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LOCAL MEMORY POLICY. THE CASE OF WAŁBRZYCH

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ORCID no. 0000–0002–7163–9923**e-mail:** wseczyk@pwsz.com.pl**Abstract**

Until 1989 Wałbrzych was an important industrial center of Lower Silesia. The system transformation which started in 1989 led to the liquidation of enterprises in the mining, ceramics and textile industries. The city began to be perceived in Poland as a city of high unemployment, illegal shallow coal mines or political corruption.

The city authorities began to wonder what events from the past could be helpful in creating its new image. They undertook a number of activities in this regard. The questionnaire was to assess the effectiveness of the city's activities. It was carried out among secondary school students, students and the employees of Wałbrzych city institutions, teachers of Wałbrzych schools and councilors of the City Council. The survey was conducted in October and November 2019. The respondents indicated mainly the activities of the authorities aimed at personalizing local historical policy. The city authorities undertook a number of other initiatives in the field of local remembrance policy. The surveys showed that the initiatives were not known to the inhabitants of Wałbrzych. In the minds of respondents, there were only two historical events, namely May 3 and November 11. To a small extent, they participated in historical ceremonies present in national historical politics (e.g. the Day of the Cursed Soldiers). Apart from the figure of Princess Daisy, most respondents were unable to identify other people important to the region. Although there are a number of organizations and associations in the city, only the Princess Daisy Foundation conducted the effective and visible activities in the field of local remembrance policy. Although the respondents declared their interest in history, their knowledge at the local level is low.

Keywords: memory policy, historical policy, local memory policy, Wałbrzych

Introduction

Wałbrzych is a city with powiat (county) rights located in the Central Sudetes in south-west Poland. Until 1989, it was an important industrial center of Lower Silesia known mainly for its mining and ceramics industries. From 1975, it was also the seat of the authorities of Wałbrzych Province. Until 1959, the city was characterized by the large role of national minorities. This is the place where Jews who survived the Holocaust ended up. Similarly, Poles from Germany, France and the Soviet Union moved to Wałbrzych. The area was also a place of Greek emigration after the end of the civil war. The city was not damaged during the war, the entire pre-war infrastructure of the city was preserved. What was beneficial for Wałbrzych in the short term turned out to be its problem in the long term. The lack of investments resulted in the progressive pollution of the environment, the decapitalization of both residential buildings and industrial plants. The political transformation which started in 1989 led to the liquidation of enterprises from the mining, ceramics, and textile industries. The city began to be perceived in Poland as a city of high unemployment, illegal shallow coal mines and political corruption.

Assumptions, questions, and research method

The political change made in 1989 raised an open question: what from the past could, and what should, remain in urban space. During the Polish People's Republic decisions in the field of historical policy belonged to the communist authorities. After 1989, it was the local authorities, together with local actors, that could make decisions on what should be commemorated. The need to adapt to the new political reality has changed the way of thinking about history. Cities began to wonder what events of the past are helpful in creating their new image. Some cities had a simplified task in creating a new historical policy. Others, such as Wrocław, had to re-create active historical policy (Korzeniewski, 2008, p.59). Wałbrzych was in a similar situation to Wrocław. Wałbrzych faced the risk of being uprooted. After all, the city was a patchwork of people from various parts of Europe – France, Germany, the eastern borderlands of the Second Polish Republic, Jews, and after a few years also Greeks. Although it seemed that after 1989 it was possible to create a local historical policy within a few years, it can be seen that this process is still ongoing and has not been completed. A number of actions have been undertaken in this respect, although they have become more visible only in the last decade.

The open questions are as follows: what values could the city refer to, what events or persons from the communist period could it identify with? Were there any patterns to which it could refer from before 1945? To what extent were the actions aimed at creating a local historical policy effective? The survey was to answer these questions. It was aimed at secondary school students, students, the employees of the institutions of the city of Wałbrzych, the teachers of Wałbrzych schools and the councilors of the City Council. The assumption was to survey groups that were not only recipients but also participants-creators of many initiatives in the area of local politics. The survey was completed by 589 people (50.2% employees, 23.1% students, 25.7% pupils, 1% pensioners). 33.3% of people were under 20, 45.7% have lived in Wałbrzych for over 30 years. The survey was conducted in October and November 2019. The survey was to answer the question to what extent the city authorities' actions were effective. Moreover, around which events or characters was

the narrative of local politics built? It was also important to determine whether the city's activities are consistent with the central historical policy. The role of the local government is very important in this process because it not only has financial resources, but is also considered the main creator of the identity of local communities (Morawiec, 2015, p. 53).

The literature on the subject emphasizes that the concept has been taken from German literature (Wolff-Powęska, 2007, p.9). It is undoubtedly one of the policy tools that supports the activities of public institutions and political power (Wałdoch, 2017, pp.49–50). In a democratic state it is a subject of discussion and its impact is much more limited than in a non-democratic state. It strengthens specific views, shapes social attitudes, imposes specific views and interpretations (Materski, 2014, p.93). It is implemented not only in the national dimension, but also in the local space and it strengthens the attitudes of national identity and local community. However, there may be a tendency to ideologize historical politics due to the needs of internal politics or international relations (Ponczek, 2013, p. 14).

The term historical policy was used in the text by Marek Cichocki “W pułapce z przeszłości” [Eng. In a trap of the past] in 1995] (Chwedoruk, 2018, p. 15). The debate around the concept was initially conducted among journalists and scientists. The disputes were dominated by the issue of whether historical policy was needed. It was said to be appropriated by conservative environments. It was argued that the thesis about the deficit of historical policy was not consistent with reality. With time, some people wondered how to conduct it. During the Law and Justice rule it became one of the elements of the party's policy (Chwedoruk, 2018, pp. 154–159). The disputes also focused on the issue of defining the concept and its name. Is it possible to talk about historical policy in the local sphere or about the policy of historical remembrance or about local memory policy? For Dorota Malczewska-Pawelec and Tomasz Pawelec it would be appropriate to define the policy of historical memory because “we mean the actions taken by the representatives of the authorities for intentional modeling of collective historical memory and exercising control over it; in other words, to rule it in order to achieve specific ideological and political goals (most often associated with the broadly understood intention to legitimize that power and the social order it supports)” (D. Malczewska-Pawelec, T. Pawelec, 2011, p.8). In this case, these would be the actions aimed at transforming, creating and deconstructing memorial sites.

The actions in the Polish People's Republic consisted both in creating a new memory model and maintaining some elements and remodeling others (Korzeniewski, 2008, p.60). The difference between what was officially propagated, and the historical knowledge passed on in the family was visible. It was not until the end of the Polish People's Republic that it was possible to refer to the role of Józef Piłsudski in the creation of the Second Polish Republic. The fall of the communist system did not automatically erase all the elements of the previous era in the field of historical policy. In the urban space after 1989, two metaphors used in commemoration activities were visible – “democratization of memory” and “commercialization of memory” (Korzeniewski, 2008, p.59). Democratization meant the return of tradition which previously was unavailable and illegal. The memory was pluralized and, at the same time, the difference between official and private memory disappeared. Usually, actions were taken to remove the symbols of Soviet domination from the local space. Although at the local level there were tendencies to preserve local habits or symbols. In the long-term context, initiatives have increasingly been based on market-based functioning.

Research on local historical policy is carried out by political scientists, sociologists, and ethnographers. Researchers focus on questions concerning the attitudes of local government towards the implemented historical policy (Wałdoch, 2017). They ask about the type of narrative addressed to the local community in order to avoid identity uprooting (Morawiec, 2015). Moreover, they wonder how the historical identity of city residents is built (Opiola, 2015). However, the case of Wałbrzych is different. City residents cannot refer to the historical past. There have been no events in the history of the city around which one could build a sense of local community. It is also difficult to build local patriotism around the events of 1989, as the city was heavily affected by the economic transformation. The aim of the article is to answer the question of what actions are taken by city authorities to create a sense of local identity. Around which values or historical figures is the narrative of the message built? Are these actions consistent with the feelings of the surveyed residents? The article uses the information from the official websites of the Town Hall in Wałbrzych and local social networks, but it will not always be possible to connect the information provided with the actual state.

Activities of local government authorities and the opinion of surveyed residents

In the creation of historical policy, reference is often made to the historical knowledge of the inhabitants, as according to TNS Polska research, one third of Poles show an interest in history (Wałdoch, 2011, pp.54–57). The surveyed group of residents of Wałbrzych differs from research in this respect, as 61.2% of them confirm that during their education they were interested in history, and 69.8% read books on historical topics. This does not mean that central historical policy is reflected at the local level. The decentralization of power in Poland and the large independence of local government units make it difficult to talk about a uniform historical policy on a national scale. Local authorities often take actions that are very different from those of state authorities (e.g. decommunization of street names in Warsaw).

In practice, most often local memory policy is conducted by local government institutions and the people who are particularly active in presenting its interpretation. Such persons served as the leaders of social memory; usually they were the leaders of the local community. They operated in the various types of organizations or administrative structures. In practice, local policies were often at odds with state policies. In the case of Wałbrzych, several active entities can be identified, such as the Duchess von Pless Foundation which is the idea of Mateusz Mykityszyn and Paweł Wyszowski. The initiatives of Marcin Kuleszo (an employee of the Former Mine) or the German Social and Cultural Society in Wałbrzych are also worth mentioning. It would seem that local media should play a large role in these activities. However, the fall of the weekly “Tygodnik Wałbrzyski” with a 50-year tradition and local portals with little impact do not confirm this assumption. The weekly, until the end of its activity, systematically familiarized its readers with the history of Wałbrzych, both from the Polish People’s Republic and pre-war periods in the free supplement (“Wałbrzyska Trybuna, no. 6/19, “Tygodnik Wałbrzyski”, 15th July 2019, no. 28).

The example of Poznań pointed to the possibility of distinguishing several strategies in this area: taming Prussianism, patriotic strategy, decommunizing and organic work

(Skoczylas, 2015, p. 252). In the first period after 1989, Wałbrzych did not undertake broader activities in this respect. Only during the last decade was there a greater activity of the city in implementing initiatives similar to the Poznań strategy. References to the pre-war period are visible through “taming” the history of the Hochberg family. The Duchess von Pless Foundation was created because, as its creators recognized, **“Duchess Daisy von Pless is our Wałbrzych heritage.”** It is a beautiful symbol of the city’s history, next to the closed down mines, practically the only one. An Englishwoman from the turn of the century is also the only historical figure from before 1945 who survived in the minds of the inhabitants. She survived not only as the first celebrity from Wałbrzych, whose pearls and charitable activities became legendary, but as a life-loving pacifist, social reformer and an angel of the poor” (the material in the possession of the author received from Mateusz Myktytyszyn). The foundation’s goal was also to shape the sense of regional identity of the residents of Wałbrzych, popularize historical knowledge, promote the creativity of the inhabitants of Wałbrzych, the Wałbrzych region and Lower Silesia in the country and abroad. Therefore, the foundation’s activities were strongly connected with the city’s tasks; they took them over and implemented them with its consent. The activities of the foundation also made it possible to popularize the Książ Castle, the seat of the duchess, which until now was rather not associated with the city.

The city after 1945 was not homogeneous in terms of nationality and culture. Although many years have passed since 1945, the research shows that the diverse origins of the inhabitants of Wałbrzych are visible in their minds. In the case of Wałbrzych, this diversity of origin made it difficult to create a uniform impact model. Those who came to the city brought their cultural, linguistic, and mental differences to it. Disputes were visible between those who came from Borysław and the Poles returning from Germany or France (e.g. in the field of work culture). But origin also had an impact on the transmission of historical knowledge. The respondents pointed out that the family (parents – 50.6%, grandparents – 58.6%) was the main source of historical knowledge, apart from school. It was the members of the family who conveyed the true story of the events in the Eastern Borderlands after 1939. New trends are also visible. Trips and computer games are a source of knowledge, along with the family. The dominance of websites in learning history today is no longer questionable. The young generation is increasingly pointing to the interactive forms of learning about the past. Many computer games are complex stories based on historical events and facts. It is surprising that as many as 17% of respondents do not know the place of origin of their family. Usually, they are the youngest – pupils and students, which raises concerns. It can be assumed that the family tradition of transferring knowledge about its origin has been interrupted.

In the case of Wałbrzych, its monothematic history was a problem in conducting local policy after 1989. The industrial city was not able to create facts or people who could play an important role in shaping local memory. None of the people performing high political or economic functions had a significant impact on the post-war history of the city to become its symbol after 1989. The city authorities tried to search and promote personal patterns in various ways. Wałbrzych gives the title of “Honorary Citizen of the City”, “Distinguished for the City of Wałbrzych” and “Ambassador of Wałbrzych”. Among the awarded there are people from various backgrounds (from sport to politics) who were associated with Wałbrzych at different times of their lives (Strzałkowski, 2019a). A similar criterion is visible in the neighboring Świdnica (um.swidnica, 2019).

Chart 1. The origin of the respondents

Source: the study based on the survey

Chart 2. The sources of historical knowledge of the respondents

Source: the study based on the survey

The respondents obtained knowledge about Wałbrzych mainly from social media (72.2% of responses). The information published on the website of the office and local press was declared by one third of the respondents (30.2% and 34.7%). 29.9% of the respondents obtained knowledge from friends. Cities, in addition to their own elements of politics, implement activities that fall within national historical policy. Only 59.5% of the respondents participated in the celebration of historical anniversaries over the last 8 years. The prevailing indication was May 3 (61.7% of responses) and November 11 (93.4% of responses). The survey shows that the residents did not remember the anniversaries that were associated with the events of the last 40 years. Such a low participation in the anniversary celebrations, to which the Polish state refers after 1989, raises especially the reflection on its causes and certainly requires taking action in this regard. Perhaps this is also the result of the weaknesses of right-wing groups that could organize a wider range of anniversary celebrations in Wałbrzych. The strong resentments to the period before 1989 seems to be its consequence. The city's residents do not refer to the events that changed their material status so much.

Chart 3. The participation of the respondents in historical ceremonies

Source: the study based on the survey

The implementation of historical policy was undertaken by the use of various tools. One should mention settlements with the past, as well as the appropriate organization of historical ceremonies. Furthermore, monuments and plaques were funded which commemorated people important for the city or those who were associated with it at various times of their lives. A large role was attached to the educational activities conducted by both schools and municipal cultural institutions (the Library under the Atlantes, the District Museum, the Puppet and Actor Theater). The attempts were usually related to the personalization of local politics. Not all actions were effective. Some of these activities fall within the scope of the central activities of the Polish state. The celebration of May 3 or November 11, the commemoration of the “W” hour or Flag Day are events also celebrated in Wałbrzych. However, the people surveyed did not take part in the events that are so important from the point of view of the current national historical policy. Participation in the celebrations related to the Day of Cursed Soldiers was indicated by two respondents, the same in the case of Flag Day or the anniversary of the Exile to Siberia. On the other hand, only one respondent indicated participation in the Polish accession ceremonies. The effectiveness of the actions taken by the central institutions of the Polish state in the field of historical policy in the local space is therefore negligible. In this case, it is not related to the policy of local authorities. Rather, it shows that historical education in Polish schools did not strongly indicate the importance of these events in the history of Poland in recent years. The creators of the alcohol advertising who decided to use the photo from the events of August 1982 from Lubin explained their campaign with “unconsciousness” (Chojna, 2019). If this explanation were true, it would confirm the lack of elementary historical knowledge of Polish school graduates.

The undertaken actions showed a tendency to personalize the local historical policy. The initiatives concerned people important for the history of Wałbrzych, but so far little popularized, such as Eufrozyn Sagan (Strzałkowski, 2019c). Initially, Antek Kochanek Street was to bear his name when, due to de-communization, it was to change its patron. Residents, however, chose a different solution – they proposed Gwarków Street. A newly built roundabout received the name Sagan. The initiative to honor Sagan was the idea of Marcin Kuleszo from the geological department of the Former Mine Science and Art

Center in Wałbrzych. As a result, a scientific conference was organized which was an attempt to popularize the achievements of the head of the Museum in Wałbrzych. The conference took place on October 4–5, 2018 as part of the 8th edition of the Lower Silesian Festival of Architecture “Post-industrial City” (28.09–05.10.2018: Wrocław / Wałbrzych (starakopalnia, 2019). The event was under the patronage of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018. The newly built roundabouts received the names referring not only to the actions of specific people, but also to the events important for the history of Poland and the history of the city – senator Mieczysław Tarnowski, the European Union, the 100th anniversary of the Independence of Poland and Wałbrzych Artists.

Famous people who were connected with the city for a short time were sought. Boards dedicated to Krzesimir Dębski (born in Wałbrzych) and Tadeusz Nalepa (marriage with Mira Kubasińska in the Registry Office in Wałbrzych) were funded (Strzałkowski, 2019b). An attempt was made to popularize Konstanty Skirmunt, a Polish politician and diplomat of the Second Polish Republic. A plaque commemorating him was mounted on the building of the Private Junior High School and the High School of the Immaculate Sisters – in the building where he spent the last years of his life. Similar ones were installed at the seat of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society – Wałbrzych branch (Zygmunt Bogusz Stęczyński) and on the building of the Library under the Atlantes (Marian Jachimowicz). Information is available in four languages: Polish, Czech, German, and English. The Library under Atlantes created the room of Marian Jachimowicz. Information and commemorative plaques were placed on nine municipal cultural institutions which mark a new tourist and cultural trail in the city (Jagna, 2019).

The attempts to create character image bring different effects. The attempts which did not quite succeed in relation to people after 1945 brought success through the activities of the foundation aiming at the creation of the image of Princess Daisy. The duchess's recognition among the respondents was 92.7%. None of the listed persons achieved similar results. The poor recognition of the first senator Mieczysław Tarnowski is interesting (although only 1 person realized the intentional mistake in the name). Actions taken by various entities brought results in the case of Jachimowicz or Sagan. Jan Lityński (MP associated with the Wałbrzych land), Marian Szeja (goalkeeper of the Wałbrzych clubs) and Robert Warzycha (football player of Górnik Wałbrzych) enjoyed good recognition. The poor recognition of Krzysztof Betka, a participant in the Round Table talks, is puzzling. Although in this case, negative decisions made in relation to the Wałbrzych mines are often associated with him (Strzałkowski, 2020). Apart from the duchess, the indications were usually accidental. The respondents associated the name with the street name (e.g. in the case of Kosteckiego Street). But in the case of the duchess one can talk about permanent activities of various scope. The figure of the duchess is used to organize a number of projects. Książ Castle is hosting the Princess Daisy International Chamber Music Festival Ensemble (wałbrzych.eu, 2019). The Polish State Railways honored the most famous inhabitant of the Wałbrzych Land, giving her name to the Przewóz Regionalny [Eng. Regional] train between Wrocław Główny and Wałbrzych Główny (Ed., 2019, *Przewozy regionalne uhonorowały Księżną Daisy*). The duchess's birthday was celebrated, which consisted of an account of the urban game Duchess Daisy's birthday which took place on June 30, 2013 in the heart of old Wałbrzych. Davina Reeves – an American actress known for her role as a ghost of Daisy in an outdoor performance of “Miasto Duchów” [Eng. Ghost Town] prepared by the Wałbrzych Dramatic Theater – played the role of Daisy inviting people to

a ride in a carriage (Mykytyszyn, 2019). In the Lower Silesian Film Center in Wrocław, on November 21, 2011 and on November 23, 2011 at Książ Castle the premiere of the fictionalized film “Daisy – wspomnienie minionego świata” [Eng. Daisy – a memory of a past world] took place (Borkowski, 2019). Książ Castle in cooperation with the Princess Daisy von Pless Foundation published the diaries of the duchess, the third volume in November 2019. No other person was so strongly promoted in the urban space.

Wałbrzych is trying to build a sense of identity by referring to its glory days. Although the mines no longer exist, the memories of Wałbrzych mining are still vivid in the city. The Former Mine Science and Art Center or the Barbórka Mining Traditions Festival became a symbol. However, the undertaken actions lack an attempt to personalize them. The celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the August strikes were perhaps an opportunity to popularize strike events in the Wałbrzych mines. Although the democratic opposition has never been strong enough in Wałbrzych, there are no actions that would bring closer, especially to the younger generation, the history of those days. However, this opportunity was not taken.

Chart 4. People related to the history of the Wałbrzych region according to the respondents' indications

Source: the study based on the survey

The city removed the testimonies of the communist era from the local space. The Wałbrzych Mining Memorial Monument was unveiled on December 4, 2007 at the site of the former Monument to the Heroes of the Red Army and Polish Army. Wałbrzych, like other cities, was subject to the de-communization law of streets. The activities of local governments were diverse in this respect. Some did little to change the names of the patrons. Others did so at the lowest cost, blurring the sense of the proposed changes. Some representatives of local authorities fought to maintain their local – communist patrons. Few local governments agreed to the proposals submitted by the Institute of National Remembrance and usually rejected them and proposed neutral solutions. One of the communes in the Opolskie Province changed the name of the 40th anniversary of the Polish People's Republic Street to Klonowa Street, Kuroczkin Street for Kresowa Street, and Dąbrowszczaków Street for Ratuszowa Street. Thus, the vision of history in the in-

interpretation of the local government was definitely different from that of the Institute of National Remembrance (Kozubal, 2019). In the case of Wałbrzych a similar trend was visible. The committee in the City Hall prepared proposals for renaming streets which were to be changed. Names did not arouse emotions, neutral names dominated (e.g. Gwarków Street, Karkonoska Street), as well as people associated with culture (Jan Brzechwa, Czesław Miłosz, Andrzej Wajda) or historical events (Monte Cassino, Warsaw Insurgents). The proposals did not include the names of the heroes of the fight for Poland's independence present in current historical policy (Jarosz, 2019). Although the number of actions undertaken has increased in recent years, respondents negatively assessed the actions of the authorities in this respect. 56.5% of people said that local authorities do not carry out any activities that served to commemorate people important for the region. But when asked what persons should be included in the conducted activities, 54.2% of the answers did not indicate anyone. Among these, there are usually the names of those who have already been commemorated. New names appearing are usually people associated with education (Marta Gąsiorowska, Jolanta Znamiorska, Jerzy Rytko), sport (Ignacy Sarnecki, Rajmund Niwiński, Bogusław Dąbrowski), culture (Kazimierz Starościak). The indication of Bogdan Kucharski (known as Johnny Radyjko) as a person worth commemorating was a surprise. He was associated with the City Center and was a controversial but very recognizable person who was mainly indicated by pupils and students. It is difficult to understand, however, what criteria were followed by the persons suggesting this candidate. Probably information posted on social media was the only factor. On the other hand, 31.6% of the respondents are not able to indicate any actions of the local government connected with the commemoration of people important for the region. The orientation in the local space in the scope of elementary activities of the activities of local politics seems to indicate a low interest of the residents in these issues. Despite declarations of interest in history, historical knowledge at the local level seems to be low. The open question is whether the activities implemented by the school in relation to certain regional history activities are effective. The fact that the answers to the questionnaire were given by people who, according to the authorities' assumption, are creators of activities integrating the local environment, is also worrying.

Summary

The city has been carrying out wider activities aimed at creating a sense of local community for several years. It has not only undertaken a number of initiatives but is has been open to supporting the activities of external entities. Despite the passage of more than half a century since the end of World War II, the multicultural origin of the city's inhabitants is still visible. However, none of the groups managed to impose their perception of the past and emphasize the connection with the culture of the area of origin. The activity of the associations was small. Today we can admit that it is slowly disappearing, as in the case of the "House of Brittany" Association. The generation which co-created these institutions is departing and their successors are not interested in the place of origin of their ancestors. Despite the fact that the city authorities have taken a number of initiatives in the field of local memory policy, the survey results are not optimistic. Environments that should be active in this area and which should be familiar with local activities do not belong to the creators of local memory policy. The low activity in promoting local historical events is

worrying. Wałbrzych is an organizer of many historical events but it is difficult to talk about the massive participation of its inhabitants. In the minds of the respondents, there are only two events, May 3, and November 11. It can be concluded that information about other initiatives does not reach the city's inhabitants, as 56.5% of the respondents said that local government authorities did not carry out activities to commemorate people important to the region. Only the activities of the Princess Daisy Foundation can be considered a success. Książ Castle, which a few years ago was not associated with the city, thanks to the actions of the authorities and propagating the image of Princess Daisy is today strongly identified with Wałbrzych. However, the city is still looking for patterns that can be an opportunity to build the local identity of Wałbrzych. The example of the foundation shows that actions must be permanent and repetitive. In addition, they must refer to the various forms of communication. Only then they will be effective.

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