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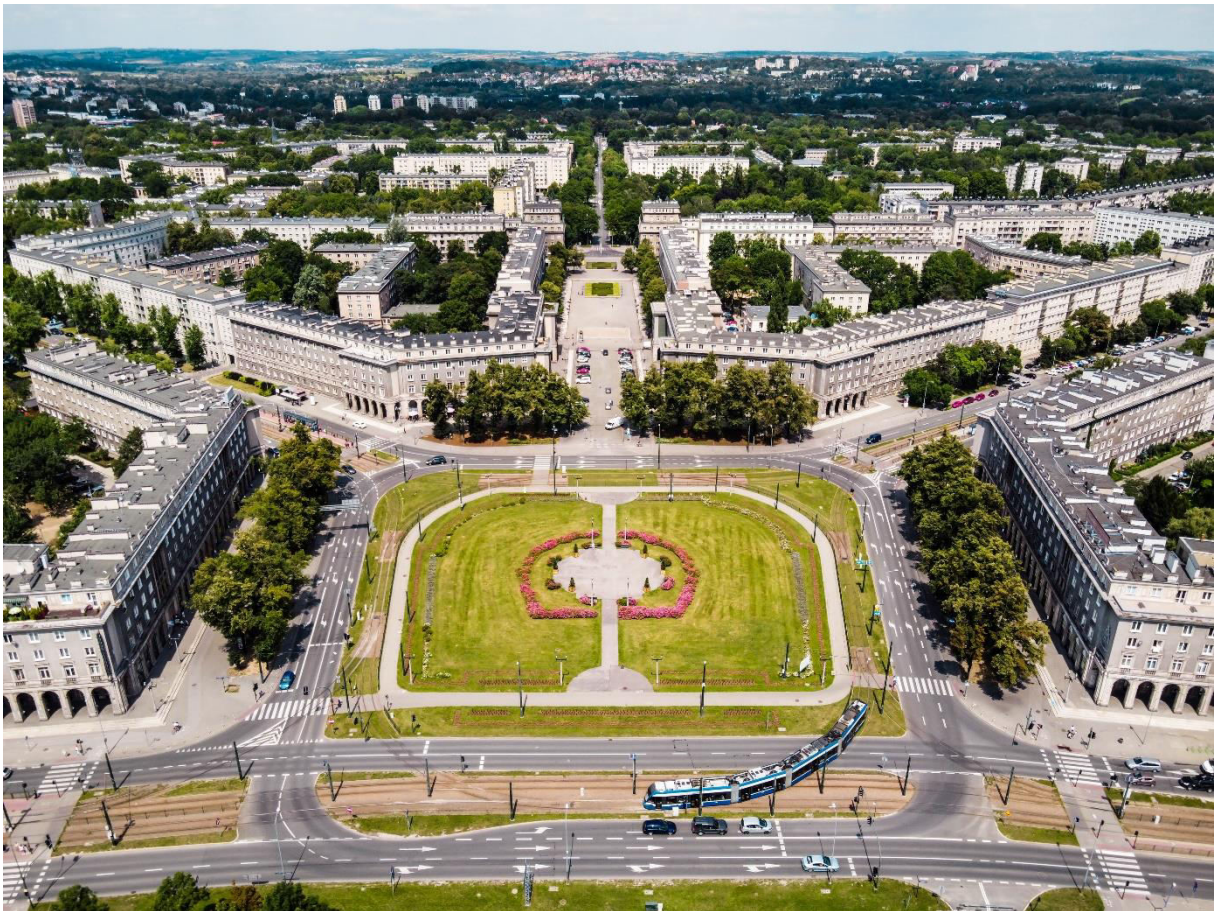
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Socialist identity in Nowa Huta: The Party and The People

1949-1957

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Introduction

The setting dust of the Second World War uncovered Poland in ruins. The country suffered massive losses not only in people, but also in infrastructure and urban spaces. The morale of the Polish people has also taken a significant blow, as the population was subjected to atrocities and death for almost six years. Additionally, the Nazi occupation of Poland has been ended by the Red Army, which immediately installed pockets of pro-Soviet socialist government. The post-war Poland, therefore, became a Soviet satellite state operating on the principles of centrally planned economy. Its first task was to remove the wartime rubble and start rebuilding.

The second task was to get Poland back on its feet. A vital part of it were massive industrial investments. In the year 1948, the decision to create the biggest one of them - a completely new urban/industrial complex - was undertaken.¹ The location and the name were agreed upon – the new city of Nowa Huta (New Steelworks) was to be erected near Cracow as a major part of the Six-Year Plan. Using the Soviet town of Magnitogorsk as its blueprint, Nowa Huta was to be built from the ground up as a city-factory combination meant to provide housing and workplaces to the people – a new beginning for a new Poland.

The design work started in May 1949² and the first construction work began on 23rd June 1949.³ The goal of the project was to provide steel for the process of rebuilding Poland.⁴ Nowa Huta was to become the pride of the People's Republic of Poland. A slogan "The entire country builds Nowa Huta⁵" would be shared. The construction was the priority of the Six-Year Plan with workers, materials and top specialists being drawn in from the entire country.

Nowa Huta, however, also had a second aim apart from producing steel – it was to raise a population with a socialist morality, a new type of people for the new socialist world. Nowa Huta was meant to be a beacon of socialism, a space designed to change the behaviors and ways of thinking of its inhabitants. Everything, from the way the buildings and streets were designed and positioned, names of locations, the types of activities available, to the organization of labor, was supposed to influence and change the people. This second aim is exactly what I am interested in analyzing in this thesis.

¹ Jan Anioła, *Huta im. Lenina (Lenin Steelworks)*, (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1954), p. 7.

² Janusz Mikułowski Pomorski, „U genezy powołania nowego miasta. Między pogłoską a dedukcją” (At the genesis of creating a new city. Between a rumor and deduction), in *Role Krakowa w dziejach narodu: Narodziny Nowej Huty (Cracow's role in the nation's history: The Birth of Nowa Huta)*, ed. Jan M. Małecki (Kraków: Towarzystwo Miłośników Historii i Zabytków Krakowa, 1999), 95-119, p. 99.

³ Janusz Mikułowski Pomorski, „U genezy powołania nowego miasta”, p. 107.

⁴ Anioła, *Huta im. Lenina*, pp. 7-8.

⁵ Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie, „Cały naród buduje Nową Hutę. Budowa metalurgicznego giganta pod Krakowem” (The entire nation builds Nowa Huta. Building a sub-Cracovian metallurgical giant), Accessed 28/03/2020, Available at: <https://ank.gov.pl/kombinat/index.html>.

The central authorities of the socialist Poland wanted Nowa Huta to be like a tabula rasa, a city that was not only looking to the future, but also a space with no history that would expect of its inhabitants to reject their past. It's important, however, to notice that it was populated by people carrying their history on their sleeves. The first people who came to Nowa Huta were the ones who experienced the horrors and destructions of war as well as the post-conflict poverty firsthand. Their parents and grandparents remembered the times of the post-First World War struggle to preserve independence, as well as the period of partitions. Most importantly, however, these people inherited a way of looking at one's performance of Polish identity, as an act of defiance against the authorities, especially when it comes to religion and patriotism. At the same time, with their spirits depleted after the atrocity of war, they were, more than ever, willing to accept the new regime and try to make the most out of it, especially since Nowa Huta was a promise of a prosperous life.⁶

This thesis is going to focus on the relationship between the plans, objectives and initiatives of the Nowa Huta's division of the Polish United Workers' Party (*PZPR*, further referred to as Party or the authorities) concerned with creating a socialist population in Nowa Huta, and the reactions (to those initiatives) as well as a complex net of motivations, expectations, pre-existing customs and behaviors of the people who arrived at Nowa Huta, and became builders and workers. The city of Nowa Huta itself is going to be the meeting point of the two actors and a space of confrontation between them.

This thesis is going to take a deep dive into the much uglier beginnings of Nowa Huta, namely the period between 1949 and 1957, when, in place of wide streets and green parks – the district's current main attraction - there were dirty worker hotels and dusty (or muddy, depending on the season) construction sites. It is going to showcase the relationship between the workers and the Party as an ever-shifting and nuanced process of action, inaction and reaction, taking place within an ever-changing space of a city built from the ground up.

Research Question

What were the Nowa Huta authorities' initiatives and policies aimed at ingraining a socialist identity in Nowa Huta, and how did the builders and workers of the city react to them between 1949 and 1957? To what extent were these initiatives and policies successful and what kind of society did they create in said time bracket?

Existing historiography

A peculiar thing concerning the histories of totalitarian regimes is the fact that one may only be able to attempt to write it, once said regimes are toppled. This is when access to information becomes easier and witnesses are more eager to talk about their experiences without a threat of being punished. Soviet Union is no exception. Hence, a thorough historiographic study of the USSR could only begin to flourish after 1989, when, as Mazower stated, the Soviet archives opened, "[...]

⁶ Jędrzej Chumiński, „Postawy i zachowania pracowników przemysłu w Polsce w latach 1945-1948” (Attitudes and behaviors of industrial workers in Poland 1945-1948), in *Rola Krakowa w dziejach narodu: Narodziny Nowej Huty (Cracow's role in the nation's history: The Birth of Nowa Huta)*, ed. Jan M. Małecki (Kraków: Towarzystwo Miłośników Historii i Zabytków Krakowa, 1999), 15-53, p. 18.

allowing historians to take over a task previously controlled by political scientists, that of analyzing the character of the imposition of communist power.”⁷

The same notion affected the historiography of Nowa Huta, which, despite not being part of the Soviet Union *per se* (as Poland was a satellite state), had a closed-off character – an Italian visitor reminisces about his trip to Nowa Huta in 1955, that not only has he been thoroughly searched by armed guards – the visit itself was very limited, showcasing one of the construction sites as well as a brief chat with one of the directors, and the photographs he took were taken away.⁸ Not a lot was known about the details of Nowa Huta’s construction, as well as the conditions of the workers and builders. It was only since 1989 and the fall of the fall of the PRL (People’s Republic of Poland), that academic workers were able to access this information and tackle the topic thoroughly. It means that the historiography of this district is relatively fresh, with many scholars, such as Katarzyna Zechenter, a researcher analyzing the role of memory and suffering in creation of national identities on the example of post-war Poland, claiming in 2007, to have provided a “first systematic and critical interpretation of the narrative centred on Nowa Huta over the last fifty-five years.”⁹ This passage serves as a representation of the relatively fresh state of the historiography of former Soviet satellite countries, especially when it comes to the stories of people inhabiting these spaces.

The above is not to say that the historiographic debate on Nowa Huta is not significant or hardly existing. In fact, the body of academic research on Nowa Huta’s first years of existence is quite rich. One of the main works that will be used throughout this thesis is Katherine Lebow’s *Unfinished Utopia*, a book that sets out to analyze the period of 1949-1956 in Nowa Huta, to identify the hubris for later revolutionary potential of the city¹⁰. It is an illuminating work that largely focuses on the relationship between the people of Nowa Huta and the Stalinist ideology. Lebow’s work will not just provide data and facts – it will also provide some guidelines on how to tell the story of society-ideology relationships. Another work vital for this thesis is Wojciech Paduchowski’s *Nowa Huta Nieznana i Tajna* (The Unknown and Secret Nowa Huta).¹¹ It is a historical compilation of excellent archival work by Paduchowski who attempted to outline the criminal history of Nowa Huta by researching documents made by the UB (Security Bureau). The book provides a valuable look into

⁷ Mark Mazower, „Changing Trends in the Historiography of Postwar East and West”, in *International Labor and Working-Class History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, no. 58, Fall 2000) Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27672684>, p. 275-p. 282; p. 279.

⁸ Radio Free Europe. *A visit to Nowa Huta and to a Kolkhoz* (Radio Free Europe, 1955) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:dece1597-0907-4d49-8dbd-d487453c4dc3>, pp. 2-4.

⁹ Katarzyna Zechenter, “Evolving Narratives in Post-War Polish Literature: The Case of Nowa Huta (1950-2005)”, in: *Slavonic & East European Review* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, vol. 85, no. 4, 2007), Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25479134>, 658-583; p. 658.

¹⁰ Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism and Polish Society, 1949-1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

¹¹ Wojciech Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną: obraz miasta w materiałach Urzędu Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego i Milicji Obywatelskiej (1949-1956)* (*The unknown and secret Nowa Huta: image of the city in the materials of Security Bureau and Civic Militia*), (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2014).

data into the people not only considered criminals, but also enemies to the mission to establish a socialist population in Nowa Huta.

To supplement these two main works on Nowa Huta, journal articles will be used. Most notably, *The Politics of Culture in Poland's Worker Paradise*¹² by Bolesław Janus, and *Public Works, Private Lives* by Lebow.¹³ The first covers the history of cultural reforms in the first years of Nowa Huta's existence. While focusing largely on the objectives and initiatives of the Party, it outlines a story of the Party not understanding (and not putting the effort to understand) the workers they were creating culture for. This theme is going to be vital for this thesis and for understanding the relationship of the Party with the workers. Lebow's article focuses on the complicated history of *junacy* – youth workers who were the first to work in Nowa Huta – analyzing their motivations, behaviors and allegiances.

These two main texts are going to be supplemented by a host of academic research by other authors who tackled Nowa Huta, each shedding some light on the complex relationship between the Party and the workers this thesis is going to tackle. The 'light' usually comes in a form of focusing on a single aspect of that relationship, like the story of *junacy* in Lebow's article or of cultural reforms in Janus's piece. When put together, these works will help shape a structured and nuanced image of that relationship. Synthesizing them with the primary source material will allow this thesis to go a step further and merge all those elements to create a coherent and comprehensive story.

Overview of primary sources

Primary material is going to be used to create a coherent image of the policies and initiatives aimed at ingraining a socialist identity among the workers as well as the reactions of the workers and builders to these policies and initiatives. These sources will be used to paint a detailed and nuanced picture of a complex and ever-changing relationship between the workers and the authorities.

One of the most important sources I am going to use when writing this thesis is *Kronika Nowej Huty* (The Chronicles of Nowa Huta) by Tadeusz Gołaszewski published in 1955.¹⁴ Gołaszewski had a background in cultural sciences and sociology and his work as an author and editor of the chronicles was initiated when he started working in a Department of Construction Monograph on 15th July 1950.¹⁵ *The Chronicles of Nowa Huta* cover a period between 1949 and 1954, from creating a Nowa

¹² Bolesław Janus, "The Politics of Culture in Poland's Worker Paradise: Nowa Huta in the 1950s", in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropa* ed. Helmut Altrichter (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, vol. 56, no. 4, 2008), Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41052158>, 543-553.

¹³ Katherine Lebow, „Public Works, Private Lives: Youth Brigades in Nowa Huta in the 1950s”, in *Contemporary European History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol. 10, no. 2, 2001) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777301002028>, 199-219.

¹⁴ Tadeusz Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty: Od utworzenia działu projektowania Nowej Huty do pierwszego spustu surówki wielkopiecovej* (*The Chronicles of Nowa Huta: From the creation of design department until producing a first batch of pig iron*), (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1955).

¹⁵ Tadeusz Gołaszewski, *Tadeusz Gołaszewski – 65 lat życia i twórczości* (*Tadeusz Gołaszewski – 65 years of life and creation*), (Kraków, 1983), p. 1.

Huta design department until producing the first batch of pig iron. The source offers a thorough and comprehensive overview of all the issues this thesis is going to cover, often written at the very moment they happened. An immediate drawback of *The Chronicles*, however, is that their creation was commissioned by the Party, which means that the author was not likely to be able to engage in critique of the authorities and their decisions. Nonetheless, *The Chronicles* offer a valuable source of information on what life in Nowa Huta was like and how the society changed overtime.

What *The Chronicles* lacked in critique, will be compensated by other primary sources. Namely, it is a collection of reports by Radio Free Europe, all dating between 1950-1955, with one report coming from 1956. They were made by either secret informants, former workers, visitors from the Western Europe or foreign people working in Nowa Huta. The reports offer a level of critique unattainable via official channels and while they are limited in their scope, they provide a crucial glimpse into the life in early Nowa Huta without filters. In the post-war years, Radio Free Europe was a US-backed station that broadcasted auditions among the countries of the Soviet bloc. Henceforth, these sources might be an opposite of *The Chronicles*, trying to represent Nowa Huta as critically as possible. I do believe, however, that both the Party-approved *Chronicles* and the critical RFE reports will offer a more comprehensive image of Nowa Huta that will be closer to what living in this town was actually like.

Both *The Chronicles* and the Radio Free Europe reports hit their final dates earlier than the scope of this thesis – 1954 and 1955 (with one outlier report from 1956) respectively. Fortunately, there are other primary sources that fill up this gap. First of all, are the two reports from Party meetings, from October 1955¹⁶ and July 1956.¹⁷ Both were concerned with the conditions in Nowa Huta in the areas of culture, work, socialist identity and the internal workings of the Party. They provide crucial information on the situation in the city and are going to serve a similar purpose to *The Chronicles* – being comprehensive overviews of the issues plaguing Nowa Huta. Additionally, they serve as two pieces of a continuous story, as the 1956 report largely responds to the discoveries made almost a year earlier. Similarly to *The Chronicles*, the two reports show the perspective of the Party. Luckily, there are sources available that fill this gap, providing, not only a critical perspective, but also additional facts and information on the situation in Nowa Huta.

One of the voices of critique was Adam Ważyk's poem *Poemat dla dorosłych* (Poem for Adults) published on 21st August 1955 in *Nowa Kultura* (New Culture) magazine.¹⁸ Adam Ważyk was a Polish poet and writer born in 1905 described by his peers as a herald of so-called surrealism.¹⁹ *Poemat dla dorosłych* was the first time he would express criticism towards the reality he previously supported. The poem criticized plenty of aspects of life in Nowa Huta, most notably boredom, lack of cultural activities,

¹⁶ Biuro Polityczne. „Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 15 X 1955” (Information on the situation in Nowa Huta 15 X 1955) (Nowa Huta, 1955), Available at: <https://polona.pl/item/notatka-o-sytuacji-w-nowej-hucie,MTE1NDA5NDk/0/#info:metadata>.

¹⁷ Biuro Polityczne. “Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 2 VII 1956” (Information on the situation in Nowa Huta 2 VII 1956) (Nowa Huta, 1956) Available at: <https://polona.pl/item/informacja-o-sytuacji-w-nowej-hucie,MTA4NzY2MTk/0/#info:metadata>.

¹⁸ Adam Ważyk, *Poemat dla Dorosłych (Poem for Adults)*, (1955), Accessed 28/03/2020, Available at: <http://lewicowo.pl/poemat-dla-doroslych/>.

¹⁹ Stefan Kisielewski, *Abecadło Kisiela (Kisiel's ABC)*, (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Interim, 1990).

poverty, failures of the Party to educate the population, back-breaking work, horrible living conditions, and drunken and backward workers. *Poemat dla dorosłych* was the first voice of dissent, which expressed disillusionment with Nowa Huta as a beautiful socialist city populated with conscious people.

Another critical voice came from Ryszard Kapuściński, a prominent youth writer and reporter. Born in 1932, he started writing as a teenager, joining *Sztandar Młodych* (Standard for the Youth), a newspaper for the youths, in 1955. In the same year he wrote an article *To też jest prawda o Nowej Hucie* (This is also the truth on Nowa Huta).²⁰ In it, he points out the effects of Party's policies – a lack of a strong cultural program, stifling critique at workplaces and overall demoralization of the society. He also describes specific cases of people and the effects Party policies had on them.

Both Ważyk and Kapuściński's pieces of writing are going to serve an important role in this thesis. As critical and non-Party voices, they will provide a counter-balance to the 1955 and 1956 reports made by the authorities.

While the primary material listed above does contain many stories of workers and builders of Nowa Huta, it is important to give the voice to them, as much as it is possible. This is going to make the arguments of the thesis more tangible and allow one to get a better understanding of the relationship between the Party and the people. To achieve this, I am going to use two documentary movies about Nowa Huta. First one is *Nowa Huta: Labirynt Pamięci* (Nowa Huta: A Labirynth of Memory) from 2009 directed Marcin Kaproń on behalf of the Historical Museum of Cracow.²¹ The purpose of the movie was to tell the stories of the people living and working in Nowa Huta at different points in time, from their contemporary perspective. Kaproń interviews artists, intellectualists, engineers, builders and workers, giving them a chance to tell their stories. The second documentary movie I am going to use is *Miasto gniewu i nadziei: Nowa Huta* (A City of Hope and Anger: Nowa Huta) from 2007, directed by Tomasz Klimczak and Przemysław Moskal for a TV channel Discovery Historia TVN.²² The aim of the movie was to provide an overview of the history of Nowa Huta, from its conception to the strikes in the late 1980s. Among footage from the times and a voiceover, there are several accounts of people who lived in Nowa Huta, most notably Janusz Ożański, a son of the first model worker and Kazimierz Kubrak, an electrician who spent his childhood in Nowa Huta. Both movies showcase a huge range of experiences, which is their strength when treated simply as a documentary, but reveals its lacks as a source, as the movie only partially goes into the time scope of this work. They, nevertheless, offers some crucial insights into the motivations of people who initially came to Nowa Huta, especially so, as they were not given a platform to talk about their experiences often. These voices are going to enrich the arguments of this thesis and

²⁰ Ryszard Kapuściński, *To też jest prawda o Nowej Hucie* (This is also the truth on Nowa Huta), (1955), Accessed 28/03/2020, Available at: <http://kapuscinski.info/to-tez-jest-prawda-o-nowej-hucie.html>.

²¹ Marcin Kaproń, "Nowa Huta: Labirynt Pamięci" (Nowa Huta: A Labirynth of Memory), filmed 2009, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpWPrtR5X74>.

²² Tomasz Klimczak and Przemysław Moskal, "Nowa Huta: Miasto Gniewu i Nadziei" (Nowa Huta: A City of Hope and Anger), filmed 2007, Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVW5tgKpPcg>.

provide an insight from the people, as opposed to the Party, the writers or outside informants for Radio Free Europe.

Methodology

The first years of Nowa Huta's existence were characterized by huge waves of people coming in and out, and living in mass shared housing, which rendered regulating and documenting behaviors of workers and builders an impossible task. What is more, because of a closed-off character of the city in its initial years, the access to such data had been made even harder. Therefore, given the lack of huge volumes of available information, when writing the story of Nowa Huta from an angle of identities, one needs to rely not on numerical data or statistical mapping, but on accounts, memories and testimonies, which often are often scarce, as workers were rarely given a voice. Hence my analysis is going to be qualitative and based on interpreting, analyzing, and putting into context the occurrences, opinions, statements and behaviors documented by the primary sources – *The Chronicles*, Kapuściński and Ważyk's critiques, the Radio Free Europe reports and interviews with workers living in Nowa Huta made as a part of the documentary movies on the town's history. The chapters of this thesis are going to assemble information from different sources containing facts, the Party line, the critique and the voices from below. Together, they create a coherent picture of Nowa Huta in the context of socialist identity. This is why, it is appropriate to treat the topic in a similar fashion to the way Stephen Kotkin treated Magnitogorsk in his 1995 'Magnetic Mountain'.²³ Just like Magnitogorsk, a city/factory complex with an economic and ideological goal, was a blueprint for Nowa Huta, so did Kotkin's approach in *Magnetic Mountain* was a thematic inspiration for this thesis. The book focused on the interactions between actors – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the people of Magnitogorsk – set in a space of a newly emerging city-factory complex. In the same way, this work is going to focus on such interactions, but set in the city of Nowa Huta between 1949 and 1957.

Another book, which greatly inspired the way the topic of this thesis is going to be approached is Katherine Lebow's *Unfinished Utopia*. The book aims at "[...] juxtaposing these [stories of workers and inhabitants of Nowa Huta] against both the official and unofficial transcripts of the party state, thereby revealing a social and cultural landscape that is at once strangely exotic and surprisingly familiar."²⁴ Whereas Kotkin focused on workers-authorities interactions, Lebow looks at the interactions between the workers and Stalinism (so, workers-ideology) in the first years of Nowa Huta's existence to uncover the source of both the city's and the whole country's revolutionary anti-government potential. Finally, I will merge both Kotkin and Lebow's approaches to look into the relationships between the workers and the authorities, defined by policies and people's reactions to them, to find their more immediate and localized consequences – the extent, to which the Party succeeded in their project to ingrain socialist identity in Nowa Huta.

²³ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) Available at: <https://www-fulcrum-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/concern/monographs/tg57nr13n>.

²⁴ Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, p. 2.

The above will be done by considering ever-changing and nuanced relationships between the two following actors:

1. The authorities of Nowa Huta who were given the task of, not only creating an entire industrial-housing complex, but also of raising a society based on socialist principles and morality, doing so in a top-down and heavy-handed way,
2. The workers and builders who came to work and live in Nowa Huta with their pre-existing beliefs, expectations, prejudices and motivations.

These two actors act and interact within the space of Nowa Huta. I will outline the relationships between these actors within three thematic areas, identified during my research, which Party's identity policies have concerned. They are as follows:

1. Merging work with ideology.
This area of Party policy in Nowa Huta involved using labor as a means of ingraining socialist identity. Throughout the entire period covered in this thesis, the means used by the Party have shifted in several ways, both impacted by workers' reactions to them and impacting those reactions. The thesis is also going to analyze the results of Party's policies on workers' attitudes towards both the Party and the identity they were supposed to adapt.
2. Culture in service of ideology.
Culture was seen as paramount in the mission to ingrain the socialist identity in Nowa Huta. The Party's execution within this area, however, left much to be desired, a condition, which sparked a vast spectrum of reactions from the working class of the city, all of which boil down to a sense of dissatisfaction and boredom.
3. Introduction of socialist identity and erasure of the Polish identity.
This theme puts the two axis this thesis focuses on – polish and socialist identity – in a direct opposition. The workers and builders of Nowa Huta were not only expected to adapt the new – they were also to abandon the old.

I decided to limit the scope of my work to the first eight years of Nowa Huta's existence, which are the years 1949-1957. The storyline begins with commencement of the city's construction, along with the hopes of building a new Poland with a new type of people – socialist ones, disconnected from their past and looking towards the future. It ends with an erection of the first cross in, what was known as a 'godless city',²⁵ thus serving as official recognition of religion – a vital aspect of Polish identity - by the authorities. The arguments are going to be presented chronologically. This is done to identify and map out shifts and patterns in the relationship between the authorities, and the builders and workers of Nowa Huta. I decided to divide the period between 1949 and 1957 into three parts, each of them representing a different stage of this relationship:

1. 1949 – 1952 – This is the period of rapid construction of the city. It is when competition between worker brigades was encouraged to push the norm and speed the building process up. During these four years one can see the most intense, yet most top-down efforts to ingrain the socialist identity in Nowa Hutans.

²⁵ John Kifner, "'Godless' Polish city gets 6th church" *The New York Times*, 23/06/1983, Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/06/23/world/godless-polish-city-gets-6th-church.html>.

2. 1953 – August 1955 – During this period the authorities started to slowly notice the faults of the competitive ‘model worker’ system. Importantly, following Stalin’s death in 1953, the ideological importance of Nowa Huta has been steadily diminishing.
3. August 1955 – 1957 – Starting with the publication of Adam Ważyk’s highly critical *Poemat dla dorosłych*, followed by the 1956 Khrushchev Thaw, this period was characterized by loosening of the grip the Party had over the people of Nowa Huta.

Each of the three periods is going to serve as a standalone chapter, with its subchapters focusing in depth on the three aforementioned areas of Party’s policy concerning socialist identity in Nowa Huta: merging work with ideology, use of cultural texts, and issues identity, as well as the reactions of Nowa Huta’s workers and builders to them. Such a structure of the thesis is not only going to allow for an outlining of patterns of identity policies, but most importantly, for a detailed and thematic identification of shifts throughout the period of 1949-1957.

Chapter 1: 1949-1952 - A Clumsy, Yet Optimistic Start

1.1: Work and ideology 1949-1952

The first four years of Nowa Huta's existence were a period focused on building housing for the future working class of the city. However, given how Nowa Huta was not just supposed to be a space for achieving industrial production goals, but also for raising a socialist population, the act of labor was to have a twofold goal – productive and ideological.

Raising a socialist society was to be done by means of mobilization, inclusion and integration – a system that, as Lebow states, required active participation from its participants,²⁶ as opposed to suppression and policing of the immediate post-war period.²⁷ One of the most significant themes of this phenomenon is the culture of work. This subchapter will delve into the merging of labor with ideology and the Nowa Huta population's reactions to Party's policies in this area.

As work constituted a major part of every Nowa Huta's life, the authorities needed to find a way to merge labor with socialist education. This was done by treating hard work as an expression of not only one's devotion to socialism, but also of being a conscious member of the Polish socialist vanguard. Bolesław Bierut, President of the People's Republic of Poland since 1947, and the head of Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) had laid the ideological foundation that has been applied to Nowa Huta. Bierut had a history of communist activism, which dates to pre-First World War times, as well as strong ties to the Soviet Union.²⁸ Apart from being depicted as a *de facto* leader of post-war Poland, in fashion similar to Stalin's cult of personality, Bierut was a hardline Stalinist himself, using both repression and ideology²⁹ to shape Poland into a socialist state. Ideologizing all aspects of life and labor were, therefore, paramount. Bierut expressed this sentiment in August 1950:

"In order for the production plan, set for every workplace, to be successfully accomplished, it needs to be laid out and explained not only for the entire crew, but its every division, production group, and finally, to each and every single one of the workers."³⁰

The success of the Six-Year Plan, therefore, in line with what Bierut said, depended on making sure the workers of Nowa Huta are actively and consciously participating in the process of fulfilling its

²⁶ Katherine Lebow, "Revising the political landscape: Nowa Huta, 1949-1957", in: *City & Society* (Arlington: American Anthropological Association, vol. 11, no. 1-2, 2008) Available at: <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1525/city.1999.11.1-2.165>, 165-187, p. 168.

²⁷ Chumiński, „Postawy i zachowania pracowników przemysłu w Polsce w latach 1945-1948”, pp. 19-20.

²⁸ Izabella Main, „President of Poland or 'Stalin's Most Faithful Pupil'? The Cult of Bolesław Bierut in Stalinist Poland” in *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc*, ed. Apor Balázs (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230518216>, 179-193, pp. 179-180.

²⁹ Chumiński, „Postawy i zachowania pracowników przemysłu w Polsce w latach 1945-1948”, pp. 19-20.

³⁰ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 140.

objectives. This was to be done “not by administrative penalties, but most of all, a systematic effort needs to be put into growing the class consciousness among the most backward of the workers.”³¹ This systematic effort involved two major areas: creation of *junacy* – brigades of youth workers formed out of the first groups of people who arrived in Nowa Huta, and the competition system. We will focus on the former first.

In 1952, Marian Brandys, a Polish author and, during the 1950s and 1960s, a reporter, said the following about the post-war youths of Poland: “they’re the most valuable raw material of the Six-Year Plan, which, on this construction site, will be purified of all impurities and forged into precious stainless human steel.”³² Indeed, many of the ways *junacy* were treated by the authorities in Nowa Huta were supposed to induce a far-reaching change and make these youths fall in line with the Party’s version of socialism. *Junacy* were organized by ZMP – *Związek Młodzieży Polskiej* (Polish Youth Union) – into brigades named *Służba Polsce SP* (In Service to Poland). They were then directed to hard labor such as digging trenches and foundations. Many felt pride and enthusiasm building the city they would have lived in, and were not discouraged by often makeshift conditions and hard work.³³ A lot of Nowa Huta’s *junacy*, however, entered the brigades, because of a promise to receive a vocational training³⁴ - participation in which was conditional to brigade’s work performance – a fact that motivated many to work exceptionally hard.³⁵ On one hand, there were people willing to work hard for personal gain, on the other hand, large groups of *junacy* (even up to 19%), would desert their brigades upon either not qualifying for their vocational training or when the trainings “failed to materialize.”³⁶ An interesting trend, therefore, emerges where a lot of *junacy* would engage in hard work for individualistic reasons, instead of a desire to build socialism in Poland, like the Party intended.

The second part of building the work culture was the competition system, inspired largely by the Soviet-era Stakhanovite movement, which gave birth to the model worker system, in which individual workers or small teams, who significantly surpassed their daily norm, were being put on pedestals and praised as socialist heroes. The Polish United Workers’ Party attempted to ignite a similar movement in Nowa Huta.

One of the first, and most notable Nowa Hutan ‘Stakhanov’ was Piotr Ożański, a builder originating from the South-Eastern city of Rzeszów. According to Gołaszewski: “After only a couple of days, he was moved from a digging job onto a construction site. He mastered his new occupation so

³¹ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 141.

³² Anna Bikont, Joanna Szczęśna, „Wiosną 1945: Towarzysze Nieudanej Podróży” (In the Spring of 1945: The Comrades of a Failed Journey), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15/01/1999, Available at: http://www.archiwum.wyborcza.pl/Archiwum/1,0,999614,20000115RP-DGW,Wiosna_1945,.html.

³³ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, pp. 84-5.

³⁴ Lebow, “Public Works, Private Lives”, p. 207.

³⁵ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 129.

³⁶ Lebow, “Public Works, Private Lives”, p. 207.

thoroughly that soon he not only became a standalone builder, but also a model worker.”³⁷ On an anniversary of the Polish Committee for National Liberation’s Manifesto on 14th July 1950, Ożański attempted to break the record for the most bricks laid down in eight hours. Together with a second builder, Szczygło, as well as four helpers, he managed to lay 34.728 bricks, which constituted 525.5% of a daily norm and heavily surpassed the previous record of 14.000 bricks.³⁸ Ożański beat his own record on 26th September 1950 to celebrate the 33rd anniversary of the October Revolution.³⁹ Together with eleven other builders and helpers, he laid 66.232 bricks,⁴⁰ raising him to a status of a national hero. Ożański’s heroism, as presented in Gołaszewski’s entry in *The Chronicles*, was rooted in his personal initiative to perform an incredible act.⁴¹

Ożański’s records secured him a momentary spot as a hero of the Party. For them hard work was synonymous with one’s socialist morality.⁴² Ożański was made out to be the Nowa Huta equivalent of Stakhanov and an inspiration for the masses to work much harder. However, his impact as an inspiration to others, needs to be put into question, as the Party seems to have had assumed that masses will follow Ożański’s example. Bogumił Korombel, Head of Nowa Huta Construction Department, had the following to say about the insanely paced ideologically driven outbursts of labor:

“Such happenings, when the entire Party would stand and look at teams breaking records, were far from frequent. When it comes to Ożański, it was his own initiative.”⁴³

Korombel’s testimony expressed a similar notion to Gołaszewski about Ożański’s initiative. Their view of Ożański’s record, as originating from the builder’s own initiative, however, clashes severely with how Ożański himself reminisces the event:

“They have been getting my site ready for two weeks. I received carefully picked bricks – new and with no cracks. In my everyday work, I would have to constantly run to the magazine manager and my supervisor. Something would break, another thing would not be delivered and I would sometimes waste half my workday. I broke the record, but they [the Party] helped me with it.”⁴⁴

³⁷ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 115.

³⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 116.

³⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 138.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 139.

⁴¹ *Ibidem.*, p. 115.

⁴² *Ibidem.*, p. 406.

⁴³ Klimczak, Moskal, *Nowa Huta: Miasto gniewu i nadziei*, timestamp: 17:40.

⁴⁴ Katarzyna Florczyk, „Stalinizm jako stan wyjątkowy: budowniczości socjalizmu czy więźniowie obozu?” (Stalinism as an emergency state: builders of socialism or prisoners of a camp?) in *Teksty Drugie (Second Texts)* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2014, no. 5) Available at: www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=290920, 122-140, p. 127.

The quote gives the impression that Ożański's success cannot be attributed exclusively to him. It was far from an impassioned declaration, rather a deliberate move by the Party. Seeing the artificiality of Ożański's record an important question needs to be asked – was it possible for an average worker to achieve such results? Not quite – The Chronicles of Nowa Huta lists only a handful of such undertakings. As a direct result of Ożański's first attempt to break the record, Tadeusz Gołaszewski noticed two brigades exceeding the norm – a three-person group tasked with supplying construction materials who reached 1500% of their daily norm and a seven-person group of diggers who regularly surpassed their norm by 558%.⁴⁵ After Ożański's second record breaking there has only been a handful of cases of workers significantly surpassing their norm peppered up until 1952. Gołaszewski mentions Leszek Złochota, a 16-year old digger regularly reaching 320% of the norm. There were also cases of completing the construction ahead of the plan.⁴⁶ Another significant example was the 'storming brigade' – a team of builders led by J. Knapczyk who, apart from reaching between 160% and 260% of the norm, worked tirelessly during the winter of 1950-1951, when the temperatures would reach -20 degrees Celsius.⁴⁷ After the mention of the 'storming brigade' in The Chronicles, there is only some praise for youth workers who, in June 1952, laid concrete in heavy rain reaching 250% of their norm.⁴⁸ It seems that the period of several months mentioned by Tadeusz Binek, when Ożański's brick-laying record had limited traction and inspired a handful of teams to work extra hard, has dissipated by the winter of 1950/1951, just like Ożański's 'stardom', as his son reminisces, quickly faded and went into oblivion.⁴⁹

One needs to examine the reasons for lack of workers' interest in participating in socialist competition. Why was this system, so extensively promoted by the authorities as a way to become socialist citizens of the new Poland, so scarcely adopted by the workers and so short-lived?

When looking at all the cases of workers participating in the record breaking, one can get the impression that their work was stretched to an absurd, not to mention the fact that Ożański's record can be largely attributed to Party's interference. Another factor is the fact that normally-paced work in Nowa Huta was already hard. As Tadeusz Śmierzewski, a former worker in Nowa Huta, reminisces:

„The conditions of work were extremely hard, because we have been working using archaic methods from the second half of the 19th century.”⁵⁰

Looking at Śmierzewski's quote, one can get the impression that the overworked workers were simply not interested in laboring themselves to exhaustion to surpass the norm, because their work was already very hard, the methods they were using archaic and the conditions bad. Another important reason that can explain scarce participation in the socialist competition is the disdain, with

⁴⁵ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 138.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 153.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*, p. 198.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 330.

⁴⁹ Klimczak, Moskal, *Nowa Huta: Miasto gniewu i nadziei*, timestamp: 17:00.

⁵⁰ Kaproń, *Nowa Huta: Labirynt Pamięci*, timestamp: 8:00.

which model workers were treated by other workers. While being praised by the Party as the socialist vanguard and an example, the model workers' records were setting high standards for the rest to follow as well as deregulating other teams' work.⁵¹

While record-breaking labor was not necessarily popular among the builders of Nowa Huta, it was not indicative of an overall lack of exceeding the norm. The attempts to surpass the norm by hundreds of percent might have disappeared from 1951 onwards, but the culture of doing more than 100% was still there, and while it was praised by the Party as evidence of a growing socialist society, the available sources suggest a different set of factors that inspired the workers to work harder.

A key characteristic of the competition system was the focus on how fast the work was done.⁵² If a particular team has done 300% of their daily norm, it meant that they did three days' worth of work (calculated based on quantity) in a single day. The workers were perfectly aware of that system and of the way their norm was being measured and were more than eager to exploit it for their personal gain. A crucial piece of information that will allow us to understand it, comes in a form of a statement made by an unspecified director, quoted in a Radio Free Europe report made by an Italian visitor to the city:

"On average, the workers earn between 1.200 – 1.500 zloty, but model workers can reach even up to 5.000 zloty per month."⁵³

Although the passage comes from 1955, it provides a crucial piece of information that can shed some light on the way workers understood the norm system. Namely, it suggests that the salaries of the workers were progressive and the more norm one fulfilled, the more they earned. This account is confirmed by another report made by a former Nowa Huta worker and based on their observations between March and November 1953, quoting many opportunities for bonuses.⁵⁴ In the eyes of the Party, a better salary was just a nice addition to the sense of pride from having a chance to build a new, socialist Poland. It was, however, not the case with ordinary workers. In fact, their salary was often a priority, and the mission of building Poland, praised so loudly by the Party, was pushed aside in favor of personal gain. This sentiment was reflected in the neglect workers felt towards fruits of their labor.

The Chronicles frequently point out badly done workmanship or hastily done work. A good example is the C-2 settlement, which saw many new blocks of flats given to use in October 1951. Even though there were already people living in these apartments, the construction site was not cleared up. Basements were frequently being flooded, and holes, dug out to install electricity would often be left after construction was over, collecting water, washing away the foundations and posing hazard for inhabitants.⁵⁵ The apartments were frequently unfinished, houses were unventilated, windows not

⁵¹ Klimczak, Moskal, *Nowa Huta: Miasto gniewu i nadziei*, timestamp: 18:00.

⁵² Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, pp. 275-6.

⁵³ Radio Free Europe, *A visit to Nowa Huta and to a Kolkhoz*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Radio Free Europe, *Nowa Huta: Salaries* (Radio Free Europe, 1953) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:ac9d1ec1-68d4-4f67-82f7-6faec452b89a>, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁵ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, pp. 276-7.

properly fitted and various decorations quickly deteriorating.⁵⁶ It was often the case that hasty work allowed for finishing work on schedule or even ahead of it. It gave the authorities a sense of success in their process of turning former peasants into devoted socialists.

Meanwhile, as Gołaszewski has begun finding out in the second half of 1952, the alleged successes of the Party were far from truth. An article from the newspaper *Budujemy Socializm* he cites in one of his entries, shows the magnitude of the problem:

“We observe cases of turning bad workmanship into a system. There are being created special technical ways of concealing this bad workmanship from the controllers.”⁵⁷

The quality of work was, therefore, systematically being sacrificed in favor of speed. By the Party’s criteria, the people were working hard and, therefore, adapting socialist values. However, many builders were in fact exploiting the system, which graded their work not by quality, but by quantity. Indeed, they worked fast, but the fruits of their labor were unfinished apartments as well as constantly disturbed organization and coordination of builders’ efforts. The problem of shoddy workmanship was extremely serious. A report made by the Party officials in 1956 estimated that the cost of repairing all the faulty done work would surpass 20 million zloty,⁵⁸ which, considering the entire budget for Nowa Huta for 1951 was 8.481.251 zloty, is very high.⁵⁹

It is important to note that the builders were exploiting a faulty system. While it shows their lack of concern for providing the best possible conditions for the working class of Nowa Huta, the collective they belonged to, the roots of the problem can be found in flawed approach of the authorities. A document summarizing a 1952 meeting of the Political Bureau shows that the Party was ridden with internal conflicts and disagreements. Even though the aim of the meeting was to address the “sources of pessimistic moods”,⁶⁰ the majority of the transcript sees representatives of different organs shifting and juggling responsibility as well as blaming each other⁶¹. As a result of the meeting, no concrete plan of action had been devised - once the policies adopted by the Party turned out to be causing more harm than good, it was not easy to get them back on the right track.

Internal struggles were not the only source of problems among the authorities. As Gołaszewski noticed in his entry from 28th December 1952:

⁵⁶ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 277.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem.*, p. 389.

⁵⁸ Biuro Polityczne, “Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 2 VII 1956”, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 245.

⁶⁰ Biuro Polityczne. *Wypowiedzi na powiedzeniu Biura Politycznego 1952 (Statements made during a meeting of the Political Bureau 1952)*, (Nowa Huta, 1952), Available at: <https://polona.pl/item/wypowiedzi-na-posiedzeniu-biura-politycznego-towarzyszy-zaproszonych-do-omawiania-spraw,MTE1NDA5NDI/O/#info:metadata>, p. 1.

⁶¹ Biuro Polityczne, *Wypowiedzi na powiedzeniu Biura Politycznego 1952*, p. 1.

“The Internal Committee of the PZPR [Polish United Workers’ Party] have had frequently noticed a rift between reports and the real situation on the construction sites of Nowa Huta. The data from these reports are often non-alarming. They obscure the true image of Nowa Huta and conceal mistakes, and shortcomings.”⁶²

The issue, therefore, extended from workers exploiting a badly designed system, to include Party officials as well. While the former were interested in carving out the best profit for themselves, the latter were covering it up, hindering positive (or any) change. It was only by the very end of 1952, that the authorities sent out a special commission that independently assessed the situation of housing, with a special focus being put on worker hotels. The commission found plenty of faults, from serious ones such as a lack of central heating or hygiene facilities to seemingly insignificant ones such as light bulbs not being changed for weeks after running out.⁶³ These resulted directly from neglect and lack of care, however the bigger picture were the authorities, who, while being aware of fake or inaccurate reports, did not act.⁶⁴ Such attitude to the issue gave a sense of an unspoken permission to the builders of Nowa Huta to put quantity over quality and secure higher salaries for themselves. When saying that, one needs to remember the main reason people came to Nowa Huta in the first place – to improve one’s, and often one’s family situation - a response to grave conditions in the Polish post-war province, countryside and cities.

The work culture of the initial years of Nowa Huta’s existence marks the emergence of a trend that is going to largely define the arguments of this thesis. Namely it is the Party’s inability and unwillingness to understand the workers – their motivations and needs – as well as assuming a set of motivations these workers had, that was connected to the Party’s perceived socialist inclination that guided the workers when making the decision to join the construction of Nowa Huta. In reality, the main motivations were to better one’s own living situation or, in some cases, to rebuild Poland after wartime destruction.

This misunderstanding of workers’ motivations was, what ultimately determined the failure of quantity-norm-based and competition systems by the end of 1952, as for many workers, the socialism, as the Party proposed, was not a goal, but rather a means to achieve prosperity. As the next chapters will showcase, the work culture in Nowa Huta between 1949 and 1952 is only the first case of the Party failing to understand the workers.

1.2: Culture 1949-1952

Each day of a worker in a socialist regime is to be constructed similarly – a systematic cycle of work, rest and sleep. Historians have highlighted the importance said regimes put onto mobilizing populations across all three of those time intervals. Kotkin, when analyzing Magnitogorsk described it

⁶² Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 459.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

as an act of finding a way to relate all aspects of life to socialism.⁶⁵ Translating his findings onto the space of Nowa Huta one can see similar patterns emerge. This chapter will focus on the workers' spare time – a much more elusive notion than merging labor and ideology, as participation was not a given.

Organization of workers' spare time focused on putting up cultural events and creating spaces where culture could be cultivated. The goal of the Party was to create a population of conscious citizens, well-versed in socialism and capable of consuming sophisticated culture.

Because Nowa Huta was able to introduce widely spanning policies meant to build a socialist population it can, contrary to Kotkin's critical approach towards Magnitogorsk, be showcased as more of an action-reaction mechanism between the Party and the population. Kotkin's Magnitogorsk, because of its failure to build facilities for indoctrination, was unsuccessful in tying people to ideology and thus can be considered more of an infrastructural failure. The story of Nowa Huta, on the other hand, is one where the ideological policies were put in place, therefore the interaction between the people and the authorities can be viewed as being a consequence of these policies.

The main assumption of raising a socialist population in Nowa Huta was that individuals were supposed to be surrounded with activities aimed at gradually turning their systems of values, morality and identity into socialist ones. While work was a major part of Nowa Hutans' lives, they needed something to do during their time off. Engaging the builders and the workers of Nowa Huta in a wide and varied range of cultural activities that promoted socialist values, morality and identity was a major task for the authorities.

The Party needed to make sure the workers and builders were capable of consuming and understanding the culture. The population of Nowa Huta, whose 80% originated from the backward countryside⁶⁶ were, in large part illiterate.⁶⁷ The authorities made it one of their priorities to eradicate that. The efforts to accomplish this started in the second half of 1950, when 53 courses for 1550 people (882 of whom passed the final exam) were organized with more concrete actions commencing in January of 1951.⁶⁸ These included 21 new literacy courses,⁶⁹ including a question

⁶⁵ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, p. 356.

⁶⁶ Jack C. Fisher, "Planning the City of Socialist Man", in *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* (vol. 28, no. 4, first published 1962, published online 2008), Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366208979451>, 251-265, p. 256.

⁶⁷ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 180.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem.*, pp. 179-180.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 191.

about literacy during registration, as well as adjusting work schedules of people attending courses. To avoid a return of illiteracy, special reading activities were organized.⁷⁰

With the issue of illiteracy being gradually taken care of, the culture of Nowa Huta had some grounds to grow. It was initially organized around community halls *świątlice*, 'red corners' and large houses of culture. These, often small venues served as concert halls, theatre stages, cinemas, rehearsal spaces, reading rooms, places for poetry readings and simply spots to come after work for some leisure.⁷¹ Janus cites data from the Archive of the City of Cracow, which state that by January 1952, there were 27 community halls, 45 'red corners' and several houses of culture.⁷²

There was much going on in Nowa Huta - 546 lectures took place in 1951. They were covering various academic as well as lifestyle topics,⁷³ such as alcohol use or family planning,⁷⁴ introductory lectures before cultural events such as a concert or a theater performance,⁷⁵ lectures on production issues, or on common Polish-Soviet history.⁷⁶ Going further, by 1954 the city had three cinemas, which held 611 screenings to 139.161 people.⁷⁷ However, it was theater that became the dominant cultural vehicle in Nowa Huta.⁷⁸ This did not happen for any particular reason other than a relative inactivity of the responsible organ – the *DRN*, National District Council, in other areas.⁷⁹ The focus of *DRN*'s activity was on increasing the number of events centered around highbrow dramatic theater.⁸⁰ Plays such as *Wodewil w Nowej Hucie* (Vaudeville in Nowa Huta), on the construction of A-1, A-South and C-2 settlements, employed builders who worked on these sites as actors. The play was supposed to drive young workers away from hooliganism and educate them to spend their leisure time in a

⁷⁰ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 180.

⁷¹ *Ibidem.*, pp. 190-4, 203.

⁷² Janus, "The Politics of Culture", p. 545.

⁷³ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁴ Anna Grochowska, „Kultura w nowym mieście: O rozwoju życia kulturalnego w Nowej Hucie 1949-1956” (Culture in a new city: On the growth of cultural life in Nowa Huta 1949-1956), in *Rocznik Biblioteki Kraków* (*Chronicles of the Cracow Library*), ed. Stanisław Dziedzic (Kraków: Biblioteka Kraków, vol. II, 2019), Available at: <http://www.rocznik.biblioteka.krakow.pl/rbk2019/anna-grochowska-kultura-w-nowym-miescie-o-rozwoju-zycia-kulturalnego-w-nowej-hucie-w-latach-1949-1956/>, 216-147, p. 230.

⁷⁵ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 665.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 439.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 330.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁸⁰ *Ibidem.*

socialist way, that is, to engage with culture.⁸¹ The choice of actors was supposed to trigger a bigger spark of interest among the builders and, thus, increase the attendance.

The number of lectures and movie screenings, or the focus on theater cannot be treated as an indicative of how Nowa Hutans related to the culture presented to them and whether they attended the events. It was not the subject matter or the cast that determined whether the audience would be packed. It was the relationship between who the audience were and what culture was available. As Bolesław Janus, Professor of History at the University of Montana Western, specializing in the history of mid-20th century Eastern Europe states, the authorities were focusing on highbrow, avant-garde culture, as it was believed to be truly enriching and the best vehicle to transfer the socialist identity unto the people of Nowa Huta.⁸² The theater groups were, therefore, staging sophisticated tragedies, such as *Wczoraj i Przedwczoraj* [Yesterday and the Day Before], a play depicting a dramatic fate of a Warsovian builder family.⁸³

The types of culture that were meant to educate the society to a bigger degree – lectures and especially theater, were not doing that well. The issue at hand was that the builders and workers, recently living in backwater regions of Poland, were not prepared to comprehend the culture the Party was surrounding them with. Indeed, the attendance suffered greatly, with many events only garnering a dozen viewers in a venue with a capacity of several hundred⁸⁴. When people did attend an event, they would often not pay attention.⁸⁵

These phenomena were magnified by the fact that 80% of the people in charge of cultural facilities at the ground level – the program coordinators for red rooms and community halls - were believed to be unqualified for their positions – the speakers, as Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, a poet involved in Cracovian and Nowa Hutan culture said, would often bore the listeners, speak intelligibly, or use complicated terms.⁸⁶ The facilities themselves were suffering from insufficient funding⁸⁷ with many of red rooms or community halls being tiny, run down or lacking equipment – Gołaszewski cited a library with 200 books for 1000 readers, a red room with only five board games, thefts of equipment and frequent changes of staff.⁸⁸

On the other hand, movie screenings enjoyed a fair share of popularity. Cinemas played films on events from Soviet history, such as the fall of Berlin, the Battle of Stalingrad or a movie on

⁸¹ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 312.

⁸² Janus, “The Politics of Culture”, p. 544.

⁸³ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 190.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁶ Grochowska, “Kultura w nowym mieście”, p. 230.

⁸⁷ Janus, “The Politics of Culture”, pp. 545-6.

⁸⁸ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 330.

Komsomolsk⁸⁹ - a city that, according to Soviet propaganda, was erected by *komsomolcy* – Soviet youth activists. As Gołaszewski stated in *The Chronicles*, in the first 14 months since the first travelling cinema arrived at Nowa Huta, 600 screenings took place.

Given a far-from-sufficient amount of worker-oriented entertainment, the people took initiative and started organizing their own free time.⁹⁰ Excited with the freedom and possibilities of a new place, the young population of Nowa Huta would put up dance parties, which would often take place on *Przy Poczcie* (By The Post Office) square.⁹¹ Krystyna Gil, a worker who moved to Nowa Huta in its first years, shared her impression of the city, which encapsulates that notion:

„When I came here, oh my God, there were so many young people! There was something going on at every street corner and all we wished for was to go out.”⁹²

For the young population of Nowa Huta the city was a space of fun and a clear breakaway from their past lives, oftentimes marked by trauma. The parties they organized were, therefore, not just a way to fill the vacuum left by badly organized Party-backed culture, but also a way to enjoy and appreciate their new lives.

The lack of interest of Nowa Hutans in attending Party-backed educational cultural events, and their own initiative in a form of street parties, might bring one to assume that the population was not interested in participating in culture altogether. This was, however, not the case, as worker initiative also involved creative endeavors. Anna Grochowska, whose research focuses on the issues of Polish, and especially Cracovian cultural life in the 20th century, notes many examples of workers writing poems, playing musical instruments, creating drawings, or even engaging in small amateur theater groups in Nowa Huta.⁹³ These activities were usually done on workers' own time and with their own initiative. However, as Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa said: “the people of Nowa Huta are on varying levels of artistic awareness. But who is there to show it to? What to do further?”⁹⁴ Gołaszewski mirrored these complaints by saying: “Passions that were ignited, die out.”⁹⁵ Workers were mostly delegated to the role of consumers of culture, as opposed to being co-creators.

An argument proving the contrary (or rather, a welcome exception from the rule), comes in a form of the ‘Nurt’ theater group. ‘Nurt’ is an essential part of analyzing the state of culture in the first years of Nowa Huta, not only because of its organizational sophistication, as opposed to street parties or cases of workers engaging in art making. It is also because of the implication of workers' ability to

⁸⁹ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 192.

⁹⁰ Grochowska, “Kultura w nowym mieście”, p. 227.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹² Kaproń, „Nowa Huta: Labirynt Pamięci”, timestamp: 4:10.

⁹³ Grochowska, “Kultura w nowym mieście”, pp. 227-9.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem.*, p. 228.

⁹⁵ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 464.

self-organize and take initiative, which was done both within the principles of socialism, but nevertheless, against the Party's wishes.

The topic of 'Nurt' is all but scratched over in the historiography of Nowa Huta. Historians such as Lebow or Janus, invested in the history of the city and its culture, have devoted little space to this theater group in their work, showing it more as a transition state between the Party-backed initiatives, than a vital part of the city's landscape. Similarly, Grochowska, while talking about the state of culture in Nowa Huta between 1949 and 1956, focuses mostly on the established artists, tasked with creating pieces about the newly emerging city, doubling down on the notion of workers as consumers, as well as objects of culture. As the following paragraphs will demonstrate, 'Nurt' was in fact, an essential part of the history of not just culture in Nowa Huta, but the interactions between the Party and the workers.

Launched in June 1952, 'Nurt' was one of many grassroots initiatives aimed at creating an amateur theater group by the workers and for the workers. 'Nurt' was, however, the first successful one, that battled through the problems faced by similar groups, such as a lack of facilities, artistic direction and support from the Party.⁹⁶ They managed to obtain wood for construction of their own venue and were helped with direction by Jan Kurczab, a Cracovian writer and activist.⁹⁷ The venue, which resembled a barrack, was built by the members of the group themselves, with some help from ZMP by the end of the construction.⁹⁸ On 15th June 1952, 'Nurt' staged their first play *Poemat Pedagogiczny* [A Pedagogical Poem], a piece about a group of lowlifes who transform into good citizens after taking part in an educational camp.⁹⁹ The play showcased a story of individual improvement through becoming a part of the socialist community – a theme Nowa Huta was based on.

Poemat Pedagogiczny got rave reactions from the audience. Krystyna Zbijewska, a theater critic, appreciated the success of Nowa Huta's first stable theater venue and expressed admiration for the efforts of group's members in staging a fully realized play.¹⁰⁰ The successes that followed were indeed, significant. In July and September 1952 (August was a holiday month), 'Nurt' staged 48 performances attended by 18,000 people.¹⁰¹

The grassroots origins of 'Nurt' were one of two main reasons as to why this particular venue achieved a tremendous success. It was made by the workers and for the workers, in an authentic,

⁹⁶ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 373.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸ Przemysław Zieliński, *Powstanie i rozwój systemu społecznego i instytucjonalnego Nowej Huty (1949-1966)* (*Creation and development of the social and institutional system in Now Huta (1949-1956)*), (Torun: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2009), p. 97.

⁹⁹ Zieliński, *Powstanie i rozwój systemu społecznego i instytucjonalnego Nowej Huty (1949-1966)*, pp. 96-7.

¹⁰⁰ Krystyna Zbijewska, „Nowa Huta na stały teatr” (Nowa Huta has a permanent theater venue), *Życie Literackie*, 06/1952.

¹⁰¹ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 448.

bottom-up fashion. Aleksandra Mianowska, a worker and an actress at 'Nurt' reminisces playing in front of large and enthusiastic crowds she was able to relate to, because of her peasant past and the amateur character of 'Nurt'.¹⁰² The people attending their shows would see their friends and co-workers sharing their passion. Meanwhile, Party-backed groups were hiring actors from Cracovian groups who, although professional and experienced, were not able to emulate the same feeling of closeness with the audience 'Nurt' actors achieved.¹⁰³

The second reason for 'Nurt's' success can be found in their focus on lighter, more entertaining plays, as well as Polish classics, which stood in contrast to overly educational Party-backed theater. Gołaszewski mentions several plays that were regularly staged by 'Nurt' actors. *Powrót Pośta* (Legate's Return) written by in 1790 Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz was a political comedy on the situation in 18th century Poland. *Halka* (Petticoat) is an opera by Stanisław Moniuszko, a 19th century Polish composer. *Pan Tadeusz* is a classic national epic poem by Adam Mickiewicz, a vital figure when it comes to preserving Polish national identity during the partitions of 1795-1918. *Trzydzieści Srebrników* (Thirty Pieces of Silver) by Howard Fast, a US writer and a socialist, is a commentary on reactionary policies of the US government.¹⁰⁴ The repertoire of 'Nurt' was, therefore a mix of lighter entertainment, some elements of socialist messaging, and Polish classics.

Despite the fact that the venue was located away from the center of Nowa Huta, had no central heating and the road leading to it was muddy and dark, 'Nurt' sustained people's interest and repeatedly saw full audiences, something that could not have been said about Party-backed venues, which, although located in more favorable and easily accessible places,¹⁰⁵ and backed by government funding, failed to replicate the success of 'Nurt'.

The issues that plagued 'Nurt' were magnified by the group's success. Since October 1952 no performances could take place in the venue, because of low temperatures. Rehearsals of the group were still taking place, however.¹⁰⁶ Despite many requests by the group and a promise by the Party, central heating was not installed until December 1952, which moved the reopening date for warmer months.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Janus, "The Politics of Culture", p. 547.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁴ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 448.

¹⁰⁵ Jarosław Kłaś, „Początki zorganizowanej działalności kulturalnej w Nowej Hucie” (The beginnings of organized cultural activity in Nowa Huta), in. *Nowa Huta w kulturze, Kultura w Nowej Hucie (Nowa Huta in culture, culture in Nowa Huta)*, ed. Jarosław Kłaś, Maria Wąchała-Skindzier (Kraków: Ośrodek Kultury im. C.K. Norwida, 2019), Available at: <https://okn.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NHwKulturze.pdf>, 175-184, p. 177. and NHpedia.pl. "Kina w Nowej Hucie" (Cinemas in Nowa Huta), Accessed 19/10/2021, Available at: http://www.nhpedia.pl/kina_w_nowej_hucie.html.

¹⁰⁶ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 448.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem.*, p. 449.

The grassroots origins of 'Nurt' were the cause of their notoriety in the eyes of the Party. 'Nurt' stood in a stark opposition to the culture the Party wanted to grow in Nowa Huta. It lacked not only the highbrow element, but also an explicit educational and socialist identity-building message. It was, however, exactly what the population needed. It was relatable and on the level that attendees could comprehend. Apart from light entertainment, 'Nurt' offered more sophisticated plays. What differed these from Party's offer, however, was their lack of educational top-down message. It was art made by the people for the people.

A crucial theme emerges in this chapter of the capacity of the workers to interpret and create the space of Nowa Huta in a way they wanted. 'Nurt', despite being a grassroots movement, included plays and messages that promoted socialism and so-called socialism. It did so, however, on workers' terms, and while the message largely belonged to the same ideological camp, it was formulated by the workers, and not the Party – a state, which the latter could not agree to. An important struggle and a tension therefore emerged between one creating a space for themselves, even if it is one that includes the system of values of the current regime, and having that space created for one. Putting it in a different way – it was a struggle between a role of a consumer that the Party delegated to the workers, and their self-appointed role of a creator and contributor. This tension between the top-down and the bottom-up will largely define the further relationship between the Party and the workers. One cannot forget about the Party's many lacks in the area of implementing culture. In this way, 'Nurt' emerges not just as a beacon of worker self-empowerment, but also a way for the workers to fight boredom.

1.3: Identity 1949-1952

From the moment the very first *junacy* arrived at the sub-Cracovian construction site, the plan to create a socialist population in Nowa Huta was set in motion. The mission, however, was supposed to go deeper than politicizing and ideologizing the workplaces and surrounding the workers with socialist culture. It was, ultimately, supposed to show the workers that they belonged in a grand work of building socialism not just in Poland, but globally. At the same time, the workers were expected to completely let go of their past identities and customs and fully embrace the new.

This subchapter will cover the policies the Party put in place to ensure the above goals would be met. These pages will take us from the *junacy*'s tents and construction sites, meetings with workers from the Soviet world, all the way to what was going on behind the closed doors of private apartments and hotels.

Let us come back to the beginning of this chapter where I covered the work competition system. There is an aspect of this system that is vital to understanding the way socialist identity was being introduced. Namely, the insanely paced work, breaking the records and declarations of finishing a certain task before the deadline, were often done to celebrate important anniversaries of the socialist world.

A perfect example of this notion are Ożański's two attempts at breaking records, which were set on important celebrations – the first one to celebrate the signing Polish Committee for National Liberation's Manifesto, which established Soviet-backed National State Council as the legitimate government of Poland, and the other, to celebrate the 33rd anniversary of the October Revolution. While the former was referring to the history of Polish socialism, which was understood as a step in building a new Poland, the latter was explicitly Soviet.

The authorities of Nowa Huta encouraged both active participation in competition and for declarations such as Ożański's, to be made.¹⁰⁸ There were several more notable examples of celebrating important socialist dates with labor. First, a crew of builders declared to build an entire structure in 21 days to celebrate the 33rd anniversary of the October Revolution. The building was erected in two weeks.¹⁰⁹ Secondly, on the same occasion, two female brigades competed for results when building a nursery. Another brigade built a training room for carpenters using leftover materials. There were also several declarations of surpassing the norm for several months that came from both the builders and the administration.¹¹⁰ Next, a team of builders declared to reach 150% of their daily norm for an entire month, to celebrate Stalin's 70th birthday.¹¹¹ Lastly, 1st May 1951, the annual International Workers' Day (known in Poland as *Święto Pracy*) was set as a date when illiteracy was to be eradicated in Nowa Huta.¹¹²

The fact that such declarations and efforts (however few there were) were made on such occasions was by no means coincidental. Gołaszewski noted the close connection of ideology and labor in Nowa Huta:

"The very essence of the political life of Nowa Huta – Poland's first socialist city – is a deep connection between construction and class consciousness."¹¹³

Coinciding declarations with socialist and Soviet celebrations had an aim of bringing the builders of Nowa Huta closer to the ideology. This notion offers an extension of the arguments made in the first subchapter, as it suggests a much more explicit merge of labor with ideology that was designed specifically to praise both socialist and Soviet elements. Taking the findings of the first subchapter further, however, one finds that this merge, has not landed on fertile ground and the system of competition, meant to facilitate a growth of socialist identity among the workers of Nowa Huta has never caught on.

Merging socialist ideology with labor was not the only way the Party attempted to introduce socialist identity into the worker population of Nowa Huta. For more cases, we need to look into the ways *junacy's* lives were designed to induce a socialist change in them. Katherine Lebow, a historian

¹⁰⁸ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 137.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 152-3.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 153.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem.*, p. 171.

¹¹² *Ibidem.*, p. 219.

¹¹³ *Ibidem.*, p. 143.

specializing in the 1950s in Poland, with a specific research focus on Nowa Huta, lists several crucial characteristics of the way *junacy* operated.¹¹⁴ Her approach to telling the history of the city, rooted in the study of societies under socialist regimes, focuses on mapping the relationship between the authorities and the ordinary citizens, with implications to its long-term consequences. In an article 'Public Works, Private Lives', she follows the story of Edmund Chmieliński, who joined *SP* as a seventeen-year-old boy. Through his story, Lebow talks about the life of *junacy*. These youths dressed identically, ate the same food and slept in the same quarters. Their days looked identical with many military drills and hard physical work.¹¹⁵ Communal living, equality and working for a greater good were, therefore, the values that the *SP* tried to instill in *junacy* to turn them into devoted socialists. It was, however, only partially successful. *Junacy*, even those who were achieving great results on the worksite, would often engage in hooliganism and drunken behavior in their free time, which most frequently took form of fights. Wojciech Paduchowski, a researcher of the history of 20th century Poland, says that although incidents recorded by the militia show a rather insignificant scope of this phenomena (only 31 recorded fights for 2738 overall crimes in 1951),¹¹⁶ the actual scope might be significantly larger, not only because a lack of clear and universal definition of a hooliganism incident,¹¹⁷ but also because of many cases where the militiamen would not react to the crimes committed, which in turn, would not be noted down¹¹⁸ - an account confirmed by a worker writer who went by the pseudonym of 'Elf'.¹¹⁹ Gołaszewski, most likely because of the Party-affiliated character of The Chronicles, does not mention hooliganism or gang behavior of *junacy*, instead expressing concern as to an insufficiency of the options available to the youths to spend their free time (one of the main reasons quoted by Paduchowski as the cause for *junacy's* criminal activity),¹²⁰ which could lead to disorganization.¹²¹ Lebow talks about gang behavior of *junacy* who, despite engaging in brawls, would do so, while simultaneously claiming their allegiance to the *SP*.¹²² This nuance in the behavior of *junacy* – engaging in behaviors condemned by the Party, and at the same time, expressing their allegiance to its organs – likely stems from the fact that living and working in Nowa Huta has had improved the conditions of life of these, most often, former peasant youths (their place of upbringing and a following lack of education also played a part in the way they

¹¹⁴ Katherine Lebow, „Public Works, Private Lives: Youth Brigades in Nowa Huta in the 1950s”, in *Contemporary European History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, vol, 10, no. 2, 2001) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777301002028>, 199-219, pp. 207-8.

¹¹⁵ Lebow, „Public Works, Private Lives”, p. 208.

¹¹⁶ Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 118.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 121.

¹¹⁹ Lebow, „Public Works, Private Lives”, p. 216.

¹²⁰ Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 118.

¹²¹ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 130.

¹²² Lebow, „Public Works, Private Lives”, p. 217.

behaved).¹²³ Jędrzej Chumiński, a professor of Economic History focusing on the economic history of post-war Poland, claims that the peasant origin of many *junacy*, and a subsequent lack of experience or qualifications, made it easier for the Party to instill socialist identity in those youths using a simple ‘carrot and stick’ mechanism in a form of vocational trainings for the best of *junacy*.¹²⁴ Still, however, as seen in the many cases of hooliganism, the authorities were not capable of fully controlling the reactions, as well as interpretations that *junacy* developed towards the Party’s policies, the Party itself and the socialist ideology. They were more than eager to accept the principles and rules of the socialist regime but then interpret them in their own way. A huge role in creating the dualism between being simultaneously a hard worker by day and a hooligan during the night, was also played by the ‘carrot and stick’ mechanism mentioned by Chumiński. It promised *junacy* vocational courses for their hard work, but provided no such incentive for good behavior off the clock. Going a step further, a report from between 1950 and 1951, provided to Radio Free Europe by a reliable source, claimed that the *SP* was not really interested in regulating the behavior of *junacy* off the clock – what mattered was their productivity as well as compulsory weekend political courses.¹²⁵ That allowed the youth workers to roam the city with little supervision, which highlights an important theme of Party activists neglecting workers outside of working hours.

There is one more aspect of the way *junacy* were treated by the Party that needs to be highlighted. The Party, with use of military-style drills as well as by uniformizing the life of *junacy*, has tried to force them into a conduct – a concept created by Foucault describing a system of regulating behaviors accordingly to the intent of a power structure.¹²⁶ The latter while accepting some aspects of the conduct, were eager to perform a counter-conduct, which is not understood as an explicit resistance, but rather a conscious “act of being in a space differently than expected.”¹²⁷ In this way, *junacy* enjoyed the conduct, which ensured their prosperity, while simultaneously engaging in counter-conduct of hooliganism, which interestingly, was still rooted in their allegiance to the Party. As we will see in next chapters, this nuanced way, with which the *junacy* related to the reality around them, will largely inform the further relationship between the workers of Nowa Huta and the Party.

Another method the Party used to try and raise a socialist population in Nowa Huta, was to create a sense of a deep and almost inherent connection between Poland and the Soviet Union, as well as other socialist countries. In a letter send on 12th June 1950 by Nowa Huta youths to their “Soviet friends” from the city of Komsomolsk, they wrote:

¹²³ Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 118.

¹²⁴ Chumiński, „Postawy i zachowania pracowników przemysłu w Polsce w latach 1945-1948”, pp. 46-50.

¹²⁵ Radio Free Europe, *Youth Labor* (Radio Free Europe, 1951) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:8f986179-ac0e-494f-bbb9-3ae89acec259>, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-78* English Series ed. Arnold I. Davidson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). pp. 256-8.

¹²⁷ Charles Drozynski, “Counter-Conduct: The Architecture of Fools in the City of Nowa Huta”, in. *Global Society* (2016, vol. 30, no. 2), Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13600826.2016.1144566>, 360-386, p. 361.

“[...]we are one in thought with the Komsomolsk youth. We are aware that there are two tasks ahead of us: building a socialist city and raising the people to be the builders and citizens of the socialist future. You are showing us the way of realizing these objectives.”¹²⁸

The quote clearly indicates the type of relationship the Party tried to create between Polish and Soviet youth workers. The latter were the ones to look up to and who have already worked their part in the grand work of building and strengthening socialism. This notion has been deepened by a Month of Soviet-Polish Friendship organized in November 1952, during which almost one hundred of lectures and talks about the Volga-Don Canal, Komsomol, Pavlov theory and the history and tradition of Soviet-Polish friendship, as well as readings of Russian authors, took place.¹²⁹

Another aspect of creating a sense of commonness between Polish and Soviet workers, were meetings with workers from the Soviet Union organized by the Party to “promote the ideals of proletarian internationalism.”¹³⁰ During one of these meetings organized in the third quarter of 1950, the builders of Nowa Huta have listened to a story by Postowidow, a Stalingrad veteran, about the process of rebuilding the city after its wartime destruction.¹³¹ Such meetings were supposed to serve as evidence to young Nowa Hutans that the Soviet experience was similar to their own and that their mission of facilitating a rebuild and rebirth of their respective countries is shared and, as a result, to bring them closer to the ideology.

The builders of Nowa Huta also took part in meetings with representatives of other countries of the socialist bloc. In September 1950, a delegation of youths from North Korea visited Nowa Huta. In his story, the leader of the group, Kan-Buk focused on his poor countryside background and his current role in organizing agricultural cooperatives.¹³² By exposing the builders to Kan-Buk’s story, the Party facilitated a further realization that the experiences of people living under different socialist systems are similar or even identical, therefore attempting to deepen Nowa Huta’s builders own sense of belonging to the socialist world.

A recognition of shared experiences among the people of the socialist bloc was not the only goal of the Party when it comes to introducing the socialist identity among the workers of Nowa Huta. Another crucial aspect was the creation of common historical narratives between Poland and Soviet Union. This was done by ‘warming up’ the image of Soviet leaders – Lenin and Stalin. For instance, a parent visit to a summer excursion for Nowa Huta kids ended with a visit to Lenin’s Museum in Poronin and a lecture on his life and activity in Poland.¹³³ The aforementioned celebration of Stalin’s birthday is also a good example of painting Soviet leaders as friends of Poland, attempting to create a stronger bond between Nowa Huta and the socialist world.

¹²⁸ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 110.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem.*, pp. 439-40.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 141.

¹³¹ *Ibidem.*

¹³² *Ibidem.*, p. 142.

¹³³ *Ibidem.*, p. 260.

While the above paragraphs have focused on the ways socialist identity was being introduced, we need to address the other side of the spectrum – erasure of Polish identity. As Nowa Huta was supposed to be a clean slate and a breakaway from Polish past, neither religion nor non-socialist and non-productive behaviors had a place there. The most important aspect of this process was eradication of religion, one of the most important parts of Polish identity and a system of morality that largely helped Polish people get through the hardships of 19th and 20th centuries. Not a single church or even a publicly placed cross could have been found in the entire city up until 1957.¹³⁴ The second aspect was erasure of Polish holidays. For example, on 3rd May 1951, the authorities have organized an exhibition named “The Soviet Union – a country of victorious socialism”. This is notable, given that 3rd May is an anniversary of one of the most crucial events in Polish history – the signing of Poland’s first constitution in 1791, a date, which is celebrated to this day as a very important national holiday.

Erasure of Polish and non-socialist elements in Nowa Huta uncovers the dualism between the space and the people inhabiting it. Similarly, as in the case of *junacy*, the relationship between the Party and the people can be described as the former trying to enforce a conduct, and the latter engaging in counter-conduct. While the workers generally reacted enthusiastically to the meetings with their more experienced counterparts from other socialist countries, it was the enforcement of conduct that has sown the first seeds of antagonism on the line of workers-Party.

Let us first talk about the ways design allowed for enforcing a conduct. Charles Drozynski, a Cardiff University-based researcher specializing in spatial design, talks about it in detail in his article *Architecture of Fools in the City of Nowa Huta*. Using his expertise in the field of architecture he dissects the ways the authorities wanted to use both public and private spaces to ingrain socialist modes of life and enforce desirable behaviors. Wide, transparent streets and almost identical settlements of blocks encouraged the builders of Nowa Huta to live their lives in a similar fashion to everyone around them,¹³⁵ extending the principles of uniform life experienced by *junacy*. Similarly, private spaces were designed to be the same for everyone, thus hindering individualization and focus on the self, instead promoting a sense of a collective.¹³⁶ The sense of a lack of privacy was reinforced by a lack of acoustic isolation between apartments - as an informant for Radio Free Europe stated, the apartments were built using airbricks.¹³⁷ While it was more of a design flaw resulting from a lack of resources and experience than a conscious choice, it allowed for bigger public transparency of private spaces and facilitated the work of informants employed by the police.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Radio Free Europe, *A visit to Nowa Huta and to a Kolkhoz*, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Drozynski, “Counter-Conduct”, pp. 376-7.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 379.

¹³⁷ Radio Free Europe, *Impressions from the town of Nowa Huta* (Radio Free Europe, 1954) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:533ba074-f958-419b-96dd-deb9fa176a4b>, pp. 3-4.

¹³⁸ Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznana i tajna*, pp. 100-1.

Private spaces (apartments) were also included in the conduct and there were attempts to politicize and ideologize them. On 19th January 1951 a call-to-action appeared in the *Budujemy Socjalizm* newspaper:

“Women of Nowa Huta! Remember that a clean apartment is a testament to a worker’s culture. Resting after work is better and more pleasurable in a clean and well-lit apartment. Our common home in Nowa Huta needs to be clean, well-lit and tidy.”¹³⁹

Ideologization of everyday mundane tasks is an important theme in historiography tackling socialist regimes. Lebow talks about spaces where “Stalinism most disrupted the conventional geographies of everyday life.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the Party attempted to introduce ideology into the most mundane of tasks, such as cleaning one’s apartment.

The struggle to politicize and publicize the private spaces was a crucial one, because, as Lebow states, they were on the frontline of ideological struggle as well as places where the workers “were able to carve out spaces of (relative) freedom from the surveillance of party, activists, and police.”¹⁴¹ While design aided the process of enforcing a uniform lifestyle, it also, to a limited extent, allowed the people to engage in non-socialist or non-productive activities, such as drinking, playing cards, criticizing the regime, discussing current events or talking about and performing religion as well as national celebrations, behind the closed doors of their apartment or a hotel room (mostly, however, the former). Channeling Figeš, Paduchowski refers to this phenomenon of a behind-the-closed-doors performance of certain aspects of one’s identity (Polish or non-socialist) as a “whispering act”¹⁴² – a part of an individual that was supposed to exist outside of Party’s jurisdiction and police’s watchful eyes, or rather, ears.

Giving people a chance to have a place to live, whether in a hotel or in their own apartments, and giving them little in form of an incentive (in terms of cultural and entertainment activities) to leave it for other purposes than work, became Party’s downfall in terms of erasing the unwanted parts of identity. The ‘whispering act’ meant that a person who appeared to have adopted socialist identity, might have just adopted an ‘act’ that allowed them to function and grow within the system. This was a frequent phenomenon in the post-war Poland, with many people deciding to work within the existing system, even if it meant compromising one’s own beliefs and putting on an ‘act’, whether it meant becoming an active member of the Party or just not speaking one’s mind.¹⁴³ It was usually done, because of a realization that acting socialist was the best way to better one’s situation.¹⁴⁴ However, once an individual stepped into a space that was, at least partially, private, the ‘act’ would be dropped and one’s true self was allowed to emerge. Whether it was praying, cultivating Polish

¹³⁹ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 183.

¹⁴⁰ Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴² Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 153.

¹⁴³ Chumiński, „Postawy i zachowania pracowników przemysłu w Polsce w latach 1945-1948”, p. 18.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

traditions or criticizing the present regime, the potential of private or semi-private spaces was utilized by the workers of Nowa Huta.

A full picture of the relationship between the workers and the Party, achieved by the fully realized thematic scope of the period of 1949-1952, affords us the opportunity to see the extent of Party's neglect. The issues of work, culture and identity interlock each other and it was often the case that an apparent success in one area exposed or highlighted failings in another.

The policies adapted by the Party, therefore, seemed to have been very inflexible and slow to adapt. On the other hand, the workers' reactions to said policies were nuanced, ever-changing and informed by various motivations. The workers of Nowa Huta were quick to react and claim informal ownership of the spaces, for which the Party had a different intended use. Importantly, this has been informed by antagonism (as in the case of the whispering act in private apartments), neutrality (setting up 'Nurt' as a bottom-up initiative, or exploiting the norm system for personal gain), or allegiance (*junacy* hooligans who were still devoted to the SP) towards the Party. It's important to notice that in such cases, the workers were utilizing or exploiting a system that was built in a faulty way and encouraged such manipulations to happen.

The starting point to the next period – 1953-1955 – is therefore one of Party's slipping control over the workers – the latter being eager to reclaim and redefine the spaces and the basic ideological principles as their own. This relationship, however, cannot be described just in terms of conduct and counter-conduct – although the workers would 'act in a space differently than expected', they would often do so not by denying socialist ideology, but rather engaging in their own interpretation of it.

Chapter 2: 1953-1955 - Cracks In The Picture

2.1: Work and ideology 1953-1955

The defining event that launched the period of 1953-1955 was the 1953 budget cut, which shifted the focus of Nowa Huta as a project, from being both ideological and productive, to being overwhelmingly centered around ensuring a strong productive output.¹⁴⁵ Katherine Lebow suggests it might have been in part due to Stalin's death in March 1953, which released some of the pressure on making Nowa Huta a socialist gem of Poland,¹⁴⁶ and in part due to the massive costs of the construction.¹⁴⁷

Nowa Huta was too expensive and too ambitious. While the initial four years of its existence were characterized by an enthusiastic sense of a new start, this new reality uncovered plenty of cracks in what was supposed to be a model socialist city. The budget cut ended the era of clumsy enthusiasm that defined the period of 1949-1952. This subchapter will cover the sudden shift in the way labor was perceived, which had caused a ripple effect that hugely impacted the relationship between the workers and the authorities.

Interestingly Lebow's mention of the budget cut is the only instance I could find in the historiography of Nowa Huta. There is some mention of it in descriptions of educational walks across Nowa Huta, but its importance is hardly highlighted.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, as in the case of 'Nurt', the topic is very much omitted from the analysis, yet its impact on the city, as will be evidenced in the next subchapters, has been a lasting one.

The budget cut meant scrapping planned construction of several large cultural centres as well as lowering the standards of housing by using cheaper materials. While the budget cut became the overarching force that influenced many aspects of life in Nowa Huta, there were more factors at play that influenced the work culture. In the very last months of 1952, there was a shift in the way labor was understood, in line with the findings of the reports that uncovered shoddy workmanship. During a meeting of model workers with representatives of the Nowa Huta Design Department and Biprohut (Department of Designing Steelworks Machinery), B. Milanczowska, a draftsman reaching 184% of her norm stated that "the basic condition for good results is proper organization of work. Quality of work cannot be sacrificed for quantity."¹⁴⁹ With these words, the authorities began to realize the

¹⁴⁵ Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴⁸ Magdalena Smaga, „Nowa Huta – założenia urbanistyczne”, Accessed 23/10/2021, Available at: <https://szlakmodernizmu.pl/baza-objektow/nowa-huta-zalozenie-urbanistyczne/>.

¹⁴⁹ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 413.

faults of the model worker system that not only pushed people to rush their work to surpass their norm and gain respect, and privileges, but also inadvertently incentivized it with progressive salaries.

That realization became much more apparent in 1953, as the population distribution of Nowa Huta changed and the city started to house more workers than builders.¹⁵⁰ While the majority was still housed in worker hotels or barracks, more and more blocks of flats with private apartments were being finished, as permanent population required permanent housing¹⁵¹. This is when the issues outlined in the previous chapter really came into light. Janina Drąg who lived in one of the Nowa Huta apartments reminisced:

“We had to shift the lighting point in our apartment. When the electricians started getting busy with it, after they took the chandelier out, there were some builder’s pants stuck in there. That’s how these apartments were built.”¹⁵²

Another inhabitant of Nowa Huta’s apartment, Krystyna Gil adds:

„When we moved in, there was no light, gas and water. There was a massive bulge in the floor of our apartment. We had to stomp on it to put it down.”¹⁵³

These testimonies of apartment dwellers discovering faults in their living spaces, although seemingly singular, represent an issue of a much larger scale. Shoddy workmanship done to speed the work up, might have looked presentable, however, the buildings often lacked in areas such as heating, ventilation, isolation, sewage system and finishing works as well as making sure the site is cleaned up after ending construction.

The aforementioned meeting of officials with model workers was the first time it was officially suggested that quality of work is being sacrificed for quantity and speed. It was, however on 19th December 1952, that this phenomenon has been acknowledged by the Managerial Department of Housing Construction (ZBM).¹⁵⁴ As it turned out, ZBM was not controlling the quality of work as well as giving unfulfilled promises to fix the defects or lying about having fixed them.¹⁵⁵ From now on, special commissions, independent of ZBM, were supposed to check whether all the defects had been fixed and punish the responsible people in case nothing was done to remedy the faults.

This new clampdown on, not only shoddy workmanship, but, most importantly, on administrative structures that allowed for it to exist in the first place, had a massive impact on the way work was understood in Nowa Huta as well as on the way labor was used as a tool for ingraining a socialist identity.

¹⁵⁰ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 544.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem.*, p. 439.

¹⁵² Kaproń, *Nowa Huta: Labirynt Pamięci*, timestamp: 6:00.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem.*, timestamp: 6:30.

¹⁵⁴ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 456.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibidem.*

To be a good socialist no longer meant to work extremely fast to surpass the norm. From 1953, it started to mean putting care into the finished product. It also meant to continuously improve oneself to achieve better results. The first half of 1954 saw an initiation of a teaching program aimed at “making sure each worker masters their job to the same degree as their supervisor.”¹⁵⁶ The focus, therefore, has shifted from praising exceptional individuals, such as Ożański, and hoping their example will inspire others to push their norm, to a more team-oriented approach. As Gołaszewski put it:

“Obviously, surpassing the production plan is not only achieved by dedication of the model workers – the most decisive factor is good organization and team effort.”¹⁵⁷

The new approach was not to praise the exceptional individuals who reached several hundred percent of their daily norm, but to ensure coordination between different teams dependent on each other, for example, the builders and brick suppliers. When looking at the summary of the work plan for May 1954, which was accomplished in 113,2%, one can see that this change was tangible. The most successful teams were the cast iron smelting and cast steel smelting brigades, reaching 120,4% and 118,1% of their norm respectively,¹⁵⁸ which was far lower than the model workers from the first years of Nowa Huta’s existence, but much more consistent with other teams.

The wide-reaching program of trainings was not only meant to raise qualifications and salaries of the workers, but also to save money on materials. What is more, well-trained personnel would be able to utilize their tools and skills in a more efficient way.¹⁵⁹

On the surface, Party’s new approach was rooted in, apart from improving quality of construction, improving workers’ welfare. However, looking into protocols from Party meetings, one can notice that the actual focal point was productivity. One of the biggest problems the authorities faced was a high level of worker turnover rate. Plenty of them were seasonal workers, looking to make a quick buck.¹⁶⁰ Others would leave for reasons such as unsuitable working conditions, low pay or bad living conditions.¹⁶¹ Staff shortages affected consistent completion of construction plans, which were only

¹⁵⁶ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 696.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 699.

¹⁶⁰ Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, „Nowa Huta: Skąd Przychodzimy” (Nowa Huta: Where do we come from), in. *Moja Nowa Huta. Wystawa Jubileuszowa (My Nowa Huta: An anniversary exhibition)*, ed. Kamil Jurewicz (Kraków: Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa, 2009), Available at: <https://www.uj.edu.pl/documents/29141690/1fdebed6-ea4a-4deb-98b4-e33489d8abbe>, 7-27, p. 17.

¹⁶¹ System Budownictwa Ogólnego, *Załącznik do protokołu SBO nr 195: Sprawozdanie o załamaniu planu budownictwa kombinatu Nowa Huta (Appendix to SBO protocol no. 195: A report on a breakdown of Nowa Huta factory construction plan)* (1954) Available at: <https://polona.pl/item/zalacznik-do-protokolu-sbo-nr-195-sprawozdanie-o-zalamaniu-planu-budownictwa-kombinatu.MTA4NjEwMjg/>, p. 11.

able to reach their quotas thanks to overtime, as well as weekend work.¹⁶² Trainings were, therefore, a way to keep people in Nowa Huta by investing in them. The aim was to raise their qualifications, which would translate to better productivity, and meeting the goals, even with personnel shortages.

Although the changes to how labor and personnel training was understood in Nowa Huta, it does not serve as an indication of labor and life in Nowa Huta becoming much easier. Looking beyond the sources, either commissioned by the Party, or created by the Party itself, one can get a fuller picture of the shift towards focusing on productivity. *The Chronicles*, while being a valuable source, is mainly focused on the positives, however, when looking at more critical voices, one can see the second side of the coin.

The reports sent to Radio Free Europe by their collaborators paint a different picture than the rather praising and only slightly critical description by Gołaszewski.

A confidential source based on one worker's testimony, writing in 1953 about the workers' living quarters noted that newly arriving workers were usually given a bed in a worker barrack, rarely a hotel. Regardless, however, as the source notes: "both better and worse quarters were dirty and unkept, but the conditions in the barracks were particularly primitive"¹⁶³ with most places lacking access to water and basic equipment. For example, while the quarters usually had access to electricity, they often had no light bulbs.¹⁶⁴ Those were slow to be replaced and often stolen by the inhabitants. As the source noted, tough conditions have contributed to a rise in deceit and egoism as opposed to caring for the collective.¹⁶⁵ Glaring lacks in basics in living quarters have pushed the people to stealing the most basic items of everyday use.¹⁶⁶

Not only living was done in horrible conditions. Labor was too. In the previous subchapter on work, I have cited a statement by Tadeusz Śmierzewski, a former worker in Nowa Huta, describing archaic working methods on the construction sites. But what kind of an effect did it have on the workers? An engineer working in Nowa Huta from 1953 wrote:

"A 20km commute to my construction site, abysmal transportation and the amount of work are beyond my power. [...] The construction site has an area of 30 sq km. On dry days, it turns into a single massive cloud of dust and on rainy ones, into a marsh."¹⁶⁷

As the quote (it is important to note that it comes from an engineer, not a worker, which indicates that manual labor may have been impacting the people even more negatively) shows, not much has

¹⁶² System Budownictwa Ogólnego, *Załącznik do protokołu SBO nr 195*, p. 9.

¹⁶³ Radio Free Europe, *Workers' living quarters in Nowa Huta* (Radio Free Europe, 1953) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:feb42cc0-0203-45dc-9d76-9816586e5503>, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem.*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem.*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁷ Radio Free Europe, *A letter from a technician working in Nowa Huta* (Radio Free Europe, 1954) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:a3db599a-3298-427a-add7-b79107d0c44e>, p. 2.

improved when it comes to labor conditions in Nowa Huta. An informant, a French woman who lived in Cracow for 30 years described her impressions of visiting Nowa Huta around 1955. When writing about watching female workers (who were being assigned jobs that required the least skill, but were often straining on the body¹⁶⁸) coming back from the factory, she stated:

“We felt uneasy, we’ve had the impression that these girls, deprived of their youth charm, were capable of stealing and murdering.”¹⁶⁹

She added:

“Nowa Huta fascinates visitors, but only a handful have wondered about the real cost of constructing this giant. The price was the morality of Polish youth.”¹⁷⁰

Above quotes showcase the effects of a shift towards productivity, caused to a large degree by the 1953 budget cut. They reveal an image of Nowa Huta as a place where life and work were conducted so primitively and induced such hardships on the workers, that they effectively have been demoralized by the very factors that were, in fact, supposed to instill a socialist identity in them.

Finally, let us analyze the actual impact of vocational trainings offered by the Party to encourage people to stay in Nowa Huta. A report by a 24-year-old electrician working in Nowa Huta submitted to Radio Free Europe in 1953 sheds plenty of light on these trainings. He says:

“The idea was that young boys would shadow senior workers. But the senior workers are so pressed by their norms that they do not have the time to teach. They also do not get any remuneration for the teaching, so they prefer to get their norms up instead. After the trainings, these so called ‘specialists’ have no idea what they are doing.”¹⁷¹

Trainings were, therefore, organized in a way that did not allow neither the youth workers to learn, nor the teachers to teach. Moreover, they were usually confined to theory and “[...] not providing any practical benefits.”¹⁷² High turnover rates remained with 900 workers including 143 Party officials leaving in November 1953 and 1000 workers including 188 Party officials leaving Nowa Huta in December of the same year.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Radio Free Europe, *Nowa Huta: The Women in Nowa Huta* (Radio Free Europe, 1954) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:3cf948dc-0b1b-4651-a451-156643239bed>, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶⁹ Radio Free Europe, *The Nowa Huta Foundries* (Radio Free Europe, 1956) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:f5a269cc-05c3-4408-8c5e-da7f3539ec90>, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷¹ Radio Free Europe, *Nowa Huta: The Industrial Progress*, (Radio Free Europe, 1953) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:f969ec3a-93b2-4c56-9b06-cac5ffb2194f>, p. 9.

¹⁷² Radio Free Europe, *Nowa Huta: Youth Workers* (Radio Free Europe, 1954) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:8f986179-ac0e-494f-bbb9-3ae89accec259>, p. 2.

¹⁷³ Radio Free Europe, *Some Impediments in the Construction of Nowa Huta* (Radio Free Europe, 1954) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:c803ce22-0837-4fb1-945b-4ded152a770c>, p. 3.

Despite the evident demoralization and hardships, the mission to ingrain socialist identity into the workers and builders of Nowa Huta has not stopped – it, however, has found other, cheaper, ways to impact people that were more in line with a shift from education to productivity. A prominent aspect of that, which emerged between 1953-1955, was the use of media as tools of discipline. Radio had a prominent role in that. Set up in 1953, Nowa Huta's own radio station was blasting through speakers placed throughout all construction sites and production halls. While the bulk of the daily program consisted of music, there was soon added a special segment devoted to the life and production of Nowa Huta. That segment was used to share information about achievements of worker teams, such as going above the norm or celebrating an important day by issuing labor declarations, as well as news about developments in factories and construction sites.¹⁷⁴ An Italian visitor who took a trip to Nowa Huta in 1955 remembers his experience with radio:

“Propaganda can be heard from radio speakers, which the construction site is full of. They fill the streets with such noise that it feels like the Milanese trade shows.”¹⁷⁵

Radio was an omnipresent medium tasked with handing out praise and propaganda messages during work. Newspaper, on the other hand, was a way to reach the workers and builders during their free time, as reading papers was a frequent past-time activity. While, from its conception in July 1950, *Budujemy Socjalizm* (We Are Building Socialism) was filled with “massive, comprehensive, problem-solving articles, which tried to empathically ingrain into workers the principles of socialist morality”,¹⁷⁶ it started changing its focus. In 1953-54, it moved from large articles to shorter forms filled with satire and humor “always with a sense of discipline”,¹⁷⁷ which corresponded to the way workers were perceived in that period – not as tabula rasa that was meant to be educated and molded into socialists, but rather as a productive force.

The way the Party tried to discipline the workers was a response to the conditions the authorities found themselves in after the budget cut of 1953. With focus shifting from tying ideology and labor, to ensuring productivity, the fight for the morality of the Polish youths seemed to have been abandoned. That left the young people who came to Nowa Huta, being expected to leave their old identities behind and embrace the new, without a system of values and morality to follow.

The major insight from the previous chapters was the slipping control the Party had over the workers. In this subchapter, we see the Party seemingly abandon the workers as well as the mission to build a socialist population (or at least assign much less significance to it) amidst the budget cut, which rendered ambitious workplace identity policies unaffordable. Instead, the workers were met with exhausting labor, badly introduced vocational trainings and horrible living conditions. The attitude of the Party towards the workers shifted from educators to agents of discipline, just as the workers were embracing individualistic tendencies instead of care for the collective.

¹⁷⁴ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 497.

¹⁷⁵ Radio Free Europe, *A visit to Nowa Huta and to a Kolkhoz*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 703.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibidem.*, p. 704.

2.2: Culture 1953-1955

The theme of culture between 1953 and 1955 follows a similar pattern to the theme of work – a reaction to the effects of the budget cut. The cut has mostly affected culture, but the range of available activities has not in fact changed, only dwindled in number. 'Nurt' remained the only successful worker-based initiative and, despite continuing to display socialist thought, it became a thorn in the Party's side.

This subchapter will cover the ways, in which workers would find themselves in spaces that were decreasingly accommodating to them. What will also be outlined is the spaces workers occupied and behaviors they engaged in given a lack of appropriate past-time activities.

The state of cultural activities between 1953 and 1955 has been disastrous. The budget cut mostly hit culture and hindered any major new developments in this area. What was already there was, according to the Minister of Culture and Arts, Włodzimierz Sokorski, not sufficient in quantity to meet the demand of the population. Moreover, the work of cultural activists was not coordinated and it did not engage the community enough.¹⁷⁸

Gołaszewski rightfully attributed this lack of interest to the bad work of cultural activists.¹⁷⁹ However, the bulk of the issue also laid in the fact that the type of culture that was being offered did not fit the needs of the workers.

In March 1954, Lucjan Kydryński, a music critic, wrote about philharmonic performances in Nowa Huta. While claiming that these concerts should remain highbrow and focused on showcasing symphonic works of great classical composers, he also stated:

"Now a word on the lectures [which always took place before a concert]. I think that, while insightful and full of ideas, their content is too hard for the workers to understand and not attractive enough. They are too lyrical and lacking in simple, yet interesting information. For example: why the conductor holds a stick in his hand."¹⁸⁰

No wonder the attendance was plummeting and the audience usually consisted of 50-60 people in a venue that could hold several hundred.¹⁸¹ From the passage, one can see the extent, to which the Party and cultural organizers were continuously failing the working class of Nowa Huta – on one hand being aware of limitations of the audience and on the other, continuously pushing for more highbrow culture to be produced, effectively isolating the workers.

Another example of this notion was the Chamber Theater, a completely new venue, plans for which were confirmed in December 1953. It was supposed to be lavishly decorated with marble floors, wall

¹⁷⁸ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 498.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 464.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 665.

¹⁸¹ *Ibidem.*

décor, crystal chandeliers and seating area for 400 people.¹⁸² All this for people who, not so long ago, have lived in some of the most backwater regions of Poland.

Gigant [Giant] – a restaurant built in Nowa Huta, is yet another example of detachment of the authorities from peoples' needs. A confidential source for Radio Free Europe described the restaurant around 1953:

“Gigant was monumental and quite tasteful, but completely unsuitable as a mass venue for workers. [...] After a short period of use, the venue is destroyed to the point that there's no need to push the doors to get in. Instead, you get in through an empty window frame. The atmosphere inside resembled the worst harbor dives. [...] That was supposed to be Nowa Huta's most representative venue.”¹⁸³

The quote shows a stark contrast between the venue and the people that were visiting it. What is more, as another source, a former Nowa Huta worker stated, *Gigant* was too costly for the workers to dine in. Instead, they would smuggle in alcohol, which was not sold in the venue, and engage in drunken parties and brawls.¹⁸⁴

Analyzing the venues and activities prepared for the workers of Nowa Huta, one can get the impression that the authorities expected a socialist identity to grow in its inhabitants simply by surrounding them with sophisticated cultural spaces that left no place for the workers to formulate their own identities. It seems as if the Party set out on their mission with the assumption that the workers of the city will have shrugged off their past experiences the moment they arrived at Nowa Huta and become open to and accepting of whatever the authorities would offer. Meanwhile the worker population of Nowa Huta was not only not interested in Party-approved entertainment – they were also more than willing to take the spaces prepared by the Party and use them in their own way.

The one venue, which succeeded at creating a program that was actually popular among the people of Nowa Huta was 'Nurt'. Between 17th and 26th January 1953, there were seven performances, a conference and two rehearsals planned.¹⁸⁵ The venue reopened after a long break for the winter of 1952-53 caused by a lack of heating. After more than half a year of its existence, 'Nurt' still had no pavement and streetlights leading up to it, making it very difficult for people to get to the venue. Despite these difficulties, Gołaszewski stated in May 1953:

“'Nurt' is always packed, despite the fact that, when it rains, its surroundings turn into a 'minefield' of puddles and ponds.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 632.

¹⁸³ Radio Free Europe, *Impressions from the town of Nowa Huta*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁴ Radio Free Europe, *Nowa Huta: Food Shops, Etc.* (Radio Free Europe, 1954) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:94855ba9-7780-4953-8b75-50158eb37e05>, p. 3.

¹⁸⁵ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, pp. 461-2.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 521.

'Nurt's' growing popularity, with its grassroots origin, worker cast, a do-it-yourself-charm and focus on light entertainment, stood in opposition to the top-down approach of the Party. It was a thorn in Party's side, an expression of worker autonomy, and an obstacle in the notion of delegating workers to be the consumers of culture. As a result, a decision was made to end 'Nurt'. The Party's plan was, however, not to shut it down, but rather to slowly erase its significance in the community.

The first sign of this process was the meeting of the Ministry of Culture and Arts, Party activists, local authorities and social as well as cultural organizations, which took place in the 'Nurt' venue on 12th May 1953¹⁸⁷. The decisions undertaken during that meeting were paramount for the future of both the venue and the group. Namely, from 1st July 1953, 'Nurt' was to be nationalized, while "retaining its status as an amateur venue."¹⁸⁸ From now on, the venue was under jurisdiction of the Central Theater Association (CZT) in Warsaw. Additionally, there were to be 19 professional artistic and technical employees added to 'Nurt's' crew.

After nationalizing 'Nurt', a decision has been made on 14th February 1954 to change its character from an amateur to a professional group.¹⁸⁹ CZT decided that 'Nurt's' actors are to undertake a two-year course "during which the group will only stage two new shows per year."¹⁹⁰ The venue was, therefore, not only changing its character from bottom-up to top-down. It was also losing what made it so popular in the first place.

By 1954, 'Nurt' it became clear that 'Nurt' was being used for the authorities' purposes and has lost its grassroots character. This loss of authenticity of Nowa Huta's only successful theater venue did not produce a counterbalance from the Party's side, making it clear that the goal of the authorities with 'Nurt' was to subdue worker initiative.

Interestingly, the topic of 'Nurt' has been nothing more than scratched in the historiography of Nowa Huta and its importance as a key example of a bottom-up worker initiative has been largely omitted. It is usually treated as a curious oddity, for example, by authors such as Lebow, Janus or Przemysław Zieliński, a researcher on PRL's culture, who in his *Powstanie i rozwój systemu społecznego i instytucjonalnego Nowej Huty (1949-1966)*,¹⁹¹ devotes little space to discuss the importance of 'Nurt', focusing on the administrative problems the group faced. Therefore, there is little mention in historiography of the crucial struggle of the workers to carve out cultural spaces that would serve their needs.

Given scarce successes of cultural activists in terms of providing culture that would encourage wide participation from the working class, one needs to ask how exactly the Nowa Huta builders and workers fought boredom and an almost total lack of entertainment targeted at them. They drank. Drinking has been a vital part of Polish culture, especially in the countryside and poor city regions. It was not only a way to strengthen the bonds between the people, but also to kill the time or even to

¹⁸⁷ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 512.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 654.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹¹ Zieliński, *Powstanie i rozwój systemu społecznego i instytucjonalnego Nowej Huty (1949-1966)*, p. 96.

drive the grim reality away. Alcohol has been an issue in Nowa Huta since its conception,¹⁹² despite there being a ban on its consumption in the city,¹⁹³ but the issue only grew more significant as the initial enthusiasm dissipated.

Janusz Ożański, the son of Ożański, the model worker, reminisces about his childhood in Nowa Huta:

“Booze was flowing during construction. It was so cheap. I specifically remember bottles with red labels, there was always one on the table.”¹⁹⁴

Shared rooms, a standard in worker hotels and barracks, only encouraged drinking. One of the informants for Radio Free Europe remembers the experience of his first day in a worker hotel:

“In the evening the roommates started to chip in to buy a bottle of vodka. Having dried out the first one, they would get another.”¹⁹⁵

The issue of drinking was enhanced by the fact that most of the workers still lived in shared accommodation.¹⁹⁶ That is especially surprising given that more and more private apartments were being finished. They would, however, be turned into additional worker hotels, by cramming as many bunk beds into them as possible.¹⁹⁷ Only Party officials could count on getting an actual private apartment and while each worker would sign up to a waiting list, officials would often ‘jump the queue’, making it virtually impossible for an ordinary worker to live anywhere else but a worker hotel or shared accommodation.¹⁹⁸

The issues of shared housing interplay with another important aspect of living in Nowa Huta, namely low salaries. While some of the sources quoted in the past subchapters indicate that the workers were receiving rather good salaries for their work, this was only the case for qualified and experienced workers who were a minority in Nowa Huta. Most of the workforce, especially the youths, were receiving as little as 200-300 zloty per month, which was not sufficient to cover all the costs of living in Nowa Huta, mostly canteen fees and tram tickets¹⁹⁹. A lot of the workers would skip meals, scramble for and steal the most basic supplies, or get rides without a ticket (which often resulted in fatal accidents).²⁰⁰ They would infamously wear their work clothes at all times, partly

¹⁹² Lebow, “Public Works, Private Lives”, p. 215.

¹⁹³ Radio Free Europe, *Nowa Huta: Youth Workers*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ Klimczak, Moskal, *Nowa Huta: Miasto gniewu i nadziei*, timestamp: 19:00.

¹⁹⁵ Radio Free Europe, *Workers’ living quarters in Nowa Huta*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁶ Radio Free Europe, *Nowa Huta: The Living Conditions of the Workers* (Radio Free Europe, 1954) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:cf81b055-8f9e-477a-b7f3-50b2ff2163c1>, p. 5.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem.*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ Radio Free Europe, *Youth Workers*, pp. 2-3.

²⁰⁰ Radio Free Europe, *Nowa Huta: The Living Conditions of the Workers*, p. 3.

because they could not afford off-work clothes, and partly because any extra garments would immediately get stolen.²⁰¹

Crime did not just stem from insufficient salaries and unfortunate housing situations that encouraged theft. Boredom also had a huge impact and saw the workers continue to engage in hooligan activities with the same trend as in the case of *junacy* where a worker with good results (thus, a good socialist), would engage in hooligan acts off clock. The year 1953 saw 27 hooliganism acts, 13 beatings and 4 fights being reported to the police.²⁰² A year later, this number rose to 103 reported hooliganism acts, 31 beatings and 59 fights.²⁰³ One also cannot forget that many of those hooliganism and petty crime incidents went unreported, as the police were often intimidated or too afraid of approaching the hooligans.²⁰⁴

Hooliganism took various forms, from throwing stones at trams, to brawls. Drunken brawls would also arise during the so-called ‘people’s parties’ organized by the authorities.²⁰⁵ These fights have gotten especially intense in 1954.²⁰⁶ The Party officials who would always open such parties with an ‘official part’, were often the first victims, as their presence was usually the trigger for a brawl to break out.²⁰⁷ Paduchowski provides an accurate account of the reasons for such behaviors to emerge in the first place:

“[...] the environment of a newly emerging city, loosening of family ties and sometimes anomy, were all creating grounds for the growth of hooliganism.”²⁰⁸

Interestingly enough, these acts constituted a tiny fraction of all reported crimes occurring in Nowa Huta, which, from petty theft to murder, reached thousands annually,²⁰⁹ emphasizing the impact of the aforementioned boredom and demoralization caused by terrible working and living conditions, on the working class of Nowa Huta. It is important, however, to note a shift in the character of these acts. The hooliganism of *junacy* between 1949 and 1952 was often characterized by their allegiance to the ZMP (Polish Youth Union) and SP (In Service to Poland) – two youth-oriented Party organs. Between 1953 and 1955, however, the hooligans were openly hostile towards the Party. The shift in criminal and defiant attitude reflects their continued disillusionment with the reality. Drinking, crime,

²⁰¹ Radio Free Europe, *Nowa Huta: The Living Conditions of the Workers*, p. 4.

²⁰² Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 119.

²⁰³ *Ibidem.*, p. 120.

²⁰⁴ Radio Free Europe, *Regime Muffs Nowa Huta Steel Mill Construction* (Radio Free Europe, 1956) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:1123186c-be80-4349-9a76-3fd16c185785>, p. 2.

²⁰⁵ Radio Free Europe, *Impressions from the town of Nowa Huta*, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 124.

²⁰⁷ Radio Free Europe, *Impressions from the town of Nowa Huta*, pp. 3-4.

²⁰⁸ Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 125.

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 118.

hooliganism and hostility towards the Party were, therefore, a response to the Party's failures to address the issues and lacks in areas of labor, culture and leisure activities. Theft and other petty crimes were a direct result of not just boredom, but of the Party's neglect in the areas of culture and housing creating a demoralized, poor and malnourished youth that was deprived of values, lived in shared housing and had to resort to crime just to get by.

The shifts in the area of culture in 1953-1955 had two important implications. First of all, the consumer-provider dynamic between the workers and the Party took an even more drastic turn as 'Nurt' became nationalized and more grand venues were introduced.

Second, the impact of existing cultural activities was effectively hindered, as the workers found themselves living in shared housing, being paid salaries that were insufficient to get by and feeling that the Party does not care about their needs, which pushed them to crime as well as hostile and violent acts.

The issues of work and culture in the period of 1953-1955 leave us with a worker population whose lives are mundane and hard both on and off the clock. The situation they found themselves in has left them demoralized and prone to spending their free time drinking and doing crime.

2.3: Identity 1953-1955

The first four years of Nowa Huta's existence had been devoted to creating a sense that the Polish experience has been similar to other socialist countries, as well as using design to eradicate unwanted parts of identity.

The issue of identity between 1953 and 1955 largely fits the patterns uncovered in the work and culture themes – a growing rift between top-down Party, and the working class of Nowa Huta, who desperately needed changes that would benefit them. The former, while struggling, due to the budget cut, still expected the workers to follow the Party line, almost without question.

In August 1953, Józef Tejchma, a Head of the Board of ZMP (Union of Polish Youths) in Nowa Huta, published an article on the impact the Union had on the youths of Nowa Huta. Here is an important excerpt from it:

"The foundation of enemy activity is ingraining in the youths a sense that the state is an alien entity to a worker."²¹⁰

An important way, in which the Party conceptualized the issues plaguing Nowa Huta between 1953 and 1955, was to attribute them to enemy activity. In this way, it was made out to be an active effort of a net of saboteurs that hindered positive change in Nowa Huta. Similarly, chaos and

²¹⁰ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 568.

disorganization on construction sites was attributed to *bumelanci* (loafers/layabouts).²¹¹ It was never attributed to systemic flaws.

Further, Tejchma goes:

“[...]personal interest of a working person does not contradict the national interest. Quite the contrary – the economic and cultural growth of our state, the blossoming of our motherland, are the only things that secure the beautiful prospects of growth, promotion, prosperity and happiness for the working people.”²¹²

Tejchma, in his quote conflated individual success with national interest, creating the impression that the Party’s way was the only way for the workers to self-improve. This notion seems to overlook the very individualistic tendencies such, most notably crime and drinking, that stemmed from Party’s policies such as low wages, bad living conditions and lack of leisure activities.

The Party’s top-down perspective that disregarded the situation on the ground is, however, only one side of the spectrum. In May 1954 the Board of Polish Engineer and Construction Technician Union organized a mass survey that pertained to people’s views on various city design issues – apartment design, distribution of shops and service points, entertainment places and urban layout of the city. It found that people were often not happy with the sizes of their apartments as well as the monotony of architecture and a lack of shops and green spaces.²¹³ What is more, the workers requested social meetings and citizen-designer conferences, where issues of city design and layout would be discussed, thus expressing a drive to become a part of the decision-making process.²¹⁴ Not only were the workers of Nowa Huta not passive when it comes to asking for improvements. They explicitly wanted to be active and contribute to the decisions that determined the ways their city and communities looked like, in a similar fashion as they wanted to be creators of culture, not just its consumers.

In Tejchma’s vision, workers would accept their flawed apartment and severe lacks in shops or green spaces and keep on working for the national interest. The actual workers of Nowa Huta demanded an active role in the processes that defined their living spaces, as opposed to a passive one. An interesting notion emerges in this subchapter – on one hand the workers were demoralized, prone to crime and desensitized to their fellow workers’ suffering, on the other, they began showing some willingness to take the matters into their own hands.

While the rift between the Party and the workers was deepening, the policies of erasing elements of Polish identity have continued. In the period of 1953-1955, however, one can begin pinpointing the results of these policies. Paduchowski quotes an archival document, which may shed some light as to why this was the case, in the context of hooliganism:

²¹¹ Radio Free Europe, *Some Impediments in the Construction of Nowa Huta*, p. 3.

²¹² Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p, 569.

²¹³ *Ibidem.*, p. 689.

²¹⁴ *Ibidem.*, p. 690.

“The author [Paduchowski] has found, in the church archives, an interesting document, in which Church representatives highlighted the fact that, in order to fight hooliganism, the state has to collaborate with the Church.”²¹⁵

Church, being a remnant of the old Poland had no place in Nowa Huta, yet its power as a moral guide cannot be denied. Just like alcohol was a way to spend free time, religion was a provider of a system of values. In Nowa Huta, as the priest was replaced by an ineffective Party official, a whole generation of young people were left deprived of values, turning to crime, hooliganism and alcohol because of boredom and primitive conditions. The policies of erasure were allowed to have such a harmful influence over the workers of Nowa Huta precisely because firstly, they were not followed by a comprehensive and robust program of introducing socialist identity, secondly, the Party itself created conditions for demoralization to spread. Following Paduchowski’s findings, this void could have been filled by allowing Church’s presence in Nowa Huta. That was not allowed and people had to resort to the ‘whispering act’, which, as was evidenced, created antagonism between the Party and the workers.

Amidst the budget cut, the Party opted for heavy-handed and seemingly inconsequential policies, namely, giving names to the newly emergent streets and factory complex, following the trend of creating a sense of a common ground and history between Soviet and Polish histories. Nowa Huta’s main streets were named after: Lenin, Model Worker, Six-Year Plan and October Revolution. The downtown streets were named after: Polish-Soviet Friendship, Engels, Marx, Great Proletariat, Polish Army, Steelworker, Red Army. The streets of several settlements became known as: Nowotko, Kasprzak, Kniewski, Hibner, Rutkowski, Red Scouts, Pavlov S, National Front, Demakhov, Majakowski, Noskowski and Sawicka²¹⁶ - socialist heroes, Polish communist activists of the inter-war period and Polish socialist organizations. The main square was named after Stalin and remaining streets referred to the issues of production and productivism.²¹⁷ On 21st January 1954, the 30th anniversary of Lenin’s death, the steelworks were named after the leader of the October Revolution.²¹⁸ Now not only the city, but also the factory, have become socialist spaces, at least by name, as they were being inhabited by a population that was becoming increasingly alienated from and hostile towards the regime.

The image of the Party that emerges in 1953-1955 is of an institution that routinely neglects its people yet expects them to keep in line with the socialist morality. It, however, lacked the means, money, manpower and motivation to fully impose it. Instead, the Party would engage in cheaper and potentially antagonizing actions, such as naming the streets of Nowa Huta after the events and heroes from Soviet and socialist history. Other policies such as building lavish facilities that were

²¹⁵ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 690.

²¹⁶ *Ibidem.*, pp. 619-20.

²¹⁷ Katherine Lebow, “Revising the politicized landscape: Nowa Huta, 1949-1957”, in: *City & Society* (Arlington: American Anthropological Association, vol. 11, no. 1-2, 2008) Available at: https://doi.org/10.1525/city.1999.11.1-2.165_165-187, p. 172.

²¹⁸ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 648.

supposed to evoke socialist identity in the workers either did not achieve their goals (such as the Chamber Theater) or served as hubs for further demoralization of the workers (such as the *Gigant* restaurant). Overly hard work and disciplining measures in the workplace have also contributed to that demoralization, forcing the workers into an endless cycle of back-breaking labor. On the other hand, the period of 1953-1955 sees first instances of workers realizing their agency to actively demand positive changes.

Chapter 3: 1955-1957 – The Picture Cracks

3.1: Work and ideology 1955-1957

The second half of 1955 saw publications of two vital pieces of writing – Adam Ważyk’s *Poem for Adults* on 21st August and Ryszard Kapuściński’s “This Also, is the Truth About Nowa Huta” on 30th September. The former went on to largely redefine the social landscape of Nowa Huta and is key to understanding the relations between the population of the city and the Party.

Poem for Adults was a fruit of the undergoing roll back of Stalinism in Poland following Stalin’s death in 1953. It was an account of Ważyk’s experience with Nowa Huta and became the first voice that was harshly critical of the system. It exposed Polish socialism’s many shortcomings and mistakes, as well as demystified Stalinist reforms and Nowa Huta’s role as a beacon of socialism in Poland. The poem became a hit among the population of Nowa Huta and triggered a swift response from the Party.²¹⁹ *Poem for Adults* has been criticized and ridiculed by Party officials, while opportunities for its publication were cut off. The poem was, however, being passed around in various ways and the damage has been done.

Because of its significance as a watershed piece of critique, it was crucial to introduce *Poem for Adults* before delving into the history of the mission to ingrain socialist identity in Nowa Huta between 1955 and 1957. However, as Ważyk’s poem largely touches upon the themes of culture and identity, this subchapter will largely focus on Kapuściński’s article. This chapter will outline the further fallout of the shift from education to production, outline the housing situation, and touch upon the Party’s attitude towards worker initiative.

In 1955, Ryszard Kapuściński was only 23, but has already made a name for himself as a prominent youth reporter (in later life he became one of Poland’s most celebrated reporters). His article *This Also, is the Truth About Nowa Huta* was commissioned by the Party to “counteract [Ważyk] poem’s damaging effects on public opinion.”²²⁰ It, however, was closer in its message to *Poem for Adults*.

While the first paragraph of the article praised the people of Nowa Huta for creating a strong community, the rest lists out the many cases of depravity and demoralization the Party’s neglect has caused. Relating to the work culture is, however, a key theme of this sub-chapter – stifling critique. Kapuściński writes:

“Remember Kwiatkowski? A splendid boy. Young, eager to learn, bold, sensible. He was fed up with villainy – he criticized, he was offended, he wrote. They found a way to get rid of him: they didn’t give him an apartment, even though he’s got a sick mother and a wife back home. Let’s silence him!

You know Mikosz? He would never give up, fought for workers’ rights. They fired him. For three months he was jobless. Let’s silence him!

²¹⁹ Ważyk, *Poemat dla Dorosłych*.

²²⁰ Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, p. 147.

What about Jakus? The brave, tenacious Jakus? They can't fire him, he's too famous, so they spread a rumor that he's a thug and a loafer. Not a bad way. Let's silence him!"²²¹

The workers described by Kapuściński were willing to improve the situation of their colleagues, instead receiving punishment from the Party. While Kapuściński only included three cases in his article, we find further confirmation of these trends from the Party itself. A report from a Party meeting dating from 15th October 1955 shared an identical sentiment to Kapuściński's article, pointing out a more systemic scope of the issue:

"[...] men, good men, genuinely concerned for the interest of the state and the workers, are too afraid to speak up. They fear being moved to a worse position, fired, removed from the Party."²²²

The report argued that the fear of consequences of speaking up and demanding positive change was the main cause of an overarching lethargy and apathy among the workers. The report lamented the behavior of the Party, which tolerated stifling of the critique, hindering much-needed change.²²³

There was a second report published on 2nd July 1956. It was largely meant to be a follow-up to the 1955 one. It indicated that some improvements have been made. Critique became allowed, but directors, officials and managers started using more cunning and unofficial ways to punish people for pointing out mistakes, lacks and areas for improvement.²²⁴ Isolating a person from their coworkers, spreading gossip, obstructing their duties or performing unnecessary checks became the new ways of punishing workers.²²⁵ According to the report, the Party, despite a change in its policy, was powerless because "[...] it is still inexperienced in fighting for making critique fully useful and acceptable."²²⁶ The slight improvement between October 1955 and July 1956 shows that, although, there was some willingness to improve on the side of the Party, the systemic issues that were allowed to persist and grow, were too serious for the Party to tackle.

Stifling of critique was allowed to go on for years, and the Party has only become willing to act upon it when exposed by Ważyk and Kapuściński, which shows the authorities' flawed relationship with the mission to ingrain socialist identity. It harkens back to the issues of active participation and the words of Tejchma about tying national interest with individual prosperity. In this way, stifling critique follows a similar path to the fate of 'Nurt'. It puts top-down vision of the Party ahead of the community and gives the workers a single and very narrow route of potential growth and activity, simultaneously punishing them for wanting to better the situation of their fellow workers. The rules of active participation prioritized obedience towards established systems over efforts to improve said systems that originated from workers' initiative.

²²¹ Ryszard Kapuściński, *To też jest prawda o Nowej Hucie*.

²²² Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji Nowej Hucie 15 X 1955*, p. 9.

²²³ *Ibidem.*, p. 10.

²²⁴ [Biuro Polityczne, Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 2 VII 1956](#), p. 12.

²²⁵ *Ibidem.*, p. 13.

²²⁶ *Ibidem.*

Apart from the issue of stifling critique, Nowa Huta has been plagued by many problems concerning the state of housing. As of 1955, between 17 and 19 thousand of people (for a population of 58 thousands) were still living in six-person rooms in worker hotels, sharing three-bunk beds²²⁷ - this population would remain at a constant level of around 16 thousand for years to come.²²⁸

The hotels were in a bad state because of poor coordination. A typical hotel building would house workers of different specializations. Organizations overlooking these workers during worktime, would then take no responsibility for the state of the buildings, claiming they are not going to take care of workers that were not 'theirs'.²²⁹

The conditions in worker hotels had improved significantly by the time the 1956 report has been released. Not only were they reorganized, so that workers belonging to a single crew would live in the same building. That increased the level of responsibility their managers felt for them.²³⁰ What is more, 3500 new apartments were built from October 1955, until July 1956.²³¹ Unfortunately, a greater scale of improvements has been bogged down by a necessity to fix existing apartments – the legacy of the quantity-based norm system of the initial years of Nowa Huta's construction. As of mid-1956, the scope of repairs was estimated to cost more than 20 million złoty, which was around twice as much as a yearly budget for the entire city project in the first period of Nowa Huta's construction.²³² Only 8 million złoty has been allocated to fix the faulty work and just 3,5 million has had actually been used by mid-1956.²³³

The reaction of the Party to the situation is has found itself in in 1955-1956 can be best described as 'too late, too little'. Both reports suggest that the Party had known, for a long time, about the issues mentioned in this subchapter, but only decided to take action when their neglects have been called out by Ważyk. Even though the housing situation has been slightly improved, it was a drop in a sea of neglects that had never been taken care of.

Ważyk's poem and subsequent article by Kapuściński, as well as the report from the meeting of the Party all indicate the major issue that this thesis has also been concerned with – the bad living situation that pushed many workers to demoralization, excessive drinking and crime. The sources also build upon and add to a theme that is vital to this thesis – exclusion of the workers from opportunities to influence the spaces and processes that surrounded them, as well as the progressing powerlessness and corruption of the authorities. In this subchapter, it is expressed with the issue of stifling critique. 1955 sees these attitude begin to shift to ensuring workers' wellbeing, yet it was not

²²⁷ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 15 X 1955*, p. 2.

²²⁸ Klich-Kluczewska, „Nowa Huta: Skąd Przychodzimy”, p. 18.

²²⁹ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 15 X 1955*, p. 4.

²³⁰ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 2 VII 1956*, p. 1.

²³¹ *Ibidem*.

²³² Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 245

²³³ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 2 VII 1956*, p. 4.

only too late to turn several years of neglect around – the extent of Party’s reforms in this area was also far from sufficient.

3.2: Culture 1955-1957

This subchapter will not only outline the issue of culture in Nowa Huta between 1955 and 1957, but also sum up the effects of eight years of Party’s cultural efforts in the city.

The state of culture in Nowa Huta in the period of 1955-1957, follows a similar pattern to the one outlined in the previous chapter. Namely, the culture and the venues the Party offered were in no way appropriate for the workers. At the same time the existing facilities were not used to their full potential. This furthered the demoralization of the worker population of the city, amplified by bad living and working conditions. A major change, however, is that these policies and their effects were now talked about and criticized, especially by authors such as Ważyk or Kapuściński, but also by the Party.

By 1955, ‘Nurt’, has completely changed its character. No longer was it a grassroots venue, led by workers and for the workers, with the aim of providing a more lighthearted and lowbrow type of performances. Following its nationalization in 1954, ‘Nurt’ became yet another overly highbrow venue, offering heavily ideologized, pompous performances. Still, the bottom-up reputation of ‘Nurt’ remained, along with, according to the authorities, its insufficient level of political engagement. This led the Party to close the venue down completely in 1956 and replace it with a completely new one along with a cast of professional actors.²³⁴

The new venue, named ‘People’s Theater’, offered heavily politicized, highbrow and pompous performances. The design of the building reflected the type of entertainment it offered. From the outside – a row of imposing socrealist columns and a heavy structure,²³⁵ on the inside – around 420 upholstered seats, a space for orchestra and a rotating scene.²³⁶ The audiences were not only scarce, but also consisted mostly of white-collar workers – engineers or directors.²³⁷ The workers, who, as Janus claimed, felt more at home in Nurt’s barracks than in a richly designed venue, demanded

²³⁴ Janus, “The Politics of Culture”, p. 7.

²³⁵ Theatre Database, “Teatr Ludowy” (People’s Theater), accessed 15/02/2020, Available at: <https://www.theatre-architecture.eu/pl/db/?theatreId=260>.

²³⁶ 70nh, “Teatr Ludowy: Architektoniczny spektakl od schronów po dach” (People’s Theater: An architectonic spectacle from the shelters to the roof), <https://70nh.lovekrakow.pl/aktualnosci/zdjecie/38684> _Accessed 15/02/2020.

²³⁷ Janus, “The Politics of Culture in Poland’s Worker Paradise”, p. 548.

performances that would “[...] make them laugh, have a good time, and most critically, were less politically rigid.”²³⁸

While the 1955 report lamented the attitude of cultural activists who would focus on highbrow performances instead of cultivating and teaching the workers basic skills necessary for consuming and understanding culture,²³⁹ cultural activists believed education should be held in massive palaces of culture, which was to reinforce the magnitude and importance of the mission to build a socialist population in Nowa Huta²⁴⁰ – *People’s Theater*, as well as *Gigant* and *Chamber Theater* from earlier years, serve as a perfect example of this notion. The grandiose came at the expense of red corners, libraries and sports facilities. In case of the first, they were both insufficient in numbers, but also, according to the Party, could have been used much more efficiently.²⁴¹ Readership was still not popular among the workers – a poll in one of the hotels revealed that none of the people living there have read a single book in over a year.²⁴² When workers did read, they preferred Polish and European classics, as well as newspapers, instead of socialist or Soviet literature.²⁴³ When it comes to the sports facilities, there was only one stadium and around a dozen of pitches in Nowa Huta – any further planned construction has had been delayed or not started at all.²⁴⁴

Given that there was not much in terms of past-time activities that were appropriate for the working population of Nowa Huta, the people were left to do as they please. This brought about disastrous results. Kapuściński mirrors the complaints of the two reports, but also lists out youth prostitution, lack of housing, and most of all – boredom:

“And now please have a look and a young man’s life. He gets up in the morning, goes to work. It’s 3 pm when he comes back. And that’s it. His day ends at 3 pm. Community halls are empty, there are two tiny cinemas (400 seats for 80000 people), no swimming pool or pitches, there’s virtually nothing that’s interesting.”²⁴⁵

Further, he exposes the flawed attitude of the authorities towards providing workers with appropriate past-time activities:

²³⁸ Janus, “The Politics of Culture in Poland’s Worker Paradise”, p. 548.

²³⁹ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 15 X 1955*, p. 6.

²⁴⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 5.

²⁴¹ *Ibidem.*

²⁴² *Ibidem.*, p. 6.

²⁴³ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 2 VII 1956*, p. 9.

²⁴⁴ *Ibidem.*, pp. 5-6.

²⁴⁵ Ryszard Kapuściński, *To też jest prawda o Nowej Hucie*.

“Where are the people who would teach these boys how to fight for their rights, how to organize their days, do something, set some goals? [...] Who cares for these boys when they leave the factory? If they behave – no one cares, if not – the militia cares.”²⁴⁶

“Who had been responsible for teaching people how to live and hasn’t done his duties? They came from the countryside with a village morality that became outdated here. We didn’t give them a teacher, a strict collective opinion, a living human tradition. How dare we turn our backs on these people, how dare we not notice all of this?”²⁴⁷

An important theme of abandoning socialist education in favor of discipline, present throughout the chapters of this thesis shows up in this passage. Another vital theme is one of boredom, demoralization and the Party’s abandonment of the workers – also peppered throughout the chapters of this thesis. Both Ważyk and Kapuściński’s works evoke themes of societal demoralization, but while the latter focuses on the institutional failure, the former goes into horrific detail when describing what said demoralization entailed. In some of the passages of *Poem for Adults*, one can read:

“Boys jump over the walls/ Female hotels, secular monasteries/ Are squeaking from all the breeding
The staircase rings with female names, diminutive, lovely/ Fifteen-year-old whores step on desks and go down to the basements/ Their smiles are of calcium lime, they reek of it.”²⁴⁸

How serious was the problem of prostitution? According to information gathered by Paduchowski from the police archives, in 1955, around 10% of women living in worker hotels were in danger of either prostitution or semi-prostitution²⁴⁹.

Both Ważyk and Kapuściński understood worker hotels as the main sources of demoralized behaviors described above. These unregulated and hard to police spaces gathered people from different backgrounds and with different worldviews. What is more, they were inhabited not just by workers, but also criminals, former convicts, pimps, prostitutes and people not employed by neither the steelworks nor the city.²⁵⁰ With almost a third of the city’s population still living in such accommodation,²⁵¹ the scope of influence of the ‘bad elements’ was enormous. With not much to do in their spare time, and without a system of values that would fill a void caused by them leaving their homes or villages to come to Nowa Huta, they would easily continue slipping into patterns of behavior such as binge drinking, gambling, petty crime or prostitution.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Ryszard Kapuściński, *To też jest prawda o Nowej Hucie*.

²⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁸ Ważyk, *Poemat dla Dorosłych*.

²⁴⁹ Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 132.

²⁵⁰ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 15 X 1955*, p. 3.

²⁵¹ *Ibidem.*, p. 1.

²⁵² Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 140.

The Party has also acknowledged the systemic consequences of their policies. Before Ważyk's poem, any problems or issues would usually be blamed on saboteurs or enemies of the state.²⁵³ The two reports, however, take on a much different approach, pointing out demoralization caused by, not only the situation in the worker hotels, but also a lack of a strong cultural program that promoted demoralized behaviors. In Ważyk and Kapuściński's work, this trend materialized as overwhelming boredom. The Party, on the other hand, was able to pinpoint its more direct causes, rooted in systemic and organizational failures:

"Secretary of the Production Committee told us: 'we are only concerned about people when they are at work – after that, as it was agreed upon, the District Committee is supposed to take care of them'. The District Committee does nothing."²⁵⁴

Although the passage indeed shows the officials pinpointing administrative and policy failure that contributed to the Party's neglect of the workers in their free time, they do so in a way that shifts responsibility among different organs. As a result, no significant improvements were made to the state of recreational and cultural facilities in Nowa Huta. In mid-1956, there was still no coordination between cultural activists, audiences were far lower than expected, only 3500 workers read books that year and no effort was made to understand the needs of the workers.²⁵⁵

Was the Party successful in their mission to grow a socialist population in Nowa Huta using culture? The answer is no. The Party created the opposite of what they set out to do, with crime, promiscuousness and alcoholism running rampant in worker hotels, because of a lack of alternatives to spend free time. What was available in Nowa Huta was not adapted to workers' needs and intellectual capabilities, as well as far from sufficient in quantity.

The answer to the question is not, however, so unambiguous and clear. One has to look at various, usually failed worker initiatives, of which 'Nurt' was the only successful one, to see the fuller scope of the Party's failure. It, namely, stems from the fact that the Party, not only failed to capture the workers' enthusiasm towards Party-backed cultural programs, but also suppressed worker initiative in cases when it was alternative to the official culture.

There were many workers in Nowa Huta who wanted to engage in the making of culture, but the Party excluded them from doing so, instead pursuing construction of large and highbrow cultural centers, intentionally omitting the groundwork for creating robust foundations for a worker-centered cultural life in Nowa Huta. These policies, in turn, have excluded the workers from consuming culture. The result such a two-sided cultural failure was mass demoralization of Nowa Huta workers.

²⁵³ Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 136.

²⁵⁴ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 15 X 1955*, pp. 4-5.

²⁵⁵ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 2 VII 1956*, pp. 9-11.

3.3: Identity 1955-1957

There were two major events that happened between 1955-1957. First, was the 1955 release of the aforementioned Adam Ważyk's *Poem for Adults*. Second of all, and more globally in scale, the so-called Thaw, which had begun with a speech by Khrushchev from February 1956, in which he denounced hardline Stalinist policies. While the former became the first open critique of the Nowa Huta city project, the latter, by easing the ideological grip of Stalinism, unofficially permitted for critique from the people to emerge. Indeed, between 1955 and 1957, there were several major instances of a worker protest against Party's policies. The main theme in this subchapter is, therefore, going to be the falling out between the authorities and the working class of Nowa Huta.

While Ważyk's poem and, most of all, the Khrushchev Thaw, were a catalyst that triggered complaints and critique of the Party, one needs to examine the direct sources of that critique. In 1950, the approach was to grow a socialist society "[...]not by administrative penalties, but most of all, a systematic effort needs to be put into growing the class consciousness among the most backward of the workers."²⁵⁶ The educating mission has, over time, turned into discipline – the use of newspapers and radio. The period of 1955-1957, however, saw the previous soft discipline measures turn into hard ones – penalties, reprimands and fines. Interestingly, Party officials have referred to those as "educational",²⁵⁷ thus recognizing them to stem from the same set of motivations as the mission of growing workers' class consciousness from 1949. At the same time, the authorities acknowledged that the system of penalties was not working, because "[...] nobody explains to the people why and for what reasons they had been punished."²⁵⁸

With the Party becoming a punitive organ, the people of Nowa Huta felt increasingly disconnected from it. The contact it had with the workers was largely limited to enforcing punishments²⁵⁹. Moreover, workers were not included in conversations, as any arising production issues, were treated as a political instead of organizational or technical ones.²⁶⁰

While the workers of Nowa Huta were finding themselves being increasingly policed and excluded, one needs to understand the national context to fully grasp the situation Nowa Hutans found themselves in between 1956 and 1957. The month of June in 1956 saw massive worker protests break out in the city of Poznań, as people were increasingly dissatisfied with an overt system of punishment and policing, bad living conditions and overwhelmingly high work norms. Józef Wielgosz, a worker from Zakłady Przemysłu Metalowego im. Józefa Stalina in Poznań reminisces his impression of the protests:

²⁵⁶ Gołaszewski, *Kronika Nowej Huty*, p. 141.

²⁵⁷ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 15 X 1955*, p. 15.

²⁵⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 15.

²⁵⁹ Kapuściński, *To też jest prawda o Nowej Hucie*.

²⁶⁰ Biuro Polityczne, *Informacja o sytuacji w Nowej Hucie 15 X 1955*, p. 16.

“The most real truth walked out into the streets to show its true face to the city.”²⁶¹

The ideological importance of these protests needs to be highlighted. Before, the issues this thesis covered: the hard work, bad living conditions, demoralization, boredom and exhaustion, would either be talked about behind the closed doors of Party meetings or omitted altogether. Now, ‘the truth’ walked the streets with sunken faces and raggedy clothes, protesting against the inhumane treatment. The protests were bloodily suppressed, leaving several dozens dead and hundreds wounded. They would officially be described as nothing more than a group of hooligans and secret enemies. Furthering this antagonism, Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz said:

“Every provocateur or madman who dares to raise their hand against the people’s republic can be assured that the people’s republic will chop their hand off.”²⁶²

With these words it became clear that the Party and the workers were two hostile groups. The Poznań protests echoed across the entire country, also in Nowa Huta. The combined impact of Ważyk’s poem, the Khrushchev Thaw, as well as the Poznań protests have given Nowa Huta workers the courage to openly criticize and resist the Party. From engaging in lively discussions and questioning during ideological education classes, painting pro-Poznań graffiti, to full-on protests in Nowa Huta factories²⁶³ and tearing down portraits of both Party officials and Soviet heroes,²⁶⁴ these protests had a clear political edge as opposed to earlier ones, such as the beatings of Party officials or hooliganism. What is more, these new protests have shown that the workers were explicitly opposed to the system they were living in. In spring 1956, during meetings with Edward Ochab, then newly appointed Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, the workers were openly questioning the system and the massive divide between the standard of living of the workers and Party officials:

“You and your manger-fellows have open bank accounts, cars, luxury apartments and as much food as you want, and meanwhile workers die of hunger.”²⁶⁵

As a response, Ochab promised an improvement to the living conditions, but urged the workers to maintain a “proletarian maturity.”²⁶⁶ This interaction perfectly represents the relationship between the Party and the workers between 1955-1957 – the former being able to offer nothing more than promises, while still expecting the workers to keep following the Party line, and the latter being exhausted, but not afraid to fight for the promised improvement.

²⁶¹ [Florczyk, „Stalinizm jako stan wyjątkowy: budowniczy socjalizmu czy więźniowie obozu?”](#), p. 138.

²⁶² Józef Cyrankiewicz, *Przemówienie radiowe po wydarzeniach poznańskich: 29 czerwca 1956 (A radio speech following the events of Poznań: 29th June 1956)*, transcript of a sound recording, Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Polski, Creative Commons Uznanie Autorstwa 3.0 Polska, Available at: <http://muzhp.pl/pl/c/1701/poznanski-czerwiec>.

²⁶³ Lebow, “Revising the politicized landscape”, p. 171.

²⁶⁴ Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia*, pp. 155-6.

²⁶⁵ Radio Free Europe, *Edward Ochab’s Visit to Nowa Huta* (Radio Free Europe, 1956) Available at: <https://catalog.osaarchivum.org/catalog/osa:0f5f5ebd-15f8-4490-91fd-878cb867e615>, p. 2.

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 2.

Katarzyna Florczyk, a Poznań-based researcher and a National Memory Institute (*IPN*) employee interested in the history of women and the social history of the People's Republic of Poland, understands these protests as workers rebelling against a system that imprisoned them in an endless cycle of labor,²⁶⁷ “a true rebellion of the working class against an imposed reality.”²⁶⁸ The situation of the workers of Nowa Huta in the period of 1955-1957 shares many similarities with Florczyk's arguments. On one hand, there is demoralization and exhaustion, on the other, a willingness to have a say in how their realities and spaces were being formulated. Ultimately, the protests have shown the workers' potential to fight for a better life for themselves.

Another sign of non-passivity, albeit less radical, that can be seen in the period of 1955-1957 was a poll organized by *Budujemy Socjalizm* newspaper in 1957. In it, the citizens were asked to give their street and settlements names suggestions as well as indicate which current names they would like to see changed.²⁶⁹ In vein with the 1954 survey by Board of Polish Engineer and Construction Technician Union, Nowa Hutans were far from shying away from expressing their opinions, seeing the poll as an opportunity to exercise their freedom of speech. Not only have they denounced Soviet-leaning street names, such as Lenin or Six-Year Plan as non-Polish and distasteful. Moreover, they have suggested names referring to Polish history and culture – Mickiewicz, Skłodowska-Curie, Słowacki, Warsaw Uprising, but also Sunny, Atomic, Rebirth or National Unity hinting at a pride stemming from participation in the Nowa Huta project and a possibility to rebuild Poland.²⁷⁰ That brings this argument to another vital point – pride and heritage. Kinga Pozniak, a researcher focused on the topics of transformation from socialist to neo-liberal regimes, as well as the memory, uncovered such notions in her 2013 article “Generations of memory in the model socialist town of Nowa Huta, Poland”. In it she interviewed several people belonging to the first generation of Nowa Hutans. One of them, an 80-year-old man, said:

“Regardless of the political system in place, it was tremendously exciting to see a new town come to life ... there were a lot of people who did a lot of good in that damn system.”²⁷¹

For the people interviewed by Pozniak, Nowa Huta was a promise of a good, prosperous life. Many had purely individualistic motivations for joining the constructions, and many were pushed into individualism to obtain basic goods. But as the time progressed, they grew proud of the city they built and wanted that space to reflect that.

The response the 80-year-old man gave to Pozniak indicates one more aspect of the mission to ingrain socialist identity in Nowa Huta – the nuance, with which the workers perceived it (and the nuance, which the Party lacked). The most striking instance of this notion is the attitude of both sides towards religion. While the pages of this thesis contain many examples of the Party being explicitly

²⁶⁷ [Florczyk, „Stalinizm jako stan wyjątkowy”](#), pp. 138-9.

²⁶⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 138.

²⁶⁹ Lebow, “Revising the politicized landscape”, p. 174.

²⁷⁰ *Ibidem.*, pp. 174-7.

²⁷¹ Kinga Pozniak, “Generations of memory in ‘model socialist town’ of Nowa Huta, Poland”, in *Focaal Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* ed. Haldis Haukanes, Susanna Trnka (vol. 2013, no. 66), Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2013.660106>, 58-68, p. 62.

against such practices, claiming them to belong in the past and be in opposition to socialism, the citizens did not see the contradiction – one could be, in the eyes of the workers, a socialist and a Christian.²⁷² Indeed, despite authorities' aversion towards religion, many workers felt a deep need to stay in touch with the Christian values they were brought up with and, which helped them get through six years of war and occupation and the hardships that followed. Practicing religion did not stop at a 'whispering act'. Nowa Hutans frequented churches in villages surrounding the city – Mogiła, Ruszcza, Raciborowice, Pleszów and Bieńczyce.²⁷³ It is important to note that many Party activists were going against the ideological guidelines, attending mass, getting married or christening their children.²⁷⁴ The same was the case for many officers of the Security Bureau²⁷⁵ (*Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*) – a police service that handled anti-ideology criminal cases, which only serves as additional evidence of the demand for religion in Nowa Huta.

By 1955-1957 the situation has largely changed. The impact of the Thaw, the protests of 1956 and Ważyk's critique, empowered Nowa Hutans. 1956 saw a petition demanding a church to be built in Nowa Huta, gathering more than a dozen thousands of signatures of the city's residents.²⁷⁶ Their enthusiasm and eagerness to fight has met fertile grounds. 1956 saw a major power change in Poland, as the position of General Secretary of the PZPR changed from Bolesław Bierut, a hardline Stalinist and a proponent of mass repressions, in position since 1948, to Władysław Gomułka, previously removed from the post in 1948 and then arrested.²⁷⁷ While Bierut is often described as a puppet to Moscow and a Polish equivalent to Stalin, Gomułka had a much milder and reform-centered approach. He began his mandate by decollectivizing agriculture and bettering state's relationship with the Catholic Church.²⁷⁸

Gomułka's policies were of paramount importance for Nowa Huta, as the many voices demanding a church or a place of worship in the city, finally could be heard. Indeed, on 27th October 1956, it was

²⁷² Alison Stenning, "Placing (Post-) Socialism: The Making and Remaking of Nowa Huta, Poland", in *European Urban and Regional Studies* (vol. 7, no. 2, 2000), Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09697764000700201>, 99-118, p. 107.

²⁷³ Milena Przybysz, "Wczoraj była w Nowej Hucie straszna awantura" (There was a horrible row in Nowa Huta yesterday), in *Aparat Represji w Polsce Ludowej 1944-1989 (Repression apparatus in the People's Poland 1944-1989)* ed. Bogdan Strycharz (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008), Available at: <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/publikacje/periodyki-ipn/aparat-represji-w-polsce/27371,nr-1-62008.html>, 247-270, p. 247.

²⁷⁴ Piotr Kapusta, „Nowa Huta – Miasto bez Boga? Walki o krzyż 1960” (Nowa Huta – A city without God? A fight for the cross 1960), in *Ogrody Nauk i Sztuk (The Gardens of Sciences and Arts)* (2011), Available at: <https://doi.org/10.15503/onis2011.276.283>, 276-283, p. 276.

²⁷⁵ Paduchowski, *Nowa Huta nieznaną i tajną*, p. 274.

²⁷⁶ Przybysz, "Wczoraj była w Nowej Hucie straszna awantura", p. 1.

²⁷⁷ Jerzy Eisler, *Polskie miesiące czyli kryzys(y) w PRL (Polish months – crises in PRL)*, (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008), p. 25.

²⁷⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 27.

confirmed that a church was to be built in Nowa Huta, and on 17th March 1957, a cross was placed on a location where the temple was supposed to be constructed.²⁷⁹

In a way, Gomułka was able to understand the people of Nowa Huta much better than the city's authorities ever could. This lack of, inability and reluctance to understand of the population of Nowa Huta by the Party has been present throughout the entire period of 1949-1957. This last period, however, thanks to ideological pressures from outside the city, has revealed the extent of the rift between the workers and the authorities, as the former took the arising opportunity to protest and demand changes. At the same time, the Party's lack of understanding of the people of Nowa Huta has rendered its mission to ingrain socialist identity a failed one.

²⁷⁹ Przybysz, "Wczoraj była w Nowej Hucie straszna awantura", pp. 1-2.

Conclusion

The story of Nowa Huta's first eight years of existence is a story of the underdog workers' gradual realization of their own agency, and the Party's loss of initiative and eventual plummet into chaos. Ultimately, it is a story of a vague whisper turning into a pointed scream. This has been tracked throughout the three main themes of work and ideology, culture and identity. They were chosen

The other part of the grid were the three periods – 1949-1952, 1953-1955 and 1955-1957, chosen not only because each begun with a crucial moment – start of the Nowa Huta project, the budget cut that scrapped plenty of educational projects, and the publication of the highly critical *Poem for Adults* respectively – but also because each is a visible stage in the gradual process of workers realizing their autonomy, and the Party losing the ideological grip on the workers while simultaneously engaging in more overt discipline measures.

In 1949-1952, the reader saw the Party commencing the project with what seemed like honest intentions to build a socialist population in Nowa Huta. The workers and builders were at their most accepting of the new system – hooligans expressing their allegiance to the Party and some attempts at elevating oneself through official channels in the model worker system. The resistance against the harsh reality of Nowa Huta – the 'whispering act' and practicing parts of Polish identity behind closed doors, the bottom-up theatre initiative of 'Nurt', and the abuses of norm system that pushed quantity over quality were passive and exploited grey areas within Party's policies.

The period of 1953-1955 has shifted the focus from education towards productivity. The workers found themselves abandoned by the authorities who were meant to raise them, and exhausted by the hardships of hard labor and poor living conditions. Many have turned to crime, alcohol and demoralization to alleviate the hardships, even if at the expense of fellow workers. Some, however, begun to realize their agency. Encouraged by the successes of past initiatives, such as 'Nurt' and angered by the lack of positive changes around them, they would begin demanding both improvements, as well as to be included in the conversation.

Finally, between 1955 and 1957, the proverbial camel's back broke under the pressure of too many straws. This is where not only saw the both demoralization and activation of the workers, as well as the disciplinary and punishing activities of the Party to be at their height, but also a decisive and politically direct pushback from the workers no longer willing to accept their continuously worsening lives.

Ultimately, and ironically, the Party managed to create a population of workers ready to fight for better future as a collective, despite the hardships, which would often put care for oneself over the collective. It was, however, a better future that was to be free from Party's oppression fought for by a population hostile towards the Party.

The Party's downfall had its hubris in their top-down approach, which involved delegating workers to be the consumers and the receivers, subsequently excluding them from having a say. To be a good socialist meant to accept the Party's line without question. But as the reality around the workers continued to worsen, how could they have been expected to accept it without question?

My goal in this thesis was to map out a timeline of changes in the relationship between the Party, and the working population of the city, both agents acting within a space of Nowa Huta. I set out to see how the Party's policies of ingraining socialist identity have influenced the way the society of workers and builders in Nowa Huta has been changing between 1949 and 1957. Contrary to Lebow, who, in *Unfinished Utopia* understood Nowa Huta as a long-term source and hubris of the protests in the 1980s, I wanted to map out these changes and present the result as an immediate image of that society and its relations with the authorities, which I presented in a chronological and thematic series of events. This allowed the reader to see exactly what policies shaped which behaviors and how each of those changes contributed to the final outcome – a society of workers who were bored, demoralized and overworked, but also willing to fight for their rights. A society that did not reject socialism, but largely rejected the Party. Finally, a society that did not see the contradiction between upholding aspects of Polish identity (most importantly religion) and working within a socialist system.

My research was embedded in both Lebow and Kotkin's work (subsequently *Unfinished Utopia* and *Magnetic Mountain*). The latter served as a structural inspiration, the former as a thematic inspiration. In her book, Lebow was interested in analyzing the relationship of workers to ideology, namely to Stalinism. In my work, however, I presented a different relationship – instead of Stalinism, I focused on the relationship between the workers and the Party. That allowed me to merge approaches developed by both Kotkin and Lebow, and produce a highly localized outcome that is embedded in the reality of Nowa Huta between 1949-1957.

In the research, I put a particular emphasis on the budget cut that happened in 1953 – an event that is largely omitted in historiography. Reading through the primary material, one can get a sense of a sudden change that occurred around 1953. Labor turned from educational to productive, cultural events grew even more scarce and inaccessible to the workers, workers' relations with the Party became one of obedience and discipline. The event was a catalyst that shifted the attitude of the Party towards the workers, forcing the authorities to scrap a lot of the policies meant to build socialist population. Those, although clumsy and badly designed, were introduced in what seemed like good faith. Instead, workers were subjected to increasing levels of discipline, their role reduced to actors of production. Ultimately, the budget cut revealed that the primary goal of the Nowa Huta project was productive, not educational, and that education was in service of production.

Another factor I emphasized on in the thesis is 'Nurt' and its implications for the potential of worker initiative and the Party's subjugation of such. Although 'Nurt' is mentioned by multiple authors, its importance is never truly explored. Reading through primary material I found 'Nurt' to be a crucial stronghold of bottom-up worker initiative, a self-realization that they could organize themselves and create spaces for themselves outside of Party's jurisdiction and without any official support – a forecast of their later demands for agency. The nationalization of 'Nurt' saw the Party explicitly squashing worker agency to assign them the role of the consumer, never the creator of culture.

The story of the first eight years of Nowa Huta's existence is one of constant tension between the inflexible top-down (the Party) and the flexible bottom-up (the workers), where the latter were in confrontation with the former from the very beginning. As the reality around the workers grew bleaker, their silent, whispered and private protests slowly turned into a communal scream, one that was pointed against the Party.

Ultimately, the story of Nowa Huta is a lesson on the sheer impossibility of building a genuine collectively minded community using top-down methods. Ironically, in the end there emerged a community in Nowa Huta. However, it was one that embraced all the things the Party rejected and banned. The cross erected in 1957 is the final sign that the Party's mission to ingrain socialist identity into the workers of Nowa Huta has been a failed one.

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