Kamilla Biskupska*

City under (re)construction: Architectural narrations as a foundation story of a city with a broken cultural continuity

The case of Wrocław

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Summary: Using the fate of the Polish city of Wrocław as an example, I present the role of architectural reconstruction/renovation in building the identity of a city with broken structures of long duration. The emergence of Wrocław after the Second World from the ruins of the German city of Breslau was one of the most prominent urban social experiments in European history. However, due to the purely political context of the city's birth, Wrocław residents still cope with the issue of having no ties to the city's foreign architectural fabric. In this study, I analyse the elite's narrative practices, whose aim is to create a sense of identification of people with the city. I discuss the above issue in detail using the example of the renovation of Wrocław Market Square (1995–1997). As viewed by the elite, the renovation of the Market Square gave the city a high position among European cities. However, as I show on the basis of the collected empirical material – thirty in-depth interviews, ordinary city residents regard the Market Square simply as a tourist-attractive space – mostly in its consumer dimension: a pleasing background for dining. The story told by the elites about the Market Square, which was supposed to "start new thinking about the whole city" and "create perspectives", completely misses the narratives of residents about this part of the city.

Keywords: Wrocław, Breslau, Recovered Territories, architecture, collective memory, foundation story

> Wrocław is a city whose memory has been amputated. I found it difficult to get used to it because, at every step, I was disturbed and annoyed by its wartime disability. It is impossible to walk down the streets of the city and not think about it (Zawada 2015: 22).

***Corresponding author: Dr. Kamilla Biskupska,** Institute of Sociology, University of Wrocław, ul. Koszarowa 3, PL-51–149 Wrocław, Poland, E-Mail: kamilla.biskupska@uwr.edu.pl

1 Introduction: a city of *amputated memory*

On different levels of their existence, cities "are indelibly shaped by memory" (Loughran & Fine & Hunter 2016: 193). In this article, I ask the question about how this city-memory relationship becomes apparent in the particular case of a city with a rapidly disrupted long lasting structure. The subject of the analysis presented herein is Wrocław, which until May 1945 was known as Breslau. Wrocław is one of the biggest cities of the "Recovered Territories", i.e. the German territories annexed to Poland after the Second World War as a result of the Potsdam and Yalta conferences. Nowadays, Wrocław is Poland's fourth largest city, with a population of around 640,000 inhabitants.

The transformations experienced by Wrocław in the second half of the twentieth century were a phenomenon of an exceptional scale even for the turbulent postwar period of the 1940s and 1950s in Central and Eastern Europe, where "history gained such momentum that border changes were much quicker than cultural and mental transformations" (Purchla & Gałusek 2017: 14). What is important – Wrocław experienced the complete replacement (within three years) of the city's population after the Second World War.

Important for understanding the difficulties of the transformation of Breslau into Wrocław is the fact that Breslau's links with Poland in the twentieth century, as Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse write "had already almost completely faded from the Polish national imaginary" (2002: 448). Breslau, unlike, for example, the Free City of Danzig (now Polish Gdańsk), was not previously associated with Polish culture, history and identity. Describing the asymmetry in the creation of cultural memory of Gdańsk and Wrocław, Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska states: "Although at the end of the war the vast majority of Danzigers considered themselves Germans, in the consciousness of the Poles Danzig was more closely associated with the native parts than Breslau. Firstly, there had been intensive economic contacts with Danzig even before the war [...]; secondly, the Polish minority was more active and institutionally stronger in Danzig (it had its own post office, for example); thirdly, Danzig was repeatedly subject to Polish interests and territorial claims. In the case of Breslau, no such claims were ever made (Saryusz-Wolska 2011: 228).[1]

1 Although Breslau was a border town, only a small percentage of its inhabitants were Polish in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Gernot Briesewitz's estimations, at the dawn of the twentieth century, there were 20,000 Poles living in Breslau (mainly economic migrants from Greater Poland and Upper Silesia), the incumbent Polish population was gone by this time; they had assimilated. After the First World War, many Poles left for the newly formed Polish state. Hence, "in 1925, the

One of the most significant consequences of this rapid transformation was the disruption of the city's long-lasting structures, so essential to its harmonious development:

> The achievements, aspirations and sometimes disappointments of successive generations are recorded in the spatial environment. Cultural heritage "enchanted" in buildings, monuments, urban layout or traditions provides evidence of the continuity of a nation's history as well as shows the complicated fate of successive generations of creators and users of the same area (Karwińska 2012: 130).

In no way did the remains of Breslau provide post-war newcomers with "evidence of the continuity of [the Polish] nation's history". Instead, they were a painful reminder of the Germans, who were held responsible for the war trauma.[2] On top of that, the city's distinctly bourgeois character made it difficult to put down roots. In this context, it is worth quoting (after Gregor Thum) the words of the Polish settler – Maria Jarzyńska-Bukowska, writing about her new hometown in 1946:

> It is not true that all ruins are the same. Ruins continue to express the character, the individuality of a living city. The devastated city of Wrocław continues to be a defiant and hostile place – defeated, powerless, and yet it has to be conquered again and again. The suggestion of a kind of heavy paralysis is agonising in the demolished streets and in the smashed houses, as if the weight of all these shattered walls has collapsed forever, suicidally, desperately (Thum 2011: xxxii).

On the one hand, testimonies of an affluent, bourgeois heritage aroused resentment in the post-war authorities, provoking "an ideological aversion on the part of the communists to the memory of the nineteenth century and the times of the industrial revolution and the domination of the bourgeoisie" (Wiśniewski 2016: 58–59), while, on the other hand, they made the remains of Breslau a semantically illegible space for the incoming settlers who came mainly from the poor rural communities of eastern and central Poland.[3]

Polish community in Breslau numbered around 3,000, representing 0.5 % of the total population" (Briesewitz 2011: 115).

2 From the perspective of the German population evacuated, expelled and resettled from areas taken from the Third Reich, the loss of the city of Breslau, among others, evoked a sense of loss and grief. As Gotthold Rhode, a German historian forced to leave the city in 1945, noted with regret in 1949: "Breslau, or rather that part of it which can neither be deported nor passed over in silence, which cannot be repainted or forged, the river with its drains and bridges, the streets, squares, houses and ruins, this Breslau today bears the official name of Wrocław" (2018: 211).

3 In 1948, 40.8 % of the inhabitants of Wrocław came from the countryside and 41.2 % from small towns (Turnau 1960: 53).

What was the most crucial starting point for the settlers seeking familiarity in this "reclaimed" but – at the same time – acutely foreign city was the remains of medieval buildings (historically defined as "truly Polish"). The city's later history – so clearly shaping the architectural form of this "inherited" city – especially the Prussian and German period, which lasted several hundred years, was completely cut off – was kept silent in public and colloquial discourse. This silence, which lasted for decades, resulted in the fact that, for the people of Wrocław, "the history of Wrocław actually began in 1945 with the incorporation of the city into Poland" (Lewicka 2006: 129). It is so because, among others, "if a space is not properly named – it is deprived of specific symbolic meanings, one does not even see its different original character, perhaps incongruous with the current character. As a result, the space becomes *unrecognizable* to its residents" (Kaźmierska 2012: 144). In post-war Wrocław, an ambiguity of existence lasted for decades. The living environment of the inhabitants of Wrocław was the surviving fragments of the city's German landscape – the surroundings were filled with architecturally alien buildings, infrastructure, signs, books, everyday objects, etc. However, this whole space of everyday life has remained "unnamed", "unspoken", and "unexplained" for decades, both on the level of the everyday life of the inhabitants[4] and in public discourse filled with slogans about the morally and historically justified return of Wrocław to the Fatherland.

This article analyzes the memory-forming processes that have shaped Wrocław's urban space on the basis of the strategies concerning the reconstruction and renovation of its urban fabric. I treat these reconstruction activities as elements of a local *politics of memory*,[5] among other things, laying the foundations for the city foundation stories – narratives oriented towards creating a Polish/European identity for the city. On the following pages, I will present the most essential post-war foundation stories of Wrocław created by the city's elite and relating to the urban space: from the 1940s, when the first outlines of the Polish city (and the related Piast

4 As Stanisław Bereś, writer and professor of the University of Wrocław, born in the 1950, recalls: "I lived in a German house where for generations German children had been born and old people had died. I slept on a German couch, looked at German paintings, bathed in a German bath, ate from German pots and plates.... Sometimes it occurred to me: 'Jesus, we live on stolen things.'... Since childhood we had been raised in hatred and fear of the Germans, and at the same time our whole world, the whole cosmos of our everyday life, even our tastes, had been formed within the objects, equipment, forms, and spirit of Germany. Do you realize that? Do you think it does not affect a person in any way?" (Bereś [Nowicki] 1993: 51).

5 In this paper, I define the politics of memory, following Igor Pietraszewski and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa: "We understand 'politics of memory' as the top-down implementation by elites of ways for society to see the past, mostly for political-ideological objectives" (Pietraszewski & Törnquist-Plewa 2016: 351).

story) were created on the ruins of Breslau, to the early twenty-first century, when the latest democratic period in the history of the city and the last of the city's foundation stories began. I consider these politically determined mechanisms of creating the urban past in detail on the basis of one of the city's most recent identity narratives – the 1997 restoration of Wrocław's Market Square. Using this restoration as an example, I also analyze how the images of the city's past, shaped by the authorities and elites (local government officials, architects, historians, journalists, teachers or activists), become visible (if at all) in the narratives of the city's inhabitants.

2 Empirical material

The empirical material consists of two parts. The first consists of excerpts from academic discourses – fragments of academic articles and monograph studies (authored by historians, art historians, architects and sociologists) published in the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries concerning the cultural functioning and social reception of the space of Wrocław.

An important strand of analysis for my considerations is the discussions relating to Wrocław Market Square. I selected this section of the city for a closer look for two reasons. First of all, in the European tradition, the market square is that piece of urban space in which "the city gets its face, lets itself be 'remembered'" and which "makes the city the one city distinguishable from others" (Sławek 1997: 18). Secondly, what is equally significant from the perspective of the topic addressed in this article is the fact that Wrocław Market Square, at the turn of the twenty-first century, became the object of increased narrative activity by the city's governing elites: they initiated a new foundation story of Wrocław, intended to closely (and ultimately) bind Wrocław residents to their – still largely – *unrecognizable* city.

I compare the suggestions, opinions and forecasts of the urban elites with thoughts about Wrocław Market Square as expressed by "ordinary" citizens. Here, I primarily use a set of thirty in-depth narrative interviews I conducted with residents of Wrocław between May 2018 and January 2020. I conducted interviews with representatives of the second (born in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s) and third (born in the 1970s and 1980s) post-war generations of Wrocław inhabitants.[6] In the course of the study, fifteen interviews were collected in each of the groups. When gathering research material, I found it vital to reach people who are primarily recipients of the

6 The study under consideration focused on the narrative patterns created in Wrocław public discourse, maintained and transformed in the colloquial discourses of the citizens of Wrocław. I was also interested in the narratives about the elements of the cultural landscape present in the discourse of the city inhabitants, with particular emphasis on the pre-war German heritage of the city.

content of public discourse rather than who are the co-creators or leaders of the city's memory. Most qualitative research conducted so far on the construction of the urban past or the relationship with Wrocław's cultural heritage involves primarily the leaders of memory: local government officials, architects, historians, journalists, teachers or activists and not ordinary citizens of the city (see, for example, Bierwiaczonek et al. 2017). In addition, my analysis is supported by existing published collections of "ordinary" voices, such as diaries and memoirs of representatives of three post-war generations of Wrocław residents (Jałowiecki 1970; Bierut & Pęcherz 2015).

3 Urban reconstructions as part of the identity transformations of Wrocław

3.1 Socialist City (1945–1989)

In the last three months of the Second World War, Breslau was made into a "fortress" (*Festung Breslau*).[7] The decision resulted in the death of most of the civilian population who remained in the city and the destruction of the city. As a result, when the city surrendered to the Soviets on 6 May 1945, more than 70 % of the city's buildings had been destroyed: "It is estimated that the greatest damage, 90 % was incurred by the southern and western districts, while the northern districts suffered in the region of 30 % damage and the least affected eastern districts 10 %. The destruction of the Old Town was estimated at around 30 % in the eastern quarter and up to 85 % in the western quarter. Out of approximately 5,000 historic residential buildings, only 134 had suffered minor damage" (Przesmycka 2020: 433–434).

The takeover of the city by the Poles meant, among other things, deciding whether to rebuild the pre-war city or, on the ruins of Breslau, to build a city for a new era from scratch. The discussions over the reconstruction of the equally deva-

7 In 1944–1945, the Germans created a system of fortress cities (*Festungen*) on the eastern front. In addition to Breslau, these included Festung Posen (today's Polish Poznań), Festung Küstrin (Polish Kostrzyn) and Festung Königsberg (now Kaliningrad, Russia). Hitler intended them to stop the Red Army heading west. However, they failed in this task. Michael Jones in his book *Total War. From Stalingrad to Berlin* (chapter "Fortress Cities") gives an insight into the reasons for the failure of this idea: "In the path of Soviet Troops were Polish and German cities that Hitler had designated fortress. Ulrich de Mazière, a staff officer in the operations section of German Army High Command, said: 'Hitler became possessed by the idea that you never surrendered any place voluntarily. He would sudden designate a city as a fortress. All that actually meant was that the commander was obliged to hold the city to the last man. But if you think of a fortress in terms of well-prepared defences or supplies, there were nothing like that" (Jones 2011: 346).

stated Warsaw proved to be decisive in this context. At that time, a course of action was set; it would later be called "the Polish School of Conservation". It emphasized the historicization of the space of destroyed Polish cities regardless of cost and the necessary misrepresentations or mystifications.[8] This principle was also applied to cities in the "Recovered Territories", which had little to do with Polish cultural heritage. In this case, the principle of selective references to selected historical styles was usually applied: "the polonization of the spaces of Wrocław or Gdańsk entailed specific political decisions about the types of decoration that were allowed and those that had to be erased" (Wiśniewski 2016: 59).

The post-war architectural landscape of Wrocław was meant to emphasize the city's "everlasting" affiliation with the Polish cultural milieu. This link was created by the medieval Piast dynasty, princes of the Polish royal family, who ruled the region of Lower Silesia (of which Wrocław is the capital) from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries. For this reason, the remains of the medieval Gothic style were reconstructed first.[9] The most essential testimonies of Gothic architecture in Wrocław, which survived several hundred years of dynamic transformations of the city and the ruinous experience of *Festung Breslau*, were the medieval churches. Consequently, despite the communist authorities' hostile attitude toward the Catholic Church and the enormous housing and infrastructure needs of the devastated city, the churches were the buildings whose restoration was tackled first; this was done with enormous financial resources. Moreover, this re-gothicization of Wrocław's space also meant the further destruction of buildings that had survived the turmoil of war: "when rebuilding monuments, especially churches, the rebuilders obsessively restored Gothic décor and destroyed later, often extremely valuable, stratifications. They obsessively scraped off the plaster, seeing the bare brick walls as signs of *Polishness*" (Kalicki 2002: 9).

8 The assumptions of the Polish School of Conservation can be illustrated by the words of Jan Zachwatowicz (general conservator of monuments in 1945–1957), who, at the first post-war congress of Polish art historians in August 1945, announced: "Unable to accept the pillaging of our cultural monuments, we will reconstruct them. We will rebuild them from their foundations up, in order to show future generations, if not the authentic materials, at least the exact form that these monuments continue to have in our memory and that can be ascertained through document" (Thum 2011: 323).

9 Linking Gothic to the city's Polish cultural heritage was a major mental oversimplification. As Gregor Thum notes: "It did not matter how much, or how little, Piast dynasty dukes had actually contributed to their construction, nor was the extent of their real connectedness to Polish history of much moment. Insignificant as well was the fact that the Gothic epoch extended far into the Bohemian phase of Wrocław's history and that several of the large Gothic buildings, in particular the cathedra and the town hall, had not been completed until long after the Wrocław line of the Piasts had died out. In post-war Wrocław, Gothic architecture was the symbol of the Polish origins of the city, and that was that" (Thum 2011: 329).

It is vital that this politically created vision of the Piast city was a response to the expectations of the settlers. This can be supported by the opinion of Jan Wrabec, who writes: "However, the shape of Wrocław's architecture was also influenced by ordinary people, whom the new authorities tried not only to intimidate but also to buy" (2003: 196). The Piast narrative gave newcomers a real identity foothold. Its examples can be found in the subtle references to medieval heritage, woven into the story of everyday life in post-war Wrocław, present in the diaries submitted in the late 1960s for the Polish Sociological Society's competition entitled "What is the city of Wrocław to you?":[10]

> The advantage and the attraction of Wrocław are its magnificent historic places, mostly Gothic, less Renaissance and Baroque. [...] Gothic monuments are usually loosely scattered sacred buildings (except the Town Hall). In the future, they will be a quiet haven, a diversification among the monotony of modern buildings and the only souvenirs of the magnificent and rich past of the city (Jałowiecki 1970: 120).

In the second half of the 1950s, the momentum of architectural reconstruction in Poland considerably slowed down. In Wrocław, the emphasis on historical references in the urban space was also abandoned and a workers' city began to be openly built, following the Soviet model (Bogdanowski 2003). Prefabricated blocks of flats also filled the Old Town, eventually diverting the most essential functions typically performed by the city center: the representative, commercial and cultural functions. The purpose of these actions was also to obscure/diminish the traces of bourgeois Breslau still present in the urban space, hated by the communists and unnamed by the inhabitants.[11]

3.2 Wrocław – the Meeting Place (from 1989)

The year 1989 opened a new chapter in the history of Central and Eastern Europe. The changes pertained to nearly every area of the social life of the inhabitants of

10 The diary competition was announced and completed in 1966. 198 people responded. The works of twenty prize-winning and awarded authors were published in the volume *Związani z miastem. Opracowanie i fragmenty wypowiedzi nadesłanych na konkurs: Czym jest dla ciebie miasto Wrocław* [*Linked to the city. A study and fragments of the texts submitted in the competition: What is the city of Wrocław to you?*] (Jałowiecki 1970).

11 Filling the city center with blocks of flats also had social consequences. In 1986, a conference of the Commission of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Polish Academy of Sciences concluded that the architectural disintegration of Wrocław's city center negatively influences the formation of Wrocław's urban community, provoking "parochial behaviors, habits and patterns of conduct" (Tarczyński 1986: 16).

this part of Europe. What I am interested in in this article is the city-memory relationship enriched by the perspective of cultural heritage, changing the perception of the past of a given space: "Cultural heritage is a process of constantly re-interpreting the past and using it for contemporary purposes" (Purchla & Gałusek 2017: 12). Cultural heritage became the axis of action and the most important vision for developing the region's largest cities (see, for example, Kusek & Purchla 2019; Sassatelli 2009). In Wrocław, too, a new image of the city's past began to take shape. What became an important issue was defining and naming the city's non-Polish past, which was ignored for decades of the functioning of the communist state (see, for example, Blacker 2019).

In the introduction to the historical study of the history of Wrocław he co-authored, Norman Davies recalls a conversation with Bogdan Zdrojewski, the then mayor of the city, held in 1996:

> [...] the Mayor talked of Wrocław's own problems of history and identity. He was the executive head of a city which for fifty years had been completely Polish, but which for centuries before 1945 had been overwhelmingly German in culture and composition. He talked of the numerous German visitors including many former Breslauers, whom he regularly welcomed to the city but whose vision of the past differed radically from that of the present inhabitants (2002: xv).

Those "problems of history and identity" of democratic Wrocław sketched by Zdrojewski gave rise to another urban foundation story which was intended to replace the compromised Piast story for the citizens of Wrocław. It was a narrative about Wrocław as a city with a thousand-year history; one that matters in the European cultural arena, whose contemporary residents are aware of and positive about the richness and diversity of their city's cultural heritage:

> The political turn of 1989 in Wrocław was marked by a new approach to urban space and its history. [...] In the following years in Wrocław, there was a growing interest in the urban landscape, architecture and art objects, which the citizens of Wrocław tried to surround with memory and include in their own historical consciousness (Kulak 2010: 95).

This new look at the city's past also included a significant change in the perception of the urban space. What followed was a turn to the architectural testimonies of the culture of bourgeois Breslau – so carefully ignored and doomed to destruction under socialism but now providing evidence of Wrocław's centuries-old metropolitan traditions.[12] Among other things, the slow revival of the deteriorating, neglected

12 However, it should be emphasized that these references to the culture of the pre-war bourgeoisie present in public discourse did not and still largely do not include the Jewish community. In the 1920s and 1930s, some 30,000 Jews lived in Breslau. A large part of this community was made up of assimilated Jews who contributed to the scientific, cultural and economic elite of the city. After the Second

Środmieście (Central) district began: above all, the revitalization of the nineteenth-century tenements filling it, which had not been repaired since the end of the fighting in 1945.[13] The renovation of tenements and the filling in of holes in the strict urban development (also a testimony to the war struggles) were read as a testimony to the bourgeois traditions of the city as well as to the aspirations of being a modern city:

> [...] particularly pronounced in Wrocław is the infill revolution, which is changing the city, completing its fragments into certain semantically sensible wholes, comprehensible to people at first glance. There are also increasing areas in which both the resident and the visitor know that they are in a city and that it is a city with decent bourgeois traditions (of which the tenement buildings are the carrier), which it nurtures and adapts to the requirements of the present day (Waszkiewicz 1997: 102).

The democratic transition and the awakening of the metropolitan ambitions of Wrocław's elite were the contexts in which the revitalization of Wrocław's Market Square began. The transformation that the Market Square underwent at the time, like its reconstruction in the 1950s, was intended by the city authorities and elites to carry a vital image message. The renovated space was to be a testimony to the democratization of the city, its dynamic development and taking its rightful position among the most important European cities.

World War until the end of the twentieth century, there was no memory of the Jewish citizens of Breslau in the discourses of Wrocław. Jerzy Kichler explains this situation in his *Guide to Jewish Wrocław* in the following way: "The population living in Wrocław after the Second World War experienced a social aphasia. This aphasia – the inability to talk about who built their dwellings and temples as well as about the experiences of the pre-war inhabitants – was caused both by the violation of the biological fabric of the city (the total replacement of the population) and by the historical narrative imposed by the rulers of the new state, People's Poland" (Włodarczyk & Kichler 2019: 4). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, publications restoring the memory of Breslau's pre-war Jewish community began to appear (see, for example, Stolarska-Fronia 2008; Łagiewski 2016; Włodarczyk & Kichler 2019; Buchen & Luft 2023), and local Wrocław organizations (such as the Bente Kahan Foundation, the Urban Memory Foundation or the OP ENHEIM Foundation) have also been active in supporting the memory of Breslau's Jews with educational and cultural activities. However, as Anna Kurpiel and Katarzyna Maniak note: "Still, this knowledge [of the city's Jewish history] has not spread enough to penetrate popular narratives and perceptions of the 'post-German' city" (Kurpiel & Maniak 2023: 38).

13 The image of Wrocław at the end of the 1980s, as recorded in the memories of its inhabitants, is sketched in dark colours, filled with grey, decaying houses and neglected streets devoid of lighting. This is exemplified by the memories of theater critic and publicist Małgorzata Dzieduszycka, who remembered the Wrocław of that time as "a gloomy city: grey, moldy old buildings, dead house facades, empty squares, dark streets" (cited in Mühle 2016: 284).

3.3 The Market Square renovation as a new urban foundation story

In the 1950s, the need to "recreate" Polish Wrocław influenced the decision to (partially) rebuild the nearly completely destroyed Old Town. Above all, it was decided to reconstruct Wrocław Market Square (and the adjacent Solny Square). It was not as propagandistically obvious and unambiguous an undertaking as the reconstruction of the "Piast" churches. However, it was assumed that the stylized "old" Old Town would support the image of a city with a thousand-year "Polish" tradition. However, Wrocław Market Square, which has been rebuilt many times in its history and, in its "pre-Polish" form, was far from the medieval ideal, became a field of fantasy activities, devoid of references to any real pre-existing buildings:

> The principle of necessity was adopted for the use of burned-out steel or reinforced concrete skeletons of high-rise department stores that replaced demolished townhouses at the turn of the twentieth century. As a result, we have "reconstructed" houses in the Market Square that are overly tall and have altered elevations. [...] No access to archival material resulted in relying mainly on the publications of a German, Rudolf Stein, rather loudly without admitting it. According to his drawings, tenements were erected at the Solny Square, which – years ago – stood in other areas of the Old Town but, in width, they fit here (Czerner 2004: 129).

After the reconstruction, Wrocław Market Square was more of a stage set than a reconstruction. Behind the pseudo-historic façades of the tenements were blocks of flats with small flats of workers. This façade approach to the old town buildings reflected the attitude of the socialist authorities toward the urban past. In socialist Wrocław, references to bourgeois culture were not accentuated while only what reminded Poles of the city's "Piast roots" could survive. The Market Square simply became part of a residential area, distinguished by the different, colorful façades of the buildings. This desirable ordinariness of the space was also emphasized by rerouting traffic, tram and bus lines through the Market Square as well as locating a petrol station there. As a consequence of the reconstruction, Wrocław's most crucial square lost the functions that had been assigned to urban market squares in Europe since medieval times: as "a place of passage, meetings, exchanges, reciprocal recognition, manifestations of power, of riots. It is on squares where public executions have taken place, but also where the noblest moments of a culture and religion have occurred" (Caruso 2007: 7).

In the 1960s, the Market Square was not noticeably an identity anchor. Although, according to the assumptions of communist propaganda, it remained a reminder of "old Wrocław," it was more of a festive decoration prepared for incoming guests than a living part of the city, crucial to the people of Wrocław themselves. Let us go back to Wrocław residents' diaries:

> Someone once asked me what is worth seeing in Wrocław. [...] I think I would take the visitor to the Market Square, as we did with my wife and her relative who had visited Wrocław for several years from abroad. Here, in my opinion, is the center of Wrocław, as it was centuries ago (Jałowiecki 1970: 169).

For Wrocław residents, the Market Square of the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s was primarily a transportation hub. Evidence for this can also be found in the above-cited diaries of Wrocław residents of the 1960s:

> The center is, of course, in the Market Square. Not so much perhaps from the side of the agendas of social life [...] but because of the main traffic routes, the concentration of representative, historic buildings and economic establishments – the commercial ones and others. Too much is demanded from the Market Square; for a modern transportation hub, it is too cramped and the outlets are too narrow (Jałowiecki 1970: 268).

The image of the Market Square primarily as a place through which trams passed is also the most common thread in the reminiscences of Wrocław residents collected much later, in the second decade of the twenty-first century[14]:

> I remember that the Market Square was a traffic hub, including trams and MPK [i.e. local – K. B.] and PKS [inter-regional] buses. In front of the bank was a petrol station (Bierut & Pęcherz 2015: 19).[15]

In the 1990s, the discourse of urban elites began building a new identity for the city, based on the city's multi-layered and multicultural heritage. The Market Square in Wrocław became an important field of memory-forming activities in this context. This important element of Wrocław's centrer, hitherto missing the idea of the city's "heart", its essence and its pride, was to become a distinctive feature of a city with European aspirations. The transformation of Wrocław's Market Square should also be read in the context of Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004. In accordance with European directives, Wrocław, as well as other Polish cities, began to pursue a remembrance policy pursuing a "cosmopolitan ways of remembrance, i.e.,

14 The publication *Wrocław. Pamiętam, że...* [*Wrocław. I remember that...*] is the result of a project of the same name, prepared on the occasion of Wrocław's role as the European Capital of Culture in 2016. This publication contains six hundred and forty-two short (two-three-sentence) memoirs beginning with the words "Wrocław. I remember that..." sent to the organizers by two hundred and forty-one people.

15 The abbreviation MPK stands for Municipal Transport Company [*Miejskie Przedsiebiorstwo Komunikacyjne*]. It is a municipal company operating public transport (bus and tram), in this case in Wrocław. PKS stands for Public Motor Transport Company [*Państwowa Komunikacja Samochodowa*]. It was a state-owned service company dealing with national public transport. It was established in 1945 and, until the 1990s, it was the only state-owned carrier with nationwide coverage.

a remembrance not exclusively centered on one's own nation but also attentive to the perspective of the Other. This model has encouraged a self-critical examination of the past and a search for historical narratives that could promote reconciliation, tolerance and multicultural coexistence" (Törnquist-Plewa & Pietraszewski 2022: 8; see, for example, Sassatelli 2009). The slogan promoting the city – "Wrocław – the Meeting Place" – can be read from this perspective. In the case of the renovation of Wrocław Market Square, references were made to the bourgeois traditions of affluent Breslau – undoubtedly, from a Polish perspective, the city of the Other (although the name of the German city itself was not used in public discourse; see, Biskupska 2022).[16] As Anna Wójcik observes, these activities fall within the broader field of policy pursued by urban planners and architects who, "through public buildings, squares, parks and promenades, aim to construct a coherent story of a city aspiring to be a continuator of pre-war prosperity" (Wójcik 2012: 175).

The renovation of the Market Square began in 1995 and took two years. It was a carefully planned undertaking and executed on a great financial scale:

> In 1995, it was decided to undertake comprehensive work to change the floor of the Market Square, the Solny Square and the nearest sections of the streets approaching it. The complexity involved the complete replacement of underground utilities while – at the same time – strengthening the floors, erecting lanterns and other elements of the so-called landscape architecture. It was decided to do it with durable materials: the floors were made of stones from volcanic deposits available in Lower Silesia, and the lamp posts, tree surrounds, grilles, and covers were specially cast according to the designs supplied, weaving the city's coat of arms into the patterns. The lanterns themselves, their handles and brackets, were forged by hand. [...] At the same time, the restoration of most of the façades of the Market Square houses was carried out and almost all the stones were cleaned. The illumination of the City Hall and more important, more beautiful houses were or, if citation was is original [sic!] installed (Czerner 2004: 135). The last sentence reads: The illumination of the City Hall and the more important, more beautiful houses was installed.

16 The essence of Wrocław as a "meeting place" slogan can be presented following Rafał Dutkiewicz, the former President of Wrocław: "Only by looking at the city's centuries-long history does it show its great wealth and enormous potential. A city of meetings, a city of tolerance; in short, an open city" (Dutkiewicz 2018: 6). However, in the image of the "meeting place" proposed by the city's elite, there is not much room for reflection on the significance of Breslau itself for the modern city – both from the material and identity-based perspectives. Slogans about Wrocław's "openness" and "multiculturalism" are, most of all, the elements of creating the image of the city as a brand (Dolińska & Makaro 2015). Andrzej Zawada writes openly that the slogan "multiculturalism" is a strategy of avoiding facing the material remains of the Germans, the remains of Breslau: "the peculiar myth of the multiculturalism of parts of the Western Territories, *e.g.*, Wrocław or Gdańsk, functions as the weakening or "softening" factor of post-Germanness visible every day especially in the architecture and the civilizational shaping of the landscape" (Zawada 2015: 93).

Even before the renovation work was completed, expectations concerning the renovated Market Square space went beyond the aesthetic aspects. This can be seen, for example, in the study *Wrocław. Dziedzictwo wieków* [Wrocław. The Legacy of the Ages] of 1997, in which the authors (Wrocław historians) conclude their presentation of the thousand-year history of Wrocław with the very information about the renovation of the Market Square:

> the spectacular success of the city government, and the personal success of the mayor, has been the revival of Wrocław Market Square. [...] Its thorough renovation (as well as that of the Solny Square) will make the central point of Wrocław a real showpiece (Kaczmarek et al. 1997: 263).

More emphasis of the importance of this renovation of the Market Square for the development of the city can be found in a publication from a few years later (published by Wrocław Municipality Office), in which Wrocław-based architect Stanisław Lose highlights:

> [...] the new local government made the right decision to rebuild, to do a general overhaul of the Market Square in Wrocław. This was not only an architectural and construction decision but also a decision that defined the core of the city's development strategy. It constituted the city for many decades. Indeed, the renovation of the Market Square restored its center-forming functions, making the Market Square the center of everything. It created – as it used to – a model for other areas of the city. Today, it can be seen how accurate that decision was. Wrocław became a different city overnight. This would not have happened without restoring the Market Square to its rightful functions and form, of course. The new Market Square started new thinking about the whole city. It created prospects (2001: 28).

The fact that, after its renovation, the Market Square was to "start new thinking about the whole city" was noticeable in the design of the renovation work itself. The reliability of the work carried out and the type of (durable and costly) materials used was to prove that Wrocław was no longer a peripheral and socialist city. Likewise, the craftsmanship, solid materials as well as the (pre-war) municipal coats of arms adorning the landscape architecture of the Market Square were meant to create a bridge between modernity and (bourgeois) Breslau. However, in the opinions of Wrocław's elite at the time and later (primarily those expressed by Wrocław historians), the renovation work took on an even more profound meaning. The restoration was even considered "a symbolic recapture of the city" (Kubicki 2013: 227)[17] and the renovated Market Square was said to provide Wrocław with "soul and

17 The "recapture" used in this phrase is cognitively extremely interesting but also intensely perplexing. On the one hand, it shows how vibrant the concept of Wrocław as a "reclaimed" city, proposed more than half a century ago by the communists is. On the other hand, it can be quite difficult to try to answer the question of to which period of the city's existence the author of this statement relates this

heart" (Kubicki 2013: 227) – which, presumably, the city had been deprived of by the "soulless" socialist reconstruction. Less metaphorically, the refreshed Market Square was to become an urban agora, that is, "a potential place for meetings and exchange of ideas" (Waszkiewicz 1997: 104) and "a public space that is the essence of urban culture" (Kubicki 2013: 227). Even the introduction of restaurants and night-spots into the Market Square served to strengthen the argument about "the reclaimed heart": "The city thus regained [after the renovation] its heart – a public space that is both a place for satisfying postmodern needs for consumption and entertainment and an agora for presenting urban culture stretched between local color and pan-European horizons" (Mühle 2016: 285).

An important thread in this elite-constructed story of the renovation of Wrocław Market Square is the residents of Wrocław or, more precisely, their approving and enthusiastic reaction to the transformations in question. The descriptions found in the literature of the residents' reactions to the work being carried out are reminiscent of the descriptions of the delight that the reconstruction of this part of the city at the time was supposed to evoke in the 1950s. Both then and now, thanks to the new face of the Market Square, it was supposed to trigger pride in the city (and the authorities):

> They did it [the renovation] in front of the eyes of the citizens of Wrocław and they were more and more surprised every day at what a beautiful city they lived in and, finally, at the end, they sat at the great table that surrounded the entire Market Square for the crowning of the work (Czerner 2004: 135).

There is no doubt that, for the people of Wrocław, the Market Square was and is a prominent part of the urban space. This is indicated both by the memoirs and recollections quoted earlier and by the sociological studies cited above. However, so far, it has remained unclear how the inhabitants of Wrocław read this space, what meanings they give to it, for example, whether this "most important common space" is part of their own lived worlds and whether the revitalization of the Market Square has brought the results predicted by the elites. The analyses presented below contribute to answering these questions.

"recapture", especially if one takes into account that the refreshed Market Square was to refer directly to the pre-socialist (at the same time pre-Polish) time.

3.4 The Market Square in the colloquial discourse of Wrocław residents

In the following pages, I would like to present how Wrocław Market Square is present in the narratives of Wrocław residents who participated in the study. In the empirical material collected, a mention of the Market Square appears primarily as a response to the questions: "Which part of the city do you like?"; "Where do you like to spend your time in Wrocław?" A preliminary analysis of the material also reveals that the Market Square (alongside Ostrów Tumski / Cathedral Island[18]) was the only piece of urban space directly singled out in the narrative about the city, both in a positive and negative way. This confirms, at least at first glance, the findings of researchers according to which the Market Square is the most important element of public space for the residents of Wrocław (see Dymnicka 2017). However, a closer look at the collected statements of Wrocław residents somewhat blurs the picture.

In the interviews collected, the only thread linking the market to the city's past was the mention of the Market Square as a transportation hub. In other words, my interviewees describe the Market Square as a place where trams used to run:

> Well, for example, the Market Square, for example, townhouses, I always contemplate their beauty, I am glad that they have been repainted. I was very happy as because the tram used to go through the Market Square, I kind of miss this tram (19/F/51).[19]

> I suffered a lot as the Market Square was rebuilt, a lot. [...] well, because it was just a necessity to get traffic out of the Market Square, but I loved how the [tram number] 16 went there and it just went that way [...] and that's what I liked the most. That's not there at all now. [...] We used to go in, we used to take that 16 [onto the Market Square], there were so few cars, so it wasn't a problem at all (2/F/60).

> My mother was just here; this is where she worked. [She told me] how she used to ride the tram around the Town Hall, because there were tram tracks around the Town Hall. Anyway I [...] remember that somewhere there she and I used to go to Feniks [a department store in the Market Square], well we used to go by tram just around the Town Hall, there was a tram there. And then there were these tracks, there were tracks but the tram no longer ran (10/K/73).

18 The word "ostrów" means a river island covered with vegetation. Ostrów Tumski (Cathedral Island) is the oldest historical part of Wrocław, established on a former island in the Oder River. A stronghold of the first Piasts was located on Ostrów Tumski, probably founded in the tenth century. From the year 1000, i.e. when the bishopric was founded, Ostrów Tumski also became a regional center of church authority. Today, it is an important tourist attraction in the city – Wrocław's most important monuments of sacred architecture (including St. John the Baptist Church and the Archbishop's Palace) are located here.

19 The code placed next to the interviews should be read as follows: sequence number/gender of interviewee/year of birth of interviewee.

This theme is consistent with the descriptions in diaries and memoirs of the Market Square from the 1960s and 1970s indicated earlier. At that time, the people of Wrocław perceived the place primarily through its transport function. Decades later, despite the fact that neither trams or busses nor even cars drive through the square anymore, this is still the strongest memory connotation of this space. In other words, neither the attempt to create the Market Square as a *lieu de mémoire* built with reference to the medieval Piast heritage nor the renovation several decades later, which was intended to evoke associations with the bourgeois traditions of the European city, has penetrated the narrative of ordinary Wrocław citizens.

The memory of trams in the Market Square is also significant for another reason. It is collectively shared. This theme appears regularly not only in the interviews I collected but also in the materials I analyzed collecting the narratives of Wrocław citizens about their city (Biskupska 2018). However, at the same time, it is a memory only of people's own experiences and those of people's own family members. In other words, the trams in the Market Square are placed in the dimension of "communicative" memory (following Jan Assmann's terminology). These images of memory (even if they are socially repetitive) include only what is experienced by the citizens of Wrocław themselves. This confirms research indicating that, in Wrocław, the history of the city (and its inhabitants) begins in 1945 (see, for example, Lewicka 2006; Kajdanek & Nawrocki 2017). Despite the dynamic political and generational changes that Wrocław has experienced in recent decades, this consequence of living in a city with an amputated memory is still present in the perception of the city.

The memory image of trams in the Market Square referred to by my interlocutors is also interesting for another reason. It is, in the interpretation of my interviewees, an unequivocally positive memory. What is more, the interviewees speak about the fact that trams have disappeared from this part of the city with regret. This is puzzling because, to the knowledge of architects, urban planners and sociologists, removing traffic from an area promotes better, more satisfying interactions with people and place (see, for example, Gehl 2011). This is also how Małgorzata Dymnicka writes about the valorization of Wrocław's Market Square. In her analysis of quantitative data collected (300 surveys conducted among the inhabitants of Wrocław in 2015), she notes:

> The Market Square in Wrocław, as is evident from the strong data, is considered the most important public space with which residents associate social functions. Certainly, the elimination of the petrol station in the Market Square (1973) and thus the restriction of car and tram traffic contributed to the revalidation of the idea of public space. Trams disappeared in 1978 and the Market Square was finally closed to vehicular traffic in 1996. As a consequence, the pedestrian space increased and the Market Square regained its lost identity (Dymnicka 2017: 303).

Most likely (this thread would also require in-depth research), for those of my interviewees who remember the city of the 1960s and 1970s, these trams in Wrocław Market Square are part of their childhood and youth and are therefore so well remembered. Furthermore, these trams are part of an urban social memory, which, in addition, they themselves were eyewitnesses to, which makes this memory even more valuable and unique.

Another narrative theme which is invoked with reference to the Market Square has an aesthetic dimension. For my interlocutors (just as it was for the residents of Wrocław in the 1960s), Wrocław Market Square is first and foremost, a "nice" [*ładne*] place worth showing to visitors and tourists coming to the city. Wrocław citizens remember the renovation of the Market Square in the 1990s but the only dimension of its perception is aesthetics – "niceness":

> Well the Market Square itself is also lovely. This way of renovating it... also... these are the things that I like here (15/F/75).

> Well for sure [it's worth seeing in Wrocław] the Market Square, for sure the Old Town. Well, that's because you have to admit that our Market Square is also nice, renovated streets in front of well but renovated (21/K/58).

Only one passage refers to the theme of the scenographic artificiality of the buildings in the Market Square:

> Well we start [the tour] here from the Market Square. Our entire Market Square is also nicely admired in the West, for example, by our Western friends just across the Oder. They are delighted with the Market Square. I once even heard from my husband's nephew: "what a beautiful Legoland", Legoland no? [Researcher: Legoland?] Legoland because he [nephew] creates animation and works in that field, so that's probably how he sees it. Each artist sees [the world] through his eyes (1/F/54).

The name "Legoland" appears in the opinion of an outsider (a visitor from Germany). "Legoland" evokes a place of play, of momentary pleasure without the possibility/willingness to establish a relationship with a place; a place of fast consumption. It is significant that only in this statement, quoted by my interviewee, does the view of the space of Wrocław Market Square appear as a place associated with corporate artificiality and detachment from a specific historical-geographical context. However, such (critical) references to the one-dimensional and idyllic image of the urban past created in the Wrocław space, including the reconstructed/refurbished Market Square, appear in interviews conducted by sociologists among experts (representatives of urban elites – academics, journalists, writers, see Bierwiaczonek et al. 2017). Katarzyna Kajdanek and Tomasz Nawrocki, analyzing these interviews, stress: "The invisibility of this [pre-war] heritage for ordinary city

dwellers is, according to experts, related both to the low cultural competence of the inhabitants and the passivity of, who do not undertake the educational tasks but only the promotional ones. They [the authorities] do not educate the inhabitants as regards the ability to read the complex cultural heritage of their city but in the spirit of 'an event', they sell simplified, easily understandable, Disneyfied elements of the past [...]" (Kajdanek & Nawrocki 2017: 20; see also Dolińska & Makaro 2015).

However, what is equally important is that the meaning of the term *Legoland* is incomprehensible to my interviewee – she herself speaks highly of the aesthetics of this part of the city and is proud of its beauty. For some of my interlocutors view the space of the Market Square as also purely attractive, decorative background for eating (and mostly by visitors):

> When they ask me what is worth visiting, [...] well, it is known the old Market Square. [...] only I'm not saying to walk around the Market Square and see the town hall and townhouses around. Leave [the Market Square] for last, when you want to eat something, drink something, for example, you will sit there, you will look at it (10/F/73).

The consumer dimension is also crucial for the residents themselves but more in terms of unusual, exotic events:

> I like to go to the Market Square, as there is this "Europe on a plate" [*Europa na talerzu*], isn't it? I am a frog gourmet; also I like to eat those frogs sometimes there [with laughter] (23/M/56).

Thus, although the Market Square appears frequently and positively (as a "nice" place) in the collected empirical material, the only function attributed to it is a tourist attraction, mostly in its consumer dimension: a pleasing background for dining. For the residents of Wrocław themselves, however, this is a part of the city they avoid just because of the onslaught of tourists:

> I don't like to go to this center [laughs]. Very rarely, for example, I am in the Market Square at the moment. Somehow I don't know, I'm not drawn to it. Here there is more greenery, more tranquility. Also, I prefer to sit here (21/F/58).

> This garden, this greenery here in the area parks that are right here, it is so important, yet we are close to the city so if I feel like it, no problem, you can also use the city. But lately it's been so even somewhere the Market Square overwhelms me a bit [laughs] (16/F/77).

It is important to note that in none of the interviews I conducted was there a reference to the story prepared in the elite discourse about the "heart" of the city, the urban "agora" or even the "center of everything". The story linking Wrocław to the pre-war heritage so emphasized in the restoration of the Market Square did not appear in the narratives collected. Treating the Market Square primarily as an at-

tractive space for tourist activities can be read according to the concept of the architect and urban planner Janusz Bogdanowski. He states that the first contact with a given landscape takes the form of an aesthetic look ("it is nice/ugly in here"), which is superficial and which is far from the deeper links, from the feeling of identity with a place (Bogdanowski 2003: 21–22). In other words, in order to be able to speak of an established bond with a place, in this case the most important urban square, the "heart of the city", it is necessary to be able to say more about it than just that it is "nice".

4 Concluding remarks

In the first years of its post-war existence, Wrocław was primarily a political project and its space had two tasks: to legitimize the city's Polishness and to showcase the strength and modernity of the post-war, socialist state – as accentuated by Andrew Demshuk: "[after the war] Wrocław [was] reconstructed as a 'medieval Polish' center to embody an ambitious national mythology: its liberation from a 700-year German 'occupation' and 'return' as an integral and heroic contributor to the eternalized Polish nation" (Demshuk 2021: 8). However, since its inception, the link between people and the city they call home has been missing. Therefore, despite the passage of many decades since the "recovery" of Wrocław, its identity framework is still undefined and incomplete. It triggers the emergence of more foundation stories assuring residents of their ultimate being at home in Wrocław. Moreover, while these stories are supported and disseminated by Wrocław's academic or political circles, they have little impact on the narrative about the city created by the city's residents themselves (see Biskupska 2022, 2024). A good case in point illustrating this is the diverse discourses of elites and residents on Wrocław Market Square renovation.

It is obvious that Wrocław is not the only city whose center has been historicized for tourist purposes. But it is certainly one of those few cities where these activities were addressed primarily to residents with a clear and strong message about the finally "recovered" urban identity of the city. The story told by the elites about the Market Square, which – after its renovation – was supposed to "start new thinking about the whole city" and "create perspectives", completely misses the narratives of residents about this part of the city. Wrocław citizens remember the revitalization carried out at the end of the previous century but do not give it any meaning other than the aesthetic one (and in a rather superficial dimension, the one related to façades). For the residents of Wrocław, the Market Square, while "nice", is primarily an area of tourist activity.

Moreover, this current focus of the elite on creating the image of Wrocław through the prism of its pre-war, metropolitan traditions[20] results in additional *unrecognized* spaces of the city becoming projects implementing the idea of post-war modernism. These fragments of urban buildings, often deteriorating and demolished, are associated by the residents exclusively with socialist backwardness and poverty rather than innovative architectural thought. Therefore, "the greatest challenge for Wrocław's present-day inhabitants is not only to preserve separate artefacts of post-war architecture and city planning, but also to imbue in the city's memory that which is most important about them – the affection for architectural experimentation" (Snopek 2017: 17).

Usually when characterizing cities with such a complex multicultural, multinational heritage as Wrocław, researchers use the metaphor of the palimpsest:

> This image of a blurred, retouched past, which nevertheless peeps out from under the new imprint, the multi-layered nature of the city's history, which allows it to be read in different ways, is in fact reminiscent of medieval parchments. However, the original sense, despite the inscription of new meanings, cannot be completely erased" (Wolff-Powęska 2010: 56).

Reading the city requires recognizing and naming the visible evidence of these successive historical layers in space. In the case of Wrocław, a city with a an "amputated" memory, this is very difficult. As Anna Wójcik notes, in the case of Wrocław, "the urban palimpsest is rewritten again and again and its proofreaders are local officials" (Wójcik 2012: 175). When a city emerges as a political narrative project, its relationship to the past is better reflected in the concept of the "field of conflict" proposed by Elżbieta Rybicka. The researcher explains the meaning of this concept and its relation to the palimpsest in the following words:

> [...] the metaphor of the palimpsest, which has usually been used to describe the temporal, historical layering of the space of cities of Gdańsk, Wrocław, Szczecin, Olsztyn [cities transferred to Poland after the Second World War], does not seem quite sufficient in the contemporary context. Speaking of the superimposition of successive culturally and temporally distinct layers of the city, it ignores the conflictuality lurking at the edges, at the interface, in the gaps between the layers. The palimpsest describes ontologies without describing the relationship between them. It is, as a metaphor, a static model; it speaks of the city as a "storehouse", a residuum of memory. It seems more appropriate in the present situation to conceptualize the urban landscape of memory as a field of conflict, where various discourses of memory (and commemorative practices), political, economic, artistic, conciliatory and antagonizing, top-down and bottom-up, clash (Rybicka 2011: 210).

20 In the case of the renovation of the Market Square, "even the benches and trash garbage cans were designed to uphold the historic character of the Market Square and not to dazzle too much with 'modernity'" (Lose 2001: 32–33).

The images of the city created and propagated by the Wrocław elite, a kind of narrative "creation called Wrocław" (Zawada 2015: 72), have become the most important element in the coherent (albeit one-dimensional and full of concealments) image of the city dominating external discourses about Wrocław. This is an image of a city that has fully overcome any difficulties regarding its multinational (and multistate) past and whose inhabitants fully accept the city's non-Polish heritage. In other words, the identity problems described above, the ambivalences reflected in the colloquial discourses of the inhabitants (see also Biskupska 2022, 2024), do not penetrate the optimistic portrait of Wrocław, which – in the discourses of external actors – takes on the form which is close to the one contained in the following statement made by the urban planner Tomasz Jeleński:

> When the Iron Curtain collapsed in 1989, it paved the way for city leaders and residents to finally acknowledge Wroclaw's various heritages. The 1990s and 2000s saw Wrocław discovering, accepting, and incorporating its multidimensional, multi-ethnic legacy. The city has found its identity in the recognition that it has many identities. The citizens, as well as the authorities, have reached out to embrace the German cultural contribution to the city. [...] The residents began to track and restore remnants of German inscriptions, statues, and other traces of a prewar society. [...] Today Wrocław reveals little of the dramatic rupture of 1945. The central squares and streets in the Old Town, with Medieval, Baroque and Fin-de-Siecle façades of the patrician and bourgeoisie houses, look as if they had survived the war without any damage. With its minutely restored, diverse historical architecture and assertive society, Wrocław might be used as a model for all those cities dealing with unresolved, suppressed conflicts of the past (Jeleński 2018: 15–16).

From my perspective, Wrocław is a city that struggles more than deals with "unresolved, suppressed conflicts of the past." Without a doubt, despite the dynamic reconstruction of the city's fabric, the city is still a field of narrative (re)construction.

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