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Coping with the Unwanted Past in the Planned Soviet Towns: Visaginas, Tychy and Nowa Huta

Abstract. After collapse of the Soviet Union, the post Soviet states have had to reform their political and economic systems, beside that, they had to redefine their collective identities and to find ways of dealing with the unwanted Soviet past and the Soviet heritage, or the dissonance heritage. Coping with the “unwanted past” was dramatic issue in the planned Soviet towns, i.e. largely mono industrial satellite settlements to the Soviet industries, constructed by decision of Soviet authorities and having no or little heritage than the Soviet one. In the article, three planned Soviet towns (Visaginas in Lithuania, Nova Huta and Tychy in Poland), their identity transformations and self representations during post Soviet period are investigated.

“Dissonance Heritage”: Dealing with the Unwanted Past in Post Soviet States

After political transformations of 1990, the newly emerging post Soviet states have had to reorganize and reform their political and economic system, also to redefine their collective identities and to find ways how to deal with the largely unwanted Soviet past. The result has been a “veritable orgy of historical revisionism, of writing the communist period out of the past” (Verdery, 1999), an ongoing negotiation of “(what is) privileged to be remembered, what is officially disregarded, and what, in spite of official efforts at suppression, resists forgetting” (Adler, 2005, p.1094).

The theme of identity is closely linked with the issues of heritage. The heritage is, by the definition, “the contemporary uses of the past” (Ashworth and Graham, 1997, p.381). J.B.Allcock argues the presentation of heritage is an ideological process, as “to speak of heritage is to speak of politics” (Allcock, 1995, p.101). Through museums and other heritage sites foreign tourists can be told the “national story”, presented so as to affirm and reinforce national identity and self-image (Light, 2000, p.159). The construction of identity is integrally bound to tourism discourses, tourism says “here is what we *are* (or *were*)”; thus the construction of tourism discourses is itself a process of constructing identity (Lanfant, 1995). Identities are produced and affirmed by the images and representations of a country constructed (or reproduced) for foreign tourists (O’Connor 1994; Urry 1994).

Since 1990, there is growing amount of literature on communist heritage tourism. The communist heritage represents the unwanted past and denounced political regime, it is in confrontation with the new post Soviet identities, and is called a “dissonance heritage” (Tunbridge, Ashworth 1996). The process of coping with ambivalent and largely unwanted past, or the “dissonant heritage”, has been analyzed by E.Mehilli (2009), T.Herschel (1999), T.Lahusen (2006), etc. S.Ivanov (2009) examines communist heritage tourism in Bulgaria, J.E.Otto (2008) works on representations of communist heritage in Poland, Ch.Scribner (2000), A.Enns (2007), P.Betts (2000), G.Castillo (2008) and D.Berdahl (2006) focus their attention on museums and memory in former GDR, D.Light (2000a, 2000b) analyzes the communist heritage tourism in Romania, Hungary and Germany, T.Coles (2003) illuminates “place promotion” in post - socialist Leipzig, C.Young and S.Kaczmarek (2008) analyze transformations of post socialist urban identities by examining the case of Lodz (Poland).

Post socialist societies deal with their socialist “unwelcome pasts” in various ways. Young and Kaczmarek (2008) distinguish three strategies of remaking the place identity - de communization, return to the pre Soviet “Age of Gold” and Westerization / Europeanization of the town.

Trying to construct new identities, post Soviet communities are looking back to a pre Soviet “Age of Gold”. New identities are constructed on the basis of the pre socialist heritage (palaces, castles, churches, monasteries, etc.), on the basis of culturally rich and plentiful past, and community is “rooted” in the centuries - long tradition that gives feeling of identity, stability and continuity. The strategy was successfully applied in such post socialist towns as Banska Bystrica, Slovakia (Bitusikova, 1998), Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina (Grodach, 2002), Tallinn, Estonia (Hackmann, 2005), Novgorod, Russia (Petro, 2005), Warsaw, Poland (Czarniawska, 2002). It is obvious, that the towns having long pre socialist history and rich pre socialist heritage cope with the unwanted past and establish their new identities more easily.

Simultaneously, post socialist towns try to assert themselves as European / Western – open, liberal, contemporary and modern. Typically, it means accentuating the town’s connectedness with Europe, good infrastructure, business friendly climate, qualified human resources, latest technologies, environmental friendly industries, etc. Some authors refer to the status of European Capital of Culture (granted to Krakow in 2000, Vilnius in 2009, etc.)¹, remodelling the town by the world known architects (Berlin’s case)², etc.

Driven by the desire to be more western, the post socialist towns are emphasizing the links with the West and rejecting associations with the East, the construction of new identities involves deconstruction of the identities created during the socialist period. Decommunization means the erasure of the socialist past through from urban space by the removal of the cultural landscapes of socialism, particularly the changing of street names and destruction of socialist-era statues. Researchers agree, that in many cases the socialist period is just erased and the present is directly linked to the Age of Gold of pre Soviet past – the phenomenon is named “the sleeping beauty complex”, i.e. visioning the reawakening of past national glory (Ágh, 1998), or use metaphors of the ‘West’ as a ‘knight in shining armour’ arriving to awake Eastern Europe from its slumbers (Verdery, 1996).

While post socialist societies tend to silence about their past and identify themselves as modern and European, the Western societies tend to see them as semi oriental, i.e. different, deficient, dangerous, and exotic (Todorova, 1997; Neumann, 1999; Kuus, 2004). D.Light (2000b) argues travel guides written for Western tourists promote Bucharest’s legacy of communism for the gaze, while local tourism promotion within Romania was focused on pre socialist tradition and expressed no interest in the communist heritage. This situation creates a dilemma which J.E.Tunbridge (1994) has described as “identity versus economy”, or, to use Z.Dujisin’s (2007) famous quotation, “Forget communism.... or to sell it.”

The dilemma is resolved by de contextualizing the Soviet heritage, i.e. removing the Soviet symbols from “normal” environment of the daily life and creating either physical or discursive distance. J.E.Otto (2008) refers to several strategies, i.e. spatial reframing, spatial isolation and narrative reframing of the Communist heritage. *The spatial reframing* is the case of the Berlin Wall: the Wall was mostly destroyed and its remnants are “museumified”, divorced from their original social, cultural and political context. *The spatial isolation* is the case for the Budapest sculpture park: in 1990, the city council decided to remove political statues of Hungary’s communist era to a park on the edge of the city. The park was opened for tourists in 1993 and became one of the major tourists’ attractions in Budapest. It also includes some elements of the narrative reframing, as indicates shift from legitimizing to the mocking of Communist regime. Yet *the narrative reframing* is best exemplified by the case of governmental palace in Romania, where the history of the building is reframed by silencing the communist past and accentuating “the very best of Romanian architects and craftsmen” (Otto, 2008, p.28).

The communist past is not erased, but it is remembered in a particular way, the Soviet symbols are exposed in order to sneer and to mimic former political regime, to witness its ferocities or to emphasize the histories of anti communist resistance. The “active processing” of the past (Marten-Finnis, 1995) makes the past more palatable to the present and to contemporary identities that legitimize new trends of development, make place attractive for investments and suitable for integration into national and global economies.

The Planned Soviet Towns: Mono Heritage Communities

¹ Hughes, H., Allen, D. and Wasik, D. (2003) ‘European Capital of Culture and its Significance for Tourism and Culture: the Case of Krakow 2000’, *International Journal of Arts Management* 5: 12–23.

² Cochrane, A. and Jonas, A. (1999) ‘Re-imagining Berlin: World City, National Capital or Ordinary Place?’, *European Urban and Regional Studies* 6 (2): 145–64.

Coping with the “dissonant heritage” was dramatically experienced in the former outposts of socialism, or the *planned Soviet towns*. The planned Soviet towns emerged first as the workers settlements to the Soviet industrial enterprises. The planned Soviet towns, altogether with their industrial enterprises, served not only economic but also ideological aims: creating, both discursively and materially, the socialist working class in the previously rural areas (Hamilton 1979; Koenker 1985; Crowley and Siegelbaum 1995; Brunnbauer 2008), fostering political support and political loyalties towards the Soviet system (Ryder, 1990; Regulska 1987; Stenning, 2000) and integrating national republics into the larger economic structures of the Soviet Union (Cinis, Dremaite, Kalm, 2008; Hogselius, 2006).

The planned Soviet towns are also called “mono industrial towns” (Cinis, Dremaite, Kalm, 2008), “new socialist towns” (Bernhardt, 2005), “spaces of socialism” (Stenning, 2005), etc. The well-known planned Soviet towns are Nowa Huta and Tychy in Poland, Prypiat and Slavutich in Ukraine, Novoplotsk and Soligorsk in Belarus, Eisenhüttenstadt and Schwedt in Germany, Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria, Angarsk, Komsomolsk, Magnitogorsk in Russia, Šturovo in Slovakia, Sillamae in Estonia, Stucka (now Aizklaukle) in Latvia, Bátornyterenyé and Ajka in Hungary.

The planned Soviet towns were mostly mono industrial towns with the specific industries, like nuclear energy (Visaginas, Prypiat), steel production (Eisenhüttenstadt, Nowa Huta), coal mining (Magnitogorsk, Tychy). The towns were designed as outposts of socialism – constructed by leading architects (Visaginas was built following the guidelines traced by the Soviet architects V. Akulin and M.A. Belyi³), the living standards above average of the country (in Visaginas, it was twice of the country's average⁴, and in Nowa Huta, salaries were among the highest in the country⁵), the socialist culture and the socialist way of life openly celebrated. The planned Soviet towns were the projects of social engineering, designed to develop new type of community and of personality⁶. As socialist model communities, they were meant to legitimize the Soviet regime, draw line with the past and signify beginnings of new socialist era. As Kate Brown argues, these were the towns where communism has already been built (Brown 2007).

The shared feature of the planned Soviet towns is absence of (almost) any history prior to the Soviet period. Most of the towns were established in the poorly populated rural regions (Visaginas in Lithuania, Aizklaukle in Latvia) or on the basis of few villages (Tychy in Poland, Petőfibánya, Bátornyterenyé and Ajka in Hungary, Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria, Šturovo in Slovakia). Usually, they were populated by the growing migrant communities, which means absence any collective memories of shared past, except of the Soviet one. Here, the Soviet authorities started with the *tabula rasa* without any previous inscriptions. The Soviet media represented heroic narratives of victorious socialist labour, construction of the town was celebrated as the project of the century. For example, the entrance to Visaginas was marked by the caption: “*Not everyone is allowed to live so generously: to built the town for the memory of people*”⁷.

Most of the planned Soviet towns were named after the Soviet leaders: Visaginas (former Sniečkus) in Lithuania was named after the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian communist party, Antanas Sniečkus; Aizklaukle (former Stučka) in Latvia named after the Latvian Communist party leader Peteris Stučka; Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria named after Bulgarian Communist leader Georgi Dimitrov, Eisenhüttenstadt in Germany initially was named as Stalinstadt.

The planned Soviet towns were *mono heritage* towns. The questions of heritage and identity became the crucial issue during post Soviet period. While other post socialist towns established new identities via de communization, return to pre Soviet “Age of Gold” and Westernization / Europeanization of the place (see Young and Kaczmarek, 2008), the planned Soviet towns had no or little pre Soviet history, poor identification with (Western) Europe, and removing of the Soviet heritage was is hard to achieve (for example, housing district “A” in Tychy, containing large ornaments and sculptures of the working class heroes). Beyond the typical challenges of transition (inflation, privatization, unemployment, changing legal basis, etc.), the planned Soviet towns were seeking for a “a further remaking of place identity at a range of scales to legitimize new

³ V. Akutin, b. 1930, had already been awarded a Russian National Award for designing industrial towns, M.A. Belyi also was a member of a planners' group for Akademgorodok of Novosibirsk, (Cinis, Dremaite, Kalm, 2008, 243).

⁴ Kavaliauskas, 1999, p. 258

⁵ Kennedy, M. (1991) *Professionals, Power and Solidarity in Poland*. Cambridge: CUP.

⁶ Fisher J.C. (1962). Planning the City of Socialist Man. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 28(4): 251-265.

⁷ *Не каждому дано так щедро жить - на память людям города дарить (rus.)*

political and economic trajectories and to create places as suitable for integration into regional and global networks” (Young, Kazcmarek, 2008, p.53).

Some methodological remarks

In this paper, three cases of the planned Soviet towns, i.e. Visaginas (Lithuania), Tychy and Nowa Huta (Poland), their self representations and strategies of coping with the Soviet past are analyzed. The research materials include municipality websites, brochures, photo albums, tourism booklets, upon availability. The external courses as *Lonely Planet*, *Rough Guide*, *Thomas Cook Guide* etc. are intentionally excluded, as the primary aim of the research is to analyze self representations of the planned Soviet towns; and Western travel guides inform on Nova Huta, yet barely mention Tychy and Visaginas. The period of analysis is 2010.

Visaginas: Public Representations and Private Imaginations

Visaginas (Sniečkus) is the satellite settlement to Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant. The power plant, founded by a decision of the Soviet leaders in 1973, was supposed to be the largest nuclear power plant in the Soviet Union. The town was built following the guidelines traced by well known Soviet architects V.Akulin and M.A.Belyi⁸, who had already planned other Soviet ‘atomic’ cities –Aktau (Kazakhstan), Navoi (Uzbekistan) and Sosnovyi Bor (near Leningrad).

In 1975, the cornerstone of the town was laid during the official meeting. The town was named after the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian communist party, Antanas Sniečkus. The moving in of the first settlers was celebrated in 1977, on Lenin’s birthday on April 22. The town was inhabited mostly by immigrant workers from different corners of the Soviet Union. Construction of the plant has been compared to BAM, i.e. Baikal Amur Main railway, the great socialist project of the century, well known all over the Soviet Union (see Kavaliauskas, 2003, p.47).

The power plant started operating in 1983. Due to the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986, construction of the second block of the plant was postponed for a year. Later on, due to the requests of the Lithuanian Green movement, construction of the third reactor was suspended and its demolition began in 1989. The national rebirth movement and the declaration of Lithuanian independency caused strong antagonism between the community of the town and the rest of Lithuania. At the very peak of tension, the workers of the plant issued an open letter to the President of the USSR M.Gorbachev, asking for the town’s political separation from Lithuania and reunification with the USSR⁹. In 1992, Sniečkus was renamed Visaginas. Following the requirements of the EU, the first reactor of Ignalina NPP was stopped in 2004, the second reactor in 2009. In Visaginas, absence of any history prior to 1975, very specific mono industrial structure of the town, Russian speaking multi ethnic migrants community, strong pro Soviet identities as well as geographical and cultural isolation of the town made the processes of transition rather complicated.

For years, Visaginas was the fastest growing town in Lithuania, both due to migration and to high birth rates. After 1990, with uncertainties about the future of the main employment site, nuclear power plant, the number of inhabitants stabilized around 30 000. Visaginas is rather remoted from other urban centers in Lithuania is difficult to reach, yet the number of tourists visiting information center of Ignalina NPP is 6000 per year¹⁰, and 3000 visitors arrive to Visaginas for different sport and music festivals¹¹. New identities and self representation of the town are analyzed on the basis of two sources, i.e. – official website of Visaginas municipality and photo book “My Town Visaginas”¹².

Official website of town’s municipality www.visaginas.lt introduces Visaginas as a green town with the well balanced architecture. It accentuates regional parks and picturesque surroundings, multiple lakes and camping sites – these are “*nice places for leisure activities, fishing and sports both in summer and winter*”. Visaginas is also promoted as place of varying sport and music events: international festival “Visagino country”, international festival of folk music and dance, Visaginas Mayor Cup Winter Rally Driving, etc.

⁸ V.Akutin, b. 1930, had already been awarded a Russian National Award for designing industrial towns, M.A. Belyi also was a member of a planners’ group for Akademgorodok of Novosibirsk (Cinis, Dremaite, Kalm, 2008, 243).

⁹ Dobryj Den, 4/13/1990, p.1-4.

¹⁰ http://www.iae.lt/infocenter/visiters_lt.jpeg

¹¹ Interview with I.Stankevičienė, Specialist of Strategic Planning and Investments Division of Visaginas Municipality Administration, 2010 11 23.

¹² Photo album “Mano miestas Visaginas = Мой город Visaginas = My town Visaginas” (Photos by V. Bogdanovič). Švenčionys, Firidas, 2009.

The list the places of interests in Visaginas includes crane, the symbol of the town, cornerstone of the town, Information center of the Ignalina Nuclear Power plant, Museum-Aquarium, Museum of ethnography, Grave and memorial to the victims of WWII, and the three local churches. Monument to the victims of Chernobyl (“Pyramid”, 1995, V.Nalivaika) is not listed there. In the short introduction of town’s history, the Soviet period ignored and silenced, and the grand project of the Soviet socialism, construction of new town and large power plant, is reduced to the single sentence: “The construction of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant stimulated the development of the plans of a new city”. Inconvenient moments of history – grand narratives of heroic socialist labor, dramatic reactions to the fall of the Soviet Union, are simply silenced: “When the country regained its independence, Visaginas Municipality was established and Visaginas was granted the city rights.” The town’s museum, containing exposition of visual and written information about beginnings of the town and early constructions, was situated in one of the secondary schools in Visaginas but was closed before 1997, the exposition is archived in the town’s library.¹³ Visaginas is represented as green town of young and active people, the town that appears out of nothing, with dispersed and incoherent heritage of local history.

Another significant publication is the photo album “My town Visaginas” (2009). The trilingual album (Lithuanian, Russian, English) has been published by municipality of Visaginas for the 35th anniversary of the town. In the introduction, there are attempts to balance the town’s history: to recuperate some pre Soviet history (the local lake first mapped in 1570, medieval roads crossing the territory, the battles of Napoleon wars etc), and belittle the spectacular developments of the Soviet period to the single sentence (“In 1975 Visaginas began its life, life of a town which was called “the nuclear town,” p.7).

The content of the album is dominated by nature, sports and arts. The dominant category, 19 pages¹⁴, are images of nature and picturesque surroundings of Visaginas, 13 pages are devoted for different sport activities and achievements, 13 pages for local youth, and 12 pages represent local arts, artists or art events.

Rather ironic for the planned Soviet town, there are 9 pages containing images of local churches, and only 3 pages related to the Nuclear Power Plant. Specific architecture of Visaginas is given 3 pages. Memorial to the victims of Chernobyl is absent. The founding the cornerstone is represented in a particular way – in a photo, the schoolchildren of Visaginas conjured a living flag to honor Lithuania and to mark the millennium of its name in 2009 in front of the cornerstone - dramatic manifestations of loyalty, attempts of being “more Lithuanians than Lithuanians themselves”, to paraphrase famous dictum of postcolonial studies.¹⁵



A living flag conjured in honor of Lithuania and the millennium of its name.¹⁶

Within the official discourse and public self-presentation of the town, there is a collective amnesia of the Soviet past. The Soviet past is suppressed and suspended, but not cancelled. Yet, the Soviet past is actively memorized in the routine of everyday activities. In Visaginas, the symbols of the socialist period remain as important points of reference for everyday life.

The cornerstone is still in the central place, with an engraved prophecy “The town of nuclear energy will be built here, August 1975.” One of the central streets is still named Tarybų (Soviet) street. The monument to the

¹³ Interview with the representative of Visaginas municipality Algirdas Kavaliauskas, 2010 11 25

¹⁴ One page contains either one large, or several small scale photos.

¹⁵ “more English than English”, cit in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* // Billl Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin. London: Routledge, 1989, p. 4.

¹⁶ Photo from: Photo album “Mano miestas Visaginas = Мой город Visaginas = My town Visaginas“ (Photos by V. Bogdanovič). Švenčionys, Firidas, 2009.

victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe remains the place of commemoration and annual gatherings on April 26, the date of the catastrophe. Each year in April, Chernobyl catastrophe is memorized in the local media¹⁷. Usually, Chernobyl is given a few large-scale articles, whereas the Day of Lithuanian Independence is formally reminder with a single line. The Soviet heritage gives feeling of continuity and allows the positive identification with one's past, it also reinvokes the whole semiotic space in which an individual is an honorable person and where his or her life has significance (cf. *Ferguson 1999*).

Need for continuity is observable in trans-generational perspective. The popular restaurant and coffee bar are called "The Third Block", i.e. in memory of the third block of the nuclear power plant that was never launched. The restaurant and coffee bar were opened in 2008, after the final decision on the plant's closure had been made. It is a case of "inherited nostalgia," i.e. nostalgia actively employed by the second generation immigrants for making sense of their identities (for more, see Maghbouleh, 2009).

In 2004, the book *Memories of the Hearth*, the documentary novel, written by 45 first construction workers of the settlement and the plant, was published in 2004. The book celebrates the triumphant narratives of the past, victorious construction of the new town and heroic labor of the first construction workers. The local weekly "Sugardas" devoted the whole issue to the event, titling one of the leading article: "Let it be a monument for all of us..."¹⁸ The past is magnificent, it is bearer of meaning and certainty. The past is not cancelled, it is suppressed and suspended, it circulates off stage only, invisible to outsiders.

While any official representations are characterized by the collective amnesia of the Soviet past, the daily life is saturated with nostalgia and focused on continuity. As D.Light has noticed, "in post socialist countries, the desire to construct new post communist national identities, characterized by a democratic, pluralist, capitalist and largely Westward-looking orientation involves 'de-constructing' identities created during the socialist period" (Light, 2000, p.158). In Visaginas, the old identities have not been deconstructed, the "unwanted past" remains present in multiple forms, including "inherited nostalgia" of the first post Soviet generation (restaurant "Third Block"). The Soviet past is suppressed and suspended, but not cancelled, it is rendered to invisible in official representations but is memorized in the daily life.

Young and Kaczmarek (2008) distinguish three directions of coping with the unwanted past and remaking the place identity - de communization, return to the pre socialist Age of Gold and Westernization / Europeanization of the town. The strategy applied in Visaginas could be named as "youth and nature". Here, in absence of any other than Soviet symbolic recourses (pre Soviet history, history of resistance during the Soviet period, symbolic identifications with the West), the identity of "young and green" town is constructed, based on two unconditionally appealing and inexhaustible recourses like *youth* and *nature*.

Tychy: Sleeping Socialist Beauty and Kiss of Capitalism

Tychy is a city in southern Poland, Silesia, about 20 km away from Katowice. Tychy was first documented in 1467 and was develop into a small urban settlement. Between WWI and WWII, the population of Tychy grew to 11 000.

The new developments started on 4th October 1950, when the socialist Government Executives made a decision to build the so-called New Tychy. It was supposed to relieve overcrowding in Silezian region, were spontaneous and ungoverned industrial development resulted in deteriorating living conditions for many people. New Tychy had to be a symbolic city, the embodiment of new socialist principles of urbanization and architecture (Szczepanski, 1993, 2). Constructions started in 1951. New districts were designated by letters of the alphabet. The first two neighborhood units, A and B, were constructed as example of socialist realistic architecture, known for large number architectural details, ornaments and sculptures: a female worker holding trowel, a miner and a steelworker, a mother with a child, and numerous low-relieves representing various animals. Estate 'D' was completed in 1959, and estates 'E' and 'F' between 1960-64, estates 'G' and 'M' were built during the seventies, etc. The letters were associated with girls' names: district M stands for Magdalena, X for Xymena, R for Regina, S for Stella, Z for Zuzanna etc. (Szczepański, 1993, p. 4). When town expanded,

¹⁷ Chernobyl: the catastrophe of the century. Five years after (Dobryj Den, 1991 04 17, p.1), 12 years after Chernobyl, 12 years of Chernobyl related problems (Sugardas, 1998 04 24), Commemoration of the victims of Chernobyl catastrophe (Sugardas, 2005 04 28 p.2) et cetera.

¹⁸ Memoirs of the first construction workers, Sugardas, 2004 04 11, p.6.

many nearby villages and settlements were incorporated within its boundaries. Incorporation of already formed communities with their identities and life practices, as well as the absence of one cultural centre made common town's identity problematic.

After change of political regime in 1990, Tychy was re divided. Five counties and villages were separated from the town. Economic zone established at the end of the 1990s attracted new investments: "Fiat Auto Poland" was opened in 1992 and Car Factory Isuzu in 1998. Town is also known for printing house "Agora", printing influential country daily newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" and food industries (the beer Tyskie, the cheeses Sertop, the juices Kubus etc.)

In contrast to Visaginas, model community of the Soviet socialism, collective identity of Tychy involved contradictions between old inhabitants and newcomers to the town, lack of shared cultural centre and observable disintegration of the town into separate housing estate communities. Although officially celebrated as outpost of socialism, the town was popularly referred as a loose collection of large housing estates, "socialist dormitory", a "city with no character", a "bedroom in a socialist style", an "unshaped city", a "desert", or a "workers' lodging house for Silesia" (Szczepanski, 1993, 14).

Today, Tychy is known for new investment and successful economic development, yet, the town's identity, the socialist past and socialist heritage remain ambiguous issues. New identities of the former "Polish socialist town" and representations of the "dissonance heritage" are analyzed on the basis of two sources, i.e. – official website of Tychy municipality and brochure "Tychy. A Good Place" (brochure is available in most Tychy hotels as well as on official town's website¹⁹).

The brochure (issued in 2007) introduces Tychy as "a good place." *"Tychy is an exceptional place. This exceptionality stems from a number of elements which together make up the contemporary town identity: tradition and modernity, innovative industry and large green areas"* - Mayor of the town, Andrzej Dziuba, says (p.3).

What makes the former socialist outpost a "good place"? The content of the brochure is dominated by images of nature (11 posts of surrounding lakes, mountains, forests, local parks, green areas, outdoor activities, ecology, environmental issues etc.). The second largest category is the local car industry (8 posts), it is followed by the old historical churches of Tychy (5 posts). Other relevant issues (4 posts each) are sports, arts, local brewery and pro European identities of the town.

The general image is the green town, surrounded by lakes, mountains, and forests, the town with modern, progressive and environmental friendly industries, FIAT among them, the old town with beautiful churches, and old historical brewery. Other constitutive elements of the town's image are sports, contemporary arts and pro European identities.

Yet, there is a collective amnesia concerning the socialist past. The socialist urban expansion and projects of industrialization are briefly summed up with the single sentence *"The industrial zone emerged In Tychy on the turn of the 1960s and 1970s"* (p.20), and collapse of the Soviet socialism is mentioned due to *"special economic zone established at the end of the 1990"* (p. 23). The Soviet period is compared to sleep or literally to non – existence: *"Before the war Tychy had only 11 thousand inhabitants. In 1950 the state authorities decided to convert it into a hundred-thousand-town. The "New Tychy" as it was called was supposed to be nothing more than a sleeping place for Silesia – the inhabitants were to commute to work, to university and to a theatre to the neighboring towns. Today Tychy is a modern, vibrant town"* (p. 19). *"No Longer a Place for Sleeping"*, the title says.

To quote Young, Kaczmarek (2008) writing on Lodz, another Polish town, "The key discourses surrounding this form of acknowledgement of the socialist past reproduce notions of the city as dormant in the socialist period – the 'decades of oblivion' – lacking dynamism and lost under a cover of dust and apathy but awaiting discovery and restoration" (Young, Kaczmarek, 2008, p. 64). In contrast to Visaginas that appears out of nothing, having literally no history, Tychy reappears after decades of oblivion. It is the sleeping beauty awoken by the kiss of capitalism. Many authors call it "the sleeping beauty complex", i.e. visioning the reawakening of past national glory (Ágh, 1998), or use metaphors of the 'West' as a 'knight in shining armour' arriving to awake Eastern Europe from its slumbers (Verdery, 1996).

¹⁹ www.umtychy.pl

The Soviet period is marked by amnesia. The 50 years of the socialist past, expansion of the 11 000 settlement to 100 000 town and its particular role as the outpost of socialism, are just ignored. Housing estate "A", or Anna, exemplar case of socialist architecture is the single landmark of socialism is not even included into brochure,²⁰ fortunately enough, it is listed among the places of interests on the official Tychy website²¹. Ironically, even the local swimming pool ("*The swimming pool is the most imaginatively winding place in town*", p. 14) receives more attention than landmark of socialist architecture. Housing estate "A", part of the dissonance heritage that does not fit into pro capitalist, is *actively forgotten*.

The moment of present is connected, in a mysterious way, directly to the pre Soviet past. Say it in a trendy way, Tychy is promoted as place, where the traditional and the modern are interwoven - "*There is a traditional touch to anything modern in Tychy ... and modern touch to anything traditional*" (p.13). The confluence of modern and traditional happens in ironic forms, as modern industries patronized by catholic Saints: "*Since 1997 the residents have been under the special care of St. Christopher – the patron saint of travelers, drivers and the town of Tychy. Ceremonial church fair to celebrate his day is held every year in July. It is also an occasion to have your car blessed – the Silesian Archbishop blesses here several thousands cars from Tychy, the region, the country or even from abroad*" (p. 25). Both, post soviet revival of formerly suppressed religious practices and triumphant outbreak of capitalism, serve to overshadow the socialist past and create new, more desirable identities.

Another ironic confluence of tradition and modernity is Piramida, local spa and wellness center located at the Paprocany lake. The Piramida, initiated by the well known Polish bio energy therapist, has the proportions of Cheops pyramid and is expected to have some healing power. The *Piramida* is presented as the symbol of polish entrepreneurial spirit: "*The great asset of the town are its residents – hard-working, entrepreneurial and open to new, even the most unconventional ideas. That is why the Pyramid – an exclusive hotel and therapeutic centre - could come into existence here. It stands on the bank of the lake, on a "chakram" – a place which is supposed to influence positively a human body*" (*Serious, Romantic and Imaginative*, p. 37).

Constructed as the socialist urban and industrial outpost, having not or little symbolic recourses for constructing new pro European, pro capitalist identities, Tychy is seeking for new place identity, in order to legitimize new capitalist developments- *with the focus industrial and entrepreneurial prospective, business and investments friendly environment, highly skilled and qualified human recourses, business friendly, and the omni present entrepreneurial spirit*.²²

The Pyramid, that resembles tiny copy of the Louvre, seems at odds with the natural urban environment. It seems imposed, imported and alien, just like *the Cloisters* in New York that were disassembled brick by brick in South France, shipped to New York and reassembled again in Fort Tryon Park. The Pyramid is erected right beside the heavy traffic road, facing group of typical socialist period block buildings, popularly known as *khrushchevki*. Ironically, for the visitors' gaze, not the *The Pyramid*, but *khrushchevki* represents real and authentic experience of the town.

Tychy's strategies for creating new post socialist identities are re inventing the Age of Gold based on significant recourses of pre Soviet period (churches, monasteries, historical market places) and enforcing pro European, pro capitalist identities (roads, industries, entrepreneurial spirit, etc.). The socialist period, that gave birth to New Tychy and made it an exemplar of the socialist architecture and urban planning, is compared to long lasting sleep, - now, thanks to capitalism, Tychy is awaken.

To quote once again three strategies of changing place identity in post Soviet space, de communization, return to the pre socialist Age of Gold and Westernization / Europeanization of the town (see Young and Kaczmarek, 2008) - all the three strategies are actively employed for constructing new post socialist Tychy identity. Yet due to Tychy's socialist past and lack of significant non socialist symbolic recourses, the images of nature

²⁰Private company Czarha Wolga is running tours to Tychy, the "Red Route" which includes *Katowice Koszutka housing estate – Tychy „A” housing estate – Brewing Museum in Tychy* <http://www.czarnawolga.com/en/routes.php>

²¹ <http://www.umtychy.pl>

²² More on negation of socialist identities as "backward" and enforcement of pro capitalist identities as "advanced and progressive", see Dunn, Elizabeth (1999) "Slick Salesmen and Simple People: Negotiated Capitalism in a Privatized Polish Firm," in *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Transformation in the Former Socialist World* (Katherine Verdery and Michael Burawoy, eds), pp. 125-150. Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield.

(surrounding lakes, mountains, forests, local parks, green areas, outdoor activities, ecology, environmental issues etc.) are dominant in the new, post socialist urban identity.

Nowa Huta: Soviet Socialism for Sale

Nowa Huta, meaning simply 'new steelworks', was founded in 1949 as a new town for Poland's first steel plant, the Lenin Steelworks ('Huta imienia Lenina' or HiL). It was constructed near Krakow, on the basis of Mogiła, Pleszów and Krzesławice settlements. The town was to become a center of heavy industry an ideal place for the communist propaganda. The development of Nowa Huta and HiL was funded by loan from the Soviet Union in lieu of Marshall Aid and the town itself was popularly called as a "Stalin's gift to Poland" (Otto, 2008).

The reasons for constructing the town and the plant were mostly ideological, as coal had to be transported from Silesia and iron ore from the Soviet Union; the products were shipped to other parts of Poland. It is broadly believed, construction of the plant and the town was "punishment for the regions weak vote in the 1946 referendum," to "remake Krakow into proletarian city" (Ryder, 1990, p.223) and to "facilitate the diffusion of the working class into Krakow" (Regulska, 1987, p.328). The construction of the steelworks and the town were "a deliberate piece of social engineering" (Hardy and Rainnie, 1996, p.148), yet, it was not successful one. In 1960, the local population revolted against authorities while trying to protect the wooden cross, erected without a permit, later on engaged into active campaign for constructing the church. In 1966, a church called *Lord's Arc* was built. In the 1980s, local community strongly supported Solidarity movement and engaged into multiple street protests. After 1990, the steelworks were renamed for Polish-born metallurgist Tadeusz Sendzimir. With production outputs reduced, and the rise of unemployment, district was facing now an uncertain future

Situated as suburban area of Krakow, Nowa Huta is easy accessible for tourists and is positioned as a socialist landmark and authentic experience of the Soviet socialism. With the niche tourism as new trend in heritage tourism (Kearns and Philo 1993; Lury 1996), sites associated with particular historical events are marketed for consumers with shared narrow interests. The sites, among others, include the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau (Young 1993; Huener 2003; Charlesworth 2004; Till 2005), Jewish Heritage Route in Jewish district in Krakow Kazimierz, Schindlers List Tour²³, paying a visit to Schindler's Factory, Krakow Industrial Heritage Route, tour "In the Footsteps of John Paul II", etc.

The Communist heritage tourism is one of the niches, although it exist on the margins and is a tiny one, compared with the "tour business in the Old Town, the salt mine in Wieliczka, or even Kraków's Jewish quarter, Kazimierz" (Otto, 2008, p.167). The tours are offered by Krakow's municipality,²⁴ Krakow tours²⁵ and Crazy tours²⁶.

Nowa Huta tour, offered by municipality, includes administrative centre of T.Sendzimir Steelwork, Central Square, several of residential districts, other outstanding buildings of the Soviet period, like Swit Cinema, Theatre Ludowy, church Arka Pana, also several sites of interests of pre Soviet period – churches, monasteries, etc. The tours incorporate pre Soviet heritage, Soviet heritage, and anti Soviet discourses and provides rather complex understanding of Nowa Huta.

Krakow Tours offer "Communism and Nowa Huta Tour". Their website contain quote from "The Boston Globe": *"Come visit historic Nowa Huta, where George Orwell's dark vision of a perfect industrial metropolis was executed with stunning precision. Until, that is, the workers rose up and overthrew Big Brother..."* As D.Light (2000) observed the "communist heritage" is to certain extent defined outside the country, i.e. shaped by the travel guides published in West and for Western tourism. Company promises "unique insight into Socialist Poland" and the first-hand experience of the "bad old days".

²³ considered effect of the popularity of Steven Spielberg's film "Schindler's List" (see Charlesworth 2004; Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996)

²⁴ www.krakow.pl/en/turystyka/trasy/?id=trasa_nowohucka/trasa.html

²⁵ www.krakow-tours.com

²⁶ www.crazyguides.com

Crazy Tours offers several tours to Nowa Huta - Communism Tour, Communism Deluxe Tour, Communist Welcome, etc. Tours are conducted in authentic vintage automobile, Trabant or Fiat, the guides are wearing workers' uniforms. Tours offer "first hand details of what it was like living under Soviet occupation" - visit to an apartment decorated 1970s-style that is rented for the purpose ("Step into our time-wrapped apartment"), refreshments in a Communist style restaurant, watching communist propaganda films and "rare opportunity to eat pickled cucumbers and toast the "good ol' days" with our close friend, and Communist relic, Mr. Vieslav.²⁷" In contrast to Krakow Tours' "dark visions" and "bad old days" of Communist, Crazy Tours are offering experience of "good ol' days", communist period is represented with grotesque and irony. Yet in both cases, Nowa Huta, the outpost of socialism, is object of difference, it is marked by high degree of otherness and secondariness, it is just "lesser", as Otto (2008) suggests.

Local community is actively engaged into producing the self image of Nowa Huta. In October 2006, the cultural center "1949 Klub" was opened by group of friends in Nowa Huta. The place is intended both for local community and for tourists, and the communist heritage tours make regular visits to the place. The center includes cafe, reading room, exhibition area, small cinema and is devoted for fostering local pride of Nowa Huta, telling the stories of the settlement from the perspective of the local people who built it and lived there, thus making their contributions to a sense of place possible. Expositions of personal photo or video materials are encouraged. In this way, people of Nowa Huta avoid passive exhibition of themselves and their neighborhood, but actively engage into construction of heritage and claim legitimacy of their own personal histories.

In a paradox way, the communist heritage tourism is generating complex acknowledgements of the socialist past (for more, see Frank 2006; Young and Light 2006). Continuous exposure for the tourists' interest, discourses imposed from outside (Western tourists and western travel guides) foster self reflection and articulation of one's own past. These empowering effects of niche tourism, as it allows positive identification with one's personal past and amortizes the dramatic experience of disjuncture, discontinuity and displacement without relocation.

The past might be reflected in many ways - dark vision of old bad days, crazy vision of the old good days, etc., but in general, the past is elevated from minor and invisible to important. The tourism narratives unveil the complexity of the socialist life (pre soviet, soviet and anti soviet narratives), and the local population, instead of being passive victimage of the tourism industries, actively engage into constructing image of the socialist Nowa Huta, thus reclaiming their power and legitimizing their histories.

Conclusions

1. After political transformations of 1990, the newly emerging post Soviet states have had to reorganize and reform their political and economic system, also to redefine their collective identities and to find a ways how to deal with the largely unwanted Soviet past. The Soviet heritage, labeled as "dissonance heritage", was inconsistent with the new pro Western, pro capitalist identities and was difficult to cope with. The strategies of creating new identities in post Soviet spaces are de communization, Westernization /Europeanization, and return to the pre Soviet Age of Gold. The de communization occurs typically via spatial or narrative reframing of the Soviet heritage, in both cases, creating either physical or discursive distance to the objects of Soviet heritage.
2. The planned Soviet towns were designed as the model communities of the Soviet socialism. Most of them are mono industrial towns, satellite settlements to certain Soviet industries, built in the poorly populated areas or on the basis of few small settlements, which means absence any collective memories. The planned Soviet towns are mono heritage towns, which makes coping with the dissonance heritage and development of new post Soviet identities rather complicated.
3. The analysis of three cases (Visaginas, Tychy and Nowa Huta) has revealed, the typical strategies for rebuilding place identity in post Soviet states, - de Communization, Westernization/Europeanization and return to the pre Soviet "Age of Gold" - are of limited applicability. Having no or little pre Soviet history and poor

²⁷ Mr. Vieslav, also called "the legendary Communist worker, Mr. Vieslav", is employee of the tour company, sometimes providing driving services and occasionally performing role of "authentic communist worker" and "communist relic".

identification with (Western) Europe, the planned Soviet towns construct their new identities based on youth and nature. Both in Tychy and Visaginas, *nature* is predominant category in the town's self representations, which is rather ironic phenomenon taking into account famous nature-culture dichotomy.

4. Local communities are inclined to forget their "unwanted past". Both in Tychy and Visaginas, the Soviet past is silenced and ignored. In Tychy, there is focus on pre Soviet "Age of Gold" and pro European identities; the present is connected directly to the pre Soviet past, and the socialist period is simply silenced. In Visaginas, there is kind of split consciousness, i.e. – the Soviet heritage is actively forgotten within official narratives, yet actively memorized in everyday life.

5. Situation in Nowa Huta is somehow different. As Nowa Huta is situated near historical old town Krakow and exposed for interests of Western tourists; the Soviet period is actively memorized. The interest in communist heritage of Nowa Huta is enforced, to large extent, from outside, i.e. by foreign tourists, western travel guides. Yet it has empowering effects on local community - instead of being passive victimage of the tourism industries, they actively engaged into constructing image of the socialist Nowa Huta, legitimizing their histories and make positive identification with their own past.

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