
Introduction to the Thematic Issue The City – Identity – Memory – Minorities

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Every city derives its character from its own history. This history finds its roots in the layout of the city, its monuments and memorials, its symbols, but also in the structured memory of its inhabitants. Some places in a city absorb several temporal layers of memory and the oldest can, with time, slip away in temporary or permanent forgetting. It is not always a question of natural processes; memory can be replaced in a violent or controlled manner: urban renewals, forced expulsion of a population, etc. However, a city also has the ability to flash back to its past: a walk through historic streets and quiet corners can bring back to the receptive walker what that space was like in the past. Often connected to the invocation of memories is nostalgia: valid and invalid phenomena. The preservation of a significant point on the timeline of a city requires a combination of the past with the present and the future: history loses its importance if it cannot be used for updating. People search in a city's history so that, with its support, they can master the present or, more precisely, project their interests into the past. That is, each of us has only those eyes granted to him by his time.

In a city there are, to be sure, areas filled with meaning and also areas that, at least for the moment, are meaningless. However, one cannot exclude the idea that even, for example, uniform hypermarket chains, sweeping away differences among European cities that are historically founded or constructing their identity on history, are still waiting for their history. In the current issue, mainly devoted to Slovak urban anthropology and, therefore, Slovak cities and their memories, are analyses of memories of urban worlds from several viewpoints. The unifying topic of the issue is, however, minority urban memories.

The Bratislava ethnologist Peter Salner, for example, drew fresh attention to the phenomenon of coerced loss of memory of the Jewish minority in the Slovak capital after World War II. As a consequence of the Shoah and postwar waves of emigration, the Jewish Orthodox community, a majority in a minority, Zionists, but also some of the assimilated Jews disappeared from Bratislava, a city with a strong Jewish tradition. Judaism as one of the significant elements of Bratislava's memory, however, also faded into forgetfulness because of insensitive demolitions of former Jewish monuments. And finally: the group of Orthodox Jews and Zionists have not yet even become part of the newly forming Jewish memory built by secularized, assimilated Jews and Communists.

Many of them, moreover, lack Bratislava roots. Salner's colleague, Daniel Luther, chose to write about the Czech minority who arrived programmatically in the city in the period after 1918 (the rise of the Czechoslovak Republic) and, in 1938, were expelled from there. At present, their existence is determined by the break-up of the federation (1992). Using them as an example, Luther introduced the contents and demonstrated the role of memory in the process of formation of contemporary minority identity. Monika Vrzgulová, the last of the three Bratislava researchers, using the example of research of memory of the distinctive social and occupational group of tradesmen of non-Jewish and Jewish origin between 1918 and 1938, convincingly applied the thesis of Maurice Halbwachs about the influence of social origin, living conditions and social strategies on human memory. Probably every memory, however, is a determined attempt to highlight the importance of one's own state (one's own group) for the over-all character of a city. What is interesting is knowledge about intergenerational transfer of memory in one social group. The Banská Bystrica researcher Jolana Darulová analyzed the contrast between two periods of the formerly important medieval mining town (1918-1945/1948) and the present.

Her research on the city center, formerly a sort of heart of the city, shows how the source of memory can view the postmodern era with its propensity toward unification. The article by Katarína Košťalová is a vivid example of the manipulation of a city with memory. Using the example of an interesting, prestigious organization in Zvolen that has the full support of city hall, she shows the possibility of revitalization of certain segments of memory of the city in the subconscious of its inhabitants and visitors. The study of Katerína Popelková dealing with two traditional wine-growing cities in the Malé Karpaty (Modra and Pezinok) is, in its way, the most relevant for post-Socialist society. On the basis of many years of research, Popelková reveals mechanisms affecting memory in the development of the city. Memory, that is to say, is capable not only of slowing down the development of a city, but also of accelerating it if, for example, it is skillfully used in the development of tourism (Pezinok).

The current issue is essentially dedicated, then, to the functions of minority memory in a city. Methodically it emanates, just as the first Polish-Czech issue did, from anthropological and historical postmodern approaches. We are, however, introducing two new sections: a Discussion section, in which we can include, first of all, discussions of contributions

relating to methodology in our field, the character of its sources, and the most important books in our specialization and, in the English version of the same section, The city and its personalities. This is in accordance with the propensity of contemporary post-

Socialist societies toward individualization and, at the same time, in accordance with our methodological foundation. We start from the fact that the city and its inhabitants create an inseparable unity. In other words: urban worlds cannot be understood without empathetic insight into mentalities (ways of thinking and strategies of behavior) of those who inhabit, work, found families, create values and enjoy themselves.

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