

**MUTUAL IMPACT:
Conflict, Tension
and Cooperation
in Opole Silesia**

Edited by Petr Skalník

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Reviewer: Marcin Lubaś

This book was written as a result of research grant
“Conflict, tension and cooperation. A case study of mutual impact
between Opole Power Station and the community of Dobrzeń Wielki.”
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Dedicated to the memory of Józef Pękala (1937-2017)
Photo by Petr Skalník

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Preface¹

The Opole Silesia (Śląsk Opolski) also known as Opole Province (Województwo Opolskie) is the smallest of all 16 Polish regions. Squeezed in between Lower Silesia and Silesia regions, Opole Silesia has faced a constant threat of being object of partition and absorption into its mightier neighbours in the east and west. The importance of the Opole Silesia consists in its position on the middle part of navigable Odra River and on an important railway line connecting Cracow with Wrocław. Of nationwide importance is the Opole Power Station (Elektrownia Opole - EO) that at present is being expanded into one of the most powerful stations in Poland. It uses coal that comes from the mines located in the Silesia region and is transported by rail. Until 2016, EO was situated on the territory of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune (gmina) but from January 2017 it was incorporated into the Opole commune. The main socio-economic problem of the Opole region is outmigration partly resulting from relative lack of work opportunities and partly because the indigenous Silesian population received German citizenship after 1990 and settled in Germany.

This book is based on first-hand anthropological field research on the sociocultural aspects of the relationship between the inhabitants of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune and the expanding Elektrownia

¹ This preface was written as part of research grant "Conflict, tension and cooperation. A case study of mutual impact between Opole Power Station and the community of Dobrzeń Wielki." The project was financed by National Science Foundation (NCN), decision no. DEC-2013/11/B/HS3/03895.

Opole. The original research proposal² did not anticipate the partition of Dobrzeń Wielki commune and the incorporation of five villages plus the EO into the Opole commune. Practically all of the year 2016 the research team had to take into account the heavily politicised resistance movement of people of Dobrzeń Wielki, who were opposed to the partition.

The research consisted of interviews with inhabitants of Dobrzeń Wielki, employees of EO and officials of Opole-located government offices. But we also studied relevant literature and archival material. The researchers stayed intermittently on the territory of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune and thus were able to act as participant observers, attending various local events such as the commune council meetings, various celebrations, church gatherings, protest demonstrations, cultural festivals, sport and recreational activities. The village of Dobrzeń Wielki was studied repeatedly since the end of the Second World War when the Opole Silesia was incorporated into Poland after being part of Prussia/Germany for more than 200 years. As such it was an ideal place for an anthropological re-study. The present research is thus completing the dynamic picture of social and cultural change exceeding the period of more than seventy years.

The construction of EO during the last two decades of the communist rule, subsequent exploitation of the power station's four blocks, and finally the present expansion in the form of blocks 5 and 6 have inevitably created an unexpected novelty for the inhabitants of the nine villages that between 1974 and 2016 made up the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. The owners of land on which EO was to be built were confronted with the necessity of ceding their property to the state. The indemnities were small and people did not know

² The title of the project was "Conflict, Tension and Cooperation. A case study of mutual impact between Opole Power Station and community of Dobrzeń Wielki." The three-year project (2014-2017) was financed by the National Science Centre of Poland, project No. 2013/11/B/HS3/03895. The holder of the grant was University of Wrocław. The leader of the research team was Petr Skalník, other members of the team being Monika Baer, Marcin Brocki, Konrad Górny, Mirosław Marczyk, Marek Pawlak, and Ewa Kruk.

what kind of health or ecological hazards they were facing once the construction would be completed and EO would start operation. There was apprehension and even fear among those who would continue to live in the shadow of the huge industrial enterprise.

Those involved in the construction were numerous and for at least some of them a special housing estate „Energetyk“ was built to the northeast of Dobrzeń Wielki. The construction lasted for two decades which gave people an opportunity to get accustomed to the existence of EO and the new housing estate in their vicinity. Also the technologies of exhalation control have improved considerably so that special filters could be installed and the level of pollution which locals feared was drastically reduced. Eventually the inhabitants of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune accepted EO as part of their lives. When the question of the completion of EO with the construction of blocks 5 and 6 emerged in the late 2000, a questionnaire designed by the students of the University of Wrocław under the leadership of the present writer showed that the inhabitants of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune did not object to its realisation. However, this does not mean that the authorities of the commune and its inhabitants would engage themselves in the struggle for the decision to start the construction of blocks 5 and 6.

Once the EO became part of the PGE (Polish Energy Group), a state-owned public company, it lost its status of an autonomous firm. The office of the director of PGE is now situated in Bełchatów near Łódź, several hundred kilometers from EO. PGE is listed among major stock exchange actors in the Warsaw Stock Exchange. As such, PGE is primarily interested in profit generation. The decision to begin the construction of blocks 5 and 6 was influenced by the fear within PGE that the interests of stock holders could be jeopardized. The ensuing debate and activist lobbying, mainly carried out by the Opole-based politicians, unionists and other interested parties, but not by Dobrzeń Wielki commune, eventually led in June 2013 to the decision of the Polish government of Donald Tusk to approve the launch of the construction of blocks 5 and 6. The construction started in February 2014.

In November 2015, in the wake of electoral victory of PiS party (Law and Justice), the Mayor of Opole Arkady Wiśniewski announced his intention to incorporate together with some other settlements five villages from Dobrzeń Wielki commune, including the EO, into the City of Opole. This was met with disagreement by the self-government of DW and population of the commune. Protest actions continued throughout 2016. After a letter by the new head of the Opole Region, member of PiS, expressed support for the plan, the Polish Government approved Wiśniewski's plan on 19 June 2016. By January 1, 2017 EO and five villages were taken out of the corpus of Dobrzeń Wielki commune and incorporated into the Opole commune. This unexpected development impacted our research as the conflict concerning EO and its expansion, now situated in Opole City, was central to our research project.

This book contains seven chapters, each by one member of the research team. The research topics comprised of various aspects of the mutual impact between the Gmina DW and EO, now "enriched" by the issue of the incorporation of EO into the City of Opole. Political ramification of the conflict, tension and cooperation have the obvious priority followed by the economic aspects of the expansion of EO. There are two chapters on economics, one concentrating on entrepreneurial activities, while the second deals more with the economic relationship between EO and the population of DW. There are also two chapters on migration. One concentrates on worker labour migration, while the second discusses women as migrants. Ethnic relations dominate in another chapter that deals with the dynamics of ethnic relations in DW in connection with the expansion of EO. Finally, there is a chapter on selected characteristics of social activities of women in DW in the light of dominant anthropological theory.

The introductory chapter by the writer of this Preface deals with political and broader social aspects of the expansion of EO. It mentions the question of Poland's reliance on coal as source of electric energy and warmth. The European Union decarbonization programme has been not heeded by Poland and the expansion of EO, although heralded as no ecological hazard, remains a problem. The

chapter further develops the overall critique of late industrialism that in some parts of the world has led to ecological catastrophes. Poland still discusses the introduction of nuclear energy generation. The chapter then broaches the social consequences of the construction of the first phase of EO (blocks 1-4). Next in the chapter is the discussion of the gradual acceptance of EO among the inhabitants of DW and the role in it of Józef Pękala, many years' director of EO, as a humane manager and promotor of mutually advantageous relations between EO and DW commune. It is followed by a brief survey of sociological research on DW and EO as successor to Giełczyn (research pseudonym of DW) studies. The chapter also tackles the debates and conflicts leading to the decision to proceed with the construction of blocks 5 and 6 of EO. There is a covert competition between the City of Opole and DW, which reflects the tension between ethnicities in the Opole Silesia. Is this region of Poland an example of a failed melting pot? The chapter discusses also the central position of the EO enlargement in the Opole Region and in the relation between DW and the Opole City. This relates to the question of the limits of self-government vis-a-vis political interest from above.

Konrad Górny and Mirosław Marczyk have analyzed the influence of the major investment - enlargement of EO - on economic processes in the Gmina DW, namely entrepreneurial strategies as well as attitudes of public and private agents, elements of continuity and change compared to the attitudes during the earlier stages of EO. They studied local markets and their links to broader dimensions of late industrialism but also discourses outside of the local scene. These two authors also included in their research verbalized expectations and needs of local inhabitants vis-à-vis EO. Concretely, Konrad Górny dealt with social reception of various developments during the operation of EO. He identified socio-economic processes and attitudes of the people living the area of construction and expansion of EO.

Mirosław Marczyk in his chapter identified the strategies within the bottom-up dynamics observed during the expansion of the EO. This author is interested in the relations between the expansion

of the EO and particular actions taken by the residents of the DW commune. The text discusses local bottom-up strategies designed with the use of the potential economic situation. They take the form of various cultural activities, among which bottom-up economic strategies are crucial. The impulses for these activities are supplied by specifically targeted social changes taking place under the influence of supra-local political and economic transformations.

Marek Pawlak's chapter takes up the question of Mobile Livelihood of workers engaged in the expansion of EO. The author contends that EO is strongly embedded in the local landscape of DW commune. Its recent expansion has fuelled new migration to the region and generated new economic initiatives. The chapter explores mobile livelihood of labourers working on the power plant's expansion and problematizes their strategies of dealing with specific kind of temporariness. First, he introduces the context and predicaments of conducting an ethnographic fieldwork in the industrial site and surroundings, which also cast light on labourers' everyday life routines. Next, he examines the temporal and spatial aspects of labourers' mobility as well as their daily strategies of living 'between shifts' while residing temporarily in the hostel located in DW territory. Labourers, who construct a mobile livelihood and move between different industrial sites across Poland (and beyond), find themselves in a rather ambiguous position of being "here" and "there." For many, it is an economic strategy, which they follow for several of years (or more), and which enables them to support their families. They are local, but only in places where they live with families; while working and residing at different industrial sites, they experience rather indifference, flexibility and temporariness towards visiting places. Their mobile livelihood has been habituated and seems to have become a strategy of "muddling through" the conditions of neoliberalism and late industrialism. Construction workers' mobile livelihood, altogether with indifference, temporariness and flexibility, is an example of their agency, which shows different ways of dealing with the existing global forces and dependencies. Neoliberal reconfigurations of political economy loosen the livelihood certainties and introduce

profit-oriented “accumulation by dispossession,” the context of late industrialism evokes the anxieties of working conditions and the questions of safety measures.

Ewa Kruk in her chapter concentrates on migrating women in the area of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. She analyzes family and maternal strategies by women for whom the Dobrzeń Wielki commune is a space cutting across the borders, where multi-level processes of exchange of people, things, ideas take place. These women, for whom DW area became a place of (temporary) settlement, are of different nationalities and occupy various social locations determined by hierarchizing factors of politics, economy, history, kinship, and geography; the hierarchies based on gender, “race,” ethnicity, nationality, etc., “shape and discipline the ways they think and act”. Due to the intensity of migration processes occurring in the studied area, their dynamic character and the transnational actors participating in them, Kruk’s analysis is embedded in the transnational/translocal mobility paradigm. “Settled in mobility,” the migrating women become members of the host community and at the same time they negotiate a number of identities and connections with their community of origin. Owing to the use of transnational/translocal perspective, the author shows that family and household are deeply rooted in gender practices, and that “the researched women manifest the multidimensional agency which reveals itself in conditions of migration as a response to situations resulting from their current position”.

Marcin Brocki’s chapter concerns the dynamics of ethnic relations in the commune of Dobrzeń Wielki in the light of social processes triggered off by the recent expansion of the Opole Power Plant. The author tests the hypothesis that the expansion affects intergroup relations. The hypothesis is backed by two premises: first, that large industrial investments and developments have an impact on the communities living in their vicinity, and second, that in the municipality with a strong German minority where mutual inter-group relations were already tense, the influx of large number of workers from outside the region may have a negative effect on those relations. Although the current research has not confirmed the research

hypotheses about the impact of EO expansion on interethnic relations (tensions), it has shown that there exist intergroup tensions independently of the development of the EO (the dichotomous division into “ours” and “not-ours” is present in all groups of residents of the commune). Moreover, the chapter shows that although for more than a decade there had been a significant progress in building a sense of local community - the sense of “we”/homeliness that would include also the immigrant population - this process has not resulted in the formation of a homogenous community but a community integrated enough so that in face of the external political pressures involving the partition of municipality, the community acted as a whole even though the ethnicity was still at play as a potentially differentiating element.

Last but not least comes the chapter by Monika Baer who studied social activities of women in the DW commune in light of anthropological critique. The author, relying on the writings of Kim Fortun, argues that the contemporary world can be seen as a product of technical, biophysical, cultural, or economic nested systems of various scales involved in multiple and complex interactions. Such context makes keeping the analyzed problems “in place” impossible. The emerging phenomena rather need to be followed through variously defined, but continuous spaces. This, in turn, requires broadening the classical forms of anthropological critique. The proposed perspective uses some elements of “anthropology of the contemporary” developed by Paul Rabinow, “para-ethnography” by George Marcus, and “ethnography in late industrialism” by Kim Fortun. Baer applied her critical theoretical approach in her investigation of social activities of women in the DW commune. The author worked with four groups of women of different ages, involved in different activities. They are comprised of an educational group focused on family issues; an association working for local community; a vocal ensemble; and majorettes. The existing literature on the Opole Silesia examines macro- and microstructures separately, treats “local communities” as coherent wholes and assumes that gender differences are basically rooted in reproductive roles. This study shows how such concepts

as “(Silesian) women,” “family,” “tradition,” “identity,” or “local community” are produced, sustained or destabilized at the intersections of “the individual” (in discursive practices of specific persons) and “the supraindividual” (conditionings of local, national, European, or global types). Instead of lamenting or even mourning the presumed “collapse” or “disintegration” of the culturally autonomous Opole Silesia, the present form of anthropological critique recognizes new forms of “family life,” the transgressive potential of “women’s agency,” discursive (re)constructions of the “region,” new emblems of the “local community,” or potentials emerging from the recently “partitioned” Dobrzeń Wielki commune.

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The authors of this book would like to thank the inhabitants of the DW commune, especially those who answered our questions. We thank also the employees of EO for the same. We are grateful to the Opole-based officials and scholars who helped us to understand the complexities of the research field. Special thanks are due to Józef Pękala, Alojzy Kokot and Henryk Czech for their long-term willingness to share with us their knowledge and memories. The book is dedicated to the memory of the late Józef Pękala, a pioneer of constructive relations between a giant industrial enterprise and the people living in its vicinity.

Komárov, 2nd December 2018
Petr Skalník

Petr Skalník, rtd

Department of Politics
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Introduction: Opole Power Station as a socio-political catalyzer¹

0.0. Energy security and decarbonization

Energy security appears as one of the decisive factors in keeping the human civilization in balance. On the one hand most of 200 nation states and territories would like to be autarkic energetically, on the other, however, they realise that it is virtually impossible. Not every country is rich in energy resources and thus is compelled to seek these resources abroad by way of trade or territorial annexation. Those energetically rich sell their surplus in energy to other countries. Some wars, both historically distant and recent, were fought over energy resources. It can be argued that future wars are to be fought in direct dependence on the demand for energy resources. Even without energy wars the unequal distribution of energy resources will lead to regional and global tensions.

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Globalisation has brought about an ever increasing realisation that energy resources should be treated with economic cautiousness, especially those deemed exhaustible such as fossil fuels. Viewing the limited supply of these fuels, some countries have embarked on gaining energy from nuclear fuel and the most advanced even rejected nuclear energy in favour of renewable energy resources such as wind, sun, and water. This shift is justified ideologically by pointing out to general overheating (Eriksen 2016) or rising average temperatures called global heating, especially in some particular localities on the globe (cf. Eriksen 2018). Recently, gas and oil are gained from cracking shale rocks, which also raises worries about human intervention because explosives and chemicals are used in fracking.

Worldwide and within particular countries debates are raging as to whether the measurable increase in average temperature is part of global climate change caused by human activities or rather we are witnessing only a temporary change irrespective of human civilisation. Theoreticians have come up with the concept of Anthropocene, a new kind of geological period principally determined by human energy consumption (Hauhs et al. 2017).

1.0. The coal controversy in the European Union and Poland

In the European Union coal power generation reaches 24 per cent of all power generation at the moment. The main producers of coal and lignite and their consumers for power generation purposes are Germany and Poland. In Poland, coal burning Opole Power Station (Elektrownia Opole - EO) is expanding, which is against the EU policy of decarbonization. As far as Poland is concerned, it has the largest lignite powered station in the world, situated in Bełchatów in Central Poland with installed energy output 5,472 MW. This power station was alternatively called "the biggest carbon polluter in the EU" (2009), "largest carbon dioxide emitter" (34,9 million tonnes

per annum, in 2016), and “the most climate damaging power plant in the European Union” (2014). At the moment, EO has installed output 1,532 MW and emits “only” 5,82 millions tonnes of carbon dioxide per annum thanks to installed modern filters. When the blocks 5 and 6 will be put into operation in 2019, the electricity output will grow by 1,800 MW to 3,332 MW which will rank EO among biggest European bituminous coal powered stations. While the previous Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska - PO) government paid some attention to the EU policy of phasing-out coal, the present Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - PiS) government, elected late in 2015, made clear that the importance of domestic coal will remain high.

Lignite consumption in the EU reached 58,3 per cent of EU’s coal consumption. The EU started its decarbonization policy at the beginning of the new millennium. In 2008 emission trading system was launched. However, in the years 2010-2012 coal power generation increased in the EU (“Coal Renaissance”). New coal power plants were put to operation in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Eastern Europe. According to Ito, “Poland is the largest steam coal producer in the EU, and coal’s share in the generation mix is as high as more than 80%” (Ito 2017: 8). At the same time, power demand is expected to grow while energy security vis-à-vis volatility of gas supply from Russia is a top priority for Poland. Thus reliance on coal as energy supplier even increases.

According to European Commission, by 2030 the power mix of Poland will change substantially (65% coal, 14,9% gas, 18,5% renewable energy) (Ito 2017: 10). According to this goal, coal will remain strategically decisive for the energy independence of the country. The country, though paying lip-service to the phasing-out policy of the EU, is not going to substantially change its dependence on coal for power generation. “In the long run, the national electricity system will still be based on coal mining” but at the same time critics such as Rosicki assert that “the Polish state is not interested in the modernisation processes of the energy sector, which gives the advantage to the conventional energy suppliers” and lament the “poor condition

of the Polish coal mining sector” (Rosicki 2015: 58, 54). “Poland has a serious concern in energy security and domestic coal industry protection, thus no plausible path has been seen for reducing coal power generation substantially” (Ito 2017: 14). The 2050 draft “envisages the continuation of the objectives laid down in 2009, which *per se* leaves no illusions as to any possible revolution in the energy sector in Poland” meaning at the same time “minimalistic approach to the observance of the EU requirements in the area of RES” (Rosicki 2015: 55-56).

The Polish energy policy document of 2009 delineating the aims of the country until 2030 is still valid although a draft of Energy Policy of Poland till 2050 was published in August 2014. The draft should have been widely discussed but thus far no final word was said which may be connected with the coming to power of the new PiS government before the end of 2015. While the policy until 2030 respects to some extent the tenets of the European Union, the 2050 document has come with three different strategies to be discussed by specialists (a) balanced, b) nuclear, and c) gas+renewable sources – RES. According to the balanced scenario, coal and lignite will remain main sources of energy generation but 15% of generation will be assured by two nuclear power stations while the role of gas and RES will also reach up to 20% (Projekt 2014: 33). The nuclear scenario accounts for 45-60% of energy from nuclear power stations and only 10-15% coal power stations. The share of oil and gas will each be 10-15% while RES 15% (Projekt 2014: 38). Finally the scenario gas plus RES projects 50-55% gas and RES (from it 20% RES), coal 30%, oil 15-20% and nuclear energy 10% (Projekt 2014: 39).

1.1. Enlargement of the Opole Power Station (EO)

Viewing these economic, political, and social ramifications, the construction of blocks 5 and 6 fits well into the Polish national strategies. What is, however, puzzling is the location of the EO within Poland, the means by which coal is to be conveyed to it, and the

relation between Dobrzeń Wielki (DW) as a self-governing commune (Gmina = commune or lowest administrative unit) and the neighbouring urban commune of Opole. The location of the EO is a result of complex deliberations which started already during the Second World War. The site was selected out of several candidates and according to all informants the criteria were geographical and economic. At the time of the decision there was no particular political reason why EO should stand where it is today. The role of the Odra River was taken into account as the construction plot is in short distance from it. Indeed, the original idea was to transport the bituminous coal from the Upper Silesian Coal Basin via the Gliwice Canal and the Odra River, to build a special port in the vicinity of the building plot and to transport coal to the power station via a conveyor system. The original building site belonged to the Gromada Czarnowąsy (1954–1972) that preceded the Gmina Czarnowąsy that was fused with Gmina Dobrzeń Wielki (established in January 1973). This plan was abandoned in the course of the construction of the EO that took approximately 20 years. Railways as the coal transporter took preference when a direct railway line was built to the site.

In spite of steady promotion of the Odra River as the ideal, economic and ecological, avenue for transport of coal to EO, Ryszard Galla (repeatedly elected into the Polish parliament as an MP for the German minority) and others were not successful. Galla succeeded in establishing a Group of Friends of Odra in the Sejm, the Polish parliament. He arranged a special exhibition on the history of Odra navigability. But he is otherwise fairly sceptical as to reaching the grade 3 or 4 of Odra navigability. The problem consists in the many years of neglect. But he believes that if Odra is made navigable as far as Ostrava on the Czech side, there will be lot of interest in the Czech Republic to use Odra as an important transport route to the sea. What is however also necessary is to build the sluice at Malczyce near Wrocław. The turbines were supplied by a Czech company but these were not installed and penalty has to be paid for that². The enlargement of EO with blocks 5 and 6 does not count with the Odra

² Interview 12 August 2015

River and further plans are to use railways. The letter of intention on navigability of Odra signed by several personalities with great fanfare during the Self-government Congress at Opole on August 28, 2016, has to my mind only a symbolic value because no concrete implementation measures have thus far been taken and the costs seem to be astronomical. In the last two years the pertinent minister limits himself to repeating that there has been urgency in creating the Odra Riverway Administration (Odrzańska Droga Wodna) but it seems that there is not enough political will to start real work on the project. Besides, one has to take into account the powerful coal-railway lobby used to make profits by bringing coal to the EO for the last 25 years.

1.2. Commune Dobrzeń Wielki

The territory of the commune was chosen for the construction of EO by default. There seems to have been no say by this commune as to the placement of EO, etc. The inhabitants of the previously existing Commune Czarnowąsy were practically compelled to sign contracts on sale of their plots to the state (represented by the management of EO) and as far as memory goes original reactions of inhabitants of the Commune Dobrzeń Wielki to the construction was negative. The inhabitants of the Opole City were also reported as opposed to the construction. No document was found which would mention any conflict about EO between the Commune of Opole and the Commune of Dobrzeń Wielki. Apparently the power of the communist state was such that nobody really dared to officially express opposition to EO and its parameters.

In the early 1970s works on a major coal power station, called Elektrownia Opole (EO), started. The location was one of the proposed placings that had been situated along the River Odra, a waterway serving for centuries as an artery of Silesia. Although originally six blocks were planned, only four were put to operation by 1993-1997. Initially, the construction of EO was met with

opposition by both DW commune and also that of Opole city. A special housing estate emerged gradually next to DW village to house the external workers on EO. Locals also found work in EO. Block 1 was launched in 1993. Fortunately, EO was provided with most advanced filters which made it one of the state of the art power stations not polluting its environs. Thus the local population gradually adjusted to the existence of a giant power station on the territory of the commune. They as well adjusted to the new neighbours in the housing estate "Osiedle Energetyk". When I first arrived in DW in 2005, I was expecting to carry out a re-study of ethnic relations and general social change, but did not know that there was a major power station there (Skalník 2004, 2005, 2008). The previous sociological studies were aimed at ethnicity and industrialisation (Ossowski 1947; Nowakowski 1960; Olszewska 1969). Therefore, subsequent research of 2006–2007, which also involved shorter fieldtrips by Pardubice and Wrocław students, was not particularly aimed at studying EO but various aspects of life in DW villages. An exception was an extensive B.A. thesis by Tomáš Sabela who studied social aspects of entrepreneurship in DW (Sabela 2008).

One of the results of the first phase of the research was that ethnicity did not play an active role in the life of inhabitants of DW gmina. Also, EO was a kind of neutral player in the social fabric of DW (Skalník 2007a). Meanwhile, by 2009, EO became part of the PGE concern with the seat in Bełchatów in Central Poland. After 2010 I continued to carry out summer fieldwork practice in DW with my Wrocław students. During our repeated stays we learned about the revival, on a higher level of sophistication, of the original plans of construction of Blocks 5 and 6. These two blocks were to be the mightiest single investment in the history of modern Poland. They were to be more powerful than all four existing blocks together and their construction would have to be completed within mere five years, which contrasts with more than 20 years for the original power station. Up to 3000 workers at a time were to carry out the construction.

Once the project was made public, a controversy emerged. The PGE Company was more concerned about its shareholders' wellbeing than Poland's increasing need for electric energy. For a while it looked as if the expansion of EO would be postponed. The construction of blocks 5 and 6 of EO became an important political issue. The Opole Region as the smallest region in Poland needed badly an important investment that would enhance the economic and thus also political position of the region within the country. Otherwise it was feared that the region might be divided and added to the neighbouring regions of Lower and Upper Silesia. Especially Opole politicians and local patriotic public were trying to prove that EO must be expanded for the sake of development of the region and stave off the exodus of population from it. Our preliminary surveys carried out in 2012, 2013 and 2014 showed that the inhabitants of the DW commune had no objections against the construction but they were not engaged in any political struggle. Eventually the Polish government of Donald Tusk (PO), representing the Polish state, which is the main shareholder of PGE, decided in June 2013 that indeed the expansion of EO would start soon.

1.3. Research history

Originally my idea to go to Dobrzeń Wielki (DW) near Opole in Silesian Poland was to perform a re-study of social change in a community alike the one I carried out in Dolní Roveň near Pardubice in 2002-2004 (Skalník 2004, 2005). In 2005 I had conceived it as part of a major grant project "Social Anthropology of the European Union: Changing Local Communities" that unfortunately was not accepted by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic. A substitute solution was found in the form of a special partial leave of absence from lecturing at the University of Pardubice combined with extraordinary professorship at Wrocław University where I was intermittently teaching political anthropology since 2005. This enabled me to start fieldwork in Dobrzeń Wielki in February 2006. Later that year and

during some of the subsequent years teams of students worked in DW on various topics, including the future expansion of EO with two more blocks.

The research project developed on the basis of the previously produced knowledge is basic, independent of the parties involved. It has been financed by the National Centre of Science (NCN) which is a state grant agency but there is no direct involvement of the agency, which means that the research team is not responsible to anyone as to its scientific findings. Its theoretical foundation is ethnographical in its nature but relying on the theories of late industrialism and overheating. As such, our research project is related to those cases of industrialism and the studies about them which stress the social, cultural, and ecological impact of late industrial investments. Major industrial installations have been closely related to nuclear tragedies of Chernobyl, Fukushima (Fujikawa 2015; Gill 2015; Hasegawa 2014; Inose 2015), the tragic explosion in chemical works of Bhopal (Fortun 2012) but also impacts of projects which did not explode. Such are cases of Bhilai Steel Works in India (Parry 2015), Austrian built coal power station such as that in northern Turkey (Knudsen 2015) or hydroelectric power stations and dams such as Three Gorges in China. It is related to mining projects such as Panguna, Ok Tedi or Lihir in Papua New Guinea (Filer 2012), to fracking in Australia and other parts of the world (de Rijke 2013; Trigger 2014; Eriksen 2018). The rights of the local populations have been infringed upon, land grabs took place in connection with these projects, while protests and armed struggle led to the closure of some of them.

2.0. From “Giełczyn” to Dobrzeń Wielki

Until 2016 Dobrzeń Wielki was a fairly large commune in the Opole Region of Upper Silesia consisting of nine villages (sołectwa) that was under the German rule for two hundred years until 1945. Local Silesian population was not expelled to Germany like in other

countries such as Czechoslovakia even though many local Silesians were Germanized and did not feel like Poles. Dobrzeń Wielki (under the pseudonym Giełczyn) was studied in 1945–1946 by Stanisław Ossowski, a well-known Polish sociologist, who was interested in ethnic relations there, both historically (plebiscite of 1921) and at the moment of research when ethnic Poles, expelled from Eastern Lands of Poland annexed to the Soviet Union, were resettled in Silesia (Ossowski 1947, cf. Czech 2015). Later the village of Dobrzeń Wielki (not the whole gmina) was studied by rural sociologists such as Stefan Nowakowski (1960) and Anna Olszewska (1969). They were interested in social change, especially in the industrialization of DW. In 1973 the state decided to form the Commune of Dobrzeń Wielki (Gmina Dobrzeń Wielki) from 9 villages around DW village (Dobrzeń Wielki, Chróścice, Dobrzeń Mały, Borki, Świerkle, Brzezie, Czarnowąsy, Krzanowice, and Kup). During the communist rule (1945–1989) German language was suppressed and Polonization was carried out. Since 1990 German national minority (mniejszość narodowa) was recognized by the state and those who declared that they belonged to it could obtain German passports along with Polish ones. That made possible labour migration to Germany and subsequent affluence of the villagers but also outmigration of the young people.

2.1. Our research

As if presciently, a team formed from researchers in Wrocław, Opole and Cracow started preparations for a major research project NCN Maestro, which I proposed to call “Mutual Impact,” during the spring of 2013. When it appeared to be too complex and thus hardly manageable, a smaller seven-member research team was formed and applied for a more modest, though still ambitious project NCN Opus 6 which eventually received the title “Conflict, tension and cooperation. A case study of mutual impact between Opole Power Station and the community of Dobrzeń Wielki.” This project was

approved in June 2014 and it began officially in July 2014. At approximately the same time the construction of the Blocks 5 and 6 started. The first short field visit by the whole team took place in February 2015. In 2015 each team member spent more or less the planned time in the field. The existing contacts within the Commune DW and with Opole academics now expanded to include the leadership of EO and the Construction Team. For example Petr Skalník and Marcin Brocki were invited to participate in an official excursion to the building site that was guided by the Manager Zbigniew Wiegner. One of the findings during the first phase of our research was that very few DW citizens were hired to join the Construction Team although many were promised jobs by the then *sołtys* (submayor) of Brzezie (as a result he was recalled from his post). Very few formal contacts between the Construction Team and DW leadership were established because the Team functioned as a closed community whose members spent weekends away from DW (so called “Chinese technique” when the investor brings along their own workers who do not mingle with the local population).

The methodological problems are many in research projects such as ours. Can we keep independence while we see that injustice is being perpetrated and our sympathies lie with people whose rights are being trampled on? Can we be neutral vis-a-vis attempts to limit or destroy communal self-government enshrined in the constitution and laws? Can we look at the abuse of power by political parties when rights and interests of the country or local community are suppressed? These are ethical dilemmas par excellence. But I believe that we should stick to our scientific expertise because it ensures that our authority remains uncompromised and our findings and reasoning unchallenged. The question, however, is to what extent are we able to present our research results to those in power positions. For we cannot be satisfied with our publications in respected journals and books. We want to see application of our findings (cf. Skalník and Brocki 2018).

3.0. Pękala

In 1979 Józef Pękala was appointed the third director of the state enterprise EO in construction. He was to remain on his post for more than 20 years. He had previous experience as director of two other power stations in the area where three former powers, Russia, Austria and Prussia touched borders. Himself originating from the Polish East, Pękala had to acquaint himself with mentalities that dominated the area. When we met for two formal interviews, he stressed that especially Silesian central values, the family, women, and the dialect, sharply contrasted with Polish values of patriotism. The Silesian homeland (*mała ojczyzna*, in German *Heimat*) is something genuine Poles do not know, for them it is fatherland or the state that has to be defended but homeland stands in the way of that. Without taking sides, Pękala's principle was sensitiveness to the local values³. He mentioned the case of a local man whose house was to be destroyed so that EO could be built. Pękala received the man, listened attentively to his complaint and promised a redress. Risking problems with his superiors, he managed to get building material for a substitute house and made sure that the house was built. Another case was when he defended his opinion that there was no need to fence the building site because he was sure that nobody would steal anything from the open air storage. Again he relied on his reading of the character of Silesians. Of course when the building was close to completion the fence was built for security reasons.

In his discussion contribution that was placed as preface into the first volume on the socio-economic transformations caused in DW by EO, Pękala stressed that "[W]e have to care more for coexistence of the arrivals with the local people. Our primary goal is to create harmonious relations between the operational staff, the builders of the power station and the inhabitants of the neighbouring settlements. It means to preserve all positive traits of that environment and care so that these traits are transferred to the soil of the collective of the power station. It is as well to care so that the staff of the

³ Interviews 31 October 2015, 3 April 2016.

power station learns and accepts the whole history of the region, somewhat inherits and continues it” (Pękala 1988: 5, translation P.S.). He put these ideas to life. He regularly met with Alojzy Kokot, the long-term mayor of the commune DW, with whom he built a good personal relationship. Kokot not once mentioned that in his conversations with me. He himself in his paper presented at the same conference stressed that those who moved into commune because of the construction of EO were not interested in the social life in the commune, with the exception of religion. He was not in favour of mass immigration so that there was a “chance to save local culture and custom. One needs to admit that the leadership of the power station and also designers of the housing estate are in favour of this moderate integration of the immigrants and local community” (Kokot 1988: 162). With the support of EO and its director, several conferences followed that of 1988 and publications came out that map the relationship which we call mutual impact.

3.1.Sociological research

A considerable attention among Opole sociologists was paid to the question of relations between the population of Commune of DW and EO. Besides the mentioned collection of essays published in 1988 (i.e. during the last year before the Round Table negotiations and the end of communist power monopoly in Poland), there were three other collective works published that discussed various aspects of EO (Łuszczewska 1993; Lesiuk et al. 2000; Rosik-Dulewska and Kusz 2009). All of them were subsidised by EO while the involvement of the Silesian Institute in Opole was not negligible in the studies and publication⁴. All four volumes consist of 66 chapters

⁴ T. Słodra-Gwiżdż mentioned that an agreement between the EO director Józef Pękala and an interdisciplinary research team under the leadership of Robert Rauziński, based in the Silesian Institute, was reached in 1984 about a continuous monitoring of past and present situation in DW during the construction and exploitation of the EO (Słodra-Gwiżdż 2009: 47).

(26+17+14+9) on 798 pages (310+200+124+164), which on average means that a chapter has 12 pages. Is it enough or not enough? The question is about the quality of research, its ratio between quantitative and qualitative approach. Not all of these articles belong to social science, some are contributions from the exact sciences. What is, however, sure is that most of these texts were not based on prolonged stay and direct daily contacts with the inhabitants of the Commune of DW. The approach from social and cultural anthropology is basically qualitative, based on participant observation, interviews, sometimes even observing participation (e.g. living in the dormitory together with workers employed in EO or its expansion). We do not want to say that our approach is better but will stress that it is a legitimate method that thus far was not tested on the issue of the relationship between DW commune and EO. It is, however, intriguing that in the four books there are hardly papers that would pertain to the relationship of the mutual impact type. Most of them discuss various aspects of the impact of EO on the DW commune, but hardly the other way around. That would mean that the commune has had no or little impact on EO. But that is impossible! One of the early researchers working in the Silesian Institute was the late Ryszard Kałuża, whose residence was in DW commune. This researcher cared for a sensitive approach so that EO “did not destroy positive family, neighbour, religious and labour ties in the local society” (Kałuża 1988). He continuously followed the changes until his untimely death in 2009.

3.2. A brief history of the relationship

Our research showed that in the beginning both the populations of Commune DW and Commune of Opole City were not in favour of the construction. However, as time passed and the coordination of activities between the leadership of EO and the leadership of the Commune DW intensified, the population not only got used to the existence of the construction site and the presence of numerous

construction workers, but started to evaluate positively these new features. Some of the commune inhabitants were able to get work as employees of EO. The attitudes toward the housing estate “Energetyk” also changed from resentment to acceptance. Eventually much later some well-to-do residents of “Energetyk” sold their apartments and built new family houses on several streets of DW proper. Once the EO was put to exploitation in the years 1993-1997, the modern filters were mounted on the exhausts of EO which made EO ever more acceptable if not welcome by the inhabitants of villages within Commune DW. Therefore, based on this positive experience, there was hardly any voice uttered against the expansion of EO by blocks 5 and 6 when the Wrocław students interviewed the inhabitants in 2011-2014. The DW commune received a substantial sum yearly as tax on land and enterprises on it. From the proceeds the commune could finance various development projects. One of the largest such projects was a park symbolically connecting the centre of DW with the housing estate “Energetyk.” DW commune has become one of the most prosperous communes in Poland. Politically these successes have been ascribed to the “German Minority” list that continuously won the local government election for at least four consecutive four-year periods until 2014.

3.3 The struggle for a decision

Nevertheless, the final decision of the Polish government to start the construction of block 5 and 6 was reached without lobbying by the leadership and population of DW commune. It was Solidarity trade union at EO, Opole journalists and some regional politicians who reacted strongly against the reluctance of the directors of PGE in Bełchatów to make a decision in favour of the construction. The EO was incorporated into the new PGE concern (Polska Grupa Energetyczna) in 2007, and in 2009 the leadership of PGE decided to proceed with the expansion of the EO by the two originally planned blocks 5 and 6. But these would be not blocks identical with the

other already installed blocks 1-4, each of capacity 360 MW. Each new block would have capacity 900 MW which means that the two new blocks would supersede the capacity of the existing four blocks (4x360 against 2x900). After that initial decision the old original foundations of block 5 and 6 were removed so that the newly conceived blocks could be constructed there. Although the project work was commissioned and drawings with documentation performed, there was no final decision taken as to when the construction should begin. Meanwhile also the tender for the Construction Company or consortium of companies took place in 2011 and the winner were the consortium Rafako SA, Polimex-Mostostal SA and Mostostal Warszawa SA. After some necessary legal and financial steps were taken and the leadership of PGE was expected to begin the construction proper, its CEO Kilian announced on 4 April 2013 that PGE would not proceed with the construction of blocks 5 and 6 (Opole II) because the concern calculated that it would not be profitable and that was not in the interest of the shareholders. One should remind the reader that by far the main shareholder in the PGE is the Polish state. The following day, the Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said at a press conference that although PGE was a stock exchange company and may have its calculations of loss and profit, however the state had its shares in PGE and the vital interests of the state had to be respected. He said that there was only one interest and that was cheap energy for the Polish people, from which both the concern and the Polish state would profit.

In Opole and in EO initiatives were created that demanded explanation and that the decision of PGE leadership should be rescinded. A special press conference organized by the trade union Solidarity and Sławomir Kłosowski, the Sejm deputy for the opposition party PiS, took place on 9 April 2013 and a resolution was approved calling the administration of PGE and the Government to proceed with the construction. The whole matter became a political affair. On 27 May a special meeting took place at EO which approved a programme action "Yes to Power Station - Yes to Silesia" (Tak dla elektrowni - tak dla Śląska). A petition was sent to the President,

Prime Minister and Minister of Economy, it was decided about a picketing action in front of the Office of the Regional Minister. Also a tent township would be erected in Czarnowąsy where signatures would be collected under the appeal calling for the construction. Meanwhile the consultative body of the Office of the President "Energetic Security" met where Prime Minister Tusk declared that the expansion of EO was one of the many investments which the government (of PO) promised to realize. After a thorough analysis of all the market data the government would find means and ways so that this investment would be carried out in accordance with the intentions. This gave hope that the expansion of EO would eventually take place. Nevertheless, the picketing took place on 7 June but the voivode (wojewoda) hesitated to give support. The tent township in Czarnowąsy gave an opportunity to stop and/or delay transport on 454 regional road between Opole and DW that also leads to EO. On 8 June the Sejm deputies for PiS Mariusz Błaszczak, Wojciech Jasiński, Grzegorz Tobiszowski, Sławomir Kłosowski visited the tent township and supported the protesters. Błaszczak, leader of the parliament club of PiS, read a letter signed by the President of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński, in which he underlined that to abandon the expansion of EO would cause economic degradation of the Opole Region, and would result in energy shortages in the country and the necessity to import it. Kaczyński also mentioned that Lower Silesia would suffer from energy deficit and the miners might face lower sale of coal and even closing of the mines. The president of PiS wrote that if PiS wins the election then one of their first decisions would be the construction of the two blocks. The politicization of the affair reached the pitch.

On Monday 10 June 2013 there was a debate in the tent township in which several energy specialists participated, present were also the MP for PiS Sławomir Kłosowski, a former PiS deputy Waldemar Wiązowski, the leader of Solidarity trade union at EO, Dariusz Kucharewicz and others. The debate, moderated by the Opole journalist Bolesław Bezeg, who acted as a secretary of the whole protest action, concluded that the expansion of EO must be

completed because it was an investment important from the viewpoint of energetic security and labour market.

What followed was an extraordinary session of the Economic Commission of the Sejm on 20 June 2013 where the Minister of Finance informed about the expansion. The PM Tusk and Minister of Finance Karpiński visited EO on 27 June and the PM promised that the construction at the value of more than 11 billion PLN (Zlotys) would start in summer 2013. It took another 7 months before it really happened. In the meantime the Coal Company signed a memorandum of intention to cooperate with PGE. The PM commented that it was a step towards bigger employment and energetic security. Meanwhile Alstom Power was added to the consortium and the PGE division GEiK informed the construction consortium about the decision to start the construction. Also the Coal Company signed a contract with PGE GIeK about the supply of bituminous coal during the period 2018–2038. During the fall of 2013 two members of the board of PGE and eventually the CEO PGE Krzysztof Kilian resigned because of differences between PGE and the Government. The PM Tusk commented that energetic concerns with financial participation of the state must care for the energetic security of the country. The new CEO of the PGE Piotr Szymanek declared on 6 December 2013 that the construction of blocks 5 and 6 would begin on 1 February 2014. And this really happened on that day. At the moment of finalising of this text, in December 2018, the block 5 is in the stage of testing and block 6 will follow soon. During 2019 both new blocks will be put into exploitation. The people of the DW commune participated in the struggle for the expansion of EO only when they were invited to sign the petition in June 2013 by the organisers of the tent township in Czarnowąsy. Otherwise it was a struggle fought by the activists from Opole and EO. It soon became politicised and mostly by politicians from the opposition party.⁵

⁵ The section was based on the memorandum compiled by Mr D. Kucharewicz and the interview with him that took place in his office on 2 November 2015. See also Czech 2012.

3.4. Monitoring

Our research team could follow the work on the two giant blocks for most of 2015 and 2016. Two members of the team were invited to celebrate the “półmetek” - middle of the construction in summer 2015, and four of us joined the following year of construction during the summer of 2016. The leaders of the DW commune were invited as well. Beside these events there was hardly any contact between the leaders of the building consortium and the leaders and inhabitants of the commune. Whereas some of the employees of EO were also residents in the commune, the Consortium hardly employed anybody from the commune. Most employees worked shifts during the weekdays and went home on the weekends. Thus also the personal contact between the employees of the building Consortium and inhabitants of the DW commune was minimal. EO continued to pay property taxes to the commune during the years of 2015 and 2016. If that continued, the DW commune would have net profit from the fact that EO is located on its territory. In comparison with the original construction of blocks 1-4 which lasted for 20 years, the construction of the two more powerful blocks was to take five years only. That made it bearable because the inconveniences connected with the construction would soon be outweighed by tax-paying most modern power station with minimum ecological damage.

4.0. Unexpected turn

Within a month after the elections to the Sejm which were won by the PiS party, our research got an altogether new dimension as a result of the press declaration, in November 2015, of the President of the City of Opole that Opole should expand and de facto annex some villages and adjacent territories including EO. The expansion of Opole would also include some other lucrative establishments such as the shopping mall Turawa (the latter was subsequently dropped from the annexation plan). The DW commune and other communes included into this annexation plan saw it as an attack on their

self-government and democracy. They immediately started vigorous protests of its inhabitants and the elected leaders entered into negotiations with the President of Opole and other elected organs such as Opole Province (Województwo Opolskie), Opole District (Powiat Opolski). By the end of April 2016 the regional governor (wojewoda) appointed by the new ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) was to give his opinion to the Government of Poland which has the authority to change borders between communes. His opinion was in favour of the plan and on 19 July 2016 the Polish government took a decision (not a law!) supporting the plan of the President of Opole. The inhabitants of Dobrzeń Wielki received the news with incredulity and therefore continued to protest against the decision and for its cancellation. They were supported by part of the press, especially journalists around the internet portal Grupa Lokalna Balaton. The Council of the Commune made a request to the Constitutional Court of Poland to block the execution of the decision which was to come into force on 1st January 2017. Also the Ombudsman (Rzecznik Praw Obywatelskich) became involved and gave his support to the cause of DW; however, to no avail.

The land grab was proposed, approved and carried out. That alienates the lucrative projects such as EO from the communities which provided territory for their construction. It is the state in conjunction with huge industrial concerns, national or international, which assists in deprivation of local populations of their rights. In that sense, our research project in Poland is a case study of the functioning of neoliberal capitalism with its reckless policies of profiteering without respect for the wishes and expectations of people directly involved in the industrial projects. Nearly two years after the annexation was carried out, the determination of the inhabitants of DW commune to get justice continues. The question, however, is to what extent those who were incorporated into the City of Opole against their will persist in demanding their civil rights. The communal election that took place in October-November brought in charge a new leadership. It would be fascinating to monitor how

the Dobrzeń Wielki commune would do without the finances from EO to which it was used for decades.

5.0. Conclusion

This introduction has discussed some of the most important political moments which I followed during my field research in Dobrzeń Wielki and in discussions with other protagonists on the scene of the expansion of Opole Power Station. The research clearly showed the key role EO has played in the life of the Opole Silesia during the last 46 years. EO proved to have influence not only on the DW commune but on other parts of the Opole Silesia and even the whole of Poland. The energy security, which in Poland is based on coal, is in apparent contradiction with the EU policy of decarbonisation and the global movement in favour of renewable energy resources. Even though EO is equipped with most up-to-date filters, it continues and will continue to spew out into atmosphere enormous amounts of carbon dioxide. Therefore, continuing to burn coal may cost Poland too much: it threatens to marginalise this great country and throw it into a neo-nationalist impasse. The expansion of EO by two brand new giant blocks is seen locally as a victory for the Opole Silesia. At the same time, it can symbolise the end of the coal epoch in the modern history of Poland. The commune of Dobrzeń Wielki has unwittingly played a role far beyond its actual size and importance.

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Socio-economic attitudes toward a major industrial investment

The presented text is based on the so called basic research. It should be treated as a presentation of conclusions resulting from empirical studies. Therefore, only to a small degree does it refer to the results of similar research. It is thus a case study providing essential data which will make it possible to conduct an in-depth comparative analysis in the future and will allow to make generalizations of theoretical nature.

Exploration and analysis of multidimensional and interconnected cultural, social, and political processes between the PGE Opole Power Station and the community of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune primarily concerns economic problems. Those intensified as the Power Station was expanded. The investment is currently one of the largest enterprises in the European energy sector.

While attempting to identify the socio-economic processes occurring in the studied area, attention should be paid to the attitudes of the residents of the zone affected by these processes. They include various phenomena and the links between them, targeted at economic activity. Therefore, various forms of economic strategies are involved, from the bottom-up ones, such as self-employment, through larger companies employing from a few to a dozen or several dozen

people, to large enterprises located mainly in the vicinity of the Opole Power Plant. The Power Plant itself constitutes a key reference point, as the main player who is the driving force of the activities undertaken within the local, but also supra-local economy. It should be added that research on this subject has mostly been directed at obtaining knowledge about the social reception of economic enterprises. These studies were part of the general research topic and concerned the interaction between the expansion of the power plant and the local community. However, in order to identify how the residents and the entrepreneurs operating in the commune describe and assess social practices of economic nature, we had to read the registers of companies, which gave us general knowledge about the number and nature of business undertakings in the commune. Having acquired knowledge mainly of a quantitative nature, we could initiate qualitative research, i.e. conduct in-depth interviews with selected representatives of the local community. Those interviews would often turn from questionnaire-based into long conversations, during which various problems faced by the residents and entrepreneurs were addressed, related to the expansion of the power station or its long-term operation in the commune.¹

Trying to learn the residents' opinions, searching for tensions, conflicts, forms of cooperation between the power plant and the community, it is necessary to ask the inhabitants a number of questions that were previously prepared on the basis of theoretical knowledge. This knowledge, based primarily on existing sources, i.e. literature, scientific and journalistic articles, various Internet content, must be analyzed and then verified during field research, followed by a stage of analysis of the research results, subsequent verification and first attempts to formulate conclusions.

¹ Socio-economic relations from the period of the construction and the hitherto operation of the Opole Power Station are only one of the contexts invoked in the text of the research results. They have already been described in a few anthologies, e.g. *Elektrownia „Opole” a środowisko społeczne*, Barbara Łuszczewska (ed.), Opole 1993 and *Między przeszłością a przyszłością. Elektrownia „Opole” jako czynnik zmiana społecznej*, Wiesław Lesiuk, Robert Rauziński, Teresa Soldra-Gwizdź (eds.), Opole 2000.

It should be noted that the preliminary knowledge, ideas about the area of research, often turned out to be completely different from everyday reality and actual issues which were considered over time, while living and conducting research in individual villages (*sołectwa*). Certainly, the breakthrough was the partition of the commune, which almost completely influenced the second stage of research and properly subordinated it to the subject of social resistance and the fight for the integrity of the commune.² Moreover, the previously assumed decisive influence of the extension of the power plant on the wider socio-cultural reality of its area has been overestimated to a large extent, and modern technologies used in this type of investments have limited the assumed interactions to several types of connections, of which the dominant ones were investments related to the expansion of the accommodation base for the employees working on the construction of new power units.

Field research was conducted in three stages, beginning in 2015. The first stage of the research was preliminary, consisting in specifying research problems, identifying actual phenomena affecting local forms of economy. The next stages, i.e. the surveys in 2016 and 2017, were already firmly embedded in the local environment, clearly showing the directions of activities undertaken by the residents. It should be emphasized that in the research assumptions, the situation related to the partition of the commune was not taken into account in any way, and what is more, it was a total surprise for the researchers, similarly as for the majority of the inhabitants of the commune. The events connected with it almost completely dominated the research conducted in 2016 and 2017, showing with full force the dynamics of changes that began to take place under the influence of political decisions made over the heads of the residents. Therefore, it was no longer possible to conduct research in accordance with the assumptions made several months earlier. It was a necessity and a requirement of the moment to take into account what for the inhabitants turned out to be a breakthrough in their

² Issues connected with the change of the commune's boundaries are raised in the final part of the text.

lives, as citizens of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, which was divided before our very eyes. Suddenly, against the residents' will a large part of the commune became a part of the city of Opole, within whose boundaries was the power station and the majority of companies cooperating with it. In this way, further attempts to study the economic interactions between those entities and the community were hampered, or rather became unproductive in reference to the main subject of the research. After all, the study would no longer concern processes occurring in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, but in a part of Opole. In this new and unaccounted for situation, the research had to be modified. And so, firstly, field exploration was not abandoned and research into the commune was not limited to the new, reduced borders. Secondly, the research was continued by introducing such modifications in questions to the residents which would take into account their opinion on the division of the commune, the losses and profits for the local economy, opinions on the events related to the change of borders, and future expectations. Thirdly, the areas now situated within the borders of the city of Opole have been treated as a transient area where the effects of changes could only be seen in the future, and which currently still had various types of connections with the Dobrzeń Wielki commune.

It should be noted that the field of research interests had to necessarily include processes connected not only with the expansion but also with the construction and operation of the power plant, which fundamentally changed the landscape of the village near Opole, and, above all, the social and cultural reality of the commune. The creation of this large industrial investment was part of the modernization processes that took over the entire country after 1989. The history of the construction, launch, and operation of the Opole Power Station is thus strictly connected with the history of the political transformation in Poland, a transformation which is most often presented as progress, yet in a way which would sometimes resemble the propaganda from the era of the communist Poland. One may risk a statement that the decision to expand the power plant reminds in some respects the "over-optimistic" atmosphere

accompanying such activities in the communist reality. Various expectations of the residents, which had not been met once the power station was constructed nor after it had operated for many years in the commune, were soon projected onto its extension. From its inception it was perceived as the main factor determining the development of the commune, which was still developing more dynamically than most communes in Poland or Europe, due to, among other factors, the taxes obtained from the power station.

As a major investment and an enormous material object, the power station became a dominant "co-resident" of the local world, radically modifying the cultural landscape also through the network of businesses, enterprises, and industrial plants which appeared in close proximity of it, as well as a proliferation of various economic activities connected directly or indirectly with the operation of the power station and, at least potentially, with its expansion.

In the generally outlined network of the local economy, the research area appears as heterogeneous, despite the suggestion of a certain uniformity of the dominant role of the Opole Power Station. The activity of business entities created mainly with the aim to cooperate with the power plant differs from the activity of those companies which use the cooperation to a lesser degree or have no connection with it at all. What is striking and inconsistent with research intuition is the small development of local entrepreneurship mainly focused on the benefits from the expansion itself, which turned out to proceed according to different patterns than those known at the time of construction. The main difference in this case is that most of the elements needed to build new power units are produced outside the commune, sometimes in other countries, from which they are transported and assembled on site. In this situation, one might have an impression that two different and entirely separate social and economic realities coexist next to each other. One includes the power station and its premises, the other one encompasses the remaining areas of the commune which have little in common with the station's expansion, where people live according to their own pace and take care of their daily routines.

The mentioned phenomena are influenced by processes of globalizing character which consist in possibilities of transferring technology and its products in short time and across long distances. Often, this results in the exclusion of local environments from the implementation of industrial investments for the benefit of environments in which the costs of manufacturing individual investment components are lower, or the search for specialized contractors in countries that are often thousands of kilometers away. Low price and professional specialization thus play a key role here, which determines treating the local environment as a less important participant in the investment. This also applies to costs related to employment, more specifically the so-called cheap labor force, which is supposed to be typical of the Polish labor market. Today, specialized agencies are ready to bring employees from remote areas of the country and from abroad if the costs of employment of local employees turn out to be too high. This happened during the expansion of the power station, where workers from Ukraine constitute a large part of the workforce. It should be added that the expansion began at a time when the phenomenon of lack of workforce, which has been noticed on the domestic market in recent years and is associated with a dynamic decline in unemployment, did not occur.

In such briefly outlined context the research was carried out with the expectation to obtain results which would allow to present the image of places, people, and processes that take place at the intersection of political and economic relations. The basic intention was to capture the bottom-up economic strategies and disclose their connection to the development of the power station, as well as to present a portrait of local entrepreneurship, the hopes and disappointments associated with it, as well as a certain trauma that emerged during the research and resulted from the political decision to divide the commune. These are undoubtedly important phenomena which impact the lives of the residents in a multi-level manner in a unitary as well as a group dimension. Such a collective portrait, created in a specific socio-cultural landscape, characterized by a mix of rural, suburban and industrial elements is possible to

obtain when the voice is given to residents who in their statements fully reveal the specificity of the place in which they live and work. The occurring changes can also be described through the analysis of gentrification processes and its effects.³ This process continues in the municipality incessantly, especially since the construction of the power station, the inflow of a new, usually better educated population affecting the local economy and its segments. The consequences of transformations in the social structure are, for example, changes in the spatial arrangement of the commune, changes in the residents' lifestyle, the emergence of specific relations between the groups of autochthons and gentrifiers.⁴ The latter often escape stereotypical opinions on their lack of socio-civic activity. Meanwhile, the goals sometimes coincide with the actions of indigenous people for the benefit of the local community and its interests, an evident example of which was the reluctance of the majority of them to include part of the commune within the city of Opole.

As mentioned, the research was carried out in three stages and thematically divided into parts related to conflicts, tensions, and cooperation, mainly involving relations between the local economic undertakings and the development of the Opole Power Station.

For the construction of new power units, the first shovel hit the dirt in February 2014 (with the completion of the investment being planned for March 2019). At that time, nothing heralded any

³ Confront: R. Śpiewak, *Wiejska gentryfikacja: definicja, znaczenie i skutki procesu*, [in:] *Studia nad strukturą społeczną wiejskiej Polski*, Maria Halamska, Sylwia Michalska, Ruta Śpiewak, (eds.), Vol.1, Warszawa 2016, pp. 129-157.

⁴ This is well illustrated by the creation of the "Energetyk" housing estate intended for the employees of the power plant, towards whom people were initially suspicious. Over time, the antagonisms dissipated and as a result of various activities and integration processes, a sense of community resulting not only from the place of residence but from sharing similar values revealed itself (Compare: D. Berlińska, *Integracja społeczna mieszkańców osiedla „Energetyk” z zasiedziałą ludnością Dobrzecza Wielkiego*, [in:] *Między przeszłością a przyszłością. Elektrownia „Opole” jako czynnik zmiany społecznej*, Wiesław Lesiuk, Robert Rauziński, Teresa Soldra-Gwiżdż (eds.), Opole 2000, pp. 89-98.

administrative changes and the tensions connected with them. The commune was perceived as very rich, one of the wealthiest in Poland. The expansion of the power station was supposed to strengthen this remarkably good economic position and result in the emergence of economic initiatives connected with it; enlargement of the investment area promised an increase in tax revenues in the future, guaranteeing intensive development of the commune. The projected influences meant that among the dilemmas faced by the Commune Council were not so much the settled basic needs of residents, but rather secondary issues, such as the discussion about whether to build a swimming pool or an aqua park in the commune. It must be admitted that many communes in Poland and worldwide would like to only have to worry about issues like these.

However, in the case of an operation and expansion of a major industrial investment, the phenomena which appear can cause tensions and potential conflicts. The very decision about expanding the power station, not preceded by broader public consultation, was of this nature. Not taking the residents' opinions into consideration was often emphasized by our interlocutors, although at the same time they were aware that the expansion was necessary and had been planned for a long time to ensure the planned capacity of the power station.

When the development of the power plant became a fact, a number of fears emerged related to many different, possible consequences accompanying this type of investment. The point of reference for this type of opinion were the experiences of the residents from the time when the power plant was created and started up. They mostly remembered chaos and pathological behavior on the construction site and in its surroundings, the influx of strangers, or the devastation of the natural environment. It should be clearly stressed that the memory associated with it exists often in an already mythologized form and is passed down by the generation that was a witness to those events. Those kinds of stories, constantly in social circulation, contributed to the exaggeration of similar threats during the expansion of the power station. The uncertainty of many residents of the

commune was exacerbated by the political discourse around the issue of expansion, which they had been carefully observing. The changing stances of subsequent state-level authorities regarding the decision to expand or discontinue the expansion, put into question the desirability of local economic initiatives aimed at potential profits from participation in the wider development process of the power station. Another issue worth noting were the fears connected with a national debate on the construction of a power station and abandoning the development of coal-based energy. Some interlocutors emphasized that although the expansion of the power station is an appropriate enterprise, conducive to development of the commune and the country, it is still a short-sighted decision. They believed it was a mistake, because eventually Poland would be forced to construct a nuclear power plant anyway. "We need to strive for self-sufficiency, and without a nuclear power plant at some point it will no longer be possible." There were also opinions suggesting that the decision was purely political and economically unjustified, although people who remembered the Chernobyl disaster emphasized that for safety reasons it would be better if the power plant was based on coal, which is abundant in Poland.

Another consequence of the expansion connected with the use of coal-based technology was the residents' fear of environmental pollution and its impact on their life and health. The fears from the time of the investment's creation reemerged, although the statements were contradictory on that matter. Persons making statements about that particular issue often did not believe the assurance that the technologies used will in no way impact the ecological situation of the region. It was emphasized, for example, that the level of groundwater was significantly reduced, which was to affect the collapse of agriculture in the commune. It was believed the power station was "poisoning" the residents and polluting the area. As some observed, mortality increased in that region. This also applies to the neighboring communes, "where the smoke from the chimney falls to the ground." They also talked about the adverse effect of the magnetic field around the transmission lines, or about the possibility

of causing asthma, cancer, or allergies, especially in children. The residents noticed that a specific microclimate was formed, characterized by a reduced amount of rainfall. On the other hand, there were also different opinions, mentioning for example an improvement in the quality of air resulting from access to district heating and thus liquidation of small boiler houses, burning low-quality coal fuel or just garbage. It should be added that many such opinions are associated with the residents' poor knowledge of the technologies used in the power plant. Those opinions concern both the current operation of the power plant and its extension, which brings with it yet another type of concern about the environment.

Already in the early stages of the investment, the residents noticed the inconvenience related to the expansion. Mentioned in the first place were the increased car and railway traffic, large air pollution, and road degradation caused by heavy road transport. These phenomena are most intense in the town of Brzezcie and its vicinity as well as on the access roads to the power plant. Moreover, Brzezcie is a village most exposed to any inconvenience accompanying the expansion, and the only place from which part of the population was displaced. This procedure was motivated by the immediate neighborhood of the newly built cooling towers, which, for example, were to limit or even deprive some households of access to sunlight. Increased levels of noise and pollution were also forecast. Despite the reluctance to move and disputes over the valuation of property, residents received long-negotiated compensation for abandoned buildings.

An issue that was extremely important and emphasized by most of the interlocutors was the anxiety about the expected influx of workers from various parts of the country and from abroad. These fears were twofold. Firstly, people were afraid of the arrival of strangers who did not know the local socio-cultural specificity and thus could be a potential source of danger. Secondly, those dangers were imagined to be in the form of increased crime or even ethnic conflicts.

Those types of fears result from the experiences dating back to the construction of the power station, a consequence of which was

the influx of people from various parts of the country. The newcomers penetrated into the structures of the area and began to alter them; what is more, it was obvious they were not familiar with Silesian lifestyle, characterized, according to the local residents, by peace, order, and high respect for work. "You can tell which houses are those of the locals. They're far more well-kept and neat." From conversations with the residents it can be concluded that the process of acculturation has never completely ended and continues to this day. From their point of view, the expansion of the power station can result in yet another influx of strangers. The first symptoms were noticed very quickly and they concerned foreigners, although many fears proved unfounded:

"There's so many of those Ukrainians now that they're expanding the power station. They're everywhere. I mean, they're not that much of a nuisance, from time to time they rob somebody, but apart from that I don't think there are serious problems" (male resident of Czarnowąsy).

"Lots of Ukrainians come here. They come to work at the expansion and they wander about everywhere. They're not doing anything wrong, but the very fact of so many of them being here is enough" (female resident of Dobrzeń Wielki).

"A lot of people are scared of the people who come here to work at the expansion of the power plant. Although nobody caught anybody red-handed, at least that's what my dad says, but still, there's fear. That they go into people's houses, steal, stuff like that. But is it actually dangerous that they're here?" (female resident of Czarnowąsy).

The incoming workers are also perceived as competition on the labor market, which is treated as belonging to the local environment, i.e. it is supposed to provide employment primarily to the local population:

"People might also be afraid that their jobs would be taken, but the truth is, if you don't have a relative or a friend at the power plant, you won't get a job. An acquaintance of mine was trying only for an internship and they didn't let him" (female resident of Czarnowąsy).

It should be added that paradoxically, along with the influx of people interested in working and living in the commune there is a very noticeable phenomenon of depopulation of villages. This mainly applies to young people who often use family contacts in Germany or the Netherlands. Opinions about the aging of the commune's residents are confirmed by the statements of one of the local parish priests, who finds a noticeable drop in fertility, visible from his perspective in the decreasing number of baptisms and communions.

The fears of interviewees about workplaces are accompanied by the conviction that foreigners will take the most attractive jobs in the Opole Power Plant, perceived as a very reliable and good employer in the region. It is also a source of employment for many residents of neighboring communes and the city of Opole. Work at the plant is considered very attractive by the residents. Apart from the common conviction about relatively high salaries, it is of great importance that it is a job at their place of residence, providing permanent employment, various financial allowances, and the prospect of a decent pension. Such opinions are often accompanied by the conviction that it is extremely difficult to get a job at a power plant and that it can be guaranteed primarily by personal or family connections. Sometimes those opinions are supplemented with the assumption that highly specialized professionals who arrive from distant cities work in the power plant. It is commonly believed that a job at the power plant is very hard to get, even if you "know people." However, upon getting employed there, people's lives change. Very good salaries, trainings, perks are magnets that attract people, therefore it is difficult to find people who would say negative things about their employment at the plant, regardless of their position.

The fact of the current identification of an attractive job in a power plant with employment in a consortium of companies dealing with its extension is extremely important. Therefore, a potential employer is not the power plant but a contractor of an extension project who employs subcontracting companies that carry out specific stages of work. The majority of residents completely fail to understand the principles of the consortium's operation, the course of

decision-making processes, rules concerning tendering systems, or the process of implementing a complex project. Without having the necessary knowledge about modern ways of organizing work with a large industrial investment, they cannot effectively seek to participate in the subsequent stages of the expansion processes. One can also notice the lack of faith in the capabilities and resources of local companies. Hence the conviction about the lack of competitiveness towards the more affluent Polish and foreign enterprises, and the fear of confrontation with them. In addition, the daunting process of decision-making, which local entrepreneurs commonly and sarcastically call “red tape,” is regarded as discouraging. This does not mean, however, that there were no investors in the municipality who were able to establish a direct cooperation with the consortium developing the power plant.

The ambivalence of attitudes towards the operation and development of the power plant is visible among many residents of the commune. Some are looking for direct or indirect benefits, others are critical and do not see themselves nor the commune profiting from the implementation of the investment, which is illustrated by the repetitive utterances:

“There’s no work. If someone wants a job at the plant, they need to have connections. Young people are fleeing from the city and the commune, most often to Wrocław, because there’s work. You’ll always find something there, unlike here (...) For the residents, there’s nothing in it. All those companies and what not are taking over the residents’ jobs. And the commune? The commune might have some profits from it. Contributions paid by the power plant or something like that. And they get hot water and heating from the plant, so it’s warm in winter and you don’t have to worry about that” (female resident of Dobrzeń Wielki).

“The taxes, so the revenues from the plant can be spent on various investments, development. We don’t need to resort to loans, for a very long time we had not been using EU funds, which I think was a mistake. Right now our mayor looks to it. Just because we are a richer commune does not mean that we cannot use them (...)

Another two units are being built. For us, the commune, it means more tax revenue. For the environment, however, it is another burden (...) Although the tender for the construction of two further units was won by companies from outside the commune, local companies serve as subcontractors and they do hire local residents. Local companies have the honour to develop and thus employ residents. Owing to that, the unemployment decreases" (male resident of Dobrzeń Wielki).

Statements glorifying and positively evaluating the presence of the power plant in the commune are repeated many times:

"The power plant has greatly influenced this commune. The commune collects high taxes and has the money for development. And many people have jobs thanks to it. It's very good it's here (...) It already destroyed what it had to destroy anyway, and right now it is only managing the rest of the area" (male resident of Dobrzeń Wielki).

"The commune is wealthy, people even say 'one lives well in the Dobrzeń commune' [wordplay, based on the similarity of words *dobrze* = well, and Dobrzeń] and that's true. Thanks to that power plant and those companies around we have money to take care of things here. The level of unemployment is virtually none, if someone does not want to work, they do not work, but apart from such cases there is something for everyone (...) This power plant is a treasure, because that's where all the money in the commune comes from" (male resident of Świerkle).

It sometimes happens that citing negative or positive aspects of the operation of the power plant and its extension is accompanied by opinions of indifferent nature, often connected with the failure to notice the relationship between the wealth of the municipality and the power plant. The power plant in this case is perceived as an element of landscape that has to be accepted.

"A power plant is just a power plant, perhaps life was a bit better before it appeared, but right now it doesn't interfere with everyday life. If someone gets used to it and adjusts, then there won't be a problem" (female resident of Dobrzeń Mały).

The mutual relations between the investment and the local community are rationalized and based on common knowledge and common reasoning. Their features are the expectations and ideas of the residents:

“Ever since the OPS launched, the commune develops better. The commune has some income, it is all interconnected. For example, an employee will come shop in my store, I am making money, one thing propels the other. The quality of life is gradually improving, but it’s not looking as they promised. For example, they promised that people living right by the power station would have guaranteed heating, but that didn’t happen. They promised every resident would get a job, and yet all the employees are immigrants, there were even some Swedes. In the old days when it was a one-man company, maybe they did fulfill these promises. Now it’s over (...) In my opinion nothing will change, the plant mostly cares about these institutions with which they cooperate closely. Us, small business owners, make profit when their employers buy things from us. It does not matter” (male resident of Brzezie).

There are opinions that the development of the power plant will not change much. Numerous obstacles are expected, and a greater interest in the protection and fate of permanent residents is demanded from the commune’s authorities. Hence the view that PGE influences local authorities, failing to fulfill its promises, which it should be obliged to live up to, having taken over the Opole Power Plant. These include, for example, the development of a heating network, reduction of electricity prices, and even the development of a local youth education system that would allow young people to work and take positions in the power plant. It should be noted that these ideas result from perceiving the power plant as a caregiver who is obliged to support the local community due to their location within the commune. For this reason, changes in the location of the power plant’s management have been negatively evaluated:

“We have a power plant, but the taxes go to Bełchatów. Bełchatów is our management here, and that’s not good. And so it’s like, there are outside companies, there are many such companies that they

have here, they leave a mess behind right here with us, while they (Bełchatów) are making money, because they're the management" (male resident of Świerkle).

Establishment of the PGE Capital Group (Polska Grupa Energetyczna), the largest power sector enterprise in Poland conducting operations related to lignite mining, electricity production from fossil fuels, as well as from renewable energy sources and distribution and sale of electricity, has made the Opole Power Station one of the many entities that make up this group. This fact meant that decision centers dealing with the relations between enterprises and the local community were outside the region of operation and impact of the power plant. The PGE Capital Group declares that it is a socially responsible organization aware of its impact on the surroundings and therefore focuses its activities on limiting their impact on the environment, acting on the basis of ethical principles and commitment to local communities by ensuring sustainable business development. In the case of the Opole Power Station, the most important manifestation of such actions are the so called Open Days, organized since 2008 and consisting mainly in educational activities which explain the technological processes accompanying the production of electricity, the role of the Opole Power Station within the power system of the country, safety rules on the premises, and subsequent stages of expansion. Those type of relations between the power station and the local community do not resemble the cooperation from the past, when the power station was an independent unit which directly supported local initiatives. The significantly limited scope of such cooperation thus influences the perception of the power station. On the basis of the residents' opinions it can be concluded that it turned from a "co-resident" of the local world into a rather isolated, separate entity. The industrial creation which is the power plant is visible from almost every place of the commune and it completely dominates over the local landscape. However, the residents managed to get used to and accept it, being aware of the benefits it brings them. Meanwhile, one political decision ended the existing state of affairs.

In March 2016 the residents of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune read in "Nowa Trybuna Opolska" newspaper that the mayor of Opole handed over a proposal to the government to expand the city of Opole by the areas of the neighboring communes. For the residents of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune that decision meant losing five villages (*sołectwa*), including the most economically important one: Brzezie, where the Opole Power Station and most of the large enterprises are located. The development of the commune and its far-reaching economic plans were now under question. That event dominated the lives of the commune's residents. Many of them think that the strategy of the Opole authorities aims at appropriating the communal space and bears the signs of an institutional intervention aiming at such a redistribution of goods that will impoverish the residents, and that those actions are not motivated by the necessity of territorial development of the city or the good of larger social groups, but a so-called "greed for cash." The willingness to break up a well-functioning local community, of which the German minority (Silesians) is an integral part, is also not without significance. That community had already borne high costs (material, social, environmental) connected with the construction of a major investment in their area, and when it began to develop dynamically using the funds resulting from the said investment, it is now about to be deprived of them. Therefore, it is no surprise that the commune's authorities, almost unanimously supported by the local community, undertook a series of actions aimed at defending the territorial integrity of the commune and respecting the civil rights of its inhabitants. That situation caused a spontaneous, bottom-up social reaction which had various forms: manifestations, pickets, blockades of roads and offices, national protests. Flags, banners, posters informing about the views of the inhabitants and their opposition to decisions taken over their heads appeared and stayed in the landscape of the commune.

Such a dynamically developing conflict created the need to look at the research undertaken so far from a completely different perspective. The expansion of the power plant did indeed cause issues which could be considered in a triad: conflict - tension - cooperation,

except that the problems associated with it moved onto another level. The operation and expansion of the power plant began to be played out between the authorities of the Opole province and the city of Opole, the government, and the community on whose territory it is located. Despite the decision taken on ministerial level about the partition of the commune, in 2016 the protest continued unabated, as the residents were still trying to find solutions that would be beneficial for them. Today, when the commune functions within the new, reduced borders and its funds have been limited, the resistance is not as unequivocal, yet it remains present. New questions arise about the future of the commune, the possibility of its survival as a separate administrative unit, the quality of life, and the possibility of starting business in new conditions.

Translated by Anna Pilińska

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The Opole Power Station, photo by Konrad Górný, 2016



The expansion of the Opole Power Station, new cooling towers,
photo by Konrad Górný, 2016



The Opole Power Station and the farmlands in Dobrzeń Mały,
photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2018



The Opole Power Station, new cooling towers,
photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2018



Buildings in Dobrzeń Mały, the Opolo Power Station
in the background, photo by Konrad Górny, 2015



“Pod Kominem” hotel, photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2018



“Dalida” hotel in Dobrzeń Mały, photo by Konrad Górny, 2018



The municipal office in Dobrzeń Wielki,
photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2018



The Cultural Center in Dobrzeń Wielki, photo by Konrad Górny, 2018



The seat of the Voluntary Fire Brigade in Dobrzeń Wielki,
photo by Petr Skalník, 2017



The school complex in Dobrzeń Wielki, view from Namysłowska Street, photo by Konrad Górny, 2018



The school complex in Dobrzeń Wielki, view from Św. Rocha Street, photo by Konrad Górny, 2018



The school complex in Dobrzeń Wielki, view from Św. Rocha Street, photo by Konrad Górny, 2018



Fountain by the promenade connecting the centre of Dobrzeń Wielki with the “Energetyk” housing estate, photo by Konrad Górny, 2015



Shops in Dobrzeń Wielki, photo by Konrad Górný, 2018



Marketplace in Dobrzeń Wielki, photo by Konrad Górny, 2018



Fragment of the new bypass of the village of Czarnowąsy (currently part of Opole), photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2018



Dobrzeń Mały - remains of river port infrastructure,
photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2017



The Oder at the village of Chróścice, photo by Konrad Górny, 2017



The Opole Power Station, view from the pond near the “Balaton” swimming area in Dobrzeń Wielki, photo by Konrad Górny, 2016



A family picnic in the village of Czarnowąsy (currently part of Opole),
photo by Konrad Górny, 2015



A banner expressing protest against the division of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. "We will not give up the commune, ours it is. We will protect Krzanowice, everybody knows it," photo by Petr Skalník, 2016



"Our commune is not Crimea," read one of the banners during the protests against the annexation of part of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune to the city of Opole, photo by Konrad Górny, 2016



Over 100 hectares of land where the construction of a large gardening enterprise was planned. The greenhouses were to be heated by the Opole Power Station. The project was not implemented, and the whole area was incorporated into the city of Opole, photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2017



Norgips - the largest company cooperating with the Opole Power Station. Similarly to the power plant, it is currently located within the city of Opole, photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2017



A celebration on the occasion of completing half of the investment, organized by the consortium of companies implementing the expansion of the Opole Power Station, photo by Konrad Górny, 2016



The Opole Power Station, new cooling towers,
photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2018



Buildings abandoned by residents, located in the direct vicinity of the new cooling towers in the village of Brzezie, photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2018 and Konrad Górny, 2016



The Opolo Power Station, view from Dobrzeń Mały,
photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2018



The Opole Power Station, view from the bypass of the Czarnowąs village (currently part of Opole), photo by Mirosław Marczyk, 2018

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Identification of the dynamics of bottom-up economic strategies in the face of the expansion of the Opole Power Station

Bottom-up social and cultural activities are often perceived as initiatives undertaken outside of formalized institutions, serving to construct a social world and an individual or local identity. It is also agreed that these activities are associated with various political, social, or economic phenomena occurring both on a regional and national scale.¹ It is in reaction to those types of phenomena that activities which can be called bottom-up are undertaken. They take form of various cultural activities, among which bottom-up economic strategies are of key importance. Impulses for those activities are provided by specifically targeted social changes. In Poland, they began after 1989 along with political and economic transformations. The result of these changes was the undertaking of various bottom-up adaptive activities, which became the subject of anthropological research and its results have already been published.²

¹ For more on the bottom-up cultural processes taking place in the microscale: *Oddolne tworzenie kultury. Perspektywa antropologiczna*, Piotr Cichoński, Karolina J. Dudek, Tomasz Rakowski et al. (eds.), Warszawa 2015.

² Among many publications on similar topics, the pioneering studies of Michał Buchowski and Tomasz Rakowski deserve special attention: M. Buchowski,

Along with the progressive course of changes and the influence of broader processes of a globalizing nature, there were changes in economic activity, in which the share of persons who most often started one-man or family businesses was visible. Similar phenomena were occurring in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, which at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s experienced problems connected with the closing of workplaces and growing unemployment.³ Small trading and service companies, especially those established after 1989, were developing slowly and only some of them managed to remain on the market or expand their operations. The situation changed when construction of a power plant commenced in the commune, and the plant soon became a source of rapid modernization processes. Thanks to them the commune was systematically losing its previous agricultural character, becoming an area dominated by industry and trade and service economy.⁴ The emergence of the power station caused a number of changes in the environmental landscape and initiated a process of establishing new forms of entrepreneurship, from companies strictly connected with the power station to various businesses meeting the needs of new residents of the commune, who came from different parts of the country to work in the power plant. Over time, the network of connections with the power station at its center began to be visible. From its assets, as a result of privatization

Klasa i kultura w okresie transformacji: Antropologiczne studium przypadku społeczności lokalnej w Wielkopolsce, Poznań 1995; T Rakowski, *Łowcy, zbieracze, praktycy niemocy. Etnografia człowieka zdegradowanego*, Gdańsk 2009. Newer publications: M. Buchowski, *Czyściec. Antropologia neoliberalnego postsocjalizmu*, Poznań 2018; W. Kuligowski, A. Stanisław, *Ruchove modernizacje. Między Autostradą Wolności a „starą dwójką”*, Warszawa 2017.

³ R. Kałuża, *Rola elektrowni „Opole” na rynku pracy*, [in:] *Między przeszłością a przyszłością. Elektrownia „Opole” jako czynnik zmiany społecznej*, Wiesław Lesiuk, Robert Rauziński, Teresa Soldra-Gwiżdż (eds.), Opole 2000, p. 59.

⁴ Already in 2000, several large businesses were operating in the commune, which was recorded in sociological research: W. Lesiuk, “Przeszłość i współczesność okolic Dobrzeń Wielkiego w badaniach Państwowego Instytutu Naukowego - Instytutu Śląskiego w Opolu,” [in:] *Między przeszłością a przyszłością. Elektrownia „Opole” jako czynnik zmiany społecznej*, Wiesław Lesiuk, Robert Rauziński, Teresa Soldra-Gwiżdż (eds.), Opole 2000, p. 8.

processes, so-called daughter companies were separated and eventually became independent. At the same time, larger industrial plants were set up to use the by-products generated as a result of the coal combustion process and other plants not related to the operation of the power plant. These companies are the main source of employment for the residents of the commune and the surrounding area. The potential associated with the operation of a large number of business entities became one of the foundations for the development of small entrepreneurship. The number of small retail and service companies is much higher in the commune than in the neighboring communes and it determines its economic potential. This network has been forming for many years, and in many cases the entrepreneurs saw a chance for its further development in the expansion of the power station, planned for the years 2014–2019.

The new investment thus raised expectations connected with the economic development of the commune and of the businesses operating within it. However, reality proved to be different, as the expansion of the power plant turned out to have no decisive influence on the functioning of the local economy. The connection of the major industrial investment with the local community proved only indirect, and local business operators were forced to seek common areas of investment which would allow them to use the expansion to their own advantage. Many local entrepreneurs managed in the new situation and recognized that potential financial gains from the expansion of the power plant could be obtained primarily from two aspects of economic activity. This concerns especially rental of apartments and accommodation for other companies which, depending on the time consumption of the works outsourced to them, book accommodation for their employees. They often stay for several weeks, months, or even longer, which guarantees a stable, predictable income. Occasionally those companies do not pay attention to the high standard of services offered, although senior staff expects a higher quality of accommodation and, for example, access to high-speed Internet. The rental price is a matter of direct negotiations, and the potential profits are high. Connected with this is the

phenomenon of accommodation providers accusing one another of concealing the actual number of people using their services and thus not revealing their actual income. In terms of accommodation rental, the inhabitants of the commune adopted very different strategies. A small number of places with hotel standards have been created or refurbished. However, the use of the existing housing infrastructure prevails. Only small repairs and modifications are carried out on a regular basis, while the rooms are furnished at the lowest possible cost. There are owners of grocery stores or bars whose businesses experienced a serious decline due to the expansion of supermarkets. Looking for profits, they convert their premises into accommodation services. The residents realize that the demand for places to rent is temporary, it will expire as the development progresses and will eventually end after the new blocks are put into use. For this reason, excessive investing in creating new objects, refurbishing and modernization of apartments are neither profitable nor necessary, since each offer is met with great interest of companies that prefer to pay larger sums than to struggle with costly transport of employees to power plants from distant places. On the other hand, owners of local businesses interested in renting apartments and hotel rooms for their guests and contractors noticed that the housing market in the commune but also in Opole "had shrunk significantly" while the prices had gone up. Thus, the costs of their businesses increased. Renovations of rooms intended for employees and the construction of hotels entails an increased demand for construction works. Therefore, companies dealing in construction materials, interior furnishing, window carpentry, electrical installation, TV services, roller blinds, windows, electric gates, etc., record much more orders.

Observing the strategies adopted within the development of the accommodation base, a clear division is noticeable into two segments of activity, one being temporary, and the other one based on a long-term, thought-out business plan. An example of this can be the operation of two hotels, each of which has adopted a different model of operation and development. The owner of the hotel "Pod Kominem," located in close proximity to the power station, uses the

economic situation of the moment and spends a significant part of income from the room rental on modernizing and raising the standards of provided services. (Currently, these services are targeted mainly at people working at the construction site of the new blocks and are characterized by a low standard of dormitory-type rooms.) As a result, this is supposed to allow to improve the quality of services to such an extent so that once the development of the power station is completed, the target customers of the hotel would include management staff, guests or various types of experts working for the power station. The situation is different in a hotel located in Dobrzeń Mały. It was built from scratch just before the expansion began, and its owner decided to use subsidies from the EU. In this case, taking advantage of the current economic situation consists in obtaining funds which will allow to pay off the loans and continue the operation of the hotel after the expansion. It should be emphasized that the quality of the services offered is already high, and the owner is planning on expanding it by a recreational section. Here the target group are supposed to be tourists, especially members of families who had emigrated to Germany and who are now eager to visit their homeland. Another important part of the activity is the organization of various kinds of special events.

Trade is considered as yet another aspect of profitable activity. Increased revenues were expected especially in the food industry. It was hoped that the workers employed at the development will shop in the businesses operating within the commune. It did happen, but trade was almost monopolized by chain stores and markets such as Dino, Biedronka, or Tesco, and so small, family-owned stores were only slightly affected by the economic upturn. However, exceptions from this rule can be found which point to the ability to adapt to changing conditions. For instance, the owner of a butcher shop in the town of Borki states that she sells much more to individual clients, and she also takes delivery orders from some companies. Among her customers there are also foreigners hired at the expansion of the power station. From her perspective, what is important is the quality of offered goods, because regional and natural products,

especially those that do not contain preservatives, are very popular among clients. The owner of one of the family-owned grocery stores adopted a different solution in the face of increased competition; she changed her line of work and started selling shoes, which turned out to be an extremely successful undertaking. It should be added that the store also sells online, which shows innovation and coping skills in the face of changing business environment.

Therefore, also in this case more or less accurate strategies based on economically justified decisions count the most. A very important aspect which affects the reduction of costs of running a business is its location on one's own property, which is very common in the case of a commune. Usually, the location is the decisive factor in starting the activity: the closer it is to the main communication routes, the better.

Gas stations are exceptionally satisfied with the expansion of the power station; recognizing that they are dealing with constructors of power units is not a problem, as they for instance require invoices. They record a significant increase in demand, and hence turnover and profits. They needed to adjust quickly to the new situation by changing the assortment of goods offered in their own convenience stores. This concerns seemingly unimportant details, such as introducing large size of coffee packs instead of small, because the new customers expected that. Currently, small local transportation companies which mainly work for the power plant are also using the gas station. The influx of employees developing the power plant resulted in an increased demand for food and catering services, however, from the observations made during the study it appears that the owners of local restaurants or so-called small gastronomy did not significantly increase their revenues. It must be remembered that workers mainly use canteens located at the power plant and prepare meals on their own, which is due to saving money and having access to a kitchen. It can be added that large restaurants did not adjust their offers to the new circumstances, while they could have include cheap meals for employees of companies or the Consortium, which is the main contractor of the extension project. For this reason, the

most frequent customers are still the residents of the commune, whereby, as the owners claim, the custom of family dining in restaurants on weekends or holidays is systematically disappearing. The basic profit in such places is therefore obtained from the organization of weddings and other family and occasional events.

Other beneficiaries of the extension of the power plant include, for example, companies dealing in advertising services, banners, signboards, etc. For them, the power plant has always been a good customer, and the emergence of new enterprises at its expansion is another opportunity to increase profits. Although some companies bring their own promotional materials, still many business owners outsource the production of such materials to local, even very small companies.

Another example is car workshops, although the situation is ambiguous in this case. Increased revenue is particularly noted in those workshops which are located in visible, well-marked places. One of the owners states that there has been an increase in the number of individual clients from various parts of Poland as well as from abroad. He managed to enter into cooperation with many companies working for the power station and he provides car repairs and other services for them. New customers are often forced to use his services due to the long distance from their place of residence or company seat. As one of few respondents, he recognizes their reliability. He explains this is due to the specifics of the operation of the Consortium that implements the expansion of the power plant. They monitor their contractors and if they do not meet certain requirements, their contracts can be terminated. Such subcontractors are not incidental, and the selection made by the Consortium is considered to guarantee that they will also make their payments to the local companies in a fair and timely manner. In a similar way, the District Vehicle Control Station in Czarnowąs significantly increased their profits; it serves a large part of the trucks used at the development of the power plant, and also cars registered with companies cooperating with the plant. It is similar in other but not all car and repair workshops, especially those that are off the beaten track. An example of such dashed hopes

for increased profit could be statements that not many new customers appeared. They come sporadically and expect cheap, quick, and temporary repairs only in the event of an emergency failure. They do thorough repairs and modernizations in their place of residence, especially when driving company cars.

Good business conditions are favorable for local companies dealing in training, consulting, control and supervision of health and safety, projects and construction supervision, which cooperate with subcontractors and contractors for the extension of the power plant. In this case, the economic situation is conducive to an increase in the number of orders and financial inflows. Ever since many more people have been passing through the commune, profits increased in a photo shop whose customers were workers from Poland and abroad who needed photographs required to get necessary documents. The increase in sales also applies to household appliances, and even a clothing store or a garden design company have new customers.

It should be added that also people who do not reside in the commune and only run their businesses there comment positively on the development of the commune, the high standard of living, and the infrastructure. The commune compares favorably with the neighboring communes or even the city of Opole. The wealth of the commune is mainly associated with the power station being located on its premises and considered as a guarantor of financial stability. In this way, the commune becomes an attractive partner for entrepreneurs using a variety of amenities and the orders it places. In other parts of the Opole region such a situation is a rarity, which is not surprising since the Dobrzeń Wielki commune is the richest village commune in the region.

Due to the direct participation in the development, and earlier the construction of the power plant and the role it plays in the local community, the Kociok Company deserves special attention. Its owner developed his own business while the power station was still under construction. He was prompted by personal observations from the construction site, where he worked for a short time. In his opinion, the lack of work organization was very noticeable. This

observation and his experiences from his stay in Germany, where he encountered entirely different patterns, encouraged him to establish his own business, which soon received its first orders from the power station in the final stages of its construction. Having obtained information about the expansion, the company started preparations for participation in tenders announced by the consortium managing the investment. Those consisted in purchasing new equipment or increasing employment so as to be able to compete on the market. The company's asset is its location in the commune, in close proximity to the construction site, which significantly diminishes labor costs and thus allows to offer cheaper services. As a result, the company won a number of tenders related to, for example, earthworks and is treated by the Consortium as a company whose services can be used in emergency cases, at the so-called intervention works. It can be added that the owner, anticipating the complicated process of receipt of orders and the necessity of issuing payment certificates, ensured the creation of financial reserves which allow for smooth operation. The owner's reflections on the attitudes of the residents of the commune, who barely take advantage of the fact that the power plant is located in their neighborhood, are also interesting. They do not attempt to reap any profits from it, even ignoring the employment opportunities offered by the companies engaged in the process of the plant's development. They consider the offered salaries too low, and the job too hard, counting on lucrative position in Germany. Therefore, the company often hires specialists from outside the commune.⁵

⁵ This issue is also often raised by owners of other companies, noticing the lack of workforce, like the manager of a company that sells and installs windows: "To be honest, there's a problem with professionals, we're actually waiting for them to arrive. Because in this region there are major problems with finding people for work. I know it can be a matter of money and so on, but even when it comes to young people for jobs that do not require any bigger knowledge or skill, there's still a problem with finding workers. That they bring people from abroad, mostly from Ukraine, that's better for us that we have more hands for work" (business owner from the village of Brzezie, currently a part of Opole).

The Kociok company is an example of a dynamically developing enterprise, skillfully using the opportunity to earn income from the works performed at the extension of the power plant. Among other things, it is owing to those works that the company is steadily growing, although in the opinion of its owner, the orders for the extension are only about 30% of its processing capacity. It follows that currently the major part of economic activity is carried out not only at the plant's development and in the commune, but above all in the supra-local market. It is thus a very good example of how a bottom-up economic initiative transforms, owing to the cooperation with the plant, into an independent enterprise, for which the local market becomes too small and does not ensure the use of the company's potential. This also concerns a few other large companies, for which the commune ceases to be an economic partner. Their owners, hiring between several and several dozen workers, hold it against the commune that while they contribute large sums into the local budget from the taxes they pay, they are still not treated seriously and they are exposed to numerous restrictions. Moreover, they are accused of excessive exploitation and destruction of roads, production of noise and smoke pollution, and the degradation of the commune's environment. Some business owners state that there had even been suggestions they should limit their operations and point to the fact that the commune authorities should be favorable to residents, who appreciate the peaceful, rural way of living or treat the commune as a bedroom community. Therefore, in this group of business owners the opinions that preferably the entire commune should be joined to the city of Opole are much more common, as the Commune Office is no longer an attractive contractor for them.

On the other hand, those who run small businesses are said to be given preferential treatment, as the commune creates perfect conditions for them. Let the statement of a person who compares their experience with the officials in Opole and in Dobrzeń Wielki serve as an example. Not only did they not receive any help from the officials, but they were informed about various problems connected with establishing a business in the industry that they proposed:

“Why do you want to run something like that? Do you know how harmful it is for the city? Do you know these services can be a disturbance? Do you know you’ll need consents from the neighbors? Do you know you’ll need permits from the environmental protection section?”(a city official in Opole)

In the same situation, the officials from the Dobrzeń Wielki commune acted quite differently:

“I came to the commune office and I said I was going to look for a piece of land and (...) open such and such line of business. Would you like me to get the mayor? Please, do come in. I went in and I tell him what this is about. Madam, we will do everything to make this easier for you. I will appoint a person who will guide you through this. We are very happy that such a business will run in the area, because we do not have one yet. We will help you a lot. He went with me to the construction department, he appointed a person to help me, and that person really did guide me by the hand through everything. After three months, I have everything. Construction permit included. Do you see the difference? Because I do (...) you have an issue, you go to the right window in the office, you tell them what your problem is, please sit down, I will help you, this is what I’m here for. They have the time, they have the will” (female resident of Czarnowąsy).

A good example of discrepancy between large and small business operators was the assessment of the construction of the planned bypass around five communal towns located by the main road No. 454 and how it will affect the economic activity carried out in these towns. In this case, fears were voiced by owners of small businesses located primarily in the immediate vicinity of the road. They were convinced that the decrease in road traffic would cause a substantial decrease in the number of customers, a reduction of income from sales or services, and it could be a potential threat to their operations.

“Once they build a bypass, Dobrzeń Wielki will be a regular, poorly developed village, off the beaten track, the development of the power station will only bring losses or nothing will change. We have fewer and fewer customers, our store is the last one in the village” (male resident of Dobrzeń Wielki).

Large business owners assess the construction of the bypass differently, especially those for whose operations the ease and speed of transport and communication are very important. In this case, the bypass promotes mobility and reduces costs, and so from their perspective it is an awaited and desired investment.

When it comes to issues connected with communication and transport, the residents of the commune notice something seemingly obvious, namely the possibility of using the Oder. It is a natural waterway running through the territory of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, and it remains unappreciated. The residents do not understand why the coal is delivered to the plant via railway, and all other deliveries via road transport. The decision makers are being accused of not taking actions to restore water transport and modernize the port which operated here in the past. Some residents remember the times when barges transported coal from the Upper Silesia, and on their way back up the river they carried river mud, which was used to fill the corridors in the mines. A recent renovation of the locks and sluice located near the village of Chróścice is considered a harbinger of changes in this matter, as a few residents of the commune found employment at the site.

The extension of the power plant thus influenced the development of entrepreneurship in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. A large industrial investment became a reason for and an opportunity to restructure the existing economic potential, which is particularly illustrated by the dynamics of the emergence or transformation of the already existing economic entities. Their number is estimated at almost one thousand, with a vast majority of private companies, of which most are small, often one-person economic entities. The statement that such bottom-up economic practices undertaken by the local community are only to a small extent directly related to the operation or development of the power plant is not justified. Moreover, the creation and development of an accommodation base for construction workers, employees of the Consortium and the Opole Power Station, and the increased demand for services and commerce are only seemingly the only visible consequences.

The flow of capital is much more complicated and cannot be captured without a deeper analysis of the employment structure, and the network of social and economic connections.

While considering the mutual relations between the local community in Dobrzeń Wielki and the Opole Power Station, its long-term operation in the commune seems to be of much greater importance than its expansion, influencing the local environment for the past few years. It is primarily the construction and operation of the power plant, and not its extension, which has left its mark on the history of the commune and its present day. The sudden increase in the number of residents and thus the increase in demand for services and trade released the potential and creativity of local, grass-roots economic activities. The cultural environment in which the described processes take place is not without significance in this respect. For this environment, identity and adherence to certain values such as attachment to the inhabited space, community, or work ethos, are very significant. Therefore, the effective implementation of economic strategies is influenced by the “entrepreneurial habitus” associated in this case with the incumbent population of Silesian origin or the German minority community. Such an observation undoubtedly requires in-depth comparative studies.⁶ Meanwhile it should be concluded that this group brought into the commune certain models which were not commonly known in the Polish cultural landscape after 1989. This concerns particularly the models of functioning of economic initiatives, thoughtful and economically justified undertakings supported by courage in decision making, resourcefulness and conviction about their effectiveness. The residents acquired those skills while working in Germany and other highly developed countries of Western Europe, where they came into contact with a different system of work organization, and the relation between its quality and remuneration. Equipped with this knowledge, they

⁶ Similar issues were noticed during the studies on the impact of the A2 motorway on local cultural landscapes: W. Kuligowski, A. Stanisław, *Ruchome modernizacje. Między Autostradą Wolności a „starą dwójką,”* Warszawa 2017, p. 316.

could easily meet the requirements of the political change in Poland. An important role in this case was also played by the fact that they had capital accumulated abroad, which in large part could be invested in their own business activities in their place of residence. Even if their enterprises failed, they had the possibility of returning to their previous way of living, that is, to go abroad for work. Moreover, coming back to their country they brought experiences and standards of living observed abroad, which contributed to modernizing and developing their own surroundings and environment. Similar models and high western European standards were applied into the models of governance and management of the community, which was thus becoming modernized at a rapid pace. However, that would not have been possible, had it not been for the very good financial condition of the commune, which was largely owing to the power plant being located in the commune. Consistent economic policy of the communal authorities, skillful spending of financial resources, and prospective action plans were conducive to the placement of new companies in the commune, and thus the creation of new workplaces and many bottom-up initiatives. All these phenomena formed an inextricable network of economic connections and solidified the capital flow between large industry, the financial resources of the commune, and small business operators. The economic successes of the commune associated with it translated directly into high quality of everyday life of the residents and they attracted a growing number of new residents interested not only in living in a commune which was clean and friendly in terms of social benefits, but also in locating their own businesses in it.

The economic relations between the local entrepreneurship and the operation and expansion of the Opole Power Station, which largely decided on the existence of the community, determined the specifics of socio-economic connections and the grass-roots economic activities undertaken within those relations. Those specifics also influenced the development plans designed in accordance with long-term strategies by the commune's authorities. It should be added that the possibility of such long-term planning was possible

owing to predictable and stable financial inflows, among which the revenues from taxes paid by the power plant and large enterprises located nearby were of key importance.

Such a stable network of connections between various types of institutions in the commune was interrupted when, at the supra-local level, sudden and unforeseen decisions were made to annex a large part of the commune to the city of Opole. The decision of the mayor of Opole, motivated by the necessity to acquire new investment areas, was accepted by the government and its consequence was the loss of five villages (*sołectwa*) by the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. Their area constitutes ca. 30% of the commune's total area and it is inhabited by a comparable percentage of the population. The power station and numerous industrial plants which used to determine the commune's economic potential, were now on the territory of the city. From the point of view of local economy, the event is unprecedented, as it disrupts or even destroys the socio-economic order of the commune developed over many years. There was also a threat of the emergence of phenomena which might affect the lives of the residents of the commune in a multilevel and sudden way. This indeed happened, the budget deficit of the diminished commune meant that without external one-time subsidies in 2017 and 2018, the municipality would face bankruptcy. According to the predictions of local authorities, without radical financial cuts and limiting or abandoning planned investments, the existence of the commune as an independent local government unit is in doubt. Layoffs of employees in the Commune Culture Center and the Commune Office started already in 2017, teachers were deprived of relatively high motivational bonuses, the support subsidies for care and educational centers and scholarships for pupils were significantly reduced or canceled, the number of sports instructors was reduced, and the plan was abandoned to subsidize the replacement of obsolete furnaces with modern heating systems. What is more, the commune was deprived of attractive investment areas. Area development plans were also no longer valid.

Decisions taken at high levels of authority and imposed without any public consultation, therefore forced and unexpected, led to a

dramatic situation. As a result, the richest rural commune in the Opole region has been degraded to a commune of a peripheral character, facing problems that it has not experienced for many years. The consequence of this state of affairs is the need to develop new strategies aimed at the survival of the commune in new conditions. If for various reasons the new strategies prove impossible to implement, the commune is threatened with bankruptcy. The decision made at the beginning of 2016 about the partition of the commune and the annexation of its significant area to the city of Opole was very negatively interpreted by the majority of residents and treated as an unjustified interference with their lives and achievements as a local community. The result of this were long protests in defense of the unity of the commune and its residents, the social space which should remain intact as one of core values. For this reason, there was a struggle to stop the process of the partition of the commune even at the expense of giving up the huge financial inflows coming from the Opole Power Station. So far, the actions of local and regional leaders have not been considered significant, the policy of the central authorities turned out to be more important.

Translated by Anna Pilińska

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Mobile livelihood: temporariness, indifference and flexible subjectivities in the industrial site

Introduction

Development investments are often perceived in public discourse as economically desired or imagined as a driving force of modernisation and important vehicle for progress and political economy of the state. However, such understandings are often limited in the scope of development possibilities and, importantly, deprived from nuanced, contextualised and localised knowledge. After all, the relationship between development investments and local communities is always an intricate one. It includes diverse and multidimensional mutual impacts and often produces rather unintended consequences of various valence.

Nevertheless, development investments and modernisation processes, in which the global meets the local, seem to be a fundamental aspect of the contemporary world. By creating frictions, tensions, but also various collaborations, they transform localities and reveal the multi-layered context of the contemporary itself. According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2016: 16), the local transformations driven

by global forces are “best understood as challenges to reproduction: people across the world have to renegotiate the ways in which they sustain themselves economically; their right to define who they are is under pressure, sometimes resulting in crisis of identity; and the physical environment changes in ways which sometimes indicate that contemporary world civilisation is ultimately unsustainable” (Eriksen, *ibid.*). Thus, the contemporary is a complex phenomenon with intricate interdependencies and existing entanglements of various social, cultural, political and economic realms. Government and business, culture and politics, nature and science, all of them merge together producing various global assemblages and impacting our local lives, experiences and practices (cf. Ong and Collier 2005; Fortun 2012, 2014). As a result, it might be argued that we now live in a time of uncertainties, which must be dealt with; a time where the future looms large in the present, but cannot be fully explored and comprehended.

The interconnectedness of the contemporary world had a significant impact on anthropology and the ways it conceptualises local communities, global and local entanglements as well as on ethnographic approach in exploring them (see Amit et al. 2000; Fortun 2001; Gupta 1998; Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Holmes and Marcus 2006; Mintz 1998; Tsing 2002, 2005). Therefore, “localities”, “regions” and “communities” have become places understood not in their physical and geographic sense as bounded and delimited, but rather as spaces of complex flows of social, cultural, economic and political matter (Olwig and Hastrup 1997).

In the following chapter, I attempt to move beyond traditional static idea of local community and focus on the mobility of construction workers who temporarily reside in the commune of Dobrzeń Wielki in Opole region (southwest Poland). To put it more precisely, I focus on the specific mobility in the industrial site, that is, on labour workers contracted to work on the construction of two new blocks of the Opole Power Plant. The Opole region is already a well-recognised research site, mostly due to role of the power station and the exploration of its impact on the lives of local inhabitants

(see Rauziński 1988; Łuszczewska 1993; Lesiuk, Rauziński and Soldra-Gwiżdż 2000; Rosik-Duleska and Kusz 2009; Soldra-Gwiżdż 2009). The construction of the Opole Power Plant spans from 1973, when the decision to build it was made, to 1993, when it was finally opened. Thus, it is an interesting period of changes and transformations not only in the political economy of the state, but also in the local community's perception of the power plant. The initial anxieties among local residents towards a power plant construction plans gave way to rather neutral or even positive valorisation of it. One of the reasons for this lies in the economic development and its social understanding and perception. But also, due to power plant the region has gradually become one of the richest communes in Poland with low unemployment rates. As a result, the power plant is now a familiar and important marker in the socio-cultural landscape of local community.

The initial construction of the power plant included an influx of people and the arrival of new inhabitants in the local community. The newcomers (engineers, electricians, labourers), for whom the officials designated new apartment blocks in Dobrzeń Wielki, came from different parts of Poland. Today, however, they are already "rooted" in the local community fabric. After all, migration inflows and outflows are rather common in the history of the Opole region. Many researchers representing various approaches and disciplines (sociology, demography and economics) explored the region, highlighting such aspects of migration as employment and unemployment, the inflows and outflows of social capital or migrants' investments in the local market (see Jończy, 2003, 2006, 2010; Heffner and Rauziński, 2012; Heffner and Solga, 2009; Solga, 2009). Thus, it has been argued that migration and mobility phenomena in the Opole region have had a significant impact on various socio-cultural and economic aspects in this area resulting in labour activities and entrepreneur initiatives.

Therefore, the region is often described as "emigration region" having close transnational ties and connections with Germany, which is the most popular destination among Poles living in the Opole

region. However, today there are also new migration trends emerging. The ongoing construction of new blocks of the Opole Power Station is one of the biggest state-funded investments in Europe and it attracts migrant workers and professionals from different parts of Poland as well as Ukraine and Belarus. Most of them stay in the region just temporarily, facing various migratory dilemmas of different nature. Thus, having been contracted for specified tasks and time, migrants “muddle through” the precariousness of their work, multiple subcontracting and flexible employment. Labourers’ mobile practices, which I explore here, are then interesting examples of contemporary livelihood strategies. Moreover, their mobility is a significant aspect of the wider context, in which a big industrial initiative reveals the complex interdependencies between different scales of the global, the national and the local imaginaries of modernisation, mobility and flexibility.

When I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork in the winter of 2015 and 2016, the power plant, located in the village of Brzezie, was administratively a part of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. However, on January 1, 2017, against the will of local inhabitants, the commune was divided and the Brzezie village, including the power plant, was administratively assigned to the city of Opole. It was a political decision, which met with a strong resistance from the local inhabitants manifested in demonstrations that took place in Dobrzeń Wielki and Opole. In 2016, people began to fight for the commune’s unity; apart from the protests, they also organised meetings and public consultations, and wrote letters and petitions to be heard nationwide. For many inhabitants, the one and only reason for – as they call it – ‘annexation’ was the income tax generated by the Opole Power Plant.

Therefore, the context of my fieldwork was rather intricate. On the one hand, the local community was preoccupied with the grassroot struggle for their autonomy; on the other, the ongoing construction of the new blocks of the power plant has generated an influx of labour workers, shifting every few months. In this chapter, I explore and attempt to problematize mobile livelihood of labour

workers and their strategies, which to a certain degree are similar to James Clifford's (1997) idea of "dwelling-in-travel." First, I introduce the context and predicaments of conducting an ethnographic fieldwork at the industrial site and surroundings, which also cast light on labourers' everyday routines. Next, I examine the temporal and spatial aspects of labourers' mobility as well as their daily strategies of living 'between shifts' while residing temporarily in the local community. It leads me to some critical reflections on popular understandings of development processes and relationships between mobility, work and labour in late industrialism (and neo-liberalism), with all the unintended consequences that it produces.

Fieldwork at the industrial site

The drive from Opole to Borki takes about 20 minutes. The bus stops in front of *Biedronka*, a newly opened supermarket with budget groceries, cosmetics, cigarettes and alcohol. It is quite a popular store in Poland, often called *Biedra*, which sounds similar to Polish word *bieda*, meaning poverty. It was midday when I arrived, and the store was rather empty. Only a few men, dressed in dungarees were wandering in the aisles and some elderly locals looking for discount products. I bought some necessities and made my way towards the Opole Power Station, which is in the nearby village Brzezcie. While passing through the railway crossing, I saw two chimneys looming up in distance and producing enormous clouds of steam. The closer I got, the more industrial the landscape was, saturated with construction cranes, scaffoldings, long rebar spacers and huge blocks of reinforced concrete. And hundreds of labourers, scattered around the vast area of the construction site.

I was struck by the size of the power plant, its industrial surroundings and work-organised landscape. It was an awe-inspiring sight with coal piles, industrial infrastructures and warning signs all over. I was heading towards the main entrance, where next to it, there is a hotel - transformed into workers' hostel during the

ongoing construction – and my field accommodation. Overall, I spent a month living there. It was a short, but rather intensive time, with many labour workers coming and going. There was quite a turnover in the hostel depending on what construction work was needed at particular time. But there were also workers residing in the hostel for a few months. It was a specific, rather isolated space, away from the residential buildings, with few dozen shared rooms and a bar on the ground floor, which became my main site of research observations, inquiries and collaborations. All the staff employed in the hostel (cooks, cleaners, bartenders and receptionists) were women, and most of them of Ukrainian origin.

The construction workers, all men, with whom I discussed various issues, such as livelihood, mobility and socio-economic conditions, came mainly from different Polish regions (Mazovia, Silesia, Lesser Poland or Subcarpathia). But there were also a few workers from Ukraine and Belarus. Most of the workers were employed in small or medium private construction companies that have been subcontracted for specified tasks by the main building contractor *Mostostal*, which supervised the whole power plant expansion. They worked in welding, masonry, carpentering or as rebar workers. There were also specialists and engineers, who visited the hostel's bar, but their accommodation was often in the Opole city. Since their work shifts (day or night) lasted sometimes even 12 hours, from Monday till Friday (but often also Saturdays, depending on the work plan and progress), they had very limited possibility to interact with the local community. One of the few opportunities to meet with the local residents was grocery shopping in the nearby *Biedronka* store or *Tesco* located a little bit further in another village.

In other words, their day-to-day life was rather constrained to work regime and off time, which they usually spent in the hostel. Some of them, mostly the young ones, hanged around in the hostel's bar and lounge after work, playing pool, video games or slot machines. Others went straight to their rooms or to the kitchens, where they prepared meals, watched cable TV or skyped with their families. During the weekends, some of the workers visited Opole's

night clubs, however, most of them went back to their hometowns, wives and children. There were neighbours from one of the Lesser Poland's villages or even families working together at the power plant's expansion; I met cousins, father-in-law and son-in-law and working side by side. Labourers from Ukraine and Belarus stuck together, but there was no friction between them and the Poles. The only "complaints" I heard from Poles was that the Ukrainians worked too hard "making us look like slackers." There were stories about Polish lads brawling because of regional differences and the "holy war" between two cities, Warsaw and Radom. But otherwise, they all hanged out together, killing time between shifts.

I must admit that in the very beginning it was a rather difficult field in terms of group access and rapport or even a sense of acceptance. As one would expect, it was a very "masculine world" in a rather traditional sense of the word. Thus, bragging and joking about masturbation were daily occurrences. Most of the bar's talks and chit chats concerned work (conditions and contracts), the pros and cons of long-distance relationships and who, when and how much has won and lost by "investing" in the slot machines. The talks about something else, on the other hand, were not so demanding, especially when a stranger like me is asking the questions. However, after a few visits in the hostel's bar and lounge, I managed to get to know some of the workers well enough to discuss with them their mobile lives and work-related issues. In achieving a sort of legitimisation, which enabled me to hang out with the workers as a researcher (rather than a journalist as I was initially perceived), I am more than grateful to one of the bartenders, Blanka from Ukraine, who at the beginning played the role of my gatekeeper. It was thanks to Blanka that we were able to break the (masculine) ice and talk more about life experiences and imaginaries.

Temporariness, indifference and flexible subjectivities

The context of construction workers' lives trajectories and work experiences, their high mobility and social and cultural practices reveal a significant interplay between flexibility, (spatial) indifference and temporariness. It shows particular ways in which existing global forces of social, economic and political matter, are entangled in local lives and produce specific livelihood strategies among some of the working class.

Most of the labour workers I spoke with at the power plant industrial site were very experienced migrants having worked at various construction sites not only in Poland (Wrocław, Szczecin, Warszawa) but also across Europe (Germany, Belgium, the UK). For many, the abiding high mobility and short-term work contracts became their livelihood strategy. By moving from site to site, they became accustomed to specific way of temporal dwelling ("dwelling-in-travel"). Such protracted mobile practices, which usually result from work opportunities, problematize the very idea of livelihood and its understanding in popular imaginaries. After all, the term "livelihood" usually is "to be thought of in economic terms" (Olwig and Sørensen 2002: 3). It is particularly true in case of migration and mobility phenomena, which too often seem to be explained in economic push and pull factors. However, as Karen Fog Olwig and Nina Sørensen (*ibid.*) point out, the notion of "livelihood" implies also other meanings, such as "course of life," "life time" and "kind or manner of life," which most definitely problematize the common use of the term and indicate "a historical shift in the definition of livelihood from an emphasis on the cultural and social to a stress on the more economic, material aspects of livelihood." Thereby, "various forms of livelihood" practiced and conceived by different migrants should be explored "in particular ethnographic and historical contexts, and the local, regional and more distant spheres of activity that these livelihoods imply" (Olwig and Sørensen 2002: 4). Thus, mobile livelihood becomes a product of existing global and

local interdependencies. Its contextualisation and problematization enables us to explore particular aspects of the contemporary since “the ways people make a living put an equal emphasis on habitus and habitat, on mobile livelihood practices connecting different localities. By studying movement from the point of view of mobile livelihoods that both define and cut across a range of social, economic and cultural boundaries, it is possible to explore critically the topical units and forms of movement that may be of relevance in migratory movements” (ibid.).

One does not need to cross the state border in order to migrate. There is a blurred line between migration and mobility, and the strategies and practices of the workers I got to know at the Power Plant construction site are in many ways similar to those constructed by many Polish migrants across Europe, with whom I collaborated previously (see Pawlak 2015; cf. Goździak and Pawlak 2016). In both cases, there is a tendency to use the spatial mobility as a vehicle for “making a living;” “living here but working there” is a common expression used by the mobile workers to explain their strategies of mobile livelihood. However, moving beyond narrow economic understanding, one can also notice the emerging contexts of indifference, temporariness and flexibility, which altogether become a crucial component of habitus constructed within the specifics of global and local entanglements. In other words, mobile livelihood of labour workers is embedded in a wider set of constructed, yet simultaneously objectified and externalized dispositions (Bourdieu 1984) that are acquired during life and mobility between different construction sites. Therefore, the combination of the social position of the construction workers and the context of migrating itself leads to the production of similarity within a habitus and, subsequently, to mobile livelihood strategies and practices that fit within the logic of this habitus.

In other words, the habitus of labourers, working in different industrial sites, is constructed in the context of work-driven sojourns, flexible employment and dwelling experiences. It is a habitus of high mobility in which time, space and flexibility are expressed and

practiced in a specific way. In the case of construction workers in the Opole region, who follow mobile livelihood and travel across Poland to different construction sites, and whose contracts of employment are rather short-term and task-specific, the strategies of daily life seem to be rather interesting. There is a sense of ambiguity in living this kind of life. Many of the workers with whom I spoke about it, pointed out that it entailed both a sense of feeling “at ease” as well as frustration and fatigue related to the idea that “one should work in the place where one dwells.” However, having been working for several or more years in different sites in Poland, they constructed a life strategy in which mobility plays a crucial role.

There is an interesting idiom which describes mobile livelihood, indifference, flexibility and the feeling of temporariness of my informants and which was used by them on several occasions. For example, on one evening, there was a dozen of us downstairs in the lounge. I was playing two-on-two pool and chatting with players, while the rest was standing next to slot machines and watched how others tried their luck. At some point, a wife called one of the workers and wanted to discuss some family issues. They only spoke for a few minutes since he ended the conversation quite annoyed and said out loud *mam wyjechane*. Now, *wyjechać* means *to leave* and *wyjechane* is a slang word for *not being bothered*. Thus, the double meaning of *mam wyjechane* expresses both, the physical absence (not being there) as well as specific state of perception (not thinking or caring about something right now). It is thus an interesting expression of being temporarily dis-embedded from daily intimacies and re-embedded in the context of work-driven sojourns, schedules and activities. Therefore, the habitus driven by indifference, temporariness and flexibility is a result of construction workers’ agency, work experiences and mobile strategies created within a wider structure of industrial processes. It has a significant impact on their understanding and experiencing of time, practicing flexibility as well as negotiating space and place in a protracted mobility.

There is a complex relationship between collective and individual experiencing of time, which often reveals the existing frictions

between different rhythms of different global, national and local scales (see Griffiths, Rogers and Anderson 2013; cf. Wallman 2004). However, in case of construction workers, there is also a sense of time, which may be understood in terms of being “in the meantime;” that is, between one contract and another, sharing the same time with people, whom we do not necessarily know or interact with. It entails different rhythms of “institutionalized time” (work schedules and assigned tasks) as well as “waiting” (for the next work shift, for the end of work shift, for the weekend trip to the hometown) and “time passing” (during the work, after the work) (cf. Griffiths, Rogers and Anderson 2013). However, experiencing time as “passing,” “waiting” and being “in the meantime” is not only related to the context of work schedules, obligations and dwellings at the construction site. It is also an important aspect of construction workers’ livelihood. Often I was told that living from one job order to another was quite difficult, demanding and frustrating. Being between jobs and waiting for a contract to come brings economic uncertainty and traps workers into precarious work. Thus, for my informants, the expansion of the power plant meant a longer employment and a sense of (temporal) stability in their mobile livelihood.

In addition, while being mobile and temporary, construction workers are also quite flexible. Flexibility is often a result of their “dwelling-in-travel” and thereby has multiple meanings as well as it also shows their agency. To put it differently, in order to work, they need to be flexible and move between different construction sites and tasks. Moreover, labour workers also have to adjust to particular conditions and circumstances (housing arrangements, working conditions) resulting from their mobile livelihoods. It leads to experiencing space and localities, where they temporary work, in a specific, flexible, way. In different conversations and chit chats we had, my informants told me various stories of their work-related mobilities across Poland. Interestingly, they were referring not to cities or towns they sojourned and worked in, but rather to particular construction sites and building structures such as bridges, highways or skyscrapers. As if places were indifferent and defined

merely by the contracted working tasks. In a way, they practice hyper-flexibility which raises interesting paradoxes and questions as to how and in what ways flexibility is conceived under the regime of neoliberal capitalism.

In the public imaginary, the link between flexibility and mobility often translates into social and economic “promotion” and “prestige” (Salazar and Smart 2012: ii). After all, the existing neoliberal discourse presents flexibility as a rather positive trait, almost synonymous with freedom and change (Salazar and Smart 2012: ii). Being flexible means to have the ability and easiness to change and to be mobile. It seems, however, that in the same public imaginary, mobile construction workers are not a “driving force” needed for infrastructural development but rather “silent agents” of industrialisation processes, who often face exclusion, uncertainty and even exploitation. It seems to be at odds with neoliberalism, which in the 1990’s was imposed onto Polish society as a “scientific project” and the only solution to “socialistic predicaments.” As a result, it “has become a hegemonic discourse constantly reproduced at various levels of public life: in the media, in school curricula, in everyday conversations and reports and in scientific works” (Buchowski 2013: 31; cf. Buchowski 2001; Buchowski, Conte and Nagengast 2001; Dunn 2004; Hann 2002; Makovicky 2014). Neoliberal ideology produced “new subjectivities” through discourse of entrepreneurship and individualism (Makovicky 2014). Thus, in order to adapt to “modern reality,” one needed to be the entrepreneur of one’s own life, had to be open to any given opportunities and be as flexible as the free market. One needed to be prepared for change, uncertainties and risks since neoliberal capitalism does not attach people to places (see Sennett 2006).

It seems that labour workers, whose livelihood directly depends on being mobile and flexible are a “perfect match” for neoliberal agenda. They follow different economic opportunities and practice high mobility between various construction sites. They are flexible and adaptable to a given working condition and while experiencing temporariness at particular work sites and localities, they use a

strategy of indifference, which makes it more feasible to cope with mobility, flux and change. In other words, labour and construction workers whom I have met at the industrial site should not be understood in terms of traditional and static category of working class, but rather as neoliberal subjects governed by economic rationalisation. However, in the times when “accumulation by dispossession” seems to be a dominant, profit-oriented ideology, even their mobile livelihood and flexible subjectivities might be endangered.

Work and labour in late industrialism

My second field visit, in February 2016, coincided with the fatal accident that had happened in the construction site a few days before my arrival. One of the construction cranes, attached to the emerging structure of the new block, malfunctioned causing a tragedy. The crane’s jib broke down and two workers who at that time were inside the transport basket, fell down from approximately 80 meters. One of them died instantly, the other in the hospital. The whole construction was stopped, and 1,200 workers were evacuated from the building site. The investigation conducted by Opole’s District Labour Inspectorate, which focused on technical issues and workers’ work-time management and schedules, resulted in imposing stricter safety measures at the construction site as well as maintenance control. In the following days, some of the workers went back to their homes, while others (mostly Ukrainians and Belarusians) stayed in the hostel, waiting for work to be resumed.

This tragic accident obviously triggered many interpretations and ideas about “what” actually happened and “who” should be to blame. For example, I was told that during the evacuation, the number 1,200 did not correspond to the number written in the construction documentation, which indicated that there were 800 workers working at the site at the time of tragedy. Hence, for some of the workers, one of the reasons was “cutting the corners” and following “deadlines” and “milestones” instead of the safety measures.

However, what is significant here is not merely the case of actual numbers and if they are correct or not; rather, it is the context of existing perils, risks and uncertainties within an industrial work place and ways in which they are experienced by the construction workers. The accident and its aftermath also produced fears and anxieties among the workers. Thus, the Ukrainians I met were worried about their salaries and health issues. There was one worker from western part of Ukraine, who did not want to report his finger injury to the employer, afraid that he would be fired. Another one asked me to explain how the convalescent leave works in Poland and to confirm that he was still eligible to be paid by his employer, a small building company subcontracted at the power plant's construction site. All of these anxieties lead one to reflect upon contemporary world and raise some questions about social, cultural, economic and political realms of work and labour.

Kim Fortun (2012, 2014) argues that we live in an era of late industrialism. It is a time when unknown and risky future encroaches upon the present. As Fortun (2012: 450) argues, "the future is anteriorized when the past is folded into the way reality presents itself, setting up both the structures and the obligations of the future. The future inhabits the present, yet it also has not yet come - rather like the way toxics inhabit the bodies of those exposed, setting up the future but not yet manifest as disease, nor even as an origin from which a specific and known disease will come. Toxics, like the future anterior, call on us to think about determinism, but without the straightforward directives of teleology." In late industrialism, the present and the future coexist in "discursive gaps" and "discursive risks," where the former emerge in yet inconceivable conditions, the latter, on the other hand, result from the strategies of experiencing and dealing with such inconceivable conditions (Fortun 2012: 452). In other words, late industrialism is a "modernist mess," an example of unintended consequence of "industrial theory of meaning and value" and "industrial language ideology" (Fortun 2014: 312), which produced particular "habits of mind, language, building, and

regulation in industrial order that privilege production, products, property” (Fortun 2014: 313).

According to Fortun (2012: 446), we entered late industrialism in 1984. It is a symbolic marker, but with real-life and disastrous consequences. On December 3, 1984, the world witnessed a “system failure,” when the 40-tonne tank “released its contents into the air of a sleeping city” of Bhopal in India (Fortun 2012: 446). It was a horrendous catastrophe that cost lives of thousands of people, with hundreds of thousands being exposed to chemical toxins. For Fortun, the Bhopal disaster was a climax in a shifting world, where old, industrial infrastructure begins to fail in both metaphorical and literal sense. Disasters result from “tight coupling between natural, technical, political, economic, social, and discursive systems, all of which are aging, often overwrought, ossified, and politicized. Deteriorating industrial infrastructure, landscapes dotted with toxic waste ponds, climate instability, incredible imbrication of commercial interest in knowledge production, in legal decisions, in governance at all scales - this is late industrialism” (Fortun, 2014: 310). Thus, living in times of late industrialism means to be living in worlds of uncertainties, which are created by ageing infrastructure, systems of deregulations and profit-driven risk taking at the cost of safety measures.

In her research, Fortun focuses chiefly on the complexity of relationships between environmental politics, ecological systems, toxins and human health, which reveal global entanglements being played out in local sites. They often lead to disasters and calamities, harsh living conditions and misery. But late industrialism is not only about the disasters happening around the world; it is also a broader perspective of exploring “things” which are about-to-happen. Uncertain futures, which are imagined, speculated and read through the signs and symptoms emerging in the present, evoke the existing risks and dangers. After all, before the collapse, there is always a “friction” and, just as in the case of starting the fire with wooden sticks, it might result in either “warming us up” or “burning us” (cf. Eriksen 2016; Tsing 2005).

Importantly, the emergence of late industrialism coincided with a radical shift in global political economy. It was a time of a rapid decline of “organised capitalism” (Lash and Urry 1987) and its transformation into the “late” or, as it is called today, “neoliberal” form (see Harvey 2005; Ong 2006; cf. Wacquant 2012). Thus, the end of “organised capitalism” meant that global political economy enters the era of post-Fordism, in which the relationship between work and capital is flexible, and the value of work and labour rather “disposable” and “redundant.” It is profit rather than work that is the core-idea of neoliberal capitalism. Industrial “order” of Fordist capital accumulation has been replaced by neoliberal “non-order” and market-driven deregulations, privatisation and speculations. According to Don Kalb (2014: 198-199) neoliberalism is a rather “messy” word, which “is now seen as simultaneously an ideological program; a set of governmental tools and instruments; the governmentalities, rationalities, and subjectivities emerging from the use of those tools and the ritualizations of the ideology; the alignments it makes with institutional traditions with a different origin, as in ‘neoliberal ngo’s and neoliberal human rights’; a convenient stand in for capitalism; and a period-concept marking out the properties that distinguishes our era from other periods, in particular the preceding world era of state socialism in Eurasia, welfare statism in the West, and developmental-statism in the South” (Kalb 2014: 198-199). Nevertheless, the transformation from “organised” capitalism to its neoliberal form has had a significant impact on various social, cultural, economic and political conducts. The “new” political economy produced a sort of world-spirit, in which neoliberalism “has become the archetypal multi-scalar concept, conjoining global structures and processes with regional and national level ones and all the way down to the intimate properties of personhood and sociality” (Kalb 2014: 198-199). However, neoliberalism might certainly be understood as an ideology driven by “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005), which reconfigures state and shapes political economy (Ong 2006). Such transformations are producing new social practices, cultural imaginaries as well as work and labour

relations. Thereby, according to August Carbonella and Sharryn Kasmir (2014: 4), the “world of labour” should be considered in “various stages of the making, unmaking, and remaking of class.” The existing dimensions of neoliberal changes and the production of new subjectivities “compel us to move beyond old antinomies in search of explanatory frameworks capable of making sense of the changing experiences of labor and all they mean for social and daily life” (Carbonella and Kasmir 2014: 4).

Neoliberalism and late industrialism make the future uncertain, precarious and, in some cases, even dangerous and life threatening. Whilst neoliberal reconfigurations of political economy loosen the livelihood certainties and introduce profit-oriented “accumulation by dispossession,” the context of late industrialism evokes the anxieties of working conditions and the questions of safety measures. Altogether, they create a risky environment where working force is dispensable. The case of construction workers, whose role in development initiatives is often neglected raises some profound questions about the impact of global forces (political decisions, economic turbulences) on the workers’ livelihood strategies as well as the ways in which mobility and flexibility intersect with modernisation discourses.

Conclusions

The Opole Power Plant seems to be strongly “rooted” in the local landscape of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. Its recent expansion fuelled new migration to the region and generated new economic initiatives. Thus, there are new retail chains in the commune as well as private accommodation designated mainly for temporary labour workers, who come from different parts of Poland as well as Ukraine and Belarus. There is a constant flow of workers at the construction site, which depends on their contracts and time-related tasks. However, there seems to be no deeper interaction between the migrants and the local community. For construction workers,

it is just *another* industrial site to which they have been either “assigned” or which they simply chose driven by economic opportunity. Thus, they are not interested in local affairs (such as partition of the commune) and do not engage in any local activities. To some extent, the construction workers residing temporarily in Dobrzeń Wielki commune are the embodiment of global entanglement of social, economic and political forces.

Labourers who construct a mobile livelihood and move between different industrial sites across Poland (and beyond) find themselves in a rather ambiguous position of being “here” and “there.” For many, it is an economic strategy which they follow for several years (or more), and which enables them to support their families. They are local, but only in places where they live with families; while working and residing at different industrial sites, they experience rather indifference, flexibility and temporariness towards visited places. Their mobile livelihood has been habituated and seems to become a strategy of “muddling through” the conditions of neoliberalism and late industrialism. Mobile livelihood creates a working context in which construction workers cannot be place-bound and change-proof. Rather, it imposes flexible subjectivities, which enable them to adapt to different working conditions and places they visit.

For the construction workers whom I have met at the industrial site, mobility seems to be a valuable resource. To be sure, most of them would prefer to commute daily rather than travel to work-sites, but it does not keep them from making the best of mobility *per se*. Thus, construction workers’ mobile livelihood, altogether with indifference, temporariness and flexibility, is an example of their agency, which shows different ways of dealing with the existing global forces and dependencies.

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“Settled in mobility” - migrating women in the area of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune¹

Introduction

Migration is a frequent component of the existence of the inhabitants of the Opolskie Voivodeship. It obviously found itself at the center of attention of social researchers. The limited scope of the following article does not allow to list all the existing studies, but works by Romuald Jończy (2003, 2006, 2007, 2008), Robert Rauziński (1999) or Brygida Solga (2002) should be mentioned. These authors, by

¹ The following analysis was based on 22 in-depth, open, structured and partly structured interviews conducted as part of the project titled *Conflict, tension, cooperation. Study of interaction between the Opole Power Station and the community of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune* under the direction of professor Petr Skalník (grant No. 2013/11/B/HS3/03895) from February 2015 to February 2017, so realized mostly before the change of administrative borders, conducted among female residents of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune in its then shape. As part of the entire gender-related module, over 50 interviews were conducted. Two general thematic paths were chosen which were used in the selection of informants - women who provide work in an industrial environment and women who are socially involved. At the intersection of these issues, another thematic areas emerged, among

using a multi-faceted approach, primarily take up demographic, economic, and social issues emerging under the influence of migration processes.

In the light of research conducted for the project, the Dobrzeń Wielki commune appears to be a specific area due to an above-average, even against the background of the Opole region, density of migration phenomena. This is due to the fact that in this region, not only do the indigenous villagers migrate abroad (Cf. Kluba 2014), but there is also a number of internal migration processes.

Since its inception, i.e. from the 1970s, the Opole Power Station is a population flow generator. In the 1990s, a group of employees of the Power Station settled in Dobrzeń Wielki, and a housing estate ("Energetyk") was built specially for them. Although initially common existence did not go smoothly, today indigenous and allochthonous people live in relative harmony (Cf. Berlińska 1997). Similarly, the Opole Power Station reveals its agency in this area since 2014, that is since the commencement of works related to its extension. Since then, the Dobrzeń Wielki commune has witnessed an influx of, among others, high and low-skilled employees of construction companies and people undertaking work on the hotel services market. Although in most cases their migration is temporary, their presence in the commune transforms its social, cultural, and economic landscape.

Each of these groups includes women whose migration experience is different from that of men. The gender of the involved entities is revealed at every stage of the process - from the decision to leave, through the shape of migration networks, the type of jobs available and performed, the nature of contacts established in the host country, the level of remuneration, and the manner of performing family functions. Gender is also imprinted in the migration

them women's migration activity and female forms of maintaining Silesian traditions. Empirical material was also acquired through participant and non-participant observation (among others, during the meetings of the residents, occasional meetings) and public discourse analysis (press releases, Internet posts).

policies of receiving and sending countries (Kępińska 2009: 48). According to Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, gender implies all social relations that constitute a functioning migration pattern and as such should not be considered as one of many variables to be explored, but as “the guiding principle of research” (Małek 2011: 58-59). Any analysis should, however, capture it in a dynamic and relational dimension, trying to demonstrate how gender shapes female and male migration experiences (Pessar, Mahler 2001: 4).

The subjects examined within the project do not so much carry out the act of migration, where the starting and destination places are clearly defined, but remain in a state of permanent readiness to be on the move. The condition of all these women can be described in Mirjana Morokvasic’s terms as being “settled in mobility”, because the objective is not settlement in the host country, but long-term staying in motion treated as a migration strategy. Migration in this case is not a single departure, but a constant element of existence. Paradoxically, being in a state of mobility allows migrants to “stay home” and as such can be treated as an important dimension of their social capital. The greater the possibility of strategic use of one’s mobility, the better it translates onto the social status achieved in the country of origin. Access to mobility and control over it, considering cultural norms and institutional context, are conditioned by gender (Morokvasic 2004a: 11). “Settled in mobility” literally means being “here” and “there”, while there does not need to be a national border between those two states.

However, in order to accurately capture the mobility of women in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, it should be considered in relation to non-mobility. Only a relational analysis taking into account the context of unequal power relations (here: gender relations) involving various social and institutional actors, and indirectly localized, including categories of time, space, and class dimension will capture the phenomenon in its entire complexity (Pawlak 2016: 57-58). Captured in this way, mobility is associated not only with moving in the physical dimension, but also in disturbing the class and gender hierarchies.

The intensity of migration processes occurring in the indicated area and the multitude of transnational actors participating in them predestine the following analysis to be embedded in the transnational mobility paradigm, which renders their dynamic character to a greater extent. The women for whom the discussed area became a place of temporary settlement are of different nationalities and occupy various social locations determined by political, economic, historical, kinship, and geographical hierarchizing factors. Working on both macro- and microlevels, the hierarchies based on gender, "race," ethnicity, nationality, etc., "shape, discipline, and position people and the ways they think and act" (Pessar, Mahler 2001: 6, 11). Dobrzeń Wielki is for them not only an area of emigration – traditionally towards Germany and the Netherlands, currently also the UK, but also an area of immigration, for which the Opole Power Station is the main causative factor. Some of them can be included in the group of highly qualified workers employed in companies commissioned by the consortium implementing the extension project. Others are Ukrainian women working in one of the hotels providing accommodation to the power plant's employees. Still others, making use of well-known and well-tested migration networks, decide to go abroad, while others are not active subjects of migration, but because of the migration of their husbands and fathers, their lives are marked by it. The experience of non-mobility completes in this aspect the analysis of mobility itself.

Women remaining in a state of mobility become members of the host community, at the same time negotiating a number of identities and connections with their community of origin. To this end, specific persons and their daily practices must be taken into account in their connection with other persons and institutions across borders (Millman 2013: 73). The following article is an attempt at analyzing family and maternal strategies manifested by women marked with migration, for whom the Dobrzeń Wielki commune is a space cutting across the borders, where multi-level processes of exchange of people, things, ideas take place. Owing to the use of transnational perspective, it will be possible to show family and household as

deeply rooted in gender practices, and to capture the multidimensional agency which reveals itself in conditions of migration and is manifested by the women as a response to situations resulting from their current position.

Transnationalism/Transregionalism

According to a general definition by Steven Vertovec, transnationalism is “a number of practices and institutions connecting migrants, people, and organizations in their homelands or in a diaspora” (2012: 14). The currently observed forms of transnationalism remain in relation to processes of cultural, political, economic globalization, over which they also exert influence. Everyday life of migrants is dependent on continual connections running above national borders, and their identity is shaped based on links with more than one geographical point of reference. Transmigrants become included in the political and economic system of the host country, and they also function in accordance with the models of everyday life established within it. At the same time, the space of their civic, social, political, economic, cultural, and emotional engagement also applies to their country of origin (Glick Schiller et al. 1995: 48). Transnational migration is thus a process of maintaining simultaneous and multi-dimensional relations both with the country of origin and the host country by the migrants.

Due to the privilege of the category of mobility and not migration understood as moving from one country to another, which eventually ends with integration or assimilation, the present study will use a transnational perspective where relations established by individual social actors may concern nations, but also regions. The women surveyed are characterized by remaining in a state of mobility, although it was not always realized in a strictly transnational space. The manifested intense mobility implies a necessity of emphasizing its dynamic and processual dimension. Defining the term “national” may be problematic. The nation state is not always a reference point

for migratory activity and the processes taking place in a given area are not always national. The reason is the ambiguity of the English term “national” and equation of the categories “nation” and “state,” assuming that a nation state constitutes a basic reference in migration processes (Bielenin-Lenczowska 2015: 15). In order to avoid ambiguity, transregionalism (or translocalism) is a more adequate term in reference to the migration activity of women for whom the Dobrzeń Wielki commune is the arena of events, since there are particular regions: of origin and of settlement, with its own specific cultural distinctiveness, that constitute points of reference for them. Following Nina Glick Schiller, I am aware of the inconvenience of these terms resulting from the fact that in the areas marked by traditions of various mobilities, the social networks of their residents go far beyond the context of origin and settlement, and through focusing on networks based on ethnicity researchers lose the possibility of capturing the intra-network relations of power (Glick Schiller 2012: 28-29 in: Bielenin-Lenczowska 2015: 18).

A shift in the concept of transnationalism has been made by Morokvasic, for whom it is an inspiring tool to analyze short-term circular migrations of women from Central and Eastern Europe. Remaining in the state of permanent mobility, the women she surveyed, involved in cross-border retail trade, house cleaning, and occasional prostitution, extend their daily existence onto two countries. These women, using the existing migration networks on a regular basis, undertake small, sporadic, and short-distance forms of work in Germany while at the same time maintaining strong bonds with Poland, which for the researcher was also an example of transnational activity. According to Morokvasic, researchers concentrate too much on the permanence and durability of transnational connections, while ignoring marginal phenomena such as the mobility of Polish women described by her. To avoid fetishization of the term “national,” a gender variable should also be introduced to the considerations of transnationalism, owing to which it will be possible to capture the structures of power and gender hierarchy (Morokvasic 2004b: 103).

Transnationalism does not have to be limited to the context of migration, and as it represents a large analytical potential it could be applied in studying many kinds of mobility. However, one should be aware of the dangers resulting from the abuse of the transnational approach and “‘discovering’ transnational connections in contexts where they do not necessarily function,” as Krzysztof Jaskułowski and Marek Pawlak notice. Nonetheless, following their voice I attempt to negate the necessity of applying a particular theory in studies on migration, and I treat transnationalism rather as a research perspective, owing to which the reality of the studied subjects is shown “in a more dialectic and multifaceted way” (Jaskułowski, Pawlak 2016: 141-142).

Transnational family/ Transnational motherhood

Transnational motherhood constitutes an alternative to the notion of an “incomplete” family referring directly to the category of a “complete,” that is, nuclear family, in which parents and children inhabit a common space. Women or men who decide to extend their domestic space onto the territory of another country break out from the universally applicable and desired pattern. It is thus essential to demonstrate the influence of social norms concerning the presence of constituent elements of particular genders on the construction of the category of motherhood and motherly absence (Urbańska 2008: 76).

By introducing a gender variable with a dynamic and relational dimension to considerations on transnationalism, it becomes possible to grasp the changes taking place within the family under the influence of migration. The patterns of migration chosen by women translate directly onto relations with a family remaining in another country/place. A household is understood as a social institution managing resources (e.g. labor, capital) and delegating tasks among their own members in the area of production and reproduction, where a

gender division of work plays a key role to providing livelihood and selecting a person to migrate (Zontini 2010: 31). Within this model, woman/mother is delegated to fulfill the caring roles realized in the private space of a home, and her maternal function is presented as key in the process of raising children. Under the influence of migration, there is a shift in roles and circumstances – a woman takes over the function of a provider of goods for the household, and the family ceases to be settled in one place, extending its reach onto at least two countries/regions (Urbańska 2008: 78).

Negating traditional constructions of gender on which normative patterns of family and motherhood are based is usually met with social criticism, and the migrating woman is blamed for the disintegration of family structures. The term “incomplete family” suggests a certain malfunction and imperfection characteristic of migration families. Especially the physical absence of a mother and a wife seems to intensify this “incompleteness.” The protective and caring functions, especially towards children, are then assigned to other members of the family, usually women. Female researchers describe a phenomenon of a global transfer of care services occurring along with the migration of women from poorer to richer countries, where they usually work as caregivers for children and the elderly (Cf: Ehrenreich, Hochschild 2002). In this context, there is talk of a transfer of emotional resources leading to a care drain in sending countries, whose victims, according to Arlie Hochschild, are the children, who go through an “inevitable trauma” (Zontini 2010: 55).

This pessimistic outlook leading to a stigmatization of not only migrating families, but especially migrating women, can still be reversed with the use of transnational perspective, which points to the maintenance of family and maternal bonds despite physical separation, and questioning the category of family as an objectively normatively understood unit, turning the attention towards the diversity and complexity of “family practices” (Zontini 2010: 33).

Mobility/non-mobility of women in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune

The research conducted within the gender module of the project showed the scale of intensity of migration processes which involve women and for which the Dobrzeń Wielki commune constitutes a geographical context of events. Mobility appears to be one of the main life-organizing forces in the case of the surveyed women. For the female contract workers employed by companies forming part of the consortium implementing the expansion project for the Opole Power Station, the readiness to remain mobile is often the condition for doing the job. These women - in many cases qualified health and safety specialists as well as administrative employees - realize a work model "from site to site," being employed at particular construction projects for the time of their realization, which involves the necessity of changing the place of residence each time. Stability in instability seems to accurately describe their rhythm of work, one of the informants states:

This is just the job for me, it is compatible with some of my predispositions, because I need change (...) And I have this change every now and then. Every construction site is a change. A change of environment, people, perhaps not a change of company, but people in the company, management, and so on.

Often a larger group of people hired in a given company migrates, which might facilitate the process of adaptation to a new environment and local settlement in new surroundings. According to our interviewee, the work environment alone was not new to her, because for the most part it was "the same old faces" from her previous construction site in Bełchatów. The mobility of this group of women takes place according to a specific and usually predetermined pattern, and its range is relatively wide and extends beyond the borders of Poland. One of the surveyed women described her work experience abroad:

That was also in the energy sector. Building power units in Hamm, so you might say a twin site: also two generators, you know, an engine room, similar. Only the area was larger there. Enough said. So this here is a big challenge. And later in Mannheim.

Other common migration destinations were the Netherlands, Sweden, Bulgaria. However, Germany was chosen most often in the case of this particular group of women.

For the contract workers employed at the expansion of the Opole Power Station, the readiness to move is inscribed in their job. Wanting to gain experience at complex and demanding construction projects, they take up the challenge to care for family bonds long-distance. This situation triggers a number of strategies created to minimize potentially negative effects and to optimize profits from their location. The surveyed women to a large extent professionalize their “embedding in mobility,” which is visible especially in reference to the private sphere, an integral part of which is the family. Distance from the environment is, according to one of our interviewees, a feature of an experienced contract worker:

A healthy mistrust, although you do not officially show it. This is how you recognize such contract employees, they talk about everything, but never ask you where you live, right? Let’s take a situation like this, that was in the first months of my work at a contract abroad, often there were a few of us in one car, carpooling, people would never want to be taken all the way to the house. They would just get off somewhere and that was it.

The informants took up a number of conscious strategies aiming at a targeted “managing” of an initially unfamiliar situation. Being “professional” migrants, they create a mobile habitus, that is, a number of dispositions with which they familiarize their migratory worlds. One of such strategies is a decision about not rooting in a given place, which is known to be temporary. Practicing domestic space is postponed by some subjects until the reunion with the members of their families who remain in a place conceptualized as “home.”

The place of temporary embedding in relation with performing professional duties is perceived more as a non-place, as a space of transit, temporariness, not marked by meaning (Cf. Augé 2012). Another interviewee always comes to Dobrzeń Wielki on Monday and leaves on Friday. She sleeps in a hotel, eats breakfasts at work, and dines somewhere in town. Her regular stays at home are in this case motivated by her son's serious medical condition of undetermined etiology. On the one hand, the situation worries the woman, she states: "sometimes I just feel so low you can't even imagine" and "I barely keep it together trying not to cry," especially as the son says he "doesn't want to live." On the other hand, the informant adopted a strategy of widely sharing the details of her son's illness, because as she claims she encounters people who have various possibilities and perhaps someone might be able to help her. Since her husband was not able to provide financial security for the family, she cannot quit her job, because: "that's not an option," especially that she once had a ten-month break between contracts and it took them a long time to make up for it financially. However, during her absence she can count on her in-laws for help. For the informant, an everyday technologically mediated contact with the family staying at home is important. Her attitude is particular and, except for when it is absolutely necessary, she does not establish close contacts with people, workplaces, or places of residence in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. It can be said that she has consciously chosen the strategy of non-embedding in the local migration context.

However, not all informants adopt a strategy of a postponed experience of domestic life. Some of them, who have already migrated more than once, firmly rejected the transnational family model and decided to move with their entire families to the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, although it often entailed negative consequences. The husband of one of the informants resigned from a well-paid job in Warsaw so that she could take up work at the expansion of the Opole Power Station. She describes her current migration experience as "too rich." Wanting to decrease the intensity of moving, she decided to settle permanently in one place, which was mainly

dictated by her concern for the children; she did not want to “break their hearts” by making them lose direct contact with their friends. The informant’s attitude was motivated by a conviction about the qualitative difference between the experience of being a woman and that of being a man, and the resulting social implications. According to the woman, children are customarily taken care of by the mother, and it is the man who should migrate for work if need be. In her case it was quite the opposite, as she was the initiator of moving to the Opole region and her family followed. In the woman’s opinion, migration constitutes a threat to the stability of the family, because from the perspective of a new environment it is easy to become fascinated by another person, something she has experienced twice. The tactics of creating a domesticated space at the migration destination are also used by Ukrainian women working in one of the hotels in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, where high and low-level contract employees employed at the extension of the “Opole” Power Station are staying. Barwomen and women employed in bars and restaurants create a mutual support group based on their common origin, in which the bonds are maintained through spending free time together (cycling) and celebrating Ukrainian traditions. Participating in church service has a particularly important dimension. Women from Ukraine aim at domesticating the migration situation through creating an atmosphere of familiarity and community, thus extending the home space onto the hotel. The strategy of domesticating the hotel and granting it the status of an emotionally significant place seems to also influence the men living there. Separated from their families and uprooted from the domestic context, they seek to recall the positive emotions associated with it, however substitutive. During my conversation with a Ukrainian woman who worked in a bar and one of the few women in that group who spoke Polish, a few men attempted to join in. They were usually guided by their need to talk about their families, especially children, and about the inconveniences of migration. As they intuitively associated women with the domestic sphere, it was with women that they wanted to share their private thoughts. The informant stated that she “knew

them all," as some were staying at the hotel for two years already and it was their "lifestyle." Among them there were men who had left the hotel, but came back again. According to the woman, she did not experience any mistreatment on the part of the hotel's residents, which could have been due to the fact she had been working there for quite some time already and she was regarded somewhat of an authority,² they even came to her with their problems or simply to talk, even if about other Ukrainian female workers that some residents sometimes have a crush on. Sometimes unpleasant situations happen, but "they will not have it."

The place that the informant conceptualizes as the "real" home, however, is in Ukraine, where her parents and her two daughters live. Her older daughter is an adult and she is planning to live in Poland shortly, the younger one has to stay in the care of her grandparents, in their home village near Lviv. As the woman admits, the younger daughter handles the separation really badly and often reproaches her mother for her absence in their everyday life. During numerous daily phone conversations, she explains to her daughter that her departure was necessary, because in this way the entire family can function economically, "it is easier." Her priority is the education of her daughters, therefore she stresses the importance of them learning languages and visiting foreign countries, especially Poland. She would also like both of them to study in Poland. She admits she often "wants to go home," but once she is there, after three days she wishes to go back. This is probably due to the fact that her partner is Polish and does not want to move to Ukraine, and the woman herself is also of Polish origin. The fact that she has a Polish Card facilitates moving between the two countries, since holders of the card do not need to prolong their visas, for which they would have to return to Ukraine. This situation provides an interesting context for the considerations of mobility/non-mobility and the ways in which they are dependent on the position determined by power geometry, i.e. the ability to move. Some social groups have greater

² I witnessed a situation when the informant shouted in Ukrainian at a few bulky men living in the hotel and none of them dared to confront her.

authority in this matter than others, some persons are beneficiaries, while others are “effectively imprisoned,” that is, completely deprived of the right to mobility (Massey 1994: 149 in: Parreñas 2001: 374).

The non-mobility of other family members is also an important context complementing mobility in relation to family. Many female interlocutors - indigenous residents of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune - described their experiences as children of migrating parents.

(...) I myself am such a Euroorphan, you might say, my dad worked in Germany for over twenty years. That left a huge mark on me, on my childhood. He left when I started elementary school and I actually had no childhood. My mom would be the one who was going to work and raising three girls at home (...) And all those domestic problems she had to tackle on her own. So it was difficult at times, especially that when my father would come back after a longer absence, everything was wonderful at first, beautiful, dad brought us chocolate; and the next day our mom would vent her emotions at him, being angry at the whole world, because this broke, that broke - she had to deal with everything all by herself. And us, we did not know how to act in that situation, so there was some sort of... For instance, when I was getting married I decided that if my husband wanted to go abroad, I would go with him. I am generally against that, such separated families, because I simply know what it involves; the pain of the children being separated from a parent, sometimes even both parents, being raised by the grandparents, that's an even bigger pain.

The adverse effects of migration in the area of family life³ were also expressed by other informants, who in their view on the issue of migration primarily took into account the perspective of children. One of them noticed on the basis of observing children from homes where

³ Family is an unquestionable value in the Opole region. Studies carried out so far show that even despite the indisputable changes taking place in this field, the family is the highest instance and point of reference in making life choices. In his study of Opole villages, Stefan Nowakowski points to the traditionalism typical of the region's inhabitants, also in relation to family. Despite industrialization and interpenetration of strictly urban elements, family in

one or both parents migrated that they were “out of control,” their non-migrating parents often yell at them, which is a manifestation of parental helplessness, and when the migrating parent returns, the spoiling begins, “oh let them have it, because I’m gone all the time.” This vision, which fits in with the pessimistic tone resounding from the previously mentioned scientific studies, is balanced with the statement of the same informant that in any family where parents do not devote enough time to their children, such problems can occur. In most of the statements, however, understanding can be found for the parents deciding to migrate, especially in the face of the limited earning opportunities in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune.

An important aspect of the women’s migration experience is a frequent placement of their work in the global care chain, which is

the Opole Silesia continues to fulfill the function of satisfying economic and cultural needs (1960: 37). There is a noticeable tendency to subordinate oneself to family authorities and family customs even after gaining broadly understood experience outside one’s place of origin. The scholar notices that women traditionally played an important role in reproducing cultural content, since “(...) a wife and mother of children usually came from a village that she never left and she was to a lesser extent exposed to non-rural influences” (1960: 40). As Henryk Czech notices, despite the revaluations and threats resulting from consumer lifestyle, media influence, and migration, according to the Silesians’ declarations, the family still occupies the top place in their system of values (2006: 154). Writing about the residents of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, he states that family remains for them “an important thing” (Czech 1997: 29). According to the author, intergenerational bonds and the power of authority of older people, mainly parents and grandparents, become weakened (2006: 150–151). Especially intense migration processes are a factor contributing to destabilization of families, particularly the departure of a husband and father tends to be fateful, since “such a situation causes the traditional, patriarchal model of Silesian family to collapse. The responsibility for raising children and keeping a house is taken over by a woman” (2006: 60). Traditionally, the Silesian community has formed their interfamily relations based on a hierarchical division of roles (Śmiełowska 1997: 5). Still, it is the family which is the main stimulus to migrate, it is within the family that a person to migrate is selected and the direction of migration is determined. Also within the family the main migration strategies are established - often another member of the family, who resides abroad, helps in finding accommodation and work in the new place (Grygierczyk 1997: 47).

visible for example in the situation of the aforementioned Ukrainian woman working in one of the hotels. Her work is a prolongation of reproductive work - she is responsible for the catering facilities and serves customers at the bar. Moreover, to the residents she is a trustworthy person in whom they confide their often intimate problems. At the same time, her own children remain in her country of origin and are cared for by the grandparents, mainly the grandmother. This situation is part of the phenomenon of the global transfer of care work from poorer to richer countries, as are women leaving to work in Germany as caregivers for the elderly. One of the informants, who runs a job agency specializing in sending women to Germany for care work, is aware of the potential abuse and risks involved in this type of job:

(...) I understand that sometimes the elderly person grows accustomed to that someone, maybe they get to know them, but I always explain that this is at the cost of this lady's family, those families fall apart because they don't have that relation (...) on the German side, there's not yet (...) a possibility or whatever you call it, because more and more married couples want to leave together and live together with this person under care or even in the same town so that they could see each other, no. The worst thing is, two weeks ago a girl called: "I'll be able to leave on Friday already, because my husband will be back from The Netherlands, we'll just switch," and they have a two-year-old at home (...) I don't know when they see each other. One returns, the other one leaves, I cannot even imagine something like that.

The informant participates in creating formal migration networks, thanks to which the women leaving for work have a sense of safety and a migratory social capital⁴. The woman regularly monitors the

⁴ Taking into consideration that the participation of women in migrations, including women from the Opole Silesia, is increasing and they currently outnumber migrating men, the relatively small number of studies in this area is surprising. However, works by Anna Krasnodębska (2012, 2013), and Marta Rostropowicz-Miśko (2014, 2015) should be mentioned. In connection with the fact that family is the main context for the discussion on migration processes involving women from the Opole region, worth mentioning are the articles

work conditions of the women staying abroad and adjusts the care schedules for each patient to the requirements of circular migration preferred by the employed women. Some of them also care for their own children or grandchildren, with those duties being delegated to other family members when they leave. Caring for grandchildren is an equally frequent stimulus for temporary migration, which is the case with a few informants whose children live e.g. in Belgium and Germany. Embedding within the migration network

by Magdalena Moj (2015), and Joanna Kluba (2014), in which the authors discuss the effects of migration on the functioning of marriage and fulfilling parental responsibilities. Although the tone of the above texts is mainly alarming - on the basis of her own research, Rostropowicz-Miśko states that migrations of women due to the high share of women in reproductive age are a factor responsible for the demographic disadvantage of the region (2015: 156-157), while Krasnodębska argues that a mother's absence can be a cause of developmental issues in children (2013: 175) - both researchers attempt to nuance the conclusions from their research results. Analyzing the influence of short-term migrations of women from the Opole region on marital and partner relations, the former states that "basically they have no negative influence" (Rostropowicz-Miśko 2015: 342) and although some interviewees did notice the inconveniences connected with the necessity of household chores being taken over by men, according to the author this does not have a discouraging effect in relation to the phenomenon of migration itself. Similar conclusions are reached by Krasnodębska, for whom the trip may be an opportunity to reformulate relations between spouses, with beneficial effects for a woman who, thanks to the expansion of economic independence, may free herself from patriarchy and the state of domestication (2013: 175). Migrating mothers make attempts at working out alternative models of motherhood and care for maintaining family bonds, in which they are aided by modern communication technologies (2013: 166). However, the author does not elaborate on these aspects. Nonetheless, Krasnodębska concludes that migration is a challenge to the traditional image of a Silesian woman, where the roles of wife, mother, and resourceful housekeeper determined the main axes of feminine activity. Temporary suspension of direct bonds with the family and the local community, as well as coming into contact with a different culture, are conducive to a reevaluation of previous lifestyle and rejection of the vision of a woman as a "guardian of certain ideals." The trip thus becomes an opportunity to expand the sphere of personal freedom, which, however, should take place without losing the "local anchorage" (2012: 131-135).

is often a prerequisite for migration, because it is owing to these types of contacts that the women are able to find themselves on the migrant labor market, without integrating with the society of the host country.

Yet another dimension of the impact of migration on the shape of family and the nature of bonds functioning within it is the relation between the grandparents living in Poland and the grandchildren living with their parents abroad. Although the fact of spatial separation impedes formation of direct bonds, the grandparents, especially grandmothers, who are already retired, often visit their loved ones for periods of up to several weeks. According to one informant, this situation applies to "practically every household," and it is the most dramatic in relation to older people. The migration processes occurring in the Opole region and the resulting depopulation and imbalance between birthrate and mortality rate cause a large percentage of elderly people to be forced to resort to institutionalized forms of care. Therefore, there is an increased demand for day care centers for the elderly, which are often established in former schools and kindergartens – the interlocutor mentioned plans for creating a nursing home in a former kindergarten in Chróścice. Due to the limited possibilities of direct contact, these phenomena require a reorganization of ways of caring for family bonds. All three daughters of the interlocutor, who is professionally involved in promotion of active living among senior citizens, emigrated to Germany, which was dictated by high earnings on the local market in the sector of their professions (health care). The woman's granddaughters, fluent in two languages in accordance with their mother's wish because in this way they can feel comfortable "both here and there," visit her in Poland during summer holidays. The woman reorganizes her professional duties with this in mind. She also tries to find time for longer stays at her daughters' in Germany, especially that her granddaughters have been recently insisting on showing her their new rooms, which are green and pink. As our interlocutors emphasize, it is important that her holiday plans are compatible with her patients' plans, which shouldn't be a problem, since most of them

also leave around the same time to their children and grandchildren in Germany.

According to other informants, one of the biggest difficulties for migrating women is the rupture of relations established within women's networks, which is significant for the functioning of a family, especially in the context of motherhood. The woman is deprived of support resulting from the relations of reciprocity and help which most often occur between women in the immediate family and friends, and are based on reproduction of experience. The need for womanly assistance results, according to one of the interviewees, from the fact that women who want to reconcile work and motherhood find themselves "at a crossroads," and according to her such reconciliation is not possible, because you are always "either here or there." Combining institutional and emotional support is essential for a successful reconstruction of these two spheres of life. The interviewee herself remembers very well how she had to "tackle three children," even though her mother-in-law lived only 5 km away in Opole. For this reason, she decided to help her daughter-in-law in taking care of the grandchildren. From the perspective of transnational mobility, the embedding within women's networks is reformulated, as in the case of the son of one of the informants, who has a home "here," but works "there," in Germany. Together with the mother of her daughter-in-law, the women try to participate in taking care of grandchildren who live in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune: "us grandmothers, we pick up the kids from the kindergarten." Although the woman's statement shows that she does not fully approve of her son's mobile lifestyle, constant movement between the two places, because they "keep flying like that" and that is "not good," owing to the help from family members, not only women, the family is positively reconstructed on a functional level.

A direct symptom of the studied subjects' active attitude towards the difficulties experienced within families and created by migration (among other factors) is the activity of women focused around the Happy Family Club (Polish - Klub Szczęśliwa Rodzina). As the interlocutors admit, the initial impulse for regular meetings in a larger

group of parents, mostly mothers, was the need to maintain social contacts. Over time, the initiator of those meetings, being socially involved, extended their formula and invited speakers selected on the basis of subjects which are interesting for parents/spouses. One of the women states:

I say: to work on the hygiene of your mind and change something. We certainly need those meetings, to get out of the house, that's number one, but also to learn something (...), to exchange opinions between moms who are facing similar problems. And to refresh yourself a little bit, let's say, to gain some new knowledge and exchange views.

The issues raised during cyclical, on average monthly meetings oscillate around the educational and health problems in children, marital problems, and broadly understood women's problems, which were diagnosed and signaled by the participants or by the organizer herself. Some of the issues experienced by the residents of the region certainly result from the intensity of migrating processes, something that our interlocutors are aware of. According to the initiator of those meetings, migration could have negative results for family life, as children become emotionally unstable, and the parents who cannot cope with it react with aggression and screaming, because "since I am not handling it, there's screaming." The parents compensate for their absence in everyday life by giving their children presents, and "that is not what this is about." The lack of continuity in contacts between a child and a migrating parent/parents can have adverse impact on the child's psycho-emotional development.

(...) some people are in a situation where the parents work abroad and once the kids are old enough to be aware that these parents are supposed to come home for the weekend, there's anxiety, joy mixed with anxiety. And on Monday mornings there's again some kind of discouragement, because dad went back to work.

The interlocutors, very often mothers and migrants themselves, show an active attitude towards hardships, trying to overcome the

limitations resulting on the one hand from the rigid framework within which maternal and marital roles have been perceived in the studied area, and on the other hand from the generally negative climate created by the media around the issue of migration motherhood. As one of the interlocutors puts it: "Parents nowadays are more critical of general recommendations, so it is not like they make a decision because others do it (...) they analyze the pros and cons."

Conclusions

The problematic nature of the issue of transnational motherhood is a derivative of the normative dimension of parental roles, in which the mother is permanently "assigned" to her children and carries out the residential care model. This approach, however, does not take into account the social status of an individual and the impact of global economic processes on the functioning of families (Urbańska 2008: 82). The diversity of human experience shaped on the basis of gender/"race"/class is reflected in the diversity of forms in which maternal care can be realized. In this context, individual realization of transnational motherhood in its emotional and social dimension is subject to global influences. A mother leaving their children in the care of others in order to join the international working class contributes to redefining the normative category of a mother, especially a "good" mother, based on traditional perception of gender roles (Millman 2013: 80). The "social climate" which is the product of discourse around the "absence" of mothers is of great importance for the positive or negative reconstruction of transnational motherhood (Urbańska 2008: 82). Taking into account the diverse expectations raised in the socio-cultural, economic, and political fields in relation to migrating mothers from different groups, may contribute to finding the cause of negative experiences of migrant women and their children. Anthropological research proves that the expectations towards motherhood are not universal and the physical presence of a mother by her child is not

a necessary condition for the proper realization of their functions. Francis Pine's studies on the inhabitants of the Polish highlands show that in that group a "perfect" mother wants material security for her children and her migration is not socially condemned. The extension of the care functions over children onto other members of the close and extended family, which ultimately has a positive effect on the positive reconstruction of transnational motherhood, is also of importance here (Pine 2007).

The conducted research, accounting for the social and emotional impact of migration of a parent, usually the mother, on the other, non-mobile members of a family, provided a more comprehensive picture in this regard. The wives of migrating men, although not mobile themselves, remain settled in a space of mobility, they live, as one of the informants puts it, in "stretched" families. The context for the global migration processes is also non-migration, i.e. not undertaking migratory activity which in this case is conditioned by the necessity to care for the still dependent family members and the household in a situation when the partner/spouse does undertake such activity. Although the studied subjects pointed to the negative results of such situations, which is compatible with the results of research carried out so far (Cf. Czech 2006; Krasnodębska 2012, 2013; Rostropowicz-Miśko 2015), testimonies of persons whose fathers migrated early prove that the experience of family separation can be difficult in itself, regardless of which parent migrates. While emphasizing the normative dimension of parental roles, researchers often seem not to take into account the changes occurring within the area of family life. Contrary to the reports of women and their families which have been cited in the literature on the subject, emotional labour within the family was a mother's duty, which was supposed to result from social expectations (Cf. Parreñas 2001), our interlocutors do not confirm this. They often notice a gradual departure from the traditionally perceived gender roles along with the duties assigned to both spouses/parents. The solution proposed by Rhacel Salazar Parreñas to the problem of the negative effects of transnational motherhood seems to be largely materialized in the case of women

surveyed, permanently and temporarily living in the municipality of Dobrzeń Wielki. The researcher claims that reformulations of gender roles within a family might not diminish the children's sacrifice, but they can alleviate the pain of separation and perhaps lead to a reconstruction of emotional care from a distance and reduce the expectations towards mothers, who are currently delegated to perform both professional and caring duties (2001: 385).

The conducted research demonstrate that the women "settled in mobility," for whom the Dobrzeń Wielki commune is their geographical context, are not passive and weak persons who are subjected to forces beyond their control. On the contrary, they show resourcefulness and readiness to manage reality in their own rights. To this end, they often use the transnational/transregional networks available to them. Making a decision to migrate, the women can escape patriarchy and extend their autonomy, which is also visible in the results of research conducted so far among migrant women from the Opole region (Cf. Krasnodebska 2012, 2013; Rostropowicz-Miśko 2014, 2015). Although in such an approach to agency the woman is not entirely perceived as the *spiritus movens* of her own experience, which results to a large extent from the conviction that the coupled action of capitalism and patriarchy leaves little room for individual intervention (Zontini 2010: 226), the analysis of women's networks, which in many cases make migration possible, reveals their subversive impact in this area. This happens in the case of Ukrainian women working in one of the hotels in the studied area, and Polish women migrating for work, usually to the countries of Western Europe. These networks play a significant role in overcoming cultural and ideological obstacles determining who can and cannot leave, as they facilitate entering into a "ready-made" migration matrix. Constructed also on the basis of migration networks, the transnational space becomes a "space of opportunities" (Morokvasic 2004a: 9).

An important aspect of being "settled in mobility" are also the strategies of "domesticizing" the migration reality adopted by migrating women, their patterns of selecting acquaintances, spending

free time, functioning in the place of residence with the aim of optimizing the conditions of their migratory position. Social reactions are formed spontaneously in response to unforeseen situations, and the individual autonomously and reflectively affects the practice (Bourdieu 2005). Women are as if *ex definitione* capable of making shifts in the gendered habitus, which to a large extent determines the scope of their activity. According to Anthony Giddens, humans as reflective beings are characterized by motivated and purposeful action, thanks to which they can “cause difference” and monitor the motivations and results of their own actions. Knowledge of convention and social structures is conducive to making creative intervention (2001: 50–51). Michael Herzfeld is equally “sensitive” in his search for agency; by the term “social poetics” he understands actions that take the form of a game with cultural immutability manifested in cultural/national stereotypes. Owing to knowledge of codes of behavior and norms defining a given culture, it becomes possible to undermine them and use them subversively, just as the knowledge of rules determining rigid morality opens the field for casual, even promiscuous behaviors. Any cultural/national essentialisms can thus be used strategically (Herzfeld 2005: 25–32). One should not, therefore, succumb to the romantic vision of agency equated with autonomy, because a conscious resignation from action or silence are also manifestations of agency. Functioning within normative systems, individuals often make “subtle” shifts in existing reality that make it possible for them to manage it for their benefit. Agency understood in this way is inscribed in the ontological status of the individual. However, capturing the agency manifested by the studied groups of women becomes more complete with the use of transnational perspective, where the Dobrzeń Wielki commune appears as an example of transnational social reality in which both migrants and non-migrants are embedded. For all the informants, their places of origin and settlement are positioned on a continuum, with each place having its own impact, triggering different emotions and behaviors, but remaining in a complementary relation. Important information is obtained here from the observation of

individual narratives and everyday practices defining the transnational/transregional habitus, which includes:

A peculiar set of double dispositions which make the migrants act and react in particular situations in a way which might be but not always is intended (...) Transnational habitus contains within it the social position of the migrant and the context in which transmigration takes place. This explains (...) generating transnational practices adjusted to certain situations (Guarnizo 1997: 311 in: Vertovec 2012: 74).

Migration, and especially long-term mobility, leads to a transformation of family structures. The conducted research proves, however, that a positive reconstruction of marital relations, and relations between a migrating parent and children is possible, as well doing production and reproduction work from this perspective. On the one hand, separation from their husbands and children is a source of suffering for women, on the other hand, it is often emphasized in this context that women become empowered to decide on their own money and time. A similar ambivalence is also characteristic of migrants' children staying in the country of origin, whose economic needs are ensured, but while experiencing the difficulties of separation from the parent they often feel neglected in emotional terms. Migration of a woman thus requires shifts in the traditional division of inter-family duties - the role of the mother ceases to have mainly a reproductive dimension and the father's - mainly productive. Standards defining the existing relations in this area are renegotiated and adapted to new transnational/transregional ways of family functioning. Realizing their motherly roles at a distance, women actively seek solutions to problems experienced by family members remaining in the country of origin. Despite the physical distance, they remain actually present in their family's life, which is largely aided by modern technologies enabling everyday contact. An attempt at capturing the strategies of migrating women from a transnational perspective thus allows to see migrating women as subjects endowed with will, who actively renegotiate the models of

family and motherhood based on the traditionally perceived gender roles, which paints a different picture, not inscribed in a “pathologizing” tendency.

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A large industrial project and the dynamics of intergroup relations on the example of the expansion of the Opole Power Station

Introduction

I visited Dobrzeń Wielki for the first time in 2004, with professor Petr Skalník. At that time, professor was preparing for the another re-studies project (he realized his previous study in Czechia, in the town of Dolni Roven), while I was preparing for fieldwork practice with the students of the Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology Department at the University of Wrocław. Soon, each of us undertook preliminary research in the commune, pursuing our own goals in the same location. I returned to Dobrzeń several times before the implementation of the project which became the basis of the following study. Since my first stay, when it turned out that this small commune is inhabited by a few large “us”-type groups, the study which was initially designed as cross-sectional and concerning issues raised in earlier sociological studies on the subject of the commune (among others: Ossowski 1947(1984), Nowakowski 1957,

1960, Olszewska 1969), became focused around the issue of creating intergroup relations, also understood by various actors engaged in their creation and maintenance as inter-ethnic relations.

The intergroup relations in the Opole region were the subject of detailed studies by numerous researchers, although undoubtedly it was the scholars from the Silesian Institute in Opole who devoted the most attention to the region. An especially valuable source of data and interpretations is the Institute's periodical "Studia Śląskie" [Silesian Studies] published since the late 1950s. Within the academic interests of the Institute's employees, there are also the inter-ethnic and intergroup relations in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. An important fact for an anthropologist studying bottom-up processes of constructing and maintaining intergroup borders within the commune is that an anthropological perspective dominates the study since the first post-war research in Dobrzeń conducted by Stanisław Ossowski (dated 1945) to more recent works of sociologists from the Silesian Institute (cf. Frysztański 1998). The studies by Stanisław Ossowski, which showed above all the importance of regional ties, familiarity as a source of collective identity situated above the national bond in Giełczyn (as he called Dobrzeń Wielki) are still considered very accurate today. The research was initiated in the summer of 1945 and continued in 1947 with his assistant, Stefan Nowakowski, who in turn returned to Dobrzeń in 1957 with his own students, among them Anna Olszewska (Sołdra-Gwiżdż 2010). Both Nowakowski and Olszewska presented their own studies concerning the changes that occurred in the development of the local community of Dobrzeń since. Stefan Nowakowski pointed to the role of class factors in bond formation and group conflicts, while Anna Olszewska tried to indicate positive effects of industrialization for the shaping of local bonds, and in another work she focused on the positive effects of mixed marriages and the negative effects of emigration (Olszewska-Ładykowska, Żygulski 1959).

Particularly noteworthy are the more recent works dealing with intergroup relations in the Opole region, including the work of Maria Szmeja (1997), who struggled to find a proper approach that could

well render the state of a not fully integrated community, not open but implicit reproduction of differences, which is connected with a sense of discrimination and grievances in both groups: autochthonous (stronger) and outsiders. On the other hand, an anthology edited by Krzysztof Frysztański (1998) embedded intergroup relations in the historical plan, pointed to the role of institutions (community center, school, parish) in shaping these relations, the importance of stereotypes, lifestyle patterns, and values. It is worth noting that all the works mentioned avoid essentializing ethnicity. Essentializing ethnic categories, with the dominant opposition "German minority/Germans" - "Poles," appear primarily in popular studies, colloquial and journalistic statements, while the authors familiar with the social and cultural situation of the commune do not use such perspectives.

The social problems connected with the construction and now the expansion of the Opole Power Station also have their own rich literature (cf. e.g.: Kokot 1988, Szmeja 1988; Woźniacki 1988; Biela 1993; Berlińska 1995; Malarski 1995; Rauziński 1995; Czech 2009; Soldra-Gwiżdż 2009), which served as the foundation for constructing my research.

The project, within the scope of my research, was aimed at analyzing and explaining the dynamics of ethnic relations in the context of social processes triggered by the expansion of the Opole Power Plant. I assumed that the expansion might influence mutual intergroup relations in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, because those remained tense at least since the end of the Second World War. The commune is inhabited by indigenous people and an immigrant population, which came to the Dobrzeń Wielki commune in several settlement waves: the first post-war wave brought to Dobrzeń the population from the former eastern Poland, occupied by the USSR, which created a compact settlement in the displaced village of Brzezie-Finkelstein, population from other regions of Poland (dispersed settlement), and subsequent ones were associated with ordinary suburban settlement, related to the proximity of Opole, and then from the 1970s to the 1990s with the construction of the Opole Power Plant. Since literature - both academic and oral, i.e. a specific

local folklore - on the causes of tensions is very extensive, I will only refer to an excerpt from an article by Danuta Berlińska, in which she accurately explains the reasons for the relative maintenance of a closed system of local identifications and mutual relations:

“Losing the war resulted in the Germans experiencing an identity crisis, and the Silesian searching for new identifications. In a confrontation with Poles, Silesians found that although before the war they had not been German enough to be considered German, after the war their cultural otherness expressed in e.g. their dialect “contaminated” with German disqualified them as Poles and made them vulnerable to constant discriminatory practices as an “insecure element.” As a result of polonization pressure (speaking German was now prohibited) and discriminatory practices, the isolation between the Silesians and the Poles deepened, and the former’s subjective feeling of proximity to Germans was increasing. Those processes contributed to subsequent waves of emigration to West Germany. Those who stayed used isolationism as a defense mechanism, expressed in a reluctance to go outside their local community, limiting institutional contacts to the necessary minimum, lack of acceptance for mixed marriages, low educational aspirations, persistence of negative stereotypes and bias strengthened by the deepening difficulties of everyday life as a result of inefficient economy. There were also conflicts that were not realized at the level authority- new citizen, but at the level of interpersonal contacts within local communities” (Berlińska 1998b:34).

Until the late 90’ intergroup relations, which base on local knowledge on the above outlined process caused the local bonds to develop not across local divisions, which might have resulted in a formation of regional local community, but within narrower circles of “familiarity”, preserving the divisions rather than abolishing them. However, when we initiated preliminary research in 2005, many informants emphasized that the old divisions cease to be an essential element of intergroup relations; they especially pointed to “mixed” marriages, tight bonds between young people attending the same schools and migrating together looking for work, etc. One could get

the impression that it was only in recent years that a local community had been forming in the commune.

In this context, an important factor which could disrupt this process and at the same time be a premise to begin research seemed to be the expansion of the Opole Power Station, as about 4,000 workers were supposed to take part in this huge undertaking (against 15,000 residents of the whole commune), not necessarily recruits from local employees, unfamiliar with the local “grammar” of mutual behaviors. Another premise to initiate the research were the results of earlier sociological studies conducted in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, concerning the social reception of first the commissioning and then the expansion of the Opole Power Station, which indicated that both processes were accompanied by fears of violation of the laboriously emerging local order (cf. Sołdra-Gwizdź 2009: 47–48).

Methodology and theoretical assumptions

Therefore, in order to analyze the eponymous dynamics of intergroup relations in the years 2015–2017, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in the commune, oriented at gaining knowledge on the bottom-up experiences connected with the construction, especially the emergence of cultural scripts directing those experiences, with a special emphasis on those semantic nodes whose components are “others” and relations with “others.”

I decided that the most efficient tool allowing to obtain knowledge on the processes significant for the community and connected with the expansion of the Opole Power Station, especially those which affect local intergroup relations, will be combining repeated focused interviews with selected residents of the commune with an observation of social practices, work on the existing data, and monitoring/observation of the content available in the public sphere and referring to the relations that interest me.

Why an interview in the form of conversations, i.e. without a recording device and using a prepared questionnaire? I decided

that in the conditions of the studied area, with all the complexity of the local situation but also being aware of local experiences with surveys, which had been done in the commune fairly often, the prerequisite for obtaining knowledge about mutual relations was a less formal way of interaction, which also allows the researcher to learn local idiolects of behavior and the rules of conversation appropriate in this place. I had the time and hope that in that way I would neutralize the effect of respondents distancing themselves in a survey from their own answers, which often become representations of imaginary contents, proper for a given contact situation with “professional-stranger” and the contact mode set by them, while I would find out sooner what questions I should ask in this particular place and in reference to the research problem. Thus the set of problems through which I could reach the issues that interested me, apart from the initial stage of research when I prepared a questionnaire (from the very beginning it was only supposed to be a guide for me, not revealed to interlocutors) developed during research, constantly oscillating around the fundamental research problem. I also had in mind the fact that common knowledge which constituted a large part of the bottom-up experiences that were interesting to me was not analytical in character, was not fully translatable into discursive forms; therefore, I did not expect that it would be present entirely in the statements made by the informants, nor that the content of those statements alone could be the sole key to its reconstruction (cf. e.g.: Bloch 1998: 11).

The conversations revolved around several key thematic axes that evoked detailed issues. I thus conducted conversations/interviews focused on the memory of the construction and the history of the current expansion of the power plant among various groups of people, the assessment of the presence of group differences in public space both private and semi-private, the attitude towards the presence of construction workers in public space and their relations/interactions with the local population, the history of mutual relations in the commune, the mutual stereotypes, the auto-stereotypes of the residents of the commune, the attitude towards mixed marriages, of

the spheres of life in which the presence of intergroup differences seems undeniable. Statements were referred to social practices (such as, for example, the problem of accepting “mixed” marriages raised in earlier studies), which are an important indicator of intergroup relations. Hence, an important component of the data are data from observation of both behavior and signs in public and home space, supplemented with data from public discourse (local press, news bulletins, local Internet portals, online forums, etc.).

Selection of informants was relatively easy - it was about finding people who had different degrees of dependence/independence in relation to the power station and occupied different positions in the local mosaic of diverse group. From the practical point of view, indicating such persons, reaching them and obtaining consent for the interview was not always easy, often ended with failure, though over time the growing networks of knowledge and publicly available information about the research being conducted in Dobrzeń presented by the local information portal (*Grupa lokalna* [Local group]) changed this situation. As a result, it was possible to obtain a large body of data that significantly exceeded the 30 interviews planned in the project.

The theoretical foundation which was the point of departure for the analysis of the eponymous issue were the still valid generalizations by Fredrick Barth concerning the dynamics of relations within and between ethnic groups (Barth 1969) as well as the construction/vanishing of borders between groups. An important point of departure was the assumption about a procedural, bottom-up definition of inter-ethnic borders as the basis of relation and practices towards others, and their fluent - socially (and bilaterally) constructed - character. Constructing social boundaries (ethnicity is a strategic reaction to social conditions) is a process in which a number of institutions are involved that are not necessarily directly related to a given locality (e.g. legal institutions, bureaucratic procedures). I will add that a similar perspective has already been present in sociological research concerning the issue of intergroup relations in this region (cf. Berlińska 1998a).

Research results

The study covered several towns: Borki, Brzezcie, Czarnowąsy, Dobrzeń Wielki, Kup, and Chróścice. One of the central issues which became the axis around which I focused my questions was the sphere of noticeable public activity of various groups and the relations between them. It soon turned out that the issue of intergroup relations in the commune in the context of the expansion of the Opole Power Station triggers narrations which are not necessarily related to the expansion itself or the power station as a workplace. The basic framework of reference for the informants was the dynamics of relations in the historical plan between the local Silesians and the migrant Poles. It is in this plan that the issues of construction and expansion of the power station are placed.

An important factor shaping the relations was, according to the indigenous residents of the commune, the discrimination against local Silesians in public space, resulting in pushing the locality to a private sphere and a closed circle of acquaintances. The degree of depth of historical knowledge invoked in this context varied - from the medieval Czech-Polish beginnings of Silesia, through Nazi Germany, to the most often invoked time after WWII, when the local government was passed over to the "newcomers," while local languages, both Silesian and German (often called "ours") were being eradicated from public space (before WWII, Silesian was prohibited for similar reasons, as a variety of Polish). The stories of "defaming," "stigmatizing," "mocking" the local dialect ("Silesian") are repeated, which was particularly painful in school, and the controversial labels "Hanys," "Kraut," or "German" (as an insult). However, it should be pointed out that both the immigrant population and the locals referred to each other with contempt - the latter called the former "Chadziaje/Chaziaje." Shame is indicated as the dominant emotion connected with local dialect in the Communist era and thus as a factor accelerating the process of abandoning local identity, which is associated with language among other things. The awareness of separateness of not only Silesian, but also the process of this language's

formation, is very strong and I had the opportunity to listen to a few mini-lectures on the influences from German and Czech (with examples of particular borrowings) in the Silesian dialect.

In the early 1990s there was a freedom of creating grass-roots associations, the local government was taken over by the locals, and German language could now be included in education to a greater extent. The informants noticed that the Social and Cultural Association of Germans in the Opole Silesia began to operate in public space more visibly by organizing events promoting local culture and efficiently engaging in local politics. However, as they emphasize, that is now in the past – today, the actions of the Association are unnoticeable. The informants mostly cannot point to any celebrations or visible activities of the organization, they also claim that there is currently no exclusivism when it comes to organizing any events in the commune. What is interesting, the very category of “German minority,” important for the local people in the early 1990s, is losing clarity even among prominent political representatives of “Mniejszość Niemiecka” [German Minority]. This is explained with the fact that it is the borderland character of the municipality that has the biggest influence on the “localness” status. It caused a similar, border status of the native population, difficulties with fitting into precise categories or labels which along with censuses were supposed to define the local identity. One of the informants straightforwardly pointed to the “ideology and policy of an identity state” implying the superiority of a broader, national identity over “localness” which, both before and after WWII, intensified the feeling of marginalization of local population and caused tensions within the community. One of the informants, whose statements were recorded by a student participating in the study, perfectly summarizes the dilemmas of local identity. As the informant claims, a family member of a starost from Strzelce was born on the German side. He got married 20 kilometers from his hometown, but on the Polish side, and settled there. In September 1939 he was drafted into the Polish army and fought in the September Campaign, during which he was taken prisoner by the Germans. They quickly realized he was

a German citizen, "born on the German side," and as such he should be serving in the German army. After joining Wehrmacht, he was sent to the eastern front and received "some medals" for his service. He survived the war and returned to his homeland. "When Wałęsa came to power, he dragged out all the September fighters - they pinned him a medal for 1939. He has a war medal on the Polish side and on the German side. That's a typical fate for a Silesian, whoever needs them, takes them, and proves to them that they belong there." The same informant recalls the fact that in the nearby village of Chróścice there were families in which there would be both Silesian insurgents and "people who were very pro-German." Unlike in any other place I ever conducted research in, while discussing the issue of identity, the category of "Slav" was sometimes recalled - I will return to this matter while discussing the research results. In general, the majority of the informants declares that the separateness of the groups only manifests itself in the sphere of family life, where apart from the possibility of communicating in "one's own" language, family occasions are celebrated (for instance, birthdays, Mother's Day - which falls on a different day than "in Poland"). They also declare that as far as mutual relations are concerned, big changes are observed, especially intense in the last decade. A large percentage of immigrant population, increasingly more common mixed marriages, common institutions (school, offices, work, events and participation in numerous forms of "cultural" life organized by GOK) cause mutual relations to be perceived as "improving," "agreeable," based on cooperation. Local Silesians positively assess the fact of "assimilation" of the immigrant population, their respect for the local ways of living, the order; at the same time, there is a belief about the gradual disappearance of Silesian language and culture.

A fact which draws special attention in the context of such outlined relations is that bilingual signs with place names are occasionally being painted over. The subject was dismissed by many informants and the statements concerning it could be summarized as: "we should not pay too much attention to it." At the same time, it is a subject which refers to a number of questions essential to

understanding the dynamics of an intergroup relation. Some informants, especially the autochthons, emphasize that the boards do not currently pose a problem, and they are being painted over by some bribed youths, “kids,” “hooligans,” or “a gang,” “nationalists.” However, since 2009, that is, from the moment of introduction of bilingual signs in the commune, it occurs more rarely. Asking about this issue sometimes elicits strong emotional reactions: one of the informants stated that it was a conscious political action aimed at antagonizing Poles and Germans (Silesians), another one said that it was a way to manifest “inferiority complex” (“envy,” “anger”) of the immigrants towards the indigenous local population.

Non-Silesians point to the fact that it was the German minority who “fought” for the right to these signs. Although some informants are aware that EU laws guarantee such a possibility (one of the informants emphasized the “Europeanness” of this solution and it made him very proud), at the same time they treat the signs as “unnecessary,” “dispensable,” even in the sense of wasting public money for their renovation, and the emphasis on the differences. Some argued that everybody spoke Polish there, so why would they need such signs. Some believe that the signs are an evidence of unequal treatment of Poles and Germans – in Poland Germans have “their” signs, in Germany Poles do not have a similar solution. A statement which summarizes a common ending to the discussion about the signs is telling: “It doesn’t bother me too much, I’ll put it that way” – the phrases used indicate that the issue of the signs represents the differences present, although it often comes with a comment that “things have been worse.” Yet other respondents pointed to the reprehensible – in their opinion – procedure of introducing the signs, done without public consultation – in those narrations, the authorities clearly supported one party and this fact could provoke discontent, a manifestation of which is painting over the signs. As a counterexample, they mention the neighboring commune of Popielów, where a “referendum” was held and right now, according to the informants, there is no similar issue.

Another issue around which the discussion on mutual relations in the context of the power plant's expansion was focused were the locally organized public events. Many informants indicated that they were afraid of how the events would go if the construction workers attended. They feared drunkenness, trouble. However, they jointly agreed that their fears had proven unnecessary. Nonetheless, the very subject became one of the nodes emphasizing the existing divisions and although they were not related to the expansion, they still provided an important context for all the categorizations and semantic assignments of particular groups and activities, which might shed light on the issues concerning the expansion in a non-direct way, which is why this thread was taken up in the research. In the research materials, the motive of the "German model" of events is repeated, both mass ones and smaller, private and semi-private occasions such as birthdays ("Geburtstag") organized in workplaces. In a few cases, I noted that non-Silesians stated that there was an informal division at such events, that there were still circles of affiliation based on the "time spent living in the commune" (for instance, unequal participation in the organization of the harvest festival, preferential to the autochthons, who "would not let the immigrants, the 'chadziaje' in;" in this category there was also a mass in German); on the other hand, numerous informants emphasized the integrating effect of mass events (summer festivals, festivities for St. Andrew's Eve, New Year's, carnival, Corpus Christi, etc.). The construction workers employed at the expansion attend the mass events and are recognized, but they do not draw attention with their behavior.

There are many symptoms of intergroup differences which are clear and recognizable by the respondents (both locals and the workers with temporary residence in the commune). For instance, differences in the exterior of the houses, organization of domestic space, areas around the houses, and the intensity of work around them (it is typically Silesian to clean "your" section of the street). Many informants, while describing the essence of those differences, used phrases based on the binary opposition "Silesian order -*chadziaj* mess" (the latter included, among others, "keeping geese on

the balconies," "going to the bathroom outside the toilet," "over the hedge, over the fence"). Silesian houses are distinguished by certain details, such as short curtains, flowers in the windows, which by many informants are associated with "Germanness." There are also houses inhabited by elderly persons, or those which are entirely abandoned (their characteristic feature are anti-theft blinds) due to the fact that "the young work in Germany," and they do not sell their houses "here." In general, for decades emigration has been common in this area and certainly until recently it was still a factor of difference (e.g. owing to the fact that many Silesians used the opportunity to move freely between Poland and Germany due to their double citizenship), currently it indirectly functions as such a factor through the use of local houses as summer houses, and businesses which are opened with the funds obtained from working abroad. In the context of the expansion of the power station, this thread also proved significant - it was mostly the locals who were said to have the money to arrange accommodation for the mass influx of workers.

The residents of the commune know very well that at the expansion and in the commune there work "Poles, companies of the German minority, Czech companies, Ukrainians, Lithuanians," but those workers are not a part of the local life. Their presence is limited to shopping in the local stores and living at their accommodations, thus the statements made by numerous respondents can be summarized in this often repeated sentence: "it's hard to say anything about them, they stick together, we stick together," or "you just don't see them."

In this context, they sometimes recall the immigration wave connected with the construction of the power station, when a housing estate was built for the construction workers and station workers. Currently, as a result of changes in the work organization system at the construction site, the locals believe that only a few persons, and rather from the management, can settle in the commune permanently. The workers come, perform their short-term tasks and move on to work elsewhere. The very fact of work organization virtually imposes lack of contact between the construction workers and the

local people, which does not mean that their presence is not negatively assessed by individuals, mostly due to their maladjustment to local standards of everyday life (they are bothered, for instance, by loud music at nights, gatherings in the yards, noisy behaviors, not saying "hello," "goodbye," etc.)

The questions about the contact with the workers bring out the issues of stereotypes and self-stereotypes. Those are permanent enough so that despite emphasizing the disappearance of clear, separate identities in the commune, the informants easily reconstruct the "characteristic features of the others." And so the non-Silesians say that the Silesians are attached to place, mistrustful especially to people they just met, secretive, closed in their own circle (locking the doors in the early evening contributes to this observation), not willing to share what they have with others, "thinking they are better than everyone," often somewhat uneducated, but also pragmatic, working hard and well, preferring order and cleanliness (this is related to ecology, recycling, "the German order"), helpful once they know someone better, well organized, and valuing law and order. On the other hand, the local Silesians say that Poles are unwilling to work, not used to keeping things in order, indifferent, cursing too much, but also helpful and emotional. A pragmatic dimension of the functioning of differences, and so an element which indirectly perpetuates the stereotype, are, for example, the questions of supporting football teams: Silesians root for the German team, the immigrants support the Polish team. Visible material differences and the division in the economic sphere between activities in which mostly Silesians specialize (production and services) which results from the fact that in Silesian families emphasis was always placed on learning a craft in order to support one's family. The attitude toward mixed marriages was also a differentiating factor, although this has changed in the last decade. There is a conviction that Silesians preferred marrying within the Silesian group, while Poles had no preference in this matter. The presence of temporary workers is not perceived in the categories of a potential "source" of new relationships and marriages, but those who settled permanently

in connection with the construction of the power station received a different treatment.

The construction of the power station, which is brought up in the conversations about its expansion, was, according to the informants, also an element causing and later preserving differences. According to some, an actual differentiation of the population emerged in relation to the construction, coinciding with a wave of Silesian emigration West. Initially, people were afraid that a mass influx of Polish workers to the construction site will result in conflicts. The very location of the facility was treated as an element of a political game aiming at weakening the independent voice of the Silesian/German population, "mixing people," although promotional and informational actions were organized in order to convince the community that the power station will bring positive results, such as jobs for the locals. The young did not perceive the power plant as a threat, but rather as a chance, however, not many took up jobs at the plant. One of the reasons cited was that "the locals did not apply for those jobs, they didn't want to work at the plant," on the other hand, some people feel cheated because of the very fact that local people were not hired.

The same fears, enhanced by the memory of the relatively recent construction, influence the perception of the expansion. However, once again the fears of crime and burglary have so far proven ungrounded (although according to local police, a slight increase in the number of robberies has been observed). The information about the expansion of the power plant met with a protest, mainly from people whose houses and land were bought out, but the perspective of an actual improvement in the situation of all the residents of the commune due to the future revenue going into the budget from such a large investment, as well as increased employment in the economic area of the power plant, caused the expansion to eventually be accepted. Noise, pollution, destruction of roads by heavy machinery were all accepted as a "necessary evil."

Analysis and interpretation of results

From the aforementioned, briefly outlined main issues around which the local ideas and narration about intergroup relations are formed, the expansion of the power plant and the presence of a large number of workers in the region seem separable. This is certainly connected with the current work organization at such a major enterprise, where the rotation of companies responsible for various stages of the process is significant, thus there is no permanent presence of several thousand workers on site, as it had been presumed, the intensity of work is substantial, and the expectations toward the construction workers are very high – the common image of a drunk and rowdy construction worker, which had been one of the foundations for the fears connected with the expansion, is entirely ungrounded and does not fit the control standards used at such a large construction site. Nonetheless, the material collected during research revealed the dominant script connected with thinking about intergroup relations, which in a way influenced the perception of the workers, and the expansion itself.

It is worth noting that the observations of Stanisław Ossowski concerning local bonds and specifically “familiarity” strike as particularly accurate and surprisingly valid. Ossowski saw “familiarity” as the basic source of identity for the autochthon population. Moreover, the dichotomous division into “ours” and “not-ours” (soft opposition) was present in all groups of residents of the commune. This is confirmed by the vagueness of ethnic categories with the use of which attempts are made to classify the local population since the appearance of censuses. In the case defined as borderline by the residents (referring sometimes to the politically neutral and devoid of immediacy category of “Slav” as one that properly identifies them, although it is associated with the postwar propaganda that used that category to justify the need to expand Poland’s territory westward, cf. Linek 1998), ethnic identity and nationality are a strategic choice rather than strongly internalized and integrated collections of attitudes and ideas (cf. Nycz 2010: 48). It is perfectly visible in the historical plan,

also accurately rendered by Ossowski, who, while writing about the postwar declarations of national adherence pointed out that the very fact “[...] whether someone was considered a Pole or not, his and his family’s fate depended on it. How can it be surprising that because of group solidarity those who had not been threatened with expulsion tried to defend the patriotism of their more vulnerable neighbors” (Ossowski 1984: 84). The correctness of Ossowski’s observations is confirmed by a recent joint reaction of the commune’s residents to the administrative changes of the municipality’s borders, where in the face of a conflict with central authorities who imposed the change, an attempt to present the conflict as ethnically charged – with the German Minority opposing the will of majority – met with a categorical rejection of such a classification of the conflict, an expression of which was the slogan used in the protests: “the entire commune always together.” Another sign confirming the accuracy of Ossowski’s theses are the ways of perceiving and evaluating the behaviors of new settlers by the local population, especially in terms of attitudes and practices treated as material representations of states of mind – this concerns acceptance and positive reception of “assimilation,” “adjustment” of immigrants to local practices, i.e. “domestication.” Moreover, the immigrants internalized local grammar and also think that the reproduction of local order is a positive element of the occurring changes and a testimony of an emerging cohesiveness of the local community.

The permanence and power of the impact of “familiarity” as the main correlate of identity is undoubtedly influenced by the still registered sense of historic damage caused by each side – German and Polish. The sense of harm includes also the feeling of discrimination and exclusion of Silesians from the decision-making processes in their own causes and on their own territory, as well as delegitimization of their own identity. According to Szmeja, “The feeling of being dominated by an outside culture, imposition of foreign models, is so painful for the Silesians that it overshadows other dimensions of social life” (Szmeja 2000: 192; cf. also Berlińska 1998b; Nowakowski 1957: 38). On the side of the immigrant population, a similar script

applies to those displaced “from behind the Bug” (means displaced from the former Polish territories, which after the Second World War were incorporated into the USSR), who for many years experienced uncertainty and temporariness of residing among the native population, which translated into their attitude towards material environment, its negligence, the experience of otherness, and superiority over the indigenous population even shortly after the war (Lis 2013: 66). For the autochthons, it was a confirmation of the “grammaticality” of understanding the situation: there are ours and others, familiarity is a familiar order, otherness is “a thing out of place,” just like the newcomers themselves and their way of living (“keeping chickens on the balconies,” “mess around the house”). This strong sense of familiarity is perceived as “isolationism” on the part of Silesians, enclosure (this is aptly summarized in one of the statements: “You can’t go much farther beyond the threshold, everything’s locked up tight over there”). At the same time, all the informants noted an increase in the number of mixed marriages in recent years, the disappearance of events dedicated to minorities, and more common dimensions of public life in general (local institutions such as the Municipal Cultural Center, fire brigade, local sports clubs, local media and the Commune Office itself play an enormous role here), while maintaining separation in the private sphere (e.g. celebrating specific holidays with their proper local ritualism, or using the Silesian dialect within the family circle).

The employees of the extended power plant do not belong to the common social space, and because it has a fundamental impact on local intergroup relations, not only can they not be part of “familiarity”, but they cannot be considered as local “actors” having any regulatory power in the field of regulating local relations. Their participation in the life of the local community, limited to using local stores and accommodation services, occasional attendance at open events or at the Balaton pond, as well as their lack of engagement in local problems only confirm the correctness of such classification by the local population. In conversations, the notion “they” is used

in reference to the workers, as opposed to indicators “we”/“here,” which identify the residents of the commune.

Although as I had already mentioned it is clear – also from the informants’ point of view – that in recent years a local community began to form in the commune, mutual stereotypes are still present and they can be reduced to a series of opposites constituting a frame of inference, triggered especially in situations of conflict (it seems to be a sociological constant regarding border communities, cf. Nycz 2010: 48). From the point of view of non-Silesian population, this frame is determined by poles of relative concepts: German minority/privileged/having a higher earning potential/wealthier versus Pole/discriminated/ with fewer earning opportunities/poorer (cf. also: Berlińska 1998b). It is irrelevant whether such a frame is empirically grounded in local realities, as it exists for those covered by the study in the commune. Moreover, since, as previously established, we are dealing with certain “ethnic categories” at most in the commune, then one of them (the German minority, the Silesians) is perceived by many non-Silesians interlocutors as an “ethnic network” (Handelman 1977: 194–196), that is, orientation of local relations from an ethnic angle (preferences in employment, tenders, etc.). This thread was already noted during my 2006 research, so it can be presumed that it is a relatively stable element of mutual relations. In the opposite direction, stereotyping is also present and has one interesting dimension: in relation to the migratory population, Silesians have a sense of “activity / movement,” being those who work, act, “do not stand still,” while the newcomers, according to informants, are lazy, which is proven by the often recalled image of “walking with hands in pockets,” referring to the residents of the Energetyk housing estate built for the employees of the power plant on their days off work. Thus in relation to external forces, the local Silesians are deprived of the sense of agency, while in relation to the immigrant population, they appear as the driving force. This duality in perceiving themselves and one another is perpetuated in the early 1990s, when the local government is passed into the

hands of representatives of local population (the desire for agency is explicitly expressed in election slogans already in 1990, the slogan being "We want to take our matters into our own hands," Lis 2016: 123-124), and so the "ethnic network" acquires a real dimension in the eyes of immigrant population. Therefore, it becomes "guilty" of many issues perceived as local pathologies - from emigration (in other words, the inability to create jobs for the local population), through unequal treatment of various towns with different types of investments, to the installation of bilingual road signs, which is considered as an unnecessary multiplication of divisions by the younger generation.

Nonetheless, for over ten years a sense of community has been building gradually, the sense of "we"/familiarity, including also the immigrant population. This "we," according to many residents, has been recently strengthened under the influence of the political battle over the change of Opole's borders. The battle revealed also that "ethnicity" may still be a living differentiating element, moreover, when the authorities of Opole and government representatives started publicly using the argument of ethnic difference as a significant barrier to the plan to expand the city, people began to talk more openly about the actual "civilizational" otherness of those who had been behind the plan to expand Opole (the "Jews" represented by the President of Opole, Arkadiusz Wiśniewski, and the "Gypsies," represented by Patryk Jaki, the current Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice). Mutual stereotypes, actually referring to the criteria of local or foreign origin, did not disappear (cf. Jonderko 1998: 152), but in the conditions of the commune-versus-city conflict, they stopped exacerbating the differences. During the conflict, which was a good occasion for observing the condition of social and intergroup relations, the power plant and the people working at its expansion were not significant subjects.

The research thus has not confirmed the initial intuitions and research hypotheses, which according to conclusions from scientific studies concerning the social effects of industrialization (Czech 2009: 87) could suggest we might have to do with deepening

interethnic tensions in connection with the sudden presence of a large number of workers from outside the region, in a place with a vulnerable balance of ethnic relations already before the expansion of the power station. Although intergroup tensions can be observed, the expansion of the power station has no impact on their existence and dynamics. It does, however, impact local value systems, a component of which is a "Silesian work ethos" (which nonetheless is not a norm obligatory for all the residents of the commune). Work is highly valued by the Silesians, it is the basis for the assessment of individuals and a component of local identity, and the related ethos is confirmed by the new organization of work on the construction site - the fact that construction workers are basically invisible apart from their workplace and local stores, inscribes them in the local ethos of work, affects their positive perception, regardless of the ethnicity of employees. Anna Olszewska (1969) showed that industrialization did not necessarily have to entail abandoning local values nor bring about changes which overturn the existing social order. The current expansion of the Opole Power Station not only confirms Olszewska's thesis, but also demonstrates that a large industrial project can even strengthen those values, which in a community with a complex identity can still be a potential source of tensions.

Translated by Anna Pilińska

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Social activity of women in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune in light of anthropological critique

The discipline of socio-cultural anthropology from its very beginning in the modern form provided the subsequent generations of its practitioners with devices to “cut against the grain” and to unveil “how culture makes us think that, in fact, socially constructed meanings and hierarchies are «natural»,” (Buchowski 2001: 19). Obviously, even though they usually stressed the need for combining ethnographic detail with theoretical insights, the changing patterns of anthropological critique reflected to a high extent disciplinary assumptions of the time as to the nature of the studied realities and adequate analytical equipment (see Baer 2014a). Today this is no different. Following Kim Fortun (2012), I personally believe that late modernity can be seen as a product of technical, biophysical, cultural, or economic nested systems of various scales involved in multiple and complex relations. Such context implies a multitude of interactions and makes keeping the analyzed problems “in place” impossible. The emerging phenomena constituted by numerous scales, variables and forces need rather to be followed through diversely defined, but continuous spaces (see Falzon 2009).

The above conceptualization of the anthropological present requires a type of critique that moves beyond the hitherto classical

models, which developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One of these models relates to the theory of practice rooted in critical humanism and puts human acting subjects at the center. While these subjects are, in a sense, the “products” of a social system, at the same time through their practices they are able not only to (re)create, but also to disrupt or to remold the system (Ortner 1984: 144-160). The other model is linked to the “postmodern turn” and advocates the strategy of “defamiliarization.” It aims at juxtaposing distinct contexts of the contemporary world in order to criticize all “ideologies in action” (Marcus, Fischer 1999: 156-159).

Until recently these two models defined my own anthropological work in many important ways. In line with popular anthropological saying that “what seems obvious is usually not so obvious”¹, in research on “women” or “sexual citizenship” in Central/Eastern Europe I denaturalized normative concepts and assumptions of both “transitology” and gender/queer studies. However, my then trust in the critical power of ethnographically informed anthropology, which “tell[s] stories about particular individuals in time and place” (Abu-Lughod 1991: 153) and thereby destabilizes “enshrined and captivating discourses” (Buchowski 2001: 20), provided a specific shield that allowed my own normative concepts and assumptions to remain intact (see Baer 2017).

In my current projects I am therefore trying to move beyond such “norms and forms” (Rabinow et al. 2008: 73-92) of anthropological critique. To this end, I use a toolbox that contains some elements of “anthropology of the contemporary” by Paul Rabinow (2003), “para-ethnography” by George Marcus (2007) and “ethnography in late industrialism” by Fortun (2012). In this context I find particularly important “ethnography” understood as a device for “generating surprises” while “performing the labor of difference” (Fortun 2012: 451, 453); the concept of “problematization” that recognizes every “situation not only as «a given» but also as «a question»” (Rabinow

¹ The credit for popularizing this phrase and the accompanying critical approach in Poland undoubtedly goes to Michał Buchowski (e.g. 2001).

2003: 18); and the idea of “contraption” which shows “data” as extending in many different directions and determined by different vectors of power. Even though anthropologists try to link the disjointed sets and processes, they are aware that this is a kind of bricolage, because the whole to connect to does not actually exist (Rabinow et al. 2008: 76-77; see also Baer 2014b: 29-30).

Exactly how this type of critical insight may work in practice, I show on the example of my own fieldwork research carried out in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune from February 2015 to November 2018. This was a part of the project on relationships between Opole Power Station (OPS) and the local community in view of the ongoing construction of the fifth and sixth blocks of the power plant.² In this context, I myself (along with Ewa Kruk) analyzed the gendered aspects of “late industrialism” (Fortun 2012). Here, I was mainly interested in the professional paths of women in the industrial workplace and in social activity of women in the commune. The latter topic was a point of departure for this article.

Both the Opole Silesia and the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, including its connections with the OPS, have long been the subject of interest for social scientists. They primarily focused on ethnic identities, intergroup relations, and industrialization (e.g. Nowakowski 1960). The construction and currently ongoing expansion of the power plant brought analyses of the social, economic, and environmental aspects of the project. All of them contribute significantly to scientific knowledge on the accelerated change and industrial processes in general. But, most of these studies refer to quantitative methods and/or examine macro- and microstructures separately. Furthermore, they often approach “local community” in terms of a coherent whole, whose “essence” can be extracted analytically (e.g. Rosik-Dulewska, Kusza 2009).

² The project was titled *Conflict, Tension and Cooperation. A Case Study of Mutual Impact between Opole Power Station and the Community of Dobrzeń Wielki* and it was implemented from September 2014 to January 2019 at the University of Wrocław with Petr Skalník as the Principal Investigator. It was financed by the National Science Center, grant number 2013/11/b/HS3/03895.

In the context of gender, topics in literature are usually limited to marriage, family, or household organization understood as normative categories. Within these categories, “women” are perceived mainly through the prism of their reproductive functions and thereby become somewhat “naturalized” social beings. Additionally, as representatives of “Silesians,” they are seen as permeated with “Silesian culture” (e.g. Swadźba 2012). Because the dominant analytical approach adopts a unitary concept of personhood, it assumes that “society” and “the individual” are mutually forming antinomies. Moreover, in line with capitalist commodity logic, it considers specific individuals as defined by discrete attributes (Cornwall, Lindisfarne 1994: 41; see also Strathern 1990: 3–40). Taken together, all these assumptions bring studies which concentrate first and foremost on the characteristics, social roles, and/or status of “women” in the (Opole) Silesia. In more recent publications, discussions on the demographic situation, family relations, migration, or vaguely defined “Silesianity” activate discourses of “collapse” or “disintegration” (e.g. Rauziński, Sołdra-Gwizdź, Geisler 2010). Here, women are sometimes openly declared as guilty of this situation (e.g. Obserwatorium Integracji Społecznej 2011).

In order to avoid simplifications, generalizations and essentializations present in the above type of studies, in my own research on social activity of women in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, exemplified by four groups of people of different ages and involved in different activities, I proclaimed “the obviousness of the uncertainty” (Strathern 2006: 203). In reference to the aforementioned premises of anthropological critique in/of late modernity, I analyzed how such concepts as “(Silesian) women,” “family,” “tradition,” “identity,” or “local community” were being produced, sustained or destabilized at the intersections of the “individual” (discursive practices of specific persons) and the “supraindividual” (local, national, European, or global conditionings) (see Boellstorff 2007).³

³ I discuss these problems a bit further and in a slightly different context in Baer 2017.

The fieldwork research involved 32 open, in-depth, partially structured and structured interviews carried out with persons operating in the groups in question and more or less directly related to their activities⁴ as well as informal chats. The groups comprised an educational forum focused on family issues, an association working for local community, a vocal ensemble and majorettes. The interviews were supported by participatory and non-participatory observation during groups' meetings and at other venues, including social events which were significant for groups' members and/or for other residents of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune. In addition, public discourses were analyzed, mainly in the form of media publications, websites, social media fan pages, and other information sources.

"Social activity" is used here as an umbrella term to cover activities perceived by the interviewees as serving "common good." While the "common good" may be diversely defined and "community" may involve only several people, these activities undoubtedly fit in an anthropological understanding of "civil society." It goes beyond the conventional Western models of liberal individualism and draws attention to interpersonal practices (of "formal" and "informal" type) which contribute to social cohesion (Hann 1996; see Baer 2003: 29-38). Consequently, "social activity" is not necessarily seen as antithetical towards the work relationship. For instance, senior activity coordinators or majorettes trainers define their activities in terms of a social mission aimed to please and bring joy to people they are addressed to, but they do collect remuneration for the said activities.

In light of the original project topic, a reference needs to be made to the OPS and its current expansion. Until the plan of incorporation of the OPS and a part of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune by the city of Opole was announced in the end of November 2015, the power plant remained a "natural" element of the commune landscape and was not perceived as specifically important by our interlocutors. A couple of interviewees talk about picnics, which the OPS organized for

⁴ The first category consisted of 18 persons with the key interlocutors interviewed repeatedly on subsequent field trips. The second category contained 5 persons.

the Dobrzeń Wielki residents and about other forms of cooperation, but that belongs to the past: “They kind of withdrew. (...) And the rest of the community is somewhat on the side.” People trying to obtain funds for their activities, both from the power plant itself and from the consortium involved in its extension, say that they were not able to contact the company’s authorities in person and that their written applications met with a complete lack of response from them. This, in turn, would bring frustration as disruptive for their previously formed ideas about the role that the enterprise should play in the life of the commune.⁵ The positioning of the OPS and its expansion in the local social imaginary changed dramatically during 2016 when in many telling ways they organized narratives on the commune partition (see Baer 2018). But this article focuses primarily on the pre-partition realities of the research sites.

Conscious parenthood

The first of the groups discussed here is basically of educational type. It is defined by the space in which open meetings are held for everyone – at the Communal Cultural Center (CCC) – and not by formal rules of membership. Although it does not target any particular age group, its activity – according to the founder and leader of the group – concentrates on issues which are interesting especially to “young moms,” who want to know how to raise their children in line with the latest state of knowledge.⁶ Therefore, the persons it attracts

⁵ Earlier strategies of cooperation with the OPS ceased to be effective, because in 2012 the power plant lost its separate legal personality and became part of the bigger concern, PGE GiEK S.A., controlled by the Polish State Treasury. When people applying for funds adapted their strategies to the new legal situation, obtaining funds was possible. PGE GiEK S.A. co-financed twice summer camps for children from a village severely struck by expansion, which was organized by the association discussed below.

⁶ I use the present tense to describe the activities of all groups, although some of them suspended their operations. The current situation is outlined later in the article.

are mostly educated and usually professionally active women aged thirty-thirty five. Even though the leader admits she would be happy to see more men at the meetings, "they are rarities," who attend the meetings encouraged by their wives. In general, the character of the participants depends on the topic of a given meeting. These addressed directly to women automatically exclude men in the organizer's opinion. Nonetheless, the group entered into informal cooperation with a men's group from Opole, which promotes the role of a father in childrearing: "That it doesn't have to be all about the firm hand."

The group's activities include mainly lectures or workshops, where invited experts speak on topics related to children's health, their upbringing, or family relationships, but also less formal meetings for a coffee or on a playground. The beginnings of this initiative were exactly social in character: it was about "leaving the house, leaving the child with daddy (...) and spending some time in a different atmosphere." As one of the regular participants of the meetings says, an important aspect of them is still the exchange of views "between moms who face similar problems." But with time, the group became more formalized and entered into cooperation with communal units (especially with the Communal Social Welfare Center - CSWC) which support its activities mainly in material terms. This cooperation undoubtedly facilitates the organization of meetings, but it also has a disciplinary character. Some of the issues discussed respond to the needs of the financing institution. Others evoke critical opinions from them, although this does not lead to topics' withdrawal. For example, people who did not take part in the meetings thought that it was "inappropriate" to organize a discussion on sex life, because these were "intimate" problems. However, even though the topics proposed by the organizer infringe in a sense the conventional approaches to gender/sexuality⁷, they do not break with the naturalization of gender/sexual difference. As part of the meetings, the obviousness of the

⁷ Apart from the aforementioned issues of sex life, which introduces "privacy" into the "public" debate, another example is the departure from the medicalized constructions of pregnancy, childbirth, and post-partum period.

difference is supported by scientific authorities who seek its sources in the physiology of the human body.

In general, most participants of the meetings emphasize they have rather conventional families: "Just like (...) it should be (...). A husband, a wife, children." Some openly connect it with "regional traditionalism." However, it is primarily having children, and not a husband, that defines a family: "I feel more rooted in this regional traditionalism and I was surprised that a young girl (...) doesn't want to have children, doesn't want a family.(...) Not to mention (...) having a husband. That's a different story."

Children as a family-defining aspect are also essential when it comes to their circles of friends. Childless families are those who cannot have children, not those who do not want to have them. Recalling the importance of children and the family as important aspects of "Silesianity," they also emphasize that in many respects their own families differ not only from the families of their parents, but also from those of many of their peers. This concerns above all the more partner relations with husbands, especially in the context of delegating household chores, more democratic ways of raising children, and also attempts to connect family life with professional or personal development. One of the dimensions of this difference is participation in the group's meetings: although they encourage their friends who do not work professionally, taking care of the house and the children, they do not want to come to those meetings although "they whine they're miserable."

Our interlocutors themselves emphasize the difficulty or even impossibility to perfectly fulfill all the roles in their family, social, and professional lives:

In this (...) Silesian mentality (...) perhaps there's this thing that (...) this woman or this girl is so resourceful, (...) she goes to work, she has a family, she does everything around the house and the children. (...) But (...) when I talk to (...) women of similar age to mine, they admit that they are just so tired sometimes, that they would want to have everything (...) and on the inside they're simply falling apart. (...) This

might not be easy to admit, but I think that once one woman opens up more and confesses, then others eventually follow.

Accordingly, even if the group's meetings are primarily educational and do not serve to solve individual problems, there are "women's circles" within it who share similar experiences. Thanks to this, participation in meetings is a form of support in dealing with various challenges faced by women and men, and created by the departure from traditional scenarios of "femininity," "masculinity," or "family." At the same time it creates a space in which these categories are (at least to some extent) destabilized.

Local agency of women

The second group is an association bringing together persons (mostly women) of different ages (from twenty- to sixty-year-olds). Its beginnings go back to the decoupage and sewing courses offered by the CCC. Its founder says that initially her aim was to gather women with artistic skills who did not present their works to a wider public:

I knew there were plenty of people in the area who did something, had talent, but were sitting at home and could not present themselves, so to speak. And I wanted them to show themselves somehow. At the first meeting there must have been about forty people. A sculptor, a painter, and what not.

But when it turned out that the group in question was supposed to work socially first of all, for the benefit of others and not of the members, many people gave up. People who remained were those actually interested not only in artistic activity within their own circle, but also addressed to the residents of the area (not necessarily limited to the Dobrzeń Wielki commune). The members explain the efficiency of the group's activities saying that "each one here knows how to do something" and "everyone knows how to do something

else.” As a consequence, together they have potential for proceeding with diverse kinds of initiatives.

The transformation of an informal group into an association that does not focus only on “typically feminine” handicraft activities (such as decoupage, scrapbooking, or sewing) resulted primarily from the need to raise funds for expanding activities. The statutory goals of the association include educational, cultural, and tourist activities, addressed in particular to children and young people, as well as supporting children, young people, and families in a difficult life situation. In addition to the activities aimed at the group members themselves (in the form of craft projects) to simply “spend time together,” the association is the organizer of several cyclical events that have been permanently inscribed in the social landscape of the commune. These are, for instance, intergenerational workshops in decorating Easter eggs or baking gingerbread cookies, a party for children with disabilities on St. Nicholas’ Day, and summer camps for the children from a village severely struck by the OPS expansion.⁸ The association also coordinates one of the biggest outdoor initiatives in the area, which combines artistic and sporting events. Its main component is an intergenerational cross-country run.

The implementation of the above projects requires collaboration with many institutions from which funds can be obtained, as well as adequate social capital facilitating both generating material help and solving various types of organizational problems. In this context, the social (and educational) resources of individuals involved in the association’s activities are important, as well as their characterological features:

I have a lot of flaws, but I have one asset, I can organize everything, I’m not afraid of anything, I make decisions quickly. (...) I don’t throw my hands up. I have positive adrenaline. Obstacles motivate me instead of breaking me down. My husband’s a pessimist, maybe that’s why. You need a really big dose of optimism to get through this life.

⁸ In 2016 the camp was organized with financial support from the Commune Office and PGE GiEK S.A.

The association cooperates not only with the communal structures (the Commune Office, CSWC, CCC) and other local groups, institutions and companies that support their activities in different ways, but also with enterprises and institutions of supralocal levels, mainly national, which in turn are inscribed in the wider context of European Union (EU). In the future, members do not rule out applying for funds directly from the EU. This is where their skills in preparing grant applications count, but also less formal contacts, thanks to which they get advice on how to apply for funds effectively. The sources of financing to a certain extent determine the nature of the activities (defined by the possibilities of procuring funds), but also of the group itself. As the leader says, in order to apply for funding the association would have to encourage men to join, so as to meet the requirements of the “fourth EU directive”⁹: “there have to be those equal rights, that equality. Here it is sort of feminized.”

Nonetheless, although there are individual men involved in the activities of the association, the main driver of activity is the specific “agency of women,” embedded in a more or less essentialized gender difference. The said difference is associated most of all with psychological dissimilarity. “[Men] think a bit differently than us.” In general, many of them believe that women are more likely to take on additional activities: “It seems to me that men can only focus on one thing. And they don’t do anything else, they come from work and they don’t feel like doing anything.” On the other hand, they indicate that perhaps gender affects the type of social involvement: activities

⁹ Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2015 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for money laundering or terrorist financing, amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing the Directive of the European Parliament and Council 2005/60 / EC and Commission Directive 2006/70 / EC (Text with EEA relevance) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32015L0849>, accessed: 29/05/2018. However, I did not find references to gender in the above directive, which shows the specific efficiency of legislative systems: not only the legal provisions, but also the discursive practices focused around them become a significant tool in constructing reality.

connected with sport, both in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune and in the Opole region, are dominated by men. Moreover, although they consider gender to be a crucial determinant of the divergence of social roles, the members of the association emphasize that a lot depends on upbringing as well: "It really shows. When a boy falls down, it's like: you're okay, keep on running. When a girls does, there's panic. And this is the way it works later on, everything results from upbringing, girls need to be well-behaved, pretty dresses, legs together, and boys are boys."

Both the association's activity and the discursive practices of its individual members problematize the image of "passive femininity" as a characteristic feature of the Opole Silesia. Conventional, somewhat "private" activities of women become a point of departure for creating wider networks of cooperation which result in "public" events addressed to all the residents of the commune and neighboring areas. What is important, the most spectacular one - the intergenerational cross-country run - enters the domain of sport, which is perceived by many of our interlocutors as a "typically masculine" sphere of social activity.

Silesianity full of singing

The third group is a vocal band comprising eight women in their sixties and seventies, which originated in the local church choir. As its members say, this and similar ensembles (relatively numerous in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune) were created in the 1990s, when it was no longer forbidden to disclose one's Silesian or German identity. They were encouraged to form the group by a local activist of the Socio-Cultural Association of Germans in Opole Silesia. Musically, the group is run by a person employed by the CCC. Rehearsals take place in the fire station of the local Volunteer Fire Department. From its very beginning, the band participated in the Festival of Choirs and Singers' Ensembles of the German Minority of the Opole Voivodeship in Walce, where - as the group members say - it

won many awards. They also performed in the commune's partner towns in Switzerland and Germany, the trips being financed by the CCC. According to the official information, the band sings in Polish, German, and Silesian. However, the members report they also sing in Czech and Ukrainian, and with the choir - in Latin and Italian. In the narratives of our interlocutors, the stories about singing in the ensemble are strictly connected with the stories about singing in the choir, and often they do not distinguish between them. Their discursive practices focus around singing as such, presented by all the members of the band as a passion realized from childhood, while its concrete location seems of secondary importance.

The group members recall that when their children were little, going to rehearsals or performances (at that time of the church choir) posed a challenge to many of them: "In the countryside, it wasn't that easy to just go to a rehearsal. (...) First you had to listen to all those: »Where have you been for so long?!«" Mothers or neighbors would help them combine their passion for singing with household chores. Some of the husbands would also join in to help. Taking into account that the stories told often tend to say more about the present than the past (Moore 1999: 153), the image they construct of their (most probably idealized) youth as a colorful world full of joy and laughter, where in various ways they would negotiate their rights to sing, is actually a critical commentary on their present situations or life possibilities.

A person from a younger generation who positions himself as a distanced analyst of Silesian reality claims that the popularity of singing bands in the regions is connected with the process of depopulation: women whose children and grandchildren live in Germany and whose husbands are dead treat their own participation in such groups as an antidote to loneliness. That is undoubtedly true, and the circumstances that some of the members have to face confirm that thesis. Only the youngest one of them, still professionally active, says that belonging to the ensemble gives her the opportunity for personal development: she meets new people, learns new languages and new songs. For the older ones, it is primarily a form

of entertainment and social life. They say the group members are "like a family": they celebrate birthdays together, wedding anniversaries, they have coffee, and sometimes "a bit of cognac." However, this is why it is worth noting that despite difficulties they try to remain active and enjoy life. As a senior activity coordinator in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune says, seniors are "aware," it is not difficult to "get them out of the house." They are "modern" and they want to travel, and not just crochet or knit. At the same time, she emphasizes that women significantly more often than men are interested in participating in the activities prepared for them. Older members of the ensemble, apart from singing or participating in the life of the parish, take advantage of the commune offer: they go to the swimming pool, to gymnastics-educational meetings, they practice Nordic walking.

The activity of this and similar bands disturbs the thesis of the collapse of "Silesianity." Undoubtedly it is true, as one of our interlocutors claims, that both the performed songs and the stage costumes are not "typically Silesian," that is, as presented in conventional ethnological literature: "one [lady] could sew and she would sew as she wanted, as it seemed right to her, but that was not Silesian culture at all." However, the social space of the discussed group as well as of other groups, also serves the performative (re)creating of "Silesian identity." The process acquires a somewhat imagological (in the Milan Kundera's sense of the word) character. The specificity of the region is linked to the borderland, which is sometimes associated with the terrains of Austria, Bavaria, and Silesia, and some other times with the Polish-German-Czech territory. Regardless of the concrete geographical location, the "Silesian cultural intimacy" - in Michael Herzfeld's terms (2004) - is seen as combining different traditions: "Being a person of the borderland does not have to limit us (...). It can only enrich."

According to our interlocutors, a very important aspect of "Silesianity" so understood is precisely passion for singing, which is supposed to connect all the cultural circles described here. Singing in Silesian and German, often to the accompaniment of an accordion,

squeezebox, or other instrument, constituted a meaningful part of their families' lives for many generations: it accompanied both work time, and family meetings. The interviewees also emphasize the significance of maintaining those traditions. Their passion for singing was instilled in them by older members of their families: grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, or fathers. Love for music (as a profession or a hobby) is also continued by the generations of their children and grandchildren. Also the unconventional choice of songs and stage costumes criticized by persons from the outside is interpreted by the members of the group in the categories of "Silesianity." They say that the lyrics of Silesian songs were given to them by a woman who had an extensive knowledge of the subject. She composed the lyrics herself and performed them "just like they used to sing." The designs for the costumes are selected by the members of the band and they are in Bavarian style. Thus, they comply with aforementioned concept of "Silesianity," created at the intersections of several regional or national traditions. At the same time, our interlocutors admit that the younger generation is not interested in singing in such groups. Nonetheless, they emphasize that young people in the Dobrzeń Wielki commune engage in other activities, for example majorettes.

Forging (Silesian) character

In recent years, the majorettes operating at the CCC have become one of the essential elements of the commune's identity landscape. Not only do they participate in most of local socio-cultural events, but they are increasingly successful in Poland and abroad. As a consequence, they appear to function as a specific "emblem" of Dobrzeń Wielki.

According to the originator of the group's founding, due to the fact that the CCC orchestra was "getting old," he decided that "pretty girls could attract young people." Initially they were supposed to be a formation marching in front of the orchestra and not

a dance group, which they eventually became, and the group consisted of seven people. In 2016, there were already almost 160 girls divided into six groups: seniors, juniors, two groups of cadets, and two preschool groups, taken care of by two trainers: "First they go to «momma,» whom the children adore, and then they move on to «harpy,» who prepares juniors and seniors for championships." Our interlocutors claim that the popularity of majorettes in Silesia, including the Opole Silesia, results from the fact that in Poland this sport was initiated in this very region in the late 1980s. Nonetheless, the majorettes from Dobrzeń Wielki are trained by coaches from Czechia and Slovakia, where professional schools have been operating for years. It is the Czech and Slovakian teams that usually score high in championships. Until the administrative division of the commune became effective, most costs related to the functioning of the team, including participation in competitions, were incurred by the CCC.

There are no men among the majorettes from Dobrzeń Wielki. On the one hand, it results from formal requirements, since in dance formation championships boys and men largely perform solo, because only one can participate in group performances. On the other hand, however, the lack of male majorettes is the effect of the Polish (or Silesian) specificity of this sport. As the originator of the group's foundation says, in Western European federations the percentage of boys and men is higher. Moreover, "typically feminine" costumes are only attributes of dance formations. In other Western European formations, sports outfits dominate. The statement made by an interviewee, who appreciates the mastery of male solo dancers performing in competitions, clearly shows that engaging in this particular type of sport is, at least for some of them, strictly associated with "femininity" and "simply does not fit" men:

Majorettes is a way to femininity, way to elegance, and as far as little girls are concerned, they are definitely attracted by the colorful costumes, all the sequins on those costumes. (...) Well, first and foremost, these are always showy girls who walk in front of the orchestra, shapely, elegant. (...) These girls have to be superbly dressed, everything has

to be fitting and steamed, with diamantes attached, make up - this teaches them being women, taking care of themselves (...) so that they look good for later.

However, although being a majorette is obviously linked to a performative femininity, embodied by a pretty, graceful and elegant young woman, this aspect is also in many ways destabilized in the discursive practices of the interviewees. Although they all admit that the feminization of this sport is connected precisely with it being perceived as “typically feminine,” there are voices saying that it is too bad that no more boys are training. On the one hand, some believe that they would be a catalyst of “womanish” behaviors: “Only women (...) it’s hard this way, some men would be of use (...) at these championships. (...) This one’s prettier, and that one was uglier, and yet something else, and that one was worse.” On the other hand, the presence of boys would open up new choreographic possibilities. Yet, they still have not succeeded in attracting one to the Dobrzeń Wielki team.

All the interlocutors clearly emphasize that being a majorette is not just about being pretty, but it is in the first place a school of character. Belonging to the team teaches healthy competition and creating relations within a group. Majorettes are “one big family:” “Between these instructors, we really do support one another, help one another, and it is just a pleasure. The girls between teams, between towns separated by many kilometers, they keep in touch and it is beautiful that this connects them.”

The stage is related to competition based on fair play. On the one hand, they absolutely do not spy on the other teams to steal elements of their choreographies. On the other one, they do not disclose the details of their own choreographies even to their schoolmates who dance in other teams. These are kept secret until the competition. Although in every team there are obviously conflicts and the Dobrzeń Wielki team is no different, this cannot translate into neither training nor competition: majorettes must trust one another and cooperate.

Being a majorette teaches also many other things useful in adult life: courage, effective time management, discipline, perseverance, not giving up in case of failure, and the awareness that only hard work brings the desired results: "If they want to achieve something, they cannot slack off, they have to practice." And these elements are frequently evoked by our older interlocutors, who consider them as significant features of Silesian people.

The above analysis concerns the "pre-partition" situation, which changed after January 1, 2017, when some of the villages (*sołectwa*) of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune together with the OPS became part of the city of Opole. However, contrary to the concerns voiced by the interviewees and the fears that the division of the commune would prevent any social activity (see Baer 2018), by November 2018, which was the last time I had a chance to contact them, it did not happen.

Two of the groups discussed here suspended their activities: an educational group for "young moms," and the vocal ensemble. However, as my interlocutors emphasize, this situation is not a result of the commune's partition but of other circumstances. In the first case, the leader of the group had another child and could not continue to coordinate the group's activity. Although it was possible to procure funds from the CSWC for this type of activity, there was nobody willing to "take over" and prepare a program or handle organizational matters. The vocal band, which operated in one of the villages attached to Opole, lost its musical guidance financed by the CCC. However, the main reason behind the dissolution of the group was the life situation of some of its members. Despite the possibility to obtain subsidies from the Opole municipality for further activity of the ensemble, they had to give up due to their own health condition or health condition of family members. But, they remained in the parish choir. Those who wanted to do something more, realize their passion in another band and/or a vocal and theater group. They also continue to frequent animation classes for seniors, which are conducted by the same person, now employed by the Opole

municipality. As one of them says, in the context of the impact of the commune's division on the offer for seniors, "everything is great and nothing has changed."

Also the members of the association and the trainers of the majorettes, who remained within the limits of the Dobrzeń Wielki commune, reports that not much has changed in their operations. The association implements the current program partly on the basis of external financing, and partly thanks to the support of communal institutions, although they admit that the communal funds, compared to previous years, are reduced. The only change consists that the 2017 summer camp for children from the village which is now a part of Opole, being financed - excepting PGE GiEK S.A. - by the Opole municipality, not the Commune Office. However, the importantly worse financial situation of the commune influenced to a certain extent the situation of majorettes. The classes are now paid, and the CCC can no longer finance the costumes. Yet, as one of the trainers says,

It's not bad (...). We collected as much as we could in our current situation. We have these fees that we keep an eye on, we pay for everything from them, we want to acquire sponsors and so on. Last year [2017], when it all started, we were in the black, on a low level, but still in the black. So it's not like we didn't have enough. All the accreditations, buses, etc., we managed to cover.

The coaches are still hired by the CCC, and the commune continues to pay for the rental of gyms for practice. Trainers from abroad are still involved in training the Dobrzeń Wielki majorettes, although currently it is to some extent owing to the private contacts of the Dobrzeń Wielki coaches. The parents "calmly accepted" the fact that they would have to pay for the classes, as they "understood the situation." However, as the classes ceased to be free of charge, the recruitment diminished by half in the youngest group in September 2017 compared to the previous year. Persons whose social activities are still located in the commune admit that the situation worsened in many ways: "It's not as it used to be, but then again it's no major

tragedy.” For instance, although the CCC’s offer of classes decreased significantly, many new options appeared, often organized by private persons, although they are obviously paid.

In conclusion, the critical perspective proposed here, which attempts to “unsettle the subjects and discursive forms with which [it] deal[s]” (Fortun 2012: 459), allows for a different perception of the situation in the Opole Silesia from the one offered by literature on the subject. Obviously in many ways the discursive practices triggered by this fieldwork research support the analyses advocating “dark” traditions in the social sciences (Ortner 2016). They do reveal conventional ideas about “masculinity,” “femininity,” or “family,” problems brought by migration and depopulation of the region, the reluctance of many people to engage in social activity, or unwillingness of the younger generation to cultivate traditional “Silesianity.” But, they also prove that instead of mourning “disintegration of family,” “collapse of Silesian identity,” or the parted Dobrzeń Wielki commune, one can recognize new forms of “family life,” the transgressive potential of “women’s agency,” discursive (re)constructions of the “region,” new emblems of the “local community,” or possibilities emerging in the post-division realities.

Certainly I do not assume that the proposed form of anthropological critique is innocent and provides an absolutely truer picture of the world than the literature cast here as the foil. My theoretical stance undoubtedly reflects the intellectual climate intrinsic to global “flexible capitalism” (see Harvey 1990) and should be problematized in this light. Moreover, the adopted methodology, while combined with time limitations of actual research in the field due to policies of a funding institution and professional responsibilities of a university teacher, makes it difficult to achieve actual “intimacy” with the people met at research sites. Thus, it allows mapping processes and phenomena rather than an actual immersion in the field. An open issue is also the extent to which the analytical attention can be actually shifted from human acting subjects treated as a source of knowledge to the creative potential of cultural, social, political, or economic relations. An experience of collaborating with particular

people living in the particular time and place somehow naturalizes the neo-humanistic philosophy of “possessive individualism” (see Morris 2007). Taking all of the above issues into account, I believe that the advocated form of anthropological critique is not a satisfactory alternative, but just a provisional strategy among many other critical insights offered by social sciences (see Abu-Lughod 1991).

Translated by Anna Pilińska

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