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The memory hidden in a space

It is possible that a man feels its existence only then, when he feels on his own skin the touch of a nameless space which connects us with the most ancient times, with all dead, with prehistory when the mind have just separated from the world and when the mind haven’t yet realized of his orphanhood.

The purpose of this article is an attempt of reflection on the relationship between space and the identity – concretely – on the significance of space, places of memory in forming of identity.

Pierre Nora is considered to be a pioneer of research in a topic of places of memory. He pointed out the need of research in a places of memory in his article which was published in the early eighties, entitled: "Between memory and history: Les Lieux de Mémoire". The author suggested that it is currently very popular topic to say about it, as he wrote: “We speak so much of the memory because there is so little of it left”.

In his text, he described the concept and meaning of the term of memory in a special way. Memory is characterized there as life which is still borne and actualized by living societies. Memory “remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically received”. The thinker indicates that the memory is very sensitive, vulnerable, dependent on the lapse of time and to

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3 Ibidem, p. 5.
a large extent on the will of individuals who can reanimate or reject the memory from their own life. Memory is susceptible to fluctuations. However, as the author mentions, memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, although for some time may disappear, memory still dealing with humanity. It can be compared to bonds which can connect people with “the eternal present”. Despite the fact that memory give in deformation with lapse of time, as the author writes, memory have never became a separate element of human life. It participates in the life of every human being, it is for him still alive and allows him to connect past stories, events, characters, buildings or landscapes with it what is actually, currently deal with the individual. It connects the past with the present.

The memory is in some sense the magic and affective – “only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic – responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection”4. In this sentence, it is shown features and tasks of memory. It is unusual because it allows to make the past of the individual or community – full, without gaps, without leaving insufficiency. It makes memories – full, valuable. It does not allow to do memories only “dry” facts which are lifeless, without any sense. Memory allows to their agitation, that they become expressive, so they are close to the modern human hearts, hearts which could not physically, tangibly participate in a specific events, they could not live in a particular buildings, co-create in a concrete moment in the history of the past. However, these people, for example, listening any story, they are getting the witness of memory, which they do not only hear random memories but they are listeners of a rich history which is alive inside of them, it gives them a clear and complete picture of this particular event or place from the past. It creates an identity which is the basic building material of individuals. Memory presents a particular reality, such as it is. It does not allow for censorship but shows it in a bright, not hidden light - what is very important for creating the present.

P. Nora refers to the idea of Maurice Halbwachs'a, who said that: “there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual”5. Memory is a factor which connects members of the group. Thanks to it, community is created which common memory just binds. Each group has its own memory, the memory which the second, another group cannot have because she already developed its own distinctive memory, which is different from any other. As its name suggests

5 Ibidem.
— “memory of group, collectivity”, what means that it is common to its members, but not only because, as thinker pointed out – it is also “individual”. It refers directly to every member of the group, concerns his private personality. It not only composes the history of the whole group but on the history of individual because people in groups are not their own doubles, every of them has a different story. They leads their own life, although to a large extent its history is combined with a history of more community with which they co-creates some part of their life.

The memory should be connected with specific images, space, landscapes, gestures, objects, building. The space in not only a place which is destined for interaction, whether the background for the events but it is also an essential component of identity. The identity through the influence of a mystical individuality of the individual, as well as the community which takes a certain area is legitimized by this space there. Images played in memory are becoming components of the human “Me”, human’s identity. They shape self-awareness of human and affect to experience of living in the present, to decision making, making choices, angling of the specific values “now”. “The most complete pictures are formed in our minds of the things that have been conveyed to them and imprinted on them by the senses, but that the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight, and that consequently perceptions received by the ears or by reflection can be most easily retained in the mind if they are also conveyed to our minds by the mediation of the eyes”

At present, memory often is identified with history, as a synonym of this word but it is not a true in reality. It is worth quoting again outstanding thinker – P. Nora: “we should be aware of the difference between true memory, which has taken refuge in gesture and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories, and memory transformed by its passage through history, which is nearly the opposite: voluntary and deliberate, experienced as a duty, no longer spontaneous; psychological, individual, and subjective but never social, collective, or all encompassing”

The author points out here that every person should have the ability of distinction these phenomena because it is important for memory to exist in its pure form which is currently easy to lose. It is noticeable that the memory of contemporaneous world is mainly based on the visible, on the material traces, for example, any kind of writing, pictures or video recording. People engage less attention to experience the memory, to play this

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7 P. Nora, Między pamięcią..., op. cit. p. 7.
memory inside themselves. Although, whether or not, experience of memory inside each other which connects at the same time with the overflow of these experiences on paper cannot be still called “pure” memory? Would it seem that yes but if is it not “only” memories – for somebody who reads it? Do memories consist only of some sentences which have not got significance in itself? Somebody who will read it for about a hundred years, he cans be unable to outlast it what was. Is it possible to call it only the way to devour memory by trying to play it? Memory is, as P. Nora writes: “the gigantic and breathtaking storehouse of a material stock of what it would be impossible for us to remember, an unlimited repertoire of what might need to be recalled”\textsuperscript{8}. However, although the memory is not identical with the notion of history – a history, also this history which is written in the landscape, space, satisfies human’s need to belong to a certain place.

Space with given its symbolic character is getting force which intensifies the awareness of the community to adherence to a specific territory, as T. Edensor writes: “(…)These specific landscapes are selective shorthand for these nations (…)”\textsuperscript{9} and M. Huysseune: “Landscapes in the discourse of nation building are the national symbol of authenticity”\textsuperscript{10}. The authors lean to sanctification of space here, making it a kind of sacred. They show the essence of places, space and how important the impact they have on society.

The space which is rich in symbolic places can be a testimony of history of a nation or region – thanks to the community which lives in the area and where interactions take place between individuals of this community. Local or nation identity is produced not only by behaving in a manner appropriate to a particular group, for example, celebrating the anniversary by a particular community but also by existing of places which have particular meaning to the specific communities. This places are special because they sanctify space while giving the identity for the individual.

The space is consists of these places of memory which could have a positive or negative connotation. They have a special significance for a certain community. These include, for example, monuments of commemorate national or local heroes, characteristic buildings, houses of famous artists, politicians or landscape. Each of these elements participates in the creation of landscape of space, landscape which is proper for specified location and it is a foundation to define identity of the individual, his own “Me”. This

\textsuperscript{8} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{9} T. Edensor, Tożsamość narodowa, kultura popularna i życie codzienne, (ed.) A. Sadza, Kraków 2004, p. 138.
landscape is usually transmitted in images, songs or stories. “Would be here – writes P. Nora – about a place in the literal sense of this world, in which certain communities, whatever they are – nation, ethnic group, party – lay their memories or consider them to be an integral part of their personality.”\textsuperscript{11}

There are free meanings of places of memory to which P. Nora points out – material, symbolic and functional\textsuperscript{12}. This meanings perfectly illustrates the notion of a historical generation which the author describes: “it is material by its demographic content and supposedly functional – since memories are crystallized and transmitted from one generation to the next – but it is also symbolic, since it characterizes, by referring to events or experiences shared by a small minority, a larger group that may not have participated in them”\textsuperscript{13}. A significances of memory have been perfectly included in this sentence, allowing to understand each of them. Referring to the materiality of memory, mentioned earlier, it should be pointed out that even purely material archive becomes a place of memory, provided that the imagination complements them with its symbolic, mystical aura. Places of memory exist and are created because they allow to stop the time, they block process of forgetting and thus it, help in capturing the important meanings, imagery which is essential for human beings.

Nowadays, a lot of people try to cut off themselves from the past, perceiving it as something radically different, strange from what it is now – they try to turn their eyes only to the future, rejecting what it was at all costs, rejecting it what could make their lives a lot of experiences. Unfortunately, at the same time, when they want to reject the past – they try to get rid a part of their identity lose a part of themselves which they developed during a certain time of their life. This abandonment of memory and phenomena associated with it, abandoning their own identity may be caused by this that the present world is a world of progress, a world which is pursuing for new technologies, wealth, prestige. World is known as “modern” which is not “looking back” – whereby it siphons off the process of self-knowledge at the period of time. Every person needs to see the value of himself. In this way, all this elements which consist on places of memory, on the same memory, including archives, museums, cemeteries, monuments, shrines, anniversaries and many others are getting more and more empty, without any big sense. They are only, like P. Nora writes – boundary stones of another age, illusions of eternity\textsuperscript{14}. It can be understood as something that was and well that

\textsuperscript{12} P. Nora, Między pamięcią..., op. cit., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibidem, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibidem, p. 6.
it was because it designated a particular moment in history but it is not useable to the present life to anyone because it do not touch any aspect of life. But it cannot be left. Every person sooner or later have to find “himself”.

The individual is responsible for maintaining memory. Everyone has to remember about the privileges of identity and what is more – protect them, not to allow the destruction of his own “Me”. P. Nora writes: “The less memory is experienced collectively, the more it will require individuals to undertake to become themselves memory-individuals, as if an inner voice were to tell each Corsican You must be Corsican and each Breton You must be Breton”¹⁵. Places of memory have to arise so as to the memory and identity have not be lost in this epoch of progress. It is necessary with the determination to create exactly those archives, celebrate anniversaries, organize various celebrations so that they can give the impression that they are natural, present and alive. Individuals are taking shape by referring to places of memory: “(...) The region and the place are joined in the inevitable institutionalized practices, discourses and memory”¹⁶. A. Paasi indicates that places which define the specific space becomes a phenomenon which exists in the cultures they are characterized by specific practices and they are a kind of memorial sites. Such a great place of memory can be exactly space, landscape, scenery which can create human’s identity.

An important element of awareness of group are social relations – the interactions of social groups within a specific space. It is possible to highlight certain spaces which are “more important” for the community that lives on the specified area. They can often become incomprehensible for the population which is “outside”. These people cannot see this values of any building or landscape which are important for people who live in this area. It is difficult for them to understand the meanings of this specific places without any knowledge of their history.

The evaluation of this space cannot be only refer to places and buildings of memory which are distributed, they are generally known, recognized as the most elements which create the collective memory but it is worth to pay attention to places which have not any special meaning for the common of society but they have got them to smaller local or regional groups. Places in their environment, for example, local monuments may become more meaningful and more important than places of importance for the all nation. This usually manifests itself in a strong sense of local identity, stronger than national. The national

¹⁶ A. Paasi, Place and region: regional worlds and words; [in:] “Progress in Human Geography” 2002, vol. 6 nr 26, p. 808.
homeland have not so close connection with the individual, as the home of local or regional. The local community during creating their identity – not reject, of course, the nation-wide values but marks out a kind of boundary which indicates of the strength of the local and national values. The strength of national values is weaker. The local or regional – homeland becomes the first homeland with which man meets from his earliest years, when absorbs the values which are identified with this little space. He shapes his identity firstly there. It is for him “tangible space”, as D. Prytherch writes: “The landscape allows us to relieve ourselves from the abstraction of territoriality, regional identity to tangible space”\(^\text{17}\). Joseph Tischner indicates to the house as the first and the closest element of space which create human’s identity: “Space which is the closest for man is house. All of man’s ways for the world measure the distance from the house. The view from windows of the house is the first view of a man on the world. The man asked where he comes from – indicates the house. The house is a nest of man. He comes as a baby here, a sense of responsibility for order of the first community is maturing here, this man recognizes the main mysterious of things – windows, doors, spoons – enjoys and suffers, he to crosses the great divide from here. Have a house means: be surrounded by an area of primary familiarity. Walls of house protect man from the ferocity of the environment and enmity of the people. They allow life and maturation. A man can feel himself at home during living at home. Be yourself at home, it means experience the sense of freedom. The house does not allow the playfulness, the house does not mean a captivity, too. Space of home is a space of multiple sense. Building the house, means: to settle down”\(^\text{18}\). A relationship which has its origin in a birth of individual is nourished in adolescence when the specified space contributes to the creation of identity, consciousness of people, then when they are the most susceptible to the formation of each other, the absorption behaviors, habits, etc. “Identities are not only situational; at the level of the community it is not only a matter of choice, preferences and feelings of individuals but a kind of collective bonds which sometimes play a decisive role. Thanks to the processes and institutions of enculturation, participation in the communication system and sometimes thanks to compulsion – we are attached to specific identity from birth”\(^\text{19}\). “Who can predict the number of patriotic tracks, national myths which connecting strength of the nation? Love to the


motherland and the beauty of the country of birth are inseparable topics connected with the mythology of the past, serving a common purpose: to strengthen community cohesion.“20

Identity is created in the form of behaving of the community because the identity of a particular group is confirmed by via a specific behavior. It is worth to quote here polish writer - Z. Bokszański: “(...) symbolic culture of community (...) is constructed from remittances which allow to reconstruct its collective identity”21. He points out that the community shapes its own culture, what’s more, identity through certain behaviors, signs, values assigned to the group. “Using” this elements do not allow to lose identity of the community.

The space is a necessary component of identity which is uses for self-identification. Space is “lived” by individual when he or she experience a meeting with the elements of space which are characterized by mysticism and symbolism. The individual survive a space in contacts with other members of their community: “If the collective knowledge, the categories or typifications are constitutive for society, it is on a par with them a collective feeling and temporality, in this collective memory which are also symbolically produced. Their material and the product is discursive symbolism, symbolic objects and behaviors”22. This symbolism of elements in the space which is characteristic for the community is still supported, alive. It is expressed in characteristic behaviors, habits assigned to the group. This group is connected by the common culture. Each space has its own, unique story. This story cannot be the same as the story of another space. It is different in terms of culture and above all, speaking about space – geographically. As the memory is different, separate for each community.

“Tradition arrogates to have a privileged understanding of time; however, it have a tendency to do the same in front of space. The space which is privileged allows for retainer differences between traditional beliefs and practices. Every tradition is always, in some sense, rooted in the context of the place from with it originates or places with a special meaning for it”23. It is not possible to separate the concept of space from the notion of tradition which are very closely linked. Tradition has its own place in every space. In the specific place, in the specific space are practiced particular beliefs or behaviors which are the building material of identity. Those habits are cultivated by successive generations which live in the territory. Thus, loss of identity, imagery of place is not possible. It is expressed in the sense of

continuity, giving security by marking distinctiveness. Safety because changes are always dangerous for society, people are afraid of them - not always rightly. By cultivating it what already is and what is proven, good – people can feel good, calmly, confidently, without fear that it will be a enormous revolution tomorrow, through they will have to radically change the style of their own life. “Thus, identity is built up through tradition. Regardless of whether the individual or collective identity presupposes the existence of meaning; however, it also assumes (…) a constant process of playing and reinterpretation. Identity is the creation of the evenness in time, it is the construction of communication between the past and the anticipated future. Maintaining the individual identity and its connection to broader social identities serves a essential tool to ensure the ontological safety in all societies. Psychological anxiety is one of the major forces allowing tradition to produce such strong emotional bonds on the side of believer. Common, if not universal threat to the integrity of the tradition are experienced as a threat to the integrity of me”24. Tradition constantly refers to places of memory which played in the community – provide strong foundations for their survival through successive generations. Space which is perpetuated through stories that relate to a common history – strengthen the sense of community within the group.

It is impossible to overestimate the meaning of space in shaping of identity. Space is needed for personal identification. Even in the face of the current world, chasing for progress, in the face of the emergence and formation of new elements which are occupying more and more place, perception of space as its own and unique from others – remains unchanged. The space consist mainly of material testimonies ( provided that the imagination complements them with its symbolic, mystical aura) above all – people, so that the heritage of the area is still alive. It is still alive in the minds of users who make continually history of the streets, cities, regions, nations. And it will be lasting, will be living, as long as there will be an awareness of their own identity because the memory of ancestors determinates the identity of every person – at the same time affecting the perception of the contemporary man. The space can in a perfect way gather traces of the past because is fixed in the memory. It is a part of the symbolic, mystical image of each nation, moreover, it is the identity of place , waking at the same time a variety of emotions. With the cultivation of memory, places of memory – people know who they are. Places of memory are still living in the history. Memorial sites which create human identity have a positive connotation. They bring a lot of goodness for

generations. They allow to stop the time and have value which cannot be overstated in the process of shaping identity of every person.

“So think, how much human touches is hidden in all of this furniture and objects, glances, how many beating of hearts, sighing, sorrows, cries, terrors and naturally – laughter, elations, explosions of joy, although these much less, these are always less. Haw many words – you only think so. And all this is gone. But are they really gone? Such, for example, a mortar to kill pepper, cinnamon, cloves when I touched it – please believe me – it said something to me. But I cannot hear.”

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