

RSC, Number 7, Issue 2, May 2015, pp. 145-173.

Marking and crossing over invisible borders in everyday life

Dagnosław Demski

Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

Corresponding author's e-mail: d.demski2@gmail.com

Abstract: *The aim of the paper based on an extensive fieldwork in South-Eastern Lithuania is to show how and why the buried ethnic borders matter today, not only as a potential cause for conflict, but as another factor shaping multiple facets of everyday life and interactions. It shows the importance of collective memory, territory, language, religion, political changes and other factors for the construction of a contemporary ethnic identity.*

By “everyday practice” I mean not only the language, schools and the church, but also several other aspects of everyday life (celebration of festivals, telling of specific anecdotes, peculiar verbal ways of expression which provoke assaults on one another, often reflecting taboo topics (edges) in mutual encounters, and a variety of cultural incompatibilities).

I focus not on the real history, but on images which can be seen through articulations of a local point of view; not the truth, but how it is/was perceived by people. On the sort of knowledge people had that had created this type of articulations.

Keywords: everyday life, presence, recognizing invisible borders, ethnic borders, public space, spatial patterns, local hierarchies, narratives, South-Eastern Lithuania

Power has principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, faces, lights, games in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation to which individuals are caught up (Foucault 1995: 202).

... community describes the arena in which one learns and largely continues to practice being social. It serves as a symbolic resource, repository and referent for a variety of identities, and its 'triumph' (Cohen 1985: 20).

The World War II ended in 1945 and left Eastern Europe divided into new territories. This way, the borders previously established in 1918 and preserved until 1939 became abolished. The new political landscape remained stable until 1990, when it was replaced – after the collapse of the Soviet Union – by the establishment of the independent states of Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. These political changes meant that some of the former republics were cut off from the collapsing Soviet Union; however, the boundaries remained intact, which means that they reproduced those of 1945. This is an empirical study of the relationship between the social and the spatial, in which I explore the history and present day of the Vilnius region as one of numerous representatives of the areas which experienced deep political shifts and relocations of their boundaries, both in the independent states, and within the Soviet Union itself. Thus, the formation of the Lithuanian-Polish borders underwent several crucial events: in 1918, 1939 and 1945. People living in the South-Eastern part of Lithuania remember (or want to forget) two sets of boundaries: the first from the period between 1918 and 1939,

and the second from 1945 until today. These were long periods of time for the region's inhabitants, turbulent and full of movements of the people from Lithuania to Poland and the West, and from the East and the South to Lithuania (Buchowski 2005, 2006, Briedis 2009). One region which remembers the shifting borders and migrations of the people is (Dzukija, Wilenszczyzna) with the city of Vilnius. It is the region which experienced a tremendous immigration to Poland, and, on the other hand, the process of settlement of people from other parts of Lithuania and from the other republics of the Soviet Union. The land which until 1939 used to be mainly populated by Poles, with the minorities of Jews, Lithuanians and Byelorussians, was later to be "Lithuanized" during the years after the Second World War. The memory of different boundaries (1918 - 1991) survived, although it cannot be confirmed without a thorough research. In order to provide the most reliable statements possible, I performed some extended fieldwork from 2009 to 2013. The paper explores the importance of collective memory, territory, language, religion, political changes and other factors valid for the construction of a contemporary ethnic identity.

The aim of the present paper is to demonstrate how and why the buried borders still matter today, not only as a potential cause for conflict, but as a yet another factor shaping the multiple facets of everyday life. It refers to the variety of former works concerning borders (Lamont, Molnar 2002), the ethnic border issues (Berdahl 1999, Curp 2006, Douglas 2012), and also to boundary as an emergent potentiality in which borders appear in spaces, practices and interactions unrelated to the traditional concept of borders, eg. a concept of border assemblage (Haggerty, Erickson 2000), and on the other hand (Deleuze, Guattari 1987) and Walters (2006).

This study draws on the concept of everyday practices and functioning in the multiethnic area (see also Wimmer 2007, Delanty 2002, Young, Kaczmarek 2008). There are possibilities, first, of studying environmental connections across difference, second, of focusing on how people can use diversity, however the zones of former friction reappear also in changing events. Following the way in which borders are defined "as political borders, which politically/legally do not exist anymore but seem

to appear in new forms and modes of social practices”, I discuss everyday actions which can be regarded as social and cultural practices.

The categories of space, place and landscape were discussed in anthropology broadly. Space is produced by attributing symbolism that fits the dominant world view. The category of place remains closely related to the category of space, and both of them are connected with the concept of cultural landscape. Henri Lefebvre noticed that place is produced via ‘lived relationships’ (Lefebvre 1991: 34). Being in a place is being in a configurative complex of things” (Casey 1996: 25). The concept of cultural landscape is based on space defined from the point of view of man as a creator of values and it elaborated by various authors (Benediktsson, Lund 2010, Feld, Basso 1996). Space in contested territories was an object of discussion on cultural dominance (Hobsbawm 1992, Rose-Redwood, Alderman, Azaryahu 2008).

An urban landscape usually reflects the past. It is no doubt, but culture continually co-produces in the everyday encounters and interactions and makes new and new interconnections across difference. Some aspects of the difference became invisible perceived through specific representations. In search of social actions indicating the invisible borders, I use the data from the interviews, focusing on the accounts about the various instances in which the individuals of different ethnic background deal with face-to-face situations where the boundary between them is visible, or when they somehow avoid an open confrontation across its line. It means that the area where new forms of former boundaries can be found covers everyday life practices. It is social because it marks a space of biographical experiences, and – in this sense – a space of relocating memories and places. To put it more strongly, the memories always have their spatial context. What seems to be the most meaningful is that the former spatial patterns, kept in memory, could find their reflection in the narratives and everyday practices. In a way people keep performing them in specific parts of public space, and in specific moments of time.

By “everyday practices” I mean not only communication, use of the language, or attending the local schools and the church, but also several other aspects of everyday life, such as: celebrations of festivals, telling of specific anecdotes, peculiar verbal manners of expression which provoke people to assault one another, often reflecting taboo topics in mutual encounters and a variety of cultural incompatibilities. It can be referred to the idea of ‘shared meanings’ (Hall 1997).

I focus not on the real history, but on the images which can be seen through the articulations of a local point of view; not on the truth, but on how it is/was perceived by people. On the sort of knowledge which people had and which had created such a type of articulations. There are references to different periods of the past: the interwar period, the Soviet Union era and the independent state’s times.

The main data in the study were obtained from the interviews focusing on the narratives and everyday practices of people living in the region of Vilnius. The article draws on the fieldwork that was done mainly in the Vilnius region. I also took into account the local press and the Internet sources ([delfi.lt](#), [delfi.ru](#)) and, therefore, the interviews provide only one of many links in the long chain of cross-references. Some issues manifest themselves in the networks of infrastructure and in the social practices. I investigate how, in what ways and on what ground they refer to the past, and how, in effect, they form a reality which is influenced by the former spatial/territorial divisions. This is an account of how both sides narrate about the past and the contemporary life. I included several statements typical for the period of 2009-2013, which might be interesting for the readers.

In this sense, the borders are social and they manifest themselves on different levels of individual and social structures. They also persist in the social and cultural practices, and the identities underlining the differences. Another question is what holds all of them together.

To go further let us introduce the main concept of old borders. They are understood as former borders, predominantly political, which do not exist anymore physically but seem to persist or re-emerge in various phenomena such as infrastructure networks or social behaviour. This phenomenon has found its place in the anthropological discussion.

What is at issue here is the nature of culture and the place of these re-emerging borders in everyday social life. How do the old political boundaries relate to the contemporary social and cultural life? There are two general concepts: the material, historical borders, and, on the other hand, the everyday life which is based on symbolical issues. As anthropology turned to the use of symbolic reason, the issue of how community and belonging to it is marked and certified became a point of interest. According to Fredrik Barth (1969), a group transforms into a community by erecting boundaries, mostly symbolical. Anthony Cohen (1985) argued that a symbolical construct derives from the situational perception of boundaries. In this sense, the division of territory can be supported not just by the institutions of political, administrative or economic character, because when they disappear, some of communities still exist, and they essentially exist as worlds of meaning in the minds of their people. Both views can be regarded as imagined communities (Anderson 1983) or even invented traditions (Hobsbawm, Ranger 1983). These meanings are to be expressed as distinctive local social discourses that, on the symbolical level, can be recognized through a common body of symbols, shared values, and common behaviour. The conceptualizations of space and power were discussed thoroughly (Allen 1999).

Understanding of a local community has to be situational, because it is a part of a broader social and cultural context. Boundaries become reinforced during certain periods of time, and fade during others. However, as Marc Augé would say, boundaries do not disappear (2010); instead, they shift, which proves that the process continues, though in an updated form. If “boundaries are symbols through which localities, regions and states define themselves” (Berdahl 1999: 3), then what can we say about a

particular area? In this case, the former political and institutional boundaries seem to continue in the new common symbolic boundaries.

The poetics of everyday life

Approaching the question of collective identity through the narratives and practices of everyday interaction demands some explanation. Everyday life is the most relevant concept here. It is characterized by a status-bound social order: persons and things are differentiated according to their positions and roles in a symbolic system. Much of everyday practice in the society can be said to entail what local actors ordinarily bring to bear in everyday situations. They continue to make the familiar, commonplace activities of their everyday lives recognizable to themselves as familiar and commonplace. However, this everyday world also serves as a point of departure and return for occasional modifications of normal life during festivals: national and religious, public, official, mainstream, regional and observed by minorities.

The skills of everyday life consist of day-to-day contacts. An encounter takes the form of an activity that is being modified in response to the expressions of the vis-à-vis party. This exchange of activities leads to the development of further forms of identity of one or both parties. The course of the encounter is then affected by many factors, from the mutual perception of the participants to the manners of narration adopted by all parties, to the interaction or the strategies used with respect to the other group. And they are manifesting themselves in the opinions and statements made regarding oneself and others. Such behaviour requires coping with ambiguities of events. The key is to fill in the information gaps through contact with another person.

Everyday social life also forms a certain kind of relationship between all the actors. A space is created to reflect the division of dominance and the balance of power and to reveal the order of tradition. The relations between Poles and Lithuanians appear different in the light of the press

and media accounts or official statements from members of various institutions and in the light of day-to-day encounters. In the media, which acted as an instrument of the government and ignored face-to-face communication, it is much more common to find confrontational statements that correspond to specific operational strategies. In day-to-day interactions, however, politics need not be manifested.

My interest is in everyday life in the sense of familiar elements of culture which are re-enacted on a day-to-day basis. By constantly verifying meanings, the perception of everyday situations organizes the stage, reinforces the processes of division, continues and recreates existing arrangements in a new reality. The course of everyday interactions is a reflection of the prevailing and dominant world view that exists in the public space, and their analysis relates to the context of the situation, its time and place.

Marking the invisible borders

If former borders do not disappear, the first task is to locate them in the local space. Invisible borders cannot be easily recognized in contrast to material things or institutional entities. However, their remnants can be searched for in both public and private space as well. If we take for granted that the markers of the former boundary manifest as distinct expressions of cultural traits, which stir misunderstanding or even conflict, we have to recognize where this happens.

Memory of the borders seems to be the main inventory. An example of this is the old photographs showing street signs in another language. Public places are those to which all residents have access. Public space, for instance: main streets and squares, government buildings and offices, churches with their changing language signs and histories, museum exhibitions which represent current ideas illustrated, become a stage for different social situations. Public space is occasionally an arena for this kind of appearance, and marks the affiliation to the dominant culture

(Lawrence, Jani 2009, Hayden 1995, Huyssen 2003). Thus, the public space is where changes are crucial and evident. The issue of whose memories can be represented, where and how, is undercurrent in the paper.

The city provides a universal space which is accessible to everyone, even though it is filled with monuments and street signs representing the official version of reality, and animated during public celebrations by people and messages which make references to history. On the city map, there are places which are more connected with Lithuanian, Polish or Russian identity. Encounters in the urban space follow similar unwritten rules, and members of minorities are generally pushed into a position preventing them from expressing themselves freely. When researching interactions, it is important to note that one is dealing with subjective judgments from people who interpret specific situations in a specific manner. Such views originate mainly in the awareness of the social actors, and are a consequence of the specific manner in which situations are interpreted and defined.

Therefore, public space is where the invisible borders can be traced not in the substantial form, but rather in a symbolical, intangible or less tangible way. Meetings take place on a “stage”; they are set within a space marked with meanings. From the ethnic point of view, situations are part of a multitude of day-to-day circumstances, and belong to the sphere of cultural experiences. Despite the fact that the space imposes specific conventions and rules which stem from power and dominance, it also provides a somewhat neglected but promising area in which sense and meaning are also created again and again.

The manifestation of presence of representatives of both parties is a situational thing, and the unique nature of behaviour in such places shows who has taken control of the space. In the context of central or local government, the language of street signs is clear: the official language dominates the public space and represents the official discourse, whereas non-official languages find unofficial space for themselves. Today’s

behaviour became attributed with a characteristic ethnic or cultural content.

Apart from places, we can talk about special moments in local calendar which make expressions of former boundaries more visible: national days, regional and local festivals of different minorities, or several rituals that organize the calendars of the year.

Another level of such a study is a way of performing actions in everyday life – the choice of language in particular situations, dress code and physical appearance, greetings, specific gestures and manifestation of particular character traits.

The language people choose also depends on the situation, and is imposed in public offices, schools and universities and, to an extent, in shops and hospitals. In the extreme cases, using a non-official language can bring unpleasant consequences. Old photographs showing people, architecture and street decorations, full of signs written in different languages and replaced monuments, demonstrate a certain continuity in the history of the city and the region. At the same time, they reflect the temporary nature of the city's decor and narration: in a broader sense, old stories are constantly being retold.

The statements of the informants affirm that. "In the past [she] knew which shopkeeper spoke Polish, and when she started hearing answers in it, she switched [the language] and continued speaking. It was fluid, once you talked this way, then in another way. In the 1990s, I had a feeling that speaking Russian was regarded as improper in the public space. After the separation of Lithuania from the Soviet Union, the Lithuanian press emerged, Lithuanian signs on the streets and in shops only, renaming of the streets. It was a syndrome of a young nationalism. At first, they were not so open, more focusing on preserving the Lithuanian movements, rather than anti-Polish. There was some reluctance if someone talked on street in a language different than Lithuanian, [there was] especially anti-Russian animosity. You could not speak Russian, it was not proper. It took two

years before Polish language was received better than Russian. You could find menus in the Polish language in the restaurants, Lithuanian waiters tried to speak Polish, it was time of a tourist boom from Poland. It was a nice time, in general all were open to us. Then something happened, the menus in Polish disappeared, it was the first signal of changes, waiters stopped replying in Polish. Then the Russian press and the Russian TV returned. And the Russian language returned, and somehow anti-Polish sentiments returned. The Polish language started to disappear again. New bans on using it emerged like ‘We don’t speak Polish, because this is Lithuania.’” (M7) (Vilnius 2012).

The use of language, shifting from one to another, is one of significant markers of the boundary, not as a line. It appears in various local spaces. In certain situations, for example at a government office, there is no choice of language. However, in this clearly defined public space, there are situations and places where such choice is still available, especially during encounters. The above choice is often determined by the setting (unofficial or private) and the language in which the situation is initiated.

“When I come to the office and do business, whatever name-plate he wears, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, I try to use the Lithuanian literary language. My doctor is Russian, so my grandmother explained that living here you have to know basic cultural phrases in all languages. She does not speak Lithuanian, but she is able to say things like thank you, have a nice day, when she recognizes a Lithuanian shopkeeper, in respect of language. If the shopkeeper is named Tatiana, I speak Russian. Why? Because I believe that languages different than the Lithuanian official [language] have right to exist in the public space.

I don’t shift to another language, I wait until he would change the language. In the beginning we talk in language in which we got to know the person, when it emerges that he is Polish or Russian you choose this language. No big difference. If the company is in majority Lithuanian speakers or a couple of them, and one Polish or Russian. I use Lithuanian. In other cases I speak Polish, trying to pronounce it clearly and

understandably for a Lithuanian colleague or even translating a sentence if needed or expressing a thought in Lithuanian. You cannot leave him unclear beside conversation.” (E9) (Vilnius 2012).

In this manner, a unique kind of etiquette is developed for navigating the city and interacting with friends and strangers of different origins. The standards of behaviour in the Vilnius Region are an expression of the general rules that determine how one should treat oneself and others when in their presence, face to face. The use of language is a sign of where boundaries emerge and disappear in everyday life encounters. Naturally, the foreigners who speak English or German can cross the boundaries inherent to being a speaker of Russian or Polish. The space of fixed language usage and these ones where a choice making of language is possible form an actual characteristic map of meanings

Crossing over cultural and social borders

A separate question concerns the situations where the line of division is being crossed. Apart from Polish places in Vilnius (churches, monuments, cultural institutions), intangible dimensions of reality manifest in behaviour. As Edmund Leach (1977) argued, the individuals spent their lives crossing socio-cultural boundaries. Hence, we can observe a difference between what people did as opposed to what they were supposed to do. It posits questions about what is going on across the boundaries. This kind of data can be taken from accounts that describe the everyday life encounters.

We study phantom realities, other peoples’ creations and constructions of reality. We look at their culture, their rituals and festivals, their narratives. And we understand them as belonging to the world of the imaginary. As narrative, they seem to be fictive. We need to make the effort to understand the minds from other times. Our aim is to get into other people’s heads in order to perceive the universe as they understand it.

I am not referring to any specific objective or cultural differences that would cause the two groups – Lithuanians and Poles - to be classified separately, but rather to statements and forms of behaviour that arise from day-to-day situations which result from a dual perception of members of the other group. The categorizations are both based on, and a source of, contradictions, and attention is focused on contradictions rather than on seeking common characteristics or a certain kind of unity.

Certain invisible boundaries determine whether individuals are categorized in one way or another, and there is one more category which also appears in this context: loyalty. The same individuals can be placed in either or both of these categories, and it can be assumed beforehand that such categorization will be determined by the circumstances, public space, and specific types of behaviour.

In everyday interactions ethnic issues were the focus of attention in a number of specific elements: language of communication, expression or concealment of ethnic alterity, signs of respect or ritual profanation. A narrative presented by an informant reflects a certain reality which he or she is trying to make meaningful when constructing a statement. Consequently, one should not look for the “objective truth”, which may well be non-existent, but rather rely on meanings that the subjects ascribe to their personal experiences.

A situation begins when mutual observation and communication occur. It is defined by the location and by specific contributions of the participants. When they act out roles associated with ethnic identity, such encounters become the object of my interest. A social play begins that combines various forms of self-presentation and concealment of elements which the subjects considered inconvenient (by exposing elements which may be useful in gaining greater influence over the further course of the encounter). The situation develops when exchange and mutual acceptance take place. Sometimes, the participants act as opponents, in which case they adopt an attitude that involves gaining an advantage at the expense of the other.

Identity is the result of a synthesis of many individual testimonies concerning various perceptions of a group, and can be treated as a re-enactment of a common matrix of opinions, convictions and emotions that exist among the members of that group. Celebration of being Lithuanian is a predominant theme for the actions that fill the public space.

In my understanding, social roles are the rights and responsibilities assigned to a given social rank. During mutual interaction, the most important things are: showing respect to others and using the opportunity for self-presentation. This entails specific rules of conduct: responsibilities that determine one's moral obligation to behave correctly towards others and one's expectations concerning the behaviour of others. If the expected signs of respect are not shown, this signifies *rituals of profanation*, which represent attempts to undermine the status quo and to change social roles, the balance of power and the extent of one's authority.

A story from 2009 exemplifies how the choice of communication language defines a situation. This situation involved two men in their thirties, one of whom had committed a traffic offence the previous day (he was probably speeding). They both lived in a small town inhabited mainly by Lithuanians, Poles and Russians, and spoke three communication languages on a day-to-day basis, fluidly switching between them as needed. The man in question was stopped by a police officer, a local Lithuanian familiar to everyone in the town. "What language did he speak?" asked the man's friend. "Lithuanian," was the response. "That's bad, it means official," continued the friend. The rest of the conversation will remain a secret. The language of the conversation becomes a determinant of the plane on which neighbours, friends and, most importantly, strangers interact. The choice of language in which a given conversation is initiated sets the framework for the situation. It depends on the assessment of all factors that matter. This framework is determined by the type of space (public or private) and the subject matter around which the interaction develops.

Recognition by dress, distinct appearance and behavior

An encounter starts earlier than direct interaction. Language is the most distinctive tool of everyday life in the public space. According to the informants there are a few more signs, less tangible, but still stressed by the interviewees. The nuances in appearance or dress are to be taken into account. This dimension is unrecognizable for outsiders; however, it was underlined by several informants.

“Everybody can be recognized by dress, though generally they don’t differ much. However, after thorough glance on what they wear, what style, the way they talk, even gestures, you can spot small distinctions. I cannot give strict rules, anyway living here you can get an eye-view. Russian wears bazaar style, rich and kitsch, novyj russkij is wearing leather, Lithuanians dress in the richer shops” (E3) (Vilnius 2012).

It matters because following Goffman (1967) recognition of the other states the frames of possible encounter. The lines go along social and ethnic divisions. The informants point out the economical factors that make the framework. “Lithuanians look in fashion mostly, because of earning more money. For what else? You can see it in Russian schools, they buy clothes in the bazaars. Not because of it is cheaper, but tradition, of buying. And there are Turkish clothes, or else, not the same as in the shops from the main street. Lithuanians from smaller towns wear similar, doing shopping on their local small bazaars, too. In Vilnius Lithuanians belong to the richest class, Polish belong to the lower class.”

From the local point of view the marking the differences goes further than appearance, the behaviour also matters.

“Poles and Russians from working class and lower clerks, children of them seem more aggressive. The rich Lithuanians are more sensitive, they don’t need do physical exercises. Working class keep in their own circle. Lithuanians attend parties (*tusovka*) more, often go to the clubs. They go party deeper, also Lithuanian girls. Polish girls stay home, ‘I have to go...’,

11p.m. and go home, never stay till morning time. If you have more money, you can show yourself in central places of Vilnius” (Vilnius 2011).

According to some statements, the social differences superimpose on the spatial divisions. “Russians and Poles live in the suburban districts. So they meet on the corridors, sit on the benches in front of the building” (Vilnius 2011).

These small differences can be used in the process of defining the framework of everyday interaction, and thus the way they cope with symbolical boundaries. The question of maintaining or crossing them symbolically returns everyday.

Greetings, gestures and characters

The next step after recognition of the type of other and thus after defining the framework of everyday encounter is action; the act of interacting. The way of starting interaction is crucial for the rest of it. Nevertheless, greetings belong to the phase of recognition and defining the framework of the situation.

“Lithuanians say sveika or slava, Byelorussians too. Mostly they shake hands shortly without any longer forms of shaking hands... No hugs and no kisses in greetings on the streets, perhaps in the family circle. Now everything got mixed, and we all live in the common city, so it can mean that youngsters greet each other in the similar way, anyway for Lithuanians more cordial greetings are impossible” (M9) (Vilnius 2012).

It shows multiple actors in public life and demonstrates that cultural categories can be localized and time bound. For some of the local people this is still a slight sign of difference. “Lithuanians are less open than Poles for the opposite opinion. In greetings Polish can hug, kiss, they have no thank you, thank you, they are cold. You cannot find something like saying good morning, good bye. This is the difference” (M4) (Vilnius 2012).

The space of encounter and the type of person taking part in it mark the context and thus shape the way of the interacting with each other.

“Grandfather was in hospital, Lithuanian doctor greeted him and spoke with him in excellent Polish language, because he [grandfather] didn’t speak Lithuanian. Once Lithuanians had to learn Polish language too. But when my mother started speaking to her [the doctor] in Polish, she immediately shifted into Lithuanian, why do you speak Polish, you know Lithuanian. And she forced my mother to talk in this language. The doctors tried to speak Polish to the older people. Young doctors apologized for not speaking Polish, and ask daughter to translate. Younger generation values multiculturalism” (Vilnius 2012).

Although stories are told and contested by various actors, they occur in a public frames governed by state promoting the official national culture in these years. The ethnic issues could be found in TV humour programs. Crossing over social and cultural borders means using various codes, understanding them and accepting them. People can go along ethnic lines or choose supranational communication. If they enter ethnic roles, a certain ritual interaction occurs. There are various types of such interactions. Situations involving open manifestation of minority ethnicity have been rare, the only exception being national holidays or other celebrations associated with the life of a minority community, school, or organization. The informants have provided descriptions of a variety of situations where ethnic origin was concealed. The choice of any of the above was determined, on the one hand, by the place of interaction (i.e. the street, government office, school, hospital, café, or disco), and on the other hand, by the subjective manner in which a particular situation was defined.

Maintaining borders

Crossing or maintaining border is a choice and it depends on the context including actors, space and time or events they taking part in. Authorities, regional and urban, are the bodies disseminating of national

narratives. These examples highlight the way of manipulating of contested histories.

Maintaining old boundaries is represented by specific encounters. Within the context of constant social interaction, inadequate manifestation of ethnic presence in the public space results from emphasizing a subordinated position in the prevailing balance of power.

Two old people are riding on the tram. A poor old woman keeps saying loudly in Polish how difficult life is, complaining about the country, the government, etc. An older man cannot take it any longer and attacks her in a stream of rude Lithuanian words. The hostile and aggressive, open and noisy quarrel lasts for ten minutes.

Experiencing hostile behaviour in the public space elicits responses which the recipient interprets as unfriendly. This may stem from the fact that, in his or her definition of the situation, there is a predominant conviction that the offences he or she is experiencing result from being a member of a minority group. A person's identity as a member of a minority (or a threatened majority) acts as a "filter" for interpreting the actions experienced by that person. Both types usually associate their negative experiences with their own position in the society or their membership in a threatened majority or threatened minority, since they too treat themselves in a similar manner. In the case of a minority member, this is made evident by the limited number of acquaintances or contacts in the society. This, in turn, limits the person's ability to realize his or her aspirations, and therefore "reinforces" the need to spend time with members of that person's own group. For a member of a threatened majority, this is evidenced by the experience of limited contact with members of the "loyal" minorities, which translates into the lack of loyal acquaintances and a limited knowledge of the matter (hence the need to rely on stereotypical representations).

Both sides know what can hurt the other the most. "You can say: 'Go to Poland to where you came from' or 'In your coat of arms there is a white

hen, not an eagle'. Or 'White Polish', which means Byelorussians converted into Polish. In the same way 'Go to Žemaitija, where you came from, to your little town'. 'What are you doing in Vilnius? Go back to your real little capital'. These are the most popular" (E8) (Vilnius 2011).

The everyday ritual of maintaining borders touches the most meaningful issues like the right of land, who was the first, who is local and who is the settler in the Vilnius region.

"Tell a Lithuanian: Vilnius is ours, he will be upset really. This is the most upsetting saying. And he will answer '*Tuslykstuslenkas* (You disgusting Pole)'. However, this is among the friends. They replies that Poles are wrong, doing wrong, working wrong. Then don't have their own reply, they cannot find an equivalent to 'Vilnius is ours'" (E10) (Vilnius 2012).

"When you start speaking Polish language he won't answer in Polish, and usually he won't reply at all. When you start English he can reply. They understand Polish but they don't want to speak it. 'Vilnius is ours' – this is the worst for Lithuanians. Tell them look at the names of people in the cemetery. There is no need to be together without conflict. For them the point is that always a Pole wants his small piece of land, of the street, of his house, and so on" (Vilnius 2012).

The difficult historical choices can also be used in defining the framework of the encounter. The most inconvenient topics for Lithuanians are their collaboration with Germans, and the massacre in Ponary forest. Some old Polish people protest against the decision of local administrative rule on the pavement in front of a church in Vilnius. They have banners with some slogans against the local rule. An older Lithuanian guy comes close and kicks one woman, bearing a banner, on her ankle. She falls down. Aggression and physical power was typical until about 20 years ago. Now it is vanishing slowly. All that shows that the reception of reality is largely influenced by notions which are sustained through a specific manner in

which situations are defined and, consequently, reinforced through specific actions, thus recreating the existing local hierarchies.

A young boy comes to a discotheque and – speaking in Lithuanian – opens his encounter with a girl. “Do you mind that I am a Pole?” (Different reply options: “Do you mind that I am a Lithuanian girl?” Or: “What are you doing here? It’s not a place for you”. As one of the informant remarked: “It’s funny because it’s not always true, and if it were true it wouldn’t be funny”.

Each object, practice or belief has its own position in the social system and derives its specific meaning from its contrast with elements elsewhere in the system. The situational uses of language, the style of dressing, the type of handshake, all depend on the wider symbolic field.

The interviews are full of updated remarks about local cultural and social landscape, for instance, that the Russians are quicker in everything than the Lithuanians, and they do not have positive opinion of the local Poles; the Poles are dominated, and do not know about their Lithuanian roots. They can be recognized by their first names, not by surnames. The Lithuanians express their opinion on “the Polishness without content”, although they see that the local Polish people can be formed, shaped and moulded, and the process of depolonization is continuing.

Conclusion

Even under the unifying frame of the state a community defines its collective identity by emphasizing differences. Perceptions express, first and foremost, the distance or lack of distance between the perceiver and the perceived. The elements that determine the identity of an individual and a group are the self-images of that group, which are never permanent and must be constantly reaffirmed. Reaffirmation (which supports coexistence) and profanation (which is used to emphasize boundaries and distance) are extreme performative acts, but there is also a broad range of intermediate types of behaviour in between.

Should space be fixed? As Allen argued, the use of space also implies that space is controlled (territorialized) (1999: 250). Connecting the material and the social seems to come from the need for another form of a society-controlled life. Situations and their definitions serve to demonstrate one's social and local rank. How is social rank measured? In an encounter, it can be gauged by the amount of space one occupies. Within that space, other narratives compete for room on the available channels which are not occupied by communication, and in the public space or outside of it. The language of the public space indicates authority, and authority depends on what most people are willing to accept and what they believe to be justified or appropriate. This creates an image of the public constructs of hierarchy in everyday interaction.

Everyday encounters in the socially constructed space shape individual and collective awareness of the local actors, and mould their identity. As we can see in the narratives, *selfness* and *otherness* remain in constant motion, and the boundary between the two keeps shifting. Ethnic boundaries, supranational coexistence or searching of the genius loci – these are separate levels of communication. The differences are minor, but they relate to disparate connotations and norms. Both derive different meanings from the experience of the same reality. Intensive migration processes, emigration of Poles, and settling of Lithuanians from other regions of Lithuania formed the base of the encounters. A lack of permanence felt subjectively to a certain extent by representatives of both sides creates uncertainties.

The construction of one's own identity and the images of alterity involves at least several elements: self-image, the past, historical figures, models and aspirations, etc. The present experience, however, always takes into account the past and predicts the future; what merges the two into one is the common meaning. In this sense, during field studies, one only discovers the latest versions of everyday behaviour and narratives of encounters between Lithuanians and Poles. Consequently, one needs to look for new themes and non-traditional types of behaviour that result from mutual presence.

On account of the above, the articles and arguments presented in the Lithuanian and Polish narration provide an opportunity to observe how the two sides perceived each other, how they presented themselves, and what expectations each of them had of the other. Now, one can find out whether they met with ceremonial understanding and acceptance, and whether the space they claimed was granted to them or not.

Generally, the differences result from the existence of separate value systems. As it seems, while the Latvian-Polish discord was primarily rooted in the differences between Catholic and Lutheran faith and the lack of a uniform and cohesive value system, such dissimilarity does not exist in the case of the Lithuanian-Polish confrontation. In this instance, both nationalities share a common past and common experiences on various planes; where they differ is in the position they occupy and, therefore, in the resulting interpretation of reality. Distinct features of the Lithuanian ethnic relations include a certain harshness in mutual interactions as well as acrimony and pride (as reported by the informants).

What can be heard in the interviews is that the former boundaries blur, especially in the territorial or settlement aspect. Vilnius as a capital city grows and appropriates surroundings. "In the Markucziai District in Vilnius there was an overwhelming number of Poles and Russians ten years ago. Now a number of Lithuanians living here rises. Many students settle in the city. The former boundaries blur more and more. People emigrate, some sell their lands, city grows, and the former boundaries blur" (E9) (Vilnius 2012).

We can observe the changing relationship between identity and space. The old model of belonging marked by the original place of birth is going to be replaced by making a community based on symbolical lines going across the spatial divisions.

As on all boundaries, the Polish and Lithuanian relations have gone through various phases: collaboration, friendship, hostility, and opposition; there have been periods of growing closer and growing apart. Two

problems weigh heavily on the image of the past. On the one hand, it is necessary to verify the narratives of superiority of the dominant culture over the local culture. On the other, there is a need to show a different version of history and local culture. The voices from 2009-2013 acknowledged some of these phases

The most common type of self-presentation involved emphasizing differences between one's own group and the rest of people. This was achieved by articulating fellow countrymen's perseverance and steadfastness, and by presenting them as victims. Attempts to take control of the situation or exert force were exemplified by statements that involved subordinating others or imposing one's own point of view on them.

There emerges a set of predominant issues, including one that seems to be the most important in that respect, partially related to the unique situation of the Baltic countries. The Lithuanians' statements reveal a perception of reality characteristic for small nations, which forms a different type of cultural pattern and requires different means of coping with politics. This is particularly visible in Latvia, where a large percentage of the population is of foreign descent, but also in Lithuania, which (despite being internally homogeneous) observes that there is a problem at the intersection of the internal policy and the foreign policy.

The ideas presented by Poles emphasized the superiority of Christianity over paganism, recognized the advantages and benefits of a culture imported from the outside, and encouraged openness to external influences. This demonstrates a different attitude, indicating that Poles in Lithuania identify with the part of Lithuanian tradition that adopted universal values from the outside world in the past and elevated them above domestic trends. These two interpretations of reality have been difficult to reconcile, and have resulted in the emergence of "dual type" Lithuanians or Lithuanian nationals.

Familiarity is defined as belonging to the land, which emphasizes a certain kind of backwardness or presence of regional characteristics, hence

the stories of Samogitians, Dzūkijans and inhabitants of Aukštaitija and Suvalkija. Is there a third option? Poles are not unanimous, hence the different terms that reflect different orientations and ideas: Poles, Vilniuks, Russophiles, or Lithuanized Poles. Switching between familiarity and alterity in the labelling of neighbours demonstrates that there is an interdependency despite the variability of the assigned meanings.

When a society is integrated in terms of ethnic relations, its representatives act in a similar manner in many situations, since all members of the society shape everyday interactions with “the other” in a similar manner. Adjustment consists in conveying a specific, positive and attractive image of representatives of others, giving them the benefit of the doubt as regards their future actions. This is true from the standpoint of members of both the majority and the minority.

Despite the above, the changes have elicited a sense of reconciliation with coexistence and interdependence, and have even encouraged young Lithuanians to discover their own multiculturalism in Lithuania. This is evident, for example, in the statements that appreciate the superiority of the multicultural Vilnius over the ethnically homogeneous Kaunas. The above is true, at least, at the level of interaction between people. In the media, the language of dominance and confrontation continues to prevail.

There are visible similarities and tendencies to attribute similar negative traits to the other side. Both groups idolize the West and, to an extent, Russia. The difference is that Lithuanians also look up to Scandinavia, and Poles look up to Poland. Anyway, an idea of multicultural society seems to be what is coming into fashion now.

Once again reminding Marc Augé idea that the boundaries do not disappear (2010), they shift, we can see how the former political borders found a new form in various everyday symbolical manifestations. The symbolical borders between Lithuanians and Poles maintained, on one or on both sides, a legitimate contemporary social inequality. The point of

debate is who is at home; Lithuanians came here, they colonized Vilnius, Poles are at home. Territory matters, in a greater sense than in the case of migration. The political historical boundaries refer not to the virtual belonging. The land matters, especially in the view of a great number of Poles' possessions and the fact that the growing city of Vilnius takes their land with no recompense to the former landowners, big and small, generally of Polish origin.

The ways of imagining the local world were contested by some practices of everyday life. Metaphors, especially the spatial ones, are related to ideological views, and always highlight a view of a particular side. They represent normative struggles over spaces and borders.

In the Lithuanian historical manuals the interwar period is still regarded as an occupation. They have not acknowledged the Polish contribution to the history and culture of this land. Vilnius is presented as a city of strangers (Briedis 2009), and the competing views on history have not found common ground yet. Tensions remain, and it can be interpreted as a question of former boundaries which still matter not on the political level – nobody raises such issues – but rather on the symbolical one, of acknowledging by all parties of everything positive they brought in to the common welfare and goodness of the region.

References

- Allen, R.L. (1999). The Socio-Spatial Making and Marking of 'Us': Toward a Critical Postmodern Spatial Theory of Difference and Community. *Social Identities*, vol. 6, No 3: 249-277.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities*. London.
- Augé, M. (2010). *Nie-miejsca. Wprowadzenie do antropologii hipernowoczesności*. Warszawa.
- Barth F (1969). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The social organization of culture difference*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget
- Benediktsson, K., Lund, K. A. (eds.) (2010). *Conversations With Landscape*, Ashgate: Farnham-Burlington.
- Berdahl, D. (1999). *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland*. Berkeley.
- Briedis, L. (2009). *Vilnius. City of Strangers*. Toronto-Vilnius.
- Buchowski K. (2005). *Szkice polsko-litewskie czyli o nietatwym sąsiedztwie w pierwszej połowie XX wieku*, Toruń.
- Buchowski K. (2006). *Litwomani i polonizatorzy. Mity, wzajemne postrzeganie i stereotypy w stosunkach polsko-litewskich w pierwszej połowie XX wieku*, Białystok.
- Casey E. S., (1996). *How to get from space to place in a fairly short stretch of time. Phenomenological prolegomena* [in:] *Senses of Place*, (ed.) Steven Feld, Keith H. Basso (eds.), School of American Research Press: Santa Fe, pp. 53-90.
- Cohen, A.P. (1985). *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. Chichester.

Curp, T. D. (2006). *A clean sweep? The politics of ethnic cleansing in western Poland, 1945 – 1960*. NY: Rochester.

Delanty, G. (2007) "Peripheries and borders in a post-western Europe", *Eurozine* <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-08-29-delanty-en.html>

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Demski, D. (2014). Us and/or the Other: The Interdependence of Lithuanians and Poles from the Vilnius Region[in:] *Middle Grounds, Ambiguous Frontiers and Intercultural Spaces* (ed.) A.; Posern-Zieliński, L.Mróz. Poznań.

Douglas, R. M. (2012). *Orderly and humane. The expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War*. New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press

Feld, S., Basso, K. H. (eds.) (1996). *Senses of Place*, School of American Research Press: Santa Fe.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual. Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*, Garden City NY: Doubleday.

Haggerty K.D. and Erickson R.V. (2000). The Surveillant Assemblage, *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 51, Issue 4, pp.605-622.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London.

Hayden, D. (1995). *The Power of Place. Urban Landscape as Public History*, Massachusetts: Cambridge Mass: MIT Press.

- Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (eds.) (1983). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge.
- Hobsbawm E. (1992). *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge University Press
- Huysen A. (2003). *Present Pasts. Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford: University Press.
- Lamont, M., V. Molnár. (2002). "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences, *Annual Review of Sociology*", 28, pp. 167-195.
- Lawrence D.B., Jain V. (eds) (2009). *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Leach, E. (1977). *Custom, Law and Terrorist Violence*. Edinburgh.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*, Blackwell Publishing: Oxford.
- Rose-Redwood, R., Alderman D and Azaryahu M. (2008). Collective Memory and the Politics of Urban Space: An Introduction, *GeoJournal*, Vol. 73, Issue 3, pp 161-164
- Walters W. (2006). Rethinking Borders Beyond the State, *Comparative European Politics*, Issue 4, pp. 141-159.
- Wimmer, A. (2002). *Nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict. Shadows of modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Young C., Kaczmarek S. (2008). The Socialist Past and Postsocialist Urban Identity in Central and Eastern Europe. The Case of Łódź, Poland, *European Urban and Regional Studies*, Vol. 15, issue 1, pp. 53-70.