Cognitive geographies of bordering: The case of urban neighbourhoods in transition

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Abstract
Linking borders to cognition can widen our understandings of space–society relations. In this contribution, border-making will be related to the creation of urban place distinctions and place narratives that create a sense of specific “thereness.” The focus is not on cognitive mappings of urban borders as such. Rather, border-making will be revealed as an intersubjective creation of meaning in the guise of socially communicated narratives of place distinction—stories and knowledges of place that reflect embodied experience of place specificity and relationality with regard to wider urban contexts. I argue that the utility of interpreting urban spaces and places in this fashion lies in understanding why borders within society are created and how they become evident in the process of meaning-making. This perspective also helps us understand the significance of place and why cities and their neighbourhoods are continuously appropriated and reappropriated in social, cultural, and political terms. As borders tell stories, border-making itself involves narratives of change and continuity that can reveal much about how places function—or fail to function—as communities. Developing an approach elaborated by Scott and Sohn, examples of urban border-making will be gleaned from Berlin and Warsaw.

Keywords
borders, cultural cognition, intersubjectivity, meaning-making, place

The study of borders within society has progressed from a largely descriptive, state-centric endeavour to a highly differentiated and multidisciplinary field of study (Diener & Hagen, 2012; Sohn, 2016). Among other disciplines, social geography, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, political science, and the humanities have explored the centrality of borders in conditioning social reality. Contemporary border studies have, for
example, provided detailed analyses of sociopolitical borders as a nexus of power, identity, culture, and historical memory (Andersen et al., 2012; Brambilla, 2015; Popescu, 2012). There has also been considerable concern with border regimes as technologies through which societies are constructed (Amilhat-Szary & Giraud, 2015; Nail, 2016). Because of the political significance of borders it is the critical and questioning gaze that dominates the contemporary debate. In this reading, borders are more often than not biopolitical instruments and social strictures that objectivise existing power asymmetries within society. In other words, borders “happen to people” and people subsequently accommodate and negotiate borders as part of their everyday lives. As salient as they are, political and theoretical commitments can nevertheless obscure the fact that borders are most fundamentally about the creation and organisation of social space—without them, relational thinking about the world would be hardly possible.

While not at the centre of contemporary border studies debate, perspectives with a greater actor-centred bias are (re)emerging; they allow us to understand not only how but why border-making transpires in such ubiquitous fashion. Border poetics, for example, expresses a concern with hybridity, fluidity, and multivocality, suggesting that border-making is as much a product of imagination as it is of political will. Moreover, bordering imaginations provide orientation and stabilise identities even under disruptive circumstances (Pötzsch, 2015; Schimanski, 2015). Moreover, the multiplicity of ways in which borders can be understood and studied is an open invitation to revisit bottom-up perspectives on the ways borders are formed within society. Besides their role in ethnic and social organisation, political and symbolic boundaries are instruments of meaning-making and interpreting the world. They are also essential to the creation and maintenance of a sense of place. Consequently, linking borders and place to cognition, that is, to ways in which knowledge and understanding about the world are acquired, can contribute to more inclusive perspectives on space–society relations. While there now exists broad consensus that borders are socially produced phenomena, it is worth considering the link between borders and cognitive functions that stabilise ways of knowing the world. For the objective of this discussion, the term border (rather than boundary) will be used in a nonlinear but sociospatial understanding. Moreover, once we have dropped the reductive requirement of linearity, we can more clearly understand borders as the creation of social, functional, environmental, and temporal distinctions that resonate emotionally.

For the purposes of this analysis, the relationship between border-making and place will be investigated in terms of embodied and intersubjective processes of cognition. To paraphrase Maturana and Varela (1980), bordering is about creating categories of distinction and relativity between spaces, thus producing, reinforcing, and/or transforming place ideas. Moreover, as Varela et al. (1991) propose, perceptions of the world are constituted through embodied action in the world. Rosch’s (2017) elaborations on participatory sense-making supports the idea that borders (e.g., within society and cities) emerge in the interaction between imagined and experienced space. Capturing the cognitive complexity of border-making processes is not the intention of this article. However, in relating border-making to the creation of urban place distinctions, we can link cognitive processes such as perception and meaning-making to social communication and the materiality of urban space. Precedents for this line of investigation have been established by architects such as Harry Francis Mallgrave (2015), who suggest that built
environments are not simply architectural products or aesthetic artefacts but are part of affective social relationships and embodied cognition. Moreover, the idea that borders are products of complex cognition is not a trivial or strictly academic question; as will be discussed below, it is closely related to issues of place identity and a sense of belonging. Understanding bordering as a cognitive process puts emphasis on the social significance of place and can be linked, for example, to cultural and political psychologies of identity (see Hopkins & Dixon, 2006).

With this essay, I suggest three things: (a) places and borders are essential to meaning-making of the social world, (b) places and borders are coconstitutive of each other, and (c) border-making is a process of cognition and imagination. However, if border-making is a par excellence example of meaning-making, how is this process disclosed? I will argue that one way we can detect border-making is in the creation and intersubjective communication of urban place (or neighbourhood) narratives. Although cities are not “narratives” in the traditional sense, they are most certainly objects of narrative representation and interpretation. Popova (2014) suggests that narrativity involves intersubjective meaning-construction, for example through the enaction of a narratorial viewpoint by the reader who thus “co-authors” that which is read (the narrative). In an analogous manner, we can conceive that cognitive processes are disclosed in the collective and intersubjective creation of place narratives. In terms of method, this article draws inspiration from cultural psychology (Tateo & Marsico, 2019; Valsiner, 2014), Tuan’s (1991) humanistic geography, and narrative approaches that privilege intersubjectivity and context (Prokkola, 2014). Concretely, this contribution builds on the work of Scott and Sohn (2018), who have suggested that neighbourhood change involves intersubjective bordering mechanisms that socially embed ideas of place. In this essay, examples of urban border-making will be gleaned from Berlin and Warsaw. The focus is not on cognitive mappings of urban borders as such. Rather, border-making will be revealed as socially communicated narratives of place distinction—stories and knowledges of place that reflect embodied experiences of place specificity and relationality with regard to wider urban contexts.

By way of conclusion, I argue that the utility of interpreting urban spaces and places in this fashion lies in understanding why borders within society are created and how they become evident in the labelling and categorisation of places. This perspective also helps us understand the significance of place and why cities and their neighbourhoods are continuously appropriated and reappropriated in social, cultural, and political terms. As borders tell stories, border-making itself involves narratives of change and continuity that can reveal much about how places function—or fail to function—as communities.

**Border-making as meaning-making**

Per Gustafson (2001) has observed that: “a meaningful place must appear as an identifiable, distinguishable territorial unit. Distinction is a basic feature of human (and social) cognition . . . and is a matter of categorisation, ascription of similarities and differences, and the drawing of boundaries” (p. 13). Gustafson’s matter-of-fact understanding of place and border-making reminds us that borders are not solely political but more fundamentally psychological in nature. However, places and borders are more than elements
of differentiation, they are also consequences of imaginative processes of meaning-making. To quote Jaan Valsiner (2014): “we react to and act upon the world in the middle of which we live, we construct it in meaningful ways” (p. 1). Recent work in border studies (see Tsoni, 2019) has reflected this idea, strengthening a bottom-up understanding of border-making through a phenomenological perspective and a concern with place as vital to existential needs, for example those of refugees. This line of investigation merits further and broader development.

The concrete aim here therefore is to illustrate the cognitive nature of bordering as manifested in narrative framings of urban places and neighbourhoods: place ideas create categories of distinction and relationality that shape shared knowledges of (urban) space. My ambition is motivated by the fact that while mainstream border studies has focused on the ways in which borders are constituted within society, on the “how” of borders, little attention has been paid to basic “why” questions above and beyond more obvious power and security-related rationales. Put simply, and as will be elaborated below, the why of borders is basically about the creation of meaning. In arguing the point that borders are inherent to cognition and meaning-making, I also contend that highly productive links can be developed between cognitive sciences, cultural psychology in particular, and humanistic geography. Linking border-making to cognition, and hence to meaning-making, requires some qualification. At one level it is an issue of embodiment, of cognition grounded in bodily interaction with the physical environment. If we consider cognition as embodied rather than merely computational, it follows that social interaction and sociocultural settings influence consciousness. In other words, cognition, as social understanding, is also intersubjective (di Paolo & de Jaegher, 2015). By extension, therefore, border-making is embodied and intersubjective.

My starting point therefore is that the border is necessary for individual development; it is the “psychic envelope” that nurtures and protects us in our infancy. Moreover, we already create borders in our first apprehensions of the world. As Maturana and Varela (1980) write:

The fundamental cognitive operation that an observer performs is the operation of distinction. By means of this operation the observer specifies a unity as an entity distinct from a background and a background as the domain in which an entity is distinguished. (p. xxii)

Borders and cognition are linked in terms of mental processes that create new information out of existing knowledge in order to effect action and ground decision-making (Knauf & Wolf, 2010; Sternberg & Ben-Zeev, 2001). However, the operation of distinction—and thus the establishment of borders—is more than a functional process, it is also emotional and relational. Emotions work to integrate cognitive activity and are a source of meaning rather than an antithesis of rational thought. Furthermore, emotions are not wholly internal as the observer is an active participant in a “sentient and responsive world” (Robinson, 2015, p. 45). Feelings, as patterns of relationships, only have meaning in relation to persons and things lying outside the self. Burkitt (2002) echoes this: “our emotions are an active response to a relational context: to other bodies with which we are related and that respond to our actions in particular ways” (pp. 151–152).
Eleanor Rosch (2017) writes that: “the lived body, lived mind and lived environment are all . . . part of the same process, the process by which one enacts the world” (p. xxvii). At the same time, cognition is fundamentally cultural (Bender & Beller, 2013), that is: a situation in which values and cultural practices inform “real-world” perceptions. According to the architect Harry Francis Mallgrave (2015): “our brains, bodies and environments (natural and cultural) are no longer seen as entities to be independently investigated, but as highly dynamic and interacting systems connected with each other biologically, ecologically and socially” (p. 22). Through embodied cognition we code or traduce environmental stimuli into action potentials; we act out and simulate how to interact with material objects. Moreover, our environments are selectively created depending on our abilities to interact with the world. Borders are therefore coconstitutive of emotion and affect; joy, fear, anxiety, enthusiasm, awe, admiration, and curiosity are among the sentiments that are evoked in the (embodied) experience of sociospatial transition—for example, by moving from one space (room, neighbourhood, city, country) to another (see Tateo & Marsico, 2019).

Borders are universal phenomena in terms of processes of differentiation and distinguishing between different elements within space and time (Maturana & Varela, 1980). They are, by extension, universal in the form of distinctions between the self and nonself (Anzieu, 1985). As Bachelard’s (1958/2014) poetics of space shows us, however, the cultural and contingent nature of cognition emerges early on. The psychic envelope necessary for early development extends to the home; Bachelard’s “first universe” is a proto experience of place that opens up the larger world to us as we go through life (Papadopoulos, 2019). Despite the intimacy of Bachelard’s home metaphor, it is not merely a solipsistic affair—intersubjectivity is essential to the development of imaginative thinking about space and place (Knoblauch, 2011). As Bachelard (1958/2014) writes:

> When two strange images meet, two images that are the work of two poets pursuing separate dreams, they apparently strengthen each other. . . . The image loses its gratuitousness, the free play of the imagination ceases to be a form of anarchy. (pp. 79–80)

Understanding cognition as driven culturally, affectively, and in terms of “embodied action” (Varela et al., 1991) presents us with an alternative understanding of borders as socially constructed. Here, they are essential elements of everyday life. Bordering processes reflect a need to create distinctions as a means to interpret the world. They also reflect affective interactions between the human body and the environment. Moreover, border-making is at the centre of spatial imaginations that provide orientation and a sense of identification with place. In other words, borders are essential to meaning-making.

**Borders, place, and meaning-making**

In one fundamental way, the “why” question I pursue here can be answered outright: we create borders, individually and as a society, as a means to create a sense of everyday reality through attributing meaning to specific spaces and relating these spaces to each other. In this discussion, I argue that borders need to be investigated more explicitly as
part of the intersubjective creation of meaning as expressed, for example, in the form of signs, codes, and ways of communicating information about the environment. Along similar lines, for example, Tateo and Marsico (2019) have investigated affective relationships involved in walking through urban spaces and experiencing urban borders as transitions and liminal spaces.

Borders and place are coconstitutive of each other, they are also products of intersubjective meaning-making. As Kevin Lynch (1960) and others demonstrated, those who live in cities actively and continuously make borders between their own neighbourhoods, everyday action spaces, and other parts of the city. These mental borders are loaded with places, images, material points of reference within the urban landscape, feelings, and value judgments. Ted Relph (1976) has argued that a sense of place elicits, almost instinctively, recognition and specific associations. Moreover, Relph (2008) suggests that a pragmatic perspective allows for the development of a notion of place that is bounded, yet open and dynamic and that “combines an appreciation for a locality’s uniqueness with a grasp of its relationship to regional and global contexts” (p. 321). This also reflects a need for rootedness and a sense of place, and in providing a sense of ontological security, establishes conditions for social and political agency (Malpas, 1999). On this view, therefore, urban borders and places are a product of human intellect and social uses of space in which formal and informal practices of organising everyday life mutually reinforce each other.

Here again, cultural psychology and cognitive and humanistic geography provide insights into how borders and place can be more clearly linked. Humanistic geographers have traditionally studied subjective interpretations of the physical world, such as landscapes, as well as connections between society, mind, and the environment (Ley, 1981). Their work indicates that, rather than mere instrumental rationality, psychological processes and cultural influences ground perception. From this position it is a logical move to consider place, both as a concept and as concrete areas within cities, as a fundamental link between the psychic and the physical, between practice and representation. Gaston Bachelard’s psychology and philosophy of imagination resonate with the phenomenology of humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1991), whose work has in large measure been dedicated to elucidating the interactive nature of place-making, for example by focusing on the role of language. In Tuan’s interpretation, evocative, emotive, and moral qualities of social communication directly influence the specific qualities attributed to place. Moreover, in Tuan’s geographies of space and place, cognition reveals itself in the knowing of space. As Tuan (1979) writes, “The study of space, from the humanistic perspective, is thus the study of a people’s spatial feelings and ideas in the stream of experience” (p. 388). Moreover, the reciprocal process of experiencing space and endowing it with meaning is not structurally predetermined but inherently guided by feelings and affect (Cresswell, 2004). This squares, moreover, with Heideggerian ideas of being in the world (Dasein) and philosophical positions that privilege ontological (i.e., existential) questions of space and boundedness (Malpas, 2012).

**Narrative as method**

In empirical terms, establishing links between cognitive processes and border-making is challenging and is perhaps best achieved through the study of narratives. Cognition
discloses itself in narrative and the telling of stories, for example, about borders, places, and what they signify, are essential elements of meaning-making, both at the individual level as well as collectively. Moreover, following de Certeau’s (1980) understandings of everyday practices, narrative is built upon interactions in space. According to De Luca Picione and Valsiner (2017): “Borders enable us to narratively construct one’s own experiences using three inherent processes: contextualization, intersubjective positioning and setting of pertinence” (p. 532)—psychological borders structure the flow of narrative processes. In other words, through narratives we actively (re)create borders that allow us to interpret natural and social environments, endowing them with affective content and value. Following Di Paolo and de Jaegher (de Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007; Di Paolo & de Jaegher, 2015), Popova (2015) suggests that narrativity requires the intersubjective construction of meaning. Among other things, borders can be narrated as embodied interactions with the environment as well as symbolic appropriations of cultural and historical ideas. As Prokkola (2014) argues, narrative method is significant in that it acknowledges both individual and intersubjective perspectives and reflects the multivocal and multidimensional nature of social reality.

To an extent, narrative method is well established in the border studies literature as is evidenced by postcolonial border-crossing narratives (Kemal, 2019) and local narratives of border negotiation (Doevenspeck, 2011; Megoran, 2006). Schimanski (2015) argues that the making of borders involves border narratives, the study of which can help us understand notions of difference and “other” in real daily situations, rather than as abstract concepts. In terms of the symbolic communication of borders and their significance, the concept of borderscapes perhaps comes closest to capturing the link between cognitive processes and the narrative construction of sociocultural borders. Among others, Brambilla (2015) and Nyman (2018) argue that borderscapes are contexts where cultural appropriations and social contestations become visible via a broad repertory of communicative means and strategies.

In terms of this discussion, Tuan’s (1991) focus on the role of language in creating place appears an especially appropriate point of departure. The narrative–descriptive approach emphasises that evocative words and concepts have the power to create or change a sense of place and in a sense reborder place by endowing with new character and content, for example by appropriating cultural symbols, referencing historical events or association with other aspects of the social and natural environment. Here again, narrative methods provide a link the between the imaginative creation of place and participatory sense-making (de Jaegher, 2018).

**Place narratives as border-making processes**

The (re)creation of urban borders will now be elaborated as place narratives that give meaning to and that are reflected in representations of specific areas (see Egger, 2012). This is, admittedly, an unorthodox way of conceptualising borders, but the point is that borders cannot exist in spaces bereft of meaning or social significance; borders bound meaning, and only in certain cases as discrete lines. In this treatment, borders take shape as ideas, as spatial knowledge that creates sociospatial difference through attribution and representation (Scott & Sohn, 2018). Attribution confirms that urban borders emerge in
social practices of distinguishing and differentiating and in the creation of shared understandings of place. Attribution is associated here with cognitive processes of producing boundedness by associating specific qualities with place. *Representation* is expressed in the creation of place narratives, stories that construct a specific sociospatial identity as well as express the relational character of place identity within a wider urban situation. Moreover, attributions and representations give evidence of the intersubjective nature of these transformations in which contestations of place consolidate the social embedding of place borders. In other words, while it is not in any way suggested that these narratives are “monolithic,” their significance as border-making practice lies in the production of shared meanings of specific places that elicit recognition and mutual comprehension. Institutionalising place borders and place ideas is a recursive and iterative process; it involves the everyday practice of creating, confirming, and recreating sociospatial distinctions. In some cases, this can involve the intersubjective invention of entirely new, and often informal place names, such as the Kreuzkölln Neighbourhood in Berlin (Scott & Sohn, 2018).

**Methods and sources**

As indicated above, Yi-Fu Tuan’s (1991) method is a point of departure, and it is a relatively short journey from his narrative–descriptive approach to understanding how place is made to cognition as expressed in coconstructed narrativity (Popova, 2015). Among others, the internet has provided a multifarious space for the expression of place sentiment and place ideas as well as the elaboration of neighbourhood-making narratives. Journalistic commentary and critical blogs regarding neighbourhood development, photo, art, and literary representations of place, cultural guides, annotated maps and visual and textual explorations of local histories are among the ways in which narratives of place are created intersubjectively. These were in fact the main sources used in this study. Specifically, sources were screened and selected on the basis of relevance to place-making: that is, perspectives on neighbourhood change, architectural design, urban development processes, cultural change, as well as critical commentary of these transformation processes. Moreover, they represented international press sources as well as local online platforms that incorporated different perspectives. In addition, background research available on the two urban areas, located in Berlin and Warsaw, was also consulted.

In terms of method, content gleaned from various sources was curated in a way that allowed for the identification of major bordering narratives (see below) specific to the Wedding and Wola districts. Curation is often associated with the targeted dissemination of filtered-for-purpose content, for example, for marketing, educational, and political purposes. However, curating is also an emergent social science methodology that involves the analysis of individual sources (e.g., social media content), a synthesis of the insights they provide and then grouping of information according to different common storylines (see Our-Voices, 2016). Following Fotopoulou and Couldry (2015), data was curated in a way that involved weaving various individual narratives into a set of consistent themes. The grouping of content thus reflected processes of appropriation and representation in the narration of place ideas expressed by residents, stakeholders, visitors, and users of the locales more generally.
This approach demonstrates how place borders are being narrated intersubjectively around interactions with and experiences of urban transformation and their specific social and spatial manifestations. Through the curation process, place ideas around which various narratives converge could be identified. In terms of processes of change we find that in both cases the creation of new cultures of diversity, new spaces of economic, cultural activity, as well as concerns with gentrification and its impact are important elements. The narratives highlight place characteristics as well as compare, or rather relate, these characteristics to those of other areas in the two cities. The borders that are thus (re)created result not from linear divisions real or imagined, but from the spatialisation of place difference—in other words, in the narration of a specific “there.” These place narratives are structured in symmetric fashion according to three interlinked subthemes that emerged as part of analysis: (a) references to historical legacies and place traditions, (b) narratives of change and contestation, and (c) narratives of place uniqueness based on distinctive qualities and relationality. In this way, the results allow for the generalisation of place ideas that provides a picture of how place uniqueness and relationality are communicated. The potential for much more extensive and thematically complex research is, of course, virtually limitless.

**Berlin: Wedding, narratives of diversity and tradition**

Wedding is part of the Mitte District of Berlin. It is a traditional working class area and former industrial centre that housed major firms before the Second World War. Today, Wedding is one of the most ethnically diverse localities of Berlin. We can identify (at least) three major bordering narratives that characterise Wedding:

- An exceptional area of diversity and authenticity that resists norming through gentrification.
- A unique space where socioeconomic and historical continuity coexist with cultural change.
- A space of alternative cultural spaces and lifestyles at affordable levels/rents.

The multicultural atmosphere is highly visible on the streets, in the types of shops and services flourishing in the area, and in its bilingual shop signs. Wedding’s new image as an up-and-coming working class area (Kwak, 2015) also references the area’s historical development, and traditional left-wing activism. It is a place where local Berlin traditions have been maintained despite Berlin’s overall rapid pace of change. At the same time, Wedding embodies gradual cultural shifts in terms of an increasingly diverse population. According to the bloggers Mick ter Reehorst and Natalia Smolentceva (2017):

> What was once a working-class neighbourhood called “Red Wedding” is now a booming and culturally diverse area. Compared to other Berlin neighbourhoods, Wedding is relatively untouched by gentrification, making it one of the city’s most authentic areas. The true spirit of Berlin is still alive here. (para. 1)

In the past, Wedding and other Berlin inner-city neighbourhoods have been subject to highly sensationalised debates regarding multiculturalism (which, to some, is an
ugly word), ethnic diversity, and their association with social dereliction. Officially, Wedding is home to the most deprived neighbourhoods and the highest concentration of socioeconomic and public safety problems in Berlin (Bezirksamt Berlin-Mitte, 2016). Wedding’s negative reputation as a centre of social tensions, criminality, youth unemployment, and dereliction is thus a constant in the narration of transformation. As Klein (2015) suggests, invisible borders restrict mobility between Wedding and more prosperous neighbouring areas: many fear that Wedding is “unsafe,” yet others, such as one visitor, proclaims that “yes, it is dirtier here and at first glance perhaps bleaker in places. Still, if I want to experience Berlin and find authenticity, a simple everyday approach to life, then I have to go to Wedding” (Klein, 2015, para. 3). Nevertheless, in contemporary place ideas of Wedding, its past stigmatisation as a “problem area” is giving way to more positive narratives based on social integration, cultural diversity, and community building.

For example, a “positive” distinguishing narrative is that Wedding is ugly but authentic—it has been largely spared the gentrification and upscaling that have transformed many central neighbourhoods in Berlin (Zlatevska, 2012). Such narratives of uniqueness are not specific to “foreign” observers, as more locally based observations indicate. Now, positive imaginaries of Wedding’s neighbourhoods in which the mix of “working class” and ethnic diversity is understood as an asset, are present in traditional and social media. In a weblog of November 2, 2016, Culture Trip’s Sarah Coughlan (2016) writes: “In a city so overrun with Kreuzkölln hype and Mitte types, north Berlin’s Wedding often gets overlooked” (para. 1). Wedding is therefore known as a place that, unlike the showcase renewal of Berlin neighbourhoods such as Prenzlauer Berg, has escaped many of the socioeconomic and cultural ravages of gentrification.

Other websites, blogs, and media reports outright praise Wedding as a mecca for students (Den Leopoldatz, 2011), Berlin’s “hippest district” (King, 2017), or “hottest new neighbourhood” (Hoeller, 2015). For example, a major UK newspaper has celebrated Wedding as “an up-and-coming neighbourhood” (Clarke, 2018). Expat, business-oriented narrations of Wedding are particularly revealing: Sophie-Claire Hoeller (2015) takes us on a tour of the “hottest new neighbourhood” in which she states:

Wedding is gentrifying rapidly, but manages to retain its authentic, multicultural vibe. While there are still some rough spots in the area, generally, upscale mingles with rundown, new rubs shoulders with old, and rent is still affordable for the many artists and students who call it home. (para. 3)

Perhaps the most unique feature of Wedding that receives attention is its apparent ability to thrive as a highly diverse place. On the Arte Info website, blogger Nathalie Daiber (2017) describes the profile of a “Multikulti-Wedding” in which: “Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Atheists, Lower Saxonians, Swabians, and other refugees live here quite peacefully together. Might this be a model for all Germany’s future? Decision-makers at least should have a closer look at the people here” (para. 1).

At the same time, there are tensions between Wedding and the “outside world” (Keresztély et al., 2018, p. 43). The spectre of gentrification and rapid neighbourhood change are constant subthemes in narratives of Wedding’s transformation. Since 2015,
and primarily due to rapidly increasing housing prices in the central city, students, artists, and small entrepreneurs have discovered Wedding and in some parts the area has begun to resemble popular areas in gentrified neighbourhoods. According to Guthmann Real Estate: “Berlin Wedding is one of Berlin’s most up-and-coming districts. The former traditional working-class quarter is undergoing a structural transformation from an industrial zone to a location for science, research and modern services” (Guthmann, n.d., Markets). In contrast to this upbeat story of progress, such change is seen to represent a threat to Wedding’s identity and unique culture of diversity (Keresztély et al., 2018). The internet hyping of Wedding that adds to perceived coolness is also reflected in new cultural and gastronomic attractions such as the new Silent Green “Kulturquartier” (https://www.silent-green.net) that many find alienating. In this way, Wedding is also narrated as the next potential target of large-scale gentrification, a process that would threaten Wedding as a model of diversity (Malplat, 2017).

Warsaw: Wola as postindustrial urban frontier and memoryscape

The Warsaw District of Wola has gained visibility as a hub of business development, spectacular architecture, residential growth, and as an area where elements of a new urban economy are emerging. It is also known for demolition of older buildings, speculation, and gentrification. We can similarly identify three major bordering narratives for Wola:

- a memoryscape and space of contrasts,
- a new borderland of quality urban development and gentrification, and
- emblematic core of a new urban economy.

Wola’s place identity is, moreover, very much rooted in history. The area is known and remembered as a traditional area of industry and working-class neighbourhoods and its history is indelibly marked by the Second World War, resistance against German occupation, and the 1944 Warsaw uprising. Historical sites in Wola document its industrial past and the ravages of war. Wola’s image as a new urban frontier thus coexists with its historical significance—what Małgorzata Kuciewicz and Simone de Iacobis characterise as an urban “memoryscape.” Kuciewicz and de Iacobis (2018) argue that Wola is “one of the most heterogeneous (and vexed) spaces in Warsaw . . . a place where many temporalities co-exist” (section 3.2). This multilayered sense of place is reflected in different narratives that identify and thus border Wola as a space of contrasts within Warsaw. Magdalena Ziółkowska, a resident of Wola and a photographer, has captured the “extraordinary character” of Wola in a series of photographs entitled “A Wola Full of Contrasts”:

“where you can find a full architectural cross-section – from the oldest tenements, through construction from the 60s and 70s, then blocks from 1997, to the modernity of Warsaw Spire and other office buildings” (Jankowska, 2017, para. 1).

During state socialism, Wola was an area in which industrial and residential uses coexisted; much of the area remained underdeveloped after the Second World War ruins were demolished. After the collapse of state socialism in 1989, Wola’s development was quite slow and as the new downtown in central Warsaw began to take form and expand
in the 1990s, Wola was bypassed, marking an urban borderland very different from the rapidly growing new employment centres in Central Warsaw. However, with the completion of the East–West metro line in 2011, Wola emerged from a certain functionalist facelessness to a place narrated as the “new business heart of Warsaw” (JLL, 2017). As one Polish real estate investment website claims:

Bordering the western fringes of the city centre, historically-speaking it’s been largely viewed as working class urban sprawl. Now touted as one of Warsaw’s most dynamic areas, one doesn’t need to look too far back to appreciate the scale of this achievement: even as little as ten years ago, Wola was perhaps better noted for its derelict factories, unused plots and bleak accommodation. Dishevelled and decrepit, it felt like a quietly forgotten no-man’s land. (Hamilton May, 2017, para. 1)

Wola’s new image has been actively narrated by image-makers par excellence—the real estate developers who extol the quality, distinctiveness, and aesthetic inventiveness of new developments that have replaced old industrial and empty spaces in the area. Examples of this are the Warsaw Spire, which has become famous as Poland’s tallest building and one of its most flamboyant business hub landmarks (Cienski, 2018). It is also an area of Warsaw where a new, more sustainable and aesthetic quality of urban development is emerging with a rich mix of urban functions and activities. The relational character of Wola’s place image (identity) partly results from bordering it as a new form of more sustainable urbanism and urban growth in marked contradistinction to other dynamic areas of Warsaw, such as the much-criticised Służewiec business district, which is plagued by accessibility problems, monotonous architecture, and a lack of amenities for a large working population. Służewiec is popularly referred to as “Mordor,” as a poorly planned and exploitative business quarter almost as hellish as the dark Lord Sauron’s abode in Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings series (see Kuciewicz & de Iacobis, 2018). More than just an anti-Mordor, Wola has the veneer of a future-smart city, and large-scale developments either completed or planned often emphasise sustainable transportation, a jobs–housing balance, and environmentally sound work places as well as new cool places for urban elites.3

As land markets in Warsaw heat up, Wola is portrayed as more successful in integrating housing, work, business, and high-quality buildings, although not to everyone’s delight. Gentrification and privatisation have exposed distinct faultlines (Davies, 2017). Reprivatisation, property restitution, and evictions also have an impact on Wola’s place identity. Piotr Ciszewski (2018) of the Warsaw Tenants Association writes that Wola was once a famous and politically active workers’ district (“Red Wola”) where social housing experiments were realised in the early 20th century. Today, residents of buildings scheduled for reprivatisation have partly successfully resisted gentrification trends.

Conclusions

The theoretical ambitions of this contribution have been to associate cognition, borders, and everyday processes of place-making, assuming that this might enhance our knowledge of why, and not only how, borders are created and recreated within society. Moreover, the two bordering vignettes provide evidence as to how the making of borders
is not only a result of social relations but also more specifically a product of complex social cognition and the social communication of distinctive place ideas. Place borders are not simply physical features of the townscape, they result from embodied interaction with the urban environment. In these vignettes, urban borders were identified not as discrete sociospatial divisions, but as border-generating narratives that express specific place relationalities vis-à-vis wider urban contexts and that produce a sense of orientation and identification. Specifically, this brief investigation indicates how intersubjective place narratives are being constructed around interactions with and experiences of urban transformation and their specific social and spatial manifestations.

These two very condensed stories of urban place reflect, in their own individual ways, processes of meaning-making with regard to the shifting sociocultural geographies of Berlin and Warsaw. They represent ways of interpreting and understanding urban change, for example, in terms of spaces of cultural possibility and lifestyle alternatives as well as political contestation. In terms of “curated” themes, the sources that were used reflect processes of appropriation and representation with regard to shifting neighbourhood character, architectural design, urban economic development, sustainability, and cultural change as well as critical commentary of these transformation processes. In this way, the two examples developed here indicate how knowledges of place are actively narrated around specific distinctive characteristics of place, of “thereness,” that exhibit both continuity and change, connecting place heritage to the present context of “post-Millennial” physical and sociocultural transformation. The bordering narratives are of course rather different: in the case of Wedding we find a unique culture of diversity coexisting with traditional Berlin lifestyles; Wola, on the other hand, is a story of rapid and dramatic postindustrial development that contrasts with the historical memory of working-class Warsaw and the struggle against German occupation. The sources of place narratives are also quite distinct, reflecting very different processes and velocities of urban change.

As a concluding remark, I would like to emphasise that the psychological nature of borders is a field that invites considerable interdisciplinary research. Through linking everyday border-making to cognitive and affective processes, we can explore the significance of borders not only as regulators of social relations but as something essential to human flourishing. This would also strengthen understandings of the ontological and pragmatic significance of meaning-making in constructing social environments. The ontological significance of borders and place is expressed, among other areas, in rootedness, familiarity, and through supporting a sense of being in the world. However, as the cases briefly developed here demonstrate, place-making does not necessarily involve “linearity” and discrete spatial divisions. Borders in society exist insofar as they emerge from embodied cognition and socially transmitted knowledge about the world. By extension, urban places and their boundedness are products of socially mediated ideas and practices, such as appropriations, attributions, and representations, which link bodies with the physical, the emotive with the built environment.

**Funding**

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: the research upon which this article is based received support from the National Science Centre, Poland under the Polonez scheme (project reg. no. 2015/19/P/HS5/04070)
and funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 665778.

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**Notes**

1. The issue of “UFO” projects appropriating local public spaces was addressed in conversation with members of the Pankstrasse Neighbourhood Management team (Quartiersmanagement Pankstrasse) in March 2018.
2. See, for example, websites dedicated to travel information about Warsaw. In the case of Wola it is industrial history and the sites of violence and resistance during WWII that are among the main attractions (Webber, 2019).
3. For example, Skanska’s projects located in Wola (Skanska, 2017); the Metropoint Apartments, which are touted as the first residential investment in Poland to be recognised with a high level of sustainability certification based on the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM): (https://www.asbud.com/en/news/metropoint-apartments-first-residential-investment-poland-be-recognized-such-high-level-breeam); the Warsaw Hub complex (www.warsawhub.com); as well as the “best” apartment development, the Dzelnica 19 complex which will produce 1700 new apartments (https://www.19dzielnica.pl/en/19-dzielnica-development/).

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