

URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY. LITTLE NARRATIVES ABOUT CRACOW AND SAINT PETERSBURG

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Abstract

The author of the present article interprets ethnological and anthropological reflections upon the city as the art or reading the signs and symbols of urban culture as well as the lifestyles characteristic for this environment. Thus, it requires the skill of creating an interpretative narrative about a contemporary or historical city. The present analysis is focused on two former capitals: Cracow and Saint Petersburg. Both are regarded as unique, both have a special place in the history of the nations that build them, and create an interpretational context for contemporary events. The little narratives pertaining to these very different cities are composed of small episodes observed in the multi-dimensional urban structure. These events create a characteristic semantic network. Cracow's European stylisation is constructed on the basis of two contradictory sources treated loosely and selectively: pan-European labels and local cultural identity. The imperial image of Petersburg was first created by its founder, Tsar Peter the Great. Both the city and the state managed to survive the ravages of time; Petersburg's potential is now used to the full by the contemporary leader of Russia Vladimir Putin. Born in Petersburg, Putin knows how to employ the myth of the city to create his political image.

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Etnologiczno-antropologiczna refleksję nad miastem autorka rozumie jako sztukę odczytywania znaków i symboli miejskiej kultury, stylów życia charakterystycznych dla tego środowiska. Zatem to sztuka interpretacyjnej narracji o mieście współczesnym bądź historycznym. Przedmiotem analizy są dwie byłe stolice: Kraków oraz Petersburg. Obu przypisywana jest wyjątkowość, obie zajmują szczególnie miejsce w historii swych narodów, tworzącej interpretacyjny kontekst dla współczesnych zdarzeń. Małe narracje o tych dwóch różnych przecież miastach ułożone są z drobnych epizodów dostrzeżonych w wielowarstwowej miejskiej strukturze, które tworzą sieć znaczeń. Europejską stylizację Krakowa kreuje się w oparciu o dwa przeciwstawne źródła, traktowane jednak dowolnie i wybiórczo: paneuropejskie etykiety i lokalną swoistość kulturową. Imperialne oblicze Petersburgowi nadał Piotr I Wielki, car założyciel. Mimo historycznie zmiennych losów miasta i państwa, przetrwało i dziś pełną garścią czerpie z niego współczesny władca Rosji W. Putin, petersburżanin z urodzenia, umiejętnie kształtując swój polityczny wizerunek.

Key words: Cracow, Saint Petersburg, urban anthropology, city little narratives.

Every once in a while the recent interest in urban culture, which has been rapidly increasing in Poland since late 1980s and early 1990s, prompts scholars to reflect on the status of urban anthropology (Kopczyńska-Jaworska 1987; Posern-Zieliński 1987;

Kuczyńska 2008; Godula-Węclawowicz 2012a). The question of its scope may be compared to the issue of the boundaries of the field of interest of cultural anthropology – and one hardly needs to state that, despite many answers provided in the past, the latter question remains open. The difficulties in defining the extent of the field of urban anthropology are said to lie in the disagreement as to the definition of the term ‘city’, the understanding of its essence and of urban life style, in controversies surrounding urbanisation, the complexity of urbanisation processes, as well as in doubts as to the use of the methods developed by cultural anthropology and ethnology in the course of research conducted in much less complex communities (Hannerz 1980; Koczyńska-Jaworska 1987).

Not so long ago, the search for the identity of urban anthropology involved considerations focused on whether the area was an autonomous sub-discipline of anthropology or simply a research orientation or practice within that field. In Poland, as in the West, this issue has never been fully resolved. A conciliatory opinion that might constitute a bridge between radical approaches was presented by Ulf Hannerz (1980), who claimed that urban anthropology is a distinct specialisation which nonetheless remains an inherent part of anthropology. Polish research practice does not differ from the predominant methods used in other parts of the world. Urban anthropology is usually understood as “anthropology in a city”, to use the elegant term coined by Hannerz, and focuses on various aspects of urban living. A holistic theory and methodology of urban anthropology still remain in the realm of aspirations, not facts (Hannerz 1980; Posern-Zieliński 1987; Dohnal 2010; Pobłocki 2011). Modern anthropologists devote less and less attention to solving the dilemma of whether the city is to be the subject or the place of research. As Anna Kuczyńska aptly observes – they simply conduct research (2008, p. 253).

The paradigm shift in the discipline which – as we know – took place in the latter half of the 20th century caused scholars to see that the subject of anthropology (i.e. a human being) may be found everywhere, *ergo* also in the city (Kuczyńska 2008, p. 256). The decisive turn toward an interpretative analysis of culture and discovering the significance of the world that surrounds human beings causes studies based on various humanist disciplines to be included in the anthropological perspective of a city. This new type of cognition begins to be known under the somewhat imprecise term ‘humanist interpretation’.

Attempts to extract such peculiarities of the anthropological view emphasise a certain type of insight that ought to stem from treating urban societies as culturally separate. Since fascination with all kinds of cultural diversity and differences in lifestyle belongs to the immanent, almost canonical, features of anthropology, the search for the sources of such dissimilarities resulted in the development of ethnographic field research, a specific taxonomy and a characteristic type of scientific narrative. Scholars use such terms as ‘anthropological perspective’, ‘anthropological reflections’, ‘anthro-

polological imagination’, ‘anthropological attitude or even ‘anthropological sensitivity’. Another phenomenon emphasised in this context is the tendency to interpret the cultural characteristics of the city in its own categories, practically from within.

The majority of scholars support the stipulation that an urban anthropologist or an anthropologist in the city ought to be characterised by a specific methodology based on interviews and participative observation. This may be a known truth, but one that never loses significance and is therefore worth stating – ethnographic fieldwork “not only provides inspiration for theoretical considerations, but also enriches the experience and exploration of urban areas, their description and the interpretation of reality which constitutes a configuration of many objects, phenomena, values and overt or covert symbols”. The author of this passage, Ewa Karpińska, claims with contentment that the proportion between meta-anthropological considerations and empirical practices in the city is no longer distorted towards the former (2012, pp. 14–15).

It is not certain how long the current tendency will last, yet I am convinced that field facts determine the value of ethnological and anthropological thoughts on the city. These considerations may be understood as the art of reading the signs and symbols of urban culture and the lifestyles characteristic for this environment (Godula 1994, p. 7). Thus, it is the art of narration or, more precisely, creating interpretative narratives about contemporary or historical cities.

CRACOW. THE EUROPEAN FACE OF A CITY

One of the many websites dedicated to my home town described Cracow as a meeting place of locals and tourists who value the unique atmosphere and exceptional mood of Cracow; a truly European city of history, culture, art and science”.¹ My attention was drawn by the expression “truly European”. It seemed redundant to employ this term to refer to a city that does lie in Europe. However, in the context of political events and social phenomena we have witnessed since early 1990s, such a term cannot be considered a paradox. ‘Europe’ and its derivative terms: ‘Europeanness’, ‘Europeanisation’ or ‘Europeism’ are among the most popular buzzwords of the past few years. They are most often used interchangeably in the contest of the process of European integration; their meaning changes according to the current need. Repeated almost religiously, like magic formulas, they open the metaphorical door to Europe – which is mostly to mean: to the Western-European model of culture and lifestyle. In the current perspective the obvious and unarguable issues of the history of a given city or even country tend to be deemphasised or even disregarded.

¹ Ethnographic observation and documentation made by the author of the present article in October 2001, April 2008, August 2011 and June 2013. The present chapter is an extended version (complemented with new facts) of an earlier article (Godula-Węclawowicz 2012b).

The history of Cracow's European identity understood as the awareness of belonging to a specific entity – Europe defined as a set of certain ideas² – reaches further back than the history of the European Union. Cracow has been in Europe 'from time immemorial', since its mythical beginnings. The legend of the city's foundation includes *topoi* characteristic for Indo-European cosmic geneses: a dragon representing theriomorphic chaos is slain by an anthropomorphic hero who sets up laws and founds the city (Węcławowicz 2010, pp. 81–92).

In the Early Middle Ages the Europeanness of Cracow was determined by its Roman Catholic religion. Its Romanesque churches and monasteries were modelled after similar structures built far away in Italy and Rhineland. They also reflected a very European vision of the world, both in its material and spiritual aspects. The layout of mediaeval Cracow – with its spacious market square and a regular grid of streets – was taken from the Magdeburg Rights adopted in the 13th century. This set of urban laws had a functional aspect, but was also filled with symbolic meaning (Węcławowicz 2007a, pp. 57–72, 2007b, pp. 64–59). It may be argued that in the Gothic period Europe drew closer to Cracow. The fact that the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV established Prague as his residence was indubitably the immediate reason for an economic, political and, most of all, artistic revival in the neighbouring capital cities (i.e. Cracow and Buda) and in the smaller urban centres in Silesia and Lesser Poland. At the end of the Middle Ages the population of Cracow was most probably nearing forty thousand. The city served as the capital of a large country extending from the borders of Silesia to the forests of Lithuania, from the Baltic almost to the Black Sea. The 'tricity' of Cracow, which included three neighbouring but separate urban bodies of Cracovia, Casmirus and Clepardia, was crowned by the spires of around thirty churches, over which towered the Wawel Hill with the Episcopal Cathedral and the Royal Castle surrounded by turreted walls as if with a crown – to use the words of the chronicler Jan Długosz (*Ioannes Dlugossius*) active in mid-15th century (1961, pp. 168–169). In those times Cracow was not only a seat of the Royal Court and the capital of the kingdom; it was also perceived as the centre of the country or even the world. Jakub z Paradyża (*Jacobus de Paradiso*), a Cistercian monk, theologian and philosopher working at the Cracow Academy described Europe and the neighbouring realms looking from its perceived centre – Cracow (Geremek 1984, pp. 255–26). The strength and durability of such ideas most probably resulted from the political stability of that period. King Casimir IV Jagiellon reigned in Cracow for forty three years; his son Vladislaus ruled in Prague for forty five years and in Buda for a quarter of a century. Thus, Cracow could then be perceived as the stable centre of Europe, or at least its eastern part.

The indubitable peak of Cracow's Europeanness came in the period of the Renaissance. German and Italian merchants flooded to the city. Italian architects and painters were invited. The Italianisation of spiritual and artistic culture proved to be a surpris-

² An expression coined by the French philosopher René Brague, quoted after Mazurkiewicz (2001, p. 13).

ingly lasting trend in the Cracow of the 16th and 17th centuries. Saying such as: *Cracovia altera Roma*, *Cracovia Firenze del norte* started to appear, authored not by megalomaniac Cracovians, but by newcomers from Italy, surprised by the presence of familiar architectural forms and the fervent post-reformation piety of the city's inhabitants (Ulewicz 1994, pp. 63–76). It may be added that the post-mediaeval architecture and the splendour of religious ceremonies still make Cracow an exception among the cities of Poland (Godula-Węclawowicz 2010, pp. 245–261).

The 18th and much of the 19th century marked a period of stagnation in the city. Only after the year 1869, when a degree of autonomy was granted to the region, Cracow experienced a revival under the kind rule of Emperor Franz Joseph I Habsburg. Within a single generation the city was restored to the role of a spiritual centre of all Polish lands, which had been divided between three absolutist superpowers – Austria, Russia and Prussia – at the end of the 18th century. The city managed to keep this role until the First World War (Kantor 1994; Ziejka 1994). In the interwar period Cracow gradually lost its significance to Warsaw – the capital city. The atmosphere of the place started to fill with the yearning after the royal glory of the Middle Ages and the charming Austro-Hungarian *fin de siècle* – feelings that still constitute important elements of the identity of Cracow and its inhabitants (Godula-Węclawowicz 2012c).

The true decline of Cracow – along with the entire Central-Eastern Europe – came only in the fifty years following the Second World War, when the Iron Curtain cut off half the continent. Geographically speaking, the city remained in Europe, yet it was now located in its marginalised part that was *de facto* no longer 'Europe'. The process of integration between the eastern and Western parts of Europe has lasted for more than twenty years. One can now see certain regularities in the actions taken to reestablish the 'Europeanness' that was lost for nearly a half of a century. These tendencies give rise to an interesting question of how the political meta-idea of Europeisation settles in the living tissue of a city.

Before we analyse the manifestations of this Euro-tropism, let us consider the issue of Europeisation. Kenneth Dyson, the author of many comparative studies on European integration and the influence of ideas, institutions and groups of interest, rightly observes that Europeisation is a multi-dimensional, gradual process that takes place in many aspects of life. The core of this process lies in the complex interplay of variables. Its effects are diverse, interrelated or even contradictory. Europeisation may be interpreted differently by various disciplines or fields of knowledge (Dyson 2002, p. 3). A Polish scholar, Krzysztof Wach, claims that the use of this term may have several dimensions, e.g.: geographical, sociological, political, legal, institutional or economic. Used in the sociological sense, the term signifies the introduction or adoption of European models and customs, including the European lifestyle, as well as the creation or popularisation of European identity and the dissemination of the values associated with the modern European civilisation in non-European countries (Wach 2010).

Rémi Brague's insightful remark about the Europeisation of Europe (signifying both the integration of Western Europe and, primarily, the current changes in Central and Eastern Europe) proves very adequate in this context. Within this framework, Europeisation may suggest a symbolic division of the world into "what already is European" and "what is not European yet". According to Rémi Brague, the latter category must assume an attitude towards what is European, i.e. either accept or reject all that Europeisation brings. This manner of thinking is based on the assumption that some regions are yet to take a stand on the processes that had already taken place in other parts of the world. Thus, Europeisation would be associated with a need to emulate Europe regarded as the apotheosis or 'Europeanness'.³

How did the 'Europeisation' of Cracow proceed after 1989? A careful analysis of the sequences of changes reveals two partially concurrent tendencies. The first stage consisted in actions aimed at restoring the parts of cultural heritage that had been rejected by the Marxists. The city took a step back into the 'golden age' of independent Polish state, resembling a patient who regains memories that had for a time been lost. Cracow did not wish to enter Europe as a post-communist carcass. Attempts were taken to clean the communist past away, to wipe it out. This took place primarily in the realm of intentions and imagery, since the reality was very different – as much as two thirds of the city had been built after 1945.

The most spectacular example of turning back the clock involved a return to street names from before 1939, abandoning the changes introduced after the war to conform with Marxist political ideology. It must be noted that during the communist period some streets and squares had not been named after political figures. Those names were also replaced and moved to the suburbs in the process of returning to 'historical' nomenclature from the year 1939. All communist monuments were removed, most notably the statues of Vladimir Lenin and Ivan Konev, the Marshall of the Red Army who liberated the city in 1945. Cracow got rid of even the smaller examples of socialist realism erected to commemorate events that had since been forgotten. These monuments included: the statue of a workman tearing off his shackles, three marching members of the working class and the monumental boulder with a dedication in honour of the "consolidators of the people's republic", i.e. the Stalinist oppressors.⁴ The writing on the monument commemorating the labourers killed in 1936 was emended, stating

³ Quoted after: Mazurkiewicz 2001, p. 15.

⁴ The workman tearing off his shackles used to stand by the Grzegorzeckie Roundabout on the axis of Kotlarska Street, whereas the 'working class trio' and the boulder could be found at the Mogiłskie Roundabout. Only one of the communist statues survived – it is the work of Antoni Hajdecki, a professor of the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts. The sculpture, depicting a group of protesting labourers, is located far from the city centre, in Ignacego Daszyńskiego Street. In the 1990s the spot was used by post-communist, who gathered there to celebrate Labour Day. After Poland entered the European Union the custom was gradually abandoned. Currently no marches or rallies are organised on 1st May.

that they were the victims not of capitalist violence, but of a communist provocation.⁵ Older statues, which had been removed in communist times, were now reconstructed. These included the figures of the twelve Apostles in front of the church of St. Peter and Paul, the statue of Tadeusz Rejtan – an 18th-century nobleman famous for having protested in parliament against the annexation of parts of Poland into Russia, and the figure of Mikołaj Zybkiewicz, Cracow's president at the end of the 19th century, who contributed to the city's development. The boulder commemorating the parade of the Polish Army cavalry in 1933, on the anniversary of the January Uprising against the Russian Empire, returned to the Błonia Park (Węclawowicz 2011).

Nostalgia for the past mingles with a vigorous movement to finance the restoration of Cracow's monuments. Even accidentally uncovered murals advertising companies that ceased to exist at least seventy years ago are carefully restored. Cafés, hotels and alehouses bearing names such as *Wiedeńska* (the Viennese), *Galicja* (Galicia), *Cesar-sko-Królewski Browar* (the Imperial-Royal Brewery) proudly display contemporary but stylised portraits of Emperor Franz Joseph I. Old Cracovians look at them with emotion; tourist from the Czech Republic and Hungary with barely hidden irritation (Frajtová 2003).

The conservation works conducted in the Collegium Novum of the Jagiellonian University before the jubilee in the year 2000 involved recreating Latin inscriptions over several dozen lecture halls and administrative rooms, even though they were incomprehensible to contemporary visitors and have lost their relevance over seventy years previously. The inscriptions were treated like a decorative ornament evocative of the past glory which was being restored.

In 2007 Cracow celebrated the 750th anniversary of the introduction of city rights modelled on the Magdeburg Law. The Historical Museum presented a retrospective of cultural and economic relations between Cracow and other European cities by organising exhibitions with grand yet tautological titles such as: "Cracow – European City of the Magdeburg Law" and "Tracing the European identity of Cracow". The president of the city ceremonially planted a jubilee oak tree in St. Giles' Square on the foothill of Wawel, beneath the Royal Castle and the cathedral; celebrations also included the unveiling of a bronze plaque by Czesław Dźwigaj in the Sukiennice Hall in the city centre. The plaque depicts a schematic plan of Cracow at the time of its location, a measuring tool used in the 13th century and a citation from the annals of the Polish Chapter (in Polish and Latin) with the information that Cracow was now subject to Magdeburg city rights.

The second trend may be called 'celebrating the Europeanness'. An association called the Cracow European Club (*Krakowski Klub Europejski*) was established in 1995. Their intended mission is to "build a pro-European identity and inform about

⁵ The statue is located in the Planty Park, in front of the Voivodship Office.

integration processes taking place in Europe and in the world”, as well as to “propagate knowledge of the culture, politics and economy of EU countries among the youth”. Despite the unusually broad spectrum of activity (defined as: “science, academic education, learning, development of knowledge and pedagogy – conducting activities on an international scale, working in local communities and completing social projects – facilitating European integration and developing contacts and channels of cooperation between societies”⁶ – the organisation is not prominently present within the mental space of the city. The label of Europeanness is also used by various private educational institutions, e.g. the Tischner European University, established in 2003. However, this claim of Europeanness finds little confirmation in the curriculum offered by the university. It is hardly present in “a wide range of cooperation with business companies aimed at preparing students for an active start on the job market”, or in the statement that this opportunity has already been used by thousands of young professionals who are now able to build stable and brilliant careers on the foundation of the newly gained skills.⁷ The European College in Cracow, comprising the European Private Secondary School and the bilingual European Private Junior High School no. 14, attracts prospective students with the slogan: “the achievements of our students who take up the challenges of the 21st century are the cause of our joy and pride”⁸ – which is more evocative of the socialist addresses than of texts of the post-modern age. Cracow is also home to the European Centre of Education, which combines the European Post-Secondary School of Hotel and Tourism Management, the European Post-Secondary School of Cosmetology and Makeup Styling and the Post-Secondary Single-Year Vocational School. In a text found on the School’s website, the creators of the institution explain that the justifiability of the use of the adjective ‘European’ in the name of the institution was questioned at first, yet after careful consideration it was decided that the ambition to provide high-level education with a curriculum that would meet European standards proved stronger and shaped their thinking of the future of modern education.⁹

Róża Thun, a Cracow-born member of the European Parliament, postulated in her 2009 campaign that Cracow become a place of European debates,¹⁰ yet did not specify the indented meaning of this phrase. One year later, one of the candidates for the post of president of the city – Andrzej Duda – proposed a transformation of Cracow into a “true European metropolis, so that it looks as good as it deserves to”, also without explicating the notion any further.¹¹

⁶ <http://bazy.ngo.pl/search/info.asp?id=968> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁷ <http://www.wse.krakow.pl/pl> (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁸ www.szkola.amgs.pl (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁹ <http://www.ece.krakow.pl> (accessed 10 June 2013).

¹⁰ www.rozathun.pl (accessed 10 July 2011).

¹¹ *Kronika Krakowska TVP 3* (accessed 30 September 2010).

The choice of Cracow as the European Capital of Culture in 2000 was celebrated. The names of the events organised at that time contained all possible derivatives of the terms 'Europe' and 'Europeanness'.¹² The Mint of Poland issued a commemorative medal. Its obverse side showed the figures of Pope John Paul II, Queen Jadwiga and St. Stephen surrounded by the inscription: *Cracovia Totius Poloniae Urbs Celeberrima*. The reverse side depicted St. Mary's Basilica and the Wawel Hill encircled by the phrase: *Kraków Europejskie Miasto Kultury 2000* (Cracow European City of Culture 2000). The year when the city became the European Capital of Culture was marked with a granite slab in the pavement of the main Market Square, thus making the date equal in importance to the historic acts that took place in this very place – i.e. the Prussian Homage,¹³ the pledge of Tadeusz Kościuszko¹⁴ and the tragic self-immolation of Walenty Badylak.¹⁵ All of the mentioned events were deeply rooted in the collective memory and had been commemorated with slabs much earlier. Poland's accession to the European Union on 1st May 2004 was also commemorated on the Market Square, while the slab put up in memory of Cracow's choice as the European City of Culture was removed.

The centre of the Old Town and its closest vicinity started to house institutions propagating the culture of the most important European countries: the Goethe-Institut,¹⁶ the British Council,¹⁷ the Instituto Cervantes,¹⁸ the Italian Cultural Institute,¹⁹ the Austrian Cultural Institute.²⁰ In the year 2012 these organisations (and many others, e.g. the European Commission Representation and the European Parliament Information Office) participated in the Cracow edition of the European Day of Languages, celebrated in EU countries since 2001. The feast of multilingualism started with an event advertised on Facebook as a "delicious linguistic-cum-culinary city game *Gotuj się!*, combining fun with the strategy of culinary conquest of Europe". During the so-called European Cinema Night (*Noc Kina Europejskiego*) visitors to the cinema in

¹² E.g.: the series Libraries 2000 – Writers from European Cities of Culture; Alternative Europe – Zaduch – Duszność – Duchowość (Stuffiness – Soulness – Spirituality); Evidence! Europe reflected in Archives; Libraries 2000 – Libraries 2000: International Conference of Library Directors from the Nine European Cities of Culture; The Young in Krakow 2000: European Opinion Exchange; Krakow – The Polish Chapter in European Heritage (http://www.krakow2000.pl/emk_a.html).

¹³ On 10th April 1525 the ruler of Ducal Prussia declared his vassalage to the Polish king Zygmunt I the Old.

¹⁴ On 24th March 1794 Tadeusz Kościuszko made a public vow to fight Imperial Russia and Prussia to win independence for Poland.

¹⁵ On 21st March 1980 a veteran of the Polish wartime underground Home Army set himself on fire in protest against the communist government's refusal to acknowledge the Katyń crime.

¹⁶ Rynek Główny 20. It is a meaningful coincidence that this edifice used to house the Association of Polish-Soviet Friendship.

¹⁷ Rynek Główny 6.

¹⁸ Kanonicza Street no. 12.

¹⁹ Grodzka Street no. 49.

²⁰ Basztowa Street no. 3.

the Pod Baranami Palace could see several movies from Western Europe. Cultural institutes opened their doors and provided “many attractions, free language lessons, games and entertainment, as well as culinary treats”.²¹

Cracow’s European stylisation finds a very spectacular manifestation in the culinary realm. Although it is possible to find a restaurant serving Polish cuisine in the city centre, the area is dominated by French or Italian establishments with grandiose names such as: *Da Pietro*, *Del Papa*, *Mamma Mia*, *La Campana*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Zazie* or *Akropolis*. The division lines run even deeper: one can sample Corsican dishes in *Paese*, or Sicilian ones in *Corleone* and *Cosa Nostra*. It is not without significance that Middle-European cuisine is hard to find in Cracow. The Bavarian restaurant in the Nuremberg House never gained much popularity and was closed after a few years. One establishment that survived is the Hungarian *Balaton*, created forty or so years ago as visible proof of the brotherly cooperation between socialist countries. The Hungarian Deli-bar is a very recent addition, in a rather obscure location. There are two Czech restaurants, both in the far reaches of the city centre.

Since the year 2011 Cracow has contested for the title of the European Capital of Sports for 2015. It bravely competes with Turin, regardless of its lack of success in 2012, when it did not qualify to become a host city during the UEFA European Football Championship. Recently the local and also national mass-media proudly publicised Cracow’s choice as the European City of Trees 2013. The organisation which grants this title – the European Arboricultural Council – recognised the worth of the undeniable facts, i.e. not only the amount and beauty of the greeneries in Cracow, but also their accessibility to the public!

One of the property development syndicates is now finishing the construction of a residential complex named *Osiedle Europejskie* (European Housing Estate). The (slightly self-explanatory) assets of the complex enumerated by the company were “comfort, quiet and safety”; its greatest advantages were “an internal kindergarten and an attractive private playground”. It appears, however, that the buildings are very close to one another and parking spots, green areas and even pavements are very scarce. Problems with parking the car or taking the baby for a walk have set in as parts of the everyday reality of the inhabitants of the complex. The estate is composed of individual walled sections named: *Londyn* (London), *Paryż* (Paris), *Rzym* (Rome), *Barcelona*, *Wiedeń* (Vienna), *Praga* (Prague), *Ateny* (Athens), *Amsterdam* and *Lizbona* (Lisbon); the three newest buildings in the centre of the complex were named *Bruksela* (Brussels).²² The property developing agency seemed to have lacked the knowledge or imagination – tempting buyers with the vision of “Roman climate, Viennese harmony, Parisian elegance and other most inspiring aspects of European cities” they forgot about

²¹ www.edj.krakow.pl (accessed 10 June 2013).

²² <http://osiedleuropejskie.pl> (accessed 10 June 2013).

the proximity of the mental hospital. To the inhabitants of Cracow, the topographic name of the psychiatric institution – Kobierzyn – is the colloquial synonym for “nut-house”, sometimes taking a derivative meaning, e.g. in the saying: *Tobie to się kłania Kobierzyn, idź się leczyć!* (Kobierzyn salutes you, you should go get some treatment!).

A unique example of the new Europeisation may be found in the changes of the Kazimierz district commonly associated with the Jewish community. Before 1939 Jews used to inhabit practically all areas of Cracow (Pordes, Grin 2004), yet since the 15th century the largest community resided in Kazimierz. The oldest synagogues and prayer houses were located here. In 1943 the Nazis did not create a ghetto in Kazimierz, as they had done in the Jewish quarters of other cities, but resettled its inhabitants to a working class district on the other bank of the river and sealed the doomed ghetto with a high wall. Historians suggest that the Nazis planned to rebuild Kazimierz into a model German city, since in the Middle Ages the district had been located by King Casimir the Great primarily for German merchants from Spiš trading in Hungarian copper. Even today the cityscape of Kazimierz is dominated by the monumental shapes of gothic churches. The closeness of the Polish and the Jewish community which lasted for several hundred years is most visible in old street names – Boże Ciało (Corpus Christi) Street crosses with Rabina Meiselesa (Rabbi Meisels’) Street, Św. Sebastiana (St. Sebastian) Street with Berka Joselewicza Street.

After the turmoil of the Second World War, Kazimierz was all but abandoned and destroyed. Inhabited by post-war newcomers, it was perceived as full of poverty, filth and crime, a ruinous district almost entirely forgotten. Only after 1989 did works commence to reconstruct and restore the Jewish quarter of Kazimierz, but – paradoxically – without the Jews, since its former inhabitants were either dead or scattered around the world. A stylised tourist complex was created in the oldest part of the district, by three historical synagogues (one converted to a museum) (Murzyn 2006). It houses kosher and quasi-kosher restaurants and hotels whose names are strongly associated with the past: *Klezmer-Hois, Alef, David, Abel Ariel, Ester* and *Rubinstein*.²³ This is where the annual Jewish Culture Festival takes place. Since 2006 it is organised under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland. The event draws crowds of tourists from all over the world.

The remaining, much larger part of the tourist district of Kazimierz is more universal in character – it is a *quasi*-artistic place, reminiscent of the Parisian Montmartre, with no hints of the Jewish past. Only the Centre for Jewish Culture and the Judaica Foundation located in the old prayer house in Rabina Meiselsa Street allude to the history of the district. They are surrounded by restaurants serving Italian, French or even Cuban and Argentinean (!) cuisine and hotels bearing universal and sometimes

²³ In 1870 the house that is now Hotel Rubinstein witnessed the birth of Helena Rubinstein, the founder of the famous cosmetic company.

romantic names such as: *Regent*, *Secesja*, *Spatz*, *Poppyhome*, *Anytime*, *Emotions* or *Honey*. As demonstrated, most of them are in English, which strives to be the language of the new integrated Europe. The popular image of the reconstructed Kazimierz is to be both Jewish and European. It also constitutes a stylised antithesis and a complementary element to the tourist area of Stare Miasto (the Old Town), set up in a different convention of mystery and nostalgia, with no references to Imperial-Royal past and metropolitan glamour.

Contemporary Polish culture still compares Cracow to famous European cities, primarily to the already mentioned Florence and Rome, but also to Athens and even Paris. These associations are cited in many publications on the culture of the city, both the academic and the popular ones, in tourist guides and in the local media. They appear on the websites of the City Council, the Association of Villages and Counties of Lesser Poland, the Historical Museum of Cracow or the Cracow Archdiocese. Such slogans also advertise the services of several travel agencies and the *B&B* hotel chain. They show up in various permutations along with other expressions praising the assets and qualities of the city by the Wawel Hill (Godula-Węclawowicz 2007). It is clear that each of the mentioned cities is surrounded by an aura of singularity, yet in the context of the processes under analysis they may also function as a *pars pro toto* of Europe.

Such comparisons and the filling of urban space with new meaning are aimed at shaping the 'truly European' face of Cracow. It is being created on the basis of two contradictory sources treated very loosely and selectively: pan-European labels and local cultural identity. The new European dimension of the city appears to be a vague set of various actions soaked in the rhetoric of Europeanness, Europeism and Europeanisation. The fact that it is outside of the traditional image of the Old Cracow only accentuates it. Perhaps we are witnessing the creation of new aspects of the myth of Cracow's uniqueness, as a kind of European *genius loci*. Time will tell if this imagery manages to put down roots in the real and imagined space of the city.

SAINT PETERSBURG. THE IMPERIAL FACE OF A CITY

"You live in Paris? That's a nice city. It is a bit like Petersburg, only smaller." These are the words spoken to the correspondent of the Parisian "L'Express" by the director of the Petersburg film studio *Len-film*, who was interviewed on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the foundation of the city (Epstein, Shevelkina 2003). This anecdote may be short, yet it constitutes a very accurate description of the image of the metropolitan Petersburg in the collective memory of its inhabitants. It is indubitably evoked by the bold plan of the city harmoniously incorporated into the landscape of the bends of the Neva River, the broad streets with far-reaching views, the large squares and parks, the monumental architecture and the regular rhythm of hundreds of windows and

columns on the facades of the palaces and mansions situated along the embankments. The significant aspects of this image include not only the scale, but also the ideological meanings assigned to the city and appearing on various levels of many texts of culture.

The modern jargon of tourism presents Petersburg in superlatives. Popular publications, guidebooks and folders, tourist office advertisements, websites and travellers' comments all repeat that this is "the largest city so far north" or "the largest open-air museum". "Its most famous symbols are the Hermitage – the largest museum and painting collection in the world – and the Mariinsky Theatre complex – which hosts some of the very best opera and ballet performances". Information regarding the historical architecture of the city is rarely limited to matter-of-fact descriptions of the decorative styles, but draws heavily from the language of numbers that is to emphasise Petersburg's scale and splendour: "in the centre there are two hundred museums (or branches thereof), eight imperial palaces and several dozen mansions. In the suburbs one can see six large palace and park complexes, containing a total number of seventeen palaces and twenty three park compounds with several hundred fountains and other architectural relics". Local tourist guides tend to switch to this style of narrative: "the Isaakievskiy Sobor is decorated with three hundred mosaics whose surface covers over 6500 square metres. Its façade is adorned by one hundred and twelve monolithic columns. The largest of them weighs one hundred fourteen tonnes. One hundred and forty kilograms of gold were used to decorate the dome; additional four hundred kilograms are found in the interior. A visitor to the Winter Palace must walk through 1100 chambers and one hundred seventeen staircases", etc.²⁴

The narrative of the city's history unfolds around several carefully selected events:

1. Founded in 1703 by Tsar Peter the Great who later proclaimed himself Emperor, the city gave rise to the new Russia which was to contrast with the old Tsardom.
2. In the years 1712–1918 Petersburg was the capital of the Russian Empire, the seat of the Tsars of all Russian lands.
3. The city is has numerous connections to the revolutionary movement. It was Petersburg that witnessed the first shots of the Great Socialist October Revolution of 1917, which transformed tsarist Russia into the USSR and started the era of communism in the history of many parts of Europe and the world.
4. It heroically withstood nearly nine hundred days of German blockade which lasted from September 1941 until January 1944. This cost Petersburg more than a million lives, yet the city did not fall.

The four events constitute the framework and the significant context for the development of the myth of Saint Petersburg's/Leningrad's greatness. The past and its

²⁴ The information presented here was gathered by the author during her stay in Petersburg in 2008 and in the course of a source inquiry conducted in 2008–2009 and 2013. The present section is an extended and updated version of an older article – cf. Godula-Węclawowicz 2009.

ideological meaning are reflected in the changes of the city's name. The name Saint Petersburg, given to the town by its founder, referred to the Holy Prince of Apostles and to Rome – ancient, imperial and apostolic. The city was also called by abbreviated forms of the name: Petersburg, Petrograd, Petropol, which referred directly to the person of Peter the Great. Historical documents clearly indicate that the mental connection with Rome and associating the Tsar with the Apostle was a very conscious element of Peter's state ideology (Łotman, Uspienski 1993, pp. 162–163; Uspienski 1993, pp. 180–184). In 1914 the name of the city was officially changed to Petrograd, as the German-sounding “Petersburg” did not seem an appropriate name in a time of war. When the communists seized power in the country, Petersburg lost its position of the capital city. The new central government moved to Moscow. Very soon, that is in 1924, Peter's city became “Leningrad”, in honour of the recently deceased leader of the revolution. The original name was restored to the city in the spring of 1991. Several months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union the community of Leningrad voted to turn back the clock. Although the city had officially been “Leningrad” for more than fifty years, the locals still called it “Peter” – a name with very specific connotations of familiarity (Żyłko 2006, p. 14). This form is still used, along with “Petersburg” or “Petrograd” (the latter is much less common); all the contemporary names are associated with the Tsar who founded the city and not with his patron saint.

The iconsphere of modern Petersburg forms a unique entity, in which the two faces of the city – imperial and Soviet, are interwoven together. In early 1990s many streets, squares, parks, palaces, mansions and houses abandoned the names that had been assigned to them in the communist period to conform to the Marxist ideology. The subway, however, still stops at Mayakovskaya (Mayakovsky) Station, Proletarskaya (Proletarian) Station, Pionerskaya (Pioneer) Station and at Prospekt Bolshevikov (Bolshevik Boulevard). Concerts are played in Oktyabrskiy (October) Hall, on the corner of 4-ya Sovetskaya (4th Soviet) Street and Grecheskiy Prospekt (Greek Boulevard). The cruiser Aurora is permanently anchored at the jetty. Other relics of the Soviet times are: the statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the Kirov Square with a monumental sculpture of the activist and several statues of Lenin. One of them proudly looks over Lenin Square by the Finlyandsky Vokzal (Finland Station). The place has a particular connection to the leader of the revolution – who, having returned from exile in 1917, made a triumphant speech to the enthusiastic crowds that came to greet him there. The second statue stands in front of the former building of the elite school known as the Smolny Institute for Noble Maidens (the name has recently been restored). In 1917 the institute was taken over by proletarian deputies of the Petrograd Soviet. In the assembly hall of this very building that Lenin declared that the power had been seized by the masses.

The Senate Square (originally called Peter's Square and later the Dekabristy' Square – Heroes of 1825 Uprising) boasts a bronze statue of Peter the Great, commonly referred to as the Bronze Horseman. It was commissioned by Empress Catherine II on the

occasion of the 100th anniversary of her predecessor's ascension to the throne. The name "Bronze Horseman" comes from a 19th-century poem by Alexander Pushkin, describing an all-powerful tsar astride a fiery steed. Peter the Great acted like a Demiurge, in founding Petersburg he harnessed Russia and spurred it for a jump, just as he did with the bronze horse in the square. The figure of the emperor of horseback found its way into the local folklore – an urban legend, most probably originating from the 19th century, states that as long as the Horseman stands, the city will not cease to exist (Toporow 2000, p. 179). According to an often told tale, the legend was the reason why the statue was not evacuated but only protected against aircraft bombardment with a shelter made of earth and wood. The city endured 900 days of siege because the Horseman remained in his rightful place.

In the year 1992 local authorities established the *Hymn to a Great City* as Petersburg's anthem. The music was taken from Reinhold M. Glière's ballet *The Bronze Horseman*. The lyrics were written by Oleg Chuprov. It is a grandiloquent ode to Saint Petersburg, praising it as a "majestic city hovering over the Neva", which is "immortal like Russia" and "impregnable", whose breath is "preserved by the Bronze Horseman" and which is supposed to shine forever in its "vibrant beauty"²⁵. Interestingly, both in the legend and in the anthem the person of the Emperor superseded the Peter the Apostle as the patron of the city. *The Hymn to a Great City* is played during festivities and anniversary celebrations organised in the city: on 10th February (Peter the Great's Memorial Day), on 27th May (Saint Petersburg Day) and on the first Sunday after 22nd July (the Day of the Fleet). For the last few years the melody welcomes and bids farewell to passengers at the Finland Station – which has more connections with Lenin, discreetly ignored in the *Hymn*.

The myth of the Great Peter – founder, constructor, reformer, unswerving ruler – is eagerly employed by the current president of Russia, Vladimir Putin. Born in Petersburg, Putin skilfully used local *topoi* to create his political image. It is said that when he held the office of Petersburg's vice-mayor he always decorated his office with a portrait of Peter the Great, which he was later reported to take with him to the Kremlin.

Vladimir Putin uses every occasion to elevate his own status in the context of Saint Petersburg. It was here – and not in Moscow – that Putin, a newly elected president, chose to hold his first meeting with a foreign politician (UK Prime Minister Tony Blair) in March 2000. According to the semantics of the 'first time', Putin's gesture was interpreted as a harbinger of a new style in Russia's international politics. The choice of Petersburg as the place of the meeting had much significance – mirroring the intention of the founder of the city, Peter the Great (Łotman, Uspienski 1993, pp. 158–159, 169–170) – Petersburg was to symbolise a breakoff with the previous

²⁵ Translation of the lyrics taken from: <http://www.mpolo-spb.ru/english/?/english/spb/interesnoe-is-istorii> [translator's note].

history of Russia and a new beginning. After Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012, the first meeting with EU leaders was held in the Constantine Palace in Strelna on the outskirts of Petersburg. The palace, which used to belong to the royal family, is now a presidential residence.

Since 1999, when Vladimir Putin served alternatively as Russia's prime minister or president, leaders of the most influential countries were repeatedly invited to Petersburg and the palaces in the vicinity. As a result, the city became the Cape David of Russia, at least in the opinion of Paul Smith, US consul in Petersburg (Graczyk 2002). According to a different commentator, the view generally accepted in Western Europe was that the diplomats visiting the former capital of Russia were pleasing the leader of the country (Łomanowski 2003).

Putin likes to accentuate his connection to his home city. Careful of his public image, he prudently chooses occasions for his visits to Petersburg. On 27th December 2008 the Polish radio station RMF FM reported that the prime minister of Russia had made a journey to the place of his origin. Together with the mayor of Petersburg he visited the Christmas market and took part in painting works of art for the customary charity auction. In October of the same year the media informed that Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin celebrated his 56th birthday in Petersburg along with the Russian cinema, which was then exactly 100 years old. The politician did not visit *Len-film*, a studio that had existed since the earliest days of the Soviet Union and was thus more relevant in the context of the 100th anniversary of Russian film-making, but participated in the press conference occasioned by the 10th jubilee of *Russian World Studio* – a new but buoyant cinematic and television company. In his speech emphasising Petersburg's role in the development of Russian cinema Vladimir Putin referred to a thought once expressed by Lenin: "It was right here, in Sankt Petersburg, 100 years ago when people watched the first Russian feature film ever. The attitude towards cinema has undergone several changes. Firstly it was perceived as a wonder, then it became a propaganda instrument of enormous power – there is even a famous saying of Lenin that cinematography is the most important of all the arts". Lenin's words took on an ambiguous and probably unintentional meaning in relation to the next event planned into Putin's birthday celebration. The "Komsomolskaya Pravda", a tabloid newspaper, reported that a ceremonial premiere screening of the movie *Let's learn judo with Vladimir Putin* took place in the presidential residence in Strelna. The film complemented a previously published book of the same title. One of the co-authors of the handbook was Vasily Shestakov whom Putin trained judo with as a child. The movie is composed of three parts. In the first, the president talks about the advantages of judo and his passion for it, in the second he recounts the history of the martial art, while in the third he demonstrates a few spectacular grapples, evasive movements and throws²⁶.

²⁶ <http://wm.pl> (accessed 10 June 2013).

It is easy to notice that the role of a Russian macho allows Vladimir Putin to fit into Russian mass-culture²⁷ and thus maintain and promote his image of a tough and imperious leader, created by himself and the media.

In 2003 Saint Petersburg celebrated the 300th anniversary of its foundation. Vladimir Putin wished the jubilee to be a grand festive occasion. He repeatedly stated that this was a great opportunity to demonstrate Russia's power and its source. The key role was played by the city that had for several years been restored to its former glory. Suburban residences of Peter the Great and his successors were also renovated. The restoration of Petersburg became a national priority. Substantial sums of billions of roubles were assigned for this purpose from the state budget. Already the external appearance of the city was to dazzle all visitors. The jubilee celebrations lasted for the entire year, yet the most spectacular events took place in late May and early June. The period was marked by two dates: 27th May – the anniversary of the establishment of the city – and 30th May – the anniversary of Emperor Peter's birth. The leaders of forty five countries and the delegates of several dozen international organisations who attended the festivities were lodged in the chambers of old imperial palaces in the outskirts of Petersburg. The anniversary celebrations began with an impressive fireworks performance; each part of the ceremony surpassing the previous ones. The program included: a laser spectacle recounting scenes from the city's history, a light-and-sound performance involving the waters of the fountains in front of the Peterhof Palace and a concert of the New York Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. The authorities did not neglect to show Russia's military power at a street military parade. Putin, who was then President of the Russian Federation, gave several dinners in splendid imperial residences, entertaining the luminaries of politics, art, culture and business.²⁸ He was a masterful director of a spectacle that lasted for several days and aimed at presenting an image of Russia as a pro-Western country which is nonetheless deeply rooted in its tradition of autocratic government. Like Tsar Peter I, Putin opened the imperial gates of Russia to the modern world.

The celebrations came to an end and with them the spectacle of Russian glory and Byzantine grandeur, yet the myth of the greatness of the state and its ruler still blossoms in Petersburg's ground and every so often presents a brand new face. In July 2006 president Putin hosted a meeting of the Group of Eight (G8), a forum of representatives

²⁷ Eg. in 2011 a company called Agency One released an online computer game, in which players take the part of Vladimir Putin, who fights for a higher GDP by collecting gold, drives the newest model of Lada, subdues vicious terrorists and extinguishes fires while aboard a government Il. These heroic acts are also complemented by our hero giving money to a poor pensioner and escaping on a motorbike from the clutches of the greedy Yulia Tymoshenko who turns out to be after Russian gas. The plot of the game develops in the context of numerous Russian victories, past and present. It also involves a performance during a charity fund-raiser, with Vladimir Putin singing the famous song "Blueberry Hill".

²⁸ Information based on Polish and Russian media reports.

of the most influential countries in the world. The summit took place in Petersburg. For the first time since the organisation's foundation the annual meeting was organised in and presided by the Russian Federation. It is telling that Andrey Illarionov's dramatic warning published by the "Washington Post" on 18th April 2006 remained unanswered. The former economic policy advisor to Putin stated that by accepting Russia's invitation the leaders of Western countries legitimise its anti-democratic and imperialist policy.²⁹ The summit in Petersburg proceeded according to plan. It was not disturbed by the clamorous anti-globalist demonstrations which have for many years been a part of the political ritual. The host took care to separate his visitors and practically the entire city from the rest of the world. (Biuletyn 2006; Gradziuk 2006). Following the custom established many years ago, the summit representatives discussed the grand subjects of grand politics. The debates and walks through parks and palaces proceeded in fine weather – the local gossip was that this was the effect of planes flying over Petersburg spraying chemicals to disperse storm clouds.

For more than ten years the Petersburg International Economic Forum, unofficially called the "Russian Davos", serves as yet another opportunity to demonstrate the city's power. The event takes place annually, in June. Politicians, economists, political scientists, businessmen, government representatives and CEOs of large companies come to Petersburg to define and discuss the most important political and economic problems occurring in Russia and in the world, and to find possible solutions. The plenary session usually starts with a speech by the President, which sets the tone for further discussion. In 2012 the audience waited for Vladimir Putin's address with particular interest, since he was returning to the post of president after a four years' interval which he spent serving as prime minister. The leader of Russia had carefully stage-managed his (non)appearance. Like a tsar, he had everybody waiting for him for several hours. The Polish "Gazeta Wyborcza" reported that the inauguration meeting with the leaders of large gas companies was planned to start at 4:30, then at 6 PM. After 7 o'clock it was no longer certain whether it would take place at all. One of the managers quoted by the "Vedomosti" daily newspaper turned his irritation to a joke saying that the people gathered in that hall manage a total capital far exceeding the budget of Russia. Ultimately the meeting started only after 8 PM.

The recent Forum in the year 2013 was organised in Petersburg for the 17th time. The media reported that Russia had spent a fortune (ca. 11 million dollars) to outshine even Davos. The Forum was attended by nearly six thousand participants representing around four hundred domestic and two hundred foreign economic entities from more than seventy countries, as well as by almost the entire Russian government – excluding the prime minister. Other guests included governors of Russian provinces, high-ranking foreign officials – most notably the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel,

²⁹ www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/04/18/russia (accessed 10 April 2009)

and the most important visitor – President Vladimir Putin. Both commentators and participants of the event emphasised that this year's event was the largest in scale in Petersburg Economic Forum's history. Journalists of the "Komsomolskaya Pravda" assessed the value of official contracts, agreements and settlements made during the three days' Forum to range from several to more than ten million dollars, even excluding the 'contracts of the century' which had been announced before. As one of the press rightly observed, all deals could have been signed away from the cameras, the clatter and the rest of the staffage, yet concluding them in that very time and place served to accentuate their meaning.³⁰ What is more, it elevated the status of Putin's Russia and her leader.

Such facts could be enumerated by the dozen, since every year of Vladimir Putin's leadership brings more of them. The events that take place between the city and its ruler form a semiotic text. The key to its interpretation lies in the myth of Petersburg's greatness, systematically used by Vladimir Putin. The myth – a consequence of a selective perception of history – is composed of several interconnected ideas:

1. The idea of a new beginning – doubled, as it refer to both Peter I and Lenin – that caused an avalanche of social changes in the world.
2. The idea of centrality, embodied by the fact that the city used to be the capital of an empire (and the seat of the mighty tsars) and the cradle of the Great Socialist October Revolution.
3. The idea of might and power embodied by Imperial Russia, the potential of the Great October and the infallibility of Leningrad.

A question that must for now remained unanswered is whether Vladimir Putin who aspires to the role of the almighty saviour of Russia will be incorporated into Petersburg's imperial myth. Perhaps he will join Peter the Great and Vladimir Lenin in their pride of place in the factual and imagined space of the city.

* * *

There were two capitals: Cracow and Petersburg. Both are praised as unique, both have a special place in the history of the nations that build them, and create an interpretational context for contemporary events. The little narratives pertaining to these very different cities are composed of small episodes observed in the multi-dimensional urban structure. These events create a characteristic semantic network for Cracow's European image and Petersburg's imperial stylisation.

³⁰ <http://www.forum-ekonomiczne.pl> (accessed 10 July 2013).

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