

Silesia's Territorialisations During the Polish Millennium Celebrations Period (1956–1967) – Competing Region's Images in Silesian Press Published in Poland and West Germany

In the second half of the twentieth century, in the study of geographical space, proposals appeared to treat territorial units not as real existing fragments of the earth's surface but as objects discursively constructed in social communication. One of the pioneers of this trend, Thongchai Winichakul, argued that the national territory, which is the basis for the self-identification of members of national communities, was also constructed and perpetuated by the discourses of national ideologists. Determining the shape and meanings given to parts of the area recognised as the homeland is what Anton Kotenko calls territorialisation. The territorialisation of Poland within the borders established after the Second World War, i.e., encompassing the former German territories and, in turn, excluding the former territories to the east, was one of the most important tasks of the policy of the communist authorities. The Catholic Church in Poland was also involved in the national, religious, and cultural unification of the inhabitants of all parts of the country and in activities aimed at creating an image of the Polish territory as an inseparable, necessary whole. The part of the country that required particularly intensive efforts in this regard was Silesia. This historical region, parts of which were incorporated into Poland at different times, was inhabited in part by 'autochthons' close to the German cultural circle and partly by multitudes of settlers from different parts of the country, mainly those lost to the Soviet Union. With great effort, the German past of the cities was removed, the non-Polish elements of the landscape were erased, and an alternative version of history was built to justify the eternal Polishness of Silesia. However, the region's status remained uncertain, both in terms of social perceptions and political and legal sense. During the millennium celebrations, a decade of particularly intense identity politics, Silesia's Polishness played an important role in the competitive programs of the Church and the state to mark the Polish millennium. The importance of this issue was reflected in the press. At the time, newspapers and magazines were the mass media with the greatest reach. Silesia published many titles that addressed the inhabitants of its parts, provinces, cities, and districts. The Provincial Committees of the Polish United Workers' Party published their periodicals: 'Trybuna Robotnicza', 'Trybuna Opolska', 'Gazeta Zielonogórska', and 'Gazeta Robotnicza'. The most important journals were 'Dziennik Zachodni' and 'Sowo Polskie'. All of them were supervised by censors, as was the church press. The Catholic weekly 'Gość Niedzielny' was addressed to the inhabitants of the whole of Silesia. In all these titles, one can find a wealth of articles related to millennium endeavours, aiming to unite Silesia with the "Motherland" in the reader's imagination. The journalists participated in commemorative events, tourist rallies, and public ceremonies and reported on them with their commentary. Many columns, historical articles, and calendars were printed, presenting the thousand-year history of Silesia in a way that legitimised the Polish administration. Therefore, the press was an important tool for the territorialisation of Silesia. Meanwhile, in the Federal Republic of Germany, the community of Germans expelled from the lands incorporated into Poland was very active. The local circles of the Union of Expellees published their periodicals, addressing people connected with various towns and districts of Silesia. The weekly 'Der Schlesier Breslauer Nachrichten' covered the whole of Upper and Lower Silesia. The Polish Millennium celebrations were closely followed and sometimes virulently commented on by the journalists of these magazines. Articles were often devoted to events, places, and figures, which, following the French historian Pierre Nora, can be called places of memory. These are tangible and intangible points around which a community's collective memory crystallises, stabilising its identity and carrying a load of content, moral values, and models of thought and behaviour. Examples include the Battle of St Anne's Mountain, the Silesian Piast dynasty, and St Barbara's Day, the miners' holiday. In German and Polish periodicals dealing with Silesia, some symmetry can be observed at this time. In both cases, it is clear that the editors wanted to shape the region's image: in the Polish version, it is an inseparable part of the Polish territory and is merged with it, dissolving into a common Polish identity. In the Bund der Vertriebenen version, Silesia is a concrete, separate region, a small homeland, a Heimat, which historically belongs to the German cultural milieu and should be returned to Germany, but which in itself constitutes a complete whole. Both contradictory images are constructed using similar means, often even the same places of memory, which, however, are given completely different meanings. Different interpretations of the past lead to different conclusions about what the future should look like. Based on an analysis of the Polish and West German regional press, this project aims to reconstruct how these policies were pursued to maintain or seize symbolic and physical power over Silesia.