

Petr Skalník, rtd

Department of Politics

University of Hradec Králové

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.

¹ The chapter 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.

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 Czarnowąs (1954–1972) that preceded the Gmina Czarnowąs 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 Czarnowasy 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, Brzezcie, 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 GEiK 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.

References

Broinowski A.,

N.d. *Immunities: Life in a Fukushima World*. Pdf Ms. Source unknown.

Czech H.,

2012 *“Opolski cud pojednania” – rola mitu w sprawowaniu władzy i uprawianiu polityki regionalnej*, [in:] Kurczewski, J., Herman, A.

(eds.), *Antagonizm i pojednanie w środowiskach wielokulturowych*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/obraz terytoria, pp. 145–176.

- 2015** *Giełczyn (gmina Dobrzeń Wielki) – dzisiaj*, „Societas/Communitas” 1-2 (19-20), pp. 163–185.

De Rijke K.,

- 2013** *Hydraulically Fractured: Unconventional Gas and Anthropology*, “Anthropology Today” 29 (2), pp. 13–17.

Eriksen T.H.,

- 2016** *Overheating: An Anthropology of Accelerated Change*, London: Pluto Press.
- 2018** *Boomtown. Runaway Globalisation on the Queensland Coast*, London: Pluto Press.

Filer C.,

- 2012** *Why green grabs don't work in Papua New Guinea*, “The Journal of Peasant Studies”, 39 (2), pp. 599–617.

Fortun K.,

- 2012** *Ethnography in late industrialism*, “Cultural Anthropology” 27(3), pp. 446–464.

Fujikawa K.,

- 2015** *Environmental Destruction and the Social Impacts of the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster*, Meiji Gakuin University.

Gill T.,

- 2015** *Radiation and Responsibility. What is the Right Thing to do for an Anthropologist in Fukushima? Special Issue Practicing a Public Anthropology of the East Japan Disaster*, Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology.

Hasegawa K.,

- 2014** *The Fukushima nuclear accident and Japan's civil society: Context, reactions, and policy impacts*, “International Sociology”, Vol. 29(4), pp. 283–301.

Hauhs M., Trancón y Widemann B., Klute G.,

2017 *Bridging Disciplinary Gaps in Studies of Human-Environment Relations: A Modelling Framework*, „Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society” 5 (2), pp. 35-76.

Inose K.,

2015 „Living with Uncertainty”. *Public Anthropology and Radioactive-Contamination. Special Issue Practicing a Public Anthropology of the East Japan Disaster*, Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology.

Ito Y.,

2017 *EU Policy Background and Realities for “Coal Phase-out”*, “IEEJ” November, 12 (4), pp. 1-15.

Kaluża R.,

1988 *Podstawowe wyniki i wnioski z badań i z konferencji naukowej n. t. Wpływ elektrowni “Opole” na przeobrażenia społeczno-ekonomiczne rejonu i gminy Dobrzeń Wielki*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Inżynierskiej w Opolu” 148, Nauki Społeczne, z. 21: p. 10.

Knudsen S.,

2018 *Is Corporate Social Responsibility Oiling the Neoliberal Carbon Economy? Contests over a Power Plant on the Black Sea Coast of Turkey*, “Ethnos” 83 (3), pp. 505-520.

Kokot A.,

1988 *Przemiany społeczno-gospodarcze w gminie Dobrzeń Wielki pod wpływem intensywnej industrializacji*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Inżynierskiej w Opolu” 148, Nauki Społeczne, z. 21, pp. 155-166.

Lesiuk W., Rauziński R., Słodra-Gwiżdż T. (eds.),

2000 *Między przeszłością i przyszłością. Elektrownia “Opole” jako czynnik zmiany społecznej*. Opole.

Łuszczewska B. (ed.),

1993 *Elektrownia “Opole” a środowisko społeczne*, Opole.

Nowakowski S.,

1960 *Przeobrażenia społeczne wsi opolskiej*, Poznań: Instytut Zachodni.

Olszewska A.,

- 1969** *Wieś uprzemysłowiona. Studium społeczności lokalnej w powiecie opolskim.* Wrocław/Warszawa-Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.

Ossowski S.,

- 1947** *Zagadnienie więzi regionalnej i więzi narodowej na Śląsku Opolskim, „Przegląd Socjologiczny”* 9 (1-4), pp. 73-124. Reprint in Ossowski S. (1967), *Z zagadnień psychologii społecznej.* Warszawa, pp. 261-300 and Ossowski S. (1984), *O ojczyźnie i narodzie.* Warszawa.

Parry J.,

- 2015** *The Sacrifices of Modernity in a Soviet-Built Steel Town in Central India, “Anthropology of the This Century”* 12, Originally appeared in Frances Pine & João de Pina-Cabral (eds.), *On the Margins of Religion.* New York: Berghahn Books 2008, pp. 233-262.

Pękala J.,

- 1988** *Głos w dyskusji. Przemiany społeczno-gospodarcze w gminie Dobrzeń Wielki pod wpływem intensywnej industrializacji, „Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Inżynierskiej w Opolu”* 148, Nauki Społeczne, z. 21, pp 5-6.

Rosik-Dulewska C., Kusz G. (eds.),

- 2009** *Budowa bloków 5 i 6 w PGE Elektrowni Opole SA – aspekty gospodarcze, środowiskowe i społeczne, Opole.*

Sabela T.,

- 2008** *Podnikatelé v obci Dobrzeň Wielki [Entrepreneurs in the commune of Dobrzeň Wielki],* Unpublished Bc. thesis, University of Pardubice.

Skalník P. (ed.),

- 2004** *Dolní Roveň: poločas výzkumu. Dolní Roveň: research at half-time, „Scientific Papers of the University of Pardubice”, Series C, Faculty of Humanities, Supplement 8.* Pardubice.
- 2005** *Community re-studies in Europe and beyond: Towards a new concerted research initiative, [in:] Skalník P. (ed.), Anthropology of*

Europe : Teaching and Research (pp. 117–142), “Prague Studies in Sociocultural Anthropology” 3, Prague: Set Out.

2007 *Slezská obec Dobrzeń Wielki: kdo je menšinou (sociálně antropologická restudie)*, Unpublished manuscript.

2008 *Opakované studie obcí*, [in:] Skalník P., Šavelková L. (eds.), *Okno do antropologie*, pp. 47–72, Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice.

Skalník P., Brocki M. (eds.)

2018 *Global Anthropologies: Can Anthropologists be Humanizers of Globalization?* [in:] *Anthropology as Social Critique. Its Public Role in the Globalized World*, Cracow, pp. 7–19.

Trigger D., Keenan J., de Rijke K., Rifkin W.,

2014 *Aboriginal engagement and agreement-making with a rapidly developing resource industry: Coal seam gas development in Australia*, “The Extractive Industries and Society” 1, pp. 176–188.

