Central Europe is a phenomenon of diversity, which today means a polyphony of memory dominated by myths. One can repeat after Jan Assmann that cultural memory is the organization and ritualization of collective memory. Cultural memory builds our identity, which has two dimensions. The first is immutability, being always the same, the second is the answer to the question, what distinguishes us from others?¹ The concept of identity is therefore an ambiguous concept. Central Europe is above all a complicated relationship between time and space. These are both real and imaginary spaces. The memory of this extraordinary place of Europe has grown and is full of myths. Identification with it takes place today, above all, through nostalgia and idealization of its past.

In Central Europe cultural identity has never been something endowed once and for all; it has always required constant, deliberate election. There can be no doubt that the best evidence of Central Europe's achievements as a civilization, and the essence of its identity, are its cities, among them Prague, Budapest, Cracow, Lviv, and Wrocław. Indeed, an understanding of the phenomenon of these cities, in particular their changing meanings and stories, and a broader historical perspective on the changing nature of their functions in relation to Europe's settlement network, are crucial to comprehending the

very essence of "Europe Minor." For the city is the fruit of protracted processes, the product of a convergence of many different phenomena.

The intriguing phenomenon of Central Europe is also a problem of the political boundaries which, in this region, changed faster in the 20th century than the cultural boundaries. Even though the fate of the two cities was different in many respects, both Lviv and Wroclaw are outstanding symbols of the complexities and problems of Central Europe. They are outstanding laboratories of our memory... and oblivion.

Wroclaw entered the 20th century as a metropolis of half a million people. Its economic potential and scale of urbanization fundamentally surpassed the possibilities of Lviv, which, in 1939, was still two times smaller and considerably poorer than the capital of Lower Silesia. World War II radically changed the fate of the two cities. The urban fabric of Lviv was, luckily, salvaged. At the same time, it became one of the symbols of the Holocaust in Central Europe, of ethnic cleansing and changes of the borders. These were cataclysms which turned the city's existing ethnic and social structure upside down. Wroclaw was not only terribly destroyed in 1945—even though it preserved a vibrant modern transport infrastructure and community facilities—it also became the largest European city which, as a result of WWII, replaced its entire population. Polish Wroclaw regained the population size of German Breslau in 1939 only in the 1980s, and it does not surpass it to the present day. The population of contemporary Lviv, on the other hand, is three times more numerous, and its geographical size is a multiple in comparison to the situation before 1939.

Lviv and Wroclaw are metropoles which were never capital cities, but they became important centers on the map of Central European civilization. At the turn of the 20th century both cities were incubators of progress and modernity. Especially after 1890, the acceleration of modernizing processes in both cities was obvious.

One of the largest metropolises of Central Europe, Lviv was finally formed and defined within the civilizational boundaries of the Habsburg monarchy. At the turn of the 20th century, it was doubtless one of the most modern cities on the former territories of the Commonwealth. As the capital city of the largest crownland in Cisleithania, it "served" nine million Galician citizens before the First World War. The autonomy granted to Galicia

in the 1860s meant that Vienna ceded to Lviv many political, administrative, economic and cultural functions that are necessary to govern such a huge province. Unlike Prague, though, it had no integrative function and was not a national capital as "no Galician nation ever existed." The period of autonomy facilitated the transfer of Austrian civilizational achievements to Lviv and, likewise, triggered an eruption of local initiatives that flourished against the backdrop of the broad liberties that the Poles enjoyed in Galicia.

The civilizational power of the Habsburg monarchy determined the shape and character of Lviv at the turn of the 20th century—the third largest city of Cisleithania after Vienna and Prague. In this sense, the public space that emerged in those days was Central European and not specifically Polish. Habsburg Lviv, as an element of the monarchy's move towards modernity, neutralized the conflict between the rival nationalisms within the city. The creative dynamics fueled by cultural variety, which had been the strength and hallmark of Lviv for centuries, was ultimately to bring about its tragedy. The peak of economic prosperity coincided with a culmination of evident national rivalry. On the threshold of the First World War, Lviv was both one of the centers of Polish national life and a "Ukrainian Piedmont" in the liberal Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In 1918, Lviv became the scene of what was in fact a fratricidal fight in which, as Leszek Podhorecki noted, "on both sides there were inhabitants of the city who had lived next door to each other for centuries, often tied by kinship, until recently struggling shoulder to shoulder with the common enemy—Tsarist Russia." The November civil war was to change the character of the Lviv metropolis forever. It was to divide and petrify even more profoundly the Polish and Ukrainian collective memories.

The city's new context and new code were eventually consolidated in summer 1920 by the Polish defense of Lviv against Budyonny's army. It prolonged, for another twenty years, Lviv's place in western civilization, of which the city became a bastion: again as semper fidelis, yet this time a fortress of

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5 The population of Lviv before the Great War was 212,000, see Urszula Jakubowska, Lwów na przełomie XIX i XX wieku: Przegląd środowisk prasotwórczych (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich, 1991), 45.
Polonism. After 1918, the Poles, busy with their fight for independence and countering the Soviet firestorm, "forgot" about the multi-ethnicity of Lviv. In this new chapter of the city's history, Jews and Ukrainians became second-class citizens. Before 1914, the Poles ignored the Austrian presence in Lviv. They claimed to be the true and exclusive owners of the city. For the Ukrainians, Austria had been a world of public order and rights which they lost after the fall of the monarchy and with the advent of the Polish Republic. For the Jews, the new reality spelt ubiquitous anti-Semitism.

How shall we fit that barely twenty-year-old history of Lviv of the years 1918-1939 into a common, egocentrism-free narrative today? Given the last century's lesson, Lviv seems to be doomed to conflicts of memories that stem from the ongoing change of political, economic or cultural context and are also rooted in Lviv's mosaic-like character. Is going back to Leopolis multiplex possible then?

7 Katarzyna Kotyńska, Lwów: O odczytywaniu miasta na nowo (Cracow: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2015), 34.
8 At this point I should quote Leopold Unger: "[...] in Lviv, life was not easy for Jews. I will not be recreating a history you are likely familiar with. There were pogroms, you know. Lviv—that wonderful Lviv—was one of the cities where ghetto benches were established. And note that it was also one of the cities where some professors opposed that. During my mature years, that is the last two years before the war, three Jewish students were murdered at the university during anti-Semitic riots. That's the way Lviv was too.

What choice did the Jews I am talking about have? They could, and did, try to assimilate. But he who remembers those days will also remember what huge hurdles there were to such assimilation. I attended a Jewish grammar school with full public rights. Therefore, I had the best specialists for teachers—being Jewish they could not be appointed to university positions. Thus, assimilation was hard. What was the alternative? One was Jewish nationalism. It did exist, in various shades of it. The leading one was Zionism, i.e., emigration to Palestine. But there was another choice, and this should be explained to everyone who does not understand why there were so many Jews in the Left and in the communist party. In Lviv, paradoxically, those were often young people from Jewish bourgeoisie families. They were looking for a solution to what was called 'the Jewish issue' in a program postulating equal rights or, which they did not realize until much later, full-fledged utopia. And they found it in the communist party—not Polish though: in Lviv it was called the Communist Party of Western Ukraine." L. Unger, panel discussion, "Kraków i Lwów w Europie jutra," in Kraków i Lwów w cywilizacji europejskiej, Jacek Purchla, ed. (Cracow: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, 2003), 209.

9 K. Kotyńska, Lwów, 12.
The history of Galicia poses different questions today, to which the answers are often mutually exclusive. Historians are clearly divided in their interpretations. The facts often support the myth, or, rather, many myths.

Lviv is a fascinating amalgam of diverse memories. The Ukrainian expert on the city’s history, Marian Mudryi, aptly noted that Lviv can be “narrated as a sequence of victories of various nationalisms, each of which wanted to make the city ‘its own.’” The historian Yaroslav Hrytsak points out: “Everyone who lives in Lviv or comes here, will sooner or later begin to look at the city and the world through ‘national’ glasses. That is why the city has had such an immense role in the national, or better—nationalized, stories told by Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, and recently also Russians: stories that have always been forged by the fear that there is always someone out there who threatens ‘us.’”

Polish and Ukrainian experts on the history of Lviv differ on some fundamental issues that arise from the dissimilar perspectives of our national historiographies. This is not confined to the troubled history of Polish-Ukrainian relations. In the case of Lviv, the moot points include, for example, the attitude to Austria, with respect to which the Polish and Ukrainian outlooks on 19th-century Lviv remain so divergent. The ambiguous perception of Lviv is an outcome of not only the Galician myth but also, and above all, of the city’s dramatic history after 1918.


Pierre Nora did not by accident describe the last decades as the "epoch of commemoration."\(^{14}\) The tragic experience of the nations of Central Europe in the 20th century is the reason that this "duty to remember" becomes a particular challenge. The Holocaust, the change of the political borders, ethnic cleansing, and totalitarian ideologies were the triggers that turned Central Europe into a great battlefield of memory, beginning in 1989, through processes of restoring, constructing and consolidating a collective memory.

Cultural heritage does not only allow us to reinterpret the past continuously, and to exploit it for present ends, it is also the subject of conflicts. A simple example of this are even battlefields. Tunbridge and Ashworth claim that each legacy is an area of debate and controversy as a matter of principle.\(^{15}\) It is, therefore, not surprising that Lviv became a particular field of the Polish-Ukrainian memory conflict.\(^{16}\)

Heritage is the subject of controversy between states, nations, religions, social groups, regions and other stakeholders. Dissonant heritage became a particular problem of Central Europe. Therefore, contemporary theories of dealing with historical legacies pay particular attention to those who have been disinherited, since any engagement with these legacies implies the question of groups who have been subject to aggression, exclusion or oblivion.\(^{17}\)

History teaches that our international relations to a large extent depend on our images of the other, which, in turn, are often based on stereotypes. That is, they are based on people's engrained convictions which are not confirmed by reality. Gordon Allport described the creation of stereotypes as the "right of least effort," which guides people as they choose, in a spirit of idleness, that is, the least laborious methods.\(^{18}\) We form simple convictions, which are perniciously superficial. They make us do without any reflection on what the world really looks like. This is particularly true of national stereotypes. Once they are established, they are resistant to change in the light

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\(^{16}\) Jacek Purchla, "Problematyka badań nad dziejami Krakowa i Lwowa w XIX wieku."


of new information. As a result, negative national stereotypes persist, despite changing relations between neighboring states. Is it possible today to challenge this artificial world of divisions? Can ongoing reflection on our imagination of the stranger, the enemy, change our stereotype of our neighbor? Do European integration, the freedom and speed of travelling without borders, the remapping of Europe, and globalization work to change the national stereotypes that have formed in a long historical process?

Legacies are a process of continuous reinterpretation of the past, in which our memory and choice play a fundamental role. Thomas Mann said that culture is the ability to inherit. Inheritance not only concerns individuals, but also various social groups, including nations and mankind as a whole. Heritage is not exclusive to states, but the state likes to take ownership of it for its own ideological needs. For heritage is also knowledge, a product of culture as well as a political and economic resource. It belongs to us all, and access to it is a basic human right. Thus, heritage always has a human dimension.

Since heritage belongs to us all, it is not the domain of a small group of experts. Its value is determined by those who use it. As a result, one of the fundamental questions pertaining to cultural heritage is that of its owners, as well as who forms, interprets, protects, and administers it. In Central and Eastern Europe today, where the political borders were changing faster than the cultural borders, there is a special separate category. This is the heritage of the disinherited and of those without heirs, who are the "product" of the tragedies of the 20th century: the Holocaust and ethnic cleansing. Wroclaw is a very good example of this, as the largest city in Europe and the world where a complete population exchange took place as a result of World War II. After 1945, Wroclaw not only became a beacon of great conservation works which reconstructed the destroyed city. It also became a real heritage laboratory, exactly in terms of memory and identity. This is a considerably more difficult matter than the conversation of monuments. For the first Polish settlers who arrived here, the ruins of German Breslau were, after all, their enemy's cultural heritage. Over the following decades, the thinking of subsequent generations of people in Wroclaw about the new homeland evolved considerably. The heritage of the enemy and of the alien city became the heritage of the neighbor, after it had been made one's own, and its universal values had been recognized. The example of Wroclaw allows us to better understand the strength and significance of intangible heritage, of our memory and identity, as well as the dynamics of the heritage process.
It is also worth paying attention to the specific location of Wroclaw in the settlement network of Central Europe. Its peripheral location in the geography of communist Poland quickly changed, after 1989, into pivot of a European metropolis, closer to Prague and Berlin than to Warsaw. Nowadays, Wroclaw is a two-and-a-half-hour motorway journey away from Berlin. It takes much longer to "squeeze through" to Warsaw. Especially since 2004, it has found itself in the orbit of the economic influence of Berlin; thus, a city with the ambitions of a global metropolis.

With respect to post-1990 Wroclaw, one can speak of a great degree of cohesion in urban society and continuity of the local administration. There is even an uninterrupted continuity of leadership. For the last thirty years, since 1989, it has been in the hands of the activists of the Citizens' Committee of Wroclaw. The long mayorship of Bogdan Zdrojewski (1990-2001) and three terms of office by the mayor Rafal Dutkiewicz (2002-18)—both leaders of the Wroclaw branch of the Citizens' Committee of Wroclaw in 1989—were based on a continuous strategy of local government since its very inception as well as on a strong public mandate.

From this, certain questions arise. Is it possible to abandon the nationalist narrative? Can one avoid contemporary clichés which result from the needs of the nation state? This is the path that Wroclaw has chosen. This is not just about the well-known book by Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse, *Microcosm. Portrait of a Central European City*, which the British historians were commissioned to write by the Polish mayor of a city that was predominantly built by Germans.19 I am rather thinking about making the enemy's heritage one's own, a process that Wroclaw went through over the last 30 years. That fundamental change in the relation to the city's heritage, which the previous owners of Wroclaw brought about, does not only concern academic circles, but perhaps above all the political elite of the city. The fact that Polish Wroclaw made German Breslau its own after 1990 has been a conscious political decision and is proof that the narrative about the city need not be created from a nationalist point of view. Wroclaw and its community have shown that one can replace the nationalism of historians with a multifaceted narrative about the city. A product of this kind of thinking is

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the recently opened City Museum of Wroclaw, which is, nota bene, located in the residence of the Prussian kings.

In 2011, Wroclaw, from among Poland’s eleven largest cities, did not by accident become the uncontested leader in the competition for European Capital of Culture 2016. One can say that Wroclaw was naturally prepared for the competition already earlier, due to its entire, 20-year-long transformation. Culture and heritage played such an immense role in the fundamental change that the status of Wroclaw underwent after the fall of communism, both in Poland and Europe. The victory of Wroclaw, and, subsequently, the execution of the plans for European Capital of Culture 2016 were also the personal success of the charismatic mayor, Rafał Dutkiewicz. Wroclaw and its President succeeded, among other things, in overcoming the problem of German Wroclaw. Nowadays, rather than a burden for the city’s residents and authorities, it has become a resource and potential that is exploited creatively towards its development.²⁰ Wroclaw has also shown that the local council and its leader, a mayor with a vision and charisma, are often the decisive element, the factor that guarantees the success of the city. The residents of Wroclaw, during and after communism, formed an exceptionally active and creative community, which reached beyond the borders of the locality itself. Wroclaw today proves that Central Europe in our times is not only a symbol of multiculturalism and dialogue. It also represents the necessity to read culture accurately for future development. Wroclaw today successfully “sells” its tradition of multi-culturalism, without being submerged under the burden of its heritage. And that distinguished and still distinguishes it from Lviv. In that sense, Wroclaw is a city that has much more turned towards the past and opened up to the “other.” “Ukrainian Lviv” remains distrustful of its multi-national past and is still an area of conflict of memory.

Every day, the shape of our memory is put to a difficult test. For, the past and memory are not only a complicated matter, but also, unlike history, memory need not be unambiguous. Nowadays, we are dealing not only with the recovery of memory and the polyphony of memory, but perhaps above all with conflicting memories—with “our” memory and “yours,” with a troublesome memory, with its manipulation, sacralization, appropriation, and exploitation. Nora draws the practical conclusion that the transformation of

²⁰ See the essays in this volume by Barbara Pabjan and Ewa Sidorenko for alternative perspectives on Wroclaw’s dealings with its German past.
the notion of heritage has turned it into the opposite of what it was before. According to the French scholar, "heritage ended the epoch of history, nation and monuments in favor of an epoch of memory, community and identity."21 Since the cult of the past is so firmly anchored in our European tradition, it becomes above all our "duty of memory," both individual and collective.

Today, memory forms a separate scholarly category. In fact, memory is the elder and less trustworthy sister of history. Insofar as history is a closed structure, memory is open to individuals as well as the collective. Collective memory is an artefact that we newly construct every day, even though people claim that the essence of their identity is invariable. Collective memory reconstructs, rather than records the past. For history and memory are two different issues. In 1984, the French scholar Pierre Nora, in support of this observation, introduced the term "places of memory," thereby ushering in the development a so-called second layer of history. It takes us into the world of collective memory, where history, rather than an established fact, is a form of memory among contemporaries. Places of memory, in that sense, constitute our identity. They comprise material as well as immaterial elements, for they are the long-lived catalysts of collective memory and identity, which are transmitted from generation to generation, and which form part of social, cultural and political habits.

The delayed beginning of the 20th century essentially brought not only the triumph of nationalisms, and later totalitarianisms, the Holocaust and the expulsions; it also spelled the end of the dream of a Central Europe. For in the bipolar post-Yalta Europe of 1945, comprising East and West, there was no place for a center. As Karl Schlögel rightly pointed out: "The elimination of the center shifted one-time metropolises out onto the peripheries."22 The Sovietization of Budapest, Prague, Cracow, Lviv, and many other cities of Kakania clashed sharply with the tradition of these cities as places with a special potential for freedom and a unique way of building communities.

Communism nullified the tradition of Central Europe and its civilizational achievements. Neither did it have room for municipal self-government or civil society. It was thus a civilizational shock, and as such was in its turn

21 Pierre Nora, "Dziedzictwo."
rejected by the nations of Central Europe. This was why the events of Buda­pest 1956 and Prague 1968 were viewed as symbolic of the fight for identity. The myth of Central Europe had a particular renaissance in the 1970s and 1980s. In that period, it represented the clear distinction between the Soviet reality and European values. Intellectuals on both sides of the iron curtain—György Konrád, Milan Kundera, Václav Havel, Czeslaw Milosz, Erhard Busek—exploited the separate cultural identities of Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland to manifest these fundamental differences.

It was then that Central Europe became a choice, a question of worldview and of a community of experience. And the key to understanding this unique identity was the fact of the former Habsburg metropolises either side of the Iron Curtain, now separated from each other by so many borders: Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Trieste, Cracow, Lviv, Wroclaw. Karl Schlögel, quoted above, rightly noted this divided unity at the time, when he wrote: "But our borders are visible in entirely different ways: in the features common to railway station restaurant interiors from Trieste to Cracow which are dec­orated in the same way, painted the same color (light ochre, of course) virtually everywhere. We move from one town to another, but we are constantly in the same place; we cross borders, but the conductor is always the same."23

This remarkable experience of the metropolises of Central Europe con­firms the accuracy of Italo Calvino's words: "The city [...] does not tell its past but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lighting rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls."24

Central Europe's watershed year, 1989, has enabled us to look again at the various different meanings of the city: as a process, as a function, as an idea, as a form, as a mirror for our civilization. As Emil Brix notes:

Once again, space is discovered in its dynamic social function. Cities are interpreted as texts, which, in Eastern Europe in the 20th century, for instance, might have belonged to as many as six different political regimes and territories. Streets and squares—if only in view of their fre-

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23 Ibid., 40.
quent changes of name—are understood as dynamic spatial structures, as is the public space: museums, monuments, churches. Regional discussions on the subject of identity (wielding terms and concepts such as Central Europe, the Danube Basin, the Balkans, New Europe) are subject to the principle of the dynamic that renders change of function and meaning possible at any time.25

For in Central Europe, cultural identity has never been something endowed once and for all; it has always required constant, deliberate election. That is also the experience of Lviv and Wrocław.

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