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VISITORS FROM BEHIND THE ELBE. GERMAN- LANGUAGE REPORTAGES ABOUT WARSAW FROM THE YEARS 1955–1970¹

At the outset, it would be appropriate to make a few remarks. First of all, the Elbe is treated more symbolically than geographically in this article, since German-language reportages did not necessarily have to come from West Germany, but also from Switzerland or Austria. This is important because Switzerland recognised the new Polish authorities already in 1945, and diplomatic relations with Austria were established the following year. Meanwhile, in the case of the Federal Republic of Germany, founded in 1949 (then still called the German Federal Republic), where most of the analysed texts were written, the political breakthrough in relations with Poland was brought about as late as December 1970, with Willy Brandt's visit to Warsaw. Guests from behind the Elbe could not count - like the Swiss, French, British or Americans - on help from embassies and consular services. Nor could they rely on the support of their countrymen who had settled in the Polish capital. According to the list of 659 foreigners with the right of permanent residence registered in Warsaw, which dates back to October 1955, there was only one German residing in Poland (or, more precisely, a German who came from the GDR). The number of

1 The article is an extended version of the paper delivered at the conference "Foreigners About Warsaw. 1945–2018", held by the Museum of Warsaw (6–7 December 2018) and is a translation of the Polish version of the text.

Iraqis, Brazilians and Vietnamese registered in Warsaw was exactly the same. Still, there were e.g. 101 Spaniards, 57 Italians and 34 Frenchmen².

Especially cumbersome in the case of the Germans (to a lesser extent in the case of Austrians) was the burden of recent, wartime past. After all, they were accountable for the destruction of the city and the holocaust of its residents. Especially that according to official communist propaganda it was the Western Germans who were to blame; the German Democratic Republic was inhabited exclusively by anti-fascists. The latter, then, found it easier to visit Poland (and Warsaw), even at the peak of Stalinism. It is worth mentioning, however, that "Polish" reportages came out at the height of Stalinism not only in GDR newspapers *Neues Deutschland* and *Tägliche Rundschau*, but also in some rather unique German-language newspapers in the West. For example, in 1952 such texts were published in the paper of the Communist Party of Germany in Bavaria (*Bayrisches Volks-Echo*) or in the *Österreichische Zeitung*, published in Vienna by the Soviet occupation authorities in Austria³. The focus of these texts is predictable - "Warsaw's pace of work", work leaders, new districts... If "normal" German-language newspapers published any information about Warsaw, it was usually short references to, for example, clothes shipped from abroad or sanitation problems of the capital's inhabitants⁴.

Visitors from behind the Elbe found the border checkpoints opened a bit wider during The Warsaw Festival of Youth and Students in the summer of 1955, in particular after October 1956, when Władysław Gomułka rose to power⁵. For obvious reasons, visitors from the Federal Republic of Germany were mainly interested in the former German territories, but many of them also visited the Polish capital. Identified in the Press Archive (*Pressearchiv*) of the Herder Institute in Marburg have been ca. 50 reports in German from the 1955–1970 period (even if definitely there are more records of this kind there). This article uses 40 of them, including two written by women⁶. These were both short accounts and

- 2 Archive of the National Remembrance Institute, 00231/195, vol. 1, *Wykaz obcokrajowców zamieszkających w Warszawie na stałym pobycie*, 4 October 1955, chart 156. As many as 446 foreigners living permanently in Warsaw were identified – 420 from the Socialist Bloc (384 from the USSR) and 26 from capitalist countries (the biggest number of 11 from France). Ibidem, chart 159. More on this see J. Kochanowski, "Życiorysy (nie)codzienne. Cudzoziemscy mieszkańcy Warszawy z lat 1945–1989", in: *Warszawiacy nie z tej ziemi. Cudzoziemscy mieszkańcy stolicy 1945–1989*, ed. J. Kochanowski, Warszawa 2013, p. 11–41. See *Cudzoziemcy w Warszawie 1945–1989*, ed. P. Pleskot, Warszawa 2012.
- 3 "Das wiedererstandene Warschau", *Österreichische Zeitung*, 14 January 1952; J. Gross, "In Warschau entsteht ein neuer Stadtteil", ibidem, 10 September 1952; J. Dobosch, E. Adamschewskaja, "Quer durch das neue Warschau", *Bayrisches Volks-Echo*, 21 April 1952. On the other hand, a mini report from Warsaw, or rather about Warsaw (and Rotterdam) came out in the Catholic *Deutsche Tagespost* (Regensburg). "Phönix aus der Asche", *Deutsche Tagespost*, 16 August 1952.
- 4 "Warschau Ciuchy. Der Markt der bunten Träume. 'Luxusgüter', die es nicht im Laden gibt", *Westfälische Rundschau* (Dortmund), 4 October 1952; "Baden ein Luxus", *Norddeutsche Rundschau* (Itzenhoe), 15 August 1952.
- 5 See more on this topic: K. Ruchniewicz, "Wer das heutige Polen bereist, kann eigentlich berichten, was er will". Reisen von Deutschen nach Polen in den 1960er Jahren", in: 1956. *(Nieco)inne spojrzenie. Eine (etwas) andere Perspektive*, ed. J. Kochanowski, J. von Puttkamer, Warszawa 2016, p. 305–331. Ruchniewicz identified 140 German reportages from trips to Poland only for the 1949–1960 period. Ibidem, p. 306. On a later period, see C. Felsch, *Reisen in die Vergangenheit? Westdeutsche Fahrten nach Polen 1970–1990*, Berlin–Boston 2015.
- 6 Margit Staber from *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) and Eka von Merveldt from *Die Zeit*. Two other female authors were identified as Eva Priester from *Volkstimme* (Vienna) and Hilde Mandl from *Rieder Volkszeitung*.

long, well-documented reports, often “travel diaries” in instalments or photographic reportages in which illustrations prevailed over text. The authors were journalists, scientists, businessmen, artists, or simply curious visitors. Every opportunity was good enough to pen one’s impressions from the East, even during short stays, including transit ones. The phenomenon was most pronounced in the years 1956–1958, when a visit to Poland still had a taste of what until recently had been a forbidden fruit. Some visited Poland for the first and the last time, others “acclimated” themselves here, getting more familiar with local relations (e.g. Hansjakob Stehle, Ludwig Zimmerer and Hans-Joachim Orth⁷). The articles came out in the biggest and most influential newspapers of West Germany, Austria and Switzerland (e.g. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Die Welt*, *Die Zeit*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*), important regional ones, such as *Oberhessische Presse*, *Hannoversche Allgemeine*, *Hamburger Abendblatt* or *Frankfurter Rundschau*, or minor papers such as *Lüneburger Landeszeitung* (yet with a major author, Alard von Schack), *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung* (Heidelberg) or *Rieder Volkszeitung* (Rieder am Inn). Occasional texts would come out in the religious *Christ und Welt*, left-wing *Volksstimme* published in Vienna or the paper of the hospitality industry *Die Wirtin*, where Hans-Joachim Orth published a reportage about the Grand Hotel in Warsaw. Quite a number of articles were published by popular glossy magazines, like *Hören und Sehen* from Hamburg, *Feuerreiter* from Cologne⁸, *Epoca* from Munich, and *Das Blaue Blatt*⁹. Both reprints and original texts appeared in such exotic places as Buenos Aires or Toronto¹⁰. It was not uncommon for an identical or very similar text to appear in several papers. This was due not so much to the importance of the article as to the foresight of the authors, who were looking for sponsors and avenues to publish their texts still before their departure for Poland. For example, August Scholtis, who visited Poland in 1961, prior to his arrival concluded agreements with *Westdeutsche Rundfunk*, *Tagesspiegel* and *Nürnberger Nachrichten*¹¹.

The character of the visitors from the other side of the Elbe, most of whom were men, as indicated above, had an obvious impact on the perspective of observation, starting from the moment of arrival and the first impressions. Only a few of them landed at the airport in Warsaw, which until the end of the period under consideration was seen by passengers arriving not only from Paris or Zurich, but also from Prague, as a provincial railway station¹². Those who arrived by

7 In the 1960s, they wrote valuable studies on Poland (and Warsaw). Hansjakob Stehle: *Nachbar Polen* (Frankfurt/Main 1963 i 1968); *Deutschlands Osten – Polens Westen? Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt/Main 1965); *Nachbarn im Osten. Herausforderung zu einer neuen Politik* (Frankfurt/Main 1971). Ludwig Zimmerer: *Warschau* (Hamburg 1970). Hans Joachim Orth: *Diesseits und jenseits der Weichsel. Der Schlüssel zum heutigen Polen* (Darmstadt 1962); *Polen, Partner von morgen: auf dem Wege zur europäischen Wirtschaftsmacht* (Oldenburg 1965); *Polen ohne Tabus* (Gunderhausen 1969).

8 H. Geyr, “Blick auf Warschau”, *Der Feuerreiter*, 26 April 1958.

9 “Neues Leben in Warschau”, *Das Blaue Blatt*, 15, 1957.

10 E. Goerke, “Warschau ist eine Reise wert”, *Freie Presse* (Buenos Aires), 9 August 1957; I. Witsico, *Reisender, kommst du nach Warschau*, *Torontoer Zeitung*, 8 January 1960.

11 A. Scholtis, *Reise nach Polen. Ein Bericht*, München 1962, p. 33.

12 G. Schnell, “In Warschau muss man warten können”, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 15 August 1968.

train did not fare any better, especially since the vast majority of visitors arrived at Warszawa Główna Station, still surrounded by a sea of ruins. The problems started when the visitors wanted to exchange money or find a taxi. The former was impossible, at least legally (illegal ways are left out). The latter was easier and offered Western visitors many new insights. Especially at night or in the morning, when it was the most difficult to get out of the station, finding a taxi was the biggest hassle and then one often had to hail a “comic” or “rickety and wobbly” horse-drawn carriage¹³. Besides, catching a taxi brought about many, sometimes even historical, insights. This was especially true in the second half of the 1950s and in particular for the Germans, who at that time were at the height of the automotive revolution (the millionth Volkswagen Beetle rolled off the conveyor belt in 1955 and the following year Erich Kästner noted: “we are living in a motorized Biedermeier”¹⁴). No wonder, since the vehicles on the streets of Warsaw in the latter half of the 1950s represented all possible global car makes of the past few decades¹⁵. At the end of 1956 Robert Stengl from Hessia wrote: “When the cab driver who was taking me to the hotel learned that I was German, he apologized for the disastrous condition of his old Opel made in 1935”¹⁶. Similar observations were made by Austrian Gustav Calupa in late 1957 and early 1958: “I am driven to the hotel in a rickety ancient 1931 Opel taxi. It has a small workshop in the trunk”¹⁷. Drivers’ customs also drew attention; Alard von Schack noted in his journal: “I find a taxi and for the first time ever I am given the chance to get to know what the term ‘get by’ means in today’s Poland, the key term really. The driver takes two more customers driving in the same direction as I (...). In front of the Bristol Hotel the taximeter shows 10 zlotys. I pay. How much will my co-passengers pay? Surely enough for the driver to be able to ‘get by’ and eke out a living”¹⁸. Another traveller noted the unpredictability of drivers, who could finish the ride at any time, saying that they were going home¹⁹.

However, already at the end of the 1950s, changes were noticeable as there were more and more cars on the streets, ancient vehicles were rare to spot and traffic intensified. In 1959 a journalist from Berlin observed: “Still, there are few private cars and the majority of vehicles are taxis and company cars, burning terrible gasoline and producing stinking exhaust fumes”²⁰. Hansjakob Stehle had a more optimistic angle on the streets of Warsaw at that time:

13 F. Schrom, “Warschau – Stadt aus dem Nichts”, *Wiener Wochenausgabe*, 19, 1957; W. Eggert, “Warschauer Impressionen”, *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*, 15 April 1960.

14 A. Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten: Freizeit, Massenmedien und „Zeitgeist“ in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre*, Hamburg 1995, p. 23.

15 See P. Kubkowski, “Pokonywanie ulic. Miejska męskość”, in: *Ceglane ciało, gorący oddech. Warszawa Leopolda Tyrmanda*, ed. A. Karpowicz, P. Kubkowski, W.K. Pessel, I. Piotrowski, Warszawa 2015, p. 156–179; J. Kochanowski, *Revolucja międzypaździernikowa. Polska 1956–1957*, Kraków 2017, p. 255–269; H. Wilk, *Między pragmatyzmem a oczekiwaniami. Społeczeństwo, władza i samochody w Polsce 1945–1970*, Warszawa 2017.

16 R. Stengl, “Namenslied statt Internationale”, *Oberhessische Presse*, 1 December 1956.

17 G. Calupa, “Warschauer neues Gesicht”, *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, 25 January 1958. Similar observations: N. Carroll, “Warschauer Impressionen”, *Der Kurier* (Westberlin), 24 January 1958.

18 A. von Schack, “Warschauer Tagebuch”, *Lüneburger Landeszeitung*, 9 January 1959.

19 K. von Bergh, “Heute im ‘Paris des Ostens’”, *Der Kurier* (Berlin), 20 June 1959.

20 Ibidem.

“Thirty-year-old rattling cabs disappear from the streets. Hunched in an old-fashioned manner but at the same time modern Warszawa car reigns supreme on the streets, and the police can’t cope with this congestion of traffic. The first car showroom has been opened”²¹. The following year the *Augsburger Allgemeine* journalist wrote that “Traffic has significantly risen. You can meet all car brands and makes, from the old DKW, a pre-war Volkswagen, to the latest models of eastern and western production. As before, also now you can see horse-drawn carriages. When farmers get to the crossroads with their wagons, traffic police go out of their way to maintain order in the streets. The old and the new are mixed up in one charming picture”²². Both the dominance of Warszawa cars and the presence of horse-drawn wagons was noticeable until the end of the decade, even if at the same time one noticed “Russian luxury Volga limousines and Wartburgs from the GDR. Every now and then you can spot single western cars”²³.

While the vehicles on the streets of Warsaw were rather amusing for foreigners, until the end of the sixties the visitors envied Warsaw residents their problem-free parking. Hansajakob Stehle’s observations from 1958 continued to describe the reality for a long time to come: “This is where the dreams of a driver from the West can come true. A city with a million dwellers and no parking issues, no jungle of signs or a thicket of one-way streets”²⁴. Traffic seemed to be intensified by the fact that, unlike waiters, drivers were moving very fast and paid little attention to any traffic rules. The observer had no doubt that in all European countries these Polish drivers would lose their driving licenses on the first day, while in Warsaw they could operate since traffic police were exceptionally liberal²⁵.

The first, most eventful, stage of the tour of Warsaw usually ended at the hotel. Initially, it was almost always the Bristol Hotel, which accommodated visitors paying in foreign currency. Although foreigners brining their valuable foreign currency were supposed to feel here like on a luxury island, there was no shortage of critical opinions about the hotel. It was called “worm-infested and dilapidated”, its discipline was described as “entirely like that of the offices of the Soviet Intourist”²⁶. A clear improvement was taking place in parallel to the aforementioned changes in the automotive industry. As a Swiss daily newspaper noted in 1959, “Warsaw hotels are on the best way to adjust to Western standards. (...) A leftover of the communist regime was, by western standards, high shoeshines’ fees at the entrance to the hotel. Room furnishings have changed significantly.

21 H. Stehle, “Warschau heute”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, 2 May 1959. Similar observations: W. Kraus, “Warschau – im Vorübergehen”, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 8 July 1960.

22 E. Goerke, “Polens Metropole nähert sich seiner früheren Bedeutung als ‘Paris des Ostens’”, *Augsburger Allgemeine*, 17 July 1960.

23 G. Schnell, “In Warschau muss man warten können”, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 15 August 1968.

24 H. Stehle, “Die Furcht darf nicht wiederkehren”, *FAZ*, 18 January 1958. See Schnell, “In Warschau muss man...”

25 I. Witsico, “Reisender, kommst du nach Warschau”, *Torontoer Zeitung*, 8 January 1960.

26 M. Saller, “Warschau im Juni 1956”, *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 17 June 1956; N. Carroll, “Warschauer Impressionen...”

While the Bristol Hotel's dining rooms still shine in a bombastic, Bierut's style, the bars and restaurants have acquired a Western polish"²⁷.

The Grand, made operational in 1958, was a "western" hotel through and through; it quickly took over visitors from the Bristol and this shift was reflected in the German descriptions of Warsaw. No wonder: the Grand Hotel offered a premium standard, multilingual staff, varied catering facilities, and a wide range of services: from medical care, through a travel agency that could organize a banquet or a trip in a car with a chauffeur, to a private servant. Naturally, everything was payable in foreign currencies²⁸.

Hotels for foreigners were also unique in other respects: mainly for female residents of Warsaw they were dream venues of realising one's opportunities, while for newcomers they were places of cheap entertainment. Characteristically, such reports appeared only immediately after October 1956, until 1958. As H.-J. Stehle reported, "A phone rings at the hotel and a clear girl's voice speaking French can be heard: 'I am eighteen years old. Do you have a car? Are you from the West?' - The immediate suspicions of a young lady's profession are far from accurate. When pressed, she finally confesses: 'I would like to make a career in the West'. Her other friends also sometimes try and, hoping to be in luck, give the hotel's operator a random room number. Perhaps some prince charming from a far-away land will respond? The younger the Varsovian girls, the less they want to believe that the West is no land of milk and honey, either."²⁹. The Germans noticed in front of hotels for foreigners scenes that resembled so-called *Ami-Mädchen* from Berlin, Hamburg and Munich of the first post-war years: shiny cars with foreign licence plates, their "rear seats strewn with goods unavailable for an average Pole. Many females were unable to resist the temptation". The staff, from the director to the bellboy, turned a blind eye. After all, as one German journalist put it: "Few earn enough in Warsaw to forego a tip"³⁰.

The Bristol or the Grand were islands of the West in the Warsaw of the Gomułka regime; here foreigners were able to communicate easily as the staff members often spoke a number of languages. However, when leaving the hotels, one had to confront members of the general public, and language was an issue. These situations were often difficult, especially for the Germans. "The German walks through the city depressed, with a black flame in his heart", wrote about Warsaw in 1962 Harro Siegel, a West German expert on puppet theatre³¹. While visitors from behind the Elbe sometimes mixed uprisings and sieges³², the awareness of the atrocities and a deliberate destruction of the city

27 C.K., "Besuch in Warschau", *NZZ*, 15 February 1959.

28 H.-J. Orth, "Das Grand-Hotel in Warschau", *Die Wirtin*, 1 July 1960; W. Eggert, "Warschauer Impressionen", *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*, 15 April 1960; W. Carly, "Im Schatten des Kulturpalastes", *Kölnische Rundschau*, 31 July 1960; H. Gerlach, "Warschau - von außen und innen gesehen", *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 18 August 1964.

29 H. Stehle, "Die Furcht darf nicht wiederkehren", *FAZ*, 18 January 1958.

30 J. Steinmayr, "In Warschau sind die Nächte trüb", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 March 1958.

31 H. Siegel, "Warschau - Rendezvous der Puppenspieler", *Die Zeit*, 3 August 1962.

32 E.g. they indicated "two sieges of the city by Hitler's armies, in 1940 and after the 1943 uprising". W. Kraus, "In Warschau neuer Altstadt", *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 20 June 1964.

at the hands of Germans was widespread. “Millions of German soldiers got to know Warsaw during the recent war as a stopover in their wandering from place to place or as a battlefield”, wrote Heinz Brestel in 1955. “What remained of Poland’s capital in 1944 was completely devastated during the major autumn uprising. When in 1945 the Soviets crossed the River Vistula, there was no Warsaw”³³. Martin Saller from Hamburg wrote in 1964: “When in September 1944, after two months of fierce combat in the streets the Warsaw Uprising was defeated, upon Hitler’s orders the city was evacuated and razed to the ground”³⁴. Incidentally, it is worth noting that none of the several dozen men, authors of reportages, admitted having been in Warsaw during the war (or even their having being directly involved in warfare)!

Characteristically, however, neither do they mention that they were discriminated against only on the basis of their nationality during their visit to Poland/Warsaw. This does not mean, of course, that they were free from certain fears or concerns: “If you do not know Polish, you have the best prospects of being understood in Warsaw if you speak German. However, if you are looking for a favour, try speaking English or French”³⁵. Such attempts usually ended, however, especially outside of contacts with the Warsaw elite, with a return to the best-known German language, which however evoked bitter associations. A journalist from a Düsseldorf paper wrote in 1960: “A taxi driver, questioned in French, responds in halting German. I have experienced the same thing many times in Warsaw: at the post office, in the shop, at a restaurant or a hotel, although people do not speak German willingly, because for some Poles it was a language of the German occupation”³⁶. Five years later the Austrian *Sonntagspost* observes: “The Grand Hotel is easy to find. All you need to do is find people over forty years of age and ask them the way. If that person didn’t know, there was immediately another one willing to help and showed the way even in German, which is far from obvious in Warsaw”³⁷.

The bank of the River Elbe where the German interlocutor lived was of prime importance, too³⁸. “As soon as they spot a German, they ask a suspicious and mistrustful question to sound him out: ‘Pieck or Adenauer?’. They remain ice-cold and bottle up when one mentions Pieck, yet are open, friendly and respectfully shy towards Adenauer’s compatriots”³⁹. Polish interlocutors deplored the fact that after the 1956 political thaw, no closer contacts, even cultural ones, had been established. Another widespread wish was for the West Germans to open their embassy in Warsaw. However, the views of Warsaw residents ranged between admiration for the Germans’ hard work and a fear

33 H. Brestel, “Jenseits der Oder-Neiße-Linie”, *FAZ*, 23 July 1955.

34 M. Saller, “Bürgerhäuser und Genossen”, *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 13 July 1956.

35 I. Witsico, “Reisender...”

36 R. Hoerhager, “In Warschau – heute”, *Rheinische Post*, 9 April 1960.

37 W. Gegenbach, “Jenseits Oder und Neiße. Reise durch das heutige Polen, V: Die Weltstadt Warschau”, *Sonntagspost*, 17 October 1965.

38 Por. K. Ruchniewicz, “Wer das heutige Polen bereist...”, p. 325–326.

39 K. von Bergh, “Heute im ‘Paris des Ostens’”, *Der Kurier* (Berlin), 20 June 1959.

of them, strengthened by the state propaganda which treated on a par the Wehrmacht and the Bundeswehr with its cutting-edge missiles⁴⁰.

However, even without knowledge of the Polish language, it was possible to compare Warsaw with other cities and form an opinion about it. It was extremely unambiguous, both in comparison with the (East) Berlin, where according to West German visitors there were even more ruins⁴¹, and the orthodox social realist Moscow. A visitor from Hamburg wrote in mid-1956: "The buildings here are more modern than in Moscow. Even on Marszałkowska Street, three kilometres long and elegant, most of which was built during the Stalinist dictatorship, Polish individualism and quiet resistance against soulless monumentalism prevented the worst. Construction in Warsaw is not idolatrous to the eastern dictator and does not condone oversized kitsch that one can find in Stalinallee in East Berlin. From time to time, one can encounter very interesting architectural solutions, clean facades and eye-catching blocks of concrete and glass. The pompous and "friendly gift of the USSR to Poland, i.e. [...] the Palace of Culture with its massive towers and peculiar decorations, built with an enormous amount of effort, looks like a foreign body"⁴². Quite understandably, the Palace of Culture was a recurrent element of German depictions of Warsaw. They both abounded in ironic definitions of this architectural monstrosity as used by the Polish interlocutors ("small yet in taste") and in ideas for some architectural counterbalance. A journalist of the Swiss NZZ observed in 1959: "Nowadays, efforts are being made to create buildings around the palace that offset its overarching magnitude. The general public discuss the results of the relevant architectural competition. The winning designs were abandoned in favour of six steel and glass buildings, which are to be constructed along the longest side of the square and provide the greatest possible contrast to the Soviet architecture of the palace"⁴³.

As of the early 1960s, the new urban and architectural cityscape were stressed. Skyscrapers were symbolic of the modern; as a journalist of a Munich-based newspaper wrote in 1962, "surrounded by greenery, they are exceptionally light to the eye. (...) While the city centre is marked by cold, monumental buildings of the Stalinist era, with the 230-metre-tall Palace of Culture and Science taking pride of place, today they build clean, colourful apartment blocks the Italian and Scandinavian style"⁴⁴. Admiration for contemporary architecture was accompanied by that for the (re)construction effort, present in nearly every reportage. A journalist from Frankfurt observed in 1957: "This city was non-existent twelve years before. Today it can undoubtedly be once again called a nation's capital. An impressive accomplishment, indeed"⁴⁵.

40 G. Herda, "Die rote Leuchtreklame des Großen Nachbarn", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 26 July 1960.

41 H. Brestel, "Jenseits der Oder-Neisse-Linie", *FAZ*, 23 July 1955.

42 M. Saller, "Warschau im Juni 1956", *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 17 June 1956.

43 C.K., "Besuch in Warschau", *NZZ*, 15 February 1959.

44 R. Thilenius, "Warschauer Prachtbauten erstrahlen in neuem Glanz", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 September 1962.

45 H.-H. Goebel, "Am Abend wird Warschau schön", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 14 July 1957.

While visitors were loath to call Warsaw a small Paris, they had no problems calling it a metropolis. “Warsaw is regaining its good name among the European cities with a million inhabitants. It aspires to be a vibrant metropolis with its charming peculiarities again”⁴⁶. There were a lot of those “peculiarities”, which were not always particularly charming. One could definitely notice both the city’s vitality and not always conspicuous manifestations of modernity (“Shop windows are neatly arranged, colourful and imaginative. East Berlin was a horse of another matter. The posters are very modern, one would say Western. The newspapers have an interesting *design*, and weeklies are so much advanced as to their graphics, that many a western magazine could benefit from a closer familiarity with the authors”⁴⁷). A journalist from Stuttgart wrote in 1964: “Unlike in other countries of the Eastern Bloc, one can see beggars in the streets of Warsaw. This does not mean, however, that the standard of living is lower here, but that the police are more understanding. I met musicians in a backstreet. They were jobless and played instruments to earn a living. In short: Warsaw is very much alive and more friendly than other cities of the Eastern Bloc”⁴⁸.

The city stood out thanks to its architecture, beggars, musicians, numerous churches, cafés, and flower vendors⁴⁹, but also due to the absence of suffocating communist propaganda, which was stressed in nearly all press releases⁵⁰. The absence of red stars, banners, oversized portraits of leaders was noticed both during the (post)October thaw and when it had long been a thing of the past. Everywhere, however, national white-and-red flags were supposed to flutter, without any “democratic, people’s additions” (especially over the Polish Parliament building, which was noticed by many guests from behind the Elbe River)⁵¹. In 1960, Georg Herda from *Frankfurter Rundschau* noticed the star only atop the Palace of Culture. “However, I soon realised that this radiant emblem was more of a light advertisement than a symbol of Poland’s ideological attitude”⁵².

At the close of the 1960s a journalist of *Die Zeit* was aware of a lot of the colour red in the streets of Warsaw, “these were not, however, socialist banners with their garish red, but red lacquered boots, the newest fad of youth fashion on the Vistula. They appeared abruptly, along with large sunglasses. (...) The teenagers’ skirts are ever shorter and the boot heels increasingly tall. Plastic

46 E. Goerke, “Polens Metropole nähert sich seiner früheren Bedeutung als ‘Paris des Ostens’”, *Augsburger Allgemeine*, 17 July 1960.

47 J. Danubius, “Die Polen wandern hart am Grat”, *Deutsche Zeitung*, 19/20 March 1960.

48 W. Kraus, “In Warschau neuer Altstadt”, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 20 June 1964.

49 E.g. “When you enter Nowy Świat, another chic street in Warsaw, you don’t see any good shop windows, but many flower vendors who put their colourful baskets under the walls of their houses and in the gates of their tenement houses. Churches and cafes are noticeable at every step. You can enter one or the other almost every 200 metres”. W. Kraus, “In Warschau neuer Altstadt”...

50 This was actually a more general observation, concerning the entire country, especially after October 1956. See K. Ruchniewicz, “Wer das heutige Polen bereist”, p. 320–321.

51 R. Stengl, “Namenslied statt Internationale”, *Oberhessische Presse*, 1 December 1956; “Polens Hauptstadt sieht überraschend westlich aus”, *Weltpresse* (Wien), 19 December 1957; von Schack, *Warschauer Tagebuch*...

52 G. Herda, “Die rote Leuchtreklame des Großen Nachbarn”, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 26 July 1960.

badges worn on sweaters entice one with such words like: *love me, Great Britain, return again* or else bear the name of the favourite Polish big-beat band *No To Co*⁵³. Such observations by, mostly male, foreign observers were the rule from the very beginning, and the looks of Polish women as well as traditional social patterns of behaviour and... flowers were seen as the manifestation of the “completely western” character of Warsaw. Actually, rare were articles from Poland that would ignore the elegance and fashionable creativity of the women of Warsaw. Here are a few typical records. 1955: “Economical residents of Warsaw are chic and dandy; they follow the Western fashion and most often sew their clothes by themselves”⁵⁴; 1956: “the streets [of Warsaw] are not as drab as those of Moscow. Despite the poverty, Varsovians know how to sew a voguish and chic article of clothing. One sees careful hairstyles, sports clothes and western faces”⁵⁵; 1959: “Varsovians read Western fashion magazines and nothing will match their refined taste of skilful seamstresses. They can sew elegant clothes out of even poor-quality fabrics. Perhaps it is women who are the most inspirational in Warsaw. A strange mix of romantic *charme* and Slavic urbanity brightens up the greyness and adds to the air of European culture, thanks to which Warsaw stands out among other Eastern metropolises”⁵⁶; 1960: “What a beautiful sight: girls holding bouquets of violets and anemones in their hands. They are so graceful and elegant in their colourful dresses that they rather look like women from southern Europe. Dark stockings and light footwear, hair powdered in silver or light pink in line with the latest fashion. Dresses are made of cheap materials by home-grown seamstresses, yet their style is truly Parisian”⁵⁷.

Other markers of the Western character of Warsaw noticed by foreigners were the affirmation of French culture, language and lifestyle, love for flowers (the number of flower shops and florists was often highlighted, as was the habit of buying flowers - despite their high price - before every visit or date⁵⁸), men's care for elegance (“One does not walk the streets of Warsaw without a hat or a tie. One also wears gloves here”⁵⁹) and finally refined politeness, such as kissing a woman's hand, at that time already a rarity in West Germany. Eka von Merveldt was amazed: “I've never seen so many hands kissed before. Everywhere: in the streets, in theatres, in cafés. Even in church. The communists even kiss capitalist women's hands”⁶⁰.

53 A. Küppers, “Warschau – Rot als westliche Mode”, *Die Zeit*, 16 May 1969.

54 K. Zellner, “Wie sieht Warschau heute aus?”, *Die Welt*, 22 April 1955.

55 M. Saller, “Warschau im Juni 1956”, *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 17 June 1956.

56 H. Stehle, “Warschau heute...”

57 E. von Merveldt, “Warschau – teils in Stuck, teils modern”, *Die Zeit*, 20 May 1960.

58 H. Pörzgen, “Warschau – nicht mehr klein-Paris”, *FAZ*, 10 December 1956; H.-W. Richter, “Warschau und seine Menschen heute”, *Aufwärts*, 15 January 1957.

59 H. Zehner, “Warschau – Frühling im Oktober”, *Die Welt*, 31 October 1956.

60 E. von Merveldt, “Warschau...” “At bottom, Poles have always seen their geographical location in Eastern Europe as an unfortunate mishap. They feel part of Western Europe (...) and regard Western Europeans, especially the French, as their cousins”. “Polens Hauptstadt sieht *überraschend westlich* aus”, *Weltpresse* (Wien), 19 December 1957.

However, a large number of visitors were not to be misled by the various manifestations of the city's occidental character, with such extreme examples as the observation made at the end of 1970 by a journalist from Frankfurt that a box of potatoes brought in by a street vendor in a horse wagon "was lined with *The Financial Times* of September 25"⁶¹. However, those who had the opportunity to get to know more than just the immediate vicinity of the Bristol or Grand Hotel, had much more polarized and critical opinions. A journalist from Hamburg admitted in the summer of 1956 that Warsaw was both a European metropolis and a showcase of all things national, but real Poland does not live in the capital city, but rather in a run-down provincial town and primitive, forgotten villages of "old Poland"⁶². A decade later, an arrival in the capital was a return to civilization for a journalist travelling around Poland: "Warsaw is like a mirage to us. It is a return to civilisation. Wide streets, or rather boulevards, a bustling traffic we have never experienced in Poland before"⁶³.

Disparities were noticed not only between Warsaw and the province, but also within the city itself. The gap between the elegant centre and the proletarian, poor suburbs was evident⁶⁴. As was the fact that the fresh, glistening façades sometimes screened abject poverty and half a thousand families lived in ruins at their own peril still in 1960!⁶⁵. However, some foreigners, like e.g. Hans-Joachim Orth⁶⁶, practically till the end of the Gomułka's regime saw mainly literal and figurative fronts and façades. Even in 1969, Orth depicted the city as a place of flourishing science and arts, vibrant cafés and absence of political problems (to say nothing of political prisoners), also after March 1968, when "the name of Warsaw had become even for those uninterested in politics (...) synonymous with hard-line, ossified communism", as the journalist from Stuttgart observed in the summer of 1968⁶⁷. Other visitors, however, like Michael Mayer from *Die Zeit*, were not blind to the modern aspects of Warsaw yet also understood that the vibrant cafés warmly described by Orth were not really a manifestation of a social idyll, but their "apolitical" ambience offered an escape from political oppression. Mayer was likewise scathing of Gomułka's regime and pointed out that the security services are more powerful than in the Stalinist era, and many repressed intellectuals need to make a living by distributing bottled milk to people's homes⁶⁸.

However, what was probably the greatest value of this external view of Warsaw was the perception of the ambiguity and diversity of a city undergo-

61 B. Heimrich, "Warschau in diesen Tagen", *FAZ*, 21 November 1970.

62 M. Saller, "Bürgerhäuser und Genossen", *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 13 July 1956.

63 W. Gegenbach, "Jenseits Oder und Neiße. Reise durch das heutige Polen, V: Die Weltstadt Warschau", *Sonntagspost*, 17 October 1965.

64 A. Kuenzli, "Einsames Polen. Warschaus Kampf um eine Zukunft", *National-Zeitung* (Basel), 23 July 1958.

65 L. Laccorn, "Warschau – eine düstere Messe", *Die Zeit*, 25 July 1969; a comparison of Orth's and Mayer's texts in "Ein falsches Polenbild. Glanz und Elend Warschaus", *Deutscher Ostdienst*, 26 August 1969.

66 H.-J. Orth, "Warschau lächelt wieder", *Epoca*, 8, 1969.

67 G. Schnell, "In Warschau muss man warten können", *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 15 August 1968.

68 M. Mayer, "Warschau – eine düstere Messe", *Die Zeit*, 25 July 1969; a comparison of Orth's and Mayer's texts in "Ein falsches Polenbild. Glanz und Elend Warschaus", *Deutscher Ostdienst*, 26 August 1969.

ing profound social transformations. The best example is the assessment of Margit Staber, who noticed in 1969 in an article for *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* both the rural nature of Warsaw and its modern diversity. “A city whose suburbs are actually a village. (...) In the streets you can often see people with a rural look (...), as if every day were a market day. There are horse carts and Gypsies reaching out their hands for alms. There are women with bouquets of wild tulips”. At the same time, this society of students, workers and clerks is enriched by a modern and tolerant social group; its hallmarks are a scant mini dress, transistor radios, cafés, self-service department stores, modern cinema and theatre posters as well as anonymous apartment blocks. Between these two worlds, a third group of city residents are pushing their way forward: palm trees and violinists in hotel restaurants, hand kissing, widespread also among young intellectuals and artists, café gardens and open-air concerts in the park. This diversity of forms distinguishes Warsaw from other large cities⁶⁹.

The constraints of this article forced me to omit many, by no means insignificant themes. Still, what I have managed to convey, confirms the old proposition that you can see more clearly from the outside and that observations of foreigners may be both painful and pleasantly surprising. At this point, it would be by all means advisable to look into French, English, Italian or Russian newspapers, too⁷⁰. I am confident that they will have their fair share of data on Warsaw and a comparison of the observations made might be both fascinating and surprising.

Visitors from Behind the Elbe. German-Language Reportages about Warsaw from the Years 1955–1970

The article is devoted to German-language reportages from Warsaw 1955–1970. On one hand, turning point marks the Warsaw Youth and Student Festival in 1955, since the borders opened wider for guests from the West, and on the other – the end of 1970, when Willy Brandt’s visit to Warsaw brought a breakthrough in West Germany-PRL relations. 40 texts from German-language magazines appearing in West Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Argentina and Canada were used, both high-volume (e.g. “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” or “Neue Zürcher Zeitung”) as well as regional, religious, industry or popular illustrated magazines. Among the authors were both journalists (later often associated with Poland, e.g. H. Stehle, L. Zimmerer or H.-J. Orth), as well as occasionally visiting scientists, businessmen and artists. A small percentage were women (two articles were used: Margit Staber, Eka von

69 M. Staber, drawings H. Fries, *Werktag in Warschau – Sonntag in Krakau*, NZZ, 18 May 1969.

70 The significance of this perspective has recently been pointed out by Błażej Brzostek in an erudite book about Warsaw and Bucharest (*Paryże Innej Europy. Warszawa i Bukareszt, XIX i XX wiek*, Warszawa 2015; the author, however, made virtually no reference to sources written in German) and Krzysztof Ruchniewicz and Marek Zybura in an anthology of account concerning Wrocław (*Orbis Wratislaviae. Wrocław w relacjach dawnych i współczesnych*, Wrocław 2018).

Merveldt). The texts contain a wide spectrum of observations – from public space (stations, hotels, urban and architectural landscape, shops), through the appearance and behaviour of residents, to politics (both the lack of aggressive propaganda and the events of 1956 and 1968). Comparing Warsaw with other capitals, mainly Moscow and Berlin (eastern), was a natural procedure. And although the reportages does not lack critical remarks, positive opinions prevailed, emphasizing the modernity and “westernization” of the Polish capital.

Keywords: Warsaw, Germany, 1955–1970, travels, reportages