

Ideology of street naming

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Street names seem to be mundane orientation markers, and yet they are often used as means of constructing local and national identity. At times of political change, various social agents compete for the right to decide “which visions of history are entitled to be inscribed on street signs” (Azaryahu 2012: 388). In this presentation we offer an analysis of street naming strategies in three locations in Poland: Słubice, Zbąszyń and Poznań. Słubice is a small town on a Polish-German border, which before 1945 was the outskirts of Frankfurt(Oder) and after the end of WWII it experienced a total population exchange. Between 1918-2018 Zbąszyń and Poznań underwent three changes in the state affiliation, as until the end of WWI they were part of Prussia, in 1919-1939 a part of newly re-emerged Poland, in 1939-1945 a part of the Third Reich and since 1945 in Poland. This choice of study sites gives us a unique possibility to compare street naming practices in locations of different size and with a different history of settlement. The results show that in locations with a cultural and linguistic continuity a significant part of street names remain unchanged even in case of change of the state affiliation and language of administration. This is the case with topological (G. Halbsdorferstrasse > Pl. ulica Półwiejska ‘Half Village Street), directional (G. Bukowerstrasse > Pl. ulica Bukowska ‘street leading to the town of Buk) street names. Commemorative names honouring important historical figures or events and geographical names related to national geographical imagery (cf. Vuolteenaho and Puzey 2018) tend to be changed not only when the state affiliation changes, but also in time of the major change in the political system. In locations with disrupted cultural transfer, street names undergo almost complete changes when the state affiliation changes.

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