

MISCELLANEA GEOGRAPHICA

WARSZAWA 1990

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IMAGES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS TOWNS BUILT IN PEOPLE'S POLAND. THE CASE OF NOWA HUTA

Research concerning attitudes towards new Polish towns was undertaken in 1988. Its aim was to show the image of the town as it exists in the consciousness of its inhabitants. The investigations were carried out in a group of people that have a particular attitude towards space because of their profession, i.e. a group of taxi-drivers. Their special image of the town is due both to the perfect knowledge of the town resulting from their mobility and to the great number of human contacts — not found in other professions — the main subject of which is the town and its spatial organization. The investigations included only drivers who had been working for at least twenty years.

The town of Nowa Huta of which the construction was undertaken at the end of the forties seems to be a particularly interesting object of investigations. Its location in the proximity of Cracow, on fertile soils, raised, since the beginning opposition of the inhabitants. The construction of ironworks, a structure concentrating immigratory population of peasant and worker origin, was perceived as an attempt against the intellectual traditions of Cracow.

Nowa Huta, which is now officially a district of Cracow, is treated by numerous inhabitants as a separate town.

The results presented below have been worked up on the grounds of 120 interviews.

CONCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES CONCERNING NOWA HUTA

The first question of the interview concerned immediate associations connected with the town. The most striking in the answers is the fact that the first association does not directly refer to the town. All thoughts concerning the town are dominated by the consciousness of the catastrophic ecological situation. This awareness lies very heavy on inquired persons. All of them consider the ironworks to be the main

source of the environment degradation and without exception their attitude towards it is negative. All would accept its closing down with relief. This relief or the great joy, declared in many answers, of the possible closure of the ironworks results in great part from the fact that the inquired people are not professionally bound up with the works.

The works itself is also a very important element of that first, most stereotyped image of the town. So the ironworks and first of all its negative effect on the environment is the first association connected with the town of Nowa Huta. This chief association is referred to in such terms as "smoking chimneys", "threat for monuments and people", "thoughtlessness of those who located Nowa Huta" and a statement isolated but highly accusing in its signification: "crematory".

The next association occurring to inquired persons is: "a district of Cracow" and "a new (less often: a modern) district of Cracow". So



it exists in the consciousness of people as a district, not as a separate town. Only 30% of persons inquired consider it a separate urban unit. Some think instead that it is a town losing its independence (13%). It is, however, a district with some particularities. The feature that distinguishes Nowa Huta from Cracow is, first of all, the awareness that it is "the first socialist town in Poland." Symbolically and emotionally it is then associated with "the period of errors and perversion", with "Stalin's times" and "communism". The persons inquired are also aware that the town was built as a counterbalance of Cracow, as a "town of workers". But they feel instead that it is "a town of disappointed hopes of the authorities", as strong political opposition arose here and much social agitation took place. People expressed the sympathy with strikes and all social disturbances that occurred here in the eighties.

The physical structure of the town plays a very small role in those first associations. The people inquired do not name any buildings (except the works), areas or proper names connected with the town. A thing that distinguishes it physically as compared with Cracow is the large amount of greenery. At first sight it could then seem that Nowa Huta, in the opinion of those persons, does not differ in any respect from other towns. Obviously it is not true. The test of first associations does not so much show the lack of distinct features as it emphasizes the tragic situation of the natural environment of Nowa Huta and its vicinity. That first association with the town is so strongly dominated by the awareness of the ecological catastrophe that all other characteristic features of the town recede to a far background. Instead, these features appear in answers to immediate questions on the characteristics of the town.

Nowa Huta, considered by the majority as a district of Cracow, possesses its own stamp. It consists of low buildings, which differentiates the town from later constructed housing estates, and of great amount of greenery as distinct in the first place, from Cracow. That large amount of green is not accentuated accidentally by the inquired people. Being aware of the ruin of the environment caused by the ironworks they appreciate the importance of green areas in the town and observe them attentively.

The structures themselves, however, are negatively estimated: "buildings raised in quadrangles with only two entrance gates to the inner courtyard so that, in case of necessity, all the district could be pacified" are treated unfavourably by those people. And this type of structure has been called here "Stalin style", "Soviet architecture". Other features of the style of the fifties are monumental edifices, "ornamented facades", "thick walls, sloping roofs". This architecture,

in spite of its unattractiveness or simply ugliness, has its great advantages in the opinion of the inquired people. The advantages are, first of all: the solidity and durability of the buildings and the use of brick as principal material. There are also incontestable advantages not resulting from the character of buildings but from the fact that those districts have been already lived-in for some time and are well managed.

Which elements of the town remain in the inquired persons' memory? Table 1 presents those which these persons have named more than twice.

Table 1

Elements of the town which are kept in mind	
1. Churches	49
2. Central Place	29
3. Smoking chimneys	19
4. Lenin's monument	14
5. The ironworks	11
6. Structures built in the fifties	12
7. Avenue of Roses	9
8. Well-realized communication	9
9. Dirt and disorder	7
10. Strikes	7
11. The convent of Mogiła	5
12. Administrative buildings of the ironworks	5
13. Popular Theatre	4
14. The Culture Centre of Nowa Huta	3

The conclusion from Table 1 is simple and obvious: the Sacred exceeds the secular space. In that most socialist of Polish towns, in that most socialist architecture formed "after the Soviet fashion" the things that people remember best are the sacral structures of the eighties. It is of course very symptomatic though not at all surprising. The interpretation of this fact needs deeper analysis. It seems logical to state that sacral buildings attract attention because of the significant events which took place there (the Pope's visit, social disturbances with which most inquired persons identify themselves, cultural events, etc.). This specific transgression of the sacred that can also be observed in other new towns assumed to be dominated by the secular is very significant of the eighties.

Interesting was the attitude of the persons inquired towards the centre of the town. People attribute much importance to centres which fact is well documented in anthropological, sociologic and psychologic literature. It was interesting to know to what extent the centre means "the heart of the town". We mean by this term an emotional, individual

centre, a place which is central because of its meaning to a person and not only because of its central situation in a space.

The centre of Nowa Huta is univocally determined: it is the Central Place with the surrounding districts: Centre A, B, C, built in the fifties, and the Avenue of Roses connected with the Central Place by means of a passage in which Lenin's monument was situated². This area is central not only because of town-planning solutions but also because here the construction of Nowa Huta was started. Thus it is the oldest, now historical, part of the town. It should then play the role of the most important point in the town. However, it appears that this central situation, from the informal point of view, is not so univocal. The area is indistinct, simply blurred. It is significant that 16% of the people inquired think that Nowa Huta has no such specific place which should be something particular and most important. Others see such an area either in the Central Place or in the sacral structures (at Bieńczyce, Mistrzejowice, Mogiła).

The problem arising here needs deeper analysing. The question should be considered whether Nowa Huta and generally new towns are not able to create those specific and particular places with which the inhabitants identify themselves most willingly, whether such places undergo revaluation and changes and whether, at present we have to do with a transitory period when new emotional centres are being formed.

Analysing data concerning stereotyped, symbolic and personal ideas of the town we may assume that, at the present moment, a considerable revaluation of the town space is taking place.

The stereotyped image of the town i.e. the most simplified one, consisting of features thought to be most characteristic and established through mass media is that of the ironworks and of the oldest part of the town. This stereotyped image of Nowa Huta corresponds well with the test of first associations.

The symbolic image of the town is however, different. The structure symbolizing it is not so univocal. In the first place comes the church called by all "The Ark" but only 30% consider it as an essential symbol; next on the list are the Central Place and the ironworks, as well as Lenin's monument and the estates in so-realist style. The church at Mistrzejowice is also recognized as an important symbol. It is difficult here to rush to conclusions. A preliminary hypothesis that occurs is the slow supplanting of old symbols which, for various reasons, lose their value and become more and more empty stereo-

¹ The Lenin's monument was pulled down in autumn 1989.

types by new ones with which the inquired persons identify themselves, emotionally in particular. The symbolic role of those new structures grows considerably through their metaphore, completely different from the metaphore used in socrealism which is aggressive and univocal. The fact that the church of Bieńczyce is called "The Ark" with no additional comment on what structure is concerned proves the rightness of this metaphore which helps much to symbolize the building.

The personal picture of the town is still something else. It depends in a great part on the individual activity of the people inquired. The important places are those which they often attend, where they have their own memories etc. That is why the list of places and buildings which form such a private picture of the town consists of cultural and recreation institutions (the Culture Centre of Nowa Huta the Popular Theatre, Academy of Physical Education). But here, too, "The Ark" comes in the first place and the church of Mistrzejowice or the churches in general are the most important, the most significant structures of the town in the opinion of 16⁰/₀ of the inquired persons. The Central Place is still important to a considerable group.

After a preliminary analysis of the presented material the following hypotheses may be advanced: the symbolics of the urban space is undergoing a considerable change. The secular space is losing its symbolic meaning on behalf of the Sacred. The process is probably rather complicated and does not only result from the traditionally symbolic role of the sacred which appears in the town after thirty years of absence. The efforts of the designers aimed at the creation of new symbolics of the town without the participation of the Sacred were not unsuccessful of which the best proof are the town's symbols which are not marked very distinctively. It is also possible that it is not a period of symbol changes but a durable structure specific of a new town built in definite social and political conditions of People's Poland.