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Exploring Macro Level Change, Paradox and Transformation at Treptow: An Evaluation of What Was, What Is and What Might Be.

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Extended Abstract

The second world war in Russia “was of such powerful political and emotional significance that it became in effect the founding myth of the late Soviet system (Morcom, 2007, p. 525). Consequently, German defeat was to be a visual experience emulating Khaldei’s iconic photography and the capture of the Reichstag and Stalin’s triumphalism (Ludwig-Hoffmann, 2011). The images of Berlin’s downfall have been appropriated seemingly like no other: within two years of peace, the ‘people’s victory’ had already become Stalin’s; later it was the party’s; and today the ‘Great Patriotic War’ is a lesson in statehood and support of Putin’s political course. The lasting physical vestige of the Great Patriotic War has been memorials. These memorials were designed conceptually by Stalin to suppress the Second World War as a subject of public discourse with an emphasis on victory rather than collapse, ineptitude, and a reliance on the West.

There are tens of thousands of war memorials both large and small erected to the Red Army across Europe. Their socialist realism design, or Soviet artistic doctrine (Tomaszewicz, 2021) represented an idealised Soviet Union, with a purpose to “provide truth and historical relevance to the working people in the socialist spirit” (Tuiñôeeâ and Typaeâ 1972). Socialist realism was seen as a means of providing a “sense of brotherhood of nations, love of the fatherland”, developing “the artistic taste in people, enriching them with new ideas and pointing the way forward” (Áoëüøay 1947, p. 244).

War monuments have always been places of meaning, they represent a means for the fallen to return home (Bartlett and Ellis, 1999) and represent a liminal space for those gone and those who remain. Despite being described as ‘ephemeral’ (Haskins & Rancourt, 2017) they are they are no longer unproblematic and their function and accommodation are in a state of flux. Memorials are not static but can be dynamic and subject to change (Grider, 2007). They operate within certain parameters for periods of time that reflect stability, political inability, and socio-cultural shifts. Problematically we don’t associate change with memorials, but change is inevitable. Interactions between different states, crisis, economic shifts, deindustrialisation, growth (Bailly, Jensen-Butler and Leontidou, 1996), and new economic orders impact on memorials. They are part of our societal discourse (Beckstead, Twose, Levesque-Gottlieb, Rizzo, 2011), past, present, and future.

Russian memorials have been removed, disappeared, preserved, and announced since the fall of the Berlin wall (Amar, 2011). There is the past and the future and there is politicisation and de-politicization attached to these. More recently IE right now, these monuments are be subjected to new narratives and meaning particularly in the macro context of widespread disapproval toward Russian aggression against the Ukraine. Indeed, those that remain have recently been subject to further disapproval, vandalism, subversion and reimagination (BBC 2023). Thus, they are once again contentious places whose meanings are being modified as a consequence of people’s interpretive processes being informed by a macro-environment of conflict and political ideology (Blumer 1969).

Subsequently we posit that Russian war memorials across Europe are inherently linked to the Macromarketing discipline given their design, positioning and reason can be considered as an act of marketing that seeks to have an impact and consequence on society (Hunt 1981). Despite Macromarketing’s commitment to scholarship rooted in marketing histories (Jones and Shaw 2006; Nguyen 2023, Witkowski 2023, Layton and Duffy 2018)

and conflict/war (Nguyen 2023, Loxham 2015, Sredi, Shultz, II, Brecic 2017) the discipline has neglected these sites and their relevance to the field. Subsequently we seek to be the first study to use a Macromarketing lens to explore contemporary meanings and perceptions of these memorials against the ‘now’ backdrop of Russia’s war with Ukraine (Crombois, 2023) and ask:

How has the Russian invasion of Ukraine altered the macromarketing dynamics of Soviet era war memorials in Berlin?

Method

Fieldwork was conducted at Treptower Park, Berlin (Europe’ biggest war memorial). Yakov Borisovich Belopolski was responsible for the design of the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park in Berlin. Opened in 1949, it is a lesson in pragmatism. Created in the style of Socialist Realism it was to represent Stalin’s the three core principles: “ideological commitment” [ideinost], “Party-mindedness” [partiinnost], and “popular spirit” [narodnost] (Waters. 2009).

in January 2024 over a course of 5 days. For the data collection the researcher integrated as a participant observer (Konu 2015, Seim, 2021) to capture attitudes, positions, opinions, and evaluations. The researcher interviewed 18 participants with a median age of 25.6 yrs. 16 from the Berlin one tourist from Ireland and a Family of three from Sweden.

Early Findings and Discussion

The Treptow park for several of the participants was now perceived as an ‘apology’ or ‘entschuldigung’. The notion of an apologetic, armed figure (See figure 1) perhaps reflects the centrality and indeed the necessity of dealing with Russia’s transgressions. The memorial

still exudes huge power and emits chills as a consequence of its scale, but for several participants it did not undermine their feeling that *it* was now obeisant, seeking absolution and perhaps pointing toward a harmony in due course.

“....kneeling as they had insight into the future and what was to come. Take a photo of their faces. You’ll see sadness. Sadness for 2014 and sadness for 2022. They’re apologising to us and Europe. Apologizing for Putin, for Russia, for Communism, for the mess”

See Figure 1 for reference.

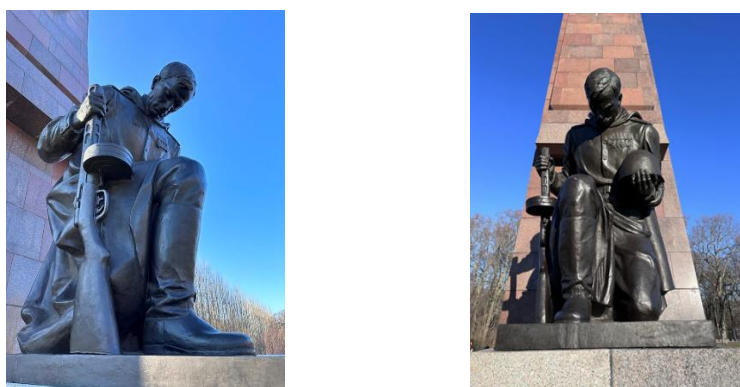


Figure 1

It is also considered that imagining the memorial as an apology facilitates a desired outcome from the transgressor. We suggest that this imbues the memorial with an integrity that up to this point hasn’t been considered.

Data indicates that the Memorial also encapsulates an economic critique of the German Government. For several participants the memorial embodies national shortcomings, not to the detriment of the corpus of diversity and multiculturalism, but deficiencies across the country. Thus, we posit the notion of the monument acting as both a reminder of separation of knowing and doing and political abandonment.

“Treptower is a beautiful abyss. It swallows intellect. Everyone here knew what was coming in Ukraine and this place has sent out that message since 89. But we just walk dogs around it and ignore it. We should have been prepared for 2022. Shame on us.”

“It’s so clean here. Spotless. Just look around. Now, think back to when you left the S-Bahn. Ready? Yes! Schmutz, obdachlosigkeit, die Obdachlosen, the worst of Germany. We give to this cause but not those who really need it.”

“How did you get here? From Mitte? The Farmers. You must have seen them. This is what the park represents. The Vernachlässigung (neglect) of our workers. The park for me is the far right coming to get us again.”

Conclusion

Memorials are not self-standing entities. They challenge commonly held assumptions and create dichotomy and paradox. To that end it is hard to find a grounded conceptualisation. At no point was war, remembrance, emancipation, and reconciliation mentioned in this data- the which ironically is the very essence of memorials. No disenable typology of that type emanated or explicit definitions as the tradition of these memorials has been lost and recontextualised against Ukraine’s’ struggle.

Rather than collective remembering there was an indication of collective and social wondering associated with a future predicated social discourse. This we suggest is representative of a shift in their Macromarketing dynamic from a marking structure that attempts to project meaning on society towards one where society projects meaning onto the structure (Hunt 1981).

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