



Editorial

Divided Twin Towns

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The papers of this monothematic issue represent a wide perspective from the German–Polish borderland to the former Yugoslavia. Most of the authors come from the disciplines of sociology, social geography and social history. The subject of *divided twin towns* is a very characteristic problematic of Central Europe. This does not mean that only this region has divided towns. Nevertheless, the region has had many historical experiences of division in the very hectic 20th century: the fall of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the dictatorships of the Nazi and Communist regimes, the Cold War, and in our day the fall of the Berlin Wall and the process of enlargement of the EU. Each one of these historical changes shifted borderlines, or at least the core meaning of the border. Comparing this region with the founding members of EU, significant “border changes” are surely one of the very most important sociological facts for contemporary local societies, too. Especially in divided towns, where the border is part of everyday social life. The older generations know well the strong border controls that were in place until 1990. The middle-generation made a living by the process of opening the borders. Young people born after 1990 have been socialized in an integrated “trans-border” society. In some other regions in Europe, such as the Balkans, today’s generations have to deal with the process of division of town structures and societies.

Divided twin towns are laboratories. The sociological debates suggest that they are laboratories first of all of the new EU enlargement process and the trans-border integration of former national societies. But it is also important to stress the historical heritage that is imprinted in the social structure of the towns: the trends in earlier migration, the memorialization of historical harms, the long-standing stereotypes between ethnic groups. If we do not consider this history, we will not understand the processes of “social bordering” (borders in minds) after the disappearance of physical borders.

Furthermore, it would be a mistake to say that the border has disappeared fully from the physical space of these towns. In spite of two decades of integration, the people recognize exactly the difference between both sides. The style of the buildings built in the 20th century, the street milieu, and the design of shops and cafes show even today two separated units.

The editor of this monothematic issue has dealt for years with the subject. He is the leader of the research project “Space and Society in Divided Twin Towns” (supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund PD 108532, 2014-2017). His former investigations

and papers published until now have allowed him to set up a model of divided twin towns. The main thesis is that historical issues do not disappear from space and society; rather, they create “layers” in the identity and in the physical space. Three main layers to observe are: (1) The integrated historical town: in this period, both sides of what will later be twin towns live in one cultural entity. The historical centre of the town is absolutely dominant. A suburb (later to become the new town) offers complementary functions to the historical “mother town”, such as the railway station, industrial area or cottage quarter. (2) The second period is characterized by the shaping of independent twin towns. The historical town has to compensate for the lost functions. The former suburb must develop into a self-sufficient new town. In this period, both the physical and mental borders are emphasized. (3) The third period is one of (re)integration, which does not mean a return back to the historical heritage, as happened in Berlin. The divided twin towns hold to their separate societies and urban spaces. The (re)integration affects only some special areas: shopping, recreation, tourism. All of these activities create a special space that we can name as places of (re)integration.

A monothematic issue can follow two basic strategies. One aims to give a general overview, a summarizing. The second strategy is more like a mosaic and aims to show the potential in narratives, research subjects and methods. This collection followed the latter strategy. The main aim was to bring subjects together, which are mostly published in a bilateral relationship of the countries concerned. The output of this work will be fully successful when it inspires some systematic comparison, trans-national research projects in the future.