Article

Memorial Ambivalences in Postcommunist Romania: Generational Attitudes towards the Symbolic Legacy of Communism

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Abstract: After the demise of state socialism, public space became an issue of contention that occupied an important place within societies' efforts to come to terms with the recent past. Extant scholarship documented extensively how postcommunist societies in Central and Eastern Europe have reconfigured the public space by removing the symbolic presence of the former regime (e.g., monuments and statues, but also place- and street names). However, there is a scarcity of research done on exploring the reception of these broad changes brought to the public statuary and urban nomenclature. In this study, we aim to contribute to this nascent strand of literature by investigating the generational differences in social attitudes towards the symbolic transformation of public space in postcommunist Romania. Data collected through a national web-survey conducted in February 2021 (n = 1156) revealed significant intergenerational differences regarding the removal of monuments and the renaming of streets. In particular, higher approval of such memory work was found among the generations born during communism in comparison to the postcommunist generation. Taking stock of these generational differences, as well as the factors underpinning them, contributes to a better understanding of how ordinary people relate to the politics of memory enacted in transforming societies.

Keywords: postcommunism; street names; monuments; youth; postmemory; toponymy; Romania

1. Introduction

Statues and monuments are the material embodiments of political power. Displayed ostensibly in public space as political objects and memorial artefacts, they commemorate the past, materialize ideology, and legitimate the present. As material lieux de mémoire, monuments politicize public space and underpin the status quo [1]. It is, then, no surprise that their demolition has become an iconic feature of political transformation and regime change. Although the practice has been employed recently in the context of the contestation of the racial and colonial past in the United Kingdom and the United States [2], this was nowhere more evident than in the Central and Eastern Europeans' struggle against the communist regimes.

In those politically charged moments, the demolition of communist monuments erupted spontaneously in spectacular choreographies of performative power and came to define the fall of communism throughout the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region. In this regard, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall epitomized the fall of the Iron Curtain and, by extension, symbolized the material destruction of state socialism. In Warsaw, the toppling of Felix Dzerzhinsky's statue from a central square was conceived of by the Polish people engaged in this iconoclastic act of revolutionary power as a public execution of the Soviet rule (Dzerzhinsky was the founder of the Soviet Union's secret police services, the Cheka and the KGB) [3] (p. 12). Similar acts of collective rage and symbolic revenge unfolded on the streets of Bucharest in early 1990. In Romania's capital city, an angry mob

dismantled V.I. Lenin's monumental statue with a crane and then crossed the city to tear down the statue of Dr. Petru Groza [4] (p. 187).

In comparison, much less spectacular are the renaming of streets and other urban toponymies that constitute an unmistakable "ritual of revolution", following closely in the wake of a major shift in a society's structures of authority, legitimacy, and power [5]. Despite their rather unspectacular fashion, street renaming after a political regime change tend to penetrate much deeper into the social system. Just like the tearing down of statues and other monuments, the renaming of street nomenclature restructures the symbolic configuration of the public space. However, the latter also become a pervasive presence of the regime change in people's daily lives, as the renaming of streets affects the address system and thus changes the administrative identity of ordinary people.

After the demise of state-socialism and the overthrow of the dictatorial regime in December 1989, Romania's urban spaces were subjected to a broad process of revision comprising both material reconfigurations (such as the removal of monuments and statues) and toponymic revisions (the renaming of the street nomenclature). Despite the large-scale campaign of cleansing the landscape from the ideological relics of communism occurred at the level of each city throughout the country, the process was never fully accomplished. Some toponymic leftovers survived unscathed: for example, Str. Dr. Petru Groza is still in place in Galați, commemorating the Romanian communist leader, while in a small town near Bucharest, people continue to live on Str. Vasile Roaită, the namesake of an interwar communist activist who was killed during a workers' strike [6].

However, the reception by ordinary people of these changes that reshaped symbolically and materially the urban space has been largely missing from social researchers' agenda. In this paper we set out to investigate the social attitudes towards the reconfiguration of Romania's topo-political order and its memorial landscape after the fall of communism. In the succeeding sections, we present an overview of the postcommunist reconfigurations occurred in Romania in terms of street name changes and the removal of public monuments. Next, we review the scholarship on the monumental politics and street renaming in the Central and Eastern Europe (with a strong focus on postcommunist Romania) and argue that its main limitation consists in the lack of approaches exploring the popular reception of these changes, as well as the undocumented influence of socio-demographic factors in shaping these attitudes (such as age and gender). Based on these considerations, our paper aims to cover some of these gaps by exploring the generational differences in the social attitudes towards the revision of spatialized memory in postcommunist Romania.

1.1. Crumbling Socio-Spatial Orders

In contrast to other countries from the socialist bloc, where the regime change was negotiated and the transfer of power was peaceful, in Romania it was the violent revolution of December 1989 that marked the implosion of the communist order. The breakdown of Nicolae Ceaușescu's communist regime was generated by a "non-utopian revolution" [7] that was nevertheless violent and claimed the life of over 1100 people [8,9].

The breakdown of the communist order in Romania was epitomized by the execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena on 25 December 1989. Immediately after the seizure of state power, the new political leadership started dismantling the power structures and the institutional apparatus of the communist regime. To this purpose, the first decree-laws issued by the new ruling authority—the National Salvation Front Council—repealed the Decree 770 on abortion and the food rationalization program [10] as well as the capital punishment [11]. Other decrees targeted symbolic features and changed the name and state symbols of the country (the Socialist Republic of Romania was renamed into Romania, the anthem, coats of arms, and the national day were also changed). In addition, in the wake of the regime change, the new ruling power also developed the legal framework for the renaming of toponymy [12].

This legal framework was deemed necessary for organizing the process of destructuring what we suggest calling the communist topo-political order: that is, the material and symbolic order pillared upon toponomastics and public monuments. As spatial practices of politicizing space, place (re)naming and monument (re)making provided the communist regime with powerful means of inscribing its ideological ethos into the urban landscape. After the revolutionary overthrow, the emerging post-dictatorial regime inherited a territory fraught with the material symbols and textual artefacts of the former communist order. These were the monuments and statues (material symbols) and the placenames (textual artefacts) which, together with the commemorative plaques (material-textual hybrids), constituted the core components of the communist regime's memorial landscape and formed its political geography of public memory.

The communist seizure of power was initiated during the midst of the Second World War. On 23 August 1944 Romania swapped sides and fought thereafter with the Soviet Union against their former ally, the Nazi Third Reich, and less than a year later, on 6 March 1945, the first communist-ruled government led by Dr. Petru Groza, was being installed in power. Shortly after, the communist appropriation of state power was completed with the abolition of the monarchy and the proclamation of the Romanian Popular Republic (R.P.R.) on 30 December 1947. In Maoz Azaryahu's terms, this regime change was followed by the "ritual of revolution" consisting of a massive overhaul of the country's toponymic order [5]. Not only the name of the country was changed, but so were numerous towns, which were renamed to honor either the leaders of the Soviet Union (e.g., Brașov was baptized Orașul Stalin/Stalin City between 1950 and 1960) or heroes from the Romanian workers' emerging martyrology (e.g., Eforie Sud, a small town at the Black Sea which was renamed Carmen-Sylva in 1928 with the literary name of Queen Elisabeth of Romania, became Vasile Roaită in 1949, name thus after the hero of the 1933 rail workers' strike in Bucharest from the Grivița Workshops) [13,14].

However, the heaviest toponymic changes were made in the nomenclature of cities throughout the country, where countless streets as well as schools, institutions (museums, hospitals, theatres, libraries, etc.), factories, stadiums—including seemingly banal places such as bakeries and grocery shops—were replaced with names celebrating the new regime, the Soviet Union, and its socialist ideology. In Bucharest, political geographers have documented the rewriting of the urban namescape and counted over 150 street that were renamed until the end of 1948 [15] (p. 137). Similar changes were registered across the country during the late 1940s and 1950s: in cities from Transylvania such as Sibiu, for instance, the renaming campaign was even broader in scope and implied the changing of more than half of the existing street nomenclature [16] (p. 54).

1.2. Postcommunist Reconfigurations

To legitimate the regime change, the emerging postcommunist political leadership engaged in a process of purging the landscape from the symbolic rubbles of communism: that is, the toponymic residua of the former regime inscribed in urban namescapes, and the monumental legacies materialized in the public statuary and busts. In Bucharest, Lenin's and Dr. Petru Groza's statues were taken by storm by an infuriated mob and demolished on 5 March 1990 in a spectacular act of anticommunist iconoclasm (these monumental statues were dumped on the courtyard of the Mogoșoaia Palace near Bucharest, where they suffered multiple acts of vandalism). A similar postcommunist fate was reserved for the busts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, unveiled in 1971 in the (renamed) Marx–Engels Square. After their removal, these material totems of communism were deposited faced down along with Lenin's and Groza's statues [17]. The capital-city's urban namescape was also subjected to serious remaking, as almost 300 streets were renamed by 1993. These streets, most of them located in the central area, were either renamed to display the symbols of the Revolution and to commemorate its victims or reverted to their pre-communist name in a symbolic quest to revive Romania's mythical "golden age" of the interwar period, including the celebration of the monarchy [18].

These changes reverberated throughout the country in varying degrees of intensity. Regarding the material legacy of the former regime materialized in its public monuments, researchers have shown than some of the statues survived destruction during postcommunism through relocation and recontextualization [19]. In this regard, many postwar monuments erected in numerous places to celebrate the "Liberating Soviet Soldiers" were discretely removed from the central squares and sheltered in military cemeteries, where these unwanted monuments are protected by law against destruction and vandalism. On the other hand, in places outside the capital-city, the scope of the toponymic change occurred in the renaming of urban street nomenclature was generally larger than in Bucharest. In this regard, a research on six major urban centers from Transylvania—Brașov, Cluj-Napoca, Oradea, Sibiu, Târgu Mureș, Timișoara—has shown than in all of these secondary cities the percentage of street name changes was twice as large as that calculated for Bucharest (the average for the six cities is 14.8 percent compared to merely 6.6 percent in Bucharest) [16] (p. 56).

2. Theoretical Background

Extant scholarship on the politics of memory in the postcommunist region and Romania in particular relies heavily on the transitional justice framework to conceive of memorialization as a public act of acknowledging the wrongdoing perpetrated by the former dictatorial regimes [20–23]. Moving beyond this transitional justice paradigm, this paper draws on the body of works developed in political geography and especially in the interdisciplinary field of critical placename studies, where important research was done on the postcommunist politics of street name changes and monumental removal in CEE region and Romania.

In the former socialist bloc, Azaryahu's work on East Berlin provided an analytical blueprint for examining the rewriting of city-texts in a broad range of places, from Budapest in Hungary and Moscow in post-Soviet Russia to Almaty in Kazakhstan [24–27]. In postcommunist Romania, Duncan Light's [18] exploration of Bucharest's changing street nomenclature has been enormously influential and inspired further analysis in other places beyond the capital city [28–30].

The postcommunist afterlives of monuments and statues erected during the communist regime were also thoroughly documented and made the subject-matter of extensive research. In post-Soviet Russia, Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson [31] documented the "monumental politics" played out surrounding these communist material artefacts and developed a three-fold typology of their fate: (1) cooptation and glorification, (2) disavowal and repudiation, and (3) contestation. Along similar lines, drawing on the case of the Democratic Republic of Germany (G.D.R.), Anne Saunders [32] classifies the repertoire of outcomes regarding the monuments erected during state-socialism as consisting of (1) removal, (2), preservation, (3) adaptation, and (4) relocation. In Romania, the fate of communist statues and monuments was discussed by Duncan Light and Craig Young [19]. Focusing on three statues erected in honor of Dr. Petru Groza (1884–1958) and installed in Bucharest, Deva and Băcia (the communist leader's natal village), their analysis points out how "these socialist-era statues have been de- and re-contextualized, translated and re-valued into 'post-socialist hybrids'" [19] (p. 493).

In another fascinating analysis, Light and Young [33] focus on another communist site of memory and its postcommunist reconfiguration: the mausoleum complex constructed in 1963 in Bucharest's nowadays Parcul Carol I (previously named Parcul Libertății/Freedom Park). The Monument to the Heroes of the Struggle for the Freedom of the People and of the Motherland, for Socialism (*Monumentul Eroilor Luptei pentru Libertatea Poporului și a Patriei, pentru Socialism*) was built as a monumental crypt for the party leaders and the heroes of the workers' movement (Dr. Petru Groza, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, I. C. Frimu, Ilie Pintilie, etc.). After 1989, the bodily remains interred in the mausoleum were removed and buried in regular cemeteries throughout the country (for instance, Dr. Petru Groza's corpse was buried in his native village Băcia, in Transylvania) [34]. In their place, the Tomb

of the Unknown Soldier—erected there in 1923 and removed during the communist regime in 1958—was reinstated in Parcul Carol I in 1991 [33] (p. 1469) and [35].

Less covered in the literature—and a major limitation characterizing this otherwise enthralling scholarship—is the reception of these reconfigurations occurred in the topo-political order of postcommunist societies by ordinary citizens. There are, however, several notable exceptions to this observation that are worthy of a detailed discussion: in Timișoara, the cradle of the Romanian revolution, Remus Crețan and Philip W. Matthews [36] have charted the essential tension between the political imperative to memorialize the Revolution and its victims in the city-text and the residents' preference for minimal changes brought to the urban nomenclature. Their study documented the latent conflict between the municipality's commemorative agenda focused on street renaming and the denizens' reluctance towards these changes due to practical reasons. These ranged from having stable nominal landmarks that facilitates efficient navigation to the administrative costs implied by the change of identity cards. Also in Timișoara, Remus Crețan's analysis has shown how the selling of the football club's name by the municipality to private investors triggered a fierce opposition from the local community of supporters [37]. Besides the fact that it was heavily contested, this commodification of the club's naming rights divided the supporters and pitted them against the municipality and the federal football league authorities (on this topic, see also [38]).

In another study, Duncan Light and Craig Young [39] surveyed Bucharesters' attitudes towards the change of Piața Moghioroș (named thus after a Romanian communist official) into Piața Drumul Taberei (a politically neutral name inspired by the socialist neighborhood where the square is located). Based on a rather small sample of respondents (n = 169), they discovered that most people continue to use the old namesake. The age factor counts in shaping respondents' behavior: whereas older people prefer the communist name due to habit (they got used to it), younger persons use it due to ignorance (they do not know who Moghioroș was). If in Timișoara, researchers found a preference for a "politics of practicality" [36], in Bucharest scholars documented "the politics of toponymic continuity" and highlighted the "ongoing lives of street names" long after a regime change occurred [6].

Beyond the regional focus and political topic of this study—postcommunist transformation of urban nomenclatures in the CEE—scholars have grappled with the oft-contentious politics of street renaming in various sociopolitical settings. In this regard, Derek H. Alderman [40,41] took stock of the white community's reactions to proposals to rename places (streets and schools) after Martin Luther King Jr. in the towns and cities located in the Southern United States. Confronted with the toponymic claim to inscribe the memory of the slain civil rights leader in the urban landscape, whites usually counteracted by attempting to contain the name of King Jr. to the residential areas inhabited by African Americans. Such an agenda was contested by the black communities, whose struggle to avoid this toponymic containment pointed out that it would reproduce the already-emplaced spatial segregation and endorse the existing racial relations of power.

In Southeast Asia, Brenda S.A. Yeoh [42] surveyed people's dissatisfaction towards the renaming of Singapore's streets from English to Malay, after the country achieved independence in 1965. Highlighting a deeply ingrained colonialist habitus in the topono-mastic culture, she noticed that "ironically, people preferred road signage and residential addresses in English, the language of the colonial masters, which they perceived as neutral if not superior" [42] (p. 302). Whereas to reach this conclusion, Yeoh carried out a documentary analysis of the petitions addressed to the municipality, in Finland, Terhi Ainiala [43] resorted to a qualitative approach based on interviewing citizens to explore their attitudes towards street names in Helsinki.

Another limitation underpinning the existing literature concerns the lack of analyses focused on examining how various socio-demographic factors shape people's attitudes towards street names and street renaming. Due to the relative scarcity of studies done on the reception of these broad transformations in toponymy and public monuments, age and intergenerational differences did not feature as relevant factor in the extant scholarship.

A notable exception comes from Claudia Văran and Remus Crețan's paper on place and the spatial politics of intergenerational remembrance of the Iron Gates displacements in Romania (1966–1972) [44]. By interviewing members of different generations with first-hand and indirect experiences of the displacement, they show how the flooded region has become a "traumascape" within a shared, intergenerational memory (see also [45]). In this article, we aim to overcome this limitation by analyzing the generational differences in the social attitudes towards the revision of spatialized memory in postcommunist Romania.

3. Methodology and Data

Based on this theoretical framework, the main objective set forth in this study is to explore the intergenerational differences in attitudes towards the changes brought about in the memorial landscape of Romanian cities. In particular, we are interested in finding out if age structures people's reception of the street renaming occurred in postcommunism and the removal of public monuments associated with the communist regime. In addition, we also explore individuals' attitudes towards the legal prohibition of communist symbols and monuments displayed in the public space, as well as the scenario of naming a street after some of the most controversial political personalities in the Romania's 20th century turbulent history associated with fascism and communism.

The main hypothesis informing this research explores the social attitudes regarding the changing political landscape of memory during the postcommunist period in terms of generational differences. It asserts that the social attitudes towards the revision of the memorial landscape in postcommunist Romania varies across generations. More specifically, we expect to find the highest approval of these changes among the members of the postwar generation, that is, the people who were born between 1945 and 1965 and experienced the traumas of communism. At the other end of the spectrum, we expect that the postmemory generation (people born after 1989 and have only second-hand memories of the communist regime) to be characterized by the lowest levels of social approval for this process of toponymic transformation.

To test this hypothesis, we collected data through a country-wide web-survey completed by a nonprobability sample of 1156 respondents in Romania. The research instrument included 89 items and was constructed specifically for this study. Prior to its application, the questionnaire was pilot tested to make sure that the items are clearly understood by the respondents. The online questionnaire was hosted by the Question-Pro platform, and the timespan of the data collection process was between January and February 2021. In collecting the data, we paid close attention to achieving a relatively homogeneous geographical coverage of the entire country and for this purpose, the questionnaire was distributed to numerous Facebook groups organized at the level of all of Romania's urban localities. In addition, specific measures were taken to ensure that the ethnic minorities are also included in the sample. Therefore, the bilingual questionnaire was available in both Romanian and Hungarian. To compensate for the age bias affecting internet users and to make sure that older people are included in the sample, we specifically targeted the seniors' Facebook groups organized at the national, regional, and local level. After preparing the dataset, the data were weighted in terms of age so that the nonprobability sample to correspond closely with the Romanian population's age structure [46].

Measurement and Variables

The dependent variable in our hypothesis consists of what we labeled as the spatial memory revision. This composite variable includes four dimensions, each of these further comprising several indicators. All the indicators were measured with ordinal scales with five values, ranging from (1) total disagreement, (2) partial disagreement, (3) neither disagreement nor agreement, (4) partial agreement, to (5) total agreement. A detailed overview of the dependent variable, its dimensions, and indicators is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Dependent variable: dimensions and indicators.

Spatial Memory Revision	Questionnaire Item
Symbolic dimension	
Street renaming	It is a good thing that the streets bearing names associated with the communist regime were renamed.
Institution renaming	It is a good thing that the names of institutions such as schools, libraries, museums, hospitals, theatres, and other objectives (parks and stadiums, etc.) that reminded of the communist regime were renamed.
Material dimension	
Removal of monuments	The monuments and statues erected during the communist period had to be removed from the public space.
Removal of memorial plaques	The memorial plaques that commemorated personalities associated with the communist regime had to be removed from the public space.
Reconstruction of monuments	The Romanian state should reconstruct and/or reinstate in their original locations the monuments that were removed and/or destroyed during the communist regime.
Legal dimension	
Antifascist law	The legislation that forbids fascists and legionary symbols (including street names, statues, and monuments) is justified.
Anticommunist law	A law that forbids the existence of streets and other places (schools, theatres, libraries, etc.) named after persons and symbols associated with the communist regime should be adopted.
Eponymic dimension	
Nicolae Ceaușescu	If the law would allow, would you agree that a street from your locality to be named after Nicolae Ceaușescu?
Ion Antonescu	If the law would allow, would you agree that a street from your locality to be named after Ion Antonescu?
Corneliu Z. Codreanu	If the law would allow, would you agree that a street from your locality to be named after Corneliu Zelea Codreanu?

As independent variable, we use year of birth to delineate between three successive generations of historical experience and collective memory. As a sociological construct, generations are notoriously difficult to delineate. Within the social sciences, two divergent approaches emerged in conceptualizing 'generation': the first one, with roots in demographic research, conceived of generations as age cohorts (that is, the totality of people born within a specific timespan) that can thus be delimited chronologically. Drawing on the writings of Karl Mannheim [47], the alternative perspective is to conceive of generations intersubjectively, as an age group with fluid boundaries whose members share some defining collective experiences (e.g., the generation of 1914 that was marked by the experience of the First World War) [48].

For the purposes of this study, we draw on both of these analytical traditions and construct a typology that combines chronological criteria with the collective experiences lived by a group of people. As such, we distinguish between three generations:

(1) The postwar generation, which includes those Romanians born after 1945 until 1965. These people experienced the political brutalities of the communist regime and the horrors of Stalinist repression (the so-called "obsessive decade" of the 1950s which witnessed the violent transformation of the social order along Soviet lines) [49]. After the communist state violently secured its basis, the postwar generation also experienced the better times of the 1970s, when the regime attempted to create a 'welfare communism' by providing public housing, education, and healthcare for the working population.

(2) The 770 Decree generation (1966–1989), named so after the 1966 decree forbidding abortion [50]. This period is intimately associated with Nicolae Ceaușescu's rise to power. Ceaușescu became the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party in 1965 following Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's death and president of the Socialist Republic of Romania in 1974. Starting with the late 1960s and increasingly during the 1970s, Ceaușescu's communism reappropriated nationalism and incorporated the cult of the nation within the cult of his own personality [51]. Besides experiencing this encompassing propaganda, during the

1980s Romanians also grappled with the chronic scarcity of a struggling planned economy in terms of basic food and consumer goods.

(3) The postcommunist generation, made up of those individuals who were born after the regime change of 1989 and experienced the ebbs and flows of Romania's protracted transition to market-capitalism and liberal democracy. This generation, which now live in a member state of the European Union (Romania joined EU in 2007) and benefit from all the possibilities granted by being European citizens, is also the "generation of postmemory" [52]. That is, the generation whose members did not experience biographically the communist regime and whose knowledge regarding the former regime is second-hand.

4. Results

The findings are structured under three rubrics: in presenting the empirical results obtained in this research, we start with (1) detailing the descriptive statistics of individuals' attitudes towards the revision of the spatialized memory of communism in terms of generational belonging. After discussing these variations, we move on to performing (2) non-parametric statistical tests in order to assess the empirical adequacy of the hypothesis formulated in the methodological section. Finally, we expand the analysis and examine the variation of the spatial memory revision index in terms of three key socio-demographic features: generation, gender, and educational level.

Table 2 shows the level of agreement expressed by our respondents when asked about the various aspects related to the public memory of the former regimes in contemporary Romania. Regarding the symbolic dimension, most respondents express their support for both the renaming of streets (62.7%) and the renaming of public institutions (67.3%) bearing communist names. The difference of five per cents between the two types of placenames can be accounted for in terms of the latter's greater importance within the urban namescape: while the road network includes hundreds of arteries or even more (Bucharest has around 5000 streets), public institutions are much fewer in number. Therefore, in this symbolic economy of urban names, public institutions are usually perceived as having increased toponomastic (and ideological) value. In the case of both types of placenames, the approval rate of their renaming decreases as we move along the generational continuum, from the postwar generation, through the 770 Decree generation, to the postcommunist generation. The Pearson chi-square tests show that there are statistically significant differences among these three generations ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Support for the reconfiguration of spatial memory after 1989 (%).

Spatial Memory Revision	Postwar Generation	Decree 770 Generation	Postcommunist Generation	Overall	χ^2 *p*-Value
Symbolic dimension					
Street renaming	66.5	64.8	51.5	62.7	0.000
Institution renaming	72.1	68.0	58.3	67.3	0.002
Material dimension					
Removal of monuments	34.1	28.3	13.5	27.2	0.000
Removal of memorial plaques	51.0	40.7	24.3	40.6	0.000
Reconstruction of monuments	73.2	66.7	56.3	66.7	0.000
Legal dimension					
Antifascist law	73.1	69.6	65.9	70.0	0.175
Anticommunist law	59.5	56.8	46.7	55.6	0.007
Eponymic dimension					
Nicolae Ceaușescu	19.6	18.5	25.8	20.3	0.064
Ion Antonescu	41.6	28.8	26.2	32.3	0.000
Corneliu Z. Codreanu	12.0	16.2	24.0	16.5	0.001
Total	31.0	49.2	19.8	100	.

Note: The numbers represent the percentages of respondents who agree (partially and totally) with the various measures of redefining the public memory in postcommunist Romania (*n* = 1156).

The situation differs considerably when we look at the results obtained for the material dimension. In this case, only a minority of respondents endorse the removal of monuments and statues erected during the communist period (27.2%) as well as the removal of memorial plaques that commemorated personalities associated with the former regime (40.6%). The considerable difference in approval rates between the removal of monuments and that of the memorial plaque derives from the fact that during the communist regime, numerous monuments that were inaugurated celebrated the national past (e.g., the Statue of Mihai Viteazul in Alba Iulia, unveiled in 1968) as opposed to the Soviet Union (V.I. Lenin's statue in Bucharest, installed in 1960) and the communist establishment (Dr. Petru Groza's statue in Deva, unveiled in 1962). Another aspect may be related with the artistic nature of these material artefacts. In contrast to memorial plaques, statues and monuments are seen as works of public art that are worth keeping in place due to their artistic value. The same generational pattern, already established in the symbolic dimension, can be observed in the material dimension as well: the approval rates of removing these monuments and plaques increases with age, with the highest values recorded in the postwar generation. Similarly, while there is an overall support for the reconstruction and/or reinstalment in their original location of the monuments removed and/or destroyed during the communist period (66.7%), this idea finds greater approval within the members of the older, postwar generation (73.2%) in comparison to the younger, postcommunist one (56.3%).

Regarding the legal dimension, most people agree with both the currently existing legislation banning the display of fascist and legionary symbols, including place- and street names (70.0%) and a similarly modelled piece of law forbidding communist symbols (55.6%). The difference is, nevertheless, quite large and reflects the dual politics of memory enacted within the European Union: whereas most countries, including Romania, have passed laws against fascism and that prohibited the denial of the Holocaust [53], no consensus could be reached regarding an official condemnation of communism by the EU [54–56]. As before, the approval rates increase with age, but statistically significant differences between generations can be established only with regards to the anticommunist legislation.

Lastly, we asked respondents about the possibility of attributing the names of Nicolae Ceaușescu (the President of the Socialist Republic of Romania), Marshal Ion Antonescu (Romania's conservative dictator during the Second World War, responsible for the Romanian Holocaust), and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (the charismatic leader of the fascist-inspired Legionary Movement in interwar Romania) to a street located in their locality of residence (the eponymic dimension) (on Ceaușescu, see [57], on Antonescu, see [58], on Codreanu, [59]). In Romania, the law forbids attributing the names of people convicted for genocide and crimes against humanity to places, including streets. As such, after the law came into effect in 2002, some (but not all) of the statues of Ion Antonescu were removed and some streets perpetuating his memory were renamed [60]. Nicolae Ceaușescu did not have a street named after himself, in spite of the megalomaniac cult of personality developed for the communist leader. Because he was tried and found guilty of genocide (although in a sham trial) and the judicial ruling was never revoked, it is illegal for a place to be named after Ceaușescu. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, who was killed while imprisoned in 1938 [61], is the only one whose name could be legally given to a street. However, in the currently existing street nomenclatures of Romanian localities, no street is named after the legionary leader.

Assuming that it was legally possible to attribute their name to streets, our survey results indicate that Ion Antonescu is the most popular of these otherwise highly controversial political figures (32.3% of the overall sample support the idea of granting his name to a street). In his case, the older, postwar generation embraces this idea in larger percentages than younger people (41.6% compared to 26.2% among the postcommunist generation). In the case of Nicolae Ceaușescu and Corneliu Z. Codreanu, the opposite is true: the level of agreement among the members of the postcommunist generation is considerably larger when compared to the postwar generation. When it comes to Codreanu, the percentage of respondents who agree (totally and partially) with attributing his name to a street is double among the youngest generation, in comparison to the oldest one (24.0% versus 12.0%).

These results represented by percentage distributions and Chi-square tests suggest that the various facets of the revision of the spatialized public memory during the post-communist period vary significantly across and between generations. However, in order to properly test this hypothesis, a Kruskal–Wallis test on independent samples was carried out, where the dependent variable was the spatial memory revision index. This was constructed as a synthetic index by calculating the average values of all the indicators included in the symbolic, material, and legal dimensions (see Table 1). A non-parametric test was chosen over the one-way analysis of variance since our dependent variables were ordinal with five categories.

The results of the independent-samples Kruskal–Wallis test indicates that there are statistically significant differences between the three generations in terms of their attitudes towards the revision of spatial memory that took place in Romania after 1989 ($H = 24.17$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$). These differences are depicted visually in Figure 1. The boxplot graphic shows that, consistent with the results presented thus far and bringing further empirical support to our hypothesis, the highest approval rate for the measures taken to revise the public memory of communism inscribed in the landscape is to be found among the members of the postwar generation. In line with our theoretical expectations, the postcommunist generation is characterized by lower levels of approval for this memory work.
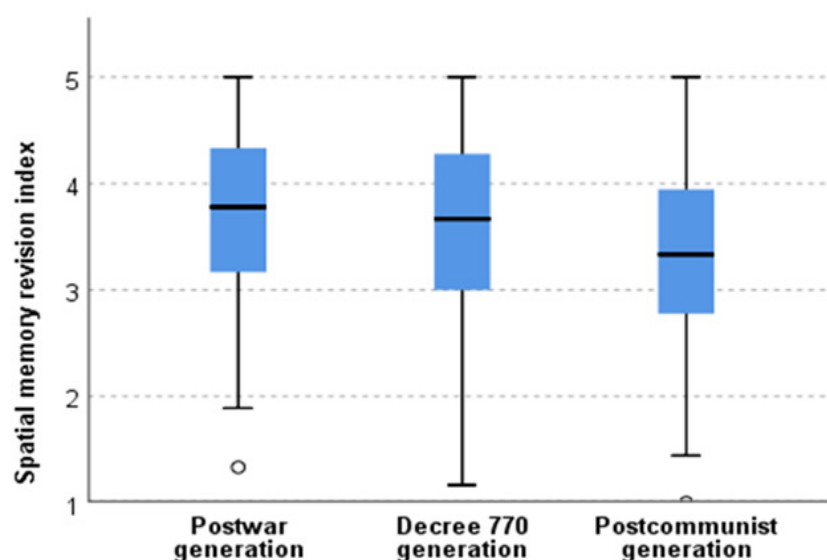

Figure 1. Intergeneration differences towards the revision of the spatial memory during postcommunist Romania.

Next, we deepened the analysis by making pairwise comparisons between the three generations. This allows us to identify the specific differences existing among all the generations and to establish their level of statistical significance. The findings of these analyses are reported in Table 3 below.

The results show that statistically significant differences could be established only between the postcommunist generations and the two older generations (the postwar and the Decree 770 generation, respectively). Between the latter two generations, both of which were embedded in the communist regime, there is no statistical difference in terms of how they relate to the spatial memory revision index used in these analyses. What these results indicate is the crucial influence exerted by living under (and within) communism: the generations who did experience communism—both before and after Nicolae Ceaușescu—endorse in a greater proportion the purging of communist symbols from the landscape. In comparison, the youthful members of the generation of postmemory made up of those born after 1989 and who are chronologically strangers to communism are characterized by softer stances of anticommunism.

Table 3. Pairwise comparisons between the three generations.

Intergenerational Differences	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Adj. *p*-Value
Postwar generation vs. Decree 770 generation	32.908	22.561	1.459	0.434
Postwar generation vs. Postcommunist generation	137.690	28.645	4.807	0.000
Decree 770 generation vs. Postcommunist generation	104.781	26.339	3.978	0.000

Note: Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

The final section of this paper examines the variation of the spatial memory revision index according to three key socio-demographic variables, that is, respondents' generation (postwar, Decree 770, and postcommunist), gender (female and male), and educational level (pre-university education and university education). Charting these variations is important because they enable us to get a close-grained picture of how the attitudes towards the changing memorial landscapes differ among people of different age, gender, and education. The results are presented visually in Figure 2 below.
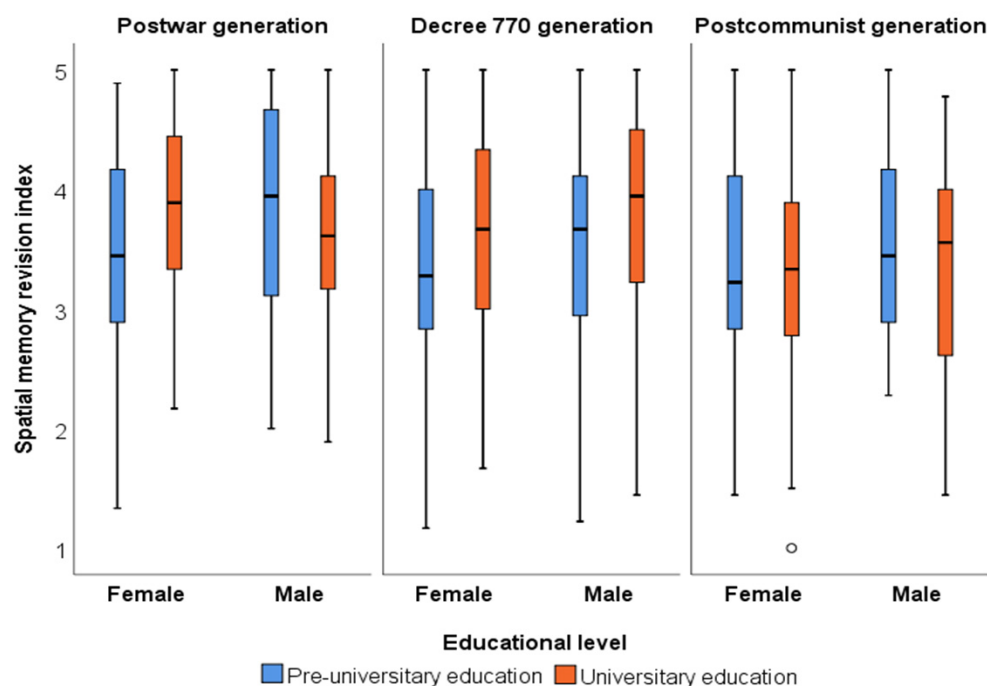

Figure 2. Variation of the spatial memory revision index according to socio-demographic variables.

Figure 2 show that, overall, these three socio-demographic features shape people's attitudes towards the revision of the public memory during postcommunism. In terms of gender, males expressed consistently higher rates of approval than females. Education also matters, since, in general, individuals with university credentials support in larger proportions the measures undertaken to change the memorial landscape after the demise of communism.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The overthrow of the communist regime in Romania was followed by a significant overhaul of the country's memorial landscape, including the removal of monuments and the renaming of places. Besides several spontaneous acts of collective action (such as the demolition of Lenin's statue in Bucharest and other acts of vandalism towards communist monuments recorded in other places throughout the country), this process of reshaping

Romania's political geography of memory in the broader context of postcommunist trans-formations was generally decided by central governmental structures and implemented accordingly by local authorities. As gestures of political power enacted to wrestle with the material and symbolic legacy of the former regime, these changes were undertaken without public debate or democratic consultation.

In this article, we documented the social attitudes of ordinary people towards the refashioning of what we called the topo-memorial order epitomized materially in monu-ments and public statuary and textually in street nomenclature. The data collected through a national web-survey allowed us to chart people's opinions on this underexplored topic in the critical place names scholarship and social memory studies. Our survey uncovered a generational fault line demarcating two collective attitudes towards the remaking of the memorial landscapes during postcommunist Romania. Living under totalitarian rule—which included experiencing the brutal postwar Sovietization of society, struggling with political repression, state propaganda, censorship and pervasive surveillance, but also the scarcity and the lack of basic goods—have left indelible marks of many Romanians.

Despite the widespread nostalgia after the communist period reported in various sociological surveys—which consistently reported that around forty percent of Romanians prefer the former regime over the current political situation [62]—our research has found that Romanians who experienced communism overwhelmingly support the revision of the spatialized memory associated with the former regime. This result can ground a critique of the widely prevailing thesis of communist nostalgia and point out that people may not be nostalgic about the political regime, but after their own irretrievable youth. If this is the case, we are dealing here with an instance of category mistake, which confuses political nostalgia expressed after the communist regime with the biographic nostalgia regarding people's individual and social past that happened to be embedded within a political regime. In contrast, the youth—who make up the postcommunist generation of 'postmemory'—are less supportive of the changes in the memorial landscape. For the individuals born after the fall of the communist regime, removing the latter's symbols from the public space does not constitute a personal stake such as it is for the members of the postwar and the 770 Decree generations. This may be due to the fact that, for the former, "the past is a foreign country", to use David Lowenthal's famous phrase [63].

The main finding of this analysis—that the generations who lived under communism and its dictatorial regime of human rights abuses support more strongly the removal of the regime's symbols than the postcommunist generation—goes against the current struggles to undo the memorial legacy of colonialism and the racial past in other parts of the world. In the English-speaking Western societies, it is the young generation that finds itself at the forefront of these memorial projects of redressing the legacies of the colonial and racial past. These diametrically opposing generational patterns observed in a postcommunist country from the Eastern Europe and the postcolonial/racial Western societies can be accounted for in terms of at least three factors: the political nature of the former regime, its historical timing, and the social nature of its victims.

In Romania, the communist regime was experienced as being imposed from outside, by a triumphant Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War, which employed political violence in its quest of achieving radical societal transformation. Its victims were large segments of the Romanian population, who experienced the traumas inflicted by the communist project and many of whom survived its breakdown in 1989 to express their support for the purging of its symbolic legacies. In the United States, in contrast, the legal regime of racial segregation was dismantled much earlier, in the wake of the Second World War. Demographically, this means that the direct victims of this regime have already passed away. It is thus up to the younger generations to fight for contemporary memorial justice. The situation is different in the United Kingdom, where the driving force behind the process of coming to terms with the British imperial past goes well beyond the racial bounds of the Black community. Here, it is a broad coalition of activists for memorial

justice through historical redress that tore down the statues of slave-traders in cities across the United Kingdom.

In conclusion, postcommunist transformations and the accelerated pace of market-oriented change that accompanied them brought about a generational ambivalence concerning Romania's politics of recent memory. Socio-demographic factors such as gender and educational level also account for these variations, but further research is needed to fully grasp how ordinary individuals make sense of the changes made in the memorial landscape of postcommunist Romania. The limitations of this work derive from its nonprobability sampling strategy employed to collect the empirical data based on the online questionnaire. Although the sample was weighted in terms of age, the sample still overrepresents those with higher levels of education who possess digital literacy and have access to internet. This is especially relevant in a country where a large segment of the population is rural. Fully acknowledging these limitations, the large-N quantitative approach to opinion data used in this paper enabled us to distinguish with statistical precision significant relationships between the respondents' socio-demographic factors and their social attitudes towards the spatialized memory revision in the postcommunist period.

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