

What do these names have in common: Grosse Berlinerstrasse, Henryka Dąbrowskiego, Saarlandstrasse, Jarosława Dąbrowskiego and Jana Henryka Dąbrowskiego? Well, you may find all of them on the Poznań city maps from the 20th century. Many families share memories about how often they had to change their IDs, inform the employers and friends about a new address. Yet, it was not moving house or migrating that was the reason for the change. The houses were in place and the inhabitants did not move. What happened then? There was just one reason - street renaming. There are many such places in many cities, where streets, squares and alleys were renamed several times.

In our project we are trying to describe these changes and compare their scope and ideological motivations in three cities of Eastern Germany and three cities in Poland between 1916-2016. The time frame covers 100 years and involves many historical events that influenced the development, destruction and reconstruction of these cities. The First and Second World Wars, the re-emergence of the Polish state in the interwar period, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, Stalinism, the division of Germany after 1945 and its unification after 1989, the Polish accession to the EU in 2004. All these events and periods influenced state ideologies and commemoration practices including the celebration of state holidays or the erection of monuments to national heroes. One of such commemoration practices is the naming streets, squares and alleys after great historical figures or events, e.g. Independence Alley, Freedom Square or John Paul the Second Roundabout in Poznań or Capastrasse in Leipzig. These practices raise many interesting questions: What were the heroes of various historical periods? How were they perceived by the following generations? Are there any universal figures that the city inhabitants always consider important and worthy of commemoration?

The project investigates street re-naming in 6 locations. Leipzig is the biggest city in Saxony, Poznań is the capital of the Wielkopolska region, which up till 1918 was under Prussian administration. Frankfurt(Oder) and Słubice used to be one town until - in 1945 - the Polish-German border divided it into two parts. Polish Zbąszyń was also a border town after WWI, it was a site of heavy fighting during the Wielkopolska Uprising 1919-1920 and a place where Polish Jews were deported by Nazi Germany in October 1938. Annaberg-Bucholz lies in the Ore Mountains not far from the border with the Czech Republic. It is a city of miners with a strong Jewish heritage and it was created in 1945 from the unification of formerly two independent towns Annaberg and Bucholz.

The project involves a cooperation of two research teams, who investigate the situation in the two respective countries. The project will result in a new model of the interaction of spatio-temporal, social and ideological indicators of change in the linguistic landscape with a focus on commemorative street renaming. The Polish-German research team consists of experts from various disciplines: human geography (Dr. Seraphim Alvanides), quantitative sociolinguistics and linguistic landscape studies (Prof. Isabelle Buchstaller), collective memory (Prof. Małgorzata Fabiszak) and urban ethnology and regional studies (Dr Anna Weronika Brzezińska).

One of the outcomes of the project will be interactive maps of the investigated towns and cities. These maps visualise the changes in the street names between 1916-2016. They will also remind us about the complex ways in which the past century has impacted upon Polish and German landscape.