

## FACING THE PAST, TALKING THE FUTURE

### The Role of Collective Memory in the Ethnic, Cultural, and Historical Borderland<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The paper presents the results of research conducted in the town of Teplice, in the Czech-German borderland. The assumption of the study is that the communicative memory in the region of borderland is a process that involves not only the members of a borderland region, but also documents of memory, in this case visual documents circulating on Internet. This process of creating communicative memory occurs in a hermeneutical triangle that includes the communication / interaction between memory users, memory makers, and visual objects of representation. The meaning of the particular elements of the borderland collective memory is constantly negotiated. The objective of the discussed research is to study the role that communicative memory plays in the cultural, ethnic, and historical borderland.*

**Keywords:** *collective memory; visual analysis; photo-elicitation interview; borderland*

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*Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future*  
T. S. Eliot

## Introduction

“Monuments, museums and memorials are ... attempts to make statements and affirmations [to create] a materiality with a political, collective, public meaning [and] physical reminder of a conflictive political past” (Jelin and Kaufman in Alexander 2004: 8). What happens when there are (not yet) monuments or museums or appropriate memorials, but still, there is a need to find a way in which to cope with a conflictive past?

In a community, collective memory contributes to establishing and maintaining the identity of its members. In regard to social institutions, we can distinguish between institutionalised *cultural* memory, a domain of institutional action which leads usually to the confirmation of the status quo (museums, manuals, historical books, etc.), and interactional *communicative* memory, performed on the level of individuals and their interactions in which they actualise documents of memory (souvenirs, images, objects, etc.) (cf. Assmann 2008). On a general level, I will argue that in borderland communities with hybrid national, ethnic, regional, and local identities, everyday-life acts of communicative memory may produce a threat to the status quo identity of its members. Day-to-day interactions are always contingent, driven by a particular situation, as well as the knowledge and interests of involved individuals that, in a community whose members have a heterogeneous past, present the potential risk of identity conflict.

Central Europe lost its multicultural flavour and moved some of its borders while resettling most of its peoples after 1945. Under the communist regime, where the variety of ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds was regarded as a threat to the communist, centre-oriented state status quo, the borderland regions of Central Europe were made to forget their roots and deal with the resettlement trauma individually – mostly within narrow circles of family and relatives with the same experience. The whole-state transformation to liberal democracies and neoliberal economies as a consequence of the events of 1989 in the regions gave space and opened the possibility of talking about the pre- and post-war borderland experiences (including discriminated ethnic minorities and religious groups). This phenomenon is distinctive for most of the Central Europe

borderlands, including the region discussed in the research. In 1945, more than 2.5 million German Czechoslovaks living in the region were forced to move to Germany. Czechs and Slovaks from other parts of Central and Eastern Europe – the Czech inlands, Eastern Slovakia, Volhynia, Transylvania, Carpathian Ruthenia – settled there in their stead (Spalová 2017: 84).

The aim of the paper is to track the bottom-up phenomenon of the memory-making process in the Czech-German borderland in the town of Teplice, and to find out what is the role of the process in the life of a borderland community, as well as to identify essential elements of the local collective memory. The perspective employed in the research is microsociological, following Randall Collins's assumptions that, "The small scale, the here-and-now of face-to-face interaction, is the scene of action and the site of social actors. If we are going to find the agency of social life, it will be here. Here resides the energy of movement and change, the glue of solidarity, and the conservatism of stasis. Here is where intentionality and consciousness find their places; here, too, is the site of the emotional and unconscious aspects of human interaction" (Collins 2004: 3). Therefore, it should be highlighted here that the research findings should be regarded and interpreted on the micro-scale level of everyday interactions, without any claims for generalisation and macro-scale conclusions.

## **Collective memory in the ethnic, cultural, and historical borderland**

Remembering is social and occurs in the social environment (Harris, Paterson, Kemp 2008: 216). Schudson argues that remembering has three aspects: collective, public, and interactive. It appears for some kind of audience and is inspired by that audience (1995: 360). The whole process of shared remembering takes place within a certain set of norms and values. Autobiographical memory is selective, but so, too, is collective memory. I find this assumption essential to the presented research.

The temporal and institutional dimensions of collective memory have been addressed by Jan Assmann, a German Egyptologist. In his understanding, collective memory consists of communicative memory and cultural memory (Assmann 2008: 117). This distinction has been, in recent decades, among the most prominent theories regarding the shared remembering within a particular social group or community. Cultural memory is a term which conveys a past that is "exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that are stable

and already-framed” (2008: 110–111). Communicative memory, on the other hand, resides in communication and language, and includes only 3–4 generations (the previous 80–100 years), which implies a living intergenerational transmission of memory elements (events, symbols, importance of certain elements of the past for the present and future of a community, language, etc.). Whereas cultural memory stands for the transmission of meanings and is rooted in the absolute past, communicative memory is closest to autobiographical remembering. It is lived and embodied and finds itself in a vernacular language.

Collective memories are negotiable versions of the past, which are to be discussed during the communication process between members of a particular community. Considering this, I have decided to apply this juxtaposition (the division into cultural and communicative memory), as proposed by Jan Assmann, and classify the form of collective memory in the Czech-German borderland as a communicative memory (2008: 117). This assumption is based on the following indicators: there are still three generations living, the memory about the past is still an autobiographical memory transmitted mostly within families, and the remembered period covers the last 80–100 years. Assmann’s theory, although a cornerstone of studies concerning shared remembering, has also become the subject of criticism, polemics, and further development.

An argument I find crucial to the discussed problem is the analytical and methodological approach by Pickering and Keightley, who raise the question of a proper methodological background for studying memory, which consists of three assumptions: (1) Any form of an individual remembering is affected and shaped by collective forms of association and belonging; (2) any form of collective remembering is participated in or interpreted by an individual with their own experience of the past; and (3) the relationship between individual and collective remembering is dialectical in the sense that there is constant interplay between those two kinds of remembering (2016: 39). This implies a different approach than that of Assmann:

Communicative memory is cultural, and cultural memory is communicative, both in vernacular milieux and in the communications media with which cultural memory becomes increasingly associated under conditions of modernity. (2016: 47)

The authors postulate that social remembering appears across different scales, and researchers should take this into consideration any time they try to study a manifestation of shared memory. The approach might be especially useful

in studying digital forms of collective memory since social media and digitally networked communities operate across scales, mixing the individual and collective at the same time (2016: 47). The collective and shared memory found on the Czech-German borderland is mediated through digital texts of memory (mostly visual); therefore, the aspect of its interscalarity must be taken into consideration at the analytical level.

In my approach, I assume that “knowledge about the past is not the only or principal component of collective memory, but is rather a precondition or a tool for its production” (Hájek, Dlouhá 2013: 220). This kind of knowledge must be “always defined in relation to historical, cultural, social, cognitive and contextual variables within specific epistemic communities” (Jovchelovitch 2007 in Bietti 2010: 504). The whole process should be interpreted as an interpretative cooperation, which takes place through communication.

There is an obvious link between the notion of collective memory and the concept of identity, and in a borderland, this relation seems to be even more vivid and vulnerable. “Identities are projects and practices, not properties.” (Olick, Robbins 1998: 122) This perspective seems most coherent with a notion of communicative memory, which is also a matter of practice and projection rather than a thing. What is more, what links the studies of identity and memory is the process of family socialisation, through which our remembering of the past is shaped by the family surroundings and experience: “This ‘sociobiographical memory’ is the mechanism through which we feel pride, pain, or shame with regard to events that happened to our groups before we joined them” (Olick, Robbins 1998: 123). The families which came to settle in the borderlands brought with themselves and gathered different traumas and autobiographical memories that were passed down via intergenerational transmission, mainly within the socialisation process.

As Jeffrey C. Alexander states, “Traumatic status is attributed to real or imagined phenomena, not because of their actual harmfulness or their objective abruptness, but because these phenomena are believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity. Individual security is anchored in structures of emotional and cultural expectations that provide a sense of security and capability... What is at stake, rather, is the collectivity’s identity, its stability in terms of meaning, not action” (2004: 10). Crucial here is the meaning ascribed to the certain event, not the event itself. The traumatic status is a result of a cultural process, as Alexander puts it, which is affected by power structures and “reflexive social agents” (2004: 10). Collective trauma, therefore,

is not the result of some kind of pain, but the result of “discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity” (2004: 10). In line with this notion, memory is social and in profound connection to the contemporary situation. These identities are also constantly being constructed through the reconstruction of the past (2004: 22).

## The visual memory

Susan Sontag in her book *On Photography* writes, “[p]hotographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we are shown a photograph of it.” (2005: 15) This utility of visual material is strictly connected to the idea of the mediality and pre-mediality of collective memory, since “photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal” and, similarly, “they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure” (2005: 9). When it comes to collective memory processes, visual resources or visual objects of representation (also as visual texts of memory) are very often focused around the emancipation and counter-narratives of the past. Images serve as one of the most powerful vehicles of memory (Kansteiner 2002: 190–191). They serve both as an “externalization and trace” (Ruchatz 2008: 367).

What I find crucial for the analysis of communicative collective memory in the place of ethnic, cultural, and historic borderland is the way visual documents are entangled into the process of communication between members of a community of memory. The images are used as facilitators of interactions centred around establishing and negotiating the newly created version of the local/regional history. As Barbie Zelizer puts it:

As vehicles of memory, images work in patterned ways, concretizing and externalizing events in an accessible and visible fashion that allows us to recognize the tangible proof they offer of the events being represented. Images actively depend on their material form when operating as vehicles of memory, with our ability to remember events of the past facilitated by an image’s availability and interchangeability. In a sense, then, visual memory’s texture becomes a facilitator for memory’s endurance. (2004: 9)

It seems necessary to think about visual texts of memory in the context of a process called premediation, which encapsulates the phenomenon of different

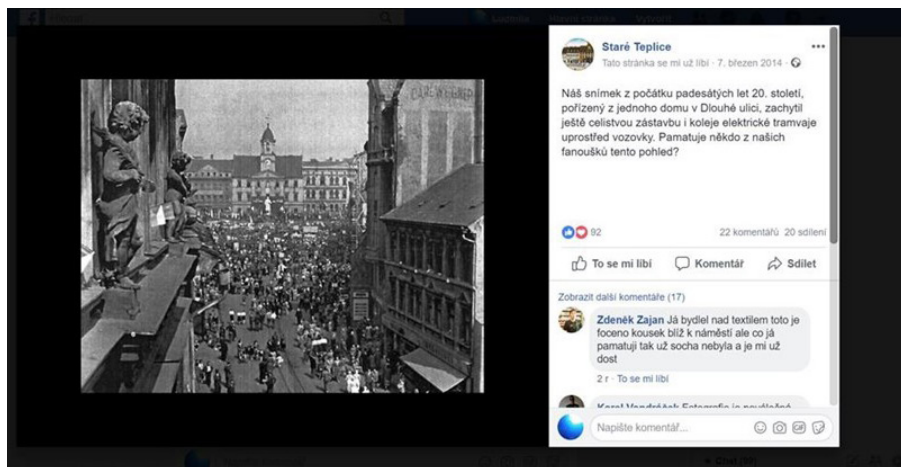


Fig. 1. A screen shot showing the social media media website devoted to the local history of Teplice. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/TeplitzSchonau> [available: August 2016]

media (especially visual) providing a public audience with an established schema of how to visualise, represent, and then read past events in the future; the representation of the Vietnam War, for instance, became the given frame for the war's relationship to modern military conflicts (Erll 2008: 389–399).

Online photo-sharing has become a tool for different memory practices (MacDonald 2015: 24) including interactional communicative memory based on the circulation of different objects of representation, which are shared and exchanged among members of a community of memory. MacDonald, in a study of online circulation of family photographs among two Facebook groups devoted to Salford, in North West England, points to the fact that:

The impulse that drives individuals repeatedly to seek out and engage others with whom their memories can be reconstructed is not itself algorithmically determined. The perception that there are other members interested in those memories is formed as a consequence of intentional human acts of communication and expression. (MacDonald 2015: 33)

Social media based or digitally-mediated communities of memory are a phenomenon which goes beyond the frame of Central European borderlands, but is common among groups or communities which deal with some kind of

social change affecting their present and shaping their future. The phenomenon is worthy of sociological interest, as most of the people actively taking part in creating a new version of collective memory are not the participants or witnesses of past events. Despite this, they create multimedia collages of memory (Kansteiner 2002: 190–191) consisting of different elements: visual, audible, linguistic, and so forth.

## **Research frame**

The field work, the main goal of which was to gather data mainly through interviews, was conducted in the second half of 2016 and included a few visits to the town of Teplice (Czech-German borderland). Teplice is a town in the Usti nad Labem region with a population of almost 50,000 people. Since the nineteenth century, the town has been well-known for its spa. Before World War II, the town, although within the borders of the First Czechoslovak Republic, had a seventy-eight percent German-speaking population (Kural, Radvanovský 2002: 74). The described fieldwork resulted in research material that includes recordings of the conducted photo-elicitation interviews, visual material used during the research, observations, and field notes.

### ***Research participants***

For the purpose of the discussed research, a purposive sampling technique was implemented while designing the sample for both borderland locations. Purposive sampling, which could also be called judgement sampling, consists of choosing research participants on the basis of differing qualities or characteristics which are desirable from the point of view of the research. The technique is not random, and the researcher is the one who decides what criteria people are to meet in order to be included in the research sample. (Etikan et. al 2015: 2). Purposive sampling methods could be divided into a few types. Regarding the discussed research, maximum variation sampling (MVS), also known as “heterogeneous sampling”, was chosen for this study. MVS is based on selecting research participants on a broad spectrum of qualities relevant to the research. The aim of this sampling approach is to comprehend the studied phenomenon at its fullest from different possible perspectives. (Etikan et. al 2015: 3).

The sample of interviewees consisted of fourteen interviewees of different age, gender, and ethnic background, including members of families which used to live in Teplice before the Second World War. The youngest interviewee was



eleven, the oldest was ninety-six when conducting the field research. The sample reflected three main ethnic groups which used to live in Teplice – Germans, Jews, and Czechs – and covers both memory makers and memory users of the community. The differentiation into memory makers and memory users have been applied according to Kansteiner (2002), based on the self-declaration of the research participants regarding their participation in various local activities concerning local past and history.

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnic origin</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Generation in borderland</b>	<b>Role in the community of memory</b>
Jana	27	Czech	higher	F	3rd	memory user (local activist)
Eliška	12	Czech-German	student	F	more than 5	memory user
Helena	11	Czech-German	student	F	more than 5	memory user
Michal	26	Czech-German	higher	M	more than 5	memory maker (local activist)
Jakub	30	Czech	higher	M	3rd	memory maker (local activist)
Eva	39	Czech	higher	F	1st	memory user
Jiří	42	Czech-German	higher	M	more than 5	memory user
Martin	72	Czech	higher	M	more than 5	memory user
Alena	62	Czech-German	secondary	F	3rd	memory user
Petr	72	Czech	secondary	M	1st	memory maker (local activist)
Jan	50	Czech	higher	M	2nd	memory user
Kryštof	52	Czech-Jewish	secondary	M	2nd	memory maker (local activist)
Barbora	96	Czech	elementary	F	more than 5	memory user
Tomáš	40	Czech	high school	M	more than 5	memory user

Table 1. Research participants in Teplice

### *Photo-elicitation interviews (PEIs)*

The photo-elicitation interview was used for the first time by John Collier in 1967. Since that time, it has become a recognised method of collecting data within qualitative research in social sciences, mainly in visual sociology (Clark-Ibáñez 2004: 1523). It consists in conducting a semi-structured, in-depth interview with the usage of visual texts – mostly photography. The interview is framed and structured by the visuals used. Since the interview is about confronting the interviewed person with two different symbolic systems of representation – verbal and visual – it also requires reflection in the further analysis.

One of the main advantages of the photo-elicitation technique is that it enables the researcher to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding between an interviewer and an interviewee. Through the use of visual material, the questions asked during the interview are framed by that material, which helps both sides of an interview situation be more assured that they know what the interaction is about while also making the interview more contextualised.

The key element in the photo-elicitation approach is not the photo itself, but the relationship with the problem under study. The images serve as triggers for evoking certain reactions, which are to be studied in the given research. The visual material itself is not the object of study. Its so-called function is to help elicit desired information from the research participant. Since the method consists of confronting people with visuals, it also helps respondents to analyse and see their own taken-for-granted thoughts and experiences (Harper 2002: 14).

### *Semiotic approach to visual texts of memory*

While working with the selected material, I applied a semiotic approach in the visual analysis. The selection of photographs used in the PEIs was made based on this approach. Semiotics presumes that “messages are made of signs and conveyed through sign systems called codes; meaning is derived only to the degree that the receiver of the message understands the code” (Moriarty 2002: 20–21). My understanding of how these codes, encapsulated in the photographs (visual texts of memory), work is founded on Peircean semiotics, where one of the key concepts is interpretation (against de Saussure’s idea of arbitrary signs). Interpretation as such is regarded as essential when it comes to making sense



Fig. 2. Example of a *memory collage* (Michal, 30, Czech origin), Teplice, Czech Republic, 2016. Source: <http://www.e-teplicko.cz/zpravy/4484-v-mukove-uctili-pamatku-padlych-americkyh-letcu> [available: August 2016]

out of visuals (2002: 21). According to Peirce, a sign represents somebody for something in regard to something. His theory of signs includes three elements: signifier/representation (the form of a sign), signified/referent (the object or concept), and an interpretant (the idea inside the concept; the sense made out of a sign).

In regard to this, I decided to code the pictures with metonymies (part for the whole), since the photographs are constantly denotative and connotative at the same time, and they “move” from the indexical mode, losing their primary context, becoming more and more connotative – either iconic or symbolic (Scott in Cabañes 2017: 34–35). Metonymies are connotative signs, the kind of signs which are “associated with something else, which then represents that something else” (Rose 2012: 82).

Photo Number	Main theme	Metonymy
1	classic view with the mountain	universal beauty of the place
2	Czech policemen marching out of town after the Munich Agreement	once Czech, then gone
3	the town's most representative street in the 1950s	once beautiful, then destroyed/non-existing
4	protests on Beneš Square (1989 Velvet Revolution)	once politically important, then periphery
5	a synagogue	once Jewish past, then gone
6	village of Flaje	once a normal place with people, then no place/no people
7	old brewery	once economically prosperous, then abandoned, bankrupt
8	<i>odsun</i> and liberation of Teplice in 1945	once German, then gone
9	train station in the 1960s	train station, non-connotative picture
10	crowded cafe in the old theatre building	once well-known and stylish, then average, provincial
11	football game on the local playground	universal sport activity
12	local commemorations (of American soldiers who died during WWII)	once absent in collective memory, then commemorated on the political level

Table 2. Set of photos used in Teplice PEI

The set of photos used in the interviews consisted of twelve photographs, selected from the internet sources, mostly Facebook fan pages devoted to posting, sharing, and exchanging visual texts of memory – old photographs and pictures regarding the past of Teplice. The photos represent different elements/parts of the communicative collective memory typical for the town of Teplice.

### What do we talk about when we talk about the past?

The analysis below discusses the most significant elements of the local collective memory in the town of Teplice, revealed through the research conducted in the Czech-German borderland. Three visual texts of memory (Fig. 3, 4, 5) were the most frequently chosen and referred to by the research participants. The



Fig. 3. Protests on Beneš square (Velvet Revolution of 1989), Teplice.  
Source: <https://www.gymtce.cz/index.php?sectionID=63> [available: August 2016]

study focuses on the meaning attached to the particular elements of the collective memory, represented by the visuals, as well as interprets it in the wider context of the role that the local collective memory plays in the borderland community.

### *Protests of 1989*

The picture showing the protests on Beneš Square in Teplice (Czech-German borderland) in November 1989, preceding the main protests of the Velvet Revolution in Prague, was one of the pictures picked by the interviewees most often and included in their collages. Although the event does not belong to any official discourse on the Velvet Revolution (which means that it is still not a part of the cultural collective memory regarding Assmann's differentiation), it turned out to be a visible and distinct element of the communicative collective memory.

The following extracts from different interviews indicate how the event (still not a part of any cultural memory discourse) is ritualised and shared and has become a collective experience, even among those who did not take part in it for different reasons (age, personal, etc.).

I: That one seems important to me. These are presumably environmental protests on Beneš Square, if I am correct that one, it seems to me that that it captures some important moment.<sup>2</sup>

(Michal, 26, Czech-German origin, Czech-German borderland)

I: That was a great feeling. This, this started with keys clinging ... and this feeling of pride that we can do it ... I am just thinking this cannot be those first days ... People did not have banners prepared at the beginning.<sup>3</sup>

(Martin, 72, Czech origin, Czech-German borderland)

I: So, it actually started here, the revolution in November! And it was actually here that the Communists, meaning power, spoke for the first time, THE FIRST TIME, to the people!<sup>4</sup>

(Kryštof, 52, Czech-Jewish origin, Czech-German borderland)

The protests are regarded as important, not only because they link an important historical event of nationwide recognition and which became institutionalised through a local event, but also – and this was highlighted by the interviewees – because it marked the beginning of the whole revolution; and this is why it is important. As one of the interviewees said, “We were here before Prague”, meaning Teplice was the first place in Czechoslovakia where protests against the communist regime started on such a scale. The issue of recognition is crucial here. In a peripheral area which has lost its political and economic meaning, commemorating the events of particular political importance and potential state-wide recognition seems to be one of the functions of collective memory and shared remembering. It is important to add that the protests are also hardly present in the local public discourse and were not commemorated until a year after the research took place. Since 2017, an annual commemoration has been organised by local activists who might be classified as memory makers.

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<sup>2</sup> I: Tak asi mi přijde důležitá tadle, to budou asi ekologický demonstrace na Benešáku, jestli se nepletu. Takže tadlecta mi jako přijde, že vystihuje důležitéj moment nějakej.

<sup>3</sup> I: No to byl pocit úžasný, takovýho toho, nooo tak takový to cinkání klíčkema začínalo, jo, prostě, asi asi hrdošti a to, že se dokážem tohle to... Já jenom přemejšlim, to nemůže bejt z těch prvních dnů. To ještě lidi neměli připravený transparenty.

<sup>4</sup> I: A vlastně, jak byla revoluce v listopadu hned, tak tady to vlastně začlo! A tady vlastně komunista jako moc se poprvé POPRVÝ bavil s lidem!

### *Little Paris: Theatre and spa life of Teplice*

The metaphor of Little Paris appeared extremely often in the Teplice interviews as a phrase the members of the community of memory used to describe the town's past. The image below refers to it, as it looks like a Renoir painting and resembles the atmosphere of fin-de-siècle Paris. The photo, showing the old theatre cafe in Teplice, was also frequently chosen by the interviewees. What is important here is that the metaphor was used across gender, ethnic origin, and age categories (from an interviewee who was ninety-six to a young inhabitant of the town).

I: This fame, that it was like a little Paris here, as my granny says, this might suit here, too.<sup>5</sup>

(Tomáš, 40, Czech origin, Czech-German borderland)

I: There was a huge difference [between Teplice and the rest of the Republic]. It was called a little Paris.<sup>6</sup>

(Barbara, 96, Czech origin, Czech-German borderland)

But the image was chosen not only due to its resemblance to Paris, but also due to its representation of the prestige Teplice used to have as a well-known spa throughout Europe in the nineteenth century, where a lot of cultural activities took place, and where cultural life flourished (from today's perspective):

I: And this one. This theatre in the nineteenth century was something. There were those, there was an opera, a musical comedy theatre, a drama theatre. They came here to the baths. And I think that the cultural life was a dominant part of that bath life, which I regard as important.<sup>7</sup>

(Jiří, 30, Czech origin, Czech-German borderland)

The picture stands for the glamorous past of the place and is connected to the economic prosperity of the town and region, as well:

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<sup>5</sup> I: Potom tady ta stará sláva, že to tady bylo jako malá Paříž, jak říká babička, to by možná bylo ještě i tady to k tomu, že...

<sup>6</sup> I: To byl velký rozdíl. To vono se říkalo Teplice malá Paříž.

<sup>7</sup> I: Pak tady ta. Protože vlastně to divadlo v celým 19. století, to bylo prostě něco, že jo. Tady byly ty, tady byla opera, opereta, činohra, jezdilo se sem do lázní a myslím si, že jako to ten kulturní život k tomu lázeňství silně patřil, tak proto si myslím, že je tohle důležitý.



Fig. 4. A crowded cafe in the old theatre building, Teplice. Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Czechoslovakia\\_1930\\_linguistic\\_map\\_created\\_2008-10-30.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Czechoslovakia_1930_linguistic_map_created_2008-10-30.svg) [available: August 2016]

I: I am thinking about those villa parts of town which the Germans left ... those ... the people, who were rich and smart, brought some culture here.<sup>8</sup>

(Jiří, 30, Czech origin, Czech-German borderland)

An important element of the Little Paris metaphor is that the German past of the place is almost automatically incorporated into it.

### *Jewish synagogue*

The third most frequent and popular element of communicative memory in Teplice that showed up in the research is the non-existing Jewish synagogue. This might be explained twofold: It is another dominant element of the memoryscape that is gone and exists only in old photographs, which refers to the aspect of loss, but it also belongs to an ethnic community which no longer lives here. Their absence, however, is the result of a third force (the Second World War

<sup>8</sup> I: Mně se třeba asociujou ty vilové čtvrti, co tady zbyly po těch Němcích, ty který jako, kde vlastně žili ty lidi, který byly bohatý, chytrý a přinášeli sem nějakou kulturu a to, no.





Fig. 5. The Jewish synagogue in Teplice.

Source: [http://krusnohorskedivadlo.blogspot.cz/2014\\_01\\_01\\_archive.html](http://krusnohorskedivadlo.blogspot.cz/2014_01_01_archive.html) [available: August 2016]

and Nazi occupation), and is not the result of Czech political or social actions. Therefore, compared to the difficult and complex history behind the expulsion of the German speaking population after 1945, it functions as a “safe” element which cannot serve as a direct face threat. It is also worth mentioning that the synagogue was well-known in pre-war Czechoslovakia, as it was one of the biggest in the country at that time.

R: And why the synagogue?

I: Because it was the biggest one in the Czech Republic. But is no longer here as it was demolished. I think this is an important part of the history of Teplice – this Jewish diaspora is still here somehow and, compared to the rest of the republic, it is rather significant. Or maybe significant is a too strong a word. But it is still functional, it has roots here.<sup>9</sup>

(Jiří, 30, Czech origin, Czech-German borderland)

<sup>9</sup> R: Proč? A proč ta synagoga?

I: The Jewish synagogue was simply fascinating. It had ... It had capacity for 2,000 worshippers. Here, before the war, eh, was the second largest Jewish community after Prague. 5,000 Jews used to live here, you know.<sup>10</sup>

(Jan, 50, Czech origin, Czech-German borderland)

I: This is one of the symbols that has disappeared, big symbols of Teplice. And the whole community disappeared with it.<sup>11</sup>

(Kryštof, 52, Czech-Jewish origin, Czech-German borderland)

It should be emphasised that the synagogue is also a symbol of something that is gone, both in a material and non-material sense: the building and the people. The motif of loss and disappearance is also present here.

The results of the conducted research point to those elements of borderland history which are regarded as important and significant to the local community: struggling with economic problems (collapse of industry and the economy after 1989), loss and disappearance as a constant element of both the material and non-material borderland memoryscape (the experience of the post-migration group), and the uncertainty of the future and the desire to influence it. The meaning ascribed to those elements – recognition, belonging, responsibility – are all adaptive parts of the emancipation process. As Boyer claims, “Imagination and memories may well be functionally adaptive – not because they liberate us from down-to-earth, here-and-know cognition but, on the contrary, because they constrain our planning and decision making in efficient ways” (Boyer 2009: 20).

The interesting question over the region’s future and direction of development should be raised here. There is an open inquiry as to whether the bottom-up, yet not institutionalised interactions around the local memory and commemorated past could become the breeding ground for a more advanced and organised struggle over the power in a borderland territory, manifested at the beginning, among others, through creating the local version of borderland history.

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I: No protože byla, že jo, největší v Čechách a už tady není, protože byla zbouraná. To si myslím, že je důležitá část té teplický historie, že ta židovská obec tady pořád tak nějak funguje a asi na poměry v republice je docela jako silná. Nebo silná je možná silný slovo, ale jako funkční, že to taky mělo kořeny.

<sup>10</sup> I: Židovská synagoga, která prostě byla fascinující. Měla... Vešlo se tam 2 tisíce věřících, což je neuvěřitelný. Tady byla před válkou, eh, vlastně druhá největší komunita Židů po Praze. 5 tisíc Židů tady bylo, jo.

<sup>11</sup> I: To je jedna ze symbolů jako takových, který zmizely, velkejch symbolů Teplic. A vodešla s tím celá komunita vlastně.

## Conclusions

The idea of locality or community lies not only in physical space, but also in a set of interactions (Gupta, Ferguson 1992: 8). In the case of the Czech-German borderland of the Sudetes, the imaginary region lives primarily in the inhabitants' talks about the future, while looking at the mythologised past. Photographs gain their meaning through the subjective "gaze of the viewer". People produce their meaning by attaching photographs to either their own personal experience and knowledge, or to some cultural discourses (Pink 2007: 82). The visual texts of memory, mostly old photographs which have sometimes been waiting – in drawers, attics, family albums, archives, and book stores – for more than seventy or even more years to be looked at again, are being recontextualised in the process of creating the ritualised communicative memory in the ethnic, cultural, and historical borderlands of Central Europe. New meaning is attached to them through the process of, usually, online sharing, discussing, and naming. They are being placed in and out the *social frames* of the agreed-upon version of the memory. The role of the visual text of memory in the memory-making process is crucial. Without any official (cultural memory) discourse on the past, and regarding the notion of the discontinuity of borderland culture, history, and tradition, disrupted by the post-war resettlement, visual texts of memory are at the same time both the medium and the message (McLuhan 2004). They are both the facilitator of the memory-making process and a proof for belonging, and what is more, they are also the main source of knowledge about the past. Photographs are about time and place and give viewers the illusionary feeling of owning them. The popularity of visual texts of memory in the ethnic, cultural, and historical borderlands of Central Europe is also connected to the notion of control over and *ownership of the place*; the visuality makes the process almost material and tangible.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and so is the memoryscape of the Central European borderlands. A landscape (a space with human activity – both material and non-material) needs a viewer, somebody who looks at it; without it, a landscape is just potential (Ćwiek-Rogalska 2017: 29–32). The landscape of the Central European borderlands has been used as a subject of great political, social, and economic shifts for the past hundred years, but it has received a new viewer: groups of borderland inhabitants who, for the first time since the new political and ethnic order was established in the post-war period, dare to see it in a new way, leaving the already-established, centre-generated frames and discourses.

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