains in the objects, places, buildings in the real world, while language functions like a mirror to reflect or imitate the true sense as it already exists. There are some landscape features, like monuments or names, where the meaning seems to be truly located within the entity. A sculpture or street name more or less directly reflexes the icon, and many people believe that the landscape mimes the system of concepts. The elimination of structures and objects thought to be mimetic began the process of liminal transformation and had also been most spectacular, theatrical and often most remarkable. The process of purging can be material or mental, and always follows liminal separation of good / acceptable from the offensive / undesirable / unwanted. Separation is the first phase of liminality, which began just after the first free elections in 1989 and 1990. Sorting out the 'good' and the 'bad', redefining and new coding stated this epistemological transformation, while 'landscape cleansing' went directly after the process of separation. Political iconoclasm has been a typical revolutionary behaviour aimed to reconstruct and reinterpret the past by eliminating unwanted icons, strongly representing the old system. Since 1989 the process has involved renegotiations of the meaning of historical events and people and affected the way how these events have been represented and commemorated in landscape. After four decades of iconoclastic strategies implemented by the communist parties, new post-communist iconoclasm has been activated by local governments, associations, political parties, and individuals (see FOOTE et al. 2000).

Fig. 2: Empty pedestal left by Lenin in front of the House of Free Press, Bucharest, 2005

The changing of the unsolicited meanings as well as eliminating the unwanted features or residua was among the major, demanded, spectacular and sometimes risky tasks of the political landscapes decision-makers and managers. The drive of de-communisation of cultural landscapes was particularly strong in Poland, Romania and Hungary, as well as in the Czech and Baltic Republics. The key role was played by the new right wing, nationalistic and anti-communist parties and governments, which usually anchored their identities in anti-socialist, anti-Soviet and often anti-Russian narrations (see Leach 1999; Sármány-Parsons 1998). Changes and removals made after 1989 were always selective. The crucial problem was to eliminate worst and unacceptable icons and oppressive signs of the fallen regimes.

One of the first aspects of elimination of unwanted meanings was the process of changing geographical names. The political map of Central Europe was fully converted: no single country kept its socialist era name, each dropped the 'People's' or 'Democratic' adjective and usually returned to the pre-WW2 form. Many streets have been renamed, from Marx, Lenin, October Revolution or Red Army to a variety of local heroes or historical names. Similar procedures has been applied to reflectively communist towns' names, like Karl-Marx-Stadt returned to its historical name of Chemnitz in East Germany, Gottwaldov to Zlin in Czech Republic, and Hungarian Leninvaros (Lenin's town) became Tiszaujvaros (see Crampton and Crampton 1996). The purge of Marxist iconic names sometimes went rather far, eliminating technically any left-associated names, together with many late 19th

century social and workers' activists. Karl Marx himself patronizes only a few streets in Central Europe, most of them in former East Germany, and none in Poland. In spring 2007 Polish right wing and populist government worked on new regulations, aimed to eliminate any leftist or communist street names still remained in some municipalities. The officially authorized and organised process of institutionalised iconic landscape revision was followed by 'landscape cleansing' and reflexes the current course of political and social actions (BIELECKI 2007). As street-naming has been a municipal responsibility, local names with some socialist connotations remained in many of the left voting towns. Local societies traditionally opting for right, anti-communist or nationalist parties have quite efficiently cleansed their landscape from any 'left-sounding' names. The process is very clearly visible in more traditional catholic south-eastern Poland with hardly any place-names reflecting communism, while in more liberal and social-democratic north-western parts of the country, streets and squares still carry names of minor communist heroes.

The changing of names was accompanied by the selection and purge of emblems, logos and coast of arms. Each of the analysed Central European countries has modified its socialist emblems and formal representations. Red stars, together with hammers and sickles disappeared, to be replaced by crowns and historical symbols. Sometimes, like in Hungary, East Germany or Romania, the national flag with a hole in place of the socialist logo symbolised the revolution in late 1989. The socialist symbols and slogans vanished from shop windows, streets, train stations, houses, factories and even farms. The stones on the former Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in Berlin were carefully replaced from the upper part of the western façade, so the holes left of the grand SED logo could be hardly traced. The same time the coat of arms of the Peoples' Republic of Bulgaria has been barely censored: the sickle and hammer had been roughly chipped off the stony façade of the today's House of the President in Sofia (CZEPCZYŃSKI 2008).

The fate of monuments of iconographical socialist heroes illustrates the political and social transformation and condition of liminal societies. One of the most common practices in 1989 and the very early 1990s included the physical destruction and demolishing of objects, which were very difficult to reinterpret, and where the meaning was too deeply coded into the form of the object. The statues often symbolised all the malevolence and misfortunes, as well as the supremacy of communist system. There have been few main strategies implemented to the old monumental icons. The most spectacular one was based on a 'remove and destroy' (or, sometimes, destroy and remove) approach. In some cases, the process of icons' removal became a fiesta and symbolic gesture of liberation. The Berlin Wall became the most popular icon reflecting the division of Europe, as well as the communist supremacy and isolation, while the demolishing of the Wall stands for the end of the communist era. The removal of Warsaw's 'Bloody' Felix Dzerzhinsky statue was accompanied by enthusiastic crowds, singing, drinking champagne and celebrating a symbolic 'breaking the chains' in autumn 1989. Several of the old icons in bronze were melted to make material for new statues, or were sold to private collectors, like Kraków's Lenin to Italy and Berlin's one to Holland. Some other seems to be 'disappeared and forgotten'; including Sofia's

Fig. 3: The almost vanished logo of socialist Bulgaria, from the former Communist party headquarter, Sofia, 2005

Lenin statue removed in the late 1990s due to a road reconstruction and never returned to its former place or the Bucharest Lenin monument, thrown away outside a garden. Most dramatic and best known recent iconic discourse between different traces of memories was seen on the streets of the Estonian capital Tallinn at the end of April and early May 2007. The removal of the 'Bronze Soldier' became a symbol of 'landscape requisition' for Estonians, as the memorial symbolised Soviet occupation. At the same time for the Russian minority the statue stand for war heroes and victorious glory. The different social constructions, attitudes and representations of the 'Bronze Soldier' mirror different attitudes, fears and expectations of different social groups towards history (BIELECKI 2007). The Tallinn street fights and casualties prove that memory has been a powerful social construction, since some do not want to remember and for some others these are highly important symbols of identity.

In every country of the region many statues were literally re-positioned and *de-pedestaled* and removed to peripheral locations (see FOOTE et al. 2000). The most famous and biggest 'Cemetery of Public Monuments of the Recent Past' in Budapest district of Szobor was established in 1993. The Statue Park composes of dozens of monuments, relieves and plates, relocated from the streets and squares of the Hungarian capital, including Lenin, Marx and Engels, memorials to the Soviet Soldier, the communist Martyrs, and many more. In 2001, a Lithuanian anti-communist entrepreneur opened a private theme park known as Stalin World or

Fig. 4: Icons' depot: Lenin in Kozłówka, Poland, 2006

Grūto Park, 120 km south-west from Vilnius. Two Lenins, Stalin, Brezhnev, Dzerzhinsky, together with Mother Russia and many more sculptures as well as exhibitions are spread on 20 ha forest. The third one, Polish Kozłówka in the Eastern part of the country is a much modest congregation of Marxist memorabilia, based on 'unwanted icons storage' established during de-Stalinisation times of 1956. Those specific theme parks are mostly visited by tourists, and become just

another interesting attraction, but rather seldom a history lesson. *De-sacralisation* and *de-pedestalisation* of old icons brought them down to be merely a tourist attraction, while the iconic and ideological role has been reduced to its market appeal.

At the same time, very practically, only a few iconic buildings were mimetically communist enough to be destroyed, in course of cultural landscape cleanings in Central Europe. Since the buildings can be much easier redefined and reused, only the most important ones had to be devastated. Only in 1999 the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov, the Bulgarian communist leader, was torn down in downtown Sofia by the right wing royalist government. For many, the other victim of revenge and purge was Berlin's Palace of the Republic, by some vicious commentators called the *Balast der Republik*. The demolishing has begun in 2006, officially due to asbestos structure of the building, but for many of the East Germans the reason was clearly political. The eminent orange mirrored-glass building, or the *Erichs Lampenladen*, is going to be replaced by the copy of the imperial city castle, blown up by the communists in 1950.

## 4 Icons reminded as warnings

The communist period and associated cultural landscape is being critically contextualised as time and spaces of oppression, devastation and tyranny. Meanings and contexts created by *homo instrumentalis* or *homo sovieticus* could only result of oppressive policy, and only remembered as such (ŚPIEWAK 2005). Disgraceful and/or insignificant icons can only bring the dark memory back, so the 'recent past' and its residuals can be merely kept as warning witnesses for future generations, as elements of historical education or tribute to the victims of the communist totalitarianism. Negative and disapproving constructions of the old communist icons have usually resulted from personal or social memories of repressive actions or connotations. Reminded grievances, injustices, restrictions and sacrifices are ceded from generation to generation, as an 'anti-communist heritage' and family identity. Deep hurts are very hard to heal, and can be additionally amplified by long lasting revenge and justice. This pejorative position often denies and rejects any positive developments and achievements of the communist area and principally does not enable any discussion and compromise. The only reason to reincorporate the communist heritage into a contemporary memorial policy is to remember the past crimes as a warning against possible future mistakes.

Contrary to the public declarations and expectations, there are not too many icons left to remember the dark heritages of the communist period in countries stigmatised by 45 years of totalitarian rules. Dozens of crosses symbolize and memorize victims of communist crimes and can be seen along the former Berlin Wall, as well in the city centre of Bucharest, as a tribute to the casualties of 1989 December revolution. Monuments and commemorative plaques to Soviet and communist sufferers are visible in almost every town and city in Poland, but also in central Prague, Budapest and Sofia. Sites and memorials of anti-communist riots and revolts became important places of public manifestation in Poznań, Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin in Poland, as well as in Prague, Bucharest and Budapest.

Ironically, comparing to all the other iconic places, the least commemorated seems to be the first, such as the 17th June 1953 Berlin riots, what might somehow represent East German reserve to negative commemorations of communist past.

Fig. 5: Museum of Communism, Prague

More educative and informative goals are being realised by museums and memory centres. Memorising victims of communism and anti-regime resistance became a

Fig. 6: Fallen Shipyard Workers monument, Gdańsk

part of important political projects, which was instrumental in establishing some of the regions leading anti-communist documentation centres and museums, including Riga's Museum of Occupation 1940–1991, Gdańsk Solidarity Museum in the former Lenin Shipyard, Berlin Wall Museum, the Forum of the Historical Times in Leipzig or Prague's Museum of Communism. There are some museums, commemorating communist crimes, located in former state security quarters, like

Budapest House of Terror and Berlin's Stasimuseum, or in ex-prisons, like Jilava Memorial Museum in Romania (see CZEPCZYŃSKI 2008). Most of those museums, like the one in Prague, are private evidences of crimes of communist legacy, while the role of central governments, except for German and Latvian, is limited to statements and celebrations. The situation is not different even in often loudly anti-communist Poland, where anti-communist heroes and events are parts of the official historiography, but evidently not strong enough to be remembered in a museum, dedicated to the 45 years of the socialist history of Poland.

'Reminding to remember' policy reflects attitudes of local and national authorities, but also many ordinary people. New construction and elimination of unwanted and communist associated meanings can be enhanced by existing or prepared legal acts, like in Estonia, Hungary and Poland. The tendency to recap and accentuate the negative, criminal aspects of communist times is connected with activities of anti-communist, right wing parties. Remembering misfortunes, traumas and victims is an important part of national and local identity, but can become also a political tool, aimed to achieve short-term goals. For many of the younger members of post-socialist societies the heroes and restrictions are as distant as the Napoleonic Wars, and often as much appreciated as those.

## 5 Reminiscence of the 'better past'

Remembering the socialist past has been as selective as any process of reminding and oscillates between carnival, museum, golden times of youth and the promised 'workers' paradise'. Sometimes the emotional attitude towards the post-socialist landscape mirrors the nostalgic sentiment of the older generation. Socialist icons can reflect and resemble 'the old good times', stability and the missed youth. Nowhere the process is more obvious than in East Germany, where *Ostalgie* stands for longing of the German Democratic Republic and, as remembered by many, better and happier times (BRUSSIG 2002). Similar yearning for old, better times can be recognised in some groups of the Russian minorities of Baltic States, as well as in the substantial part of the post-communist parties' electorate all around the region. Communist nostalgia is connected mainly to the most recent past, mainly the 1970–1980s period, while not many want to recall the 'dark ages' of 1950s. As ESTERHÁZY (2007, 14) puts it "Kádár era is petrified with us, we can read it in our fits, elaborated in that time. And this happens despite the fact, that consciously we might not want this memory to come back." It is still yearning for comfort and security, mixed with the yearning for youth, hopes and expectations but hardly nostalgia for the communist system per se (see ŠIMEČKA 2002).

The combination of leftist icons and 1970s design result in quite an attractive product, appealing to many who never experienced communism. Hundreds of gadgets, like copies of old badges, posters, post cards, but also plates and egg cups designed in communist style, utilize, re-use and recycle the old symbols in brand new cultural context (BRUSSIG 2002). The Red star, *CCCP* or Lenin's head are hardly anything more then an aesthetic sign, trendy and fashionable in some of the social groups. The demand for socialist kitsch, *de-sacralised* and recycled icons seems to be merely an original and visual trend, sometimes unconsciously

promoting forgotten or unrealised ideas. The other new but stylish use of old iconic features appears in dozen of post-communist theme pubs and bars, located in many cities around the region. Some of them are mostly touristy, like *Committee* in Lublin in Poland or *Under Red Hog* in Warsaw, but many are focused on local clientele, and also located in smaller towns. The interior design, full of communist propaganda and icons, as well as the names recalls the communist past, but only in funny, amusing, odd, curious or comical way. Many of those places are full of students, for whom looking for post-socialist past is the way to self-identify in a globalising and amalgamated world.

Fig. 7: Ostalgic pub *PRL* in Wrocław, 2006

Due to the limited connection with the outside world, the socialist landscape had resisted, to some extent, the globalisation flows until early 1990s. There is a growing demand for grandeur and symbolism in a post-modern world which can be found in many features of socialist cultural landscape. Some of the grand designs are preserved as symbolic, museum-like objects, forgetting and stripping off the negative meanings. The historical patina makes the pompous landscape and Stalinist heritage of 1950s quite an attraction, which appeals to many tourists. One of the most popular post-Stalinist urban arrangements includes the 1950s new town of Nowa Huta in Kraków, designed in neo-renaissance and classicistic style, known as *soc-realism*. Similarly, the triumphalist former Stalin Alley in East Berlin, now Frankfurter Allee or Poruba district in Ostrava in Czech Republic meets tourist demand for 50 years old and distinctive features. All of these urban establishments

are listed and are present in city sightseeing programmes, as well as guide books and tourist maps. Probably the most significant example of re-positioned icon is Warsaw's Palace of Culture and Science.

Fig. 8: Triumphalist housing on former Lenin Av. of Poruba, Ostrava, 1997

The nostalgic feelings and longings are also exemplified by museums and exhibitions, like the private GDR (DDR) Museum in Berlin, opened in central Berlin in 2006. Every museum, especially historical museum, is always a political project, where the organizers try to stress and commemorate some aspects of the past, since it is never possible to present all of the features of the historical discourse. There are also more of nostalgic exhibitions in East Germany, often caring rather peculiar names, like *Zeitreise* (Travel in Time) in Radebeul near Dresden or very informative, like *Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* (Documentation Centre of Everyday Culture of GDR) in Eisenhüttenstadt. The names are not directly referred the communist period, as if trying not to raise too much controversy and antagonism.

## 6 Conclusions

The cultural landscape is in a sense a living laboratory of transforming meanings and forms, where memory is being negotiated in places. Settings of Central European cities carry the imprints of half a century of the state socialism. De-communisation and transformations of meanings are always connected with cultural

background of society, its history, structure, wealth as well with aspirations and hopes. Attitude towards post-socialist icons mirrors precedent humiliations and dictatorships, as well as present acceptance and reconciliation with own history and can be seen as explicit indicator of political and cultural transformations. The same time fate of old communist symbols represent attitudes towards the 'recent past' and can be seen as a 'litmus paper' indicating position in the process of liminal transformation. The past manifested in memory practices of commemoration and rejection influences contemporary identities and, to a further extent, future opportunities and developments (see CZEPCZYŃSKI 2008).

Several questions have been raised concerning the symbolic places of the 'recent past': how is objectionable history to re-interpret, what is to remember, what to erase, what is important, and for whom? The discourse has been accelerated by various political goals and disputes. All of the old former communist icons are re-positioned and reinterpreted. They often changed their form, like some buildings and monuments, frequently changed their function, and always their significance. The Red star is hardly anything more then a funky item, a party headquarter is not the political centre of the country, while a pair of blue jeans do not signify the desired West any more. Many tracks of many *lieux mémoire* evoke different memories and connotations of socialist landscape icons. Those icons transfer us, just like Proust's *madeleine* to the forgone landscapes, between reminiscence and oblivion; sometimes and for some of us this *madeleine* is sweet and tasty, but for some it is only hard and bitter.

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