



Between history, politics and economy: The problematic heritage of former border railway stations in Poland

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KULTURELLES ERBE

CULTURAL HERITAGE

BETWEEN HISTORY, POLITICS AND ECONOMY: THE PROBLEMATIC HERITAGE OF FORMER BORDER RAILWAY STATIONS IN POLAND

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with 2 figures in the text

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Summary

This paper deals with the issue of former border railway stations (FBRs) in Poland in the context of their problematic heritage. Since the creation of those borders coincided with the development of the railway network in the 19th century, the FBRs, now deprived of their past function, remain scattered throughout the landscape as confusing components of a troubled history in an even more confusing contemporaneity. This article assiduously analyses the FBRs in their capacity as offensive hallmarks vested in inoffensive elements of technical culture, often with high aesthetic value. This is done by departing from a number of analytical lenses: unwanted history, competitive heritage, utility vs. economy, politics and money, and the 'here and now' policy. These competing perspectives reveal the intricacy of heritagisation, especially in times of greater ease of obtaining monetary funds aimed at revitalisation: what to revitalise, why and how?

Keywords: Cultural heritage, railway heritage, border railway stations, material culture, contested heritage, heritage preservation, revitalisation, political resistance

Zusammenfassung

ZWISCHEN GESCHICHTE, POLITIK UND ÖKONOMIE: DAS PROBLEMATISCHE ERBE DER FRÜHEREN POLNISCHEN GRENZBAHNHÖFE

In diesem Beitrag wird auf das Thema der früheren Grenzbahnhöfe zwischen Preußen, Russland und Österreich-Ungarn aus dem 19. Jahrhundert, die sich auf dem heutigen polnischen Staatsgebiet befinden, im Kontext ihres problematischen Erbes eingegangen. Da die damalige Entstehung dieser Grenzen als Folge der Aufteilung Polens zwischen den drei genannten Staaten mit der Entwicklung und dem Ausbau des Eisenbahnnetzes zeitlich übereinstimmt, sind die früheren Grenzbahnhöfe, die heute ihre ursprüngliche Funktion verloren haben, als verwirrende Relikte einer bewegten Geschichte in einer noch bewegteren Gegenwart über die gesamte Landschaft verstreut. In diesem Beitrag werden die Grenzbahnhöfe als Manifestationen einer früheren politischen Situation und technischen Kultur, oft mit einem hohen ästhetischen Wert, analysiert. Dies erfolgt mittels verschiedener Ansätze: ungewollte Geschichte, konkurrierendes Erbe, Nutzen versus Wirtschaftlichkeit, politische Beziehungen und finanzielle Möglichkeiten sowie Politik des „hier und jetzt“. Diese konkurrierenden Perspektiven offenbaren die Komplexität des Aufbaus von Kulturerbe, insbesondere in der heutigen Zeit, in der Geldmittel für Revitalisierungen einfacher zu beschaffen sind als früher: Was und wo soll man revitalisieren, und warum?

Schlagwörter: Kulturelles Erbe, Eisenbahnerbe, Grenzbahnhöfe, materielle Kultur, umstrittenes Erbe, Bewahrung des Kulturerbes, Revitalisierung

1 Introduction

Of recent, the notion of cultural heritage has once again been brought forth as the rampage of deliberate devastations of historic buildings in areas of military conflicts has caught significant media attention. In the meantime, in places where no such conflicts occur, the significant decline and decapitalisation of historically interesting objects takes place continuously without hitting the headlines (GRAHAM et al. 2002; MURZYN-KUPISZ and PURCHLA 2007; DYMITROW 2013). To the latter belong the former border railway stations (hereinafter *FBRs*) in Europe, as one of the most striking examples of marginalisation and negligence in view of their ascribed heritage value (cf. JERCZYŃSKI 2015). The issue of preserving objects of material culture connected to the history of the railway is a global point of interest (BURMAN 1997; COULLS 1999; TIRY 1999; HALSALL 2001; ITO and CHIBA 2001; KIDO 2005; KÖŞGEROĞLU 2005; ERKAN 2012; GACZKOWSKA 2012; KRZYSZTOFIK et al. 2014; STEVANović and STEVANović 2014; TAYLOR and LANDORF 2015).

However, considerations about protection and renovation of railway heritage emerge most often when the buildings in question are in a very poor condition, or even when already assigned for demolition (ERKAN 2012). TAYLOR and LANDORF (2015) argue that the significance of railway stations as material culture stems from two fundamental values: the urban-architectural and the socio-economic (BIDDLE and NOCK 1983; BURMAN 1997; cf. AHLFELDT and MAENNIG 2010), both of which are intricately interweaved and not always fully understood. Railway stations are not just *any* buildings. They are known to help create spatial identities for communities both at the local and regional level (COULLS 1999; cf. also GOSPODINI 2004; DYMITROW 2014).

This is due to the fact that *FBRs* form a visually striking, functional and meaningful element of the public space and, by that, become an essential part of the cultural environment. What is more, the historical value of *FBRs* is also emblematic of past relationships between different countries, well worthy of attention (ROSS 2000; ORBAŞLI and WOODWARD 2008; HENDERSON 2011; ZEMP et al. 2011; KOWALSKA 2012; DINGJAN 2014). In that sense, the public debate about *FBRs* has also had considerable political significance in that the buildings in question have been described, interchangeably, as ‘victims’ of myths, misunderstandings and various taboos (SCHMIDT 2013).

In view of this situation, the aim of this paper is to unlock and possibly explain the complex relationships and conditions that accompany the production of material culture by taking cue from *FBRs* in Poland. Poland is interesting in this respect because, in the wake of its turbulent history, Poland’s territory encompasses the greatest number of former border railway stations (*FBRs*) in Europe, most of them stemming from the 19th and early 20th centuries, i.e. the time of railway’s heyday. And while not all *FBRs* have been equally preserved, mostly due to destruction from military operations or as a result of progressing technical degradation and decay, for the purpose of this study, only those *FBRs* have been selected, whose architectural assets have been widely acknowledged as cultural heritage, but whose prominence within the national railway system has been gradually weakened or even lost.

In this paper, our ambition is to discuss and possibly resolve this apparent paradox by using a dialectic approach to factors likely to cause marginalisation of *FBRs*, but

also through a detailed analysis of FBRSS' place in spatial, social, economic and political contexts.

It should be mentioned that although restricted to the FBRSS, the implications of this paper, as will be shown later on, have also a wider reference to other types of railway-related objects. In the case of Poland and some other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the paradox is deepened by the notion that social interest in and administrative protection of railway heritage are often embedded in negative historical associations, such as conquest, violence and extermination of humans (VAN GORP and RENES 2007). This, in turn, makes railway heritage a special form of heritage that necessitates scholarly inquiry in its own right.

We argue that unless the multiplicity of values is made explicit, the true nature of this form of heritage cannot be fully understood. In that sense, FBRSS provide an important opening for engaging with these multiple values through discussion, dialectic and legitimisation. In that sense, a deeper understanding of FBRSS has the potential to supersede conceptual inertias upheld by the ilk of forces such as cognitive internalisation, political correctness or cultural taboos (cf. RAPPORT and OVERING 2014).

2 Methodological note

In terms of orientation, this paper adopts a critical take on the problem of former border railway stations (FBRSS) by emphasising “the significance of networks, connections, flows and mobilities in constituting space and place, and the social, economic, cultural and political forms and processes associated with them” (cf. WOODS 2010, pp. 40–41). We assume that a paper about an obscured form of railway heritage is unlikely to be poignant if confirming or disproving known or promulgated assumptions, as this would be epistemologically incongruent with the assumed point of departure. Instead, our paper offers a *redux*-type interpretation of the phenomenon of FBRSS by restoring, remixing and remastering ideas from the existing research field. To do so, we work broadly – athwart different aspects, situations and contexts, and interdisciplinarily – across different theoretical frameworks from geographical, architectural, sociological and political studies.

In terms of underlying knowledge base, this paper departs from empirical research conducted between 2016 and 2017. The bulk of the research work, preceded by critical literate studies, was carried out at eleven State Archives in Poland¹⁾ with the aim to obtain qualitative materials (historic cartographic and written documents) to identify and analyse the FBRSS. The second leg of empirical research was based on field work, which included inventories, technical assessment and photographic documentation of 15 FBRSS and their surroundings. The results from both legs were then analysed and compiled into a data base about the state of investment in the FBRSS and their current usage. Lastly, the results were corroborated and contextualised through seven semi-structured interviews with representatives from the local governments and many spontaneous conversations with affected residents.

¹⁾ The archives included the State Archives in Białystok, Gdańsk, Kalisz, Katowice, Łódź, Piotrków Trybunalski, Poznań, Toruń and Warsaw, as well as the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw and the National Archives in Cracow.

In terms of format, while this study builds on years of field research on FBRSS, this paper is intentionally crafted as a conceptual – not an empirical – one. Conceptual research is nominally the opposite of empirical research in that it seeks to undertake a logical clarification of any one given phenomenon by combining theory with more general empirical insights and philosophical commitments (XIN et al. 2013; MAXWELL 2013). Conceptual research assumes that knowledge is value-mediated and hence value-dependent (GUBA and LINCOLN 1994) and therefore lends itself well to *interdisciplinary eclecticism*. As a conceptual approach that does not hold rigidly to a single set of assumptions, eclecticism draws upon multiple theories, styles or ideas to gain complementary insights into a subject or applies different theories in particular cases (cf. SIL and KATZENSTEIN 2010).

In terms of method, as TRIBE and LIBURD (2016, p. 45) contend, “the authors’ expertise, long term engagement with the issues and deep knowledge of the relevant literature” is favoured before systematic evaluation of empirical materials (cf. LEUZINGER-BOHLER 2004). Mindful of this, XIN et al. (2013) propose “a process of scoping, comparison, reflection and abstraction [...] including defining concepts, comparing them, historical analysis, the construction of conceptual typologies, finding conceptual gaps, deep reflection, synthesising and finally a reconceptualisation of the subject” (summarised by TRIBE and LIBURD 2016, pp. 45f). In that vein, while drawing on and combining insights from extensive empirical work, the focus of this paper is on philosophical analysis of the central findings common to much of the underlying empirical material. This includes digavations on how FBRS-related heritage is produced, attained and withheld, and how it is used with regard to different, often contradictory, cultural meanings and significations.

3 Former border railway stations in Poland and their architectural uniqueness

In the 1790s, as a consequence of geopolitical perturbations, Poland was partitioned by Prussia, Russia and Austria-Hungary and eradicated from the world map, only to reappear after World War I. It was during this time FBRSS lost their significance and faced great challenges resulting from the independence-induced political transformations. The territory of Galicia, a Polish region incorporated in 1793 into Austria-Hungary, was characterised by the least developed railway network, with the two main lines being the Galician route (Cracow – Lviv) and the Galician Transversal route (through the Carpathian Mountains).

Poland’s geopolitical history is still visible on the map, especially with regard to the density of the railway network (see Fig. 1), where the old partition boundary between the developed ex-Prussian territory and the underdeveloped ex-Russian/Austrian territory has been visibly sustained.²⁾ This has led to infringements upon Poland’s spatial development

²⁾ Another example of this legacy is visible in the political affiliations during parliamentary elections, with ex-Prussian sectors voting predominantly left or center, and ex-Russian/Austrian sectors voting predominantly right (cf. DYMITROW 2012, p. 10).

in terms of railway alignment (and thus transport possibilities), with the railway lines in the sparsely covered ex-Russian and ex-Austrian territories running predominantly longitudinally in the ex-Russian sector and latitudinally in the ex-Austrian sector. As a result of this, the east-west difference in Poland is often depicted as ‘two Polands’ with a better-developed western part and a worse developed eastern part (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2006, p. 17). Ultimately, this crevice has been pointed out as “the main factor destabilising Poland’s development and the functioning of democratic institutions in the longer term” (GORLACH and FORYŚ 2003, p. 296). Only more recently, with the advent of climate-awareness and sustainability thinking, has the role of rail transport regained some of its lost significance (cf. PAPROCKI 2006).

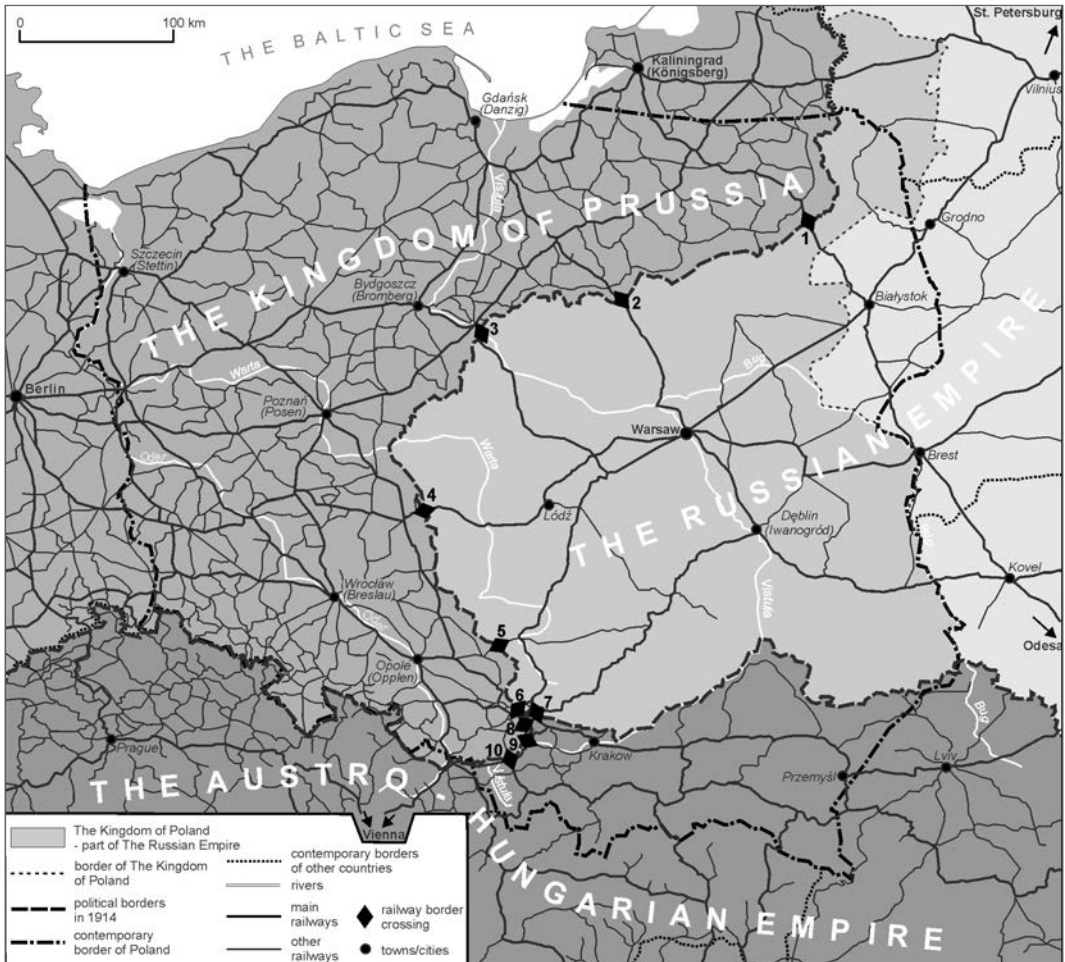
Given Poland’s chequered history due to its location in the ‘shatter belt’ of Europe (cf. DAVIES 2001), Poland comprises a crucible of architectural legacies inherent of belonging to different cultures and nations. Among the economic priorities of the three occupying empires was the creation of railway links between the major cities (Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Königsberg and Budapest), industrial regions and seaports. Therefore, places at which the railway lines crossed national borders became of particular strategic significance. The border railway stations were their most significant spatial elements. Their significance was strengthened by the fact that among the three oppressor states, there were relatively few railway border crossings (Fig. 1).

One of the first railway lines built on the current Polish territory was between Berlin and Breslau (now Wrocław) and farther still to the Prussia – Austria-Hungary border at Mysłowice (in 1846).³⁾ The second railway line ran towards Cracow from the junction station at Szczakowa (in 1847), with an offshoot towards the Russian border station Granica on the Warsaw – Vienna Railway (now Maczki, within the city of Sosnowiec) (BERGER 1980). This line provided since 1856 a connection with Vienna (KRZYSZTOFIK et al. 2014). Königsberg (now Kaliningrad), an important Baltic port, also received a connection to the port of Odessa on the Black Sea via the Russian border stations at Grajewo (1873) and Brest (Fig. 1). Another important line between Prussia and Russia was the Warsaw – Bydgoszcz Railway via the border crossing at Aleksandrów (Kujawski⁴⁾) (1862), which was also connected to the Warsaw – Vienna Railway. Since 1859, Prussia had also a direct connection to Warsaw via the Kattowitz (now Katowice) station (KOMUŚIŃSKI 2013), and then onwards to Saint Petersburg.

The interchange of differences and influences between the neighbouring countries was especially visible in the transborder zones and settlements. In places where the three countries met, a number of architecturally distinctive and unique FBRs were erected, most likely as a silent exercise of power between the emperors. These FBRs constituted specific ‘land ports’ (cf. MEEKS 1995) known from BURGHARDT’s (1971) concept of ‘gateway cities’. FBRs became the spatial dominants of the transborder settlements, exuding the power and majesty of the state they represented to everyone crossing the border.

³⁾ The first railway line was built between Warsaw and Grodzisk Mazowiecki in 1845 as part the Warsaw – Vienna Railway (CYWIŃSKI 2009).

⁴⁾ The postscript (geographical qualifier) ‘Kujawski’ was added in 1916.



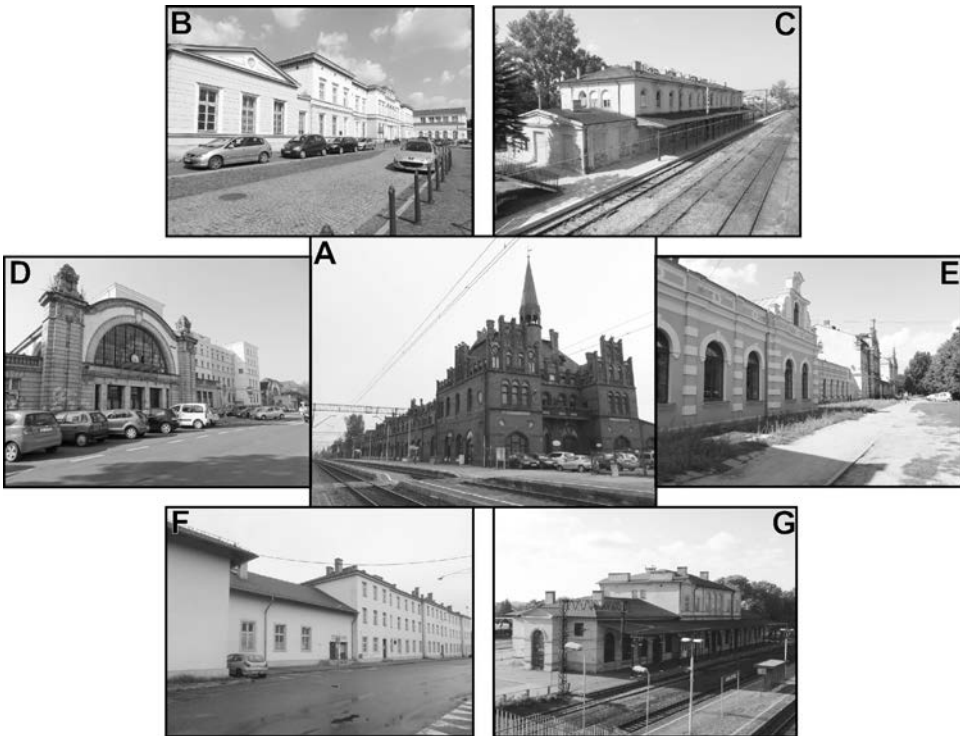
Railway border crossing points: 1 Grajewo – Prostki; 2 Mława – Iłowo-Osada; 3 Aleksandrów Kujawski – Otłoczyn-Toruń; 4 Kalisz – Nowe Skalmierzyce; 5 Prussian Herby – Russian Herby; 6 Sosnowiec – Katowice; 7 Granica – Szczakowa; 8 Szczakowa – Mysłowice; 9 Oświęcim – Mysłowice; 10 Dziedzice

Source: Own elaboration based on Atlas linii kolejowych Polski 2014 (2014)

Figure 1: The railway network superimposed onto the political map of Central Europe in 1914

One of them, the railway station in Nowe Skalmierzyce, is architecturally one of the most impressive in Europe (Fig. 2A). Built in the Basilin (Neo-Baroque) style, it was 100 m long and 21 m wide. The steeple that ran in the middle of the station separated the platforms serving the trains from Prussia from the ones arriving from Russia. The building was lavishly ornamented on the outside, with crow-stepped gables, attics, secessionist ornaments,

and on the inside, with crystal chandeliers and marble-clad bas-reliefs. Its monumentality was almost on a par with the railway stations in Berlin and Vienna (MEEKS 1995). The railway station in Aleksandrów (Fig. 2E), built in neo-classical and French neo-renaissance style, appeared to be as monumental and richly decorated as the latter two. The Aleksandrów station even boasted a special luxury wing that housed court apartments, where Czar Alexander II of Russia and the German Emperor Wilhelm I met in 1879.



(A) Nowe Skalmierzyce, (B) Sosnowiec Główny, (C) Granica (now Maczki in Sosnowiec), (D) Katowice, (E) Aleksandrów Kujawski, (F) Szczakowa (now in Jaworzno) and (G) Grajewo
Photographs: the authors

Figure 2: Former border railway stations

Such eccentricities were symptomatic of the 19th century, when railway stations, frequently handling the elites as a new and fast means of transportation, were adequately prepared to handle those (BERGER 1980). Other examples of this are the station buildings in Sosnowiec and Granica, both designed by Enrico Marconi (1792–1863). The Sosnowiec station on the Vienna – Katowice – Warsaw route was reminiscent of the Viennese style and also housed Czar’s Quarters (Fig. 2B), while the statuesque railway station in Granica was built in neo-classical style, mimicking an Italian palazzo (Fig. 2C). For imperial conven-

ience, the latter was even connected by a few hundred meters long ground-level tunnel in glass to the Austro-Hungarian side of the border, where it connected to the parallel station on the Dąbrowa – Ivangorod (now Dęblin) Railway.

FBRs were also of economic and urban significance, a fact demonstrated in the functional and spatial development of the place of their location (BERTOLINI and SPIT 1998; YE-KYEONG and HYE-JIN 2015). This was for instance the case with Kattowitz (now Katowice) (Fig. 2D), which quickly gained a key position within the dynamic development of the surrounding mining region. Another example was Mysłowice, which at the turn of the 20th century became the largest inland port in Europe, from which more than 5 million people migrated to North and South America (SULIK 2007). The northern railway station in Grajewo, on the other hand, was an important station connecting the lines running to the Baltic Sea port in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) and the Black Sea port of Odessa (Fig. 2G).

Today, in pace with the reduced significance of passenger traffic, most FBRs and their surroundings are subject to progressive degradation. Remarkably, none but one⁵⁾ of the most representative FBR buildings has been demolished, only Katowice's old station building being at risk of demolition.

4 Difficulties in recognising the former border railway stations as cultural heritage

The FBRs in Poland constitute, on the European scale, a unique combination between engineering-architectural achievement and the complex political history of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, they are probably some of the least known examples of this form of cultural heritage. What is more, they are regarded indifferently at best, with many FBRs being neglected, devastated and running the risk of demolition. Trying to understand why this is happening is neither easy nor unambiguous, but several key factors seem to reappear. Based on our research, those factors can be arranged into five categories: (1) 'unwanted' history, (2) utility vs. economy, (3) 'competitive' heritage, (4) politics and money, and (5) the '*here and now*' policy. These will be deliberated next.

4.1 Unwanted history

As noted earlier, the FBRs in Poland appeared at a time when Poland was divided among three European empires, Prussia, Russia and Austria-Hungary. In Poland, this particular period, for obvious reasons, is regarded in a pejorative way. On the one hand, the material heritage of FBRs has no direct political associations and is often treated in a neutral

⁵⁾ Only the customs house of the Granica (now Maczki) station was demolished. The remainder of this iconic railway station of the Warsaw – Vienna Railway, although strongly decapitalised managed to survive the difficult period of post-Communism political turmoil and transformation (1990–2010) (cf. FELTYNOWSKI et al. 2015; KRZYSZTOFIK et al. 2017; DYMITROW et al. 2018).

or even moderately positive way (it is used e.g. as cultural facilities, industrial plants or residential buildings). On the other hand, one can observe public attitudes towards this heritage where past foreign political dependency is more directly exposed and where the stations' former trans-border past becomes sort of a taboo.

Interestingly, such reasoning belongs also to other elements of Poland's past political divisions. A notorious example of this is the protest of 2006 in southern Poland. In the vicinity of the old contact zone between Prussia, Russia and Austria-Hungary, the so-called *Dreikaisereck* or Угол трёх императоров (English: *Three Emperors' Corner*), there were attempts to organise an official celebration of the disappearance of borders in Europe. However, the event coincided (one day earlier) with Poland celebrating the anniversary of its accession to the European Union. The protesters highlighted that one could not celebrate events based on past injustice (cf. DYMITROW 2017, pp. 47–48). As a result of this, the border disappearance project had to be considerably subdued. And even though an obelisk was unveiled at the Three Emperors' Corner in 2007 with the inscription '*Monument to the Memory of former partitions of Europe and its unification*', the area has never quite become a tourist attraction. 'Unwanted history' has become an inertial force, further strengthened by strong social and political resistance.

The described example subscribes well to the problem of old borders in general, including FBRs, where it is seen as inconvenient at worst, or met with indifference at best. And while there are attempts to rebrand these artefacts for purposes based on their cognitive, historical and geographical values, they continued to be internalised through references to *present* events, or are merely treated as local curiosities.

4.2 Utility versus economy

The second unfavourable factor speaking to the depreciation of FBRs in Poland is their lack of utility. Today, many station renewal projects subscribe to the ongoing "station renaissance" trend, which involves caring for the railway heritage through the introduction of new features aimed at passengers (KIDO 2005). As several principal governmental documents show, in Poland there is a need to commercialise redundant post-railway spaces by transforming them into intermodal transfer centres (Master Plan ... 2008; Strategia Rozwoju Transportu ... 2013). Objects of economic functions, however, are rarely seen as elements of cultural heritage. Often, this is not a problem as the vast majority of stations in Poland are drab buildings from the socialist period.

Contrarily, revamped historic railways stations with aesthetically pleasing architecture are often perceived negatively by the travellers. Their spatial limitations in terms of passenger handling (ticket counters, luggage storage, information points, lounges, cafés) and inaccessibility is regarded as a nuisance to many. The general assumption is that the historical rank of a station (in terms of "uniqueness" and "monumentality") increases as its utility decreases: the more parts of a station are excluded from economic use the more valuable the station becomes. Loss of function, however, often succumbs to vandalism and disrepair (ERKAN 2012). This typical heritagisation process is disturbed in objects of multifunctional utility or when the original utility of an object has been exchanged for

a different kind of utility. This applies particularly to post-industrial (mines, factories) and post-railway buildings of architectural value, where the following logic applies: if it is still in use, it is not regarded as valuable. The situation is not helped by the fact that many such buildings, being integral parts of a larger infrastructure, remain unavailable to outsiders. This form of counter-heritage management is not beneficial in terms of procuring grants for repairs, protection, conservation and supervision, and by that for enticing tourism.

In the case of railway stations located in the Katowice region (also known as Upper Silesia), economic utility was a broadly understood problem. During the socialism era, the railway network in this region was strongly associated with mining and industry, whereby the railway infrastructure became an important element in the policy of industrialisation. Whenever the FBRs were considered useful for the railway industry, they were incorporated in a broader network of mining, industry and the associated railway transport. In some cases, such as Szczakowa, FBRs became nodes for export of goods manufactured in the highly industrialised Katowice region. The lost cross-border functions of FBRs in this region were replaced by new economic functions. While this undoubtedly protected them from damage, it at the same time lessened their chances to become regarded as cultural heritage.

4.3 Competitive heritage

Objects of heritage should always be contemplated in the broader geographical context that has shaped them, and the natural 'competition' (the race towards heritage) arising therefrom. According to this logic, during our research we have identified the following three fields of competition.

The first field of competition refers to the competition between objects distinguished by their functional or utilitarian value when compared to other objects of this type. As examples can be mentioned the palaces of bishops against other palaces in the region or the FBRs compared to other station buildings. The second field of competition relates to a scenario where a lot of historic buildings of the same type and origins are located within the same, relatively small, area. Evidently, this is often an asset, especially considering the practicality of tourism development (such as the châteaux of the Loire Valley or the towns of Tuscany). There is, however, a thin line when 'a lot' becomes 'too many'. The result of this is the phenomenon of overshadowing, with objects of interesting origins being overwhelmed by other nearby objects of more conspicuous features, better marketing or more convenient accessibility. Finally, the third field of competition refers to a situation, when an object of historical value is located in the neighbourhood of buildings of outstanding cultural values, such as those inscribed onto the UNESCO World Heritage List. In comparison with the second field of competition, the effect of '*being in the shadow*', this situation is not dependent on the number of buildings (with relatively similar historical and cultural values) but on their ascribed rank in superior listings.

The FBRs in Poland inscribe themselves in all three fields of competition. An example of the first one is the FBR of Nowe Skalmierzyce (population 5,000), which has

been marginalised by the existence of the nearby non-FBRS of the much larger Ostrów Wielkopolski (population 75,000).

Examples of the second field of competition are the many FBRSs in the Katowice region, whose rich post-industrial heritage potential has become a burden for both the local authorities and society at large. The many post-industrial facilities, the number of which increases every year, overwhelm the FBRSs and their chance at heritagisation. The problem is also visible within the management and development of such objects, which, while in a relatively good technical condition, keep deteriorating as they ‘compete’ for new functions and financial resources with dozens other industrial factories and mining facilities. Among the few recent ‘winners’ is the railway station in Maczki (Fig. 2C), which is scheduled to become the Science and Didactic Centre for Transport run jointly by The Silesian University of Technology and the Polish Railways (PKP).⁶⁾

Lastly, an example of the third field of competition is the FBRS of Aleksandrów Kujawski, where intra-regional relationships come into play. Being located in the vicinity of Toruń, renowned for having its entire Old Town inscribed into the UNESCO World Heritage List, Aleksandrów Kujawski faces severe competition from its neighbour. With the FBRS being its sole significant heritage asset, the town has little or no chances at competing for tourists or at least proper conservation. Unsurprisingly, the station remains in disrepair.

4.4 Politics and money

A recurring problem of the FBRSs in Poland (and the entire railway transport for the matter) was and, to some extent still is, their poor economic situation. From the 1980s onwards, the role of railway transport began to be diminished rapidly in favour of road-borne transport (TAYLOR 2006). Adding to the dilemma were the many economic problems inherent of the failing socialist economy. In times of post-socialist economic transformations, railway, on a par with mining, heavy industry and textile manufacturing, was the one most acutely affected national enterprise. Between 1990 and 2000, around 1,000 km of railroads have been liquidated, with additional 1,000 km closed to passenger traffic (TAYLOR 2007). The remaining, now disused, railway infrastructure was also negatively affected, leaving 87 percent of stations unfit for passenger service, causing a systematic slowing-down of train speeds due to degrading tracks, and leaving 200,000 out of 500,000 workers unemployed (Informacja o wynikach kontroli ... 2008, p. 6; TAYLOR 2007).

This new, demeaned, role of railway transport within the Polish economy was also visible in the quality of railway management, where two opposing phenomena could be noted. Firstly, Poland had very strong railway trade unions, that played an important role within the state economic policy. These unions and the associated communities of railway workers, with the support of some left-wing and conservative governments, promoted the

⁶⁾ In September 2017, however, revitalisation works were discontinued as the Silesian University of Technology withdrew from the contract, explaining that current regulations prevent universities from creating off-site didactic centers and only – the more expensive – off-site faculties.

concept of evolutionary change within the railway sector, especially concerning privatisation and functional transformations. From the perspective of the deliberated problem, such actions could prove beneficial to the preservation of railway heritage (cf. COSSONS 1997). Unfortunately, the adopted vision commonly led to indecisiveness and subsequent stagnation. Progressing decapitalisation and financial problems triggered further dramatic consequences for the railways, including bankruptcy, dismissals of employees, demolition of tracks and other infrastructure, liquidation of ticket counters, etc.

The second phenomenon was nested in the ensuing Polish liberal politics, which – while endorsed only by a small part of the railway community – was systematically pushed forth and rationalised by liberal governments and authorities at the regional and local level. The policy was based on the practice of issuing quick decisions about what was to be developed, liquidated, sold or left to its destiny. Such policy seemed more perilous for the historical infrastructure, especially in times when railway transport's new role within the market economy was yet undefined.

Today, all above mentioned economic and political factors, but also historical and geographical ones, form a 'binder' of sorts, through which possibilities to revitalise and transform the railway infrastructure can crystallise. On the other hand, these possibilities, apart from the potential growing number of passengers, also create the basis for a policy of heritage conservation for the FBRs. Such a policy, in turn, can be best defined by way of its management – the '*here and now*' approach, as discussed next.

4.5 'Here and now'

'*Here and now*' is a very common expression in Poland, referring to a style of politics dealing foremost with immediately profitable issues, mostly EU, while disregarding its future implications. The '*here and now*' policy has at least two aspects. The first aspect is rooted in the practice of exercising policies, where financial resources are seen as the end goal rather than a means to obtain a higher good. This policy, common to many Central and East European governance modes, is particularly noticeable at the local level, where the authorities become the main beneficiaries of funds obtained mainly from various EU funds. The second aspect is the '*hot potato syndrome*', systematic avoidance of controversial issues which cannot easily be done away with, but which involve unpleasant or dangerous consequences for anyone dealing with them.

With the enforcement of the 2008 Railway Act, the state-owned Polish Railways (PKP) was given the opportunity of selling some of its fixed assets, including railway buildings, to the local governments only if the sold property was intended for public purposes (Ustawa z dnia 8 września ... 2000). According to the Supreme Chamber of Control, this opportunity positively influenced the process of simplifying the management of superfluous real estate in 2009–2010 (Informacja o wynikach kontroli ... 2010). However, the issue was further complicated by the extent of railway-related problems, not least the remainder of many potential heritage buildings in the hands of Polish Railways. On the other hand, local authorities inherit, apart from post-railway infrastructure, also many industrial and post-industrial objects. According to the Supreme Chamber of Control, "[d]espite 10 years

that have elapsed since the beginning of railway restructuring in Poland, most properties unfit for the proper functioning of the rail transport have not been developed“ (Informacja o wynikach kontroli ... 2010). It should be added that this involved more than 40,000 plots and 14,000 buildings.

The results of the two aspects of the *'here and now'* policy show that from the entire system of buildings in need of revitalisation or refunctionalisation, only single buildings are selected, for which financial support can be obtained at a particular moment. The remaining buildings are instead mothballed indefinitely (GACZKOWSKA 2012; PIELESIAK 2015; CIECHAŃSKI 2016). What is more, this policy has until 2012 been considered standard, and only six of Poland's 20 FBRs were revitalised or thoroughly renovated (Kalisz, Sosnowiec, Toruń, Ława, Malbork and Rawicz). In the cases of Kalisz, Sosnowiec and Toruń, the local governments were the sole or the key investor. And while such partnerships may have had positive outcomes for Sosnowiec, such effects were mainly incidental.

2010 and onwards saw some changes, when the policy of modernising the Polish railways, including the railway stations, began to be realised on a larger scale, i.e. in big cities and small towns alike. Ever since, the railways transport is supposed to become an alternative to the rapidly expanding road transport, while resources spent on railway revitalisation should balance expenditures aimed at construction of motorways and expressways.

While the extent of railway negligence in Poland has been significant in the last decades, positive effects can be seen only moderately. An important element of this is the policy of *'new openings'* which refers to Polish Railways' openness to deal with various partners, including small business and even individuals. It happens with varying results, as evidenced by the historic railway station in Katowice. Today, it is one of the most valuable railway stations in Poland and a symbol for an agglomeration of two million inhabitants. It is also regarded as the quintessence of many legal and economic problems and challenges, as well as of intricate relations between the involved stakeholders. Only after years of negotiations between Polish Railways (PKP), the municipal authorities and a private developer it was finally possible to revitalise the station (revitalisation lasted during the preparation of this paper). The renovated part of the station has been designated for food outlets and other services as well as office space (JEDLECKI 2018). Still, past experiences suggest that this building has been subject to straightforward speculation inundated by lacking heritage management skills despite boasting one of the best locations among FBRs in terms of commercial prospects.

Lack of resolution with regard to FBRs must be sought for in historical policies, which still act as the principal barrier against the full exposure of FBRs true origins. Most conveniently, they can be said to be buildings of historical importance with aesthetically pleasing architectural traits. The fact that their true functional origins are marginalised lies in the notion that they were created as a result of changing political borders. In this sense, Poland is paradoxically notorious worldwide for its *'evil heritage'*, i.e. artefacts left within its territory by other countries, most notably the Nazi extermination camps (BUNTMAN 2008). Similar associations can also be spotted amongst the Polish society.

The political discourse dealing with the origins of FBRs also has traits of *'here and now'* thinking. However, it is more the result of incidental policies implemented by very

small steps. This thinking manifests itself primarily in the political endorsement of certain historical facts, which are pushed out as curiosities to travel guides and Internet sites. Such thinking is not uncommon, for instance: “What if someone would want to come and see the palace-like railway station in Aleksandrów Kujawski, where the two emperors met?” or “What if someone would want to visit Maczki to see the peculiar glass tunnel?” In that sense, the historical policy of *‘here and now’* with regard to FBRs could be summarised in two terse aphorisms. Firstly, historical curiosities are only conveyed to those interested in them and not necessarily to the broader audience. Secondly, the mere significance of historical facts from a heritage point of view is not the most important, as there is always an overabundance of higher-rank heritage nearby.

5 Discussion

Digging deeper into the essence of the problem of former border railway stations (FBRs), a notable conflict arises. While the Polish society is aware of certain positives of their material historical heritage, it at the same time has troubles accepting it (cf. KOWALSKA 2012; PIELESIAK 2015). While theoretically we do know why is the case (as outlined in the preceding section), at a closer look, the most fundamental question still raises several crucial doubts: what exactly is cultural heritage? Trying to answer that question can be helped by two complementary queries:

- (1) Can every element of the past be considered cultural heritage? And how does that relate to the issue of foreign political domination?
- (2) If yes, can foreign heritage become important for the local communities?

Judging from countless theoretical studies on the nature of heritage, the answer to the first question is, of course, ‘yes’. Going into the details, we can easily discern between desirable and acceptable heritage as well as rejected and unacceptable heritage. While the first distinction often provides the background for value-laden attributes such as ‘national treasure’, ‘the city icon’ or ‘key tourist value’, the second distinction easily becomes a socio-political taboo. Without doubt, heritage of positive connotations is much more desirable than one of controversial character (VAN GORP and RENES 2007). In Poland, this dichotomy is very conspicuous, while every attempt at exposing national (Polish) mistakes or foreign domination of over Poland is readily marginalised, and often deliberately not allowed to reach the public airwaves.

The exaggerated distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ material culture in Poland surely corresponds with its difficult history of foreign oppression in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including its eradication from the world map and subjugation to antagonistic and aggressive policies. As a result, all that is ‘Polish’ or done in the name of restoring ‘Polishness’ is widely condoned (cf. DYMITROW 2013, pp. 624–625; 2017, p. 49), even if the social costs are disproportionate to the achieved results (e.g. the immense costs of rebuilding Warsaw after the destructive 1944 Uprising). Uncomfortable issues are conveniently avoided, such as the fact that the UNESCO-protected Old Town of Cracow, deeply venerated by Poles as their national icon, was in fact established in 1257 by and for the

German-speaking population⁷⁾ (DOLINGER 1997). Another example of similar action was the outcry that followed the unveiling of the original name of the renovated station in the ex-German town of Szczytno ('Ortelsburg'), which was quickly replaced for the Polish one (Polskie Radio 2015).

Can thus 'bad' political history serve as the basis for heritagisation? Can an area of 200 km² belonging to seven FBRs in southern Poland, built for the purposes of three hostile nations, be remade into *Polish* heritage? Answering this question is not as simple, but judging from the opprobrium that followed Barack Obama's 2012 "Polish death camps" speech (referring to the Nazi concentration camps on the German-occupied Polish territory during World War II), a spontaneous answer would be 'no'. While the political reasons for rejecting and marginalising parts of cultural heritage in Poland are rather obvious, there is a need for rational solutions, especially wherever politics can exert a negative impact on the preservation and conservation of historical artefacts. In our view, this process should be implemented gradually.

More than anything, the Polish society needs to realise that most FBRs have served the Polish economy at least twice as long as any other branch of the economy. Again, the example of the Old Town in Cracow becomes a useful analogy. While undeniably of non-Polish origins, this place has over centuries acquired elements of Polish material and immaterial heritage to the extent of becoming an internationally recognised bastion of Polishness. In our opinion, the most appropriate policy would be that of small steps, i.e. proportional to the pace of social acceptance of these objects as beneficial to the interests of the Poles and the Polish statehood in the longer run. With regard to the FBRs, it would be worthwhile looking for a compromise and, in cases where history collides with political incorrectness, simply replace the expression 'FBR' for 'terminus'.⁸⁾

The policy of small steps, we argue, should be anchored in social participation at a local scale, something that is increasingly visible in Poland with regard to the protection of railway heritage. Here, the role of the local governments, both as stakeholders and custodian, becomes important. Reconstructing a FBR is not merely a matter of technical investment but also a matter of building and maintaining long-term relations between stakeholders interested in its renewal, and instilling a communal sense of *genius loci* (BERTOLINI 1996; BERTOLINI and SPIT 1998; POL 2002; ZAŁUSKI 2010; HALE 2013). One should also be cautious of excessive commercialisation of these buildings, even if that might prove unavoidable in a free market economy (ROSS 2000).

With regard to the second question posed in the beginning of this section, namely whether foreign heritage can become important for the local communities, a spontaneous answer could be 'yes'. One obvious reason for this is that the FBRs have been already inscribed into the national register of objects of heritage value, and just owing that, they attract attention. In practice this is more difficult. We have already mentioned aspects such as 'satiation' of heritage objects, overshadowing or inter-regional competition. These barriers, however, can paradoxically act to the benefit of FBRs by exposing them to the public. In the case of the Katowice region with its ubiquitous post-industrial heritage, the

⁷⁾ The Poles obtained permission to settle in Cracow only in the mid-fourteenth century (DOLINGER 1997).

⁸⁾ The vast majority of FBRs were also the termini on their respective lines.

means for obtaining that goal is by making use of this ubiquity, e.g. through the creation of the *'Trail of Technological Heritage in the Silesian Province'*. As of yet, only two of its 36 objects are related to railway transport. One FBRS, in Sosnowiec, has been stricken out from the list in 2014, due to poor engagement of the local railway authorities in promoting the object. And while the original shape of the station building has been preserved, it has not been transformed into a tourist attraction (cf. HENDERSON 2011; BHATI et al. 2014; CONLIN and BIRD 2014).

A solution for 'heritage of lesser importance' located in the vicinity of 'heritage of greater importance' can be the case of Kazimierz, the Jewish district of Cracow. The 'discovery' of its material culture was a milestone in ways of thinking about the past, old culture and monuments. Despite initial concerns about its Jewish heritage (owing to long-rooted anti-Semitic stereotypes), Kazimierz proved to be an economic success for Cracow (KOWALSKA 2012). Today, apart from Cracow's Old Town, the salt mine in Wieliczka and the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum, Kazimierz is a top tourist attraction in southern Poland, attracting visitors from all around the globe. For the contemporary Poles, contrarily, it became a symbol of tolerance and openness. While Kazimierz's way is perhaps not fully implementable for the FBRS, it could definitely raise their status.

There is one more fundamental issue relating to the FBRS, and which concerns many cities and towns in Poland. The FBRSs were the direct facilitators of the emergence of these cities (e.g. Aleksandrów Kujawski, Szczakowa, Maczki and Nowe Skalmierzyce) or of their significant growth and economic expansion (Kalisz, Mysłowice, Mława and Grajewo). For instance, the population of Grajewo rose from measly 511 inhabitants in the year 1808 to 8,558 inhabitants 100 years later, while Aleksandrów increased its population more than threefold in just four decades (from 3,633 to 11,464 between 1869 and 1911) (DYMITROW 2012). Notably, both were still rural settlements at the turn of the century, as was Sosnowiec, until it was finally granted urban status in 1902, with a population of 61,000 (sic!), probably the biggest village in Europe at the time (cf. JELONEK 1967).

In that sense, the FBRSs contributed to the demographic boom of the border towns and subsequent urbanisation in the region (cf. TIRY 1999); however, this fact is often underplayed. For instance, the role of the railway for Sosnowiec's growth was exposed only in the last decades; previously, this role was attributed to industry and mining. In fact, Sosnowiec is the only city in the world with four *functioning* FBRSs: Sosnowiec Główny (Main), Sosnowiec Południe (South), Sosnowiec Maczki-KWW and Sosnowiec Maczki-KID. Another example of FBRS marginalisation is the station building in Mysłowice. Despite its global role at the turn of the 20th century when it served as Europe's biggest inland port, there is not even a simple plaque commemorating this extraordinary achievement. Most disturbing, however, is the state of the FBRS in Katowice, which has fallen into complete disrepair.

Heritage is never a given. It is a channel through which different values and knowledge can be discussed and legitimised. In that sense, bad exposure, corrupt politics or geographical misfortune, can lead to the marginalisation of an historical object and the prospects of both material and immaterial gratification. With regard to the FBRSs, the paradox lies in the fact that these buildings of exceptional merits in both the functional and the aesthetic dimension also belong to the most underserved ones.

6 Conclusions

Heritage is not merely artefacts. Heritage is foremost a *process* that uses objects and sites as vehicles for the transmission of ideas in order to satisfy various contemporary needs (ASHWORTH 1991). Cultural heritage thus is a concept subject to permanent challenges concerning its preservation, social acceptance and the possibility to be used as part of local and regional development strategies. The phenomenon of former border railway stations (FBRSS) inscribes it particularly well into this problematic.

This article has discussed a number of problems and conflicts related to the neglected FBRSS in Poland with regard to their current geographical, economic and political conditions. The complexity of aspects undergirding these conditions, in turn, is indicative of the mindsets that shape the socio-economic situation in contemporary Poland. While the variety and specifics of these problems would suggest an individual approach to the FBRSS problem, however, this does not seem to be the case. In Poland, it is not easy to deal with the concept of heritage in an effective way, especially in times of proliferating nationalistic sentiments, which remain the chief factor influencing current preservation and conservation policies. In many cases, material culture associated with foreign political oppression has little potential to compete with projects of outspokenly national tenets. Still, actions for the improvement and preservation of these ‘black sheep’ of history are slowly becoming noticeable.

FBRSS constitute an important part of Poland’s history, and, given their great number, they are also a significant contribution to world culture. Ridden with disputes and controversies, FBRSS are seldom regarded as objects of identity between place and people. All the same, they do inscribe themselves into an indivisible cultural landscape, with which many citizens bond. In line with the current railway renaissance trend, FBRSS, due to their architectural and historic importance, should be better taken care of, not least through modernisation and adaptation to new commercial and utility functions, most notably passenger traffic.

However, in line with current Polish policy, renewal of FBRSS seldom improves their utility; what is more, modernisation often involves incursions into the scarce space available to passengers. Lastly, because of their association with historical oppression, FBRSS are a vivid example of so-called ‘unwanted history’. Due to this specific insistence, FBRSS are more favourably received as parts of an established cultural landscape than as individual testimonies of historical value. By conflating different understandings of ‘*cultural heritage*’, we are shaping a disjointed reality which seems to lack a consistent rationale. This understanding is essential to garner more critical attitudes towards objects of questionable past, given that this issue – as evidence shows – cannot be left to chance.

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