

The accompanying book to the project: Berlin and Wrocław. The Story of a Relationship

In 1988, Berlin held the title of "European Capital of Culture" at a time when the Wall was still standing and Europe was still divided. Just one year prior, in 1987, Berlin had celebrated another milestone that had helped raise its international profile, namely the 750th anniversary of its founding in 1237. One key event that year was "Myth Berlin", a multimedia exhibition exploring the city and its history. The City of Wrocław, which is the European Capital of Culture in 2016, also has mythical qualities of its own: as a bridge between the German and Polish people in the Middle Ages, as the second most important city in Prussia, as home to Nobel Prize winners, but also as a city whose population was completely replaced after 1945, when Breslau became Wrocław.

This year, Berlin will play a part as Wrocław showcases itself to the world as an open and tolerant city constantly redefining its European identity. A number of events celebrating Wrocław's tenure as European Capital of Culture will take place in both cities: for example, a "Culture Train" will connect the German capital to the Lower Silesian metropolis, and a unique LUNETTA ("telescope") will make it possible for people in both cities to experience each other in real time.

What do Berliners know about Wrocław? And what do Wrocławers know about Berlin? What exactly is worth knowing? Do both cities actually have a common story to tell?

Indeed, they do. Especially seeing as the history of the relationship between the two cities also has some mythical qualities. For a long time, one often heard it said in Berlin that every second Berliner was originally from Silesia or Wrocław – a quip referencing the population explosion Berlin experienced during the industrial era. In turn, Wrocławers have upheld the memory of the ten Nobel Prize laureates the city has produced, most of whom were Prussians and Jews, with not a Polish person among them; and yet, as was emphasized after the fall of the Berlin Wall, they belong to the legacy of a former German city that became Polish in 1945 and has already long since become entirely European.

There are many intertwining threads that make up the Berlin-Wrocław relationship. The Flying Silesian is one of them; prior to WWII, it connected Berlin and Wrocław to one another in less than three hours. The Oder waterway, which made possible the construction of Potsdamer Platz in the 1990s, is another. The experience of flight and expulsion also connects the two cities today. Many Berliners, including former Bundestag President Wolfgang Thierse, originate from Wrocław, and many Wrocławers, in turn, come from the former Eastern Polish areas that today belong to Ukraine. In other words, the histories of Berlin and Wrocław reflect both the myths and the traumas of the twentieth century.

And both cities cherish the memory of the vibrant atmosphere in 1989 which led to the end of the division of Europe. In Wrocław, the "Orange Alternative" subculture movement undermined the authority of the communist party using the weapons of irony; and in Berlin, the fall of the Wall on 9 November was preceded by major civil-society demonstrations on Alexanderplatz. The Europe shaped by these two cities is a Europe of civil society. For this reason, both cities are marked by the conviction that culture functions as the oil that keeps society together. That is to say, the myth is not a mere fantasy; in fact, it has a very solid foundation.

The story that Berlin and Wrocław have to tell is thus a threefold story. It is the regional history of two cities that were once closely linked to one another and now build on those connections. At the same time, it is a German-Polish story of the dialogue which began after WWII with the letter of reconciliation written by the Polish bishops in 1965. And, finally, it is a European story that must now face the harsh headwinds of renationalising politics and memory – and thus must reinvent itself once more.

On the occasion of Wrocław's tenure as European City of Culture 2016, the book "Berlin and Wrocław. The Story of a Relationship" seeks to bring both cities closer together. Edited by the German-Polish team of Mateusz Hartwich and Uwe Rada, the book contains the work of over 20 German and Polish authors who describe the intertwined history of the two cities, but also their common features, conflicts and utopias. The result is a two-city history of a transnational region at the heart of Europe.

Authors / Themes

Mateusz Hartwich / Uwe Rada – Berlin and Wrocław: Two Unequal Sisters

Artur Becker – Two Cities, One Walk

Krzysztof Ruchniewicz – Athens on the Spree Meets the Flower of Europe: A Double City History

Wolfgang Thierse – Wrocław, My Birthplace

Magdalena Parys – Have no choice, must go to Wrocław

Mateusz Hartwich – Germans and Poles: The Double Expulsion

Irina Modrow – How the University of Berlin Came to Benefit Wrocław

Robert Żurek – The Pastoral Letter of 1965 - The Difficult Path of Reconciliation

Lisa Höhenleitner – The Oppenheim House Tells More Than Just One Story

Vasco Kretschmann – The Wrocław City Museum in the Former Prussian Royal Palace

Uwe Rada – Street Careers: What Connects Friedrichstrasse to Ulica Świdnicka

Beate Störkuhl – In Dialogue with Berlin: Modern Wrocław Architecture from 1900 to 1933

Bente Kahan / Jerzy Kichler – Jewish life in Wrocław before and after 1945

Agata Gabiś – Reconstruction: Wrocław and Berlin Reinvent Themselves

Roswitha Schieb – Traces of Silesia in Berlin

Uwe Rada – Space for Pioneers: Berlin Kreuzberg and Wrocław Nadodrze

Andrzej Dębski – Lights, Camera, Action: Berlin and Wrocław in the History of Cinema

Wolfgang Templin – Reinforcement: Wrocław and the GDR Opposition

Katarzyna Roj – Laughter against Communism: The Wrocław Opposition

Katarzyna Wielga-Skolimowska – Wrocław and Berlin: More Sustainability, Please

Bogdan Twardochleb – Don't Run Out of Steam: The Oder Partnership

Volker Hassemer – What can a European Capital of Culture do?

Krzysztof Czyżewski – The Wrocław Laboratory of Culture

Chronology

Read more

- Published by Kulturprojekte Berlin GmbH in cooperation with be.bra Verlag; edited by Mateusz Hartwich and Uwe Rada as part of *Wrocław–Berlin 2016*.
- 32 pages, large-format photos of both cities
- Language: German/Polish
- The book will be available in May 2016