

MEMORY ASSAULTS AGAINST OBLIVION: CONTRASTING THE MEMORY OF BORDER SHIFTS IN CIESZYN SILESIA, ORAWA, SPISZ

ONDŘEJ ELBEL

UNIVERSITY OF OSTRAVA

Received February 7, 2023; Revised July 11, 2023; Accepted December 8, 2023.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the memoryscapes of Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa and Spisz in a context of the border conflicts of the twentieth century. The regions located on the current Czech-Polish and Slovak-Polish border have lived through paralleled histories of the border demarcation after WWI, which was unprecedented there. In both cases the national minorities were left behind the border, outside of their home states. Their stories and memories are, however, not being researched together. This paper contrasts the patterns of memory production related to the border shifts in the landscape in both regions. Emphasis is placed on the memory sites, their narratives and memory activism related to the conflicting past. The results show that the main axes of both memory debates are contrasting. While the conflict over Cieszyn Silesia was most shaped by the short war in 1919, the lesser-known dispute over Orawa and Spisz was marked by numerous smaller incidents, assimilation efforts and a layer of post WWII violence. This has important consequences for the memory production. The other important differentiating factor is the scope of memory activism inside of the national minority group.

Keywords: border studies; borderlands; memoryscapes; national minorities; Czechia; Poland; Slovakia

DOI: 10.14712/23363231.2023.15

This article has been prepared as a part of the grant project “Political geography and the concept of hybridity: hybrid borders, hybrid ethnicity, hybrid threats” (SGS08/PfF/2022), financed by the University of Ostrava.

Ondřej Elbel is a PhD candidate at the Department of Human Geography and Regional Development at the Faculty of Science, University of Ostrava. Address correspondence to Přírodovědecká fakulta, Ostravská univerzita, 30. dubna 22, CZ-701 03 Ostrava. E-mail: ondrej.elbel@osu.cz.

1 Introduction

The village of Chyżne in southern Poland and the town of Český Těšín in the eastern part of Czechia have at least three characteristics in common. Both lie next to the state border (Chyżne borders Slovakia and Český Těšín borders Poland). Both are parts of the formerly compact regions divided in 1920 by the border (Chyżne belongs to the Slovak-Polish region of Orava/Orawa, Český Těšín and its Polish counterpart Cieszyn were the historical capital of the region Cieszyn Silesia).¹ Finally, both have their own monument dedicated to the state border. The one in Chyżne stands next to the Roman Catholic church, and the one in Český Těšín is located in front of the Museum of Cieszyn Region (Muzeum Těšínska).

Even though the monuments represent the state border through their inner meaning, they do not have a function of a border stone. The distance between the monuments and “their” border is 2 kilometers in the case of Chyżne and 300 meters in the case of Český Těšín. The state borders have never been demarcated through the current location of the monuments. Therefore, the border stones are used artificially here as self-reliant symbols. The quarrel caused by the unveiling of the “border monument” in Český Těšín shows that such a step is rarely value-neutral due to the semiotics of border.²

Taking into consideration that both monuments commemorate a border which has been shifted under a tense international atmosphere, then both memory sites (understood as the places that elicit or retell memories of past events as the result of some activism) are part of the narratives the nation-state or other actors (e.g., museums, ethnic minority groups) are promoting.³ Their location

¹ For sake of terminological coherence, the region of Těšínské Slezsko (in Czech)/Śląsk Cieszyński (in Polish) is here referred to with an international version “Cieszyn Silesia.” This linguistic solution was not possible in the case of the regions Orava (in Slovak)/Orawa (in Polish) and Spiš (in Slovak)/Spisz (in Polish), which do not have a single name in English. Therefore, this article chose one variant: the Polish one (Orawa and Spisz) is used throughout whole article. The reason is that the disputed areas are nowadays part of Poland.

² Ondřej Elbel, “Border-Crossings as Memory Sites? The Case Study of the Czech-Polish Border in Cieszyn Silesia,” *Pogranicze. Polish Borderlands Studies* 10, no. 3 (2022): 145–170, doi: 10.25167/brs4689. Christophe Sohn, “How to Brand a Border Despite Its Wall? A Social Semiotics Approach to Cross-Border Place Branding,” *Geoforum*, no. 135 (October 2022): 82–92, doi: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2022.07.016; Raffaele De Luca Picione and Jaan Valsiner, “Psychological Functions of Semiotic Borders in Sense-Making: Liminality of Narrative Processes,” *Europe’s Journal of Psychology* 13, no. 3 (2017): 532–547, doi: 10.5964/ejop.v13i3.1136.

³ Annika Björkdahl, Susanne Buckley-Zistel, Stefanie Kappler, Johanna Mannergren Selimovic, and Timothy Williams, “Memory Politics, Cultural Heritage and Peace: Introducing an Analytical

is not without significance due to the relation of time and space. The landscape can record situations and experiences.⁴ The observer may recall memories or contextual associations there and the landscape may work as an anchor for memories that have their geographical dimension.⁵ Both sites in Český Těšín and Chyžně are, therefore, structuring their symbolic landscapes, in other words, “memoryscapes.”⁶

This paper analyzes the memoryscapes of two borderland regions that experienced several shifts of the border over the course of the twentieth century. The conflicts (either armed or diplomatic) over Cieszyn Silesia (nowadays the Czech-Polish borderland), Orawa and Spisz (the Slovak-Polish borderland) stem from the post-World War I dilemma of how to divide the former Austro-Hungarian Empire into nation-states.⁷ As the boundaries between ethnic groups were often blurred, such a step was difficult to manage.⁸ The cases analyzed in this piece had different socio-economic positions and demographic situations around 1920. However, they were contested by Czechoslovakia and Poland at the same time and the borders were shifted again around the time of the Second World War, which makes them comparable.

Although the state of the art in the historiographical research on the division of Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa and Spisz in the 1920s and around the Second World War is steadily developing, comparative approaches are, in essence, lacking.⁹ If debated, the memory issues of Cieszyn Silesia or Orawa and Spisz are taken individually. In the field of border studies, the Cieszyn Silesia region is very often debated in the context of other border-twin cities, cross-border

Framework to Study Mnemonic Formations” (Research Cluster on Peace, Memory and Cultural Heritage Working Paper No. 1, 2017), doi: 10.2139/ssrn.3206571.

⁴ Jan Skaloš and Ivana Kašparová, “Landscape Memory and Landscape Change in Relation to Mining,” *Ecological Engineering* 43 (June 2012): 60–69, doi: 10.1016/j.ecoleng.2011.07.001.

⁵ Peter H. Hoffenberg, “Landscape, Memory and the Australian War Experience, 1915–18,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no. 1 (2001): 111–131, doi: 10.1177/002200940103600105.

⁶ Stefanie Kappler, “Sarajevo’s Ambivalent Memoryscape: Spatial Stories of Peace and Conflict,” *Memory Studies* 10, no. 2 (2016): 130–143, doi: 10.1177/1750698016650484.

⁷ Orawa and Spisz are, from the ethnographic and historical perspective, two separate regions. However, their “Polish parts” are located close to each other and both are under the strong cultural influence of the “Podhale” region, which is located between them. Also, both Polish Spisz and Upper Orawa share the history of the division by the state border after WWI and historians very often make parallels between both regions and narrate their histories together. Therefore, Spisz and Orawa are considered in this paper as one case.

⁸ Tadeusz Siwek, “Otázka vnitřních hranic v návrhu federalizace Rakousko-Uherska Aurela Popoviciho,” in *Hranice v krajinách*, ed. Eva Semotanová (Praha: Academia, 2020), 134–158.

⁹ The thin brochure of Žáček and Borák is often quoted as an exception: Rudolf Žáček and Mečislav Borák, *Ukradené vesnice. Musí Češi platit za osm slovenských obcí?* (Ostrava: Sfinga, 1993).

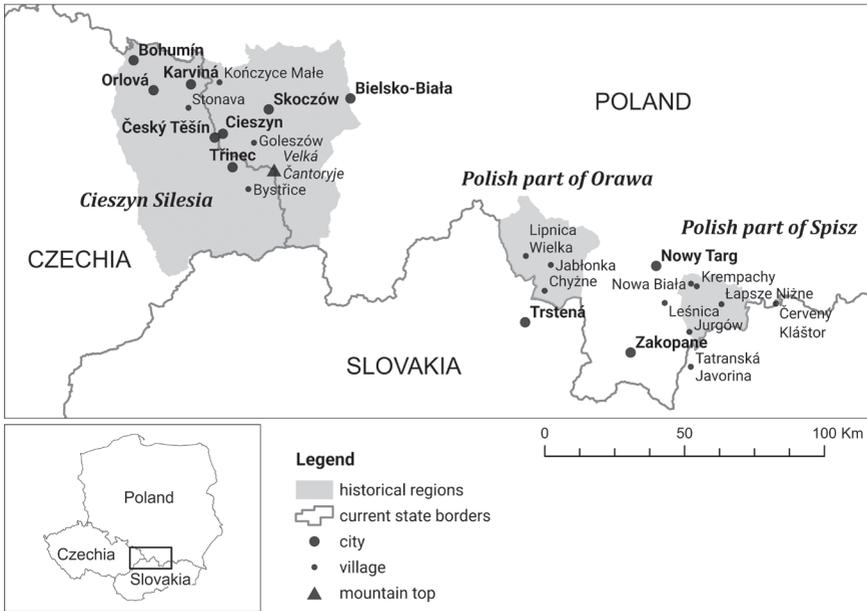


Figure 1: Map of Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz

Source: Ondřej Elbel

cooperation or cross-border work and compared with the regions around Frankfurt an der Oder/Slubice (DE/PL) or Komárno/Komárom (SK/HU).¹⁰ In the case of Orawa and Spisz, the interest of border scholars is lower, probably due to the absence of strong urban centers and low population density resulting in sparse network of cross-border bonds.¹¹

¹⁰ Jarosław Jańczak, “Cross-Border Cooperation across Polish Borders: Thirty Years of Cross-Border Eldorado?” *Észak-Magyarországi Stratégiai Füzetek* 18, no. 2 (2021): 5–14, doi: 10.32976/stratfuz.2021.30; Justyna Kajta and Elżbieta Opilowska, “The Impact of Covid-19 on Structure and Agency in a Borderland. The Case of Two Twin Towns in Central Europe,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 37, no. 4 (2022): 699–721, doi: 10.1080/08865655.2021.1996259; Wojciech Opiola and Hynek Böhm, “Euroregions as Political Actors: Managing Border Policies in the Time of Covid-19 in Polish Borderlands,” *Territory, Politics, Governance* 10, no. 6 (2022): 896–916, doi: 10.1080/21622671.2021.2017339.

¹¹ Marián Halás, “Development of cross-border cooperation and creation of Euroregions in the Slovak Republic,” *Moravian geographical reports* 15, no. 1 (2007): 21–31; Justyna Pokojcka, “Recreating the local community – the process of reconstructing Polish-Slovak cross-border relations after 1989: The case of the villages of Sromowce Niżne and Czerweny Kláštor,” *On-line Journal Modelling the New Europe*, no. 39 (2022): 69–99.

The overall research question of this paper is focused on the interaction of memoryscape with cultural memory production in the borderlands: What are the representations of memoryscape related to the border shifts in the previously contested territories of Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz? To answer this research question, field trips to all three regions were organized with the aim to analyze the memory traces connected to the issue of border contestation and also conduct research interviews with experts (regionalists, historians, anthropologists; the methods are more deeply discussed in Chapter 4). The aim of this paper is to contrast between two cases of memoryscapes shaped by the same phenomenon (border demarcation after WWI) in a similar geographical context. The findings should illustrate which role the memory issues have in the local identity, symbolics, and heritage which is a prominent research topic for borders in Central and Eastern Europe.¹² Apart from filling a research gap, the paper also sheds light to the current echoes of old historical conflicts that are time to time revoked and revived in the regional political context which has however international dimension due to the presence of national minorities.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next chapter the theoretical considerations are debated. Then the context of border conflicts in Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa and Spisz is introduced. The methods, sampling and structure of interviews are described afterwards. These chapters aim to form the terminological and geographical anchor for the Findings and Discussion.

2 Remembering and Forgetting in the Landscape

The process of remembering and forgetting is inseparable from space.¹³ The collective memory is connected to the public space because the events or actions being remembered originally took place there or are believed to be anyhow connected with the particular site. The markers of memory are encoded into the visual and literary cultures of a space.¹⁴ This spatial dimension of

¹² Vladimir Kolosov and Marek Więckowski, "Border changes in Central and Eastern Europe: An introduction," *Geographia Polonica* 91, no. 1 (2018): 5–16, doi: 10.7163/GPol.0106.

¹³ Stephen Legg, "Contesting and Surviving Memory: Space, Nation, and Nostalgia in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23, no. 4 (2005): 481–504, doi: 10.1068/d05.

¹⁴ Anouk Bélanger, "Urban Space and Collective Memory: Analysing the Various Dimensions of the Production of Memory," *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 11, no. 1 (2002): 69–92.

remembering is also supplemented by the variable of time.¹⁵ Together, they comprise the hermeneutics of place where experience or past events are constantly re-narrated.¹⁶

The palimpsest of memories is materialized by the monuments,¹⁷ the commemorative plaques,¹⁸ the street names,¹⁹ the urbanism and the architecture,²⁰ the graffiti,²¹ or the museums.²² The cemeteries are also vocal sites of remembering, as the names and epitaphs on the tombstone may witness lost linguistic or religious diversity.²³ Due to their usually visual character, these sites need material and ideological maintenance. If the responsible actor is not able to cultivate the site and talk about its heritage, the plaques fade, and the meanings are slowly disappearing.

When the memory issues become part of the political agenda, they may work as the identity-makers influencing the perception of the border and mutual relationships between groups.²⁴ As Yi Fu Tuan argues, monuments, temples,

¹⁵ For the context of the temporal dimension of “borderscape,” see Alena Pfoser, “Memory and Everyday Borderwork: Understanding Border Temporalities,” *Geopolitics* 27, no. 2 (2022): 566–583, doi: 10.1080/14650045.2020.1801647.

¹⁶ Forrest Clingerman, “Memory, Imagination, and the Hermeneutics of Place,” in *Interpreting Nature*, ed. Forrest Clingerman et al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 245–263, doi: 10.1515/9780823254286-014.

¹⁷ Wojciech Opiola, “Pamięć zbiorowa i tożsamość historyczna lokalnej społeczności pogranicza,” in *Pograniczność i pogranicza w perspektywie nauk społecznych*, ed. Wojciech Michał Chlebda and Ivana Dobrotová (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2015), 81–91; Ágnes Eröss, “Living Memorial and Frozen Monuments: The Role of Social Practice in Memorial Sites,” *Urban Development Issues* 55 (2017): 19–32, doi: 10.2478/udi-2018-0002.

¹⁸ Bélanger, “Urban Space and Collective Memory.”

¹⁹ Přemysl Mácha, Horst Lassak, and Luděk Krtička, “City Divided: Place Names and Nationalism in the Czech-Polish Borderlands,” *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft* 160 (2018): 303–329, doi: 10.1553/moegg160s303; Přemysl Mácha, “The Symbolic Power of Place Names: The Case of the River Olše/Olza/Łolza in Northeastern Czechia,” *Names. A Journal of Onomastics* 68, no. 3. (2020): 169–184, doi: 10.1080/00277738.2020.1786925; Ulrike Capdepón, “Challenging the Symbolic Representation of the Franco Dictatorship: The Street Name Controversy in Madrid,” *History & Memory* 32, no. 1 (2020): 100–130.

²⁰ Alena Pfoser, “Between Russia and Estonia: Narratives of Place in a New Borderland,” *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 2 (2014): 269–285, doi: 10.1080/00905992.2013.774341.

²¹ Alessandra Miklavcic, “Slogans and Graffiti: Postmemory among Youth in the Italo-Slovenian Borderland,” *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 3 (2008): 440–453, doi: 10.1111/j.1548-1425.2008.00045.x.

²² Grzegorz Studnicki, “Prywatne i społeczne muzea na Śląsku Cieszyńskim w kontekście tożsamości regionalnej,” *Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Muzealnej*, no. 5 (2018): 157–176.

²³ Krystian Puzdrakiewicz, “Cemeteries as (Un)Wanted Heritage of Previous Communities. An Example of Changes in the Management of Cemeteries and Their Social Perception in Gdańsk, Poland,” *Landscape Online*, November 20, 2020, article no. 86, doi: 10.3097/lo.202086.

²⁴ Tatiana Zhurzhenko, *Borderlands into Bordered Lands: Geopolitics of Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (Hannover: Ibidem, 2010).

battlefields or cemeteries are amplifying the sense of belonging, construct identity, and build awareness and loyalty towards a place.²⁵ The aim is to re-construct myths that the groups share about themselves in specific places and times.²⁶ The formation of public memory is a dynamic process, which impacts the identities that are symbolically coded in the monuments.²⁷ The mobilizing potential of these symbols helps construct an imagined community of nation.²⁸ The dynamics of the construction and demolishing of monuments can unveil which topics are promoted or silenced.²⁹

Together, the memorial imprints and practices in the landscape form a “memoryscape.”³⁰ These clusters of spaces are defined by the significance of the narratives about the past.³¹ From them, the public imagination and interpretations of the landscape stem.³² The meanings of the memoryscapes are, however, not stable. They acquire content through social discourses.³³ According to Kappler, the main characteristics that influence the shape of the memoryscape are *the design of memory sites* (what is narrated, depicted, and arranged), *their location and size* (what is visible, which audiences are targeted), *their timing* (temporal context) and *the memorial practices* (the behavior of visitors, public understanding of the message of the memoryscape).³⁴

²⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, “Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective,” in *Philosophy in Geography*, ed. Stephen Gale and Gunnar Olsson (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), 387–427.

²⁶ Karen E. Till, “Staging the Past: Landscape Designs, Cultural Identity and Erinnerungspolitik at Berlin’s Neue Wache,” *Cultural Geographies* 6, no. 3 (1999): 251–283, doi: 10.1177/096746089900600302.

²⁷ Nuala C. Johnson, “Mapping Monuments: The Shaping of Public Space and Cultural Identities,” *Visual Communication* 1, no. 3 (2002): 293–298, doi: 10.1177/147035720200100302.

²⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso books, 2006).

²⁹ Tatiana Zhurzhenko, *Memory Wars and Reconciliation in the Ukrainian-Polish Borderlands: Geopolitics of Memory from a Local Perspective. History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), doi: 10.1057/9781137302052_11.

³⁰ Christine Lawrence et al., *Global Memoryscapes: Contesting Remembrance in a Transnational Age* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011).

³¹ Kappler, “Sarajevo’s Ambivalent Memoryscape,” 131.

³² Toby Butler, “‘Memoryscape’: Integrating Oral History, Memory and Landscape on the River Thames,” in *People and their Pasts*, ed. Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 223–239.

³³ Lawrence et al., *Global Memoryscapes*.

³⁴ Kappler, “Sarajevo’s Ambivalent Memoryscape,” 132.

3 Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz between the 1920s-1950s: Parallel Worlds?

When looking from the capital cities of Prague, Bratislava, and Warsaw, the regions under scrutiny may be considered distant peripheries. Orawa and Spisz on the one side and Cieszyn Silesia on the other side are located on the Polish southern Carpathian border defined after the Second World War. As Musil argues, the southern border of the Polish state was contested since the Middle Ages. However, in the course of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, Polish territory was divided, unified, reduced, and enlarged again in the East-West perspective.³⁵ The border with Czechoslovakia was also not as strategic in the inter-war period when the main concern of the Warsaw government was to defend its Eastern border against Soviet armies and later to find some security guarantees being straddled between Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union. After the Second World War, the Polish state moved westwards and this decision was accompanied by major population shifts from the Eastern territories (*kresy wschodnie*). These areas are, therefore, more present in the Polish collective memory of border shifts.³⁶ However, the demarcation of the Carpathian border also produced tensions with some consequences, at least for local memory politics.

The conflicts over Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz succeeded after the First World War and the dissolution of the Austrian-Hungarian empire. The establishment of new states in Central Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia) was accompanied by border disputes over the industrial region of Cieszyn Silesia and the mountainous and scarcely populated Orawa and Spisz. Although the socio-economic characteristics and strategic value of both regions were different, what they share is the temporal coincidence of both border disputes and the same political context. The knowledge about both border conflicts is reproduced mainly in their region and is not as often reproduced beyond the borders of borderlands.³⁷

³⁵ František Musil, "Pronikání moci raně středověkých Uher na území dnešního Slovenska v 11. století a Anonymova bitva o Nitru – legenda vs. skutečnost ve světle historické geografie," in *Hranice v krajinách*, ed. Eva Semotanová (Praha: Academia, 2020), 46–115.

³⁶ Zhurzhenko, *Memory Wars*, 177.

³⁷ Marcin Dębicki, "Cieszyn jako wyspa mnemoniczna / w paradygmacie kultury pamięci zbiorowej i socjologii pogranicza," in *Lokalne polityki pamięci w mieście podzielonym granicą państwową: Cieszyn – Těšín – Teschen*, ed. Radosław Zenderowski (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie, 2021), 57–74.

3.1 Cieszyn Silesia

The case of Cieszyn Silesia is probably more famous in public awareness due to the short war that accompanied the division of the territory as Cieszyn Silesia was rich in coal resources and contained strategic steelworks and a railway connecting the Czech and Slovak part of the young Czechoslovak Republic.³⁸ The Czechoslovak part, therefore, highlighted its historical rights over the territory as the Duchy of Cieszyn had been previously part of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. The Polish side was referring to the national identity of the population.³⁹

The previously unified territory was divided by the Beskydy mountain ridge and Olza River, which created a completely new border tearing apart existing social networks. The Polish side was especially dissatisfied with such a solution and started to undermine the provisory regime by calling elections and recruiting inhabitants to the military service. In January 1919, Czechoslovakia reacted with an offensive that lasted eight days (this conflict is often called The Eight-day War or mistakenly The Seven-day War) and left behind dozens of casualties and hundreds of injured persons.⁴⁰ The military campaign stopped with the battle around the town of Skoczów when the Polish army successfully built a defensive line. The conflict was interrupted after the diplomatic intervention of Western countries. After that, the promised plebiscite which should have decided about the territory did not take place. According to the Spa Conference in July 1920, the border was anchored at the Beskydy mountain ridge and Olza River.⁴¹ The Olza River also gave the name Zaolzie (literally, “behind the Olza River”) to the territory with a Polish population that was attributed to Czechoslovakia. What remained was a latent sense of injustice from the Polish side for several reasons: Czechoslovakia obtained municipalities where Poles were in the majority (these areas were populated by 48.6% by Poles, 39.5% by Czechs, and 11.6% by Germans), those hoping for the plebiscite were disenchanting, and the negative

³⁸ Rudolf Žáček, “The Czecho(slovak)-Polish Relations until 1945,” in *Conflict – Competition – Cooperation in Central Europe in the 20th and 21st Centuries. The Intricacies of the Polish-Czech Relations*, ed. Dušan Janák, Tomasz Skibiński, and Radosław Zenderowski (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie, 2020), 57–88.

³⁹ Marek Olszewski, “Cieszyn/Czech Cieszyn (Český Těšín),” in *Critical Dictionary on Borders. Cross-Border Cooperation and European Integration*, ed. Birte Wassenberg and Bernard Reitel (Bern: Peter Lang, 2020), 177–179.

⁴⁰ Daniel Korbel, “Walki o Stonawę 26 stycznia 1919 roku,” *Pamiętnik Cieszyński* 23 (2019): 29–56.

⁴¹ Žáček and Borák, *Ukradené vesnice*.

emotions towards Czechs were strengthened by the narrative about alleged Czechoslovak crimes against Polish captives and civilians.⁴²

The inter-war period in Zaolzie was marked by the subliminal and often disguised efforts of the Czechoslovak administration to assimilate the Polish minority.⁴³ Also, the landscape was conversed by the border demarcation that led to the disruption of the town of Cieszyn into two parts divided by the river. That impacted not only the networks and infrastructure of the town but also its symbolic landscape.⁴⁴ Czechoslovakia also tried to furnish its new territory with its standards of urbanism, official architecture, schools, and monuments.

Before the outburst of the Second World War, the Polish side took advantage of the international situation of the Munich Agreement which considerably weakened Czechoslovak positions. The Polish army marched into Zaolzie in October 1938 and the border was pushed eastwards which caused a refugee wave of Czech inhabitants as the Polish administration wanted to cut off the traces of Czech influence at Zaolzie. The situation did not last, however, for more than one year as a result of the German occupation of Poland in 1939. After the Second World War, the borders were returned to the scope of 1920 and the Polish minority at Zaolzie entered the second half of the 1940s with the reputation of traitors.⁴⁵ The complicated relationships between the Czechoslovak and Polish states were silenced by the Soviet surveillance which resulted in the politics of amnesia towards the conflict that was almost impossible to research or commemorate.⁴⁶

⁴² Daniel Korbel, "Śmierć kapitana Cezarego Hallera," *Wadoviana. Przegląd historyczno-kulturalny* 24 (2021): 19–55.

⁴³ Grzegorz Gąsior, *Polityka narodowościowa państwa na czechosłowackim Śląsku Cieszyńskim w latach 1920–1938* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2020); Halina Rusek, "Granica: portret antropologiczny," *Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne* 11 (2011): 77–88.

⁴⁴ Katarzyna Kulczyńska and Roman Matykowski, "Images of the urban spaces of Cieszyn," *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series* 15 (2011): 83–94.

⁴⁵ Jiří Friedl, "Češi a Poláci na Těšínsku během parlamentních voleb v roce 1946," *Slovanský přehled* 98, no. 3–4 (2012): 273–291.

⁴⁶ Jaroslav Drozd, "The Czechoslovak-Polish Relations in 1945–1989," in *Conflict – Competition – Cooperation in Central Europe in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, ed. Dušan Janák, Tomasz Skibiński, and Radosław Zenderowski (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, 2020): 159–174; Tadeusz Siwek, Stanislav Zahradník, and Józef Szymeczek, *Polská národnostní menšina v Československu 1945–1954* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2000); Jan Kajfosz, "Magic in the Social Construction of the Past: The Case of Teschen Silesia," *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 183 (2013): 351–367.

3.2 Orawa and Spisz

Similarly, the historical border between the Hungarian kingdom and the Kingdom of Galicia was questioned after the First World War with a reference to the ethnic composition of the territory. However, in the case of the peripheral rural regions of Orawa and Spisz, the level of national self-identification was not as developed as in the case of the industrial region of Cieszyn Silesia. Therefore, both sides – Czechoslovak and Polish – claimed the populations of Orawa and Spisz as undoubtedly Slovak, respectively Polish. The Polish administration endeavored to enlarge its southern territory and get some territories of Spisz and Orawa which were inhabited by the “highlanders” – “Goral” population. In the Polish narrative, the Goral people were “Slovakized” during the Hungarian rule over Spisz and Orawa.⁴⁷ The result of the First World War was, according to them, a welcomed opportunity to return to Poland.

Jakubec points out that such an effort was a consequence of the long-time mythologization of Goral people as the bearers of Polish national awareness in times of the partition of Poland.⁴⁸ The romanticizing interpretation admired the purity, self-esteem, and bravery of the highlanders which should have been a model for the rest of Poland.⁴⁹ The popularity of the neighboring High Tatra mountains contributed to the prominence and symbolic value of the terrains under the mountains.⁵⁰

Before the Spa Conference in 1920, the regions of Orawa and Spisz experienced several propaganda campaigns from both sides intending to reawake the national awareness of the local population before the promised plebiscite. This period was also accompanied by some violent clashes (without direct military confrontation between Czechoslovakia and Poland). The result of the Spa Conference partly accommodated Polish territorial demands and the previous Hungarian-Galician border was pushed to the south. The conference of ambassadors

⁴⁷ Andrzej Tłomacki, “Powrót do Polski w latach 1945–1948 północnych rejonów Spiszu. Przyczynek do dziejów sporów granicznych między Polakami, Czechami i Słowakami,” *Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka*, no. 1 (2011): 95.

⁴⁸ Pavol Jakubec, “Formovanie československo-poľskej hraničnej čiary (s dôrazom na jej spišský úsek) počas Parížskej mierovej konferencie, 1919–1920,” *Slovanský prehľad* 96, no. 5 (2010): 578.

⁴⁹ Maria Małanicz-Przybylska, “Góralczyzna istnieje?” *Konteksty*, no. 1 (2013): 172–177; Joanna Dziadowiec and Elżbieta Wiącek, “Góralczyzna, góralskość: konstruowanie i funkcjonowanie podhalańskiego mitu,” in *Semiotyczna mapa Małopolski*, ed. Elżbieta Wiącek (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2015), 251–354.

⁵⁰ Pavol Jakubec, “Javorina v (česko)slovensko-poľských vzťahoch medzivojnového obdobia ako symbol,” in *Nepokojná hranica*, ed. Milica Majeriková-Molitoris (Kraków: Spolek Slovákov v Poľsku, 2010), 25–51.

in Spa did so without consulting the population in the plebiscite. The Slovak population became a target of Polonization campaigns in schools, churches, and administration. These efforts proved to be successful for Poland as some local inhabitants chose to emigrate to Czechoslovakia while others cultivated the Slovak language only in the private sphere.⁵¹

In 1939, the army of the Slovak Republic supported the German offensive in Poland and Slovak troops also actively participated in the occupation of Spisz territory. While the Slovak minority welcomed them with relief, the Polish population perceived this as a neuralgic point in mutual relationships, the act of betrayal.⁵² During the Second World War, the regions of Orawa and Spisz were incorporated into the Slovak Republic which tried to convert this territory into the showcase that overscores neighboring Polish regions under Nazi occupation in the quality of life and food supplies.⁵³ An important part of the ideological fight for the identity of the region was the return of Slovak-speaking priests, teachers, and administrative officials. As a result, the memories of the WWII period in the Orawa and Spisz regions are mixed. There is a sense of nostalgia from the side of the Slovak minority while the Polish audience emphasizes the Slovak alliance with Nazi Germany and the annexation of the territory.

Likewise Cieszyn Silesia, the post-war order opened the field to the restoration of the pre-WWII borders leaving an important part of the population with a newly awakened Slovak identity in the Polish territory. In contrast with the period between 1918–1920, the replacement of administration was accompanied by violent conflicts which the Slovak minority tends to perceive as ethnic-motivated violence.

4 Methods

One hundred years after the division of Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz (1920), it is relevant to ask which memories are remaining and which stories are present in the memoryscape referring to the border shifts. Kajfosz discusses the case of Cieszyn Silesia as an example where the Czech and Polish states

⁵¹ Jozef Čongwa, “Krakovská cirkev a jazyková práva slovenskej národnostnej menšiny na Spiši v rokoch 1920–1945,” in *Nepokojná hranica*, ed. Milica Majeriková-Molitoris (Kraków: Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku, 2010), 77–80.

⁵² Pavol Matula, “Slovak-Polish Relationships in 1938–1947 in the Context of Border Disputes,” *Studia Humanistyczne* 12, no. 1 (2013): 57–65.

⁵³ Milica Majeriková-Molitoris, *Vojna po vojne: severný Spiš a horná Orawa v rokoch 1945–1947* (Kraków: Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku, 2013).

successfully converted borderlands into two separate nation-states and the border seems to be something “natural” there.⁵⁴ The following question, therefore, is, whether any actors or spaces problematize this assumption. If so and the cultural memory is materialized in the memoryscape, then, the contrasting analysis reconstructs the similarities and contrasts of the local memory politics and consequences of memory production. To achieve this, two research phases are conducted, which assure triangulation that anchors the findings from different angles.⁵⁵ The main data sources are qualitative expert interviews and observation during the field research.

Firstly, several expert interviews were undertaken. The sampling procedure was non-probabilistic.⁵⁶ The informants were either historians or anthropologists researching the respective regions, regionalists, civil society actors, or representatives of Euroregions. In other words, they were chosen for their insight into the post-conflict relationships and the production of memory in the societies of the borderlands of Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz. In the first stage, the researchers based at universities, museums, or other professional institutions were approached. The procedures of purposive and chain-referral sampling allowed that some of the experts provided contacts to other colleagues with professional experience in that field.⁵⁷ In several cases, the experts served as gatekeepers to some local activists and regionalists. Some informants work in public administration or serve as mayors. In total, 26 research interviews were conducted between March and June 2022. Between 26 informants, there was a balanced proportion of the regions under scrutiny. Some of them debated both cases, as their knowledge and experience covered not only Czech-Polish but also Slovak-Polish borderlands. The meetings organized both online (ZOOM) and on-site took 30-80 minutes each. The semi-structured interviews were thematically based on the following questions:

⁵⁴ Jan Kajfosz, “Euroentuzjastyczni demarkatorzy, czyli o najnowszych strategiach politycznego kształtowania pamięci o Śląsku Cieszyńskim,” in *Lokalne polityki pamięci w mieście podzielonym granicą państwową. Cieszyn – Těšín – Teschen*, ed. Radosław Zenderowski (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie, 2021), 75–87.

⁵⁵ Roberta Heale and Dorothy Forbes, “Understanding Triangulation in Research,” *Evidence Based Nursing* 16, no. 4 (2013): 98, doi: 10.1136/eb-2013-101494.

⁵⁶ Stephen Rice, “Sampling in Geography,” in *Key Methods in Geography*, ed. Nicholas Clifford et al. (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 230–252.

⁵⁷ Charlie Parker, Sam Scott, and Alistair Geddes, *Snowball Sampling*, ed. Paul Atkinson et al. (London: SAGE Publications, 2019), doi: 10.4135/9781526421036831710.

- What place does the conflict over Cieszyn Silesia/Orawa/Spisz have in the collective memory of the region?
- Which meanings and symbols are associated with these events?
- What is remembered and what is forgotten?
- How is it evolving over time?
- Is this memory associated with the particular sites?
- What are the most characteristic materializations of memory in the landscape?

A preliminary analysis of data from interviews consisted of the identification of possible sites that form the memoryscape. Special attention was paid to the locations that represent some symbolic value for memory production and were mentioned during the interviews. To avoid possible bias, this list of places was combined with the sites derived from the literature review and research in the maps of Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz. Such a basis served as a guide for the second pillar of the study: the set of field trips to the regions under scrutiny. The main interest during the field research was to inspect the museum expositions, monuments, or information panels that relate to the border dispute in the respective regions. If there were such sites, then their content was analyzed in concordance with the attributes of memoryscape. According to Kappler, the shape of the memoryscape is influenced by the design of memory sites, location and size, and memorial practices (as mentioned above).⁵⁸

Then, in the third step, the data gathered during the field trips were combined with the evidence from the expert interviews. In a hermeneutical circle through the observation analysis of the memoryscape, the interviews on memory production were approached again to reread them. Together, they are used for the analysis of contrasts of two memoryscapes formed by the various patterns of memory production. The information picked up during the interviews was analyzed using the methods of discourse analysis.⁵⁹ Identifying the categories behind the corpus of answers, the meanings and patterns in memory production are reconstructed.⁶⁰ As the sites of memory are not isolated from the social

⁵⁸ Kappler, "Sarajevo's Ambivalent Memoryscape," 132.

⁵⁹ Vít Beneš, "Diskurzivní analýza," in *Jak zkoumat politiku: kvalitativní metodologie v politologii a mezinárodních vztazích*, ed. Petr Drulák et al. (Praha: Portál, 2008), 92–124.

⁶⁰ Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, "Unfolding Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J. Yates (London: SAGE publications, 2001), 198–209.

structures, people, and landscape, there is a goal of a double interpretation.⁶¹ This is a way how to analyze the social context where the memory actors, their narratives, and the landscape interact.

The overall research question stated above (What are the representations of memoryscape related to the border shifts in the previously contested territories of Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz?) can be divided into two sections:

Q1: Where is the memory about border shifts in the borderlands produced?

Q2: Which symbols and narratives are associated with these sites?

5 Findings

*When you meet someone after twenty years, you notice – that he/she has changed.
If you observe him/her instead every day, you will not notice the contrast as easily.
And with the borders – it works the same.⁶²*

One hundred years after the division of Cieszyn Silesia, Spisz, and Orawa, the regions live in a paradoxical situation. The national borders are naturalized by the century of separateness and in an everyday life as noted the informant in a motto of this part. The old conflicts are not vivid and heated on a daily basis. However, from time to time, the latent rivalry may be awakened capitalizing on old symbols and seemingly forgotten wounds.

5.1 Minorities and Their Positions

As mentioned, both border disputes left some national minorities behind the new state border. However, their numeral strength is contrasting which also has consequences for memory production and politics. In the Czech region of Zaozie, there are approximately 38,000 people that identify themselves with the Polish nationality, which forms 10–30% of total inhabitants in certain municipalities.⁶³ In Polish Orawa and Spisz, the numbers of those who register Slovak

⁶¹ Ken Taylor, “Cultural Landscape as Open Air Museum: Borobudur World Heritage Site and Its Setting,” *Humanities Research* 10, no. 2 (2003): 51–62.

⁶² Interview with a Polish regionalist, ZOOM, May 12, 2022.

⁶³ “Polská národnostní menšina,” Vláda České republiky, <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/rnm/mensiny/polska-narodnostni-mensina-16124/>, accessed January 5, 2023.

nationality are much lower (around 3,000, which forms less than 5% of the total population in the municipalities).⁶⁴

The contrast in numbers was also due to the more restrictive policy towards minorities in inter-war and post-war Poland. That meant a ban on the Slovak language in schools and churches and, according to the Slovak interpretation, the result was a Polonization of the region. Although nowadays in Orawa and Spisz the Slovak language is taught in some schools as an optional subject, the decreasing trend of Slovak presence in Polish Orawa and Spisz is continuing, as illustrates one Polish regionalist from Spisz:

It is evident when we look at how many children choose the Slovak language in schools. Today we should decide whether to merge all the Slovak-speaking from all classes into one course. Two pupils in one school, two pupils in another. (...) The same in the churches, there is a long-ago settled proportion: on the weekday, we sing the first half of the Holy Mass in Slovak and the second half in the Polish language. The next day vice versa. Why is it fifty-fifty? The proportion in the population is not the same.⁶⁵

The presence of a minority can also be considered part of the memoryscape because it problematizes the narrative of the nation-state that acquired the borderland territory. The Slovak minority in Spisz and Orawa tries to cultivate its memory of border shifts as it is their *raison d'être* and the group protagonists feel threatened by Polish narratives, groups, and outnumbering. It is the minority who bears the signs of Slovakness in the public space of Orawa and Spisz and the Polishness of Zaolzie.

In the Polish Orawa and Spisz borderlands, the imprints of Slovakness can be found in the churches. The Slovak language in the liturgy is a sign that there are at least some believers who cultivate the Slovak language in worship. The second “Slovak” parts of the memoryscape are the cemeteries: in villages like Kacwin, Niedzica, or Rzepiska, there are some gravestones that also contain epitaphs in the Slovak language. It is not exceptional that both languages meet on the tomb. Some family members were closer to the Slovak identity, some felt Polish.

⁶⁴ “Mniejszości Narodowe i Etniczne: Słowacy,” Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, <https://www.gov.pl/web/mniejszosci-narodowe-i-etniczne/slowacy>, accessed January 5, 2023.

⁶⁵ Interview with a Polish regionalist, Łapsze Niżne, June 21, 2022.

Apart from the optional lessons in the Slovak language in schools, there are no other signs of Slovakness in the public space. The Slovak language is not used in the daily conversations as the people of Spisz and Orawa – no matter of national identity – communicate in the dialects *gwara spiska/orawska*.

There are at least three conceptions among the Polish population of Spisz/Orawa regarding the identity of the region. The first trend emanates from the cultural influence of the near region of Podhale, which is prominent in Polish ethnography and national identity also due to the myth of highlanders (Gorale). This was an important theme for more informants; one of them, a Polish anthropologist, has defined it as follows: “There is a powerful national narration making the sign of an equation between highlander identity and Polish identity.”⁶⁶ This trend pushes away the regional uniqueness of Spisz and Orawa and replaces them with the unambiguously Polish highlander folklore and identity from Podhale.

Secondly, there is an effort to build the regional, e.g., “Spisz” identity over the national ones. It is typical of folklore ensembles that are promoting the multicultural character of the borderland as something positive, overarching the national camps. “The melodies are the same in the whole Polish Carpathians. The csardas dances are, however, unique for us in Spisz – these are the Hungarian influences. Our dances are different than those of Gorals-highlanders. Our traditional costumes and those of Slovak Spisz are the same,” explained one Polish regionalist from Spisz.⁶⁷

Thirdly, there are the migration dynamics contributing to the demographic changes. Young people from Slovak families sometimes choose schools in Slovakia and do not return. Instead, there is a migration into Spisz/Orawa from more distant Polish regions due to the nature and closeness to the High Tatra mountains. New incomers often neither speak the dialect nor emphasize the regional “Spisz” identity.

In comparison to the hardly noticeable Slovak traces in Spisz, the presence of the Polish minority in Cieszyn Silesia is more apparent. The guests from outside are welcomed in the cities and villages with a Polish minority with bilingual signs in streets and the railway station. The Polish language is also present in the liturgy and schools (often as the language of instruction). Regarding communication, the local dialect of Zaolzie (*po naszymu*) stems from the Polish language which secures the Polish presence in the landscape and can automatically raise

⁶⁶ Interview with a Polish anthropologist, Cieszyn, April 4, 2022.

⁶⁷ Interview with a Polish regionalist, Jurgów, June 18, 2022.

questions about the history and memory of the Polish minority in the region. The representatives of the Polish minority, however, do not behave as memory activists and concentrate more on the quality of life and the rights of Polish citizens.

Nevertheless, what connects both minorities is silent isolation from their nation-states. The awareness about their existence is not well developed. Slovak historian defined the situation in Spisz and Orawa followingly: “Polish officials claim that the policy towards minorities is their inner issue. Slovak politicians seem to be uninterested.”⁶⁸ The feeling of forgotten minority corroborates one Polish regionalist from Spisz: “In the 1970s and 1980s, when someone from the Slovak community came to Slovakia to work there, he/she was often disappointed. Everyone thought they were a Pole.”⁶⁹ The similar notion fits for the Polish community in Zaolzie, as one Polish sociologist states:

It is a forgotten minority and the Polish community in Zaolzie knows it. We remember the Polish fade in Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. From the perspective of Warsaw, the border in Cieszyn is also a border of Polishness. The people behind the border there are often considered Czechs that may have a Polish origin.⁷⁰

Memory issues and other topics, therefore, do not have an impact on mutual relationships at the level of countries and governments. Outside of the region, the interest is raised only in times of anniversaries of the border division.

5.2 Symbolics of Borderscape

An important variable in the memoryscape of the borderland is also the border itself, its role in the landscape, and the symbolics of its surroundings. This is also a source of contrasts between cases of Orawa/Spisz and Cieszyn Silesia. In Orawa/Spisz, the border runs primarily in unpopulated areas, through watersheds or rivers. In the border section of Orawa, there is only one prominent place on the border – Babia Góra mountain peak, which was, however, also the border in the pre-WWI period. That presents a possible barrier that was even reinforced by the strict border regime of the pre-1989 period. “For many years,

⁶⁸ Interview with a Slovak historian, ZOOM, April 5, 2022.

⁶⁹ Interview with a Polish regionalist, Jurgów, June 21, 2022.

⁷⁰ Interview with a Polish sociologist, Cieszyn, April 6, 2022.

the Polish and Slovak Spisz stood back-to-back with each other,” assesses Polish regionalist from Spisz.⁷¹

The Spisz section of the border is defined by its two edges that have their symbolic value. On the western edge, there is a Slovak municipality Tatranská Javorina that was demanded by Poland during the inter-war period. With the holiday residence of Slovak presidents and tourist trails, it is a lucrative address. However, it is located on the periphery of the Slovak High Tatras “behind the mountains.” That decreases the symbolic value of the site which does not bring any decisive opportunities for cross-border interactions. Then, for the next 20 kilometers, the border runs through mountains far from the populated settlements. The only exception is a small border crossing between the villages Veľká Franková (SK) and Kacwin (PL), which was re-opened at the initiative of the Slovak minority.

The most symbolic site on the “Spisz” section of the Polish-Slovak border is a canyon of the Dunajec River, which is famous among tourists and paddlers. The memoryscape there is shaped to some extent by the monument dedicated to the two Czechoslovak officials murdered by a commando of Spisz Poles in June 1920, in the context of the tense atmosphere around the planned plebiscite. The monument, erected in 1928, was destroyed ten years later during the Polish occupation of the canyon and the village of Lesnica. In 2020, the monument on the border arose once again at the initiative of two cooperating institutions – the Association of Slovaks in Poland (Towarzystwo Słowaków w Polsce, Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku) and the Historiographical Association of Spisz (Spišský dejepisný spolok). However, the text on the stone does not mention Polish perpetrators, and the conflicting potential of the site is minimal.

In contrast, the Czech-Polish border through Cieszyn Silesia is richer in meaning and symbols. It is partly due to the different characteristics of the landscape and settlement. The border is demarcated partly by using the Olza River, which flows through the town Cieszyn/Český Těšín and other populated areas. The opposite side of the border has been visible even in times of restricted border regimes. The loss of Zaolzie has been, therefore, more tangible for the Polish population and the border and Olza River are still an important identity-maker of border twin-town Cieszyn/Český Těšín. The informants mentioned that a sole look into the cityscape of Cieszyn/Český Těšín with three bridges provokes questions about the reasons for division. “The consequences are visible

⁷¹ Interview with a Polish regionalist, ZOOM, May 12, 2022.

until now. The Polish part of the site has the main square, and the Czechs have a railway station,” retells a Polish historian.⁷²

The mnemonic potential is also actively employed by various municipal projects. Czech and Polish town halls, for example, reconstruct the streets, where the city tram operated before 1920. To remember the former common public transport, the pieces of rails are symbolically put into the pavement on the streets. The common history of the town is also remembered on the various information panels and through the events of town cultural centers. Around the Bridge of Friendship, on both banks of the Olza River, an Open-Air Museum narrates the stories of the town, as a representative of Euroregion explains:

This exhibition was part of the project “Garden of both banks” which was inspired by the Euroregion Kehl-Strasbourg. The project was carried out by the Cieszyn and Český Těšín town halls. Each event that we create together may contribute to the goal, that history does not affect how we perceive our neighbors.⁷³

Apart from Cieszyn/Český Těšín, there are other important sites conversing borderscape into the memoryscape. The southern part of the state border through Cieszyn Silesia is delineated on the ridge of the Beskydy mountains with popular hiking trails that lead almost exactly along the borderline. Dozens of meters from the Czantoria Wielka/Velká Čantoryje peak, which the local legends touch upon, there is a monument commemorating the victim of a criminal act which was similar to the one in Canyon of Dunajec. In 1920, during the delimitation of the border, the commission of representatives of both states – Czechoslovakia and Poland – was attacked there under the peak of Czantoria by a Polish paramilitary organization that did not want to accept the new border. Czech historian comments it: “The dead official Klement Šťastný was buried in Bohumín. In 2017, a monument was erected under Czantoria. However, someone has destroyed it several times, although nothing sensitive is written there.”⁷⁴ The grave of Klement Šťastný in Bohumín is today furnished by the plate: “murdered by the militant nationalists.”

⁷² Interview with a Polish historian, ZOOM, March 30, 2022.

⁷³ Interview with a representative of Euroregion, Cieszyn, April 6, 2022.

⁷⁴ Interview with a Czech historian, Bohumín, April 13, 2022.

5.3 (Non-)controversial Monuments

The materialization of some narrative into the monument may become a weapon or a target of various counter-initiatives. One informant, a Czech historian researching the past of Cieszyn Silesia labeled it during the interview as a “monument assault.”⁷⁵ He referred to the initiatives imposed by radicals from both national groups. An example may be a monument dedicated to the Czech general Josef Šnejdárek who led the Czechoslovak troops into the Polish-Czechoslovak war (of 1919). Czech historian states:

The monument is situated on the Polední Hill. For Poles, it is a controversial site. When they are writing about the war crimes of the Polish-Czechoslovak war (of 1919), they personalize them with General Šnejdárek. It is a few kilometers from the border next to the village Bystřice/Bystrzyca where there is a large share of the Polish population. That was perceived as a monument assault. Several times, the monument was destroyed, or the information plate was removed. Instead, gallows or crooked crosses were scribbled on them. Some Czech activists organize trips to Polední. Luckily, the speeches today are not as controversial as in the past. The most radical activists have passed away.⁷⁶

With time, the event on Polední transforms into the gathering of the army fans who typically come from more distant regions, not from Zaolzie.

The feelings of the Polish minority towards the site were described in one of the interviews by the Polish historian: “General Šnejdárek has never been to Polední Hill and did not have any relation to the village Bystřice/Bystrzyca. Therefore, the Poles have considered the monument as a gesture of evil nationalistic intentions of the fans of legionaries who had built the monument.”⁷⁷

Other controversies in Zaolzie are associated with the monument of border stone erected in 2020, to remark a centenary of the town of Český Těšín. The monument in the colors of the Czech national flag (design of Czechoslovak border stones in the 1930s) is located in front of the Museum of Cieszyn Region (Muzeum Těšínska). Temporal coincidence with covid fencing measures restricting cross-border mobility even extrapolated the negative reactions of Poles. Some of them saw in the monument a totem of Czech dominance in

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Interview with a Polish historian, Ostrava, March 24, 2022.

the town, as one Polish historian points out: “This was a *faux pas*. I do not want to judge if it was an intentional gesture. In any case, it was miserable. We live in Schengen, cooperate and suddenly the Czech neighbors are building the border stone and the symbol of division is back.”⁷⁸

The fact that the monument stands in front of the Museum of Cieszyn Region was not ignored by some informants. Czech historian comments it: “The museum on the Czech bank of the Olza River is strengthening the traditional nationalist narrative. I think that the director of the museum knew very well what he was doing. There was a wave of Polish resentment because the stone refers to the tragic episode when the beautiful town was torn apart. And there is no reason to celebrate it.”⁷⁹

Next to the stone, there is an information panel in the window of the museum with commentary about the division of the town. However, the museum does not mention the short war between both countries in this small open-air exhibition. Inside, there is a large exposition about the history of the Cieszyn Region in the twentieth century. However, there are almost no references to the Polish minority in Czechia after 1920. Polish historian was disappointed about it:

It is a big mistake that the Polish history of Zaolzie is silenced at the exhibition. It looks like a car that has only two wheels. Yes, it looks like a Škoda car, but without two wheels, it is immobile. The Polish minority is not irredentist, they are paying taxes, and are involved in politics. I do not understand why the perception there is in a hundred-year-old style.⁸⁰

Only 400 meters from the Museum in the Polish part of the town, another important memory venue is located. Next to the Bridge of Friendship, the Monument of Silesian Legionaries commemorates the inhabitants of Silesia who fought and died for Poland (typically against Germans; the obelisk was erected in 1934, then again in 2008). On the pedestal, there are several plates with the names of important battles in which the Silesians took part. On the back side of the obelisk, one also mentions the Battle of Skoczów from the Polish-Czechoslovak war (of 1919). The nickname of the monument is “Niké of Cieszyn” as on the top of the obelisk, there is a sculpture of a woman holding a saber. The weapon is heading in the direction of Czechia which can be read as a symbol, explains

⁷⁸ Interview with a Polish historian, ZOOM, March 30, 2022.

⁷⁹ Interview with a Czech historian, Bohumín, April 13, 2022.

⁸⁰ Interview with a Polish historian, Ostrava, March 24, 2022.

a Czech historian: “The message of Niké of Cieszyn is quite clear: once we will come on the bridge again to fight to get the Zaolzie back. It is also a site of commemoration with wreath laying. The Battle of Skoczów is on the opposite side. The reason is probably to hide the controversy.”⁸¹

“The reconstruction of the monument elicited the fantasies of Czech nationalists,” recalls one Polish historian about the development in the years 2004–2005.⁸² Back then, to appease the tensions, the Polish side tried to present the site as a non-revanchist or non-assault monument, narrates a Polish geographer: “Poles ordered an expert reference from the fencer who explained that the gesture of the sculpture is not attacking but defending.”⁸³

Apart from the symbolic borderscape of Cieszyn, the second important part of the Polish memoryscape related to the conflict is the town of Skoczów, where the Czechoslovak offensive in 1919 stopped. The conflict is commemorated there with a mural on a façade of a house next to the main square and a set of information panels. From the symbolic point of view, the most interesting site is a monument dedicated to “Our Heroes,” which is located in the wider center of the town.

The monument with a sculpture of a Silesian Eagle on the top contains a relief where a young fighter beats a lion (a symbol of Czech lands), the year 1919 is marked below. A short patriotic poem is added with the verses about “our blood,” that made the freedom of Silesia possible. The reconstruction of the monument was unveiled in 2015 on Poland’s Independence Day.

The specific cases in the Czech-Polish borderlands’ memoryscape in Cieszyn Silesia are cemeteries. The Polish victims of the Polish-Czechoslovak war (of 1919) are buried in several cemeteries. Some of them are part of a network of National Memory Sites – for example, a tombstone of soldiers in Skoczów has this label. The same sticker can also be found on the cross of Mayor Cezary Haller, one of the commanders of Polish troops, who died in the village Kończyce Małe during a Czechoslovak offensive. The most symbolic site is, however, a cemetery in the Czech village Stonawa/Stonava, which was traditionally remembered as a site of Czechoslovak war crimes (approx. 6 out of 21 soldiers buried there were murdered), Czech historian tells:

⁸¹ Interview with a Czech historian, Bohumín, April 13, 2022.

⁸² Interview with a Polish historian, Ostrava, March 24, 2022.

⁸³ Interview with a Polish geographer, Ostrava, March 24, 2022.

There is a headline: “20 murdered and killed.” It is the biggest and almost dogmatic legend, sometimes labeled as Silesian Golgotha. The Polish ministers or important army officials are attending the commemorative events. The Czech side does not want to take part as it does not like the one-sided narrative.⁸⁴

The Czech casualties of the conflict were exhumed in the interwar period and transferred to the cemetery in Orlová. The monument to the victims of the Polish-Czechoslovak war (of 1919) was first built in 1928 then damaged during the Polish invasion of Zaolzie in 1938 and renewed again. Renovated in 2022, the monument contains a motto: “The Division of Cieszyn Region” and the names of more than 50 victims from the ranks of legionaries. However, there are a few other Czech casualties buried in different cemeteries, for example, two Czechoslovak legionaries in the Polish municipality of Golezów. Polish historian states: “Both graves are maintained by the Polish local community in the village. This should be a model example of how to deal with the conflict after one hundred years.”⁸⁵

In Orawa and Spisz, when looking for the monuments or other sites that elicit the memory of border shifts, the Slovak part of the regions does not propose almost any cases to compare. More numerous are the examples from the Polish side of the region, where a memory battle between the narrative of the Polish majority and the Slovak minority occurs.

The most prominent site of this battle is paradoxically located outside of the Spisz and Orawa region – in the center of Zakopane town. In 2006, in one of the city parks, the Polish president Lech Kaczyński inaugurated the monument of Józef Kuraś – Ogień (1915–1947). The historical record of this man is controversial and as one informant (Polish historian) summarized it, “it is the main axis of the memory conflict.”⁸⁶

While the Polish right adores him as a fighter against communism, the Slovak minority and other groups consider him a looter and murderer. Given the controversies, the monument made headlines when someone poured red color on the monument in Zakopane. Even fifteen years after the inauguration, the monument with the Eagle (Polish symbol and also one of the Kuraś’s nicknames) on the top still sparks emotions as can be seen from quotations from interviews. The first is from Slovak historian: “The Polish historians present him

⁸⁴ Interview with a Czech historian, Bohumín, April 13, 2022.

⁸⁵ Interview with a Polish historian, ZOOM, March 30, 2022.

⁸⁶ Interview with a Polish historian, ZOOM, April 29, 2022.

as a partisan. That is not true! He was partisan only before 1943, then he became a bandit and criminal.”⁸⁷ A Polish anthropologist explains it:

The affaire of Ogień is impossible to discuss without emotions, that stops rational debate. Those who initiated the monument in Zakopane have their truth and do not accept the other perspectives. It is however interesting that the monument emerged in Zakopane where the locals know about Ogień only from legends. They created their picture of him. In Nowy Targ, closer to Spisz, there is no monument of Kuraś. They know that the memory is not as unambiguous.⁸⁸

The commemoration of Kuraś is guided by the figures from the Polish right political camps and also the Institute of National Memory (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*, IPN). The Slovak minority, on the other hand, inaugurated a monument to the victims of Kuraś – in the village of Nowa Biała, which is traditionally associated with the Slovak minority.

An important role in commemoration efforts is also played by Polish municipalities. One of the villages in the Polish Spisz Łąpsze Niżne built 2018 a monument to celebrate the anniversary of 100 years of Polish independence. In 2020, the municipality added to the stone the sculpture of the book to commemorate “the anniversary of the return of Spisz to Poland” – as the mayor describes:

It was an initiative of our municipal council. We successfully obtained a subsidy from the program Niepodległa (Independent). Thanks to this money, we could organize the festivity to celebrate the anniversary of our return to Poland. There was a cycle of programs for two years. We held a competition of patriotic songs, dedicated one internet site to the anniversary and we bought one hundred Polish flags which we installed on the streets.⁸⁹

For the representatives of the Slovak minority, it is controversial to evaluate the border shift in 1920 as a return to Poland; rather they speak about the incorporation of Spisz and Orawa into Poland. This language and also the fact that someone celebrates the anniversary of the division are met with the disapproval of the Slovak minority. It is parallel to the borderstone issue in Cieszyn.

⁸⁷ Interview with a Slovak historian, ZOOM, April 5, 2022.

⁸⁸ Interview with a Polish anthropologist, ZOOM, May 9, 2022.

⁸⁹ Interview with a Polish mayor and regionalist, Łąpsze Niżne, June 21, 2022.

Between 2018 and 2020, related to the anniversary of the “return” of Spisz and Orawa to Poland also in connection to the program Niepodległa (Independent), other memory sites arose, dedicated to the figures that campaign for the Polishness of Spisz. Apart from Łapsze Niżne, it was also the municipality Lipnica Wielka in Orawa, that initiated a patriotic project – www.orawa2024.pl. In the vicinity of the village, the authors are identifying the sites connected with Polishness and Polish patriots. Among others, the emphasis is put on the border stone in Chyżne (mentioned in the introduction), graves, and memory panels. The municipality also organized a “patriotic show” in the summer of 2021 with local music, dances, poetry, and the exhibition “Does Orawa remember?” As a parallel to the campaign in Łapsze Niżne, the Association of Slovaks in Poland protested against the content of the exhibition, accusing the municipality of Lipnica Wielka of manipulation with historical evidence.

6 Discussion: Memory Production in the Contested Landscape

Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz are examples of borderland regions rich in memory traces. At the same moment, all three regions became victims of power politics, which disrupted the patterns of everyday life. The dispute over the border in Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz forced their inhabitants to emphasize their national or ethnic self-identification and othering from the opposite group. As a consequence, the violent clashes, conflicts, and mutual harms have complicated the reconciliatory resolution of the conflict and good neighborhood policy for the rest of the twentieth century.

The complexity of memory production is given not only by the conflicting past but also by the presence of ethnic minorities that are to some extent forgotten by the population of their “motherland.”⁹⁰ The monuments and other parts of the memoryscape in their essence support the narratives of nation-states. Either Czechia in Cieszyn Silesia or Poland in Orawa and Spisz tried converting the landscape into “their” territory with characteristic symbols (flags, architecture, language).

The presence of the counterculture in memory issues is visible thanks to the national minorities in the contested border region. The nation-states may proudly present the multiculturalism and uniqueness of their border regions

⁹⁰ Christian Promitzer, “Small is Beautiful. The Issue of Hidden Minorities in Central Europe and the Balkans,” in *Hidden Minorities: Language and Ethnic Identity between Central Europe and the Balkans*, ed. Christian Promitzer, Klaus-Jürgen Hermanik, and Eduard Staudinger (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), 75–108.

(as Poland does with Spisz), but without the minority actors, the polyphony becomes sooner or later monophony. Especially in the case of Orawa and Spisz where the numbers of Slovak minorities are narrow, their visibility is anchored by the cemeteries, church timetables, and community houses.

This article also supports the note that borders themselves can play a role as a memory-site as they may bring about associations about past events with historical significance coined by the presence of museums or memory plaques.⁹¹ This observation is valid for Cieszyn Silesia where the border itself is a prominent bearer of meanings. The demarcation of the border in Cieszyn Silesia meant an intervention into the landscape that forcibly divided one town and several villages. This characteristic is not as important for the division of Spisz and Orawa.

How does the shape of the memoryscape contribute to the patterns of memory production in the borderlands? It should be acknowledged that the conflicts over the border are not topics for everyday discussions and their relevance for the general population cannot be exaggerated. Young people, especially those coming from the national majority, usually do not seem that interested in the historical episodes from the childhood of their great-grandparents. However, the conflicts over monuments in Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz indicate that the scars of the history are not yet healed. The monument dedicated to Józef Kuraś in Zakopane still has an unpleasant taste for the Slovak minority. Some proponents of the Polish minority in Zaolzie guard the commemoration of Polish-Czechoslovak war (of 1919) victims in Stonawa and the memoryscapes of Cieszyn and Skoczów are still developed by new installations, exhibitions, and events. As this paper shows, the memoryscape still provokes questions about identity and connects the past with the present. What are the possible scenarios for further memory production?

The first option is an oblivion of the past. The Schengen Agreement and the following de-bordering processes in the European Union lowered the importance of borders as the security procedures for border crossings were canceled. With a so-called “green border,” the border became permeable and the relevance of the exact territorial delimitation (which had been a *casus-belli* in 1919) decreased. Using the terminology of Baud and van Schendel, the borderland regions in the Schengen Area become *declining*, because new cross-border

⁹¹ Elżbieta Opilowska, “Borders and Memory,” in *Critical Dictionary on Borders. Cross-Border Cooperation and European Integration*, ed. Birthe Wassenberg and Bernard Reitel (Bern: Peter Lang, 2020), 115–117.

networks emerged and transcended the nation-state logic of the borderlands.⁹² Nevertheless, there are at least three obstacles to oblivion. Firstly, the division of the territory in 1919 had not been only an administrative task and in the case of Cieszyn Silesia, there were numerous victims of the Polish-Czechoslovak war (of 1919). Their tombs and related ceremonies witness that the conflict brought not only territorial losses but also losses of human lives. This makes the history of the border shift more sensitive. The other and already mentioned factor is the presence of national minorities. Thirdly, the covid-fencing measures adopted on the national borders during the pandemic revived the old world of border controls.⁹³ In 2020 and 2021, the cross-border regions of Cieszyn Silesia, Orawa, and Spisz were once again divided by the police and army patrols and mobility was strictly restricted. Especially the case of Cieszyn is illustrative as it had been considered a show-example of successful cross-border contacts before the pandemic. The pandemic nationalism however reopened prejudices when some Czech politicians presented Poles as the bearers of the virus.⁹⁴ In this atmosphere, a monument of a border stone was erected in front of the Czech Museum of Cieszyn Region, which sparked the controversies discussed above.

A second possible way for memory management in the future is an intensification of the memory battle. This scenario is hardly probable as the concerned states (Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia) cooperate within the framework of European Union and NATO and declare themselves as close allies. That decreases the chance of negative escalation in mutual relationships which could have also been accompanied by the emphasis on the territorial gains and losses and the harms from the past. Also, patriotic narratives of the Polish government led by the Law and Justice party do not directly influence neighborhood policies. Moreover, neither the Polish minority in Cieszyn Silesia nor the Slovak minority in Spisz and Orawa question the border demarcation today.

The third thinkable way for memory production in the borderlands lies in between the previous two. In this concept, the memory sites stay in the

⁹² Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands," *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (1997): 211–242.

⁹³ Eduardo Medeiros, Martín Guillermo Ramírez, Gyula Ocskay, and Jean Peyrony, "Covidfencing Effects on Cross-Border Deterritorialism: The Case of Europe," *European Planning Studies* (2020): 1–21, doi: 10.1080/09654313.2020.1818185; Ondřej Elbel and Vincenc Kopeček, "‘I Thought That Everyone Perceived the Situation Similarly to Me.’ The Czech-Polish ‘Cieszyn Silesia’ Region as a Case of a Polysemic Border?" *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft* 165 (2022): 145–168. doi: 10.1553/moegg164s145.

⁹⁴ Florian Bieber, "Global Nationalism in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Nationalities Papers* 50, no. 1 (2020): 1–13, doi: 10.1017/nps.2020.35.

landscape as self-standing symbols. Their meanings are, however, reserved for those who are aware of the past – being under the influence either of schooling, communicative memory in their community, or campaigns instigated by various memory actors (municipalities, museums, public and private institutions). Their strategies and steps will be decisive for the future development of the memoryscape. They have an opportunity to moderate the discussion and to promote potentially reconciling narratives. The frontrunner in this sense is a body of the Euroregion of Cieszyn Silesia and the common projects of Cieszyn and Český Těšín. This can serve as a possible inspiration for the Slovak-Polish cases where the cross-border ties are not so intense. One can think of a parallel between obstacles in cross-border cooperation including missing public transport and complicated way towards cross-border interpretation of common history.

If the other actors can heat the discussion with traditional (friend vs. foe) interpretations, they should have also the power to convert the memory sites into spaces of mutual friendship and understanding. In other words, there is still a potential for saying sorry on both sides, either in Orawa and Spisz or in Cieszyn Silesia.