The time-space matrix of ideological street renaming in Eastern Germany

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While linguistic Landscape (LL) research shares many of the concerns of variationist sociolinguistics, surprisingly, the interface between these two disciplines has only recently become the site of scientific inquiry (Amos & Soukup 2016; Backhaus 2007; Soukup 2016; Buchstaller and Alvanides 2018). As Blackwood (2015:51) points out, “the marriage of [the] two methodologies … is significant since the conclusions … are greater than the sum of their parts. [By] … start[ing] with a statistical approach, it is possible to examine more closely the function, authorship, materiality, and target audiences of signs”. Our paper reports on a project which explores ideologically-driven changes in street naming patterns in Eastern Europe.

### Eastern Europe offers an unparalleled case study for transformations in representational politics as a result of changes in state-ideology. Having established their first democracies after WWI, these states were occupied and/or governed by Nazi Germany until the end of WWII. Post-1945, the USSR-aligned countries were ruled by communist/socialist regimes until the end of the cold war brought parliamentary democracy to most Eastern European countries. When ideologies change due to “ruptures in political history” (Arazyahu 1997:481), the consequence is often the renaming of urban features (streets, public spaces, neighbourhoods, even whole cities). Unsurprisingly, the rapid succession of changes in state ideology has left its mark on the linguistic landscape of these nations.

### Our paper contrasts commemorative renaming for two cities, Annaberg-Bucholtz in Germany and [Zbąszyń](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zb%C4%85szy%C5%84) in Poland, from the end of WWII up until last year. By tracing the waves of instatement and erasure of Nazi officials and socialist revolutionaries in the urban toponymy of the past 100 years, our project allows us to illustrate the power of commemorative renaming as a mechanism to obliterate the memory of the former regime. The public elimination of “the discredited past from the public sphere demonstrate[s] the end of [one regime] … and the beginning of a new era.” (Arazyahu 2012:387).

Our interdisciplinary research relies on variationist sociolinguistics, social geography, collective memory and urban ethnology. The triangulation of research methods results in the empirically-driven quantitative and qualitative modelling of the ideological processes that continue to shape Eastern European linguistic landscapes. Detailed spatio-temporal visualisation techniques (Oueslati, Alvanides, Garrod 2015) allow innovative visualisation to identify patterns of renaming practices across the quick succession of regime changes. Qualitative methods build on these findings to provide a contextualisation of the quantitative results through the analysis and interpretation of data collected from mass media and ethnographic interviews (Bennett, ter Wal, Lipiński, Fabiszak & Krzyżanowski 2013, Fabiszak & Brzezińska 2016).

Our innovative interdisciplinary approach to commemorative renaming promises to open new horizons in variationist landscape studies by examining the complex processes underlying “relations of power, language ideologies” in the Linguistic Landscape (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004:1-2). As such, it allows us to conceptualise renaming practices in a “time-space matrix of long and short historical periods and locations” (Arazyahu 1997:480).

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