

# From Military Sites to Exhibitionary Arenas in Poland and Latvia, 2015–2019

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## Abstract

In the last years mass tourism has become, alongside with previous forms constituting ‘exhibitionary complex’ (Bennett 2004), an element affecting the formation of cultural institutions. The present analysis is based on four examples of grand post-military objects (established in the 19th and 20th centuries) transformed with the use of diverse techniques and now serving functions of a non-military character. The common denominator of the post-military territories presented in the text is the fact that all of them have become a peculiar ‘exhibitionary arena’. I attempt to demonstrate that post-military territories which bear resemblance with respect to former functions and infrastructure, i.e. size and passage of time since their establishment, condition and substantiality, are currently going through various processes of transformation. Within these processes they have been ascribed with different values which are created by practices transforming sites. The notion of the politics of memory is also taken into account.

## Key words

post-military base, exhibitionary complex, authenticity, experience, knowledge, memory politics, participatory turn, Poland, Latvia

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## Introduction

Since 2015 I have been researching territories of former Soviet military bases in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (see e.g. Demski – Czarnecka 2018; Demski 2017; Demski – Czarnecka 2015). Most have been abandoned and have deteriorated, some have continued to serve military functions, but there remain a number of possibilities of ‘coping with’ similar objects and spaces. While visiting the territories of former Soviet military bases in Poland and Latvia (2015–2019) I began to wonder whether in the era of developing tourism, closely tied to ‘participatory turn’ – a relational arrangement of social goods and people in places (Löw 2016: 200), which in tourism manifests itself through, among others, practices of involving visitors not only in viewing but also in the active (co)creation of exhibition spaces – potential can be found in so-called military tourism and, if yes, why it is possible.

More than 20 years have passed since the final withdrawal of the Russian Federation forces from military bases located in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> This period is long enough to enable the observation of changes in attitudes towards post-military sites, changes in narratives concerning post-military remains in these areas and to examine practices and strategies of (re)creating military past(s), developed within the tourist industry. As time passes, one can notice how state and local authorities, private owners and inhabitants modify the ways in which they present the former military bases and their history to visitors.

Immediately after the withdrawal of the foreign armies’ former military bases often became dilapidated for various reasons or were abandoned (Czarnecka 2017; Boldāne-Zelenkova 2017; Demski – Czarnecka 2018). Later, in certain cases investors appeared (state and private), due to which some of the places became adapted to civil purposes and revitalized.

This article attempts to describe selected solutions used in Poland and Latvia illustrating directions in contemporary management of the military legacy, which is related with different forms of development of post-military sites. I am particularly interested in determining which factors most significantly affect the future of former Soviet military bases: local attitudes to a site, geographical location, condition of buildings’ preservation, or memory of the past. Currently it is not only the local actors

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1 The ultimate withdrawal of the Russian Federation troops from Poland occurred in 1993, from Latvia it was completed in 1994. Moreover, some strategically important military objects remained under the control of and inhabited by the Russian military until 1999 (see: Seljamaa – Czarnecka – Demski 2017: 9–10).

but also visitors and tourists who participate in the place-making process. There appears increasing interest in post-military sites – places with specific characteristics, whose functions have changed over time.

Post-military spaces become types of ‘exhibited areas’, within which specific practices emerge that encourage visitors to acquire their own experience, express personal narratives, stories, opinions and run discussions, or, in other words, to become involved in an interactive environment. The approach of memory studies is inspirational, but in our case the exhibitionary complex related to authenticity and the knowledge offered in the period of the participatory turn comes first. The notion of the politics of memory will appear more or less in case studies. I will address this issue at the end.

Such ‘exhibited areas’ are closely connected with the ‘exhibitionary complex’,<sup>2</sup> which should be understood as “ordering objects for public inspection and ordering the public that is inspected” (Bennett 2004: 119). That pertains to institutional articulations of power and knowledge relations in sites of development and the circulation of various types of knowledge.

This concept provided the foundation for my research as former bases or grand military objects became transformed into venues attractive for visitors in one way or another. The selection of a few buildings of similar size erected in the pre-Soviet era and currently used as exhibition arenas formed the research question. The comparison of these places enables insight into the mechanisms of transforming grand post-military buildings, which due to their origin are classified as cultural heritage sites and reveals different contexts of such transformations. I will illustrate differences arising from it by referring to two different notions – that of authenticity and the knowledge generated by ‘exhibitionary institutions’ established on past strongholds.

According to Wang (1999) it is about what is perceived as authentic by the visitors, which can be divided into object authenticity and experiential authenticity. The concept of knowledge is directly linked to an exhibitionary form, where, through representations selected specifically

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2 The phenomenon described as ‘exhibitionary complex’ emerged in the second half of the 19th century as a consequence of progressing modernization, urbanization and growing demand on displaying and exhibiting. “The institutions comprising it were involved in the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed (but to a restricted public) into progressively more open and public arenas, where, through the representations to which they were subjected, they formed vehicles for inscribing and broadcasting the messages of power (but of different type) throughout society” (Bennett 2004: 118).

for visitors, messages are created and, consequently, a particular type of knowledge becomes generated.

Tourism and its institutional goal have become a new active factor in the field of exhibiting practices. World tourism has been undergoing a new stage referred to as 'overtourism'. This is due to, among others, cheap flights, increasing incomes or the ability of social media to direct their users' attention to particular places. Consequently, new trends have started to emerge in order to attract tourists and spread the number of visitors to less popular locations. Switching the attention of visitors to other places resulted in, among others, the fact that tourists were becoming increasingly interested in Eastern Europe which, from the perspective of the West, used to be considered rather 'exotic' and, in due course, stimulated willingness to visit more atypical sites, like, for instance, former military bases.

This text is an attempt to elaborate on some processes through which places acquire new or lose old meanings and how particular understandings are generated. In order to do this, I will present detailed analyses of four examples of post-military spaces (two situated in Poland and two in Latvia) as follows: 1) The Warsaw Citadel, 2) the former military garrison in Borne Sulnowo, 3) The Daugagriva Fortress in Riga, 4) the former naval military base Karosta in Liepaja. The common denominator to all the above examples includes, among others: their origin as military bases, similar size, complicated history, the presence of material remains of military infrastructure, and the relatively good degree of preservation built before Soviet times.

I conducted field research in Poland and Latvia between 2015 and 2019. Fieldwork consisted in the observation of participants during major events in particular locations as well as in periods without the events. I collected data concerning both the space, its history, including the most recent, and the organization of events, plans and expectations of the organizers for the future, the type of visitors the content was directed towards, as well as the number of visitors. Collected materials in the form of interviews, notes and visual documentation were used to delineate tendencies and changes in the process of the transformation of military spaces into what is broadly understood as "exhibitions". In fact, I took into account the results of changes, and I am not closely following the path of those changes specifically to the present.

### **Exhibitions in the Era of Tourism**

Global tourism is becoming diversified, demonstrating specific stages of development. These changes affect processes occurring at the territo-

ries of former military bases. They contribute to the rebirth (not only in the sense of invention) of local traditions, the emergence of possibilities of telling local stories, which, in turn, can facilitate the reinforcement of local identity through practices and ‘performances’ manufactured for the purposes of tourism (Comaroff – Comaroff 2011). In case of post-military territories, the majority of tourists includes ‘change seekers’ rather than ‘pleasure seekers’ (Cohen – Cohen 2012).

Though its advertisements, new destinations and seasonal discoveries the tourist industry provides specific interpretative schemes for tourists to be able or guided to move around the world. Over the course of the last decades the ‘image production industry’ (Harvey 1989: 290) has emerged, with an increasing amount of places earlier untouched by changes becoming subjected to ‘tourismification’ (Salazar 2012: 866). In this context the notion of the ‘world of pseudo-events’ was introduced by Daniel Boorstin – denoting the phenomenon where the reproduction or simulation of an event becomes more important or ‘real’ than the event itself – constructed for the needs of manufactured spectacles (Boorstin 1964). It is within the ‘world of pseudo-events’ that values are reformulated, which contributes to the transformation of meanings and forms of tourism. Manners of behavior and presentation of places in the tourist industry count as a form of ‘recording’ reformulations which take place.

What is the promise held by military tourism and what is encountered by people visiting post-military sites? My hypothesis is that, in particular conditions, post-military territories and objects are subject to the same rules as other forms of representation and exhibition spaces. This pertains to territories and objects which have neither been abandoned nor serve military functions but have acquired a new form of utilization, which, to a broader or lesser extent, is linked with their original military purposes.

There are two essential aspects of exhibiting: 1) the topic developed in a specific discourse, 2) the selection process, owing to which constructing a detached fragment of presented reality is possible. The topic around which exhibitions are organized defines the focus and imposes manners as well as techniques of participation. In the case of post-military spaces, it does not always have to be linked to military history.

When analyzing different exhibiting strategies, among others in museums, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett drew attention to the fact that what is exhibited is only a fragment of the original reality, “detached, segmented and carried away” (1998: 2), and “for this reason, exhibitions displayed the objects or people... they are also exhibits of those who make them (ibidem). David Giddens also drew attention to this aspect, but he referred to the view of modernity as “experiences influenced by

processes which have been increasingly removed from the local... Distancing has been a fundamental experience of modernity” (quoted after Walsh 2002: 26).

Distancing is then connected with the institutionalization of services, in this case exhibitionary services. According to these scholars, the emergence of the museum was a part of the experience of modernity – the developments in science and technology, and urbanization, as well as the consequent changes in the experience of time and space. Thus the museum can be considered either as an ideological tool which reinforced the held conceptions of order, time and progress or as a tool of emancipation – the representation of other places and other times which opened people’s eyes to a world other than their own, and thus helped them maintain a sense of place, and make connections with those processes which had influenced their current position in the order of things.

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a remarkable expansion in the West of sites which purported to be representations of the past. This was linked to the ‘heritage boom’ (Walsh 2002: 94) – the trend towards the promotion of heritage ‘experiences’, experiences produced through an often inspiring combination of visual, auditory, and olfactory media as well as presenting one’s ‘own’ past as something valuable. In Central and Eastern Europe these changes emerged with delay and similar processes only began to develop after 1989. Nonetheless, one can claim that the same tendency has been occurring over the entirety of Europe.

### **Authenticity and Knowledge**

Before moving towards the analysis of selected case studies I will reflect on the notions of authenticity and knowledge, which constitute key categories for the present analysis. Specialist literature in this field usually distinguishes between two fundamental types of authenticity, namely object related authenticity and existential authenticity. As object authenticity refers the notion of authenticity to the object, existential authenticity is connected to the category of experience (Handler 1986; Wang 1999; Steiner – Reisinger 2006; Reisinger – Steiner 2006; Theodossopoulos 2013; Filitz – Saris 2013; Baraniecka-Olszewska 2018). Object authenticity differs from the second authenticity as the former involves objects and buildings in a given place which are genuine and originate from a presented era. In the latter case it is the experience of authenticity that becomes evoked in visitors (e.g. by a copy of an artifact) by means of processing past actions, behaviors, etc.

This distinction appears important, as in all examples described below we are dealing with object authenticity – this category might be consid-

ered a common denominator for all former military bases analyzed in this text. Both the former military bases as a whole and many of the buildings preserved at their premises in relatively good condition are perceived as authentic both by insiders and outsiders.

The second notion which appears significant in the context of this analysis is knowledge. Tony Bennett's exhibitionary complex focuses on the relationship between knowledge and power, or, to be more specific, the techniques of exhibiting which become entangled in the new forms of "spectacle" through generating a particular type of knowledge. Former military bases constitute territories within which "spectacles" are organized, often at the premises of grand post-military buildings. Each of the spectacles is connected to different goals, intentions, messages and audiences. A question arises as to what kind of knowledge is produced by these "spectacles". And to what purpose and to whom does it serve? It is also significant to determine the impact of the knowledge produced in this way on the experience of outsiders. The use of the categories of authenticity and knowledge influences the creation of the attractiveness of the post-military spaces.

The collapse of the 'Cold War order' introduced a variety of changes in Central and Eastern Europe. After 1989 new ideas and practices began to emerge in the domain of tourism. Some institutions of "knowledge" lost their significance. Old military institutions became useless. The public sphere underwent transformation and was organized in a new manner.

The military legacy of post-Soviet bases in Poland and Latvia seems to be relevant for analysis, as "different products for quite different markets can be created from the same raw material by varying the interpretation process" (Ashworth – Haan 1986). Nowadays we can speak of a "military market" or areas of military interest. These are formed in response to specific needs and are shaped to meet the requirements of a specific group of visitors and users interested in military themes generally as part of a longer tradition.

If tourism creates exhibited places (Coleman – Crang 2008), what can we say about the former military sites? Above all that these territories are more likely to be modified to cater to the visitors' needs. Referring to the concept of 'exhibitionary complex' I make a preliminary assumption that exhibiting denotes a public dramaturgy of power. In Tony Bennett's (2004: 122) understanding exhibiting stands, primarily, for what is left, paraphrasing his words, "brought together and from their towers, to lay it before a controlling vision". Secondly, who is involved in making spectacles (state, regional, NGO or private entities)? That suggests the emergence of new forms as new types of power begin to play an important role



in public space. The Cold War is over, bringing to an end certain values, norms and orders. New forms reflect the new divisions of power in public space; they adhere to the present dynamics. In practice this happens through updated narratives and experiences of visitors, which ‘transform’ military sites into broadly understood ‘exhibitionary arenas’. Below I discuss four case studies which constitute the foundation of this analysis.

## Selected Case Studies – Overview of Post Military Spaces

### *The Citadel in Warsaw*

Though the Citadel in Warsaw is not a former Soviet military base I decided to include it in the analysis as it qualifies as a post-military object located near the city center and is of a size comparable to the other examples discussed in the present article.

The Citadel is a grand building surrounded by additional forts situated on the left bank of the Vistula River, erected between 1832 and 1834 by the personal order of the Tsar of the Russian Empire. In the years 1918–1939 as well as after 1945 the Citadel was used by the Polish Army after World War II; Wehrmacht soldiers were quartered there during the war. The Citadel has never served any defensive functions – it was only built to enable the soldiers quartered in it to pacify the city.<sup>3</sup>

Even though a part of the Citadel has until this day been occupied by the Polish Army, the space inside and around the Citadel has been adapted to civil use. It currently houses museums including: The Museum of the 10th Pavilion (opened to visitors in 1963 on the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the January Uprising),<sup>4</sup> the Katyń Museum (opened in 2015),<sup>5</sup> the Museum of Independence (moved to the Citadel in 2018).<sup>6</sup> There are plans to open the Museum of Polish History and the Museum of the Polish Army in the Citadel in 2020 (today this part of the Citadel is a construction site). Consequently, the space of the Warsaw Citadel currently functions mainly as museum space, though its character is not homogenous.

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3 For more on the Warsaw Citadel see: <https://warsawtour.pl/cytadela-warszawska/> and <http://muzeum-niepodleglosci.pl/historia-cytadeli-warszawskiej-i-x-pawilonu/>, last accessed on July 11, 2019.

4 For more on the museum see: <http://muzeum-niepodleglosci.pl/xpawilon/>, last accessed on July 11, 2019.

5 For more on the museum see: <http://www.muzeumkatynskie.pl/>, last accessed on July 11, 2019.

6 For more on the museum see.: <http://muzeum-niepodleglosci.pl/>, last accessed on July 11, 2019.



The Katyń Museum is the first martyrological museum and research center in the world devoted to documenting and commemorating the Katyń massacre. As a place of memory and an educational unit it offers a ‘modern lesson in patriotism’. The Museum of independence operates on a similar basis. Both institutions ‘speak’ about events distant in time and space. As a result, the space of the Citadel is not related to the presented stories which became ‘inscribed’ into it pursuant to decisions of authorities, at a time completely different from that of the events that they ‘talk’ about. Therefore, the very space is not as important as the heirlooms and artifacts around which a consistent narrative is being built. The post-military space of the Citadel counts as some kind of ‘scenography’ abstracted from the ‘narratives’ told within its boundaries.

The Museum of the 10th Pavilion, however, presents the past and tells the stories which happened at the territory of the Citadel, so they are directly related to this place. The exhibitionary strategy of the Museum is to a large extent based on displaying original locations and interiors (e.g. death cells) from the period of the January Uprising (1863–1864). ‘Authentic’ rooms allow the visitors to feel the atmosphere of those events. Visits become interactive experiences, however, the scope for discussion or creating one’s own versions of the past is rather limited.

Original prison cells and historical objects, as well as the very space of the Citadel surrounded with a high wall on the one hand, and on the other hand, exhibitions related to the Katyń executions constitute reference points to allow visitors to experience the “patriotic” narrative (within the historicized landscape) more fully.

In each case the past constitutes the subject of exhibition. As memory places the traditional museum institutions located at the premises of the Warsaw Citadel represent a classic model of conveying knowledge and information – a specific interpretation of the past. They aim at education. Due to its location in the center of Warsaw the territory of the Citadel has become a part of cultural politics pursued by the state authorities, hence what is offered to tourists adheres to national politics. As exhibitionary strategies are created by state institutions, so the rhetoric of patriotism dominates. The primary functions of the Citadel have become, at least partially, changed. Its space is an ‘exhibitionary arena’ in the traditional understanding of this notion where the imposed ‘monologue’ makes it impossible for the processes related with the ‘participatory turn’ to emerge.

The Citadel is mainly visited by groups of school-age tourists and participants of anniversary celebrations. For the visitors the authenticity of material manifestation plays a very significant role, impacting how the space is experienced through the body as well as the interpretations of the

stories it conveys. When asked what they experience visiting the Citadel, apart from coolness of cells and darkness, people mention the pathos of the place and the solemnity related to the presented topic.

### Borne Sulinowo

The former garrison town (German and then Soviet) located in north-western Poland has already been described from several perspectives (see e.g. Demski – Czarnecka 2018; Demski 2017; Czarnecka 2017; Demski – Czarnecka 2015). In this article I only examine a single, previously unexamined aspect, namely how the post-military space is used in the context of the development of mass tourism.

Interest in former military bases in Poland gained popularity in the period of political transformation after 1989. After the final withdrawal of the Russian Federation's troops from Poland (1993), new civil residents sought ways to use the residue left by foreign soldiers. In addition to the elements of weapons, missiles buried in the ground and hundreds of leg-ends, the Russians left behind the infrastructure.

In the 1990s post-military territories were becoming more commonly used for military tourism purposes. Fans of historical military vehicles and other military objects began to gather cyclically and create unique 'military spectacles'. It is not immediately clear why people are coming to Borne Sulinowo to the Rally of Military Vehicles although visitors themselves, when trying to answer this question, usually point to military vehicles or, more broadly, military equipment. Military vehicles are the biggest attraction during the gathering, however, practically the entire territory of the former military training ground has been filled with all kinds of equipment and military technology from World War II, as well as that from later, and even copies. Nonetheless, it would be difficult not to notice that the participants of military gatherings in Borne Sulinowo are attracted to it not only by military vehicles but also the peculiar space of the former Soviet military base. Old buildings, the preserved arrangement of streets and the remains of military infrastructure 'speak' about a controversial and complicated past (military, foreign – German and Soviet, marked by two totalitarian regimes – fascism and communism). The spirit and signs of the site's military past are additionally emphasized by the local authorities, e.g. through copies of old photos displayed on the wall next to the former military training ground. Consequently, the space of Borne Sulinowo serves the role of an 'authentic exhibitionary space' where, during events such as military gatherings, military history and technologies are presented. Interestingly, additional military objects ap-

pear on the training ground and in the town at these times, which become temporarily exhibited on the territory of the of the former Soviet base both in a traditional (outdoors museum exhibitions – e.g. military museums put their vehicles out for display) and non-traditional way, through the active participation of visitors (it is possible to ride in/on these vehicles, visit their interiors, have conversations with experts, their owners and users). As a result, knowledge about the past (concerning vehicles, technologies, equipment, uniforms, military history) is conveyed without a single operating interpretation. Visitors are allowed to create their own versions of the past. Despite the fact that such events are aiming at not only entertainment but also education, the latter is offered in an open and direct manner. Encounters provide opportunities for asking questions and receiving answers. The presence of foreigners wearing uniforms and carrying weapons gives the possibility of learning different stories, perspectives and interpretations of the past. The Gathering of Military Vehicles in Borne Sulinowo becomes a ‘seasonal’ platform for exchanging knowledge as well as somatic experience. Ultimately, visiting outsiders together with organizers of events such as military gatherings jointly create the full experience.

Different exhibiting strategies contribute to the fact that what Borne Sulinowo offers to tourists significantly differs from that of the Warsaw Citadel. The post-military space of Borne Sulinowo does not serve the role of restoring memory of the past as is the case at the Citadel. It could rather be seen as ‘scenography’ for manifestations of contemporary imagined visions of the military past and technology, which may differ from the historical ‘truth’ and significantly ‘diverge’ from the solemnity of a place of memory.

The genuine barrack town, historical military objects and the very space of the town with the remains of the entry gate, surrounded by a forest plus the military training ground and post-military territories located further in the forest all constitute reference points enabling visitors to experience the military space directly and sensually, becoming part of the place “physically”. Most visitors look for a more complete immersion in this military landscape.

Borne Sulinowo also offers historical knowledge concerning this site’s past, however, this knowledge is mainly of a sensory character. Therefore, it touches upon the experience related to pseudo-military activities. The place is visited by numerous tourists searching for entertainment and historical military knowledge. All appreciate the authenticity of the material buildings and spatial arrangement. They experience both the spaces of old barracks and the specificity of the formerly closed forbidden military

zone surrounded by forests, but during the military gatherings they preserve the memories of sensory experience such as: noise, dirt, sweat, thirst, heat, odor and the movement of military vehicles.

## Latvia

The examination of former Soviet bases has not yet acquired much interest among local researchers. Following existing studies one can notice that Latvia has many specific military objects, and therefore their maintenance is financially difficult (Boldāne-Zelenkova 2017). Another barrier is that Latvia features negative natural population growth and the population has also declined because of emigration to the western member states of the European Union, hence, there are not enough people to fill the housing stock left by the vast masses of the Soviet military personnel and their dependents. And a final barrier is the negative attitude of Latvian society toward its recent past and the post-Soviet legacy.

Ilze Boldāne-Zelenkova suggests that, concerning the territory of Latvia, the location of military objects has, to a great extent, determined their future in the independent Latvian state, according to at least three scenarios: 1) they have been used for their intended purposes as garrisons of the Latvian military forces or residential areas, 2) they have become abandoned ghost towns, or 3) the buildings and territories have been adjusted to various needs, most often for the needs of cultural institutions or forest industry enterprises (Boldāne-Zelenkova 2017).

During my research stays in Latvia, I visited many former Soviet military bases (Karosta Liepāja, Ventspils, Skrunda, Riga, Līgatne, Marciena, Daugavpils, Aluksne, Zeltīni, Gulbene). In terms of the exhibiting practices, the Daugavgrīva fortress and Karosta in Liepāja are, in my opinion, the most thought-out and accessible to outsiders.

### Daugavgrīva Fortress

The Daugavgrīva (*Усть-Двинск*) Fortress is located in the northern peripheries of Riga, on the left bank of the Dvina river, close to its estuary to the Bay of Riga. It is a place of lengthy history which housed a submarine port during the years 1944–1993. The Soviet naval ship repair workshops began operation at Bolderāja on December 3, 1944 (Upmalis et al. 2012: 171). The fortress was constructed in stages during the era of the Russian Empire. The first stage lasted from the 17th century until the period 1893–1917. In 1915, a total of 9,500–10,000 soldiers were stationed in the fortress, excluding the river flotilla. After the end of the Latvian

War of Independence (1918–1920) the fortress was passed over to the Latvian army. When the occupation of Latvia started in 1940, the fortress was again taken over by the USSR Baltic Navy units. The USSR military units and objects were located in the fortress and included an increasing number of submarines, mine trawlers and ship repair workshops. After the withdrawal of the Russian Federation Army from the fortress on August 31, 1993, it was taken over by the Latvian Defense Forces. On November 6, 1995, the fortress was granted the status of ‘an architectural monument of national importance’,<sup>7</sup> which has been retained until today. In 1999 the Latvian Ministry of Defense made a resolution on passing it over to a private NGO.

Currently the NGO members organize visits to the fortress predominantly to cater the needs of organized groups and individual tourists (e.g. one can visit and listen to the stories told by tour guides concerning the preserved parts of fortifications, interiors of old barracks, old military equipment garages, ammunition and military equipment warehouses). At present, there are no specific exhibitions available at the premises of the fortress; visitors can only see material remains of the past. The territory of the fortress is surrounded by water and there are military objects in the direct neighborhood. Since the beginning of 2014 the *Bolderaja Group* has been actively involved in “the ideological revival and practical management of the fortress”.<sup>8</sup> The “revival” manifests itself through, among others, an increasing number of events related both to renovating buildings and organizing celebrations (e.g. 100th anniversary of the Latvian State in 2018) or historic reenactments. Entry to the territory of the fortress is monitored. During the events organized at its premises, talks, discussions and parties take place without any interpretation of the past imposed by authorities.

The organization administering the fortress was granted permission to organize an open-air art and culture festival called the ‘Kometa festival’.<sup>9</sup> The event has been taking place regularly (once a year) since 2016, slowly gaining recognition beyond the local level. The space comes alive and becomes filled with hundreds of people thus becoming an ‘arena’. Apart from

7 One of the websites features the following comment: “The fortress must be preserved, first, as state property and, secondly, as a cultural heritage, still its long-term development has not been a priority of any institution”; <https://festivalskometa.lv/en/daugavgrivas-cietoksnis/>, last accessed on July 6, 2019.

8 See: <http://tormacauli.blogspot.com/2009/08/vladimir-jakushonok-bolderaja-group-in.html>; and <https://www.facebook.com/bolderajas.grupa>, last accessed on July 6, 2019.

9 For more on the festival see.: <https://festivalskometa.lv/en/>, last accessed on July 6, 2019.

concerts the festival offers theatre performances, dance shows, a techno village, a circus, a cinema, and meetings and lectures with famous people (2017 festival edition). A specific 'ideological revival' is conveyed in some slogans accompanying the festival: "We are radical. We are shameless. We are alive. Freedom is legal. Thinking is courage. Beauty is ever present". The aim of the festival is to revive the Daugavgrīva fortress as a place of culture and thinking and to stimulate public discussions about its future.

It is not difficult to see that this post-military space currently hosts activities combining political history (e.g. 100th anniversary of Latvian independence), military history (historical reenactments, people wearing uniforms from the era of the Russian Empire) and contemporary culture. Despite the historical surroundings and military past of this place events organized at its territory revolve predominantly around current issues and visions of the future. As a consequence, the fortress appears to be a peculiar 'exhibitionary arena' often featuring 'spectacles' usually not pertaining to the history of the place and its former purpose. The fortress constitutes a kind of scenography, whose value became abstracted from the function and history of the place as a former military object. This value is currently related to its 'old age' and physical characteristics (e.g. size, location).

One notices a lack of references to the Cold War period, though in some interiors traces left by soldiers quartered there have been preserved (e.g. inscriptions of soldiers serving in the Soviet army). This part of history has so far remained silent. Visitors appreciate the authenticity of the material buildings and spatial arrangement, however, the Kometa festival evokes an atmosphere of freedom, thoughtful exchange and creativity, all of which help to transform the military site into at least a temporary landscape of freedom. Visitors witness a different kind of knowledge transfer. They are aware of the location, but it is not characterized by becoming closer to the past symbolized by the walls. It seems that in this case there are no reference points analogical to those present in the previous examples. The main point is to experience detachment from everyday life, through which immersion in the constructed world is possible. If we assume that the Kometa festival can be understood also as a critique of reality, then the space of the old stronghold, which is unusual for contemporary people, may enhance the experience of contrast and contestation.

### Karosta – Liepāja

Karosta is a large area adjacent to the port of Liepāja, separated from this city by a canal, fence and gate. Between 1945 and 1994, it was an area closed

to civilians, and there was a military port, founded by the Russian tsar in 1880s. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, it constituted an important military and commercial port in the Baltic Sea (which never froze), a kind of ‘window’ to Western Europe. Today, this area, encompassing more than a dozen hectares, contains several interesting buildings – an Orthodox church, former barracks, coastal bunkers – all of them built at the end of the 19th century. Additionally, one should mention the old prison buildings for seafarers erected in tsarist times and the area of the military cemetery. Other objects erected during the Tsarist period have deteriorated, similarly to many buildings erected during the Soviet era.

One of the main tourist attractions of the military port Karosta is a former prison, which has been functioning as a museum.<sup>10</sup> The former prison is a place where one can find not only objects but also ‘stories’ from the past (the Soviet period) and somatically experience the conditions reconstructed to imitate those of the past prisoners. It appears that the ‘experience of the prisoner’ is a unique offer in Latvia. Judging by the number of visitors the place receives a great reception from the audience. The museum constitutes an authentic space which was rather smoothly transformed into an arena exhibiting the distant past, both that related to the era of the Russian Empire and of the Cold War period. It does not qualify as a place of memory, rather it functions as an arena of ‘dark’ exhibition.

The transformation of the former prison into a museum exemplifies how the exhibition space is gradually becoming close to the idea of a theme park. The stories told by tour guides combine real accounts of prisoners at the same time attempting to meet the requirements of the visitors. Gradually, the specific experience of tourists is considered increasingly significant, which can also be reinforced by creating fiction or even shifting towards the world of ‘pseudo-events’.

The remaining parts of the former base have been preserved in their old form, and have not yet been transformed into exhibitionary arenas. When strolling around the territory of the former military base one can sense a peculiar atmosphere. The original military infrastructure bears the marks of both the Russian Empire era and the period of the Soviet Union. Activities for tourists at the premises of the former military base are constantly being developed, with escape rooms and spy games emerging over the course of the last few years, however, it is the Karosta Festival of Art that deserves particular attention.<sup>11</sup> Its emergence most likely sug-

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10 For more on the museum see: <http://karostascietums.lv/en/>, last accessed on July 6, 2019.

11 For more on the festival see: <http://karostascietums.lv/en/karostas-festivals-2019/>, last accessed on July 6, 2019.



gests the direction of the development of this grand area, bearing in mind the needs represented by contemporary culture and using, for example, former military bunkers as a type of arena displaying modern or alternative themes in art and culture. The remains of military bunkers left along the coast as well as the distinctive separation of this area from the town of Liepaja reinforce the military landscape and general atmosphere of the place.

The main problem in Latvia is the attitude to the Soviet past. A satisfactory approach to the past has not yet been found (Boldāne-Zelenkova 2017). Simultaneously, as the military port of Karosta was built during the Tsarist period (similarly to Daugagriva and the fortress in Daugavpils) it is classified as cultural heritage.

Everybody appreciates the authenticity of historical buildings and the specific spatial arrangement of the former closed military zone. They experience both the space of the old historical buildings, the bunkers along the seashore, the former barracks and the area formerly detached from the town on the other side of the channel. In the old prison they experience the coolness of the cells, and the claustrophobia and anxiety present in the dark atmosphere of the place.

Genuine prison buildings, horrifying cells and stories from the past, passing through the channel-entry gate to the premises of the old barracks, bunkers on the beach and the military Orthodox church constitute reference points enabling visitors to experience this unusual and extraordinary military space directly and sensually.

### **Historicized Places and the Exhibitionary Complex**

The common denominator of the four cases is the exhibitionary complex, or in other words, the manner in which the past can be presented in original military spaces and what the presented examples of exhibitionary arenas demonstrate as knowledge as well as whose knowledge this is. Each of the four examples described above replicates the same pattern, namely original military space and different kinds of knowledge passed over. These are not only museums or memory places, but also huge exhibitionary arenas visited by increasing numbers of guests and tourists.

The concept of “the invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm – Ranger 1983) opened a new ‘window’ for understanding how claims to historical continuity are strategically loaded with ideological and political energy. At the same time, there is a tendency to perform the local history anew, as a way of reinforcing the local community, but over time the local message begins to transform in accordance with the tourist imagination. In this

way, there is a new logic of exhibiting, which combines local responses to military imagery on the one hand, and the expectations of visitors to post-military spaces, on the other.

If we juxtapose the four case studies described above certain similarities and differences can be observed. Differences are due to the property title related to the premises, the institutions in charge of organizing the display, the adopted aims and subjects of exhibition and what follows: the types of presented 'spectacles', messages, and power of display.

When it comes to 'spectacles' offered in the four places described above, one can perceive specific characteristics thereof. The Citadel presents the model of educational 'lessons of patriotism'. The Gathering of Military Vehicles in Borne Sulinowo provides educational lessons in history and military technology connected with the possibility of active participation for the visitors. The festival in the Daugagriva fortress demonstrates an open-minded and civil society educational character with particular emphasis on issues of contemporary interest (though maintaining respectful acknowledgement of the place's past). Karosta offers 'history spectacles' (some buildings were preserved with all details) dedicated to the modern-day tourist, meaning its most visible inclination towards 'pseudo-events', as compared with the other places.

As we posit the point of who are active agents, the type of power of display presented by the described places appears significant. The Warsaw Citadel is operated by state institutions, hence, the entire exhibitionary message of the museum reflects the public 'instructions' of authorities. The gatherings in Borne Sulinowo, in turn, adopt the rhetoric of playfulness and 'fun' education accompanied by active participation and somatic experience. The Daugagriva festival, apart from fun and education including elements of art, music, and debates on contemporary themes, emphasizes the value of communication and dialogue. One should not only see things but also experience them, however, thematically the festival focuses on the present and the future. Karosta provides the opportunity to experience the past 'again' but, at the same time, constructing a world of 'pseudo-events', reaching out to tourists. The organization of the art festival suggests that former military territories and their special atmosphere resonates with what can be referred to as art or alternative culture.

Generally, the authenticity of buildings, objects and artifacts may also evoke a particular experience in visitors, namely that of transferring people into a different reality, which is the case to a lesser or greater extent in each of the examples described above. In this sense, object authenticity may sometimes be combined with existential authenticity. They both enable the generation of adequate messages directed to visitors. What

knowledge do they produce on these stages? Historical (in the case of Citadel), 'sensory' combined with historical, technical and military (Borne Sulinowo), knowledge originating from the contemporary perspective on the world, past and future (Daugagriva) as well as historical, military to some extent, and sensory (Karosta). In all of them an element can be recognized which helps to convey and sustain the identity of community (patriotic, military fans, supporters of freedom or connoisseurs of dark history fragments). They are also constructed using the reference points listed above.

Adopting the concept of 'exhibitionary complex' as it presently functions, we can observe a specific kind of order in each of the examined places. Museum exhibitions at the Citadel reassure the visitors in believing that order ought to endure and does not depend on the visitors. The example of Borne Sulinowo, on the other hand, suggests that order is fluid and depends on people's active participation. The festival in Daugagriva seems to demonstrate that order is open to change and influenced by new currents of modernity, as well as alternative ones, though in accordance with certain norms and rules. Karosta reveals shifts in the traditional order, which endures in some stories, however, at the same time undergoes changes reflecting the new expectations of modern-day tourists, replacing references to the past with values generated by imagination.

### **Between the Exhibitionary and the Politics of Memory**

The two categories – authenticity and knowledge – which emerged in the context of exhibitionary complex enabled us to observe the results of changes in places related to the military past. A further question emerges as to why so many former military bases have been forgotten and vanished, whilst some of them continue to function despite the loss of their military role? What are the deciding factors regarding the fact that in some places related to military history, despite the passage of time, military themes are still dominant and the places gain state supervision (e.g. the museum in Warsaw Citadel), while in other places military 'tradition' only establishes a framework and background, which are later filled with content completely detached from the past? The four examples described above demonstrate how old military bases and objects become transformed into distinct objects.

As we have seen, the military space is transformed differently in each case, and thus presents a different kind of knowledge. Each of the presented 'proposals' is a form of an 'exhibitionary arena': some 'arenas' exhibit achievements of military thought and technology (Borne Sulinowo), oth-

ers display patriotism and sacrifice (Citadel), contemporary independent culture (Daugagriva) or the 'dark' sides of the Soviet past (Karosta).

The evolving 'exhibitionary complex' reflects the changes in power embedded in it. Alongside the development of the 'participatory turn' we are observing the idea of going beyond the visual to performance, and forms of movement and the relationship to spatiality vary in the appropriation of place (Coleman – Crang 2008: 11). Contemporary ideas of participation go beyond movement in its literal sense towards the allowance of comments, discussions and the co-creation of collective versions/visions of the past. Nowadays the exhibitionary complex is moving towards progress, namely the idea that developing forms of participation in creating exhibitions translate into the concept that power lies within the provision of access to discussion for broad arrays of participants. What we are observing is the display of the ability to command (Bennett 2014: 121) in a new way. If old museums are able to function as organs of public instructions (ibidem: 124), then in the case of the presented examples the discourse has moved beyond direct reference to reality – representations and the rhetoric of progress take over.

Remembering is contingent. As we have seen in each case the place was important but not always treated as a memory place. The Citadel is a memory place with a strict interpretation and instructions for collective identity. Borne Sulinowo can be taken as a rather vernacular or popular memory place, and thus not offering a clear message or clear memorial. As Nicole Maurantonio put it rightly, remembering can be not only past-oriented but also points toward certain visions of the future (2014). The Kometa festival is more future-oriented exposing diverse ideas and hopes about the future. Karosta seems to be still a place *in statu nascendi* however being inclined towards both the future and the past.

Summing up, we can see that the final exhibition/display is determined by many factors, not only ownership, ideology, and politics of memory, but also from the exhibitionary view by focusing on specific details, aimed at shaping collective identity or staging the tourist experience. In this sense studying the exhibitionary complex moves beyond memory as placed within a culture. In the broad understanding, there is not just one path leading to classic musealization – former military spaces can function as living museums, broader cultural spaces, technological parks, entertainment centers or spaces for open artistic and scientific debate.

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Figure 1 Borne Sulinowo, gathering of military vehicles  
(source: author 2017)





Figure 2 Warsaw Citadel, Museum of Independence  
(source: author 2017)



Figure 3 Daugavgrīva, the territory of the fortress  
(source: author 2017)



Figure 4 Karosta, museum in a former prison  
(source: author 2017)