

**“THE PEOPLE WHO BURN”: PUBLIC CREATIVITY, IDENTITY, AND THE
MYTH OF CULTURAL CHANGE IN BELARUSIAN DISCOURSE**

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This chapter will focus on the collective stories and underlying myths which are present in discourse and are practiced at the *Creative Mornings Minsk* community.

I look at how the participants of *Creative Mornings Minsk* refer in discourse to their personal and collective deeds and challenges as members of this community and how they portray themselves in relation to the community, to the challenges encountered, and to the members of surrounding social and cultural environment. I aim to provide a detailed cultural discourse analysis of the underlying collective stories that give meaning to the existence of this community and its members and that render a particular social and cultural world shared and practiced by the participants of the community.

The main research question addressed in this chapter is *How identity is cued and made relevant in communication that unfolds within the Belarusian practices of public creativity?* The focus of this chapter and the main communication practice of concern is storytelling in which the myth of cultural change is expressed in discourse at the *Creative Mornings Minsk*. I ask the following sub-question to address this issue: *What is the collective story the members of the Creative Mornings Minsk tell about themselves and the world they live in?*

The primary data for this chapter were 17 sessions of *Creative Mornings Minsk* recorded on video between February 2017 and February 2019. Videos represent all sessions that happened during that period and are publicly available at the *Creative Mornings Minsk* website. Each video is between approximately 25 and 45 minutes long. I have also attended

several sessions in-person as a participant-observer in order to get a better understanding of the community and their communication practices from within.

I focus on the discursive hubs of identity expressed through the radiants of acting and relating found in the stories told at the *Creative Mornings Minsk*. I have selected and transcribed the most prominent examples that render cultural key terms and statements about identity, action, and relation in these stories to formulate a set of cultural propositions and premises which reflect the statements of participant value and/or belief about the community, its members, and activities.

In the analysis below, I present the findings as a set of cultural propositions and premises based on the excerpts and cultural key terms examined. As a result of this analysis, I show how the members of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* communicate, create, and maintain collective identities via the stories they tell at the community sessions. I start with the first discursive excerpt and a few cultural propositions to introduce the story, then follow-up with the related literature on myth to embed the story into the appropriate conceptual environment, after that I provide more examples of the story parts via discursive excerpts and cultural propositions and premises. In the end, I combine the parts of the story based on the excerpts, cultural propositions, and premises provided in this analysis to give a summary of the cultural myth examined in this chapter.

Belarus is “really worthy”

The next excerpt and the three cultural propositions that follow address some of the mythic components reflected in communication at the *Creative Mornings Minsk*.

2.1. Creative Mornings Minsk from April 2017 (00:52-3:30)

1. [...] =A:a- и нам кажется, что Минск действительно достоин быть в числе таких=
1a. [...] =A:a- and we believe that Minsk is really worthy to be among such=
2. =городов, как Нью-Йорк, Берлин, Копенгаген а:m:m:m- а- Торонто и остальные.=
2a. =cities as New-York, Berlin, Copenhagen а:m:m:m:m- а- Toronto and others.=
3. =Мы ничем не хуже, может быть даже лучше, и:э:э- я уверена, что мы когда-=
3a. =We are no worse, maybe even better, and:e:e- I am sure that someday=
4. =-нибудь не мы будем- то есть не нам будут давать лекции и мастер-классы=
4a. =it is not we- that is not to us they will be giving lectures and master-
classes,=
5. =э:э- международные эксперты из Лондона, или Нью-Йорка, а мы будем давать=
5a. =international experts from London or New-York, but we will be giving=
6. =мастер-классы для вот этих ребят, которые в очень таких а- м- так скажем=
6a. =master-classes for those folks who are in very such а- m- so to say=
7. =хороших условиях, по сравнению с нашими, делают свои продукты, проекты [...]
7a. =good conditions, as compared to ours, making their products, projects [...]

- CP1: Minsk, and Belarus in general, are “no worse, maybe even better” than such places as “New-York, Berlin, Copenhagen, Toronto, and others” (2.1.: 2a-3a)
- CP2: One day, we will be the ones “giving lectures and master-classes” to “those folks” “from London or New-York” (2.1.: 4a-6a)
- CP3: We are “really worthy,” because we are able to “make our products” and “projects” in not “very good conditions” “as opposed to those folks” from “London” or “New-York” (2.1.: 1a; 5a-7a)

The speaker suggested that “Minsk is really worthy to be among such cities as New-York, Berlin, Copenhagen, Toronto, and others” (2.1.: 1a-2a) and continues suggesting that “we are no worse, maybe even better, and I am sure that someday [...] it is not to us, [...] but we will be giving lectures and master-classes for those folks who are in very such [...] good conditions, as compared to ours, making their products, projects” (2.1.: 3a-7a). What this excerpt underlies is a specific cultural myth which is highly active in discourse in the contemporary Belarusian speech community, as well as in some other post-Soviet countries, – an assumption that local culture and life, in general, are inferior to that of Western Europe, the USA, and other ‘developed’ and “progressive” countries.

A myth can be defined as a story about something significant, which may refer to what happens in the past, present, and/or future (Segal, 2015, p. 3-4). It is not simply a story about something significant, but it also accomplishes something significant for those who adhere to

the myth (p. 5) – it is a reality lived (Malinowski, 1991, p. 81). The story does not necessarily have to be true, but to qualify as a myth, this story must be firmly embedded into the everyday lives of its adherents (Segal, 2015, p. 5).

Myth is not merely a story, but it is also a type of speech, a system of communication (Barthes, 2012 [1972], p. 217). It is a mode of signification expressed in a discursive form (p. 217). Discursive form, in this case, refers to any type of symbolic representation and communication in a broad sense (p. 218). Every myth consists of bundles of relations found in the discourse which are expressed in forms of oppositions that are resolved in the story in one way or another (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 211-212; 226). Myth assumes speaking *excessively* about reality, as there is always value and/or quality added to the form when we communicate something about an object (Barthes, 2012 [1972], p. 274). Speech is not thus just a medium of and for communication, it also shapes and constitutes social life by uniting people into a particular humanity manifested in particular words and practices – it serves both as an act of and as a resource for “membering” in the community (Philipsen, 1992, p. 13-14).

Myth does not stand by itself but is rather tied to an activity or ritual – it is an action, rather than a statement (Segal, 2015, p. 49). Rituals are meant to give form to human life on a deep existential and ontological level, not on a mere surface (Campbell, 1972, p. 44). Rituals are physical enactments of myths, where myths give meaning to this physical form in which rituals are expressed (p. 45). A basic characteristic of myth is to transform meaning into form (Barthes, 2012 [1972], p. 242).

Myth fulfills an important function of justifying existing social practices and cultural forms and serves as a pragmatic charter for the community (Malinowski, 1991, p. 82). It also expresses and confirms traditions and existing group values (Oakley, 1976, p. 156). The purpose of a living mythological symbol is to induce community members to a certain way of acting or being within a group or society at large (Campbell, 1978, p. 88). A living mythological

symbol is thus “an energy-evoking and -directing sign” (Campbell, 1978, p. 213). By participating in the community’s rituals and by adhering to the myths underlying these rituals, an individual learns how to be a competent member of the community and gets an idea of how the community is organized (Campbell, 1978, p. 45-46).

Public myths where common terms and tropes about the community are found and which are available widely to the members of the community, resonate with the existential condition of hearers (Philipsen, 1992, p. 87). They provide the materials for rationalizing and interpreting everyday stories that community members tell each other in small groups or which are used by individuals to make sense of everyday reality they live in (p. 87). A myth expressed in the form of a public or personal story reveals a code – a snippet of culture in everyday communication (p. 87-88).

By studying community myths, one may not simply get an idea about the meanings, motives, and storylines that inform certain practices but also understand how these elements converge in the everyday cultural life of the community, thus making it meaningful to its members (p. 87-88). Moreover, the key elements of a cultural code are made particularly salient in certain stories – the *cultural myths* (Philipsen, 1992, p. 133). A cultural myth thus is a kind of story that provides the community members with resources for interpreting their individual experiences and for communicating personal stories to others in commonly intelligible ways (p. 133).

Thus, on the one hand, there is this commonly shared idea that Europe/US/West is more “progressive” than Belarus, which implies that being like West is to be “progressive,” “creative,” and ‘superior’ in various kinds of ways. However, on the other hand, the discourse from the *Creative Mornings Minsk* emphasizes that this community is not in the West, it is here, in Belarus, and by suggesting that “we are” the “people” who do “progressive” things here, which are “no worse, maybe even better” (2.1.: 3a) than “those folks” (2.1.: 6a) who

“develop their products and projects in such good conditions” (2.1.: 6a-7a), the speaker offers an alternative cultural myth.

This cultural myth presents the members of the local community as both in line with and in opposition to the “progressive” world. The main logic of the opposition in this story can be summarized in the following way: “we” overcome the difficulties to achieve this state, while “those folks” get it all for granted. “We” here struggle to achieve that, while “those folks” do not. That is why “we” are “really worthy,” and that is why in future, “we will be giving lectures and master-classes to those folks” (2.1.: 5a-6a). On the one hand, there is this opposition between “us” Belarusians and “those folks” from “London,” “Berlin,” “New-York,” “Copenhagen,” “Toronto,” and “others.” The opposition between “our conditions” and “their conditions,” while, on the other hand, “our products” and “projects” are “no worse, maybe even better” (2.1.: 3a) than “theirs.”

This is a story of collective struggle which happens in the present moment and which is directed toward a particular future ideal where the members of the community will eventually find themselves in a different state because they are “really worthy.” This talks back to Berdyaev’s (2008 [1948]) idea that Ruthenian/Russian culture, in general, has this eschatological component in it, which makes it directed toward the collective future ideal in a broader sense.

The similar mythic pattern is not only present at one of the meetings, but the story recurs in time and is found in discourse at other Creative Mornings Minsk meetings as well. The two excerpts below and the cultural propositions that follow, explicate the mythic patterns further and illustrate how this myth is being repeated and addressed by the participants throughout the year.

2.2. Creative Mornings Minsk from October 2017 (0:23-1:53)

8. АВ: [...] Итак, я на самом деле вернулся- в последний раз, в Августе, меня=
8a.АВ: [...] *So, I have actually came back- last time, in August,=*
9. =не было, я было, потому, что я был на Creative Mornings London [...]=
9a =*I was absent, I was, because I was at the Creative Mornings London [...]=*
10. =[...] *Dammit*, это было круто, это было ровно то же самое, поэтому можете=
10a.=[...] *Dammit*, *this was cool, this was exactly all the same, thus don't=*
11. =ни разу не грустить и не страдать то, что вы находитесь сейчас в=
11a.=*need to be sad and don't need to suffer even once that you are now in=*
12. =Минске. По-моему, это даже прекрасно, на самом деле- и, блин, это ровно=
12a.=*Minsk. I think, this is even great, actually- and, damn, this is exactly=*
13. =такая же опыт- такой же опыт, как и во всём мире, поэтому, радуйтесь,=
13a.=*the samea experience- the same experience as in the rest of the world, thus, rejoice=*
14. =поэтому, наслаждайтесь, поэтому, я предлагаю начать этот день так,=
14a.=*thus, enjoy, thus, I suggest starting this day in such a way,=*
15. =чтобы еще больше, чем месяц он вас заряжал.[...] Creative Mornings нужны,=
15a.=*that even for more than a month it would charge you. [...] Creative Mornings are needed,=*
16. =в первую очередь, для того, чтобы заряжать комьюнити на месяц и далее=
16a.=*in first place, for charging the community for a month and further=*
17. =вперед и блин, по-мойму, это очень круто, потому, что, когда не было=
17a.=*in advance, and, damn, I think that this is cool, because when there=*
18. =Creative Mornings, вам нужно было самим что-то находить, а так, блин,=
18a.=*was no Creative Mornings, you had to find something yourselves, and now, damn,=*
19. =мы вам стучимся в сториз каждый месяц и говорим: «Чуваки, придите к=
19a.=*we knock on you in stories every month and say: "Dudes, come to=*
20. =нам». А:а- итак, это всё [...]
- 20a.=*us."* А:а- *so, that's all [...]*

2.3. Creative Mornings Minsk from January 2018 (2:37-3:50)

21. =ML: [...] так сложилось, что это движение очень быстро разрослось и:и-=
21a.=ML: [...] *it so happened that this movement has spread very fast a:and-=-*
22. =а:а:м- Creative Mornings проводится уже на протяжении шести лет и:и-=
22a.=а:а:м- *Creative Mornings have been held during six years already a:and-=-*
23. =эта волна докатилась и до Минска и:и- я вам хочу сказать то, что а- в=
23a.=*this wave has also reached Minsk a:and- I want to tell you that a- in=*
24. =Минске очень много талантливых а-, прогрессивных а-, людей а- людей,=
24a.=*Minsk there are many talented a-, progressive a-, people a- people,=*
25. =занимающимися творческими профессиями и не только- и:и- эм- наш город,=
25a.=*occupied with creative professions and not only- a:and- em- our city=*
26. =он абсолютно достоин того, чтобы стоять а:а- на том же уровне, что и=
26a.=*it is absolutely worthy to stand a:a- at the same level as=*
27. =Лондон, Копенгаген, Нью-Йорк и так далее, whadever. А- мы были в Апреле=
28a.=*London, Copenhagen, New-York, and so on, whadever. A- we were in April=*
29. =на Creative Mornings в Лондоне и я вас уверяю, там то же самое, что и у=
29a.=*at the Creative Mornings in London and I assure you there it is the same as=*
30. =нас, вот. Поэтому, а- а- нам очень радостно то, что а- как-то, точка на=
30a.=*we have, okay. Thus, a- a- we are very glad that that a- somehow, a point on the=*
31. =карте а:э- напротив нашего города (0.3) ↑ есть и:и- каждый месяц мы=
31a.=*map a:e- in front of our city (0.3) ↑is there a:and- every month we=*
32. =доказываем, что в Минске тоже есть талантливые и прогрессивные люди.
32a.=*prove that in Minsk there are also talented and progressive people.*

- CP4: *Creative Mornings Minsk offers “exactly the same experience as in the rest of the world” (2.2.: 12a-13a)*

- *CP5: When you participate in our “community,” you become “charged for a month and further in advance” (2.2.: 15a-17a)*
- *CP6: You do not “have to find something yourselves” anymore, because “we knock on you in stories every month” and call to “come to us” (2.2.: 18a-20a)*
- *CP7: Minsk is “absolutely worthy” to be “at the same level” as “London, Copenhagen, New-York, and so on,” because we have “many talented, progressive people” (2.3.: 24a-28a)*
- *CP8: Minsk is now “on the map” of Creative Mornings which “proves” “every month” that we “also” have “talented and progressive people” (2.3.: 30a-32a)*

The mythic story is repeated and developed further in October 2017 (six months after the excerpt 2.1.) and in January 2018 (three months after the excerpt 2.2.), which renders the idea of being alike the “progressive” world: “This was exactly all the same” (2.2.: 10a; 2.3.: 28a-29a) as in “London” (2.2.: 9a; 2.3.: 29a) – an attempt to show that Belarus is not worse than the rest of the world and is a part of the “progressive” world community – this is what *Creative Mornings Minsk* represent in this discourse. This shows how the same idea persists over time at the *Creative Mornings Minsk* project – the mythology survives, and the story continues. The story is told and re-told. The members of this community maintain the idea through time. Malinowski (1991) argues that myth comes into play when a certain practice or moral rule needs to be justified for the group members (p. 86), which the speakers have repeatedly been doing, as shown by the excerpts above.

This is important, because, as mentioned previously, there is a problem of downgrading local culture, local cultural practices, and their products. Thus, saying that something is like in the “progressive” countries allows fostering a different attitude through identifying with the things which are perceived as ‘superior’ and ‘good’ compared to what is done in Belarus – this is a demythization of Belarus for Belarusians, especially for “active,” “really creative,” and

“European-minded” Belarusians. The speakers with their presentations about the “progressive” business, social, and creative projects undertaken in Belarus become a part of this demythization, because they illustrate particular examples of active projects that were initiated and developed in Belarus by Belarusians, and which are successful and important for the local communities, which are “no worse, maybe even better” than “those folks” in the “progressive” world do.

Moreover, it is suggested that *Creative Mornings* “is needed, in the first place, for charging the community for a month and further in advance” (2.2.: 15a-17a). In this case, “to charge” means “charging” based on the idea that this is not simply a local community, but that this community provides “same experience as in the rest of the world” (2.2.: 13a). This means “charging” for “a month and further in advance” (2.2.: 16a-17a) knowing that by participating in this community a person partakes in the global “experience” (2.2.: 13a), “as in the rest of the world” (2.2.: 13a).

Creative Mornings is an international project held in approximately 180 cities of the world. However, in each country and each city it is held, it may have different meanings and can signify different things. Even though each city from the global community addresses the same monthly topic during the meetings, these topics are approached based on the local context, based on local examples, where local speakers give presentations addressing the topic based on their personal and professional experience. Moreover, it has been shown that *Creative Mornings Minsk* is not simply about the presentations, but is rather about the practice of *obschenie*, which has been rendered as being an important element of this community, as well as an essential element of public creativity.

In the Belarusian context *Creative Mornings*, thus, creates a particular meaning: it symbolizes “progressiveness,” embeddedness into the global context among all the “progressive” countries in the EU, the USA, and the West. Thus, the myth activated here

suggests that *Creative Mornings* in Belarus means not simply a celebration of creativity, of *obschenie*, or other things, but also superiority of Belarusian culture and its creations, the equality of things created here with the rest of the civilized world as opposed to the backwardness of the “state,” commonplace, regular things done in Belarus. It is a celebration of irregularity, of uniqueness, of something that stands out among the regular order of things.

Thus, *Creative Mornings* in Belarus become a symbol of superiority as opposed to the official creativity, routine, state of things. It signifies innovation of a positive kind, as opposed to the innovations introduced by the “state” or “authorities.” Innovation by itself may exist separately from the *Creative Mornings*, but in this case, it becomes a part of this community and their particular public creativity, which allows this innovation to appear in a particular physical form. Moreover, this form, which is maintained by its community becomes a symbol of an alternative reality, where innovation is real and where the things are “no worse, maybe even better” than in “London” and “the rest of the world,” as opposed in this discourse to the rest of post-Soviet Belarus, which is “Kolkhoz,” “done bad,” “Soviet-style,” and so on.

“We wake up early” and “believe in Minsk”

However, maintaining such an innovative community requires engaging in particular recurring practices, or routines, which is reflected in the excerpt and the cultural proposition below:

3.1. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

1. AB: [...] Я вам расскажу немного о Creative Mornings. Во-первых, будьте готовы=
1a.AB: [...]I will tell you a bit about Creative Mornings. Firstly, be ready=
2. =к тому, что это утренняя секта, вы с нами навсегда х:х-. Мы просыпаемся в=
2a.=that this is a morning sect, you are with us forever h:h-. We wake up=
3. =восемь тридцать утра. Точнее, нет, просыпаемся еще раньше - приходим сюда=
3a.=at eight thirty AM. Actually, no, we wake up even earlier - we come here=
4. =в восемь тридцать утра и понимаем то, что черт возьми, люди могут быть=
4a.=at eight thirty AM and understand that, damn it, people can be=
5. =выспавшимися в восемь тридцать утра. Мы слушаем прекрасных людей, которые=
5a.=well-slept at eight thirty AM. We listen to wonderful people, who=
6. =приходят к нам поговорить про удивительные интересные вещи с удивительной=
6a.=come to us to talk about amazing things from a surprising=
7. =и очень интересной стороны. Мы видим партнёров, которые верят в Минск, не=
7a.=and very interesting side. We see the partners who believe in Minsk, not=
8. =то, что делают многие минчане ((смешок из аудитории)). Поэтому, вы с нами,=
8a.=like many other Minskans do ((audience laughter)). That is why you are with=
9. =добро пожаловать ((аплодисменты)).=
9a.=us, welcome ((applause)).=

- CP9: “You” are with “us,” because in contrast to “many Minskans,” you “believe in Minsk,” same as “our partners” do (3.1.: 7a-9a)

The speaker suggests that since it is “a morning sect” (3.1.: 2a), there is no way out of here, because “you are with us forever” (3.1.: 2a). Then he describes what the common routines practiced by this community, by this “morning sect,” are: “We wake up at eight-thirty AM” (3.1.: 3a), “actually, no, we wake up even earlier” (3.1.: 3a), “we come here at eight-thirty AM” (3.1.: 3a-4a), “we listen to wonderful people who come to us to talk about amazing things from a surprising and very interesting side” (3.1.: 5a-7a), “we see the partners who believe in Minsk, not like many other Minskans do” (3.1.: 7a-8a). The latter phrase is followed by laughter from the audience – this is a common problem – the lack of belief in Minsk and Belarus in general among the “people.”

Basso (1979), in his analysis of jokes among the Western Apache, has shown that jokes may not simply be told or performed to make the audience laugh, but can also refer to the existing social relations, problems, and inequalities in the society and may thus reinforce the group identity of those who perform the jokes as opposed to those who become the targets of these jokes. This not merely reminds the participants about the existing lack of belief in Minsk and Belarus in general, it also puts them into the symbolic opposition to those who lack this

belief, because, as the speaker says: “That is why you are with us” (3.1.: 9a) – because “you” “believe in Minsk” (3.1.: 7a) too. This suggests that the “people” who come to *Creative Mornings* are those who “believe in Minsk,” and who “believe” in Belarus in general, as opposed to those who do not participate in this community.

Continuing the group mythology, the excerpt below shows a particular achievement of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* community, and the cultural proposition that follows reveals more of the mythic story practiced at the *Creative Mornings*. The story talks about an achievement recognized by the ‘West,’ by the ‘ideal’ “progressive” world, which Belarus is commonly compared to as an inferior place. The speaker tells a story that contributes to the overall myth: “Imagine in your head[s], how many maps of Minsk, more precisely, not of Minsk but of the world you had which did not have Minsk on them. I believe, very-very-very many. Two and a half years ago, we understood that we want that one map would have one more mark of Minsk on it. It seems we have achieved this. After two and a half years, we are on the map of *Creative Mornings*, and this map also has a hundred eighty-five cities of the world” (3.2.: 10a-15a).

3.2. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

10. =Представьте в голове, сколько у вас было карт Минска, точнее не Минска,=
10a.=Imagine in your head, how many maps of Minsk you had, more precisely not
of Minsk,=
11. =мира, на которых нету Минска. Мне кажется, очень-очень-очень много. Два с=
11a.=of the world, where there is no Minsk. I believe, very-very-very many. Two
and=
12. =половиной года назад мы поняли то, что мы хотим, чтобы на одной карте =
12a.=a half years ago we realized that we want that one more map should=
13. =стало отметки Минска больше. Кажется, мы этого добились ((показывает=
13a.=have one more mark of Minsk. It seems, we have achieved this ((shows=
14. =пальцем на карту)). Спустя два с половиной года, мы есть на карте Creative=
14a.=on the map with a finger)). After two and a half years we are on the map=
15. =Mornings и на этой карте есть еще сто восемьдесят пять городов мира. Это=
15a.=of Creative Mornings, and this map also has a hundred eighty-five cities
of the world. This is=
16. =сто восемьдесят пять сообществ- и сто восемьдесят пять умножить на очень=
16a.=hundred eighty-five communities- and hundred eighty-five multiplied by=
17. =много людей, которые просыпаются каждый месяц, так же, как и вы, страдают,=
17a.=many people who wake up every month same as you, suffer as you and=
18. =как и вы и радуются, как и вы. Кажется, это очень классно. (2.0)=
18a.=rejoice as you. It seems that this is very cool. (2.0)=

- CP10: “Rejoice,” because “after two and a half years” of existence “we” appeared “on the map of Creative Mornings” among the “hundred eighty-five cities of the world” (3.2.: 14a-18a)

This excerpt suggests that to “have one more mark of Minsk” (3.2.: 13a) “on the map of Creative Mornings” (3.2.: 14a-15a) is an achievement because this is an international map where Minsk is recognized as one of the “hundred eighty-five” (3.2.: 15a) other “cities of the world” (3.2.: 15a), thus becoming a part of the global community of like-minded people involved in the *Creative Mornings* projects all over the world. This is important because it shows that things that are done in Minsk and Belarus are not only recognized and known in Belarus itself, as it frequently happens but that this is something bigger, something “progressive,” which is recognized by the whole world. This is a symbolic parity with the ‘developed’ countries and such cities as “London,” “Berlin,” “New-York,” “Copenhagen,” “Toronto,” and “others.”

It also suggests that the participants of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* community achieve this because they “believe in Minsk” and Belarus in general. This is an example of how the “progressive” world becomes closer as a result of participation in this community. Since *Creative Mornings* exists because of the “people” who are “creative,” “talented,” “open,” “progressive,” “European-minded” and who are, in this case, a part of the “international morning sect,” it suggests that participating in such communities leads to international recognition and brings the “people” closer to the ‘ideal’ world which is “same, and even better” than in “Europe or the U.S.”

Malinowski (1991) would describe this as a myth of cultural change where heroic deeds which lead to the establishment of customs, cultural forms, and social institutions are reflected in the story (p. 61). It not simply brings “people” closer to the “progressive” world here and now in this story, it also brings them closer to the ‘ideal’ future where those who “believe in

Minsk” and Belarus become the agents of change, and where the “state” has lesser and lesser role in everyday life. This is a kind of the ‘ideal’ future which Berdyaev (2008 [1948]) would describe as operating on the idea of *sobornost’*, where there is a communion of people built on trust, love, and harmony as opposed to the oppressiveness of the existing official forms of sociality (p. 200-204).

The “amazing people”

The speaker continues in the next excerpt, that they also got help from other “people,” from their “partners” (3.3.: 26a) – “the amazing people” (3.3.: 25a) – in this quest of putting a mark of Minsk on the *Creative Mornings* map. The story continues: “[...] we could not simply come to the street and call: “The Creative Mornings will be here” and start. Definitely not. Two and a half years ago, we came to our first partners and said: “Listen, we do not yet have a community, we do not have people, we just have an idea, we have an approve from two girls from New-York...” That time they say: “Yes, do it” (19a-24a).

3.3. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

19. =Да, но такая удивительная вещь, то, что мы не могли бы просто прийти на=
19a.=Yes, but such a surprising thing that we could not simply come to the=
20. =улицу, кликнуть: «Здесь будет Creative Mornings» и начать. Конечно нет.=
20a.=street and call: “The Creative Mornings will be here” and start.
Definitely not=
21. =Два с половиной года назад, мы подошли к нашим первым партнёрам и сказали:=
21a.=Two and a half years ago we came to our first partners and said:=
22. =«Слушайте, у нас еще нет сообщества, у нас нет людей, у нас есть просто=
22a.=“Listen, we do not have a community, we do not have people, we just have=
23. =идея, у нас есть апрув от двух девушек из Нью-Йорка...». В тораз говорят:=
23a.=an idea, we have an approve from two girls from New-York...” That time they=
24. =«↑Да, делайте это». Кажется, сумасшедшая идея, правда, но именно так
24a.=say: “↑Yes, do it.” Seems a crazy idea, really, but exactly thus=
25. =рождаются почти все классные идеи. И:и: без удивительных людей, коими=
25a.=are born almost all cool ideas. A:and: without the amazing people, who=
26. =являются наши партнёры, скорее всего, мы бы тоже закончили очень быстро,=
26a.=are our partners, more likely, we would have also ended very fast=
27. =потому, что невозможно каждый месяц печь самостоятельно, невозможно каждый=
27a.=because it is not possible to bake by yourselves every month, it is not=
28. =месяц самостоятельно что-то закупать, поэтому, давайте подарим кусочек=
28a.=possible to but something yourselves every month, thus, let’s give a piece=
29. =своей любви всем нашим партнёрам. А это двадцать плюс партнёров за два=
29a.=of our love to all our partners. And this is twenty plus partners in two=
30. =года. ↑Уау!
30a.=years. ↑Wow!

The following cultural propositions further explicate the ideas from the excerpt above:

- CP11: *Creative Mornings Minsk* “seemed a crazy idea,” but “our partners,” the “amazing people,” said: “Yes, do it!” (3.3.: 24a-26a)
- CP12: *Creative Mornings Minsk* “would have ended very fast” without “partners,” “the amazing people” (3.3.: 25a-26a)

This shows how “amazing people” help other “people” who have “crazy idea[s]” (3.3.: 24a) of creating “communities” (3.3.: 22a) and bringing “people” together, especially, when these ideas are “approved” (3.3.: 23a) by someone from the “progressive” world – “two girls from New-York” (3.3.: 23a) in this case. As a result, there have been “twenty-plus partners in two years” (3.3.: 29a-30a). There is this belief, which is a part of common mythology, where Belarus, same as some other post-Soviet countries, are perceived as inferior places when compared to Western Europe and the U.S. Hence if something is “approved” or in any other way related to the “progressive” world, then this activity is more likely to be treated as something ‘better’ than the one which is not related to this “progressive” world.

However, *Creative Mornings* and other communities comprised of “the people who burn” – “creative,” “talented,” “open,” and “European-minded” “people,” “who believe in Minsk” are showing that the things in Belarus may be “no worse, maybe even better” than the ones in “Europe or the U.S.,” and with the help of the “amazing people” this becomes possible.

Thus, follows the overall cultural premise which summarizes the ideas from the discourse examined and illustrated above: *Belarus is “really worthy” and is recognized by the rest of the world, because of the “many talented, progressive,” and “amazing people” who “believe” in it.*

“She came back to Belarus from Switzerland... But why?!”

Another part of the mythic story is related to people who have come back to Belarus from the “progressive” world and stayed here to live. Usually, such behavior and choices are

considered as poor choices – it is a common sense that a person cannot simply come back to Belarus from Europe or the U.S. Usually, such people are treated as ‘idiots,’ or as ‘losers’ – idiots because they came to live to a country that has no future, and losers because they were not able to stay in the “progressive” world. There is a kind of stigmatization of such people. It is also interesting that while these people are still physically in the “progressive” world or somehow affiliated with that world and spend a significant amount of time abroad, they are appreciated more highly than those who constantly live in Belarus. Some people even envy those who live abroad. Some think they are upstarts, because they achieved what they have, and traitors because they left while the rest of the Belarusians are living here and struggling like everyone else.

However, things are starting to change, especially among the “creative” “people,” and among the “people” “who burn.” They have a different take on those who return from the “progressive” world. Those who return are more welcome among the “creative” people than usual because they can share the experience they achieved and implement it in Belarus. This is the part of the story which the excerpt below illustrates.

4.1. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

1. OZ: Буквально год назад, я приехала в Беларусь из Швейцарии. (2.0) Сейчас,=
1a.OZ: Literally a year ago, I have come to Belarus from Switzerland. (2.0)=
2. =у каждого в голове, я прям это вижу, появляется мысль: «↓Она приехала в=
2a.=Right now, in everybody’s head, I really see this, appears a thought: “↓She”=
3. =Беларусь из Швейцарии... А почему?!», да, «Что случилось?» :x:x:э «↑Как, как=
3a.=came back to Belarus from Switzerland.. But why?!” yeah “What happened?”
:h:h:e “↑How, how=
4. =вдруг так произошло?» Друзья мои, мне очень понравился подход, который я=
4a.=suddenly this happened?” My friends, I really like the approach, which I=
5.=услышала в самом начале выступления Александра, про то, что Беларусь=
5a.=heard at the beginning of Alexander’s presentation, that is, that Belarus=
6. =появилась, Минск появился на карте мира, еще одной и это прекрасно и,=
6a.=has appeared, Minsk has appeared on the map of the world one more [map] and
this is wonderful=
7. =именно, это та причина, по которой я переехала вот, в итоге, из Швейцарии=
7a.=and exactly this is the reason why I moved, as a result, from Switzerland=
8. =в Беларусь, потому, что мне невероятно хочется что-то сделать классное в=
8a.=to Belarus, because I badly want to do something cool in this=
9. =этой стране.=
9a.=country.=

- *CPI: “I moved from Switzerland to Belarus,” because “it [Belarus] has appeared on the map of the world” (4.1.: 1a-6a)*

- *CP2: Since Belarus “has appeared on the map of the world,” “I badly want to do something cool in this country” (4.1.: 6a-9a)*

This excerpt starts with the speaker telling a story about her return from Switzerland: “Literary a year ago I have come to Belarus from Switzerland. Right now, in everybody’s head, I really see this, appears a thought: “She came back to Belarus from Switzerland... But why?!” yeah, “What happened?” “How, how suddenly this happened?” (4.1.: 1a-4a). This part of the story talks back to this common problem of downgrading Belarus among Belarusians. This discourse, this story about one’s return to Belarus from abroad, from the “progressive” world, reflects the wondering about and incomprehension of this kind of personal trajectory by the people present in the room.

However, the speaker further explains the reason for her return: “I really like the approach which I heard at the beginning of Alexander’s presentation, that is that Belarus has appeared, Minsk has appeared on the map of the world, one more [map], and this is wonderful, and exactly this is the reason why I moved, as a result, from Switzerland to Belarus, because I badly want to do something cool in this country” (4.1.: 4a-9a). However, this seems to be not enough to explain why someone would come back from Switzerland “to do something cool in this country” (4.1.: 8a-9a) and the speaker involves in a further explanation in the excerpt below to clarify the reasons and rationale behind this personal trajectory, which frequently surprises Belarusians.

long absent, there is a contrast: “A bright young generation, very serious changes [...]” (4.2.: 12a). This shows that everyday life, everyday routines in 2007 have been different from those practiced now in 2019: “I have come to absolutely different world, different space, I see different people, and for me, during this last year, it was very interesting to take a look at who are the Minskians, who are the Belarusians, who are those people who will be attending my lectures?” (4.2.: 13a-16a).

“This is an amazing story”

The speaker does not stop here and continues with explanations in another excerpt below:

4.3. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

17. =И я хочу вам сказать, э- всех присутствующих здесь объединяет одна=
17a.=And I would like to tell you, e- all present here are united by one=
18. =потрясающая черта - вы (1.0) свободомыслящие (1.0), у вас есть потребность=
18a.=amazing feature - you are (1.0) free-thinking (1.0), you have a demand=
19. =в самовыражении, но не в самовыражении для того, чтобы доказать, “какой я=
19a.=in self-expression, but not the self-expression in order to prove “how=
20. =крутой”, а для того, чтобы понять, “кто я вообще есть”. И это потрясающе.=
20a.=cool I am,” but in order to understand “who am I at all.” And this is
astonishing.=
21. =Вы не хотите никому ничего доказывать, вы просто хотите быть, вы хотите=
21a.=You do not want to prove anything to anyone, you just want to be, you want=
22. =светиться, вы хотите что-то творить, вы хотите делать этот мир лучше и=
22a.=to shine, you want to create something, you want making this world better=
23. =вот ↑это удивительная история, потому, что предыдущие поколения, э:а- как=
23a.=and ↑this is an amazing story, because the previous generations, e:a- as=
24. =показывает мой опыт, пытаются кому-то что-то доказать и с кем-то бороться.=
24a.=my experience shows, are trying to prove something to someone and to fight=
25. =А ну к черту эту войну:, давайте мы будем что-то творить, что-то создавать=
25a.=with someone. Screw this wa:r, let’s be creating ((tvorit’)) something,
making something=
26. =и вот за счет этого действительно появится что-то интересного, как у нас,=
26a.=and that is because of this it will really emerge something interesting,
like we have,=
27. =да. Это будет не разруха, это будет какой-то креатив и интересное=
27a.=yeah. This will be not a devastation, this will be some kind of creativity=
28. =пространство.
28a.=and interesting space.

The following cultural propositions summarize the discourse from the excerpt above:

- *CP5: Those who come to Creative Mornings “are united by one amazing feature”:*
they are “free-thinking” and “have a demand in self-expression” “to understand
who they are” (4.3.: 17a-20a)

- CP6: *Those who come to Creative Mornings “simply want to be,” “to shine,” “to create something,” and “making this world better,” instead of “proving anything to anyone” (4.3.: 21a-22a)*
- CP7: *Instead of “devastation,” we are creating ((tvorchestvo)) “some kind of creativity ((kreativ)) and interesting space” (4.3.: 25a-28a)*

The speaker suggests that “all present here are united by one amazing feature – you are free-thinking, you have a demand in self-expression, but not the self-expression in order to prove “how cool I am,” but in order to understand “who am I at all” (4.3.: 18a-20a). The speaker suggests that this is something unique, “this is astonishing” (4.3.: 20a), because the people in this discourse “do not want to prove anything to anyone” (4.3.: 21a), they “just want to be” (4.3.: 21a), “to shine”(4.3.: 22a), “to create something”(4.3.: 22a), “making this world better” (4.3.: 22a) – “and this is an amazing story (4.3.: 23a).”

The “story” is “amazing” because this comes in contrast in this discourse with how things have been here before: “The previous generations, as my experience shows, are trying to prove something to someone and to fight with someone” (4.3.: 23a-25a). This suggests that the old ways are not popular among the “people who burn,” and instead of “war” (4.3.: 25a) they strive to “create ((*tvorit*’))” (4.3.: 25a), which according to the speaker would lead to “the emergence of something interesting, like we have here” (4.3.: 26a-27a) at *Creative Mornings Minsk*. The speaker suggests that “this will be not devastation; this will be some kind of creativity ((*kreativ*)) and interesting space” (4.3.: 27a-28a).

This part is particularly interesting and talks back to the distinction between *tvorchestvo* and *kreativnost*’. The speaker refers to *tvorchestvo* when saying “you want to create something” (4.3.: 22a) and “let’s be creating something” (4.3.: 25a), while she refers to *kreativnost*’ when saying “this will be not a devastation, this will be some kind of creativity” (4.3.: 27a). As mentioned earlier, this is the only instance in the *Creative Mornings Minsk* data

presented here for the analysis when the speaker uses the concept of *kreativnost'* instead of *tvorchestvo* in discourse. It is also important that the concept of *kreativnost'* is reflected in discourse with the use of the word *kreativ*, which usually refers in communication to the product of *kreativnost'*. However, in this case, *kreativ* becomes the product of *tvorchestvo*, thus emphasizing its deeper existential and philosophical opposition to the state of “war” (4.3.: 25a) and “devastation” (4.3.: 27a) which are the products of “proving something to someone” (4.3.: 24a) and “fighting with someone” (4.3.: 24a-25a) in this discourse.

By using these concepts in this way, the speaker emphasizes the opposition between “creativity” expressed in the form of *kreativ* and “devastation.” This “creativity” is manifested and materialized in this case in “something interesting like we have” (4.3.: 26a) at the *Creative Mornings Minsk*. “Creativity” (4.3.: 27a), thus, becomes not merely a quality of people, but it also becomes a quality of “space” (4.3.: 28a), which is “interesting space” (4.3.: 28a) as opposed to the “space” of “devastation” (4.3.: 27a) and “war” (4.3.: 25a). While sounding tautological in English, this example shows that one can actually “create” (4.3.: 22a; 25a) “creativity” (4.3.: 27a), which implies that *kreativ*, in this case, becomes a result of *tvorchestvo*, but not of *kreativnost'* as is usually the case. The result of public creativity, or *public tvorchestvo* in this case, thus, becomes a particular form of creativity, or *kreativ*, which is not simply a mere material product but is also something that attains deeper existential and philosophical meanings for the people who are involved in its creation, or *tvorchestvo*.

Additionally, the speaker indicates a direction toward some ‘ideal’ future, where “something interesting” (4.3.: 26a) “like we have” (4.3.: 26a) “will really emerge” (4.3.: 26a) as a result of “creating something, making something” (4.3.: 25a) and which “will be some kind of creativity and interesting space” (4.3.: 27a-28a) as opposed to the state of “devastation” (4.3.: 27a) that has been here before, during “the previous generations” (4.3.: 23a). On the one hand, this links back to Berdyaev’s (2008 [1948]) ideas of *sobornost'* and the eschatological

striving of people toward the ‘ideal’ future, which he argues is an inherent quality of Ruthenian/Russian culture. On the other hand, it shows that old ways of “proving something to someone” (4.3.: 24a) and “fighting” (4.3.: 25a) cannot lead to this “creativity ((*kreativ*))” (4.3.: 27a) and “interesting space” (4.3.: 28a), – it is simply “being” (4.3.: 21a), “shining” (4.3.: 22a), “creating ((*tvorit*)) something” (4.3.: 22a), and “making this world better” (4.3.: 22a) which can lead to this ‘ideal’ common future – to *sobornost*’ – a communion of people based on peace, love, and harmony – ‘real’ unity of people based on *obschenie*, not on competition and on “proving something to someone” (4.3.: 24a) and “fighting” (4.3.: 24a).

“Yes, this is possible!”

As the excerpt below illustrates, these beliefs are not merely a collective delusion, but actually result in real changes in the relationships between the “state” and “people,” between “the previous generations” and “a bright young generation,” between “authorities” and “the people who burn,” between the “Soviet-thinking” and “European-minded” “people,” between “Kolkhoz” and “interesting space,” thus resulting in some kind of hybrid products, spaces, and relationships where “state” and “people” come together. As Anzaldúa (2012) argues, hybridity allows for not merely assembling the separated pieces together, but rather for the emergence of something third which is bigger than a mere sum of its parts – a *mestiza* consciousness which is both a source of great pain and a result of continual creative motion (p. 101-102). Such consciousness, which results from hybridity, is not simply about uniting and joining the oppositions but is also about questioning the definitions of both poles and giving them new meanings (p. 103), as the excerpt below also shows.

4.4. Creative Mornings Minsk from November 2018 (00:00-15:06)

29. АВ: если вы не были на нашей- на нашем день рожденья, которое было в=
29a. АВ: *if you have been at our- at our birthday, which was held at*=
30. =Национальном Художественном Музее, я думаю, что вам стоит прийти к нам=
30a.=*The National Museum of Arts, I think that you should come to us in*=
31. =в Феврале девятнадцатого года, потому что в прошлом году, когда был=
31a.=*February of the year nineteenth ((2019)), because last year, when it*=
32. =Национальный Художественный Музей, у нас всё получилось, это=
32a.=*was The National Museum of Arts, we have succeeded, this is*=
33. =удивительно, это было удивительно по всем аспектам, что у нас=
33a.=*amazing, this was amazing in all aspects, that it turned out not* =
34. =получилось не сложно, оказывается можно взаимодействовать с гос.=
34a.=*complicated, it appears it is possible to cooperate with state* =
35. =структурами, хотя, назвать Национальный Художественный сложно гос.=
35a.=*structures. Although, to call The National Museum of Arts a state*
structure is difficult,=
36. =структурой, потому что он был прекрасный. Девушка Лиза, которая всё=
36a.=*because it ((the museum)) was magnificent. The girl Lisa who was*=
37. =говорила: «Да, это возможно!» И это всё возможно, поэтому, вот, в=
37a.=*constantly saying: "Yes, this is possible!" And this all is possible,*=
38. =девятнадцатом году, всех вас здесь мы уже пригласили, мы с вами увидимся.=
38a.=*that is why, that is, in the year nineteenth ((2019)), all of you we have*
already invited, we will see you.

The following cultural propositions summarize the discourse for the excerpt above:

- CP8: “Last year” we have realized that “it is possible to cooperate with state structures” (4.4.: 31a-35a)
- CP9: “It is difficult” “to call” some institutions, such as “The National Museum of Art” “a state structure,” because state structures are not supposed to be “magnificent” (4.4.: 35a-36a)
- CP10: “Last year” has shown that “this all is possible” and that is why “we will see you” at The National Art Museum “in the year nineteenth ((2019))” again (4.4.: 31a-38a)

On the one hand, this excerpt shows a surprising discovery by the organizers of the *Creative Mornings Minsk*: “It appears it is possible to cooperate with state structures” (4.4.: 34a-35a). On the other hand, it shows a degree of frustration, since “The National Museum of Art” (4.4.: 35a) “was magnificent” (4.4.: 36a) and this is not something that was expected from a “state structure” (4.4.: 35a), it is thus “difficult” (4.4.: 35a) “to call The National Museum of Art” (4.4.: 35a) a “state structure” (4.4.: 35a). This example suggests that “The National Museum of Art” does not fit into the conventional definition of a “state structure,” since “this

was amazing in all aspects” (4.4.: 33a) and “it turned out not complicated” (4.4.: 33a-34a) “to cooperate with state structures” (4.4.: 34a-35a) in this case.

As a result, “The National Museum of Art” becomes in this discourse something that is both a “state structure” and not a “state structure,” some kind of a liminal extraterritorial space stuck in-between the “state” and “people,” a hybrid space which is a synergetic third that comes out of the “cooperation” between the “state” and “people.” There is no cultural term for this kind of “structure” in this discourse, but it is described through both its opposition and correspondence to the “people” and to the “state,” which makes it the province of neither and of both at the same time.

Moreover, this was not a one-time occasion, and the “cooperation” repeated the following year, because “this all is possible” (37a) – “people” and “state” can “cooperate” and create something together, as this example shows. This suggests that public creativity or public *tvorchestvo*, in this case, is not some kind of unique property of the “people who burn,” but is rather an outcome of “cooperation” which leads to *kreativ* and “interesting space” as opposed to “proving something to someone” and “fighting with someone” which leads to “devastation” and “war.”

Thus, it follows the overall cultural premise: *People come back from abroad because “Belarus has drastically changed” and “what is happening here inspires them more” – “all is possible” now.*

The myth of cultural change

In this section, I summarize the overall story narrated throughout the two years by the participants of the *Creative Mornings Minsk*. I combine the pieces from the excerpts and the analysis above into a single narrative, which contains the main ideas presented by the speakers and discussed during this chapter. The story presented below possesses all the basic narrative

features identified by Labov (1972), which are abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result, and coda (p. 363).

When applied to the story below, the narrative features are found in it in the following way: abstract (lines 1-9), orientation (lines 10; 25-28; 33-34; 42-44; 52-53), complicating action (lines 11-12; 17-29; 31-35; 41-46; 51-54; 57-58), evaluation (lines 1-2; 10-15; 29-30; 35-37; 47-48; 55-57; 60-77), result (lines 12-13; 22-23; 37-40; 48-50), and coda (lines 8-9; 15-16; 57-59; 77-79). This is done to illustrate how multiple parts of the cultural myth discussed in this chapter come together as combined elements of this mythic story told by many, as a single text that can be read as a whole. The story is as follows:

Creative Mornings Minsk and the Myth of Cultural Change

1. Minsk, and Belarus in general, are "no worse, maybe even better" than such
2. places as "New-York, Berlin, Copenhagen, Toronto, and other." We are
3. "really worthy," because we are able to "make our products" and "projects"
4. in not "very good conditions" "as opposed to those folks" from "London" or
5. "New-York." "We" overcome the difficulties to achieve this state, while
6. "those folks" get it all for granted. "We" here struggle to achieve that,
7. while "those folks" do not. That is why "we" are "really worthy" and that
8. is why one day "we will be giving lectures and master-classes to those
9. folks."

10. "We were" "at the Creative Mornings in London" and our community in Minsk
11. is "exactly all the same" as there. Creative Mornings Minsk offers
12. "exactly the same experience as in the rest of the world." Minsk is now
13. "on the map" of Creative Mornings and is "absolutely worthy" to be "at the
14. same level" as "London, Copenhagen, New-York, and so on," because we have
15. "many talented, progressive people," like "those folks." "We" "prove" this
16. "every month."

17. When you participate in our "community," you become "charged for a month
18. and further in advance." Creative Mornings charges you with
19. "progressiveness" as opposed to outdated "Soviet-style" official and
20. state-related practices and allows you to become a part of global
21. experience which is "exactly all the same" as in EU, USA, and other
22. western countries. You do not "have to find something yourselves" anymore,
23. because "we knock on you in stories every month" and call to "come to us."

24. It is "a morning sect," there is no way out of here, because "you are with
25. us forever." "We wake up at eight thirty AM," "actually, no, we wake up
26. even earlier," "we come here at eight thirty AM," "we listen to wonderful
27. people who come to us to talk about amazing things from a surprising and
28. very interesting side," "we see the partners who believe in Minsk, not
29. like many other Minskians do." "You" are with "us," because in contrast to
30. "many Minskians," you "believe in Minsk," same as "our partners" do.

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31."Imagine in your head, how many maps of Minsk, more precisely, not of
32.Minsk but of the world you had which did not have Minsk on them. I
33.believe, very-very-very many. Two and a half years ago we understood that
34.we want that one map would have one more mark of Minsk on it. It seems, we
35.have achieved this. After two and a half years we are on the map of
36.Creative Mornings, and this map also has a hundred eighty-five cities of
37.the world." Thus, "rejoice," because "after two and a half years" of
38.existence and because you and "our partners" "believe in Minsk," "we"
39.appeared "on the map of Creative Mornings" among the "hundred eighty-five
40.cities of the world."

41.Two and a half years ago, "we could not simply come to the street and
42.call: "The Creative Mornings will be here" and start. Definitely not. We
43.came to our first "partners," "the amazing people," and said: "Listen, we
44.do not yet have a community, we do not have people, we just have an idea,
45.we have an approve from two girls from New-York..." It "seemed a crazy
46.idea," but "our partners," the "amazing people," said: "Yes, do it!"
47.Creative Mornings Minsk "would have ended very fast" without "partners,"
48."the amazing people." And thus, Belarus is "really worthy" and is
49.recognized by the rest of the world, because of the "many talented,
50.progressive," and "amazing people" who "believe" in it.

51.Because Belarus and Minsk have "appeared on the map of the world,"
52."people" come back and move from "Switzerland" and other "progressive"
53.countries and "badly want to do something cool in this country." There are
54."very serious changes" in Belarus, the country has drastically changed in
55.the last decade. Those who return, they "come to absolutely different
56.world, different space," and "see different people" - "a bright young
57.generation." Those who return "regularly receive offers to move to another
58.country with some project" but "this does not inspire" them "the same way
59.as that what is happening here."

60.Those who come to Creative Mornings "are united by one amazing feature":
61.they are "free-thinking" and "have a demand in self-expression" "to
62.understand who they are." Those who come to Creative Mornings "simply want
63.to be," "to shine," "to create something," and "making this world better,"
64.instead of "proving anything to anyone" and "fighting with someone," like
65."previous generations" do. This results in the "emergence of something
66.interesting," "some kind of creativity and interesting space" instead of
67."devastation." Old ways of "proving something to someone" and "fighting"
68.cannot lead to this "creativity" and "interesting space" - it is simply
69."being," "shining," "creating something," and "making this world better"
70.which lead to this.

71.Thus, "last year" we have realized that "it is possible to cooperate with
72.state structures." "Our birthday" "was held at the National Museum of
73.Art." It is owned and managed by the "state," but "this was amazing in
74.all aspects" - "It turned out not complicated to cooperate with state
75.structures." However, "It is difficult" "to call" some institutions, such
76.as "The National Museum of Art" "a state structure," because state
77.structures are not supposed to be "magnificent." "Last year" has shown
78.that "this all is possible" and that is why "we will see you" at The
79.National Museum of Art this year again.

Thus, this story talks about the collective struggle of the "creative," "talented," "free-thinking," and "progressive" "people." They struggle with "not very good conditions" which exist in Belarus, with "those folks" from "New York," "London," and other developed predominantly Western countries, with "older generations" who follow the old ways of

“proving something to someone” and “fighting with someone,” with the “complicated” “state structures,” and those who do not “believe” in Minsk and Belarus in general.

The reason they struggle is that they think that they are “really worthy” of being “at the same level” as Western developed countries, or maybe even “better,” because they have to deal with more everyday problems as compared to “those folks” in “New York and London.” To prove that they are “really worthy,” they attempt a quest of “putting a mark of Minsk” on the “map of Creative Mornings.” If they succeed, then they will stand on the same level as the other 185 cities of the world who are a part of the global *Creative Mornings* community.

After two years of struggle, multiple raids to the “progressive” countries, negotiations with foreign overlords – the “two girls from New-York” – from whom they got an “approve,” and with the help of the “amazing people” who allowed them to use their chambers for the gathering of their “international morning sect” and its following, “the mark of Minsk” for the “map of Creative Mornings” was finally earned and successfully placed.

Due to their success, Minsk and Belarus appeared on “one more map” and thus became closer to the world community. Because of this success, as well as due to the successes of others in promoting Minsk and Belarus worldwide, the “people” start to “move back” to Belarus from “Switzerland” and other “progressive” countries. The people who come back to Belarus from the “progressive” world encounter “very serious changes” and “a bright new generation” who chose “simply to be,” “to shine,” “to create something,” and “to make this world better” instead of “fighting” and “proving something to someone” as “older generations do.” This change and the “emergence of something interesting,” of “some kind of creativity and interesting space” “inspire[s]” those who “move back” to “badly want to do something here,” in Belarus, instead of “moving to another country with some project.”

When the “creative,” “talented,” and “progressive” people realized that it is “possible” to “cooperate” with “state structures” and that “cooperation” is “magnificent” and “amazing,”

they started to believe that their ways work and that they can continue to do what they are doing, because it leads to “creativity” and “interesting space” instead of “devastation” and “war.”

Chapter conclusion

This chapter showed how the participants of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* continuously communicate an alternative cultural myth among themselves, which pictures Belarus as “no worse, maybe even better” than the “progressive” ‘developed’ countries of mainly Western Europe and Northern America. This cultural myth stands in opposition to the pervasive idea that Belarusian culture and society, the same as some other post-Soviet regions, are inferior to the culture and society of the West.

The myth tells about the “creative people” and their collective struggle with “not really good conditions” that surround them, with “older generations” who “try to prove something to someone” and to “fight with someone,” with those who do not “believe” in Minsk and Belarus, and with “those folks from London and New York,” who have it all for granted, according to this story. The “creative people,” as a result, chose to “simply be,” “shine,” and “make this world better” instead of “fighting” and “proving something to someone.” They choose to “create” an “interesting space” instead of “devastation” and “war.”

The communication of this alternative cultural myth allows for the creation and maintenance of different shared consciousness and identity among the participants of the community where the people learn how to value themselves and their deeds. In this case, the reversal of values becomes possible by symbolically aligning with the similar practices of the “progressive” world and by portraying Belarusians as not merely “no worse” than the Western countries, but also as “even better,” because local people are not simply achieving the same results as “those folks” in “London” or “New-York,” but they also manage to do this in severe conditions, according to this myth.

On the one hand, such mythology provides examples of successful achievements recognized by the “progressive” world, such as getting a mark of Minsk on the global *Creative Mornings* map among the 185 other cities. On the other hand, it provides examples of successful “cooperation” between the “people” and “state structures,” such as the *National Art Museum of Belarus*, and proves that such cooperation is possible. These examples contribute to the overall myth of cultural change, where, according to Malinowski (1991), heroic deeds which lead to the establishment of customs, cultural forms, and social institutions are reflected in the story (p. 61).

Moreover, this mythology also leads to the redefinition of the social environment and offers a different worldview, where “all is possible” and where the prevailing ideas about “state” and “state structures” as social and cultural entities are challenged. The example of the *National Art Museum* shows how “state structures” attain qualities that they were not ascribed before, such as “not complicated” and “amazing.” This “cooperation,” in turn, results in the emergence of hybrid spaces, where the “state” and “people” intersect and interact and where new forms of sociality emerge as a result of this cultural synergy.

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