Arrested Conflict: Transnational place-making in Polish-German border towns

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Word count: 9,354

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Abstract

This paper studies the role of cross-border interactions and public spaces in the local mediation of national conflicts in three Polish-German border towns. It draws on Luc Boltanski's pragmatic sociology in order to address questions raised in the recent literature on urban conflict and borders. Our analysis traces transformations under Schengen in relation to Boltanski's concepts of uncertainty, justification and tests. We investigate ordinary inhabitants' everyday experiences of cross-border relations through different types of spatial practices and place-making strategies in the context of a shifting border. Recent transformations have started to challenge a longstanding situation of 'arrested conflict' rooted in blocked local networks, disconnected from supranational discourses of cooperation.

Introduction

This paper studies the role of cross-border interactions and public spaces in locally mediating national conflicts in three Polish-German border towns: Frankfurt(Oder)/Słubice, Guben/Gubin and Görlitz/Zgorzelec. Formerly ethnically homogenous German towns, these provincial settlements became divided in 1945 as a result of the large-scale territorial reconfigurations of states and the related violent population exchanges imposed by the Allies after World War Two (Jajeśniak-Quast & Stokłosa, 2000, Domke, 2009) (Figure 1). Along the new dividing line of the rivers Oder and Neisse, this arbitrarily defined border created severed and distorted urban environments. Both the German and the new Polish towns were cut off from the river areas. For both the post-war period was marked by suffering, fear and mutual animosity, with limited possibilities of interaction. New possibilities emerged with the

end of the Cold War and the eastward expansion of the EU. Nevertheless, the towns have struggled to overcome mutual resentments grounded in memories of violence, displacement and a deep sense of victimhood and mutual blame (Opiłowska, 2009). Reconciliation and cross border integration are further undermined by tensions that arise from ongoing socio-economic asymmetries and the persistence of neo-colonial hierarchies (Asher 2005). The towns thus serve as a rich terrain for the analysis of a variety of conflicts and attempts at reconciliation negotiated at an *urban* level between different national groups which face similar challenges but whose relations suffer from the burden of the past.

The existing research on Polish-German border towns and wider border regions draws on evidence from the pre-Schengen period and has focused primarily on issues of governance (Rogut & Welter, 2012; Leibenath 2007), and the Europeanization of identity (Dürrschmitt, 2008; Asher, 2005). While some studies have explored conflicting perceptions of the urban environment amongst ordinary people (Galasiński & Meinhof, 2002) or symbolic struggles over space (Nowotny 2009), the role of spatial practices, architecture and heritage sites have received little attention to date. Following a recent trend in urban studies, we employ a framework based on pragmatic sociology to address this lacuna (Boltanski, 2012; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, 2006). The interest in pragmatism in relation to cities has so far focused on questions of planning (Holden & Scerri, 2014), neo-liberal urban redevelopment (Fuller, 2012) and local activism (Blok & Meilvang, 2015), all in the context of North America and Western Europe. In this paper, we argue that elements of this perspective may be fruitfully extended to explore questions posed in the current literature on urban conflict and borders (Paasi & Prokkola 2008; Pullan & Baillie, 2013, Sohn 2014); we also pay attention to the local impact of the supranational organisation of the EU (Diez and Hayward 2008; O'Dowd 2012). Specifically we ask: how do architecture, place and the urban fabric affect the everyday life of urban environments in borderlands? How can urban populations absorb, resist and potentially play a role in local transformations of national conflicts through everyday life interactions and cooperative place-making strategies?

Boltanski's theory (Boltanski 2012, Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) is well attuned to contribute to an understanding of the transformative role of everyday life and the

agency of ordinary people in channelling conflict and reinterpreting the persistence of physical fissures in the urban fabric (Pullan, 2011, 2015; O'Dowd & Komarova, 2013; O'Dowd & McKnight 2013). Following Bruno Latour (2005), Boltanski includes non-human actors as important elements of social processes. According to Boltanski and Thévenot, material arrangements carry responsibility for the definition of social reality, just as human actors do: 'persons confront uncertainty by making use of objects to establish orders, and conversely, how they consolidate objects by attaching them to the orders constructed' (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006, p. 17). In his division between different 'regimes', or 'modes of action', Boltanski argues that people can acquire more reflexive and active attitudes primarily by moving from the regime of fairness to regimes that allow for the formation of equivalences between different stances and therefore enable dispute, conflict and justification (2012, p. 70). To Boltanski, the gateway to the understanding of how social reality operates is located in moments of dispute and conflict, where the fragility of this reality is revealed.

Rather than strictly following Boltanski's methodology, we have adopted mixed methods engaging in interpretive-qualitative analysis of historical and media sources, site observation, photography, interviews and maps (Groat and Wang, 2013; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). The article draws on three fieldtrips to the border towns conducted in 2011-13 that included 30 qualitative interviews falling into two broad categories carried out in all six towns. The first targeted German and Polish municipal and EU officials, as well as civil activists engaged in cross-border cooperation; some interviews took place as part of a walks through interface areas in the towns. The second category were more ethnographic in nature, based on impromptu interviews with ordinary residents of different generations encountered in specific everyday life situations (Kusenbach 2003).

In our article we focus on various actors in contested situations, and as active elements of wider borderland processes. Particular attention is paid to spatial practices, as we argue that they play a crucial role in everyday attempts at constituting an 'acceptable' common reality, transcending histories of violence, trauma and social 'othering'. We are not concerned here with the specific dynamics of transnational memory processes in their own right; these have been explored with renewed interest

in the context of Eastern Europe (Blacker, 2013; Hackmann & Lethi, 2013). Rather, we study current spatial cross-border interactions, and the construction of shared spaces—some of which are heritage sites. Our study suggests that there are particular liminal situations in a distinctive context that we term 'arrested' conflict. Our analysis traces transformations during the pre-Schengen and the Schengen periods in relation to three of Boltanski's key concepts: uncertainty, justification and tests.

Uncertainty

The theme of uncertainty and the oscillation between social stability and instability play a crucial role in Boltanski's social theory (Fabiani, 2011; Boltanski, Rennes & Susen, 2014). In critical dialogue with Bourdieu's (1992, 2000) arguments about symbolic power, the role of doxa and prevalence of systemic misrecognition, Boltanski devotes much attention to the description and analysis of actors' capacity to understand situations they must react to: 'the fragility of the social order and the plurality of regimes of justification make it possible for actors, and indeed require actors, to conduct themselves in a reflective and critical manner.' (Celikates, 2012, p. 165). Of particular relevance is Boltanski's interest in disputes (Boltanski, 2011, p. 60) and the role of institutions in reducing uncertainty (Boltanski, 2011, p. 61). This attention to uncertainty and the ability to understand it are especially pertinent to our analysis, because they reveal a key disruptive feature of life at the border. In distinction to the types of disputes Boltanski has focused on, our case studies reveal that in spite of continuous and diverse efforts of actors, as well as the unremitting work of various institutions, uncertainty may become normalised to the extent that it precludes the stabilization of social and spatial reality.

While the progressive opening of the German-Polish border from 1990 came with a general promise of economic growth, it mainly brought persistent socio-economic uncertainty to the border towns (Halle 2007). Despite the unrelenting flow of lorries that cross the border in and around the towns, the economic benefits of increased trade have largely 'skipped over' the border regions (Krätke, 2002). The German towns relied heavily on centralised heavy industries and coal mining, which all but collapsed in Guben and Görlitz. Frankfurt's semi-conductor sector did in part survive, but it has hardly been able to compensate for the loss of employment elsewhere

(Stryjakiewicz and Tölle 2009). Depopulation, which afflicted many parts of East Germany, struck the towns hard. Frankfurt's population shrank by more than one third. Wages continue to lag behind those in the West of the Federal Republic and high unemployment is pervasive. Many of the most qualified people left for West Germany or abroad; this is true for the Polish towns too (Matthiesen 2002). Due to heavy state subsidies, the German side nevertheless remains significantly wealthier than the Polish towns, where wages are more than a third lower (Dürrschmidt 2002).[1] Despite being considerably poorer, the Polish towns have exhibited significant economic resilience through the creation of myriad small private businesses of what effectively became an informal bazaar economy in the 1990s. Yet the eastward expansion of the EU has to some extent undermined this sector (Krätke 1999). The open border has also led to the withdrawal of some of Polish army bases, such as in Gubin, creating a vacuum of income and investment that has yet to be filled. Like many post-socialist provincial towns, neither the German nor the Polish towns have found stable economic prospects.

The economic uncertainties of the past twenty-five years have left their mark on the physical environments of the towns in different ways. From surveying the physical fabric of the Polish towns through repeated walks it is apparent that they, to large extent, remain town 'halves'; this is a phenomenon that has been documented in relation to longstanding local perceptions of urban space (Galasińska, Rollo & Meinhof 2002). Słubice and Zgorzelec only inherited suburbs; Gubin received merely the fields of the devastated former centre. Lack of investment and growth has slowed densification and the formation of more coherent townscapes (Haslinger, Kreft, Strauchold & Zerelik. 2010, p. 32–38). While the centres are in need of refurbishment and reconstruction, new growth has favoured scattered suburban development, underlining a sense of fragmentation. The border economy has produced its own urban distortions by creating a commercial landscape catering almost entirely to bargain hunters from beyond the border, as evidenced in the largely unregulated German-language street advertisements for a limited range of products and services, such as cigarettes, petrol or dentistry. Gubin alone, a town of less than 17,000, has 50 hairdressers. In the early 1990s, Gubin counted as many as 3000 informal stalls.[2] Efforts to make the Polish bazaars more formal have brought some results. Yet local Polish inhabitants rarely shop at these markets, and in recent years

fewer and fewer Poles reap the benefits of this local trade. Germans may be regular consumers there, but often refer to the commercial topography in a derogatory way as the 'Polenmarkt'.[3] This causes particular offense, since shops on the German side, now increasingly reliant on Polish consumers too, make little effort to cater to their new consumers, through language or tailored customer service. The Polish towns thus have had to deal with ongoing asymmetries etched into their environment, while relying on the foreign purchasing power of an economically stagnant region with an ageing and declining demographic. This situation of economic imbalance, strengthened additionally by national prejudices, significantly reduces the emergence of different kinds of cross-border relations that could create a common platform for constructive conflict and reconciliation (Raczyk, Dołzbłasz & Leśniak-Johann 2012).

Despite enjoying greater prosperity relative to their Polish counterparts, physical transformations also betray a climate of uncertainty in the German towns. Frankfurt may serve as an example. The decline in her population has led to vacancies so persistent that thousands of housing units have been demolished since the 2000s.[4] New cultural foundations, such as the Kleist-Forum established in the 1990s, remain poorly visited and are in continuous need of public subsidy.[5] Meanwhile the historic theatre building, once home to a noted ensemble during the GDR, stands prominently as an abandoned ruin. The town's largest memory-site is the vast Soviet War memorial, which is ignored by Frankfurters, but carefully maintained due to official agreements between Germany and Russia. Other sites of the socialist era have found bittersweet reuse. The former headquarters of the hated Stasi has been fitted with triple glazing and now hosts the job centre. Locals speak sarcastically of uncanny continuities since the Fall of Socialism.[6] Protracted negotiations between municipalities and the federal state left the large border and customs buildings on the central bridge languishing without purpose years after the Schengen agreement had made them redundant. Since their demolition, the municipality has been at a loss as to how to fill the void around the bridge which occupies a central location in the town centre. Despite the extensive investment in regenerating Frankfurt's riverside, its commercial revival has stagnated. The association of German local businesses views the competition with the other side as a zero-sum game.[7]

Post-war displacement, ongoing economic stagnation and unpredictable changes in the nature of the border have conferred a persistent uncertainty on German-Polish border towns in the post-war decades. In Boltanski's perspective, this uncertainty should have compelled various actors to overcome the ostensibly untenable and problematic situation, and act towards building a commonly acceptable socio-spatial reality. Yet despite continuing attempts by various actors and institutions, uncertainty has persisted into the present period. This is due to fundamental maladjustment between actors and institutions that we discuss in more detail below. While inhabitants struggle to cope with the precariousness of their everyday life, the institutional work has concentrated on the resolution of large-scale, abstract issues of governance or economic cooperation. Neither domain has succeeded in sufficiently stabilising the socio-spatial reality of the towns. The post-Schengen situation appears to challenge this disconnection between everyday and institutional processes, but the role of institutional Europeanization per se must be considered ambivalent at best, as we further elaborate below (Jańczak, 2008).

Justification

In *On Justification* Boltanski and Thévenot formulate a general model of procedures used by actors in situations of dispute and conflict. In their account, the primary procedure is based on a need for justification. Boltanski (1999) understands justification as a process in which actors necessarily refer to things and beings existing on a more general level (such as the common good or institutions) and beyond the immediacy of a situation they are engaged in, in order to explain their position and prove their worth. In cases characterised by social instability and uncertainty, people will use various resources and recall explanations from different registers to come to terms with what is perceived to be tenable and to reconstruct order. In the process, actors and material objects might be reshuffled, and as a result the state of reality might change as well.

What is of special importance in our case studies is that the general level of reference for actors is constituted not by the 'grammars of worth', as discerned in *On Justification*, but rather consists of values and discourses created by socio-political and ethnic entities, namely nation-states and, more recently, regional and supra-national institutions. Due to the ongoing legacy of the post-war division and the role

of existing institutions, their resources of critique and justification have been limited. The intrusive presence of the border in the first decades created a deep rift between inhabitants' everyday experiences and the discursive offer of justification established at the state level. Furthermore, these contradictory justifications on both sides of the border largely conflicted with each other, adding further obstacles to cross-border reconciliation. The presence or absence of certain types of memorials are particularly telling instances of this tension between official discourse and daily life. In this section we focus on historical legacies of repressive memory regimes as they continue to be *physically* manifested in the urban landscape.

The primary trauma of the post-war period for both Germans and Poles in the border towns was the experience of violent displacement. The Allies envisaged ethnically homogenous nation-states as the corner stone of the post-war order, leading to systematic ethnic cleansing of Poles and Germans (both processes equally violent) from the redrawn territories of the Soviet Union and Poland respectively (Service, 2013). Yet it was precisely the memory of forced migration that was strictly taboo under Socialist rule in both countries. As client states of the Soviet Union – the principal driver and beneficiary of the territorial realignments – both the GDR and the Polish People's Republic strictly repressed any mention of the great suffering the population transfers had caused. This was particularly challenging for the border towns as the majority of inhabitants were refugees. The German towns came to host both internal refugees from the neighbourhoods across the river, and other Germans displaced not only from Silesia, but also from Pomerania and other former German territories in the East (Jajeśniak-Quast & Stokłosa, 2000). In the Polish towns, the population was entirely foreign to the regions in which they were resettled, and composed of a highly heterogeneous mix, including refugees from different parts of Poland's Eastern territories, former forced labourers and war prisoners. The first years on both sides were marked by severe hardships, including starvation and profound insecurity (Service, 2013). Communities endured their plight in fear of, and isolation from, each other; few felt at liberty to discuss their experiences, even in the privacy of their own families, for decades to come. Despite this essentially shared trauma, more than twenty-five years after the collapse of Socialism, in none of the six towns is there a single memorial or permanent exhibit that makes allusion to displacement as a *shared* experience between Poles and Germans.

Not only was the memory of displacement taboo, official discourses and commemorative practices coercively told displaced inhabitants they were actually returning 'home'. In Frankfurt, one of the few Socialist memorials to make a direct allusion to displacement, pays tribute to the 'homecomers' in a general call to 'peace among nations'. Yet even for internal refugees, the post-war years were anything but a homecoming. In Guben, for example, inhabitants driven out of their homes east of the river must have found it particularly painful to gaze across the narrow course of the river, not just at their dispossessed houses, but also at the empty fields of their devastated and never reconstructed former city centre.[8] In Poland, refugees were told to embrace the annexed German areas as 'regained territories', presented as a revival of the early medieval Polish kingdom (Opiłowska, 2009). In the border towns, as elsewhere in the western territories, public spaces were expurgated of signs of German origin by renaming streets and removing inscriptions, cemeteries, memorials and monuments (Thum, 2006). Particularly in the first decades after 1945, efforts to recast the formerly German towns through a nationalist and Communist prism could not, however, prevent Poles from experiencing the largely ruined landscapes of their new homes as profoundly foreign (Muzeum, 2011). As in other divided borderlands subject to ethnic cleansing and top-down resettlement, such as Northern Cyprus, refugees continued to live with, and to some extent were haunted by, the furnishings of the previous German inhabitants in the context of their private dwellings (Navaro-Yashin, 2009). It was common for many refugee families to keep packed bags in their homes, in some cases for decades, as they expected to suffer from renewed displacement (Muzeum, 2011; Bazuń 2005).[9] While the post-war nationalist construct of the 'regained' medieval territories has come to be regarded as defunct in post-socialist Poland, a large stone 'Piast-cross' memorial, that symbolised the medieval occupation of this land, was erected in Zgorzelec as late as 2000, testifying to the persistent hold of Polonisation ideology in the border areas. For Poles and Germans, their homes had either vanished completely or were forever transformed, yet official discourse barred them from addressing this trauma, either for themselves or cross-communally, while insisting that they ought to embrace the towns, from which they were profoundly alienated, as though they had always lived there.

Perhaps the deepest contradiction in people's daily experience of their environment was the brutal fact of militarised border closure, whilst the regimes were simultaneously propagating a discourse of socialist brotherhood and cooperation. In Poland, in the first few decades in particular, official propaganda simultaneously instilled fears of German revanchism and militarist imperialism by brandishing West Germany as a fascistic state. The Western border was conceived as a bulwark designed to put a definitive end to two centuries of German expansionist aggression. Even though the German Democratic Republic was officially an ally as a member of the Warsaw Pact, what lay beyond the border effectively remained the archenemy for ordinary Poles. In this regard, it is important to remember that it was only after Reunification that the German Federal Republic definitively recognised the borders established in 1945 in the Polish-German Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighbourliness of 1991. In Słubice the municipality erected a memorial in 2011, dedicated to veteran soldiers and border guards defending Poland's western border, giving expression to the continued defensive meaning of the border in the Polish towns' official narratives (Galasiński & Meinhof, 2002).

In the period 1945-89, border crossings were mainly restricted to official events. A brief détente allowing visa-free travel in 1972-80 was suspended when the GDR again imposed a closure of the border, this time to shield its own population from the subversive activities of the Solidarity movement. In the border towns, as in many contested cities, the repressed figure of the enemy did not remain abstract but was both a visible and intimate presence, without however, the possibility of interaction, aggravating the vilification of the other side (Pullan, 2011). In many parts of Eastern Europe displaced communities lived with ghosts from the past (Blacker, 2013), yet in few places did these ghosts actually live at a stone's throw away. The border turned the riverbanks into a dead zone, subject to a security regime highly resistant to local re-appropriation or reinterpretation. In Guben/Gubin, for example, a centrally located island in the river had been a major focal point of public life in the pre-war period – after 1945 it became a military no-go area and its large theatre was burned to the ground. Furthermore, the fragmented urban environments of the towns, bereft of access to their natural recreational areas along the river, undermined the creation of coherent townscapes and functioning public spaces that might have conveyed a sense of civic space and pride, particularly on the Polish side where reconstruction and

densification was piecemeal and incomplete (Galasiński & Galasińska 2005). For decades, the populations faced irreconcilable justifications at a more general level, and at a local level were unable to engage in actions that could have created alternative spaces for coming to terms with the past and establishing relations with the former enemy across the river. Links between the particularity of people's everyday actions and their personal needs for stabilization on the one hand, and the general level of constructed acceptance for reality on the other, were critically weakened, and these different levels can be characterized as profoundly maladjusted.

Given these double blockages, it should not be surprising that European integration and regional cross-border cooperation have met significant resistance in the border towns despite the fact that cross-border Euro-regions were founded as early as 1991. From the early 1990s, local elites have engaged with EU integration discourse, ostensibly cooperating with the other side in the domains of town planning, infrastructure, tourism and security. Yet these policies were premature in many cases, as local communities have often felt detached from, and in some cases even resentful of, these official cross-border discourses. The municipalities on both sides quickly attempted to present themselves as models of European integration, well before they were able to achieve any tangible results of bi-communal cooperation. Frankfurt might have called itself a European twin city in 1991, but neo-Nazi groups were a visible presence in public space throughout the 1990s, through graffiti, marches and arbitrary violence against perceived non-Germans. Many EU-funded projects have been equally self-interested and municipalities have struggled to establish fruitful, long-term working relations with their counterparts. In Frankfurt/Słubice a Cooperation Centre was founded in 2010, precisely to counter the lack of common strategies and the difficulties in mobilising popular support. Cooperation is still seen as a zero-sum game by many inhabitants.[10]

At a national level, German-Polish relations have made significant strides in the domain of reconciliation and have proven resilient in the face of ongoing controversies. The border towns have lagged behind in this process of rapprochement. Despite visa-free travel starting in 1991, the border was not necessarily experienced as open in the context of the towns. As the external border of the EU, the border remained heavily securitised between 1990 and 2004. The border lands were the arena

for all manner of contraband, continuing the sense of insecurity and stark differences between the two sides (Halle 2007). Even after EU enlargement, border controls continued to determine daily life in the towns. Waiting times were still unpredictable and many Poles felt discriminated against by German border guards.[11] While the extensions of the Schengen agreement of 2007 significantly mitigated the intrusiveness of the border, some restrictions remained even then. Poles, for instance, were only granted full access to the German labour market in 2011. The open border in turn has caused anxiety among Germans, who feel exposed to increased criminal activity. Many Germans continue to see the proximity to Poland as a problem rather than an opportunity.[12] Socio-spatial realities have thus lagged behind discourses of cross-border cooperation, which partly accounts for why they have remained an abstract promise viewed with scepticism by many on both sides of the river (Ruhland 2009). Yet cross-border relations have also faced new challenges which contribute to a climate of uncertainty that has beset the towns from the beginning of their emergence.

According to Boltanski's framework, one would have expected the significant transformations brought about by the end of the Cold War to have provoked local actors to search for appropriate means to engage in disputes to re-organize their present reality. Yet as the aforementioned examples show, the justification procedures, whether related to discursive or spatial arrangements, have been largely organized from above, by supra-national, national or local administrations. While the towns' inhabitants have certainly felt the need for justification, their engagement has been severely limited. Bottom-up processes, constructing a common reality within the towns, have been remarkably stifled.

Tests
Boltanski has developed the concept of the test to describe procedures, employed by actors in critical situations, which provide the relative coherence of these situations and ensure at least partial resolutions of conflict. Tests work as 'procedures that are capable of reducing the uncertainty of a situation through the achievement of agreement as to the qualification of the beings involved' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006, p. 360). For a test to emerge a situation must be recognized as questionable, and there must also be someone or something that would reveal it as such, prompting

others to join the procedure, which can result in a provisional resolution. People do not only participate in conflicts, they are responsible for their emergence and definition of their subjects, stakes and limits. The issue of the construction and definition of a test itself turns attention to the fact that the condition of uncertainty has historically been so prevalent in the border towns that contacts, disputes and tests have not resulted in durable forms of reconciliation and stabilization of reality. However, as the border has become more negotiable and looks set to retain a high degree of permeability, new spatial opportunities for productive tests have emerged. The focus here is on the emergence of shared spaces that have been conceived, disputed and constructed with a significant involvement of ordinary people and across ethnic divides, illustrated by one leading example from each of the pair of towns. Put differently, the cases presented below can be considered as tests (though heterogeneous), and all present attempts at re-configuring spaces in order to establish a new local reality.

Frankfurt/Słubice: cross-border public transportation
In the twenty-five years since the advent of cross-border cooperation discourses in the Polish-German border regions, joint infrastructure projects have loomed large on the agenda in official policies, particularly in the domain of shared public transport. Frankfurt/Słubice's struggle to create a joint transport link is revealing in this regard. In 2001, Frankfurt's city council proposed the creation of a joint bus line. While Słubice's council initially responded favourably, the vocal lobby of Polish taxi drivers thwarted the initiative, determined to defend their monopoly on ferrying German shoppers to and from the bazaars. A civil society group of artists, 'Słubfurt', dedicated to creating a shared transnational urban environment, offered some opposition to the lobby but withdrew after receiving threats from the Polish cabbies. Słubice's council caved in under the pressure. Two years later, the project entered a new round, this time with a German proposal to reinstate an EU-funded tramline on the Oder bridge connecting the two towns (Figure 2). Up to its destruction in 1945, the bridge had carried a tramline, and the German advocates presented its revival as a symbol of hope, as much as a promise of economic growth. The Polish council once more reacted positively, yet as news broke of the full economic costs of the project, Polish popular support swung against it. There was growing suspicion in Słubice that EU funding would not suffice, and that Frankfurt intended to burden Słubice with

hidden costs. Unsure of itself, the Polish municipality called a referendum and the tramline was overwhelmingly rejected. Yet despite these setbacks, the municipalities returned to the more modest idea of a bus line, which was indeed introduced in 2012 without any further controversy and has since been well used by both sides.

Demographic and economic asymmetries ultimately account for the botched tramline project. A planner in the Polish council stated that Słubice was simply too small to sustain a tramline on its side.[13] The bus line was ultimately the appropriate answer to a shared pragmatic need. At the same time, the bazaar economy is today no longer so dominant that one of its particular interest groups, such as the taxi drivers, can undermine cooperation where a majority of people and politicians recognise its utility. One of the German drivers of the new bus line blamed the incompetence of politicians in general for taking such a long time to address such an obvious functional need.[14] In his opinion, the towns are less opposed to each other as ethnic groups than united in common opposition to their politicians. In its modesty, the bus line in Frankfurt/Słubice poses no threat to either community, and the absence of EU funding has in this case avoided extensive political negotiation and lobbying which might have been distorted by nationalist anxieties. The symbolic value of a tramline across the bridge is ultimately rooted in memories meaningful only to Frankfurters. It would have presented a revival of an urban symbol none of the Polish inhabitants ever knew, and thus failed to inspire. Arguably the recurrent controversies of this protracted project are not so much a failure in cross-border governance as an instance of cross-border contestation that may be characterised as a constructive dispute. Ordinary people, for the first time since the war, actively shaped a physical process pertaining to the border in which they felt they had a stake.

Görlitz/Zgorzelec: commemorating victims
In contrast to Frankfurt/Słubice, Görlitz/Zgorzelec's rich architectural heritage has survived almost intact (Figure 3). Questions of heritage and memory have for this reason perhaps regularly featured prominently in cross-border relations. Each town founded a museum of regional history in the mid-2000s, the Silesian Museum in Görlitz and the Lusatian Museum in Zgorzelec. Both were the subject of controversies about how to represent each other's history and relate to the region. Despite these disputes, the museums coordinated to put on parallel exhibitions on the painful topic

of violent displacement in 2011. These exhibitions have marked a watershed in mutual recognitions of painful chapters of history in the towns, even by national standards.[15] Both exhibitions received above-average visitor numbers, including from the other side of the river.[16] While exhibitions are arguably ephemeral in their impact on everyday life, cross-border interest in traumatic memories is also in evidence outside of the formal framework of museums and the elite milieu of curators.

In the past ten years, the former Prisoner of War Camp Stalag VIIIA, located at the southern outskirts of Zgorzelec, has achieved particular prominence as a heritage site. A cross-communal organisation, 'Meetingpoint Music Messiaen' has dedicated itself to developing the remains of the camp into an active memorial site and cultural centre. Stalag VIIIA is not only one of the best-preserved German POW camps in Central Europe, it is also where the leading French modern classical composer, Olivier Messiaen (1908-92), was interned for 9 months in 1940-41. During his imprisonment, he composed the critically acclaimed *Quartet for the End of Time*, which he also performed at Christmas with fellow inmates. For decades after the war, the camp remained virtually unknown to the residents of both Zgorzelec and Görlitz. From 2006, activists founded Meetingpoint and mobilised young Germans and Poles, as well as members of the municipality in Zgorzelec, to preserve and develop the site. The Meetingpoint has since put on many concerts on site and has arranged summer camps which focus on maintaining the camp, uncovering remains, introducing signs and explanatory panels, as well as artworks.[17] Representatives of the Meetingpoint emphasise that inter-cultural relations are as much a priority of their work as the preservation of the memory of the camp.[18] In 2014 a European Centre for Education and Culture was opened on the site, funded by local, national and EU grants.

What is particularly noteworthy about this new shared space is that it is driven by civil society actors on both sides of the border. It is equally a place actively used for cultural purposes that go beyond exclusively commemorative functions. Given that it is a site of German terror during World War Two, but whose victims were in the majority neither German nor Polish, it is remarkable that a Polish-German group of activists has been able to sustain a shared initiative over ten years that has resulted in a permanent memorial and cross-cultural institution. While the organisers of the Meetingpoint have admitted that they have struggled to enlist the participation of

older residents in Görlitz,[19] there is little evidence of the suspicion or condemnation in Görlitz or Zgorzelec that has often accompanied bi-communal projects in the border towns. While creating a cultural centre of this scale is logistically far more challenging than introducing a joint transport link, the vision of an inter-cultural centre at the Stalag has taken less time to come to fruition than Frankfurt/Słubice's bus line. Throughout this period the initiative was continuously driven from below, while being successful in garnering state support. The Stalag appears set to emerge as a heritage site of European standing, drawing on a powerful narrative of art that defied terror and war. It remains to be seen whether the site will shape cross-border interactions at an urban level. Lying outside the built up area of Zgorzelec, the Stalag is not easily reachable by foot from the city centre, and is rather far removed from Görlitz. What is evident from the emergence of this site, however, is that addressing memories rooted in painful chapters of the past, has engendered more interest and commitment from the towns' public than many official projects which have purported to offer 'neutral' or 'post-national' meanings.

Guben/Gubin: shared heritage

While Guben/Gubin is the smallest and economically most marginal of the border towns (Makaro, 2007; Kaczmarek, 2011), it has arguably developed the most significant shared heritage site along the Polish-German border. The ruined church of Gubin is unusual in that it is a monument that stands on the Polish side with a major symbolic value and *physical urban* presence for the German side too (Figure 4). The sixteenth-century Gothic church of pre-war Guben – the only one of the border towns where the historic centre was east of the river – was badly damaged at the end of the war and lay as an abandoned ruin in Gubin right into the early 2000s. In 2005, local Polish and German civil society activists founded associations jointly dedicated to reconstructing the church.[20] After achieving considerable local support in both towns, the organisations received funds from national and regional bodies and private donors, as well as an EU grant to establish a European Centre for Communication and Culture, also referred to by the societies as a Place of German-Polish encounter. In 2013, the restored tower was opened to the public for the panoramic vistas it affords. The fundraising for the final phase, which involves reconstructing the nave, is ongoing.

Reconstruction of heritage in societies that have endured violent conflicts frequently plays a divisive rather than a healing role (Sørensen & Viejo Rose, 2015). A number of specific circumstances have allowed Guben/Gubin to defy this tendency. The reconstruction has attracted remarkably little controversy in both towns, although the church speaks of wartime traumas that have long been perceived through the lens of mutually exclusive narratives of victimhood. There have seemingly been few calls on the Polish side to keep the ruins as a memorial, turn it into a Catholic church or simply to reject collaboration with the German side. The actors that have driven the project forward are locals, as in the case of the Meetingpoint, yet they have gained considerable expertise in managing German-Polish relations, whilst working in different positions in Frankfurt/Słubice. This has lent them a particular competence and legitimacy, as well as sensitivity to local needs. Both societies emphasise the project's importance as a symbol of Europeanisation, but are essentially focussed on using the church for the purposes of local, cross-border reconciliation, and creating shared opportunities for the struggling towns.[21] As opposed to similar efforts in constructing shared heritage site in the other border towns, this project does not primarily look to address audiences beyond the towns, and has thereby engendered a mutual interest and commitment, unique in the border towns, in creating a shared site of significant heritage value.

The spatial possibilities of the church's particular urban context equally account for people's capacity to appropriate the reconstruction in productive ways. The site can be actively used for multiple everyday purposes, rather than just being viewed or visited as a memorial. Events and ecumenical services held in the nave in recent years have been well attended by Gubeners. The church is as an increasingly active locale that can be used as a backdrop for a wide range of events, mitigating the sense of void in Gubin's centre. The progress of the project is regularly and sympathetically reported in the local media on both sides of the border. The joint project restores a historic landmark that can once more function as a source of civic pride, having long embodied an oppressive wound for both communities.

Importantly, reconstruction also signifies *reinvention*, as the collaboration itself has become a symbol of shared local meanings. From the point of view of Boltanski's understanding of social conflict, the protracted nature of the project may in fact be

one of its primary strengths, as it has facilitated the formation of accepted procedures and has drawn people into the process. The long and complex negotiations the activists have had to engage in has turned a significant piece of the city into a common rallying point. It has developed into a new icon that has necessitated continuous collaboration in the face of significant challenges. For the first time, a bottom up cross-border initiative has been able to substantially transform the reality of a central part of their towns through collaboration and creating new and shared meanings. Tests can function as a reinforcement of existing relations, but can also genuinely affect relations between actors, offering ready-made procedures for the course of conflict and possible reconciliation. Arguably, current spatial interventions, such as common transportation links, cultural centres or acts of reconstruction, are not yet fully-developed and sufficiently rooted in 'trial' procedures, available to the towns' inhabitants. Rather, they are examples of resources that may in time have a chance to be utilized in problematic situations. One of the main conditions for this to happen is a deepening tacit acceptance of these new tests, or, put differently, the (unquestioned ability to use certain spaces and social situations as common ground for critical procedures in the future.

Conclusion

In the years following EU enlargement and during the absence of border checks in the Schengen-period in particular, citizens of Polish-German towns have begun reconstituting their relations with their neighbours and the public spaces they have come to share. Everyday cross-communal interactions in the domains of shopping, labour, the consumption of services and, to some extent, leisure have become routine for many ordinary people on both sides. As inhabitants have taken advantage of these new possibilities of daily urban life through the increased permeability of the border, civic spaces have become more inclusive of, and hospitable to the other side. Symbolic spaces that express local identities that transcend predominantly self-referential national narratives remain rare, yet a number of significant examples of new, shared spaces and amenities that result from cross-border interactions have emerged.

We have argued that only by rediscovering and reconfiguring local public spaces and heritage sites, beyond the abstract, supranational discourses of EU integration, have

inhabitants been able to formulate new situations of conflict, renegotiate national boundaries, and create novel approaches to local circumstances. The analysis of the border towns' ongoing conflictual and reconciliatory relations points to the relevance of, but also certain limitations to, Boltanski's framework in this context. Pragmatic sociology has not yet fully acknowledged a type of situation that we have called arrested conflict. By this we mean a situation where conflict is systematically hampered in its capacity to unfold and opportunities to engage in constructive dispute in everyday life are absent. As a result of their long history of physical division, potentially transformative conflicts in the border towns were arrested. It was not possible to forge viable justifications of conflict which would have linked the general level of national or supranational ideologies (be they of a socialist or free-market variety) with inhabitants' everyday lives and mundane urban practices. In our Polish-German border towns conflicts were apparent, and uncertainty and instability conspicuous. Still, they did not support the reinstatement of an acceptable social order through critical procedures engaging various institutional and individual actors, as posited by Boltanski. Similarly, it is hardly possible to determine what kind of test may be called legitimate in the post-war border towns. For instance, 'truth tests', whose primary function is the reconfirmation of 'certain pre-established state of relationship between symbolic forms and states of affairs' (Boltanski, 2012, p. 103), were present in the towns, including in the forms of staged, artificial manifestations of friendship and international cooperation. Spatial arrangements may be more telling in this case than the analysis of people's actions. Prolonged uncertainty that becomes normalized, even 'natural', to inhabitants presents a distinctive context which undermines the transformative potential of conflict.

The capacity of ordinary dwellers to experience the border not as a barrier, but rather as a potential resource in negotiating the common ground they occupy with the other side (Sohn 2014), is dependent as much on enabling factors at a state level as on contingent local spatial conditions at a local urban level. The potential integration of town centres around the river in conjunction with the valorisation of places of symbolic value to both communities, such as Guben/Gubin's church, are of major importance. Still, it is not place or heritage as such which are decisive. In other 'post-conflict' areas, such as Northern Ireland, much investment has been made in physical 'shared' heritage sites with ostensible tourist value, albeit with limited success. It is

the ongoing, active reinvention of place by internal needs and for local audiences that begins to establish foundations for mutual recognition, reciprocal hospitality and normalised, shared everyday urban life. Yet the border towns in their situation as marginalised provincial border settlements remain haunted by the spectre of uncertainty. While the EU may not have actively generated transnational place-making it has certainly not hindered this process since Enlargement and the Schengen Agreement. As Europe's internal borders are once more threatened with increased restrictions and securitisation, and as official commitment to EU cooperation gives way to increasingly strident nationalist and xenophobic discourses across Northern Europe, the precocious process of local reinvention may once again be in peril.

Endnotes

[1] Anna Wrobel, Director; Gubin Municipality European Department, 20 September 2012.

[2] Anna Dziadek, Information Centre Gubin, 27 March 2013.

[3] Anonymous, 19 September 2012; confirmed by Michael Kurzwelly, 25 March 2013.

[4] Confirmed in interview with Karola Huhold, Town Planner, Guben municipality, 20 September 2012.

[5] Toralf Schiwietz, Managing director of the Euro-region Viadriana in Frankfurt (Oder), 17 September 2012.

[6] Anonymous, 17 September 2012.

[7] Sören Bollmann, Project manager, Frankfurt-Słubice Municipal Cooperation Centre, 18 September 2012.

[8] A resident born after the war from a family formerly residing in the eastern part of Guben, mentioned for the generation living through displacement, memories are simply too painful to share even in the context of the family. Anonymous, employee of tourist office in Guben, 28 June 2011.

[9] A third generation resident mentioned that her grandmother finally conceded that her family may actually settle down in Gubin. Civil servant, Frankfurt-Słubice Cooperation Centre, interviewed on 16 September 2012.

[10] Sören Bollmann, Project manager, Frankfurt-Słubice Municipal Cooperation Centre, 27 March 2013.

[11] Urzula Kondracik, Society of the Friends of Gubin, 19 September 2012.

[12] Luise Träger, Meetingpoint Messiaen, 28 March 2013.

[13] 16 September 2011.

[14] 25 March 2013.

[15] The Silesian and Lusatian museums staged 'Life paths into the uncertain: Görlitz-Zgorzelec 1933-2011' and 'In the new land among strangers' respectively.

[16] Piotr Arcimowicz, Director, Lusatian Museum, 28 March 2013.

[17] http://wordpress.themusicpoint.net/ (accessed 20 March 2015).

[18] 28 March 2013.

[19] Luise Träger, 28 March 2013.

[20] See: www.stadtkirchegubin.de and www.fara.gubin-guben.eu/index.php (accessed 1 July 2015).

[21] Günther Quiel, Chair of the Society for the reconstruction of the city-church, Guben 27 March 2013; Bartłomiej Bartczak, Mayor of Gubin, 20 September 2012.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Territorial realignments of Poland and Germany 1939-1945 © Lefkos Kyriacou.

Figure 2. River Bank of Słubice with view to Frankfurt across the Oder (September 2012) © Matthias Schumann.

Figure 3. Joint town festival in Zgorzelec riverside area with view to Görlitz Cathedral (August 2013) © Matthias Schumann.

Figure 4. New pedestrian bridge leading from Guben across the island to Gubin with church tower visible toward the middle (September 2012) © Matthias Schumann.