

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND URBAN IDENTITIES¹

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Abstract

My paper focuses on the construction of the collective memory of certain social groups in an urban space. I studied issues related to re/construction of the collective memory and related group identities in two separate but inter-related research probes.

In the first case, I looked at the way in which the picture of a city was constructed in biographic narratives of the members of a group of small business owners and tradespeople as part of the urban middle class who lived in the studied city between 1918 and 1948. I studied this heterogeneous group (members of the Slovak majority as well as the Jewish minority) in the years from 1987 to 1997 and, through an analysis of their biographic narratives and oral histories I strove to reconstruct their way of life and their place in city life in the first half of the 20th century through their values system and everyday active participation in urban life and culture.

In the second field research I focused on efforts and concrete steps of present-day urban elites and political representatives (members of the municipal council, local government and employees of the City Hall) in the creation of the image of the city.

Both pieces of field research were carried out in the same city and they encompass a broad spectrum of issues related to social and collective memory, identity of the individual, as well as reflection on the urban space in the memory of certain social groups, and also the presence or absence of this specific group in the public space of the city and in the collective memory of its inhabitants.

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In my paper I use the concepts of collective memory, identity, identification which have been at the center of interest of social scientists in Central Europe since the mid-1980s. In Slovakia, more attention has been paid to the concepts since the late 1980s and also in relation to political and social changes after 1989.²

Keywords: *collective memory, identity, identification, urban space*

I. Image of the City and Collective Memory of One Social Group

Memory – either individual or collective – has become the center of attention of historians, but mostly ethnologists, anthropologists, psychologists, social psychologists, sociologists, philosophers and other social scientists. *In the first place*, it can be said that it represents the actualization of the past. It is important for the continuity of the individual, group, community. It represents a psychological and intellectual reconstruction portraying a selective picture of the past. This past is not only the past of a concrete personality, because individuals always move in a certain social context – such as the family, peer group, gender, occupational, religious, ethnic group and the like. As Halbwachs proposed, in this sense every memory can be regarded as collective. Memory is an elementary building block of identity: perception of the self and others, and it matters what kind of optics we use: whether the individual or that of a certain social group.³

When speaking about *social identity* we mean the identity of an individual that can be ascribed or acquired; as the main social categories defining the individual's social identity I regard his/her age, gender, occupation, family, social class, place of residence, religion ethnicity and the like.

Standard definitions of *identity* are based on observations that social interaction between individuals or groups is possible only when its actors start to perceive each other and distinguish each other as social subjects. It means that

² See Bauman, Z.: *Identita ve světe, který se globalizuje. Individualizovaná společnost*, Praha, Mladá fronta 2004, p. 166-181. (Identity in the Globalizing World. *The Individualized Society*. Czech translation.)

³ For a more detailed discussion see e.g. Rousso, H.: *Paměť není co byla*. Bartošek, K. (Ed.), *Dějiny a paměť*. Praha 1993, s. 25-30. (Memory is Not What it Used To Be. *History and Memory*)

they themselves either acknowledge their own identity and difference from others – enabling them to distinguish themselves from other groups – or these attributes are ascribed to them from the outside.

As the social identity of an individual is related to the performance of certain social roles that an individual should, according to social expectations, fulfill, the study of social identity focuses on the social membership of an individual and on his/her individual perception of this membership. In my research I tried to reconstruct, on the basis of oral histories and biographic narratives, the acts of members of the social group of small business owners and tradespeople, their self-reflection as members of this particular group, but also construction of the picture of the city in their memories as influenced by their social membership. In this concrete case there is some overlap of the concepts of social and collective identity, or they are used in parallel. I use the term social group to denote a group of people who are aware of their group membership and understand their group as a concrete, definable unit. In my understanding, the *social group* is the basic building block of social structure; it is a group of people interconnected by special relationships. As its basic traits I regard interaction, cooperation, common collective norms, goals, values, feelings of belonging to the group, definition of authority and heterostereotypes, solidarity, integration and identification, structure: the existence of positions/statuses/roles, its extent and duration. But in my opinion, the *function* of the group in a setting, i.e., “the activity of the given group aiming at continuation of its existence and its survival,” is its most important trait.⁴ Similarly, the group can be distinguished from other collectivities by the fact that it has meaning and importance for its members and they are aware of this meaning/importance (Jenkins 1998).

In the recorded narratives, former small business owners and tradespeople reflect mostly the 1930s and 1940s. This was a politically and economically dramatic period: the aftermath of the Great Depression, the rise of fascism and Nazism to the European political scene and the growing influence of the Slovak autonomist movement in the Czechoslovak republic. The urban milieu in Slovakia was also characterized by delayed modernization, which was reflected in the social composition of the population, including the middle class. Small business

owners and tradespeople, as part of the middle class, were an important economic and social power, although they were more or less jeopardized by transnational capital accelerated by industrial production and the growing position of new middle classes in the urban social structure. These also influenced their self-conscious evaluation of their own positions, power and influence in the city. To them the city was a space where strong social control determined behavior and actions. An individual had a clear idea about his/her social position, and what that meant for his/her personal, professional and social growth, what his/her roles were and how he/she should behave to be correctly understood, accepted and the like. On the basis of this knowledge they could articulate their goals and strategies of their achievement. In general, biographic narratives of members of this social group construct the urban space as a communication framework with these peoples as main actors: through their physical presence in their businesses, through the exercising of their trade, they were an integral part of the town's everyday culture and communication; through their behavior and activities, influenced by values and norms of their professional group, they participated in the creation of the urban culture.

In the first half of the 20th century, representatives of the studied social group experienced two changes of the political regime – the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 and its breakup after 1938. They more sharply remember and more often recollect the latter – when the democratic regime was replaced by totalitarianism in 1938 and 1939. However, with the exception of Jewish entrepreneurs, this fact is mentioned only marginally in their narratives. This is one example of what psychologists call selective perception: in each situation with its almost infinite number of facts we select only those that are important to our objectives and disregard the rest (Berger 1991:55). Therefore, for instance, “Aryanizations” – confiscation of Jewish property in the war-time Slovak State, are not a strong theme of biographic stories of non-Jewish entrepreneurs no matter whether they profited from them or not. “Aryanizations” are mostly mentioned in relation to the value system of the then entrepreneurs and their negative impact upon it. “Aryanizations” are used as a parallel to the later period of nationalization of private property in February 1948 that destroyed small business owners as a whole (Vrzgulová 1998).

In all biographical narratives there is a strong auto-image of the entrepreneur as a public personality, an opinion maker, a role model to be emulated, and the like. Owners of businesses and stores regarded themselves, and usually were also regarded by others, as personalities with strong opinions, with

⁴ For a more detailed discussion see Vrzgulová, M. (1997): *Živnostníci – kultúrotvorný prvok v mestskom prostredí*. Bratislava, ÚEt SAV, Dizertačná práca, 203 s. (Small Business Owners as the Element of Creation of Local Culture in the Urban Setting. Doctoral Dissertation)

a positive affinity to the space in which they lived and did their business. Competition and relations between and among individual entrepreneurs are often described in a simplified way, downplaying differences and clashes. This is undoubtedly also due to the fact that much time has passed since the actual events, which endows their interpretation with romantic undertones. Distortions can also be caused by incorrect interpretation of narratives on the part of researchers when they *hear something other than what has been said*. This risk is also always present in the study of the present, although its likelihood is higher in historical reconstructions. Historian Lubomír Lipták pointed to specificities of historical experiences and hence of the memory of a generation, group or individual. The awareness of historical coordinates in the life of individual people helps the researcher to better understand their reflection on a certain historical event or their own life (Lipták 1992).

While non-Jewish entrepreneurs, after the creation of the war-time Slovak State, also construct the picture of the city in an almost unaltered way (they reflect the change of the regime and politics primarily through their impact on their own lifestyle and business), their Jewish colleagues' biographies portray "another" city. Implementation of anti-Jewish laws led to narrowing of their communication space to the family, relatives, and friends, and brought about changes in their standing in the urban social structure, the loss of business and ultimately of their civil and human rights. Simply, the public space ceased to belong to them, and they reflect on it in this way.

Having their business, together with their private lodgings,⁵ located in the city center – central squares and the adjacent business street, was a clear sign of social status of members of the studied social group. Jewish entrepreneurs had to leave these spaces, which were THE most highly valued in the social topography of the city. To them, that fact meant not only a loss of property but also a loss of status, and it concerned also the life of the majority although this majority did not realize it and often still does not.

The life stories of Jewish small business owners and tradespeople living in the city in the first half of the 20th century represent the specific memory of a subgroup that used to be an important part of the urban space. Their auto-image contains statements about their efforts not to attract attention to their "otherness"; the theme of assimilation and the Jewish identity in a society

marked by modernization processes is also often voiced. Memories of representatives of this social group also focus on the interwar period (esp. the beginning of the 1930s), on the period of the wartime Slovak State and the Holocaust, as the cornerstone of Jewish identity after 1945, and on frustrated expectations in the postwar period.

In their biographies, Jewish residents of the city articulate their affinity to Jewry and Jewish identity in a very similar way symptomatic of the urban milieu of Western Slovakia of the first half of the 20th century. All of them stated their lukewarm affinity to Judaism and they considered their families to be more or less assimilated. The positions of Jewish respondents in relation to their own identity oscillated between complete assimilation (not to differ, to be on equally good terms with both Jewish and non-Jewish fellow citizens) to practicing Judaism according to the Torah (mostly "Neologue" Judaism) emphasizing concrete non-conflictual relations with the majority in everyday situations. Almost without exception, the interwar period resonates in their memories as the time when communication barriers broke down and were replaced (at least on the surface) by norms and values accepted in the whole social space in everyday forms of public (in the neighborhood, in business and professional life, in offices, schools, interest and professional associations, cafés and streets) as well as private contacts.

Multifaceted plurality, typical for the urban space of Central Europe, was also present in the studied city. Its residents differed in terms of their ethnicity and religion as well as their culture. It can be said that it was this horizontal differentiation that, on the one hand, offered possibilities for interaction while, on the other, it contributed to the constant presence of differences, and even *contradictions*, that are in the memory of the members of the Jewish minority interlinked with ambivalent evaluation of their everyday communication with the majority. There is much similarity in the way they describe their own position in the city: they largely belonged to the urban middle class, which was reflected in their social status, lifestyle and everyday interactions. It was also reflected in the location of their businesses in the social topography of the city – in the historical center and the main business street. The intensity of contacts was higher in their own extended family and it was common to help needy people within their own group. With non-Jewish people they tried to maintain as non-conflictual relations as possible. The small size of the city and the power of social control did not permit for much deviation from social norms and expected behaviors in the public space.

⁵ Contrary to the present, for small entrepreneurs of the first half of the 20th century, these two worlds – professional and private, were closely intertwined

The end of the 1920s brought a radical change. The regime change formally came in March 1939, but my Jewish respondents had felt the change in the social climate earlier than that – they speak about the general mobilization in 1938 that was followed by the creation of an autonomous Slovak country. Heightened activities of the Hlinka Guards, their classmates joining the Hlinka Youth on a mass scale, proclamations of support of the political orientation represented by the Hlinka Slovak People's Party, the increase in nationalist sentiments – all this marked the atmosphere in the city. Most contacts still remained unchanged, but the nature of many was already changing. Verbal attacks, confrontations, invectives in the local press became commonplace. Much of this was undoubtedly due to the fascist propaganda counting on the latent anti-Semitism of the population. The declaration of the independent Slovak State meant the end of the relatively calm previous period. Anti-Jewish laws and governmental decrees and abundant anti-Jewish propaganda disseminated by the media contributed to swift narrowing of the communication space of Jewish small business owners, and of the Jewish minority as a whole. Their opportunities for free existence and activities dwindled. In the memories of my respondents it is apparent that this new political reality completely overshadowed the results of Jewish assimilation efforts. The only possible mode of existence was the life in Jewish institutions in a strictly delineated space that was forced upon them. The city was gradually constructed as a “space without Jews,” which, at the same time, was also a demonstration of the strength of new political forces. This situation is a textbook example of a process when the social location of an individual/group ascribed by the others conflicts with the self-perception of this individual or group, which leads to an identity crisis.

Members of the Jewish community were wrenched out of their routine way of life, marked against their will and pushed out of their usual frame of social communication. All social contacts narrowed down to the family, friends and neighbors. The urban public space ceased to be a Jewish space; usual patterns of behavior and social behavior did not officially apply to them any longer. People's reminiscences of this period are filled with ambivalent statements and judgments. What is important about these strongly emotional memories is the accuracy of facts and details that fatally impacted people's lives: names of denunciators, aggressive or sympathetic Guards members, those who confiscated Jewish property and the like. Memories of the year 1945 convey hopes for restoration of the prewar climate of tolerance and subsequent disappointment over political and social developments, when the respondents again iso-

lated themselves from the broader society and turned inwards towards their own community or family.

The ordeal of the former small entrepreneurs (both Jewish and non-Jewish) is an active part of their individual, family or collective memory and, at the same time, it is an important basis of local memory. It is significant as part of the city as a whole and also provides crucial coordinates for present communication for those who still remember or who have not forgotten.

The official culture of remembrance or deliberate forgetting after 1948 and during decades of the communist rule purposefully omitted and marginalized the importance and the very existence of small business owners and tradespeople. First, in the first half of the 1940s, ownership of nationalized or dismantled workshops, small companies and businesses was transferred from Jewish to Slovak hands, which was followed by the gradual forcible expulsion of the entrepreneurs from the economic, social and cultural scene of the city.

What followed after 1948 was diametrically opposed to the social world of the small entrepreneurs. The main reason for their destruction was their lifestyle and the values they honored. The core of individual biographies is the system of traits of the groups – habitus, which is a generative principle of different and differentiating practices and opinions (Bourdieu 1998). Articulation and demonstrative verbalization of the *difference* of one's own social group within the urban community realized in the last phase of the existence of the political regime (records of narratives from 1988 and 1989) that strove to erase this difference from the social space and memory through social and physical destruction of its representatives, endowed the life narratives with specific meanings. As if by narrating their life stories, former small entrepreneurs tried to rehabilitate themselves in their own eyes and reestablish themselves in the symbolic hierarchy of the urban social space. Their acts, everyday practices, opinions, proclamation of collective interests on one hand endowed their existence with meaning, while explaining their logical interconnectedness with the local social space. And even though small entrepreneurs have always been a heterogeneous, richly diversified group, their fate after 1948 has become one of the unifying elements of their stories. Those almost 50 years that have passed since their common collective past have significantly influenced their perception and interpretation of their ordeal. The main determining fact was their interest in capturing and retelling their experiences through the prism of their status. They endeavored to logically explain their acts from the perspective of

social beings with their own position in real historical time and space to a person (researcher) without the same social and historical experience. What was important was not only who was speaking and what was being told – and how, but also to whom and when was this conveyed.

In the families of former small entrepreneurs the experience was handed down in family communication and also active in the following generation – the generation directly afflicted by various forms of discrimination by the official political regime. The awareness of group membership was also transferred in a weaker form to the grandchildren's generation, but the year 1989 and the ensuing political change also sparked a renewed interest induced by processes of social rehabilitation and property restitutions.

In the group of Jewish respondents, past experiences and memories of the Holocaust were often suppressed, and people often also concealed their Jewish background. Many members of the Jewish community chose to act in this manner due to their experiences and because they wanted to protect their children and relatives from experiencing similar intolerance and discrimination. The transfer of information within respondents' own families was often accelerated by "outside" interest in their experiences (an increasing number of research projects focusing on testimonies of Holocaust survivors in the 1970s and also later in the 1990s).

While tri-generational orally transmitted memory is rather unstable, reminiscences about traumatic experiences (the Holocaust, political persecutions) are more stabilized and anchored in the memory of the next generations.

But what about the official social memory of the whole local community? Pichler (Pichler 1999), in his study about searching for lost memory, writes that there are various strategies of remembering. He even speaks about the politics of remembering or forgetting, giving examples of national and communist politics of forgetting the undesirable. Collective experiences creating the basis of social memory of former small business owners and tradespeople, as well as memories of urban residents of Jewish origin, became a subject of this politics of forgetting or silencing. I agree with Pichler, who prefers the strategy of recollection of the issues related to the whole of state-building rather than just nation-building, as this enables more pluralistic capturing of the past; assembling of the common local (urban) memory from collective memories of particular components of the (in our case, urban) community. The best politics of remembering does not suppress the undesirable which we would rather forget: this way the history we never had a chance to experience could also become our

history. In the recent past, the acceptance of different experiences and their different reflections inspired resentment induced by this very difference but also by the kind of information these memories contain. Why is this so? It may be due to mental indolence preventing people from critically reflecting upon their recent past caused by last remnants of the totalitarian mentality in each of us. Perhaps it is difficult to accept the fact that it is possible to remember in various ways, or we cannot admit that one universal historical truth, one correct version of the past, is simply a myth.

II. Construction of the Image of the City and Local Identity

Related to the way of remembering and forgetting, or construction of local memory, is also the second piece of research that I have been carrying out since 2002. It is focused on urban local identity and local politics in relation to the construction of the image of the city both internally and towards the outside world. I was interested, among others, in the ways in which representatives of the city (municipal council, local government and City Hall) construct the history and image of the city for the current generation, what elements they use and what they want to achieve.

In marketing and media politics, the following elements that can be used as building blocks in the process of creation of the image of the city crystallized:

Representative symbols of the city

– important objects and their meaning for local identity: the castle, the city tower inside the fortification wall; personalities – the famous lord of the castle Matúš Čák Trenčiansky, the famous writer Vojtech Zamarovský; locally important events – the Roman inscription carved into the castle rock as proof of the most northern presence of the Roman legions, etc.

History

– the role of the city in the history of the country – as a business and administrative center
 – local history: local historic personalities, events, legends
 the rector of the Piarist secondary school Jozef Branecký, the founder of the County Society for Natural History (Brančik), the re-discoverer of the Roman inscription in the castle rock (Stárek), national and cultural personalities who in the past lived in the city (S. Štúr, K. Štúr, Palacký, Dohnányi).

Myths and legends

- working with historical narratives, their dissemination and promotion, identification with them. Some legends are still alive in the collective memory of the residents and are part of their local identity, for instance:
- the legend about the Well of Love from the times of the Ottoman wars
- the legend about a secret passage to the castle and about the tomb of Matúš Čák
- about municipal executioners
- about the hermits St. Svorad and Benadik who lived on Skalka hill near Trenčín

Traditions

- their current forms – annual markets, fairs, festivals
- informing city dwellers about the origin and history of traditions (e.g. Skalka hill near Trenčín as the oldest pilgrimage place in Slovakia)
- creation of balance between commercial use of traditions and those that are still alive (e.g., a combination of the Christmas Market and a living Nativity)
- long-term attempts at revitalization of the city promenade

Education

- the history of local education vs. the current situation (establishing continuity with interrupted historical development of, e.g., parochial schools and their importance for the life of the city)
- the structure of today's educational institutions and their involvement in the process of identification with the city and creation of its image through: current local personalities (their portraits aired by the local TV), annual awards for *the child personality /celebrity*, annual meetings of writers – natives from the city, combined with a discussion in the municipal library

Sports

- the history of famous clubs and athletes
- the current hockey club, the legacy and celebration of successful players and their career in the NHL, their financial support for the construction of a hockey stadium for the youth – these are facts that contribute to the creation of the modern image of the city, mainly for the younger generation of its residents.

Culture and arts

- Trenčín as the co-founder of the ARTFILM film festival
- the city of the famous Bažant Pohoda open-air festival

- the city of trade fairs and exhibitions in the Trenčín Mesto Módy Exhibition Area
- the continuing absence of a municipal theater vs. growing activities of amateur theaters and ensembles of historical fencing

The above-mentioned elements are the main areas of local politics in film festival the creation of the image of the city and in the formation of the local identity of its residents. Effective tools are mainly interactive events for people of various ages organized in public spaces, working with school-age children, improving the communication of municipal institutions with the people, a good city website and the like. The city is among those regional centers in Slovakia that record positive economic growth and a low unemployment rate and offer a relative high quality of life, i.e., it is a modern and developing city. Despite this fact, its history along with the commemoration of it *is* an active, living part of people's local identity.

However, just as in previous decades, even before 1989, the process of commemoration of local personalities, important dates and historic monuments is selective, dated and serving a certain purpose.

The symbols representing Trenčín⁶ were already promoted by the city officials (active in the area of tourism) in the first half of the 20th century.⁷ Both current tourist guides and those from half a century back introduce to potential visitors the same city symbols. We can find there the Castle, below it St. Mary's Hill with the complex of religious monuments (the parish church of the Birth of Our Lady with the charnel house of St. Michael), the historic monuments zone basically congruent with the main square (consisting of religious monuments, a part of the municipal fortifications with a tower and urban architecture of the 17th–20th centuries). Also temples of various religions – Catholic, Lutheran, Jewish, are among representative showplaces of architectural and historical value. They are a demonstration of the religious diversity of the city's

⁶ I studied activities of employees of the Municipal Office in city tourism in 2004 and 2005. I also use my data from my own research carried out in the city in the previous decade.

⁷ The following quotation from the brochure *Trenčín Invites You* from the wartime Slovak state illustrates the fact that the city residents were aware of the tourism potential of their city and had a strong local identity: "Trenčín, an ancient Slovak town, with perhaps the richest and most interesting history among all Slovak towns, is making a rapid progress in terms of its culture and material development. As concerns natural beauties, it has beautiful groves, forests, fertile soil, a healthy climate, good water and a world known spa in the vicinity and it's a home of good Slovaks. Shouldn't it rightfully be called the pearl of the Slovak country?" (Trenčín vás zve. Trenčín: Tlač. Gansel, 1940, p. 3.)

past and present, its culture in the broadest sense, and perhaps also the tolerant climate of the city. Less frequently, the current offer includes monuments from the modern history of the city – functionalist buildings, evidences of modernization – the first railway station, the original and current post office, the Municipal Office building, educational institutions, the Court of Law, or urban middle-class villas in the Kollar neighborhood. At present, even mention of the former small business district demolished in the 1970s is missing. The official argument was inappropriate hygienic conditions, but the generation of former small entrepreneurs as well as the middle generation sees the demolition in the context of communist ideology: in the minds of city residents the whole neighborhood was constantly reviving memories of the pre-communist era. Sidewalks, workshops, firms located in houses of small entrepreneurs were replaced by megalomaniac communist buildings of the District Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, the District Army House and a shopping center. And although more than thirty years have passed since their construction they still have not been integrated into their surroundings and they are incompatible with the rest of the broader center.

The city creates its image not only through tourist guides which are constructs of a certain “desirable” picture of the city, but also through memorial plaques commemorating important personalities or events. After 1989, those personalities that communist ideologues considered acceptable were joined by local religious dignitaries, e.g., the rector of the Piarist school and the writer Branecký (1882-1962) or professionally successful natives from or residents of the city (painters, architects). In contrast, the memorial plaque of the leftist intellectual Clementis disappeared from the main square, just as the plaque commemorating the tragic death of unemployed Matúš Drgoň, who died during a strike of local textile mill workers, disappeared from the former Workers’ House. Similarly, the local synagogue still lacks a memorial tablet to commemorate the tragic events of the Holocaust and its local form. Rather than remembering events pertaining to modern, and more problematic, history the re-constructors of local historical memory find inspiration in more distant events – the presence of Roman legions, the Middle Ages and history related to the castle.

Quotations and paraphrases from the local history of the royal burgh or the castle can often be heard at both regular and one-time events taking place in public spaces. Usually, these events involve parades in period costumes, jousting tournaments and the like, featuring elements of traditional culture of sur-

rounding villages staged by local folk ensembles. The form and context in and through which these are incorporated into particular shows attest to the fact that the primary function of their exploitation in tourism is their visual appeal at the expense of historical accuracy, which, however, is not a rare occurrence in today’s exploitation of historical facts.

Local history and the importance of the urban space in the historical development of the region and the country as a whole are at the center of attention of the local political elite. Local cultural heritage and its European contexts are stable parts of local identity while (logically) they also constitute one of the priorities of local policies. They are tools to help politicians to safely address the majority of their constituency, and through them they foster and realize their intentions related to local development. But ambitions of the political elite go even further: inspired by examples of European historic towns they also try to newly formulate and reconstruct the image of the city in the collective memory of its residents through the European context. Through this changed point of view they want to redirect reflection on history and the local cultural heritage away from the immutable historical space towards its perception as an asset endowed with new meanings and valuable not only in the local but also in the European context.

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INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS OF A TOWN – HISTORY AND PRESENT

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Abstract

Social and professional groups create a significant part of an urban community. It can be proved that business activities have existed ever since the Middle Ages in the town of Banská Bystrica: there were activities connected with mining and metallurgy (mines, smiths, etc.) and there were sawmills, textile factories, mills, and distilleries in the period of the establishment of manufacturing and factories. Powerful local business families were formed in this context. The period between the two world wars was especially prosperous. A number of trades and shops were reconstructed. Later, during the socialist period, the tradition was interrupted and, after 1989, business activities did not continue in the tradition of family business. Commercial activities in the town have now been influenced and homogenized by the establishment of famous-brand retail chains and restaurants offering foreign cuisine.

A professional group of miners in Banská Štiavnica had helped to create mining traditions. These traditions have been reproduced today – even after mine closings. Social activities of the town also reflect tradition.

Keywords: ***urban anthropology, industrial and commercial districts***

The main aim of this study is to point out significant changes in public town spaces which created town cores and were centers of trade, crafts and businesses for centuries. My hypotheses are as follows:

- 1) In 1989, after a long period of a totalitarian regime, when all the functions of the town were centralized under the aegis of Communist ideology, the town attracted its original functions back. It was closely connected with a growing number of small businesses based on the private ownership of former own-