Border-crossings as memory sites? The case study of the Czech-Polish border in Cieszyn Silesia

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Abstract:

This project evaluates the state borders between Czechia and Poland in the region of Cieszyn Silesia from the perspective of memory studies. Emphasizing the fact that the borders and especially border crossings are sites rich in symbolics, a field observation was conducted to explore whether the border-crossings (can) play a role in memory work. These sites, apart from their apparent function, represent bridges between two states and are usually two national communities. If these groups were in antagonistic relationships in the past (tensions, violence), the border could also become a site of rivalry (e.g., contested border demarcations). In this project, all the border-crossings between Czechia and Poland in Cieszyn Silesia are considered, and the imprints of the past are identified. According to the approach of the SANE framework (Björkdahl et al., 2017), some of these border crossings can be also considered memory sites which means they are (can become) a platform for reconciliation or construction of new and better cross-border relationships. That goal is also valid for Cieszyn Silesia which was divided into two parts after the First World War (Czechoslovak and Polish). Such demarcation did not respect the national and linguistic distribution of populations and left many Poles in Czechoslovakia. The demarcation of the new border was accompanied by events that turned sensitive from a longer perspective (Czechoslovak military campaign in 1919 on Polish territory, Polish occupation of Cieszyn Silesia in 1938). This paper, therefore, explores the reconciling and conflicting narratives the memory sites may have.

Keywords:

memory site, borders, border-crossing, Cieszyn Silesia, SANE framework

Introduction

The landscape is loaded with historical symbols and cultural meanings. Similarly, it works as a blend of identities (Kapralski, 2001; Murzyn-Kupisz & Gwosdz, 2011; Mitchell, 2001). It is not only a space for present interactions but also carries its memory (Crang, 1998) which can be at some point a weighty burden.

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This piece wants to investigate this complex memorial background in the context of one borderland area which was shaped by dynamic events of the 20th century.

If even any landscape can be rich in traces of the past (Brierley, 2010), the borderlands may present an extreme case (Koter, 2003; Gibson, 2016). The simple nation-state interpretation of history is being steadily challenged there due to their multi-ethnic characteristic, border shifts, conflicts, cross-border contacts, and crossing identities. Such considerations do not have to be visible at first sight from the capital city or from a simple look into the political map. The clear demarcation of space into the nation-states is still a rather young construct. Patrolled borders in Europe are the late accomplishment of the Westphalian international order, as the heyday of borders in Europe came only after 1945 (Zaiotti, 2011). The elaborated system of border surveillance could contribute to the clearer delimitation of space. However, the nation-state borders fit only rarely with the linguistic, sociological, or ethnic boundaries (Haselsberger, 2014). This fact, thus, questions the nation-state narrative that prefers to focus on its perception of history and tends to omit the others. A single-minded nationalistic conception may collide with the much more complex reality of mnemonic imprints in borderlands.

The field of memory studies analyzes the borderlands continuously (Zhurzhenko, 2013; Narvselius, 2015; Barwiński, 2017; Zhurzhenko, 2010; Andersen & Prokkola, 2018). The scholars have been identifying the memory sites in cities with a multiethnic past; focusing on monuments, investigating meanings, present narratives, agents, or events. This paper adopts an innovative approach that examines spaces that are not typically associated with memory but play a crucial role in cross-border contact. Border crossings are primarily a tool of state control over logistics. However, these sites also represent a sphere for mutual contact, they are quasi-indispensable when discussing cross-border mobility in legal terms. They can function as a bridge between communities divided by the border. They enable mutual contact, which can be irreplaceable for the reconciliation of harms.

That holds true for the Central European historical region of Cieszyn Silesia (*Těšínské Slezsko* in Czech/ *Śląsk Cieszyński* in Polish). This former duchy was divided after the First World War between Czechoslovakia and Poland. The border demarcation was accompanied by a short-armed conflict and in consequence, other waves of tensions and wounds in the memories were provoked. Moreover, the new boundary separated countless families (Böhm & Drápela, 2017). Instead of free movement in the formerly common land, new cross-border facilities were installed, and the movement was regulated. The hard border regime was partly relaxed after 1989. However, more important changes came with the enlargement of the Schengen Area in 2007, when the obstacles for cross-border mobility ceased

to exist. It is worth noting that the history of cross-border cooperation in this region is shorter than in older member states of the European union.

Since the border demarcation was challenged by both sides of the conflict and the shape of the border presented a disputed political issue, it is worth analyzing whether the border and specifically border-crossings still contain objects and facilities with symbolic meaning referring to memory issues. The sites of memory are helping people in expressing their collective shared knowledge of the past and anchoring their sense of unity (Assmann, 2011; Winter, 2008) and may have a formative impact on the perceptions of past influencing group behavior (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). Therefore, the research question of this study is the following: What memory imprints do border crossings between Czechia and Poland in Cieszyn Silesia hold?

Using fieldwork methods, all border crossings between fringes of the historical region on the Czech-Polish border Hrčava and Bohumín will be considered. To explore these sites in a methodologically productive way, the SANE framework (Björkdahl et al., 2017) will be the backbone of this study. Through the lens of memory studies, the particular site and its mnemonic function or potential, the agents active in this sense, any memory narratives and related events are analyzed. After the observation of the site and look into the media, the border-crossings are divided into several categories according to their mnemonic function and potential.

Memory in the landscape

Newmann (2006) understood that borders are not just a static outcome of historical development but rather a dynamic process. They are continuously constructed, reshaped, and redefined through various ways – discursively, practically, representationally, perceptually (Scott, 2012). Therefore, the borders are also a result of the historical process that covered them with layers of memorial imprints. And the other way around, border dynamics incessantly boost the memory issues in the borderlands (Zhurzhenko, 2013).

The construction of landscape and the construction of identity are inseparable parts of one process (Kapralski, 2001). Each piece of landscape is unique (Stobbelaar & Pedroli, 2011), and this uniqueness is shaped by the inhabitants who invest meanings in it (Crang, 1998). The constant change of the landscape has its reasons not only in ecological development but also in a cultural way. Therefore, Marcucci (2000) emphasizes considering both spatial and temporal aspects of a landscape. The human imprint on a given space can be manifested with any kind

of material objects, symbols, or various narratives (Crang, 1998), ideas, dreams, or place names (Johnson & Larsen, 2013), and many more. The spectrum of human participation in the construction of landscape is truly wide and, in the course of time, new layers of human activity are covering the older ones (Vedru, 2009). That opens space for selective interpretations, remembering, and forgetting. The landscape is, therefore, a resource of cultural memories (Crang, 1998), and scholars often compare it to old palimpsests (Marvell & Simm, 2016).

It was Pierre Nora who developed these reflections of the interactions between space and history in a very distinctive way. Nora (1989) introduced the concept of *lieux de mémoire* (memory sites) which "anchor, condense or express the exhausted capital of our collective memory" (p. 24). As the real environments of memory continuously disappear, new memories catch hold of spaces, gestures, images, or objects. The *lieux de mémoire* can represent the boundary stones of another age. Nora (1989) gives several examples: museums, cemeteries, archives, festivals, anniversaries, or sanctuaries.

When looking into the landscape; the questions of what has remained from the past may emerge (Kozłowski, 2011). If there are such objects, narratives, or perceptions, the other inquiry can follow on determining which symbols these things represent. On the sites that evoke commemoration, emotions are often elicited (Sumartojo, 2020); the affection is driven by recognition of symbols (Smith et al., 2018). Nora (1989) noted that commemorative attention can be attracted by both the extraordinary and the banal actions, objects. Some meanings that are important for self-identification may be associated with obvious topics. That is very relevant for this research as well because border-crossings are not typical memory sites at all.

Landscape, thus, influences the meaning of commemoration (Johnson, 2002). As Alderman and Inwood (2013) suggest, commemorative spaces have normative power. The symbols which are present can help people to self-identify according to given narratives. It is not negligible to ask, who financed or introduced such a symbol here. Forest and Johnson (2002) put forth that memory sites are often controlled by the social elite. Sometimes, more understandings of history may clash at these sites which then become the battlefields of memory (Kapralski, 2001). The interplay of commemorating events, memory narratives, symbolic landscape and involved actors forms a background for the analytical SANE framework (Björkdahl et al., 2017) which will be presented in the methods chapter. This approach shows that these factors do not exist independently from each other and if they are well integrated by some actor, they may become an object of memory activism with possible political impacts.

As some previous studies showed, the symbols in the borderlands matter (Fikfak, 2009; Zhurzhenko, 2013; Pfoser, 2014). Apart from the street names, banners or cemeteries, the border crossings themselves may present an interesting case. An example may come from the Czech recent past. The western and southern borders of the present Czech Republic were under strict protection in times of communist Czechoslovakia (1948 – 1989) and belonged to the Iron Curtain. The memories of the restricted access to the borderlands and forbidden passage to Western Germany and Austria still present important symbols of the lack of freedom and sudden lift of the restrictions for the citizens (Šmidrkal, 2012). After long years of isolation, the first experience with the non-communist world occurred at the border crossing, and such feelings were vastly shared after the dismantling of the Iron Curtain (Berdahl, 1999). The presence of armed patrols and rigorous controls before 1989 were also psychologically demanding for those who could cross the border with permission. During the check, the citizens were under the sovereignty of border guards, and the passage into the neighboring land was out of his/her control. Hypothetically, this experience could also be formative for any other border-crossing in the post-communist future when the border checks were less thoroughgoing. As pointed out above, cross-border contact is often facilitated by border-crossings. As a miniature of the borderlands, they can work either as the contact zone or point of difference. Therefore, the memorial struggles are often alive in these sites.

The equipment of border-crossing may elicit memories as these sites hold symbolic meanings both for those who were authorized to leave the country and for those who could not. During the 1990s, and specifically after entrance into Schengen Area, the conditions for cross-border mobility were steadily relaxed and, therefore, new narratives of the freedom of movement inside of the European Union could proliferate. However, they represent only an upper layer of memory as will be shown in the next chapter.

Cieszyn Silesia in the 20th century

Cieszyn Silesia stands for a historic region that underwent dramatic changes during the 20th century. In the beginning, it was both an industrial and mountainous region concentrated around the city of Cieszyn. As a Duchy of Cieszyn, it belonged to the historical Czech lands. From the sociological point of view, its cities were home to Polish, Czech, and German-speaking populations, and the Jewish minority was also present there. Some inhabitants also identified with the Silesian minority (Siwek, 2018). The important indicator for national affiliation was the religious practice at the same time (Morys-Twarowski, 2018). The region

belonged to Austrian Silesia and experienced the boom of mining and modernization of cities (Jemelka, 2014).

This history of coexistence was interrupted firstly after the First World War when the principle of national self-determination collided with the varied reality of the Cieszyn region and the economic interests of the state actors who were drawing new boundaries. For the new Czechoslovak government, the area was strategically important due to the railway connection of Czech lands to the newly attached Slovakia (Kaim et al., 2020; Buttin, 2005). The first and provisory division of the region between the Czechoslovak and Polish states took place at the beginning of November 1918, however, both governments were deeply unsatisfied with the demarcation. The Czechoslovak government started to prepare the military operation (Gąsior, 2009) and in January of 1919, the Czechoslovak troops invaded the Polish area to move the border to the east.

What followed were a dozen months of turmoil, violence, agitation for the plebiscite, and waiting for a diplomatic solution (Gąsior, 2009). In the end, the Czechoslovak republic obtained the railway connections, mines around Karviná, and steelworks at Třinec. In total, these areas were populated by Polish (48.6%), Czech (39,5%), and German (11.9%) inhabitants. The former administrative center of Cieszyn was divided into two countries, the river Olza became a symbol of separation (Kamiński, 2004). The Polish republic got the land where the Polish nation represented 67.5% of the inhabitants and the Germans 30.7%.

As a result, the grievances and feelings of injustice were widely disseminated among the Polish people. These tensions were coming alive as long as the first Czechoslovak republic existed (Baran, 2009). While the newly acquired Czechoslovak region attracted the immigration of the Czech population, the Poles strengthened their identity through schooling in their mother tongue, unpolitical organizations and free time associations, and a network of relationships with relatives in the Polish Republic (Paul, 1999).

While the dynamics in the divided region calmed down during the 1920s, the area started to gain prominence in Polish foreign policy (Baran, 2009; Cienciala, 1968). Under the influence of Warsaw's nationalist strategy, the dissatisfaction with the Czechoslovak administration rose again in the 1930s and prepared the ground for the capture of the Český Těšín district by the Polish army in the October of 1938 after the Czechoslovak government was deprived of its borderlands with the German population (Baran, 2009; Borák, 1997; Bílek, 2018). This Polish era, however, took no more than one year, on September 1, 1939; the troops of Nazi Germany invaded Cieszyn Silesia and incorporated the region into the Third Reich. After the wave of emigration of Czech inhabitants to the

Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the number of Czech inhabitants of Cieszyn Silesia decreased (Baran, 2009).

The status of both Czechs and Poles in Cieszyn Silesia deteriorated, while the Czech position was slightly more favorable (Borák, 2009). It was a strategy of Nazi administrators to make both nations angry against each other due to the different standards of treatment. Under these circumstances, the national resentments grew even more dramatically. The wounded relationships between Czechs and Poles rose into prominence once again after the Second World War when the émigrés from the Protectorate wanted to return to Cieszyn Silesia (Friedl, 2009). However, Poland did not plan to surrender the region at all. The first clashes occurred already in the first days of the armistice. Some Czech returnees wanted to settle their accounts with the Poles, whom they perceived as collaborators. Such a judgment was particularly misleading as it ignored the casualties of Nazi occupation on the Polish side. Also, the proclaimed Germanization of Polish inhabitants was to a large extent forced by the officers. Regardless of that, the grain of injustice was once again seeded. An important target of hatred were the Poles who moved to Cieszyn Silesia after 1938. It did not matter much whether they originally had fled the region in 1919-1920 or not. The Czechs understood the Polish capture of Cieszyn Silesia in 1938 as a part of the Munich Conference trauma (Friedl, 2009).

The international border between Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1945 was again an object of dispute (Hannan, 2006). Originally, the positions of both governments seemed to be irreconcilable. The Czechoslovak government wanted to settle the border back at the position from 1920 (include cities Bohumín, Fryštát, left bank of Olza river and Třinec), while the Polish government denied the legitimacy of such a borderline (Friedl, 2009). The quarrel was overseen by the Soviet Union, who pushed the Warsaw cabinet to accommodate the Czechoslovak claim, and both countries could conclude the Friendship Agreement in 1947. Under the eye of the Soviet regime, the Polish government did not dare in the coming years to renew its claims, and the issues of the Polish minority in Czechoslovakia became again, more or less, the local affair. The border at the pre-1938 profile was confirmed finally in the Border Treaty in 1958.

After 1948, the communist propaganda considered nationalism as bourgeois deviance and the voices calling for the more just consideration of the Polish minority were silenced (Friedl, 2009). But still, the events were not forgotten as the Polish community remained divided into the two states with limited possibilities to cross the border. Also, the Polish minority distinctly felt that its claims were not heard in Prague (Nowak, 2009). The city Český Těšín/Cieszyn was divided

not only by the river but also by the armed guard and customs officers and both states stayed rather isolated from each other despite the proclaimed friendship and alliance in the Eastern Bloc. Cross-border mobility was facilitated at the end of the 1970s but this arrangement did not last more than three years. Mutual contact was limited even more after the declaration of Martial Law in Poland in 1981 (Rychlík, 2006). Later, entrance into Poland was permitted only for a limited number of organized tourists and people with an invitation from Poland.

Despite restrictions, Poland became an increasingly popular destination for cross-border shopping (Rychlík, 2006), and such a reputation became one of the platforms for renewal of the cross-border contact after 1989. However, the Czechoslovak side did not open the border immediately and waited until 1991, which could be again perceived with bitterness among Poles. Combined with the memories of the tensions with Czechs, some Poles perceive the treatment of their minority in the Czech Republic as unfair (Böhm, 2018).

In the period after 1991, two parallel developments can be detected. On the one hand, some resentments, painful memories, and antipathies can be voiced openly in the democratic society. The guaranteed status of the Polish minority enlarged, and very concrete signs of their presence are now visible in public space (bilingual street names). However, this innovation also sparked some disproving voices on the Czech side. Some acts of vandalism with graffiti over the Polish names of streets were reported and this issue also attracted heated debate on social media (Mašková, 2015; Siwek & Kaszper, 2009). On the other hand, the mutual relationships, cross-border cooperation, and mobility between the Czech Republic and Poland increased to unprecedented levels (the impact of Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia debated in: Kasperek & Wróblewski, 2019). The cross-border labor or cross-border shopping was made even easier after the enlargement of the Schengen Area in 2007 (Böhm & Opiola, 2019; Dołzbłasz, 2015).

New interactions can be, therefore, a useful and efficient tool against prejudices against others. Cross-border cooperation and commuting can shadow the animosities. It takes nevertheless much longer to erase the negative memories. Both understandings live next to each other as the competitors. It will be, thus, an important aspect of the empirical part of this study to focus on which narratives will be present at the memory sites inspected in this paper. In the context of Cieszyn Silesia, some pioneering studies explored the memorial aspects of street names (Mácha et al., 2018) or festivities (Grygar, 2004). The study that would analyze the border-crossings as memory sites was missing until now.

Case selection and methodology

For this case study, the area of the historical region of Cieszyn Silesia was not chosen by chance. As argued in the previous chapter, the border between Czechia and Poland is in this region rather young and sometimes contested. Also, after years of separation into two states, the post-socialist democratization and adoption of the Schengen Agreement facilitated mutual contact. Due to the advantageous shopping prices and attractive commercial supply, consumers from the Czech Republic use the border-crossings regularly. In the opposite direction, Poles profit from favorable conditions in the labor market. Apart from these quasi-general characteristics of Czech-Polish borderlands (Pászto et al., 2019), Cieszyn Silesia represents a special case due to its troubling history. In comparison with other sections of the Czech-Polish border, the Cieszyn region has an above-average urban settlement, employment rate, and economic development (Pászto et al., 2019). In total, this makes Cieszyn Silesia a most likely case for the analysis of border-crossings as the memory sites.

Nora (1989) discusses that knowledge about memory sites or elicited emotions is individual. Although such affections are indeed easily transmissible (Sumartojo, 2020), such limitation may be also an important critique of memory studies that they bring about only a limited part from the many memories. This obstacle will be settled through the structured methodological tool which will be the „SANE" framework (Björkdahl et al., 2017). Although it was originally intended for a context of peace research and politicization of memory, it can also help here in this rather micro approach.

The collective of authors around Björkdahl (2017) proposed to concentrate on four aspects of memory sites in the space. The first one is the site itself. The pinning of memory to a very concrete site is a constitutive characteristic of a memory site. This place also produces some meanings (Björkdahl et al., 2017). The sites are shaped by their past more if the traces of history are visible (Kappler, 2017). Of course, the associations elicited by memory sites can be ambivalent as people may perceive the memory in different ways. Some of the passengers do not necessarily notice the memorial aspect of the site at all (Kappler, 2017). Therefore, the first step of spatial analysis is to consider whether a chosen place represents any memorial layer, whether this place says something about the past (Szpociński, 2016). If there are any memorials, statues, information desks, or other symbols, the other points of the „SANE" framework will be put under scrutiny.

"A" letter in the SANE abbreviation stands for "agents". These are the institutions, states, individuals, NGOs, citizen initiatives, or churches that cultivate the memory sites (Björkdahl et al., 2017). These actors „have wildly diverging

understandings of the past but share that they have a stake in how it is remembered" (Björkdahl et al., 2017, p. 7). The object of memory does not have to be extra-ordinary for being remembered. In the stories that ordinary people as agents of memory continuously re-tell, the traces of "big" historical events intermingle with the "little" ones from everyday life. In the case of this study, the focus will be on the actors from civil society, municipalities, churches, or other institutions that cultivate the memory (through the financing of statues, information desks, organizing events, etc.).

The third analytical point may shed a light on the ambiguous character of the memory site. The complexity of commemoration may be disentangled by the analysis of narratives and stories that the site contains (Kappler, 2017). The „N" means „narratives" and without them, the site would be mnemonically empty. In this logic, the place without any narrative about its history cannot be a memory site. Narratives do not have to be in unison and some competing story-telling frames may coexist (Björkdahl et al., 2017). This work aims to inspect if there exist some narratives at all.

The last aspect considers the synthesis of the previous points in space and time. If the agents produce the narratives in the particular moments while being present on-site, the results can be labeled as memorial „events" (Björkdahl et al., 2017). These socially and morally meaning-making practices (Ashplant et al., 2004) are often parades, ceremonies, demonstrations, or tourist tours (Sumartojo, 2016; Marschall, 2012; Ferguson & Halliday, 2020; Rousselet, 2007). Such events can be organized from above (state, municipalities) or bottom (mnemonic activism, civic society).

This study stands on the fieldwork done during the research trips in May and June 2021. Step-by-step, all of the border-crossings between the Czech Republic and Poland in the former Duchy of Cieszyn were inspected (both for the road traffic and for pedestrians). On the selected section of the border, 14 crossing points for road traffic and 12 crossing points for pedestrians were found. These border crossings will be classified into several clusters according to the character of the memory site (operationalized through the SANE framework). Their overview is listed in the appendices.

During the visit, I was looking for both the typical infrastructure of memory sites (statues, memorial desks, flags, information desks) and for the potential memory trace in the objects of everyday life (barriers, traffic signs, guideposts). For the second step of the study, a brief analysis in selected media was done to check the coverage of events on the border-crossings together with direct observation of traces of agents, narratives, and events on the border-crossings. It is

important to state here that the fieldwork was done in spring 2021 when the region was still experiencing the impacts of covidfencing measures (Böhm, 2022) that were imposed by governments to regulate the spread of the COVID-19 infection. For instance, some slogans in the public space still mentioned the struggle against virus. However, the data were not gathered under lockdown and at the time of the fieldwork, the borders were permeable and no signs of barriers on border-crossings were detected.

A brief analysis of news coverage consists of the articles about memory sites identified in this paper. Due to the limited availability of the news archive, only the articles from 2016 – 2021 are taken into consideration. If the border-crossing is characterized as a possible site of memory („S" letter in the „SANE" framework), then its name is put into the search engine of news media archive Anopress (Czech database of news articles) possibly together with its characteristic [*Hrčava* AND *trojmezí* (tripoint), *Těšín* AND *mosty* (bridges), *Čantoryje, Těšín* AND *protest*]. The articles from the period 2016-2021 in nationwide and regional Czech media were considered. The detected articles help in demonstrating the commemorative practice *via* quotations in the analytical part of this paper.

Findings

26 border-crossings analyzed in this paper represent a diverse mixture of functions, traditions, and practices the border-crossings may have. Their infrastructure has various origins. The border bridges between the cities of Český Těšín and Cieszyn present a symbol of the previously undivided city, while some others were installed after 1989 to enable and control cross-border contact (Třinec-Líštná, Chotěbuz / Boguszowice on the European Route E 462) or were established uniquely for tourists on hiking trails before adherence into the Schengen Agreement (Velká Čantoryje / Wielka Czantoria). Although each border-crossing has its specific history, not all of them are actively reproducing memories and do not present attributes of the memory site.

Using numbers, only 10 border-crossings out of 26 complied with the necessary condition of a memory site as they contained symbols of the past which may elicit memories. That constitutes a basic differentiation between border crossings, while another categorization is made according to the existence of agents, narratives, and events of memory. In the end, three clusters of border-crossings were identified (see the Table no. 1). The complete list of the border-crossings with assigned categories can be found in the appendices.

Tab. 1: The clusters of border-crossings according to the SANE approach

All "SANE" categories detected:	Memory sites (4)
"S" condition fulfilled + presence of Narratives; without Agents and Events:	Partial memory sites (6)
No traces of memory:	Functional border-crossings (16)

Source: own investigation

Functional border-crossings

The functional border-crossings are those sites that do not meet the pre-condition of a memory site as they are lacking any symbolic materialization of memory. With an increasingly better developed Schengen border regime, virtually all features of border crossing have disappeared there. Usually, the remaining one is a traffic sign notifying the drivers that they are entering another country or another type of neutral informative message. Sometimes, the border is completely invisible except for the small border stones.

It might be possible that some people passing by have specific experiences from this site, but such association is not generalized because any understandable symbols are missing. Functional border crossings are, therefore, only a platform for crossing the border, defined solely by their usage. As pointed out above, on the analyzed section of the Czech-Polish border, most border-crossings belong to this group. Among sixteen such sites, there are either border crossings on the highways, pedestrian border-crossings in the Beskydy mountains, or border crossings on streets of some inhabited areas. If there had previously been any border-crossing) facilities (ancient buildings for border guards, barriers), such remnants were removed. They form typical examples of perfect border permeability.

Partial memory sites

The second group of border-crossings (6 cases) brings noticeable traces of the past. Typically, abandoned buildings of customs officers can elicit memories of times when motorists had to stop there and present their documents. Nowadays, the infrastructure houses are characterized by emptiness. Behind the windows, void offices are waiting for new use. Dilapidated and untended booths for border guards with torn jalousies can be considered as a monument of disintegrated borderlands from years before adherence to the Schengen agreement. Such a situation repeats during the trip alongside the Czech-Polish border. The pictures

of the former customs house in Bukovec/Jasnowice, Horní Líštná/Leszna Górna, or Dolní Marklovice/Marklowice Górne are very similar.

However, this is not the only layer of history being present on such sites. Particularly in the 1990s after the first loosening of border restrictions, some border crossings became a center for commerce. Local entrepreneurs wanted to attract customers from the neighboring state with goods that were more expensive in the second country. For the Czech customers, Polish fashion shops were particularly popular, Polish customers could be attached for instance by the supply of alcoholic beverages in Czechia. The markets were frequently very close to the border crossing which allowed customers to cross the border on foot. Although the height of this era is over, the memories of very popular shopping trips can be elicited through abandoned stalls, kiosks, and advertising placards. The entrepreneurs in some places tried to re-use ancient custom houses. However, such efforts turned unsuccessful from a longer perspective, and nowadays, such buildings testify to the lost glory of cross-border shopping markets.

Another type of partial memory site can be found on sites where the post-Schengen transformation was successful. Nevertheless, the border still influences the appearance of such a place. There is, for example, a family house on the border-crossing Karviná Ráj II/Kaczyce Górne which still bears a silhouette on the façade of the former border-crossing emblem. In the Beskydy mountains, the border leads on the ridge. As the cross-border passage was limited before the adherence to the Schengen Area, two parallel hiking trails (Czech and Polish) had been established. Although the tourists now use only one common track, there are still a few sections of the tourist trail where the pathway is branched into Czech and Polish parts. The service for tourists is also composed of the Czech and Polish chalets as they had previously been operating only for guests from one state.

These observations are referring to the layers of history that can be found on the border-crossings and may suggest some narratives about quite recent history. These remnants of the past may elicit memories. However, they do not represent memory sites as such. Their mnemonic potential is not used by any actor and no memory events are present.

Memory sites

The third category of sites groups those border-crossings that contain memory traces and are also subject of mnemonic activism. Four cases in this category vary widely in the scope of memory work and composition of memory agents. Thus, the cases will be analyzed individually. Cases 3 and 4 (border bridges

in Český Těšín/Cieszyn) are analyzed together. The summary is provided bellow in the Table no. 2.

1)   Hrčava Trojmezí / Jaworzynka Trójstyk

The first place considered as a memory site is located on a tripoint where the borders of Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia meet each other. In the conception of this site, it is also a place of encounters. The tripoint is located in a ravine but there are tourist trails from all three countries that make this border stone accessible. Very close on the Czech side, there is a bistro for tourists. The shelters in all three countries are basic part of the tourist infrastructure together with information panels. They present a narrative that the tripoint is something being shared by everyone and invite tourists to visit the attractivity in the respective countries. As the demarcation of borders was a sensitive topic here (the Slovak-Polish border has also its history of border disputes), there is a strong subliminal frame that the whole mountainous region is a space for friendship and the populations can discover what they have in common. In addition, the information panels about the older history of anti-Ottoman fortifications are adding another historical layer to the debate. In contrast, the borderline between municipalities Hrčava (CZ), Čierne (SK), and Jaworzynka (PL) is quite young, as the border between Czechia and Slovakia was demarcated in 1993. As a result, many visitors remember borderless times before 1993 when this place was not nearly as interesting for tourists. It became a tourist attraction only after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. The formative characteristic of this site is that after demarcation of a new border, a narrative was invented that a tripoint renews the bridge between countries and, in other words, counters the impact of the border.

The aim to write a new chapter in the history of this border region and to cultivate memory imprints is underlined by the agents and events that transform the memory site with their narratives. Very close to the tripoint, there is a stage on Polish side that hosts ethnographic festivities and religious pilgrimages. Each August, pilgrims from Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia wearing traditional clothes walk there in processions with their bishops and celebrate holy mass there. As the media reports suggest, the event demonstrates through religious ties the cultural proximity and mutuality of the borderlanders (Frýdeckomístecký a třinecký deník, 2017). Additionally, the history of tripoint and the ethnographical and linguistic proximity will be outlined in a prepared Museum of the Tripoint History that will be located in the nearby Czech city of Jablunkov (Frýdeckomístecký a třinecký deník, 2020).

2)   Velká Čantoryje / Wielka Czantoria

The second example of a memory site on the border-crossing is also situated far from urban areas. The peak of Velká Čantoryje / Wielka Czantoria, which is 995 meters above sea level, is the highest point in the border ridge dividing historical Silesia. It figures in local legends, which are loading the site with many ethnographical symbols. Presently, a lookout tower, stalls, fast food, and the restaurants are attracting tourists from both countries. The top of the mountain is also a place where national symbols are found – e.g., a red-white column with Polish national emblems. As the tourists hike there from both countries, this peak serves as a cross-border meeting point. From the memory studies point of view, there are no memory actors from above. However, the coronavirus pandemics showed that the symbolic importance of the mountain can be reproduced with new meanings that can create a new and probably more reconciling future for previously disputed borderlines. During the lockdown restrictions in 2020 – 2021, local activists hung a banner on a mountain peak encouraging people from both countries during the pandemics. It contained a slogan „it will be fine" in both languages and included images of people cutting the wired border fence declaring the "victory" over the virus.

However, the peak of Čantoryje also bears a memory of tragic moments. In the forest under the top of the mountain, a small wooden cross commemorates the victims of an incident from November 1920. A group of Czechoslovak geodesists demarcating the new border was assaulted by Polish militants. One of the members of the helping staff was found dead there. Later, the local Polish Military-Political Committee claimed its responsibility for the attack. As a Czech local newspaper reports, the cross commemorating the victim of the incident was damaged several times by the vandals during the last decades (Region Karvinsko, 2020).

3-4)   Český Těšín / Cieszyn – two border bridges

As mentioned above, the city of Český Těšín and its Polish counterpart Cieszyn are the most famous symbols of the border demarcation between Czechoslovakia and Poland in the 1920s. As the borderline leads through the river, the bridges enable cross-border contact. They were not constructed as the border crossings; the urban plans did not consider the construction of custom houses. Indeed, there was a line for trams leading through one of the bridges. Therefore, the newly established border meant discontinuation in the city and the border-crossing buildings symbolized this rupture. After establishing the Schengen border

regime in 2007, the new system allowed free passage on bridges, and the border-crossing infrastructure lost its function.

That was, however, a chance for the abandoned buildings to discover new roles and meanings. Nowadays, visitors can stroll through both cities on a border, read the information tables and find out more about the history and separation of the city. Today, the former customs houses on the Bridge of Friendship serve as an office of Euroregion Cieszyn Silesia for whose employees the reconciliation of Czechs and Poles and the cooperation without prejudices are important goals. In summer 2021, there was a poster on the front doors of that building inviting people to take guided tours through the city that unveiled partly forgotten ties between both shores of the Olše/Olza river ("Discover Český Těšín/Cieszyn without borders").

Very close to the Bridge of Friendship, on both banks of the river, the "Open Air Museum" presents the history of a formerly unified city. Information panels inform visitors about the mutual ties and common history of the borderland regions. This is in a contrast with the information panel about the division of Cieszyn Silesia which stands in front of the Czech Museum of Cieszyn Silesia that ignores the armed character of the border dispute in 1919.

The character of memory site is even strengthened in the vicinity of the border bridge by the commemorating project that revives the abandoned tramway rail that had connected both parts of the city. As a symbol, only one rail was inserted into the pavement on the street that connects the main square on the Polish side with the railway station on the Czech side of the twin-border town.

Traditional festivities take place simultaneously on both sides of the border. Among them, The Feast of Three Brothers (the supposed founders of the city) connects both cities with a parade that starts either in Poland or in Czechia (Karvinský deník, 2019). Similarly, Czech and Polish Catholic Christians celebrate together St. Melchior Grodziecki – a martyr that was born in Cieszyn. Czech and Polish processions meet and interconnect at the border bridge (Katolický týdeník, 2019). Taking into account also the cinema and theatre festivals in Český Těšín/Cieszyn that are held in both countries and connect both cities, we can see that the border town has a great potential for events that overlap the border and create common cultural content. The mnemonic agents are municipalities, the Euroregion, cultural institutions but also local activists. In this sense, the border shores were used in spring 2020 during the protests against the closure of the border due to the COVID-19 pandemics that once again materialized the border between Český Těšín and Cieszyn. The manifestation took place on both shores of the river, symbolically connecting Czechs and Poles divided by the border. This event did

not support only the interests of cross-border workers but also the effort to end the timespan of mutual alienation and restricted cross-border contact (ČTK, 2020).

Despite these efforts, the topic of borders in this city still sparks emotions. In July 2020, Czech authorities erected a monument of the hundredth anniversary of the Czech-Polish border and the city of Český Těšín. The authors created a replica of the former border column with the Czech national flag, which originally stood on the head of the Bridge of the Friendship. It can be found in front of the Museum of Cieszyn Silesia (100 m. from the border). The event sparked outrage among some Polish activists that voiced their criticism in the local media „Voice of Cieszyn Land". According to them, Czechs wanted to prove their dominance over Czech Silesia which was unfairly usurped by them (Glos Ziemi Cieszynskiej, 2020).

Tab. 2: Summary of memory sites at the border crossings

	Site	Agents	Narratives	Events
Tripoint	A border as a tourist attractivity, information panels mentioning the history of the site	Municipalities, churches, public institutions	Cultural and ethnographical proximity, tripoint as a site for encounters	Religious and ethnographical festivities, school trips
Čantoryje /mountain peak/	A border as a site of demarcation, the mountain with symbolic value for both countries.	Activists	Common traditions, meeting point, partly wound from history	Group climbs, school trips
Český Těšín /two bridges/	The city divided by the border, rediscovering the forgotten ties	Municipalities, churches, public institutions, activists	Re-integration of both cities, past wounds, overcoming of past wounds	City festivities, religious events, manifestations, guided tours.

Source: own investigation

Discussion

The past and memories influence the perception of the landscape (Brierley, 2010; Kirmayer, 1996). The imprints of history are more persistent if they are cultivated and re-narrated (Whelan, 2016). In the end, the various layers of the past overlap each other and create a synthesis which cultural geographers call palimpsest (Gibson, 2016).

Time is not the only factor for remembering and forgetting. It also very much depends on who is active in memory work and whether any contested narratives revive the debate. As this study shows, another aspect contributing to the intensity of memory burden is ethnohistoric. In the areas typical of cohabitation

of two national or ethnic groups, more narratives are present because the entities can differ in their perspectives, and in the case of mutual animosities it is also the perception of victimhood or guilt that can make a difference. Such a situation can be characteristic of borderlands where two or sometimes more nation-states meet. From each side of the border, a specific interpretation of history originates. As the borders were frequent sites of rivalries, conflicts, and tensions, dramatic memories can be produced.

Cieszyn Silesia was introduced in this paper as a zone of contested memories and in effect, as a wounded region where the process of nationalization, dissolution of the previously unified historical area, occupations, and military campaigns contributed to the perception of injustice and betrayal. These memories are present in museums, cemeteries, or taboos. However, as this study shows, the position of border crossing is also a sensitive terrain. Anywhere else is the contact of both countries so intensive. New demarcation of this unprecedented border between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Republic of Poland in 1919 meant a rupture in the landscape and everyday practices. Although the Schengen border regime significantly contributed to the cross-border mobility and contacts, the contested memories are not forgotten and, from time to time, they appear relentlessly.

The reason is that border crossings are also places that speak in symbolic language. Even if the Schengen border regime does not use some classic border symbols (barriers, customs houses, uniforms), some of the remnants of the past are still present and witness the past times of division. Furthermore, these symbols can still work as a trigger for tensions and heated debates (e.g., the monument of border stone in Český Těšín unveiled in 2020). However, there are other possible examples of sites that treat the past and its burdens in a creative and potentially reconciling way. These are the former custom houses in Český Těšín that currently function as an office for the Euroregion or the activities that enable cross-border contact to help dismantle prejudices.

It can be argued that the resurrection of borders inside of the Schengen Area due to the coronavirus pandemics elicited many memories as well. Suddenly, the cross-border networks were interrupted. Such a step revived memories of the period of restricted cross-border contact (before 1989). This „event" organized by central governments (Kajta & Opilowska, 2021) renewed the nationalist narrative because the borders regained their significance as a protection against external threats. They became a site of division that cannot contribute to the reconciled future of borderlands. It is also a matter of responsibility of central governments to deal with state borders with high sensitivity. The act of closing borders is not merely a functional measure but is also deeply symbolic.

This paper shows that the border crossings in a selected region are in most cases neutral sites where hardly any traces of past are present. However, others elicit memories and some of them can be considered as memory sites due to the not negligible intensity of memory work (monuments, events, activities of agents). In total, three border crossings were labeled as memory sites in this paper – a tripoint near Hrčava, a peak of Velká Čantoryje/Czantoryja Wielka and the border bridges and their surroundings in the twin-border town of Český Těšín.

However, the analysis of border crossings is not sufficient to approach the complex issue of memory reproduction in borderlands. Rather, this study raised the topic of mnemonic potential of border crossing facilities and showed the diversity of symbolic communication of such sites. As discussed in the theoretical part, the borderlands are particularly rich on memory traces. From their inner logic, the border crossings are available from both sides of the border and can symbolize the need to bridge the memory narratives instead of isolation.

During the trips in the borderlands, various layers of history were reemerging. Next to each other, the imprints of former unified Cieszyn Silesia, traditional regional architecture, sites reminding Czechoslovak-Polish war in 1919, socialist monuments, or post-1989 border-crossing infrastructure. All this together forms a palimpsest whose layers gain intensity due to the active memory work. It is, therefore, a chance for local activists, the Euroregion, or municipalities to continue in their reconciling efforts by turning the burdens of mutual harms into the advantages of living in a good neighborhood.

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Acknowledgements

Appendix

List of border-crossings and maps

1)   Věřňovice / Gorzyczki (D1/A1 highway)
2)   Věřňovice / Gorzyczki (local road)
3)   Věřňovice / Laziska (for pedestrians)
4)   Závada / Golkowice (local road)
5)   Petrovice u Karviné / Skrbeńsko (local road)
6)   Petrovice u Karviné - Kempy / Jastrzebie Ruptawa (for pedestrians)
7)   Dolní Marklovice / Marklowice Górne (for pedestrians)
8)   Dolní Marklovice / Marklowice Górne (local road)
9)   Karviná Mizerov / Wymysłów (for pedestrians)
10)   Karviná Ráj I / Kaczyce Dolne (local road)
11)   Karviná Ráj II / Kaczyce Górne (local road)
12)   Chotěbuz / Boguszowice (E462 highway)
13)   Český Těšín (Hlavní třída) / Cieszyn (local road)
14)   Český Těšín / Cieszyn (local road)
15)   Kojkovice / Puńców (local road),
16)   Horní Líštná / Leszna Górna (local road)
17)   Nýdek / Cisownica (for pedestrians)
18)   Nýdek / Wielka Czantoria (for pedestrians)
19)   Velká Čantoryje / Wielka Czantoria (for pedestrians)
20)   Beskydek / Beskidek (for pedestrians)
21)   Malý Stožek / Stozek (for pedestrians)
22)   Velký Stožek / Stozek (for pedestrians)
23)   Bukovec / Istebna (for pedestrians)
24)   Bukovec / Jasnowice (local road)
25)   Hrčava / Jaworzynka (local road)
26)   Hrčava Trojmezí / Jaworzynka Trójstyk (for pedestrians).

Memory sites: 13, 14, 19, 26
Partial memory sites: 4, 8, 11, 16, 18, 24
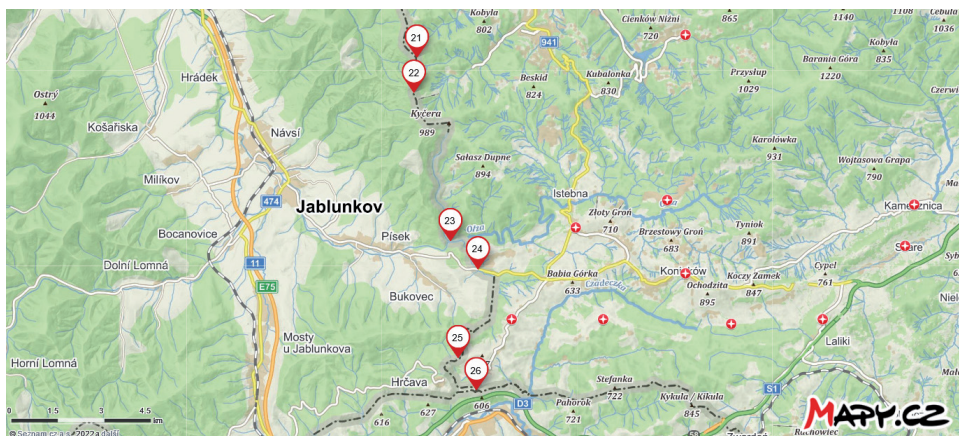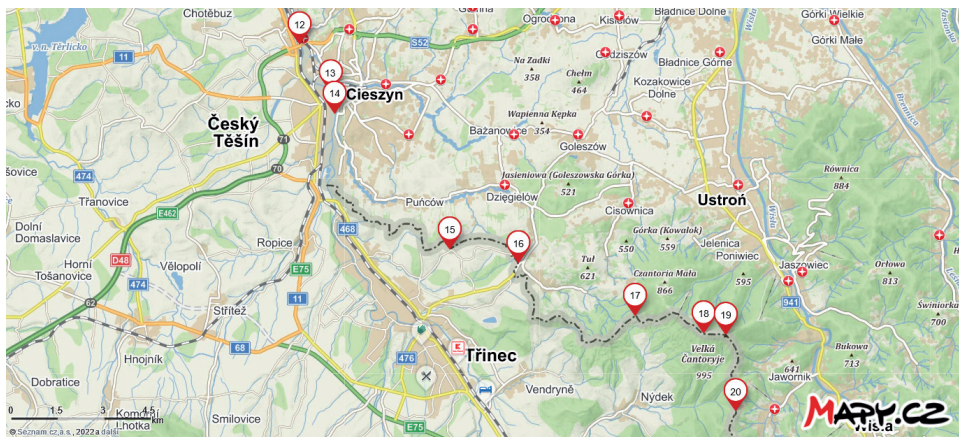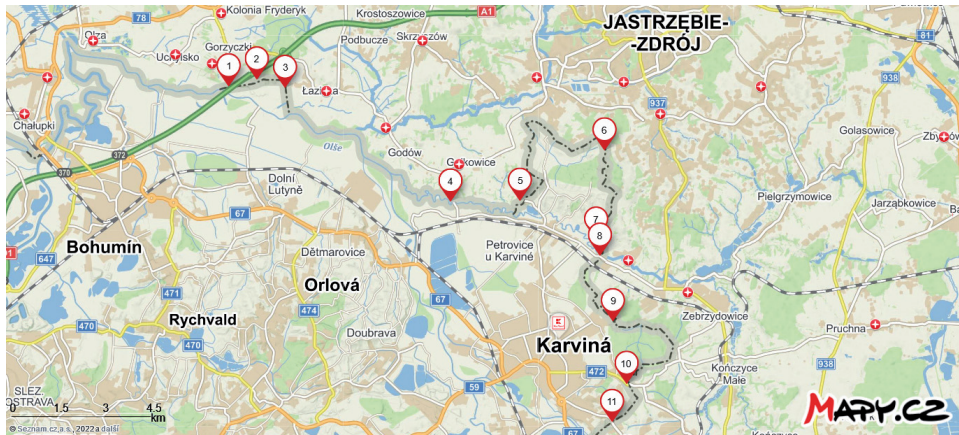
Maps 1-3: Localization of border crossings

Source: mapy.cz