



## Presenting and Experiencing History in Post-Displacement Regions: Editorial

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German leather chairs in the wedding hall of the city of Jelenia Góra in southern Poland (Tumiłowicz-Mazur, 2024), actors playing Slovak Germans in a theater in central Slovakia (Korhel, 2024a), German artifacts in the Museum of Warmia and Masuria in Olsztyn in northern Poland (Pufelska, 2024), and members of a military-historical club reenacting German soldiers in the Hulczyn region of northeast Czechia (Wohlmuth, 2024) – these examples, drawn from the articles in this special issue, not only represent German history but also reflect the histories of specific regions in Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia. Until World War II, these areas were predominantly inhabited by the German population.

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However, as the end of the war was approaching, Germans were either forced to flee or were expelled as part of postwar efforts to establish nationally homogeneous states (Ahonen et al., 2008; Borodziej & Lemberg, 2001; von Arburg et al., 2010). Their place was taken by new residents of mostly Slavic origin.

As the examples above illustrate, the remnants of the previous culture were not entirely erased, despite the efforts of new authorities. Rather, they were repurposed to serve new communities, emerging in places where the former inhabitants had been displaced. Other cases analyzed in this issue – such as the community of descendants of the Czech Brethren (Zawistowski, 2024) or the fate of folk dress in Polish Lower Silesia (Kurpiel, 2024) – demonstrate the complexities of incorporating elements of a vanished cultural landscape into the supposedly homogeneous landscapes of post-displacement regions.

To this day, one of the enduring consequences of conflicts across the globe is the mass-scale migration of thousands, or even millions, of people forced to leave their homes, often in areas subsequently resettled by new populations. Regions subjected to such processes are referred to as post-displacement regions (cf. Ballinger, 2023). In some cases, these regions became part of a different country. Several regions in Central Europe examined in this special issue experienced this transformation – for example, the Polish “Recovered Territories”, that is, formerly German regions incorporated into Poland in 1945.

However, even when territorial changes did not occur, Central European regions affected by forced migration share several common characteristics, including shifting borders, changing demographic structures, complex political situation after 1945, and, perhaps most importantly in the context of this issue, the fact that they were predominantly inhabited by Germans until 1945. Following their forced displacement, traces of the previous culture – both subtle and pronounced – remained. As current research indicates, the tangible and intangible remnants of this previous culture continue to shape the emerging cultural landscape of the new populations in these regions (Ćwiek-Rogalska, 2020; Hoření, 2024a; Korhel, 2024b).

To legitimize the new status of post-displacement territories and foster a collective identity among their new populations, the history of these regions was reinterpreted (Grzechnik, 2017; Mazur, 2006; Traba & Żytyniec, 2017). Consequently, the way it was presented played a crucial role, particularly in determining how traces of previous cultures were either removed or repurposed to fit the new historical narrative. Post-displacement regions can be seen as laboratories for their invented traditions (Hobsbawm, 2003). On one hand, a form of historical amnesia emerged regarding the pre-1945 period, when the previous German inhabitants used to live there (Tuan, 1979). On the other hand, especially after 1989, there has been a growing interest in pre-1945 history of these regions, as well as effort to preserve material remnants of the German past.

This has been due to the fact that the new inhabitants often encounter gaps in the history of their regions and struggle to construct coherent historical narratives. As the prefix “post” suggests, historical events such as forced displacement, even if it occurred eighty years ago, continue to shape the realities of these regions today. This special issue, there-

fore, seeks to examine various aspects of how this historical laboratory of Central Europe functions after different cultures which had intersected dynamically for centuries here, vanished (Genov, 2015; Lechevalier & Wielgoń, 2013; Spurný, 2011).

Despite the shared characteristics of the regions in focus, as outlined above, they also differ, for example in terms of the origins of the new settlers. There are also variations in how the new authorities sought to legitimize the current political order and integrate these regions into national historical narratives (Glassheim, 2000; Krejčí, 1996; Zaremba, 2001). At the same time, local populations responded to these efforts in diverse ways, leading to differences in how remnants of German culture were treated in both public and private spheres. Another crucial factor is the evolution of these attitudes over time, as explored by the authors in this issue; for example, how the German past is now used as a resource for place-based learning in Czechia (Kupková, 2024).

To provide the reader with a broader perspective, this issue – in accordance with the journal's policy – includes also other contributions, which explore both the past and present of post-displacement regions from various angles. Accordingly, readers will find an article discussing how a Polish scholar and writer perceived the relationship between Czechs and Germans (Hoření, 2024b), as well as reviews of two important books in the field, showing ways ethnographers can study migrations. The first, *Porządek rzeczy* [The Order of Things] by Anna Kurpiel and Katarzyna Maniak, examines the strategies employed by present-day inhabitants of Szczecin and Wrocław in engaging with formerly German objects (Bubík, 2024). The second, perhaps unexpectedly, is a review of *Koloniści z Rio Claro* [Colonists of Rio Claro] by Karolina Bielenin-Lenczowska, which explores how a foreign landscape has been adapted and is perceived by the descendants of Polish settlers in Brazil (Fiałkowska, 2024).

We believe that the way history is presented and experienced in post-displacement regions is a deeply engaging and multifaceted topic, touching on memory, identity, politics, and culture. It reminds us that history is not merely about the past – it is a living, evolving force that continues to shape people's lives today. The challenges communities face in preserving their history are inseparable from broader questions of power, belonging, and identity. Delving into this subject offers valuable insight into how historical narratives are not only created but also contested and passed down through generations, revealing the ever-changing relationship between people and the places they call home.

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