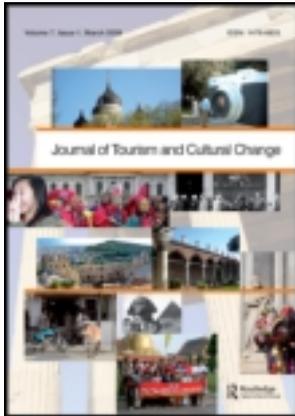


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### The past as staged-real environment: communism revisited in The Crazy Guides Communism Tours, Krakow, Poland

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## The past as staged-real environment: communism revisited in The Crazy Guides Communism Tours, Krakow, Poland

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Through an analysis of a tourism design in Krakow Poland, *The Crazy Guides Communism Tours*, I wish to present one possible way of promoting a district through dealing with an unwanted past, an undesirable heritage. In this instance, it is Nowa Huta, a part of city from the unwanted past, that is revalorized partly through the construction of staged environments in real places. Such designs realize the communication potential of the situation and can change socially constructed knowledge into social (inter-) action. *The Crazy Guides Communism Tours* require a high level of bodily and emotional investment both from the tourists and from the guides themselves. The paper investigates the designs on a representational and an experiential level and uses field analysis to try and answer the questions if, for whom and why these tourism designs change anything.

**Keywords:** staging communist heritage; Nowa Huta. post-1989 identity; experiential environments; local pride; nostalgia

### Introduction

Since the 1990s, Western post-modern tourists have been turning their attention to the post-communist Central and Eastern European countries as potential holiday destinations. At the same time, alternative or special interest ‘themed’ tourism has become increasingly popular. Sports tourism, green tourism, sex tourism, heritage tourism, and dark tourism are just some of the special interest tourist forms that have developed over recent years (Jansson, 2002; Light, 2000a, 2000b).

The special themed tourism that I explore in this paper is the cultural heritage tourism directed towards the communist past in post-communist countries. The development of tourism in central Europe has been a dramatic growth in communist heritage tourism (Stenning, 2002). A few examples of sites in former Eastern Block countries will suffice to give an impression of the kinds of sites and sights in question. One can go on nostalgia tours in Berlin – either on bicycle or on foot – to certain important in situ memorials such as the headquarters of the Stasi in Normannenstrasse and the prison of the former East German Ministry of State Security, Hohenschönhausen. The prison was shut down in 1990 and taken over by former prisoners who now perform live, guided tours, based on eyewitness

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accounts of the ordeals suffered by the inmates. As a result of this use of ‘live’ witnesses as guides, Hohenschönhausen is becoming an increasing popular site. In 2007, there were 208,000 visitors, a number that increased to 250,000 visitors in 2008. An artistic designed memorial such as The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (2005) in the centre of Berlin is an example of an open and therefore controversial design of a holocaust memorial.

Sites in other former Eastern Bloc countries include Memento Park (<http://www.szoborpark.hu>), in Budapest, Hungary. Memento Park, opened in 1993, is a half-acre open-air museum sited on the edge of town, which is filled with Soviet-era public statues and symbols of the former regime. Western commentators have observed that it is almost ‘a theme park’. In central Bucharest, Romania, The House of the People, the material evidence of the project of Romania’s president Nicolae Ceausescu’s ambition to re-create central Bucharest as a modern socialist capital, has become a major tourist attraction. This together with Ceausescu’s birthplace in Scornicesti, 150 km from Bucharest; the graves of Nicolae and his wife Elena Ceausescu in a Bucharest suburb and official villas used by the late dictator, are now included in tourist packages. The Grutas Statue Park in Lithuania, an out-door exposition of Soviet relics – mainly monumental sculptures of key communist figures assembled from all over Lithuania and distributed on a 20 ha area in the woods 120 km from Vilnius – is to be considered as a traumatic themed space that allow audiences to visit the past in a designed and controlled manner (Lukas, 2007, 2008).

The examples show that cultural heritage tourism can either go to constructed spaces of the past (museums, out-door exhibitions) or to *in situ* places at which significant historical events took place. In the latter case, going to Auschwitz–Birkenau, Ground Zero, Screbrenica much of the tourist experience is just to be there and *feel* the historic aura of the place (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). I am, in particular, interested in cultural heritage tourism at *in situ* places with difficult – even traumatic – pasts. Questions such as how is the past managed, designed and communicated in short encoded/framed? What material, aesthetic and discursive devices are at play? Who is doing the encoding? What kinds of knowledge and feelings are produced through different kinds of communication strategies present? These are some of the key questions that I tried to answer.

My case in this paper is a tourism concept called *The Crazy Guides Communism Tours* in Krakow, Poland. It is run by a group of young Poles who are managing the cultural memory of their parents. I intend to examine what forms the management of the past take, aesthetically, materially and discursively, in order to see what post-1989 identity possibilities the concept offers both to producers and consumers. A remarkable feature of this tourism concept is that the sites presented are part of a lived space and that the theming or staging takes place within this context of the everyday lived space. It gives this tourism concept a very special aura of everyday realness and of intimate closeness of the communist experience. Even though the guides themselves stress their nuanced attitude towards the communist past ‘We are not taking a position, or giving our own opinions’ (Eryk, 2009), the implicit agenda is to promote the district ‘I am totally in to it, I read about it, I connect with people’ (Eryk, 2009).

I have conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with the manager of Crazy Guides as well as of one of the leading guides. My fieldwork likewise consisted in participation observation on five-guided Communism Basic Tours and on one Communism de Luxe tour.<sup>1</sup>

My analysis covers the explicit communication of the Crazy Guides (on the web or in an interview) as well as the sites themselves, the guides’ performances at the sites and I point to some of the decoding strategies that the tourists perform at the sites.

Methodologically I use a multimodal semiotic theory of communication, textual and discourse analytical tools (Hall, 1999; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), as well as a materialist-aesthetic approach – around concepts such as atmosphere, stagings of the past in real surroundings and nostalgia – in order to show how the communication works and what feelings it triggers in tourists.

### Difficult cultural heritage sites and their stagings

Managing and experiencing places with difficult pasts form the conceptual framework of this article. While tourism to places of difficult pasts appears to be quite a well-known topic within tourism studies, the perspective of different ways of managing, designing and staging the past seem, however, quite absent. These two perspectives that I will sketch out in this paragraph conflate in the case of *Crazy Guides Communism Tours*. CGCT not only represent the past through documenting narratives; the concept also stages the past in interactive forms that permit tourists to engage with these difficult pasts in new ways.

Difficult heritage tourism can take the form of thanatourism that present an interest in representations, symbolizations and material evidences of mass death sites (Seaton, 1996). This form of tourism has sometimes been labelled as black spot tourism (Rojek, 1993, 1997) or dark tourism (Lennon & Foley, 1996; Sharpley & Stone, 2009). The significant feature of thanatourism is that it evokes ‘feelings for the particular people who have died (personal, nationalistic or humanitarian)’ (Seaton, 1996, p. 243). Whether the thanatouristic activity plays itself out as pilgrimage to spots of sudden death (the subway in Paris where Lady Di perished in a car accident, the spot outside the block of flats where John Lennon was shot, Marilyn Monroe’s grave) or to scenes of mass killings (the Auschwitz–Birkenau concentration camp, the trenches in Verdun and surroundings, the football ground at Screbrenica) it seems that the visit to the death site represents a form of remembering that establishes one’s relationship towards the past (Antze & Lambek, 1996). In other words, thanatouristic activities appear to be a way of *relating* to the past (Knudsen, 2009).

Another critical view of the management of thanatouristic sites points to the exploitive and consumerist nature of such cultural heritage tourism (Cole, 1999/2000; Rojek, 1993, 1997; Urry, 1990/1999). In these scholars’ critical perspective, the past is just consumed as any other tourist item because it is subjected to the idealizing tourist gaze. The idealizing and partially nostalgic tourist gaze is sometimes accused of promoting a naïve and innocent attitude towards difficult pasts, such as 9/11 in using kitsch as key aesthetic (Sturken, 2007). In this view, you overlook or pass by the challenges of the past, a constant risk in this kind of tourism.

A minor form of thanatouristic activity evolves around undesirable cultural heritage. With the definition Macdonald gives of an undesirable heritage as ‘a heritage that the majority of the population would prefer not to have’ (Macdonald, 2006a, p. 9), phenomena such as slavery, apartheid, Nazism, fascism, extreme poverty become central. The Polish experience – Nazi aggression and Holocaust immediately followed by communist invasion certainly has the features of being such a difficult and undesirable past.

Macdonald (2006a, 2006b) highlights some of the inherent problems with difficult heritage sites in her work on the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg. As any kind of monument tends to produce a sacralizing gaze (Lowenthal, 1985; MacCannell, 1973/1999<sup>2</sup>), Macdonald’s article thus asks how a heritage-sacralizing museum-gaze might be avoided, and goes on to outline strategies for dealing with the risk of unwanted identification. She states that the material buildings of an undesirable past site must be staged

and managed deliberately in order not to appeal to the museum-gaze. Calculated neglect, trivialization and documenting instead of appealing to an immediate identification are some of the strategies that can be used to manage the material traces of the past. Second, when it comes to more discursive forms such as tour guides, all kinds of linguistic distancing effects must be put into use in order to avoid unwanted sacralization.

The Crazy Guides are highly aware of the fact that they manage a controversial past that Poles nowadays have different attitudes towards. Crazy Guides has to be conceived as an agency that manages an undesirable past in new ways. The young Poles (21–25 years old) who make a living out of the past present a partly kitschy consumerist perspective (small Trabants, statues of Lenin and Crazy Guides tee-shirts can be bought) but these features are far from the whole story. The exceptional character of *the Crazy Guides Communism Tours* is on the one hand the stagedness of the different sites in an everyday lived environment, on the other hand the personal involvement and performances of the guides. These features signify that the tours transcend traditional discursive framings and produce other forms of knowledge and meaning: ‘Material qualities can also acquire meaning, not on the basis of “where they come from”, but on the basis of our physical, bodily experience of them’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 74). An extended use of bodily experiences supported by an elaborated discursive framing of what the experience of communism was for the workers and inhabitants of and in Nowa Huta back then and now as well as for the Polish people in general is what makes the CGCT special.

### **Nowa Huta – a new tourist site**

*The Crazy Guides Communism Tours* has to be seen on the background of how the communist ideal city is perceived since the decline of communism. During the 1980s and the 1990s, the district was invisible in guidebooks. Poverty, unemployment and the links to the then recent communist past gave it a bad reputation. In her research, Stenning demonstrates in terms of both how Nowa Huta paradoxically has been a victim of derision from outside and how a clear local patriotism nonetheless has engendered from the town’s various representations throughout its short history – ‘a socialist city, a town of labour, a town of peasants and immigrants, a bastion of the Party, a city without God, a town of struggle, later a bastion of Solidarity’ (Stenning, 2002, p. 4). Looking through recent debates on Nowa Huta as a recent tourist phenomenon, I have found three significant ways of dealing with the communist past in connection to Nowa Huta<sup>3</sup> in the papers *Dziennik* (2006), *Lodo amacz* (2007), *Rzeczpospolita* (2006), *Gazeta Wyborcza* (2008):

- (1) *Those who mean that Nowa Huta and the bad communist past are inextricably linked.* An example is here counsellor Włodzimierz Pietrusz from Poland’s ruling conservative, Law and Justice, party (PiS), commented when discussing how to celebrate Nowa Huta’s 60th anniversary in 2008: ‘It is better to leave unsaid socialism and other “dark” stories’ (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2008).
- (2) *Those who understand themselves as just locals regardless of the history of the town or those who have come to terms with the past.* These locals call themselves ‘Nowa Hutanians’ and just live their lives independently of the past. Being a local could also mean coming to terms with the communist past as a memory you have to understand and live with (an example is the work of Michał Rożek, author of many books about Kraków).
- (3) *Those who are actively working to change the image of Nowa Huta.* An activist might be a local entrepreneur trying to make initiatives grow in the district, for

example, local radio, fashion shows. Another possible initiative is combining the will to change the understanding of the past with an active rebranding strategy. The Krakow City Council has attempted deliberately to change the image of the district by creating new tourist trails leading through Nowa Huta and also by letting the route of Krakow's marathon go through the area.

Crazy Guides is a small private agency, which works deliberately on changing the image of Nowa Huta. Although the guides perform different levels of engagement, some of them support explicitly local pride and patriotism 'I am totally into it. Developing the concept and promoting the district. I read about it, I connect with people' (Eryk, 2009). As a tourism enterprise, Crazy Guides Communism Tours to Nowa Huta and the Steelworks on the outskirts of Krakow present itself as an alternative to the more mainstream tourism to Krakow. Basically Krakow promotes itself on its cultural heritage whether we talk of its status as a World Heritage Site since 1978 mainly because of its large medieval centre, the many reminders of World War II, both in the town itself and outside the town, the most notable being the Nazi extermination camp, Auschwitz–Birkenau in Oswiecim which is one of the most significant thanatouristic (Seaton, 1996) sites in Europe; but also because of the city's status as a catholic pilgrimage site due to the late John Paul II being a former bishop of Krakow; and the status as a fairytale industrial heritage site due to the Wieliczka Salt Mine.

Besides being alternative and focusing on the potentials in a local town and community supporting local initiatives, promoting Nowa Huta as a tourist site of a difficult past has two major advantages. It *documents* the past through the site as legacy and relic of communism in Poland and it focuses on the *everydayness* of Poles living in Nowa Huta in contrast to the westernized lifestyle in Krakow with fancy bars, restaurants and galleries. The Communism Tours to Nowa Huta tries to revalue the potentials of the town for several reasons. In order to make a living out of it, in order to build up a post-89 identity in actual Poland by showing the potentials of the difficult communist past and its relics, in order to show to foreigners a small extract of Polish everyday culture nowadays and in the past.

Nowa Huta – New Steelworks – was Stalin's gift to Kraków and is now home to 250,000 people. The site originally included a huge steel and iron metallurgical complex and a housing estate for 100,000 people. Construction of the new city began in 1949 and 5 years later the first furnace was lit. Nowa Huta had, and still has, green areas, schools, cinemas, theatres, shops. The Central Square from which long straight avenues radiate (not unlike some aspects of the plan for nineteenth century Paris) has for a long time been read in an ideological frame, which understands the city plan as a panoptical weapon in the hands of the totalitarian dictator. Crazy Guides clearly presents the city architecture as something the inhabitants live in and not as something they are subjected to. The whole set-up in front of the town map with the guide holding a loudspeaker is a good example of the mixture of entertainment and information that Crazy Guides perform. A mixture that provokes criticism<sup>4</sup> but it is a mixture that in my perspective does not exempt former regimes but it just accentuates the material everyday lived experience of communism: the endless queuing, the lack of basic commodities, no freedom of beliefs.

The Polish version of Communism was in fact a resistance towards communism characterized by a strong catholic influence and a pronounced and prolonged protest by the workers, which ended with the formation of the Solidarity movement. The Church of Our Lady in Bienczyce, Nowa Huta was erected in the late 1960s, as a result of a massive protest against the no-religion dogma of Communism. Pressure from the local population and the intervention of the bishop, Karol Wojtola, resulted in the population being allowed to erect a church themselves. The Solidarity movement gave birth to the

first free trade union in the communist block. This movement's story began in the shipyards of Gdansk in 1980 and by the end of the decade, members of the Solidarity movement were sitting down for Round Table Talks with their erstwhile enemies, the representatives of the Polish Communist Party. The talks led to Poland's first multi-party election in June 1989, which the Solidarity movement won. They then undertook the task of steering Poland towards a democratic and capitalist future.

The aim of Crazy Guides is to confront a controversial part of Polish history and to show how deep an impact communism had in Poland, but it is obvious that the version of communism Poles lived through from an actual perspective is marked by the strong and successful insurrections demonstrated through the slow but steady erection of the Church of Our Lady as an activism against the ban of churches and through the uprising of the Solidarity movement as an open political criticism. The point is here that the history of communism in Poland is marked by rebellions against it; a feature that facilitates the building of post-1989 identities.

### **Crazy Guides<sup>5</sup> – on the web**

The crew of Crazy Guides consists of around 11 members: a management team, 7 guides and 10 Trabants. As shown, the new tourism design has gained a position on the internet and it is widely commented on in foreign newspapers, on radio and television stations abroad, such as the BBC, Lonely Planet, Reuters, CNN; Traveller, The New York Times, Der Spiegel, La Republica. The founding father Mike is a little unsure about the figures but believes that around 5000 tourists a year use *the Crazy Guides Communism Tours*. As already stated, the crew set out to become an alternative to the official tourism to Krakow, and must now be recognized as part of the standard programme for a trip to Krakow although the concept still maintains to be niche market.

Looking at how Crazy Guides present themselves on the net is important in order to see how the agency captures the attention of audiences. The website contains a lot of subpages with information on the selection of different tours available, presentations about the team, the story of the birth of the agency, as well as testimonials of tourists from all over the world, newspaper clippings, radio and television reports and all sorts of articles that mention Crazy Guides. In the video and image gallery, we find interesting self-presentations of *The Crazy Guides Communism Tours*.

The founding father of Crazy Guides is Crazy Mike, who in 2004 worked as a receptionist and as a periodic guide in old town Krakow. A couple in their twenties came and ordered a two hours tour that was something else than the official sites (Wavel Castle, Jewish Cemetary, The window of the former bishop of Krakow, the late John Paul II) and Mike took them – in his old Fiat 125 – out to places he himself liked, took them home to his apartment, cooked for them and the next day continued to Nowa Huta (<http://www.crazyguides.com/history/>). They gave him money to start out a business on the concept because 'It was great, fantastic, so real' (Ostrowski, 2009). Many of the key ingredients of Crazy Guides Tours are present already in the foundational myth of the concept: sites out of the ordinary tourists tracks, intimacy/friendship between guides and customers, the focus on everydayness.

In general, a distinctive feature is the prominent display of well-known Marxist-Leninist icons such as the red star in a circle, the hammer and sickle, the Trabant and the tank, people dressed up in blue-collar work wear, the industrial city skyline. An outspoken use of concrete materiality on the webpage: objects such as coins, tickets/coupons point to the everyday culture of former times. To the tourists for whom the lived past is not communist,

the explicit use of recognizable icons echoes the different representations of communism through mass-cultural forms (Landsberg, 2004). The explicit use of these icons seems to be a way of playing along with the stereotypical tourist imaginary as Eryk (2009) puts it: 'It is just the way people's minds work, vodka, gurki, communism ...'. It is likewise a way of creating a platform of mutual understanding.

The time and place of enunciation is quite clear: we, a group of younger Polish students, in a contextual frame of capitalism, invite you to revisit our communist past. The Crazy Guides are presented as the new symbolic workers of the new capitalist and democratic century in Poland. The main resource in this new capitalist framing turns out to be the entrepreneurs involved in the initiative. The overall tone of the enunciation is often ironic and self-ironic (Hutcheon, 1998). The picture of Mike wearing sunglasses and holding a big cigar, playing on the stereotypical representation of a capitalist – an important part of the visual repertory of communist propaganda – is at one and the same time a cliché but also the truth of what is actually happening through the concept of Crazy Guides making a living out of the communist past.

### The Crazy Guides Communism Tours

Crazy Guides offer different tours in and around Krakow. The means of transport commonly used is a Trabant – a vehicle reminiscent of the communist era. As the drive is environmentally irresponsible (the cars are heavy polluters) and unsafe (the safety belts are broken, as the guides point out very explicitly), the rides can be seen as stagings of controlled transgressive practices in the public space that imitate former times and offer some respite from contemporary culture's heightened focus on safety and security (Figure 1).

*The Crazy Guides Communism Tours* include four iconic 'live' sites and two immersive environments in which the aesthetic atmosphere (Böhme, 1993) is integral to instilling the feeling of the past in the tourist<sup>6</sup>. The four iconic sites in Nowa Huta are the central square,



Figure 1. The characteristic ornamented vehicle from the communist past.

Plac Centralny, renamed The Ronald Reagan Square; the entrance of the huge Tadeusz Sendzimir Steelworks; a Russian tank, randomly placed as a memorial and the Church of Our Lady, The Queen of Poland, The Lord's Ark. In general the guides' narratives focus on the everyday experience of communism and it is obvious they try to give a nuanced portrayal of this part of Polish history. Their desire is to tell a true story of the past that they can document: 'Nowa Huta is the physical proof that it all happened here' and to do it in an entertaining way: 'We are a group of young funky guys who were creative enough to use this good story' (Eryk, 2009).

At Plac Centralny, the low, five to seven story, buildings are intersected by the wide radial avenues meeting at the central square. Significantly the middle of the square is now empty since the statue of Lenin has been removed and replaced by the more discreetly positioned Solidarity Monument that commemorates the workers' resistance towards Soviet communism.

At this site, the guides point to the paradoxes in former Poland: showing communism as a panoptical power play and making fun of the fact that the steelworks is situated at the centre of the architecture, it points equally to the fact that Nowa Huta has attractive features on a pragmatic and everyday level, besides it is becoming a tourist attraction (Figure 2). The apartments are relatively modern and there is more green space than you find elsewhere in Krakow. The guide Victor, whose grandfather was sent to Siberia and whose family still lives at Nowa Huta takes us to the local souvenir shop with its regional handicraft products and the underlying message of supporting local production. Victor's biographical investment gives the whole experience a hint of intimacy and it adds to the desire to re-interpret Nowa Huta beyond its commercial value as a tourist attraction.

The second important site is the church 'The Lord's Ark' in Nowa Huta. As a giant symbol of resistance to the communist denial of religion, the workers literally erected the church as a medieval cathedral. It took the inhabitants of Nowa Huta 10 years to build the church with stones carried in bags from all over Poland. As the Lord's Ark was



Figure 2. A guide with loudspeaker at Plac Centralny, Nowa Huta.

finally consecrated in 1977, the site offers a brilliant setting for telling the story of Polish resistance towards communism via the Catholic Church.

The third important site is a Russian tank, which is offered as a photo opportunity. At this point, one could ask if the well-known cold war hardware is just used as a fun piece and a photogenic object for Westerners not familiar with communist regimes? Some of my fellow-tourists, who included an Australian couple in their fifties on a big Eastern European tour to trace the husband's Polish roots and two American female students of political science from Miami in their twenties, immediately took the opportunity to climb on top of the vehicle. Following the framing that the guides offered, it seemed apparent that the tourists took the chance to *perform*. But to perform what? Here it is worth noting that the character and significance of the tank probably is experienced differently depending on your own life story. The images of the Chinese student uprising at Tien'anmen square in Beijing in 1989 is one constituent ingredient in the prosthetic memory concerning tanks, something that prevented *me* from climbing up. It seemed to me, however, that the climbing on top of the tank could to be read as an active possession of a weapon that has mastered and subjugated others/us in the past. The photo-shoot at the tank is a significant example of the enjoyment in mastering the past and its staged quality in the present.

The most important sites in the tours are the two immersive environments: the Stylowa Restaurant next to Rose Avenue and the staged apartment 3, 12 in Nowa Huta. The common denominator of the two immersive environments is their atmosphere of 'the old days' aesthetics having a strong affective impact on the tourists' perception (Böhme, 1993). Stylowa, splendidly decorated with marble floors, pillars, numerous mirrors and crystal chandeliers, opened in 1956 as a high-class place for the elite of Nowa Huta: lawyers, artists, professors and engineers from the steelworks. Nowadays very few tourists find their way here according to the estate manager, Stanisława Olchawa, but those who do will notice that the atmosphere of Stylowa in the 1950s seems to be returning with dances, traditional Polish dishes (pirogi and herring) and vodka on the menu. The stay at Stylowa is rather long (30–45 min). During the visit, the tourists can browse material evidence – photographs, journal articles, ration coupons etc. – of everyday life in the communist era which supports the narrative of the normality of communism (Figure 3) for those who lived during these times. As part of a large group DeLuxe tour (on April 1 2008), one had a whole menu at the restaurant and a local orchestra provided us with a dance opportunity. On a sleepy and quite Tuesday afternoon only a few locals were present, but all joined the 30 min staged dancing that took place there in remembrance of Stylowa as a venue in former times.

The apartment 3, 12, a mimetic environment as in the 1990s art-scene, is staged as an 'old fashioned' apartment of the 1950s/1960s/1970s in Nowa Huta. It includes heavy wooden furniture with old, worn upholstery; a cabinet with a glass front displaying communist souvenirs and iconography: a communist party membership book, small flags, a Lenin statue and a huge television, likewise in a wooden frame (Figure 3); and on the walls, old oval wooden frames with portraits in sepia colours and carpets as decorations. Also noticeable are the small table runners and artificial flowers in vases. The apartment is situated in an inhabited residential area and not in a museum setting: the tourists were asked to keep silent in the stairway in order not to bother the residents of the block. A propaganda documentary from 1951 is shown, which describes the construction of Nowa Huta and explains the 'paradise' that the architects envisioned (Figure 4). The idea of a utopian paradise is deconstructed by the guides in their framing of the movie as a propaganda movie, while the tourists are served the stereotypical Polish dish of cucumbers and vodka (Urry, 1990/1999) (Figure 5).



Figure 3. A small size Lenin statue in the Restaurant Stylowa, Nowa Huta.



Figure 4. Cucumbers and Vodka in the kitchen of apartment 3, 12, Nowa Huta.

### **Crazy Guides as encoding performers**

According to Eryk, coming from a small village outside Krakow, now a student of sociology in Krakow, the success of the concept is mainly due to two elements: 'Crazy Guides have a controversial story to tell and they do it in a "funky" way'. The motto is:



Figure 5. Italian student watches propaganda movie from 1951 in the living room of apartment 3, 12, Nowa Huta.

'Give people information, give people experience' (Eryk, 2009). Visiting Nowa Huta, seeing parts of everyday life, and consuming cucumbers and vodka in staged-real surroundings *is* an alternative to the standard tourist experience to central Krakow. Their concept is a success because it allows tourists of different origins to experience, sense and feel the past in ways that connect them to their own past (see below). It has likewise succeeded in combining education and entertainment in a fruitful way: 'We want to give people something a little out of the ordinary. Something they remember' (Ostrowski, 2009). But the guides do not give the tourists all they want. They react negatively to a flippant attitude towards the difficult past. On a tour with a couple, a Polish woman in her thirties, born in Krakow, now living in Ireland with her Irish husband, the guide, Eryk (2009), replied ironically to the Irish husband's demand for vodka: 'So that is what you expect from this tour ...'. Sometimes the guides have to fight a little to get the information part of the tour through to the tourists. A group of Spanish students with very sparse skills in understanding let alone speaking English really had a hard time concentrating on the propaganda film in the apartment (21 Spanish students, 7 crazy guides, 2009 March 16). Eryk formulates spontaneously a slight criticism of some tourists' expectations: 'People expect more entertainment, but sorry this is part of the story, you have to go through it. It is not just about driving in a funny car' (Eryk, 2009).

The grotesque truth – that people had to wait fourteen years to get a new car but that they could get a used car from one day to the next at a much higher cost, and that you had to stand in line for days in order to get staple goods in Poland as late as in the 1980s – is sometimes hard to believe. And sometimes the guides encounter visitors who deny such facts in order to keep the idea of communism intact (Eryk (2009) recalls in particular a Swedish Phd-student in Political Science, who shocked him by denying many of the simple facts about communism in Poland). From quite an opposite perspective, the domestic Polish tourists are hard to impress: often they think that this kind of tourism is nothing special and they

have difficulty valuing Nowa Huta as a tourist site. Towards this attitude, the guides try to re-valorize Nowa Huta and towards the tourists from the West they inform and make fun but constantly correcting the worst fun-seekers.

‘We are not standardized, we become personal friends for some hours. People can ask us about our personal lives’ (Eryk, 2009). The founding myth of Crazy Guides appearing on the web site and repeated by Mike in the interview about their will to intimacy still play an important role in the whole concept. The guides are personally invested and involved at different levels and while performing they use their personal stories: one’s mother was a member of the communist party, another one grew up at Nowa Huta, a third lives there now, etc. Being a Crazy Guide is a lifestyle that involves the whole person, even outside working hours. The guides are often recognized in the urban space as well-known symbols of the new economy.

The non-standardized way of guiding can also be detected in the course of tours. Victor gave in, for example, to a journalist from the UK who was about to write an article on leisure life in Warsaw and Krakow – and took us to the apartment, even though that was not part of that day’s tour. He also took a couple from Australia to the Church of Our Lady, even though it was getting very late. The guides likewise use their intellectual skills in order to differentiate between the visitors. A different version of the story is delivered to groups from Warsaw than that given to couples from Australia, who barely know anything about Polish history or to highly distinguished elderly scholars from the UK who come to Nowa Huta because of a special interest in the topic. The tours and the guides are flexible, dynamic and sensitive towards the differences between the tourists and respond to the tourists on an individual level.

### **The tourists as hyper-touristic and nostalgic decoders**

The selection of sites and experiences, that the tours offer gives the tourist an impression of former communist times and the contemporary life in Nowa Huta on a level of everyday life. We are invited to get to know a generation of Polish people living with, shaped by, but also resisting communism throughout the post-war years until 1989. The Crazy Guides’ tourism design appeals to special interest tourists – some call these hyper-tourists (Jansson, 2002) – seeking sensory experiences that are combined with alternative/critical views and non-standardized sites.

Another important decoding strategy of the tourists is the nostalgic one. Nostalgia is a strong feeling of longing triggered by a sensation, a material thing, a place, an encounter or an experience. Nostalgia is a feeling arising due to sensuous stimuli. For the memory to become nostalgic longing, a qualitative change has to happen. The memory transforms into an idyllic image of the past, a utopia of the past expressing what we would have liked the past to have been independently, sometimes, of what it really was (Bronfen, 1998). Nostalgia does not have to be conservative and something that only reactionary people experience. Nostalgia can be reflective as a conscious way of dealing with one’s imagination of the past (Boym, 2001).

I claim that the CGCT trigger nostalgic decodings on two levels. By using icons, stereotypical stagings and iconic memorials as parts of a prosthetic collective memory of communism in mass cultural forms (Landsberg, 2004), CGCT produce structural nostalgia for tourists from the West, on the other hand, it is obvious that the stagings just trigger nostalgia of any past. Huyssen (2000) argues that the desire for the past has superseded the desire for the future in Western societies since the 1980s. The disappearance of communism as an alternative political system within Europe has produced a renewed interest in this

vanished former political alternative. The gaze upon the former communist countries from Western countries is *exoticizing* in the sense that it isolates and focuses on the (for the West) unfamiliar communist past with its material traces, different political and social structures and alternative practices.

On a structural level, one could claim that the interest in the communist past is a kind of new orientalism within Europe. On the level of the theatrical settings in the CGCT, it seems obvious that the Westerners desire for exotic experiences and iconic stereotypes is addressed through devices such as the guides in blue-collar work wear with loudspeakers, Mr Wieslav, a 65-year-old, toothless man with no skills in English, as an original 'trace' from the communist era, the serving of vodka and cucumbers, the polluting Trabants.

On a more individual level, the settings can off course produce memories as they did in the case of the young Polish woman exclaiming: 'Oh, I remember these ...' at the sight of the coupons of rationing at Stylowa. Or they can produce nostalgia of any past as was the case for me at the group dinner at Stylowa that really reminded me of my childhood family parties and of afternoons spent in the company of my cousins at dusty popular restaurants or inns in the countryside. In the case of a woman in her forties from Atlanta, Georgia in the USA, who exclaimed at the sight of the apartment: 'Oh, it reminds me of my grandmother's home, so kitschy ...', which is a way of relating emotionally to the place via your own private memory. On yet another occasion, a group of 21 young Spanish students had difficulties in concentrating on the propaganda movie. As their English was poor, they began to sing Spanish folksongs as a response to the staged setting of the Nowa Huta experience. Bursting into the songs of one's own homeland can be seen as a way of one's past to the others' past.

## **Conclusion**

Managing a legacy from former generations, the Crazy Guide team are quite pragmatic about the inherited past. They live in it (Nowa Huta) and they live on it (making the past a commodity), a fact they treat ironically, but consciously in their promotion of a district they try to revalorize both to foreign and to domestic tourists.

As a post-1989 identity construction, the focus is not on a direct criticism of communism as a system on an ideological level, the focus is entirely on the everyday life in Poland back then and now. The concept documents the past discursively and materially through the creation of staged environments that the tourists sense, feel and are surrounded by. As symbolic workers of a new economy, the crazy guides team is successful because they invest personally in their non-standardized tours.

The tourists are addressed as individuals who want to be educated and entertained. The whole range of material things, sensations and impressions documenting the Polish past nourish the nostalgia in the tourist. Either the nostalgia on a more structural level due to the extensive use of communist stereotypical icons or nostalgia on a more individual level as nostalgia of one's own past. Both kinds of nostalgia must be characterized as reflective nostalgia because of the explicit distancing irony in the guide's attitudes and because of their will to document the difficulties of everyday life in Poland during communism.

Crazy Guides Communism Tours have change the image of Nowa Huta through their use of the place as a material relic of the past. The concept confirms the place as an important site for communism, as a place of resistance towards communism, and as a place of new local belonging after the silence of the 1980s and 1990s. Crazy Guides Communism Tours are definitely a way of putting a changed prouder image of Nowa Huta back on the map.

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Two conferences I attended in 2009 provided inspiration for this article. The first, entitled *Emotions in Motion: The Passion of Tourism, Travel and Movement* took place in Leeds, UK, the second one *Emotion and Motion within Place* in Aarhus, DK. The conference in Denmark was part of the network on Emotional Geography, which I have attended for a long time. Thank you to the organizers and colleagues at these two conferences for accepting me and for commenting on my paper. I would also like to thank Josef Ploner and the editors of the *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* for inviting me to submit my paper to the journal. An 'anonymous' thanks go to the colleagues who have reviewed an earlier version of this article. Their exact, generous and sharp comments have improved the paper significantly. A warm thanks also goes to the Crazy Guides Communism Tours team for the many free tours and the talks, and to my skilled translator Hanna not to mention Joanna, my favourite restaurant companion in Krakow.

### Notes

1. My fieldwork in Krakow consisted of two trips to Krakow: one in April 2008 and another in March 2009. I assisted on five different guided tours, group tours as well as more individualized tours and I conducted interviews with the manager Micha Ostrowski and Eryk in March 2009.
2. MacCannell enumerates five stages of sight sacralization: the naming, framing, enshrinement, mechanical and social reproduction.
3. My material here is an extract of revue and newspaper articles (from 2006 to 2008) commenting on Nowa Huta as a new tourist phenomenon.
4. A colleague from a private company performing cultural heritage and film tourism in Krakow (Schindler's List Tours) had the immediate reaction to Crazy Guides that they are entertaining and are not critical enough towards communism as a political system.
5. <http://www.crazyguides.com/> *The Crazy Guides Communism Tours* concept developed from the founder, Micha Ostrowski's (called Mike), experience as a guide in old Kraków when he was a student. He met a couple from California for whom he provided a special service: he took them home and to his own favourite places, and they were thrilled and encouraged him to start a business based on this more personal service. They even lent him money to get started.
6. The number of sites and the level of staging depend on which tour you choose. From Communism Tour to Communism DeLuxe Tour and Communist offer for groups, the number of sites varies. The visits at Stylowa and at the apartment are only included in the DeLuxe Tour. The blue collar outfit as well as the loudspeakers are devices for groups only.

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