

Polish Buenos Aires – Polish Traces in the Urban Space of the Past and Present

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Abstract: The beginnings of Polish mass emigration to Argentina date back to the end of the 19th century, but since then, several stages of the influx of Poles to the country on La Plata can be distinguished. They differ both in terms of the number and the social nature of immigrants. The aim of this article is to show how the presence of the Polish immigrants community was reflected in the urban space and cultural life of the capital of Argentina. This study investigates the material traces of presence, such as monuments, squares, buildings, commemorative plaques, as well as its intangible dimension: the activities of Polish organizations, Polish schools and parishes, Polish festivals, which have been part of the ethnically diverse urban landscape of Buenos Aires for years.

Key words: city, immigration, Polish diaspora, urban culture, Argentina

The growth of Buenos Aires – an introduction

In the category of urban areas with a population exceeding 10 million, Buenos Aires is the 17th biggest city in the world (DWUA 2020) and the fourth in both Americas (beside São Paulo, Mexico and New York); it is also the second biggest city in South

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America. Though the existence of megacities in countries whose population exceed 300 million (The USA), 200 million (Brazil) or 100 million (Mexico), the formation of a town with more than 16 million inhabitants in a country whose population amounts to 40 million people is not so clear. Argentina's territory is the 8th biggest one in the world³ so the disproportional settlement cannot be explained by limitation of the area. It is also worth noting that 92% of Argentinians live in towns (the Polish figure is 60%) (Banco Mundial, 2019), half of the population are settled in towns of more than 500 000 inhabitants and 37% live in the capital (Clarín 2016).

The figures support the opinion of the Argentinian writer and former president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento expressed in his book *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants; Or, Civilization and Barbarism* in which he stressed the European influence on the development of Buenos Aires:

Communication with all the European nations was ever, even from the outset, more complete here than in any other part of Spanish America; and now, in ten years' time (but only, be it understood, in Buenos Ayres), there comes to pass radical replacement of the Spanish by the European spirit. We have only to take a list of the residents in and about Buenos Ayres to see how many natives of the country bear English, French, German, or Italian surnames. (Sarmiento 1868: 123)

However, it should be emphasized that from today's perspective the views formulated by Sarmiento in the 19th century are anachronistic. This does not change the fact that his work has contributed to making Argentina one of the most urbanized countries in the world. Thanks to its rich history in which the immigration of people from different parts of the world⁴ played the most important role, Buenos Aires became a town of a complex national-ethnic and demographic structure – this quality is now vivid in the urban area and cultural life.

Among the variety of architectural styles one can find the colonial style which shows the influence of Spanish colonizers (Cabildo of Buenos Aires, Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar), classicism (Palace of the Argentine National Congress, Colón Theater, Casa Rosada), Art Nouveau (Palacio Barolo, Confitería del Molino), and Art Decó (Opera Theatre, Kavanagh Building), however, this is eclecticism which dominates the architecture of the Argentinian capital (Palace of Justice, Palace of Running Water) (Guía del Patrimonio Cultural de Buenos Aires 2008).

As Ewa Kubiak (2016: 355) rightly admits, the eclectic forms perfectly mirror the conspicuously diversified ethnic structure of the artists who created the architectural fabric of the town: the Italians, Swedes, Norwegians, French, and English. Thanks to

³ The comparison of the territories of Poland and Argentina would show that Argentina contains as many as nine areas of Poland.

⁴ In 1857–1949 the populace of Europeans in Argentina got increased by about seven million; their potential and effort contributed to the fact that in the first half of the 20th century Argentina was among the richest countries in the world (Guillermo-Sajdak, 2015: 26).

them one can find British infrastructure, French patterns of city plans, and Italian buildings in Buenos Aires (Rodríguez 2017). An intensive development of the town took place at the turn of the 19th and 20th century giving the growth of population from 34 000 in 1800 to 1,5 million in 1914 (Kubiak 2016:356).

It is worth noting that the modernization of the town was accompanied by changes in the social fabric: the citizens were becoming better educated, enlightened, and, most of all, more European (Gorelik 2010: 23–28). Examples of fascination with European culture can be found in the language usage: it was chic to intersperse an utterance with French or English words (Rodríguez 2017).

According to Sarmiento the attitude of openness to European immigrants, who were seen as a source of civilization, was a means to develop the country. The saying ‘gobernar es poblar’ – ‘to govern is to populate’ illustrates the belief that the development of the country depends on the growth of population (Porada 2018: 27). This attitude is to be found in the Argentinian constitution of 1853: help to all immigrants who would take employment in agriculture, industry, or education is declared. It is worth noting that though the constitution (CSJN 1994) has been amended several times since then, the entry on the support offered to Europeans who would like to settle in Argentina is still there:

The Federal Government shall foster European immigration; and may not restrict, limit or impose on any tax whatsoever, the entry into the Argentine territory of foreigners who arrive for the purpose of tilling the soil, improving industries, and introducing and teaching arts and sciences.

Nowadays the municipal office of Buenos Aires has a separate section Dirección General de Colectividades (Buenos Aires Ciudad 2020) whose job is to popularize the culture, tradition and history of the multinational community of the country’s capital. Indeed, multiculturalism is the defining factor of Buenos Aires’ identity.

Methodological frames

The aim of this article is to show how the presence of the Polish immigrant community was reflected in the urban space and cultural life of the capital of Argentina. This study investigates the material traces of presence, such as statues and monuments, squares, buildings, commemorative plaques, as well as its intangible dimension: the activities of Polish organizations, Polish schools and parishes, and Polish festivals which have been part of the ethnically diverse urban landscape of Buenos Aires for years. The article focuses mainly on the review and description of the traces of Poles in Buenos Aires and is an attempt to answer the question whether the presence of the Polish community is noticeable in comparison to the activities of other diasporas.

A valuable source and inspiration for us was the work *100x100 Polonia en Buenos Aires* (2018) published in the Spanish language by the Polish Embassy in Argentina and I. Domeyko Polish Library to celebrate the 100th anniversary of regaining independence by Poland. Its author Marta Bryszewski gave short descriptions of the most important Polish places in Buenos Aires which she accompanied with numerous photographs. In this article we develop and supplement the data and information given by Bryszewski – we have based this on the available research findings and the materials we collected during our stay in Buenos Aires in 2019. Our knowledge about Poles' activities in the past comes mainly from historical and sociological research. The data concerning contemporary Buenos Aires and the functioning of Polish emigrants, or rather their descendants, come from available research, websites dedicated to Polish emigration in Argentina, articles in the Polish community press, and face to face interviews we had with the Polish community during our stay in Buenos Aires in 2019, as well as online interviews we conducted via social media on our return to Poland. It is worth noting that the Polish community in Argentina feel closely related to the homeland of their ancestors and foster the relations with Poland – collecting information about Polish traces in Buenos Aires would not have been possible without the direct contact with representatives of the Polish community.

Poles in Buenos Aires – a historical outline

Polish emigration to Argentina began in the 19th century and since then thousands of Poles had come to this country⁵. Stanisław Lis-Kozłowski (1967: 4), a Polish community activist and popularizer of Polish culture, science, and history distinguished five phases of this emigration: 1) emigration after the 1863 January uprising; 2) emigration of farmers who, since 1987 had settled mainly in the province of Misiones; 3) emigration after the revolution of 1905; 4) emigration after the year 1918; 5) emigration after World War II. According to sources, in 1947 the Poles made 'the third group of emigrants after the Italians and Spaniards: the first ones came in the number largely exceeding 700 000, the Poles were counted up to 111 000, and then the Russians with 89 000' (Pindel 2018: 177). Currently, the percentage of people of European origin is decreasing in Argentina, while the influx of immigrants from South American countries like Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru is increasing. The Polish community nowadays is comprised mainly of the descendants of the Poles who came to Argentina in the last few decades. They constitute a noticeable group, though significantly smaller in comparison to the descendants of the Italians or Spaniards who predominate the urban space of Buenos Aires. According to the data from the Buenos Aires

⁵ The description of the phases of emigration is quoted after our book A. Seniów, N. Pielacińska, *Argentyna w prozie wspomnieniowej Józefy Radzyńskiej. Perspektywa językowo-kulturowa*, (2020: 31–41), where the issue was discussed in details.

City Hall, as many as 47% of Argentines have Italian roots – this is clearly reflected for example in the city’s architecture, music, or cuisine. (BA Colectividades 2020).

The presence of Poles in Argentina, and particularly in Buenos Aires, can be examined in the material and non-material dimension. The first one can be traced in the urban space of the town, the latter in the functioning of Polish community organizations, and the activities of individual representatives of the Polish community who had and have been co-shaping the multinational, ethnically and culturally diversified urban fabric.

In our study we shall focus mainly on the Polish community after World War II – in this time about 20 000 Polish immigrants came to Argentina, though the majority were ex-soldiers of general W. Anders army, there were also engineers and university professors. That is why, contrary to the previous waves of Polish emigration, this one is dubbed as ‘intellectual emigration’ (Krochmal 2004: 24). Their devotion to foster the relations with the homeland brought about the foundation of many Polish community organizations which enriched the multinational potential of Buenos Aires.

Polish community associations and organizations in Buenos Aires⁶

The most important Polish community organization in Argentina and the centre of Polishness is *Związek Polaków w Argentynie*⁷ which since 1951 has been housed in *Dom Polski* at 2076 Serrano street (today J.L. Borges street⁸) in Buenos Aires. This 19th-century residence was refurbished by *Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Domu Polskiego* which organized a fund collection and supervised the renovation. The support of the Polish community made it possible to create a unique and elegant place where the emigrants and their descendants could and can preserve Polish tradition and culture. *Dom Polski* has been the haven of Polishness where numerous events to celebrate the homeland of the ancestors are organized, where Polish guests are received, and the legacy of the Polish community in Argentina is taken care of. The place hosted theatrical performances of outstanding Polish plays (e.g. *Wesele*, *Śluby panieńskie*, *Moralność pani Dulskiej*) staged by such companies as *Teatr Polski* under Wanda Zbierzowska or *Nasz Teatr* established by *Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów*.

⁶ More detailed information on the unions of the Polish community in Argentina in the past, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s were presented in our book A. Seniów, N. Pielacińska, *Argentyna w prozie wspomnieniowej Józefy Radzymińskiej* (2020).

⁷ The association *Dom Polski* was founded in 1926, then it was transformed into The Federation of Associations *Dom Polski*, *Związek Polaków w Argentynie* was originated in 1929 (Bryszewska et al. 2004: 23–24).

⁸ Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986) – Argentinian writer, poet, essayist, translator. Witold Gombrowicz who lived in Argentina saw Borges as one of his greatest rivals. The change of the name of the street in which *Dom Polski* is placed into J. L. Borges Street is a peculiar Polish-Argentinian paradox.

(Pielacińska, Seniów 2020: 164) *Dom Polski* has a rich cultural and educational offer from teaching the Polish language to dancing classes where Polish folk dances are taught.

The most important of all organizations is *Ignacy Domeyko Polish Library*. It houses the biggest collection of objects of Polish historical and cultural value in South America: about 25 000 volumes, archives, photographs, and recordings concerned with the history of Polish emigration in Argentina. Its official opening on the 4th of July, 1960 (MKiDN 2020) which got the support from the eminent Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, and the then head of the National Library in Buenos Aires, indicates the fact that the presence of Poles in Buenos Aires was notable and acknowledged by the intellectual circles in Argentina. Since its beginning, the Domeyko Library promotes research and Polish culture in Argentina, organizes exhibitions, publishes books, and popularizes knowledge about Poles and Poland. It organizes lectures on Polish literature, book promotions, and exhibitions concerned with Polish culture and activities of organizations of the Polish community. One of the examples of smooth cooperation is the cyclical international conference on Witold Gombrowicz which the library co-organizes with Universidad de Buenos Aires.

Dom Polski was also the home of the editorial board of *Głos Polski – La Voz de Polonia*, the most important Polish periodical which has been published in Buenos Aires since 1922⁹. It is also worth noting that the periodical *Kurier Polski – Niezależny Tygodnik na Amerykę Południową*, which was to be the counterpart of *Głos Polski* controlled by Związek Polaków, was published in Buenos Aires in 1957–1971 (Pielacińska, Seniów 2020:156).

For over 50 years *Dom Polski* lodged the restaurant *Casa Polaca* which since 1982 had been run by Antos Yaskowiak, the son of Polish emigrants (La Nación 2002). Nowadays it houses *Klub Polski*, a place where Polish cuisine and Polish vodka are served. Yaskowiak opened a new restaurant *Lo de Antosh* in Villa Urquiza, a place with a good reputation in Buenos Aires. The cooks, who earlier worked in *Dom Polski*, serve specifically Polish dishes like herrings, borsch, or pork jelly.

Another Polish place on the map of Buenos Aires is *Ognisko Polskie (El hogar polaco)* at 3972 Gorrita Street. It has been functioning since its foundation in 1930. The Polish emigration meet there to celebrate such holidays like Christmas Eve, the 3rd of May Constitution Day, the Independence Day, or to share traditional Polish dinners. (Bryszewski 2018: 24) The interior is decorated with pictures presenting important historical events and portraits of rulers and kings.

Polska Macierz Szkolna, founded in 1949, propagates Polish culture and, most of all, coordinates programs and monitors activities involved in teaching the Polish language in Argentina. It was also engaged in scouting and co-editing the first Polish scout periodical in Argentina entitled *Nasz Znicz*.

⁹ 'Głos Polski- La voz de Polonia' is currently the only Polish periodical in Argentina.

Scientists and intellectuals were centered around *Klub Polaków*, an organization founded by Jeremi Stępowski in 1940. The activities of *Klub Polek*, who always insisted on nurturing the relations with the homeland, included numerous cultural events and charity projects to support Polish children in Germany and satisfy the needs of sick and orphaned children. (Pielacińska, Seniów 2020)

The Argentinian Polish community owes a lot to *Polski Ośrodek Katolicki OO. Franciszkanów* in Martín Colorado. Its foundation in 1958 satisfied the need for religious and cultural life in the big Buenos Aires. The building of the chapel and monastery along with the school allowed for pursuing a variety of activities for the benefit of the local Polish community. Additionally to pastoral and cultural service the centre offers Saturday classes on the Polish language, history, geography, and dances which are still popular among new generations of Polish emigrants. (Wróbel 1986: 347) The centre's mission is to foster Polishness: numerous celebrations, shows, and Sunday meetings of the Polish community are organized. The centre houses *Muzeum II Korpusu*, a vast library, and the archives established by the monastery's abbot father Herkulan Wróbel (Popielarczyk-Pałęga, Szczerbiński 2011: 30), now a great source of information for researchers in the history of Polish emigration in Argentina.

A clear evidence of Polish presence in Buenos Aires in the 1950s and 1960s was Billinghamurst Street¹⁰ dubbed *La Polonesa* and located in the harbour Dock Sud district. Poles had dominated the emigrant populace which inhabited this poor part of Buenos Aires. *Towarzystwo Polskie (Sociedad Polonesa de Dock Sud)* founded by Stanisław Czyżewski has had a great impact on the character of the district whose buildings bore numerous Polish signboards. Today, events which popularize Polish folk and patriotic songs, and Polish dances or cuisine are celebrated on a regular basis¹¹.

Since 1931, in the centre of Buenos Aires *Banco Polaco Polska Kasa Opieki* (a branch of PKO Bank) had been operating at 462 Tucuman Street: it boasted of its own exclusive property and about 10 000 clients. Polish emigrants could keep their saving accounts there, transfer money to the homeland, or settle various matters connected with their immigrant status. Witold Gombrowicz himself worked for the bank in 1940–1948. Though the property was sold in 1955, the Polish community, and particularly the oldest generation of emigrants, still associate it with the services for the Polish community.

Beside the above mentioned organizations, one needs to list other associations whose functioning was dedicated to specific groups within the Polish community like ex-soldiers (*Związek Byłych Żołnierzy Samodzielnej Brygady Strzelców Karpackich, Koło Byłych Żołnierzy Armii Krajowej, Stowarzyszenie Lotników Polskich*), engineers (*Stowarzyszenie Inżynierów Polskich w Argentynie*), and artists (*Towarzystwo*

¹⁰ The former Billinghamurst Street is now named Nicolás Avellaneda Street.

¹¹ On the 100th anniversary of regaining independence by Poland the front of the residence of Sociedad Polonesa de Dock Sud was adorned with patterns of Polish folk art.

Śpiewacze im. Fryderyka Chopina, Koło Artystów Polskich) (Krochmal 2004:24)¹². The post-war Polish community in Argentina focuses on pursuing cultural activities and preserving tradition by the means of radio broadcasts, music festivals, or various celebrations – it had and has influenced the multinational and multiethnic fabric of Buenos Aires.

Poles who achieved fame in Buenos Aires

In this part we shall talk about people who were not active members of various Polish associations, but on becoming prominent personae in Argentinian culture had a great impact on the image of Poles.

One of them was Jerzy Petersburski who stayed in Argentina for almost 20 years. This ambassador of Polishness was appreciated for his talent and achievements. He had the position of a conductor at *Teatro Nacional* in Buenos Aires, cooperated with *El Mondo* radio in Buenos Aires and Astor Piazzolla, the famous composer of tango music (Petersburski 2020); his music composition entitled “All roads lead to Buenos Aires” enjoyed such great popularity that one of the major radio stations turned the initial notes into their signature tune. Petersburski bought a share of “Blue Sky”, a famous bar in Buenos Aires and co-ran the business with a Pole named Kazimierz Krukowski; he would entertain the guests by playing his compositions on piano – one of them was *Tango Milonga* which owes its fame to Argentinian radio. “Blue Sky” was a notable place on the cultural map of Buenos Aires – among the guests there were many distinguished Argentinians like Jorge Luis Borges and Pablo Neruda, and Poles like Witold Małcużyński, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, or Artur Rubinstein. (Krukowski 1987: 112)

The picture of Polish traces in Buenos Aires would be incomplete without Witold Gombrowicz, a well-known person of controversial reputation among the Polish community¹³. It must be underlined that Gombrowicz is regarded not only as an immigrant, but as a Polish writer. His works have been included in the literary output of Argentinian writers – in *El Ateneo Grand Splendid*, the most famous bookshop in Buenos Aires, the works of the author of “Ferdynand” are stacked under the label ‘Argentinian literature’. The writings of Gombrowicz have been important for vast numbers of Argentinians and have had a great impact on many intellectuals: Universidad de Buenos Aires and Domeyko Library co-organize international congresses on Gombrowicz, Argentinian scholars publish books and organize conferences to

¹² Józefa Radzyńska, a Polish writer who stayed in Argentina in 1948–1962 also quotes most of these organizations (Pielacińska, Seniów 2020: 118–180).

¹³ A very interesting article on Witold Gombrowicz’s stay in Buenos Aires which proposes a tourist route following his steps was written by Faryś & Kijowska (2018: 85–102), “Projekt kulturowego szlaku turystycznego śladami Witolda Gombrowicza w Buenos Aires”.

discuss his output¹⁴, and his works are translated into Spanish¹⁵. The apartment at 615 Venezuela Street which Gombrowicz rented in 1945, and in which he lived until the end of his stay in Argentina, now houses the bookshop *Księgarnia Witolda* named so to celebrate the writer. Customers there can buy all the Spanish translations of his writings and related specimens of literary criticism. On the 30th anniversary of his death a plaque to commemorate his stay in Argentina was installed. The fact that theatres in Buenos Aires stage Gombrowicz's plays prove that the Argentinians are still interested in his writings. *El Teatro General San Martin* presented the première of *Ślub* in 1981, and in 2018 Polish director Michał Znaniecki presented his innovative rendition of the play there; in 2009 the *National Theatre* staged a play based on "*Transatlantyk*" which was directed by Adrian Blanco (Bryszewska 2018: 79). In their article on Gombrowicz's traces in Buenos Aires M. Faryś and J. Kijowska (2018: 95) note that the National Library opened a 'literary stop' (*Apeadero Gombrowicz*), a pavilion located at Las Heras y Agüero where readers could buy Gombrowicz's books and gadgets.

In the survey on Polish traces in Argentina Mieczysław Najdorf, nicknamed 'the father of Argentinian chess' occupies a special place (Ilardo 2019). Born in 1910 in Warsaw, this eminent chess player won the national championship in Poland in 1935 and in 1936 represented Poland at the Olympic Games in Munich where he won a gold medal. Prior to this success in 1928, Najdorf took part in the famous contest with B. Glucksberg in which he defeated his rival in 22 moves; S. Tartakower called this contest 'Polish immortal' (Winter 2012). When in 1939 Najdorf participated in a chess tournament in Buenos Aires, World War II broke out and he could not return to Poland. After his fruitless attempts to get in touch with his family in Poland (wife, daughter, parents) he concluded that they had all been killed – this was confirmed on his visit to Poland in 1956. Being sure that he had lost all his family, Najdorf decided to start a new life in Argentina: he was granted Argentinian citizenship, achieved reputation of an outstanding chess player and thanks to the job of selling insurance policies for Berkley de Argentina he became a billionaire, one of the richest and most influential Argentinians. He used to play chess with many politicians like Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Nikita Khrushchev, Winston Churchill, and the then president of Argentina Juan Perón; for more than twenty years he contributed articles to the most important Argentinian periodical *Clarín*. The story of Najdorf exemplifies the policy of giving chances to immigrants to start a new life in the new country. He was highly esteemed by the Argentinians who are still proud of his achievements in the game of chess. Najdorf became an icon of Argentinian culture: he was the hero of

¹⁴ These include i.a. Hochman N., (2018) *Incomodar con estilo. El exilio de Gombrowicz en Argentina*, Buenos Aires; Hochman N., (2011) *Conflictos y posibilidades de los escritores en el exilio. La discusión entre Émile Cioran y Witold Gombrowicz*, Universidad de Medellín; Hochman N., (2008) *Gombrowicz y la sujeción del sujeto*. Revista Kafka, N° 5, México, pp. 46–49; Dall'Oste F., Di Paolo F., (2019) *Basta ya de obras inocentes*, Buenos Aires.

¹⁵ Gombrowicz W., (2003). *Ferdydurke*, Buenos Aires: Seix Barral; Gombrowicz W., (2004). *Trans-Atlántico*, Buenos Aires: Seix Barral; Gombrowicz W., (2005). *Diario 1953–1969*, Buenos Aires: Seix Barral.

Quino's comic strips about Mafalda (Bellón 2020); his success in the 'Polish immortal' game is commemorated in a large chess board with human size pieces located close to Boca Junior Stadium in Flora Nativa Benito Quinquela Martín park – this specimen of art authored by Alejandro Marmo and Daniel Semilla Bucarelli in 2010 is a visible Polish material trace in the urban space of Buenos Aires (Bryszewska 2018: 43). Other examples of high reverence for Najdorf is a series of postage stamps representing his image and issued in 2011, and the annual celebration of April 15 (Najdorf's birthday) as Chess Day that the Argentinians have observed since 2007. Despite his successful assimilation in Argentina, Najdorf fostered relations with other Poles. He was an active regular at a chess salon in Rex Café opened by a Polish emigrant Paulino Frydman¹⁶ in Corrientes Street (Kępa 2020). The café was frequently visited by Witold Gombrowicz who, assisted by friends, used to translate his "Ferdydurke" into Spanish.

León Untroib (1911–1994) is an esteemed artist of Polish descent who came to Argentina with his parents at the age of 12 (Clarín 2011). He has the reputation of a master of *fileteado*, an ornamental style initiated by Italian immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century. Stylised ornaments found on various elements of urban architecture (underground stations, shops, taxis, buses) are typically used in Buenos Aires. Recognized as unique art present in the urban landscape, it was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2015):

Filete porteño from Buenos Aires is a traditional painting technique used for ornamental design that combines brilliant colours with specific lettering styles. It can be seen as a form of decoration on urban buses and trucks and is also used for store signage and increasingly, home decoration. Images used relate back to the city's heritage incorporating social and religious elements, acting as a form of collective memory.

León Untroib learnt this art from his father whom he had assisted since childhood (Stefanetti Kojrowicz 2015). His art, regarded as a perfect representation of *filete porteño*, can be admired all over Buenos Aires. An icon of the town, it is used in advertising materials like leaflets or picture postcards (Colección Mose 2020). His main theme – the tango – appears in a few works. One of them is the front of a venue at 348 Corrientes Street where Carlos Gardel used to perform at night and where the international career of tango began. The name of this venue appears in one of the world's most famous tangoes *A media luz* by Edgar Donato and Juan Carlos Lenci, and the characteristic sign is recognized by tango's fans all over the world. Untroib also authored a board at the crossroads of Suarez Street and Necochea Street in the magic district of La Boca where the tango was born, the mural at Carlos Gardel underground station which commemorates the most famous tango singer, and numerous works dedicated to other tango artists like Osvaldo Pugliese, Horacio Ferrer, Julio De

¹⁶ Paulino Frydman came to Argentina in 1939 to accompany Najdorf who was to participate in the chess contest.

Caro, Enrique Santos Discépolo. His art is full of flower ornaments, completed with folk aphorisms and both humorous and admonitory elements (Genovese 2007). The quality of his art is undeniable, many of his works are exhibited in Manoblanca de Pompeya Museum, others can still be admired in the urban space of Buenos Aires – on signs, shop fronts, buses, or even on cars. León Untroib educated a new generation of artists (Alfredo Genovese is among the most famous ones) and enjoyed the reputation of master of the genre; the commemorative plaque made by one of his disciples Luis Zorz which in 2011 was unveiled on his house to celebrate the 100th anniversary of his birthday is a tribute paid to his art and his greatness.

An equally important person in the artistic world of Buenos Aires is Basia Birnbaum Kuperman. Born in 1927 in Warsaw, she came to Buenos Aires at the age of 8. In 1967 she was granted Argentinian citizenship. She is a recognized artist whose works can be found on numerous buildings, murals, private properties, and public schools in Buenos Aires. In 1963 she opened Instituto Vocacional de Artes Plásticas Uruti, a place where children and young adults have been educated in arts until today. The institute is recognized both in Argentina and worldwide. Basia Birnbaum Kuperman died in 2013; her achievements were frequently honoured – in 2009 the municipal government of Buenos Aires awarded her with the prestigious title Artífice del Patrimonio de Buenos Aires (Arte de la Argentina 2019).

Polish places in Buenos Aires

The urban space of Buenos Aires is a specific repository of Polish traces, of those Poles who played a praiseworthy role in their new country. One of such places which commemorates Polish immigrants is the most famous Argentinian cemetery Cementerio de la Recoleta. The most important and influential citizens of Argentina are buried there – scientists, artists, war veterans, prominent politicians (including several presidents), and the most famous among them – Evita Perón. This is a cemetery and a museum where only meritorious people or millionaires who can afford to pay millions of peso can be buried in (Radzymińska 1978:56–57). Among uncommon monuments there are a few tombs of foreigners, and of Poles too.

One of them is Jordan Wysocki, a participant of the Polish January Insurrection of 1863, who was exiled by Russian czar authorities and found asylum in South America. He was not only a colonel in the Argentinian army but also a scientist, a co-founder of the Geographical Institute who edited the atlas of the Argentinian pampas and designed the famous Palermo gardens (this will be covered later). The Argentinian government awarded him an honorary medal of merit in 1881, and in honour for his achievements in exploring and development of the border provinces he was nominated an honorary member of Argentinian Industrial Institute. The fact that Wysocki's tomb was classified by the municipal authorities of Buenos Aires as a national monument of

history is clear evidence of the recognition of his achievements (Gobierno de la Ciudad de BA 2020b). Other Poles who had their share in the attainments of the Argentinian army in the 19th century were Robert Chodasiewicz and Henryka Spika, participants of the Paraguayan War, also known as the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870), whose bodies are buried in a commemorative pantheon at the Recoleta cemetery.

The Recoleta records reveal an entry for the burial of Isabel Walewski (1847–1847), the daughter of Aleksander Walewski, an illegitimate son of Napoleon Bonaparte, and his wife Anna Maria Walewska who was a niece of Michał Józef Poniatowski. Aleksander Walewski came to Argentina in 1847 as an envoy of the French government to negotiate on the blockade of the port of Buenos Aires. He and his wife lived there in the centre of the town at 177 La Piedad Street for some months. Isabel Elisa was born then, however, she died at the age of two months and was buried in this famous cemetery. After the reform of the cemetery launched in 1881 by Marcelo T. de Alvear, the then mayor of Buenos Aires and future president of Argentina, the gravestone of the dead child was destroyed, however, historians say that the body of the girl was laid in the grave of Maria Józefa Petrony de Todos los Santos Sánchez de Velazco y Trillo, a friend of the Walewski family (Chowanczak; Bryszewska 2018:11; Pielacińska, Seniów 2020: 135). The tragic story of Isabel Elisa Walewski remains in the memory of new generations of Polish emigrants as proof that the Polish diaspora in Argentina included members of aristocracy too.

Among all other gravestones in the Recoleta cemetery there is one outstanding statue of particular beauty. The white marble sculpture represents a woman reading a book to a child. It was dedicated to Emma Nicolay de Caprile, a Pole born in Poznań in 1838, who came to Argentina in 1870 at the invitation of president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. Emma Nicolay de Caprile had a broad education and spoke five languages; in Argentina she got engaged in promoting literacy and was headmistress of the first teacher training school for women in Buenos Aires (Misa 2020). Her merits and achievements are still appreciated by the Polish community and Argentinians alike: the proposal to name a square in Puerto Madero after her shows that she is still in living memory in Argentina.

The Recoleta cemetery also houses the tomb of the Żóttowski family. Zbigniew Adolf Żóttowski (1888–1973), a Polish army officer and diplomat came to Argentina in 1940 as a representative of the Polish government in exile in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay, and a delegate of the Polish Red Cross; he was accompanied by his wife Helena and son Jan Damascen Edmund.

The latest Polish trace to be found at the Recoleta cemetery is the granite mausoleum erected in 1990 by Jan Kobyłański, the then presidents of *Związek Polaków* in Argentina. The remains of famous Poles were transferred there: three generals, veterans of World War II and holders of the *Virtuti Militari* Order – Bronisław Rakowski (1895–1950), Jan Świerczyński (1897–1969), and Jerzy Aleksander Zawisza (1895–1995); Polish duke Leon Hieronim Stanisław Radziwiłł (1922–1973); Adam Dyląg, the founder of

Fryderyk Chopin Choir in Argentina who was laid there in 1999 (Bryszewski 2018:13). There are two inscriptions on the monument. The one on the left reads 'Union de los Polacos', the right one reads 'Familia Kobylanski' – it looks that the benefactor ensured a place for himself among eminent personalities who had been buried there.

In the urban space of Buenos Aires one can also find numerous statues and plaques which commemorate famous Poles – those who emigrated to Argentina and contributed to its growth, and also those who had never visited the country but gained worldwide fame.

An important Polish trace in Buenos Aires is the famous city park *Tres de Febrero (Palermo)*. Its opening on November the 11th, 1875 attracted 30 000 visitors, almost one sixth of the population of the capital city (Stefanetti Kojrowicz 2013). The main originator was the aforementioned Jordan Czesław Wysocki. He also designed the main building in the Buenos Aires Botanical Garden which was first the residence of the National Agricultural Department (1882–1894) and then of the National Historical Museum (1894–1896); nowadays it houses the administration of the botanical garden. Every year, celebrations to honour Wysocki's attainments are organized there. In 1981 a part of the park was allotted for *Plaza Coronel de Ingenieros Jordan Wysocki*. At the crossroads of Pinedo Street and Alcorta Street we can find a plaque with the inscription 'In honour to colonel Jordan Czesław Wysocki, the author of the Great Central Palermo Park, citizens of Buenos Aires. 1839–1883' (Bryszewski 2018:17).

Polish traces can also be found at the famous Argentine Polo Ground (Campo Argentino de Polo) dubbed as 'Cathedral of Polo', a popular place among the citizens. A statue placed at this polo ground commemorates the first manned balloon flight "El Pampero" which in 1907 crossed the Rio de la Plata river. The plaque placed beside tells that the pioneer of Argentinian aeronautics was a Pole called Robert Chodasiewicz who in 1867, the fourth year of the Paraguayan War, was the first one to use the balloon to locate the position of the enemy (Bryszewski 2018: 20). This achievement earned him the respect of both the soldiers and commander general Mitre (Pielacińska, Seniów 2020:135).

In the school 'La Escuela Normal Superior n.º 1 en Lenguas Vivas "Presidente Roque Sáenz Peña' (E.N.S.N.1 Archivo Histórico) there is a historical room dedicated to the aforementioned Emma Caprile, the first headmistress of the teacher training school initiated by president Sarmiento in 1874. Beside Caprile's bust there is an exhibition of her books, notes, and other artifacts which commemorate her contribution to promoting culture and education.

The Argentinians play tribute to achievements and scientific discoveries and inventions of some Poles who had never visited their country. One of them is Mikołaj Kopernik (Copernicus). At the celebration of the 500th anniversary of his birthday on May the 6th 1973, an exhibition dedicated to his accomplishments was opened and a bas-relief depiction of his was unveiled at the main entrance of the Galileo Galilei Planetarium in Buenos Aires. It was authored by a Polish sculptor Adolf Glett (CPAU

2011). One of the streets in Buenos Aires is named after the famous astronomer and one of its buildings bears a bronze plaque endowed by the Polish community in Argentina on the 400th anniversary of his death (Bryszewski 2018: 23). It shows Copernicus surrounded by books and astronomical instruments.

The only oncological hospital in Buenos Aires and the street which leads to it were named after Maria Curie in 1991. In the nearby Centenario Park a bust of the Nobel Prize winner was unveiled on the 150th anniversary of her birthday. The celebration was joined by the vice minister For Human Rights and Multiethnicity, Polish ambassador Marek Pernal, member of parliament Eduardo Amadeo, and a large Polish community; the hymns of Poland and Argentina were played by the military band *Paso de los Andes* of the 7th La Plata Regiment. The name of Maria Skłodowska-Curie was given to primary school No. 1 in Buenos Aires, and in the Bernardino Rivadavia Museum of Natural Science an exhibition dedicated to the discoveries of the famous Polish scientist was arranged.

The Argentinians are also well acquainted with Fryderyk Chopin. The composer's bust authored by the Italian sculptor Pedro Juan Ferrari was unveiled in the Chacabuco Park on November the 22nd, 1944 (Fernández 1990); a plaque bearing his name is an ornament of the vault of the famous Colón Theatre; eminent Argentinian piano players like Martha Noguera and Martha Argerich have Chopin's compositions in their repertoire (Bryszewski 2018: 78).

The most respected and recognizable Pole in Argentina is John Paul II. There are many places in Buenos Aires which have some connection with him. Polish sculptor Stanisław Słonina authored the statue which was erected beside the National Library in 1999. The statue has references to the Gospel: it represents John Paul II holding the cross in one hand and a net in the other one; his bust is adorned with the image of the Heavenly Mother of Częstochowa. It is worth noting that during the pope's first pilgrimage to Argentina in 1982 he called for peace in the war between Great Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands – this was an immensely important gesture for the Argentinians. (Bryszewski 2018: 55–58) To commemorate this event, a plaque which remembers his words was unveiled at the crossroads of Avenida del Libertador and Avenida Sarmiento in 2017.

There are also streets in the city of Buenos Aires whose names refer to Poland: Varsovia Street and Polonia Street in the Liniers district (Bryszewski 2018: 48). They are located somewhat distant from the city center, however, these toponyms may testify to the city administration's awareness that Poles were among all those nationalities who had settled in the Argentine capital.

The numerous Polish signs found in the urban space of Buenos Aires prove the strong relationship between the emigrants (and their descendants), and the homeland they once had left. They are symbols of important historical events and people who played an important role in the history of the Polish nation. Józef Piłsudski has a special place in the hearts of the Polish community in Argentina. The 100th anniversary

of his birthday was marked by a plaque unveiled at the entrance to *Dom Polski*. However, the most important celebration took place in 1987 in the Devoto district where a statue was erected on the 120th anniversary of his birthday. Prior to this, Aleksander Florkowski (from the association *Stowarzyszenie Byłych Kombatanów*) originated the executive committee for erecting the statue; the design was commissioned to the sculptor Selva Vega (Chelmicki 2018).

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of regaining independence by Poland, the bust of Ignacy Paderewski – authored by the sculptor Jorge Bianchi – was unveiled in front of the Polish Embassy in Argentina (Mackiewicz 2018).

Many lesser known Poles were also commemorated in the urban space of Buenos Aires. One of them is Anna Borkowska, to whom one of the 26 plates which make the *Righteous Among the Nations* monument was dedicated. The monument was unveiled to celebrate the International Remembrance Day of the Victims of the Holocaust in 2016 (Gobierno de la Ciudad de BA 2016). As mother Bertranda she was the prioress of a Dominican convent in Kolonia Wileńska, a place nearby Vilnius. During the war she gave shelter to 15 Jews, however, in 1943 the Nazis closed the convent and arrested her. After the war she left the order and adopted the name Anna Borkowska (Leszczyńska 2010). In 1984 she was awarded the honorary title Righteous Among the Nations for her heroic deeds: ‘During the days when angels hid their faces from us, this woman was for us Anna of the Angels. Not of angles that we invent in our hearts, but of angels that create our lives forever’ (Yad Vashem)

The atrocities of the second World War were also commemorated in one of the chapels of the side nave of Buenos Aires cathedral – a glass case which was installed in 1997 displays artefacts connected with the Holocaust like books, documents of prisoners of concentration camps and the Warsaw Ghetto, and prayer books from the concentration camp in Treblinka.

The victims of the second World War are also commemorated on plaques placed in the hall of *Dom Polski*. Respect is given to the heroes of the battle of Monte Casino, the Warsaw Uprising, and 69 volunteers from Argentina who fought in Europe (this plaque was funded in 1955 by the veterans of *Związek Byłych Wojskowych i Obrońców Ojczyzny*). There are four places in Buenos Aires which are dedicated to the memory of the Katyn Massacre (Fundacja Polskie Maki 2019):

- The plaque funded by the veterans of *Związek Tobrukczyków i Karpatczyków* unveiled in *Dom Polski* on August the 15th, 2000.
- The plaque placed on the wall of the church *Polski Kościół Księży Werbistów* in Mansilla Street which depicts a white eagle on red ground encircled with authentic barbed wire with the inscription ‘To the victims of Katyń, fellow countrymen’¹⁷.

¹⁷ The church was built in 1890 as Property of the Werbist order; in 1908, thanks to the initiative of priest Ladislao Reike Zakrzewski it was passed onto the Polish community in Argentina in whose posses-

- The plaque to the memory of the victims of the Katyn Massacre funded by Ricardo and Jorge Nieczyporczyk which was unveiled in the Polish Youth Centre on May the 11th, 2003.
- The picture on display in *Muzeum Wojska Polskiego* which was painted on the canvas of the tents the soldiers of the II Corps used during their stay in Persia; it was authored by a Polish soldier and the painter sergeant Jan Gilowski and depicts remnants of the victims and the hammer and sickle as symbols of the slaughterers, it is completed with the inscription 'Katyń 1940'.

Polish holidays in Buenos Aires

The contribution of Poles in the growth and development of Argentina was officially valued and appreciated in 1995 when a new national holiday – Día del Colono Polaco (Polish Colonist Day) – was introduced. The holiday is observed every year on the 8th of June to honour the first colonists who put their feet in Argentina in 1897 (Sobolewska 2013). Since 2010 it has been accompanied by the festival 'Buenos Aires Celebra Polonia' which promotes Polish culture among the citizens of Buenos Aires (Sobolewska 2011). The streets vibrate with red and white colours, are packed with Polish souvenirs and folk costumes. During the celebration in Avenida de Mayo, the main artery of the town, Polish associations, organizations, and artistic bands present their programs and achievements; visitors may taste traditional Polish cuisine (*bigos*, *pierogi*) or learn about the activities of the Polish-Argentinian Trade and Economic Chamber. The event is advertised by the municipal authorities on their website – the Internet users may browse festival pictures, information on history, or learn that Argentina is populated by 500 000 people of Polish descent (Gobierno de la Ciudad de BA 2020a).

Conclusion

The above examples confirm the thesis that in the urban space of Buenos Aires the presence of Poles had and has been clearly reflected both in its material and non-material aspects. Traces of Polishness can be found not only in the activities of Polish organizations (festivals, celebrations of national anniversaries, commemorative plates, services of Polish churches, or Polish food served in Polish restaurants). They are also to be found in the least expected places and works which seem typically Argentinian and unrelated to Poland (e.g., the works of Untroib). The promoters and founders of Polishness include:

sions it has remained until today. In 1948 the altar of Holy Mother of Częstochowa was installed there (Bryszewski 2018: 63).

- 1) the representatives of the Polish community in Argentina who are associated in various societies and organizations;
- 2) the Polish state whose presence is felt mainly through the activities of the Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires;
- 3) Buenos Aires city authorities.

The capital of Argentina is an agglomeration whose distinguishing feature is multiculturalism. For decades it has been an open place to welcome foreigners. Currently, the city's policy focuses on activities aimed at the integration of different nationalities living in Buenos Aires. The authorities support many initiatives to promote various nationalities: the immigrants and their descendants may cultivate their traditions, foster the memory of their ancestors, and promote their culture among representatives of other communities.

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