

Disappeared – Places That No Longer Exist

In the regions that were populated by Germans until they fled or were expelled at the end of the Second World War, there are numerous places that no longer have any inhabitants at all. Most of them lie in present-day Poland, Russia and the Czech Republic.

Towns, villages, churches, farms, castles and factories – not to mention graveyards, monuments and inscriptions – only appear when people are there for them. What happens to them when those people are suddenly gone?

In addition to the disappearance of entire settlements comes the demise or deliberate destruction of countless European – mostly formerly German – cultural vestiges. These places largely perished owing to demographic change, but also ideological, economic and social factors. Sometimes their destruction was intentional, sometimes it was part of a chain of events whose goal was not to obliterate them. In most cases, their disappearance was due to several different causes.

When expellees revisit what was once home ground, but now lacks the old familiar features, many of them find it a traumatic experience, akin to a second expulsion. Today, decades after the end of the Second World War, more and more of the people who live in these regions – especially members of the younger generation – likewise feel the demise of these places as a serious cultural loss.

The purpose of this exhibition is to piece together the story of this disappearance with the help of significant historical examples.