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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-Gwiżdż (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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