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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-Ładykowa, 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 outlanders. 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; Słodra-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, ten- ders, 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.

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