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Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

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ABSTRACT

In this article we analyse local community-based concepts and practices related to establishing a new middle-class identity when under social and "environmental" pressure. We based our ethnographic inquiry in "RA" – a Warsaw suburb – well-known as a former village but now a location for industry and waste-processing plants. Its vicinity, despite being populated, is polluted by heavy traffic, noise and an unpleasant odour, all of which recently have become the stimulus for social mobilisation and intense criticism toward the local authorities and an inconsiderate urbanisation policy. A key role here is played by two organisations, both exerting a strong influence on the new middle/creative class living in gated communities – a novel phenomenon for the local sociocultural landscape. We argue that this activism and struggle for a clean environment is rooted in the post-1989 Polish politico-economic transformation and the emergence of new middle-class identity projects. Thus, we reveal that sustainable urbanisation and "green policies" in Poland are embedded in middle-class identities, and gain momentum especially when class identity and image are under threat.

KEY WORDS: ecology, identification, middle-class, social divisions, urbanit

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Introduction

Recently in Poland, discussion about the state of the environment has gained momentum. It is no longer a secret that the air quality in most Polish cities is some of the worst in the EU. But air is not Poland's sole Achilles heel. Although the state has undertaken much effort to better organise waste collection and processing, there are still many unsolved issues, namely litter and fly-tipping in forests, inefficient recycling, or the common practice of burning waste in private heating stoves. Thus, in 2013[1] a new "Act on waste" policy came into force. Since then, the local authorities are responsible for waste collecting and policy – their task is to protect the environment from waste-generated degradation and promote green behaviour.

Despite the general goals of the reform being laudable, its actual impact on some local communities and waste processing plants was only revealed later when the new waste policy was already in operation. Currently, the Polish waste policy and resulting actions are a complex maze of regulations and blurry relations between local governments and private or municipal waste companies, raising concern amongst social movements and independent organisations that focus on the environment and sustainable development. Surprisingly, this subject matter still has not attracted sufficient attention, leaving many socially important issues, like the impact of new waste policies on local communities, virtually unknown.

In this article we present the results of ethnographic research conducted in RA[2], a Warsaw industrial suburb until recently dwarfed by one of the biggest waste companies operating in the Mazovian district. RA is located near a protected nature site and has been rapidly changing since building companies began investing in the area and selling real estate in guarded neighbourhoods mainly composed of small apartment blocks or semi-detached houses. These locations have been steadily attracting people who we define as the post-transformation middle (BUCHOWSKI 2006, 2008, 2012) and urban creative (FLORIDA 2011) class, along with their social capital, worldview, values and most importantly – expectations. Unfortunately, the latter, after July 2013 – the moment when the new "Act on waste" policy took effect, were confronted with a shocking change. Suddenly, the calm area of RA was transformed into the crowded site of two waste dumps, producing traffic, emitting noise and a debilitating odour suffocating the vicinity. The local middle class, after the initial

[1] In 2019 and 2020 other reforms came into life, however, in the article we do not deal with their consequences, as they are not fully known yet.

[2] The name of the district along with the local addresses and names have been coded. We use the "RA" abbreviation to name the location of our fieldwork.

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shock, began their crusade against the new waste policy and local waste companies, blaming them for unconcerned about the environment, health and a sustainable waste policy. In September 2018, these actions resulted in shutting down one of the RA`s facilities.

We argue that the recent events in RA, namely the appearance of two social movements, repeated protests, visible class stratification and growing internal social divisions between the new and "native" inhabitants, have their roots in post-transformation social reconstructions. Thus, first we pose questions regarding the sociocultural origins of the active members of the local middle/creative class living in guarded communities and new to the area. We demonstrate that the post-transformation shifts, and discourses have visibly shaped their ethos and values, including their strong attachment to social stratification, class identification, and their need for activism. Following the ethnographies of post-socialism delivered by Michał Buchowski, Asta Vonderau and Elizabeth Dunn (BUCHOWSKI 2006, 2008, 2012; VONDERAU 2008; DUNN 2008a, 2008b), we decode class-rooted neoliberal discourses, actions and values in RA related to the environment, sustainable development, and waste policy. We ask how these discourses have impacted RA`s spatial organisation and have shaped middle-class perspectives on locality and social relations. Next, we demonstrate that the impact of RA`s waste facilities – the odour affecting inhabitants` quality of life from 2013 to 2018 – undermined middle-class values and brought to our informants` every-day reality emotions like anxiety, shame, stigma, and experience of isolation. Finally, we argue that in RA, due to the unanticipated effects of the last waste reform, the supposedly emancipating sense of class-belonging has been ruined. The local new middle/creative class has been pushed towards social mobilisation aiming to prove that the residents of RA`s gated communities, despite living in a stigmatising and odorous district, are still "true" members of a middle and creative class able to control their life and social status.

Research Methods

We follow Kirsten Hastrup`s call to re-establish empirical research as a primal source of ethnographic knowledge (HASTRUP 1995, 1996). We designed methodologically holistic empirical research involving many observations and long working periods in the field. We desired to understand and experience a range of elusive factors impacting people`s life conditions and daily existence, like the sounds of noisy machinery and, of course, the notorious odour, whose intensity depends on the weather, humidity, wind direction and – bafflingly – the season of the year. We spent a year staying as close as possible to the ordinary

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local reality, inspired by the postulates of phenomenology-influenced anthropologies of every-day life, as we believe they:

"have contributed greatly to how anthropologists think of lived experience, illness and healing, suffering, violence, morality, bodiliness, sensory perception, communicative practices, mind and consciousness, creativity and aesthetic efforts, and subjectivity and intersubjectivity, among other themes and topics. More generally, they have helped anthropologists to reconfigure what it means to be human, to have a body, to suffer and to heal, and to live among others" (DESJARLAIS –THROOP 2011:88).

We worked in RA between September 2015 and October 2016, and later we came back in June and July 2018, observing people`s interactions and the contexts in which they appeared. We documented these "small expeditions" – as we called them, to give a bit of piquancy to our "urban hitchhiking" (MALLA et al. 2017:41) – by taking photos and shooting short quasi-documentary films. A "capstone" of our hitchhiking – as Tuuli Malla and colleagues write, "a drift in a city space guided by interaction with another person" (MALLA et al. 2017:41) – was our ascent to the top of "górka śmieciowa" – "the waste hill" – a waste mound dominating over RA. We went there with our guide working for one of the local waste companies and two other activists who were unknown to us. Then, later, we made a cagey approach to the source of RA`s conflict – the prisms, i.e. the containers, where organic by-products were collected and heated to intensify decay, releasing an intense odour affecting local households and public spaces. This hike helped us to change our perspectives and altered all of our senses. We learned that the dump not only had its own characteristic odour, but also colourations and possibly dangerous gas-emitting cracks. The machinery in operation there produced a whole array of sounds, from low trembling to high-pitched whistling, adding gripping sonic effects to this dynamic, yet baleful moon-like place.

We wanted to immerse ourselves in RA and its social issues. As the latter were mostly worsened by the local social movements, we turned our attention to the activists' gatherings. After establishing contact with CB[3], we engaged ourselves in their gatherings and demonstrations. We helped to organise protests, mainly by distributing leaflets, and walking from door to door and talking to people. Later, we were present during these events, where we could participate, observe and arrange some interviews. Unfortunately, that was not the

[3] The CB and CR abbreviations are coded names of the local social movements/organizations involved in protest against waste companies located in RA.

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case with CR, which we found to be reserved and closed to outsiders. As we were not journalists eager to advocate against Miejskie Przedsiębiorstwo Oczyszczania m.st. Warszawy (City's Cleaning Venture, CCV), the CR members for a long time ignored our calls, only to give us some underwhelming interviews at the end of our research, where they literally dictated to us their ready statements.

Despite these disappointing reflections on interviews with CR, conversations with people were important to us. We recorded 36 interviews, both individually and in groups, and carried out countless field conversations, which we described in the fieldnotes. Most of the interviews we conducted in informants` houses, and only a few in RA`s unpleasant and almost non-existent public spaces. We conducted 31 interviews with "nowi", mostly thanks to our engagement in CB and participation in the protests, where we also had chances to meet people from CR. Our good relations with CB gave us an insight into correspondence between the engaged inhabitants and the local authorities. We could observe real confrontations between these parties live, during meetings between activists and the authorities that took place in various local government departments.

We have enriched our data with discourse analyses, especially focused on CR`s and CB`s websites and their social media profiles. We have investigated the local press and carefully combed through the websites of the following institutions: Miejskie Przedsiębiorstwo Oczyszczania m.st. Warszawy (CCV), BYŚ, (BYŚ Cleaning Venture, BCV), Urząd Dzielnicy Bielany (Bielany Local Authority Office, BLAO), and the Wojewódzki Inspektorat Ochrony Środowiska w Warszawie (Mazovian Inspectorate for Environmental Protection, MIEP).

Finally, we disseminated a questionnaire where we asked the inhabitants of Bielany[4] about their quality of life, reasons for choosing this location, and their knowledge about RA`s case. We received 52 responses, sketching out the broader sociocultural context of our research topic.

[4] Department in Warsaw.

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The Return of the Middle Class

The middle class has been a vague entity since its early days. Academics have debated how the middle class should be defined, yet they have never determined what precise factors constitute it. They have lost any defining accuracy in a maze of measurable economic factors, political declarations, and clashing Marxist and neoliberal philosophies obscuring class definitions. The ambiguity of the middle class, however, does not only concern Western societies. Mark Liechty, after research in Nepal, concluded that the middle class is itself an extraordinarily complex culture; entrepreneurial and progressive on the one hand, on the other it is Hamlet-like – anxious about the impact of capitalist doctrines on its own identities and values (LIECHTY 2002). Consequently, the concept of middle class has almost been abandoned in favour of discourse, subjectivity and cultural identities (SCHRÖDER 2008). The rapidly blurring class borders – mistakenly interpreted as the end of class itself (CARBONELLA – KASMIR 2006) – have only served to push researchers to entomb the middle class along with related analytical and methodological backgrounds. Thankfully, recently the concept of class has once again been rediscovered and reinterpreted. Here, the contribution of Pierre Bourdieu is of great value: his incisive meditations on social capital and "class on paper," upgraded by symbolic and political activity to "class in reality," (BOURDIEU 1985, 1991) have inspired new waves of academics across multiple disciplines to deliver a wide range of new theoretical and empirical research.

Nevertheless, despite new energy and fresh insights, mainstream study of class still follows the old paths, mostly reclaimed by a clash of neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian perspectives (DEVINE et al. 2005; SAYER 2005; YODANIS 2006). Yet, the refreshed class theory, we believe, has much to offer, especially in post-socialist societies where, as the case of RA illustrates well, social contrasts are starker than in Western "old democracies". Up against such contrastive conditions, post-socialist class formation was a violent event, in contrast to the evolution of Western working and bourgeois social formations:

"Class distinctions were drastically aggravated, however, after the fall of socialist governments through a variety of social processes such as unfettered, unequal, and often opaque privatisation, industrial restructuring, rapidly rising living costs, the decline of the state and its regulatory function, increasing corruption, and differential access to information" (SCHRÖDER 2008:11-12).

The post-socialist classes have emerged from social backgrounds where relations of power and dependency were often established under socialism, and which, despite the new liberal atmosphere, have been – if not fully preserved – then significantly influenced by the

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appearance of new social divisions. Buchowski compellingly revealed the nature of the new stratification being shaped by experiences of internal orientalism, otherness and stigmatisation (BUCHOWSKI 2006). Thus, when speaking about the middle class in post-socialist realities, the role of inequalities and the transformation come to the fore. Researchers have unanimously ascertained that the implementation of capitalism and neoliberal values has comprehensively shaken Central and Eastern European societies (KUBIK 2013; VERDERY 1996; KÜRTI – SKALNÍK 2009). Their heated discussion focuses more on the consequences of this earthquake. Some, like Leszek Balcerowicz or Michael D. Kennedy, glorify the transition (BALCEROWICZ 1995; KENNEDY 2002), and others, it suffices to name just Buchowski and Dunn, in their ethnographies question the transition`s universally beneficial impact (BUCHOWSKI 2008; DUNN 2008a, 2008b). Dunn sees the transformation predominately as a thorough social reconfiguration, which, she argues, has shaken people`s identities, values and roles. Thus, it has demolished the old patterns of power and relations, now replaced by new models of social stratification and class distinctions. In this new setting, many people have lost their agency, though some of them have established a new authority. Here, a certain category of people attracts our attention. Dunn describes them as follows:

"New governing technologies, representing a neoliberal perspective on autonomy and activity, have promised the birth of a new person: active, mobile, decisive. The idea of "being flexible" and producing flexible workers meant to be the antidotes for socialism – a kind of freedom contrasted with communist limitations" (DUNN 2008b:193).

We believe these people, just like our respondents, represent a so-called "new middle class", a social formation which arose after the transformation, in a culture of liberal capitalism and discourses of choice, agency and activity (BUCHOWSKI 2008). Contrary to classical Marxist materialism, where people from the middle class owned some means of production, the "new middle class" defines the individual`s position in relation to production as being only one of many distinctive factors. Thus, its ethos and identity are predominately imagined and socially constructed. Then, the "new middle class" reaches beyond pure materialism, and addresses the issues of worldview, morality, values, authority, knowledge and responsibility when confronted with the new capitalist discourses and culture. The members of this class join based on the shared ground of market values, independence, and activity, all translating into a self-identification dubbed by Vonderau as the "capitalist self" (VONDERAU 2008:114). Individuality, mobility and self-responsibility are the crucial distinctive values for these "new individuals", who are:

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"flexible, mobile, self-controlled, linear and consistent individuals, both in terms of actions and thoughts. The capitalist self is not only structured differently in terms of temporality but is deprived of its social environment – privatised and individualised" (VONDERAU 2008:114).

Such identifications stand in sharp contrast to the groups of people, who, as Dunn (2008a) points out, after the transition were quickly rubbed out from public life, as they have failed to accept the new order. These allegedly passive people, along with their presumed limited social capital, became seen as outdated and unnecessary in the new world. To our informants, who indeed critically spoke about "aborygeni" (informant`s term: a reference to Aborigines, yet without ethnic connotations, however, still strongly negative – a "savage" local people allegedly unable to act, poorly educated, unemployed etc.) they have become bearers of stigmatising anti-self-identifications originating from the disgraced world of socialism. Therefore, the "new middle class" is a political and ideological project built from scratch, and for Buchowski, also a teleological quest for transformation, fixated on the reproduction of "Western" patterns of social relations, or it is better to say, their local images (BUCHOWSKI 2008). This class has fluent borders, and it is composed of people ranging from farmers and small businessman to well-educated city dwellers. Nevertheless, the invention of the ideological "new middle class" was aimed to implement a new liberal socio-economic order and deliver a certain explanatory model legitimising the ongoing changes.

Despite almost three decades having passed since the beginning of the transformation, we believe that the divisions and discourses stirred up by capitalism, liberalism and the transformation are still visible in contemporary post-socialist societies. Poland, with its sharp social, ideological, and economic divisions exposed in policy, public debates and every-day local realities, provides a potent source of examples. Yet, we are aware that accession to the EU and globalisation have inevitably affected class divisions and definitions. Thus, we propose to enrich the concept of the "new middle class". To do so, we employ Richard Florida`s idea of a "creative class", as we believe it illustrates quite well our informants` sociocultural background (FLORIDA 2005, 2011).

Unlike theoreticians of a "new middle class", Florida pays more attention to late modernity and lifestyles emerging from intense urbanisation, making his proposition more progressive and fresher than the slightly clichéd concept of the middle class. The members of the creative class, above all city dwellers, are people who earn money via their knowledge and creativity. They are well-educated technocratic professionals or artists, who create new ideas, technology and knowledge in diverse and more liberal urban settings. Here Florida makes a valuable comment – urban quality of life entails not only money and access to services and

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pleasures, but a chance to live in an open, safe, clean, and friendly place. RA was supposed to be exactly one such place – a green, calm and safe corner in the never-sleeping Warsaw metropolis.

We believe our core informants represent a local variation of the "creative class", as they mostly occupied positions associated with entrepreneurship and a discourse of progress. Additionally, their response to RA`s disappointing reality was valuable social activism. "Nowi" desired to voluntarily shape their neighbourhood and, when the opportunity arose, their self-image as active and engaged citizens. Thus, they have presented themselves as the emancipated creators of their life-reality. Then, their creativity was not only limited to earning money, but was also the raw ingredients in a struggle for the quality of local space, the environment and welfare. The discourse of creative engagement was a platform unifying "nowi", but simultaneously a factor drawing a symbolic and imagined border between new people from gated communities and the orientalised – according to the informants – passive and uncreative "aborygeni".

The Shadow of the Waste Dumps: A Short Guide

RA became a part of Warsaw quite recently – in 1951, when the city absorbed a number of villages that were already slowly changing into metropolitan and industrialized suburbs. In 1957, just a heartbeat from the place, a new ironworks was erected. That eventually turned RA into a place of rapid industrialization – the waste processing plant was only one of the emerging industrial facilities supporting the ironworks. Others, like concrete manufacture, fuel magazines, and many others quickly dominated the landscape.

Currently the vicinity is rather grim and scruffy and supports Jeremy Seabrook`s sceptical reflections on rapid urbanisation, leaving landscapes socially and environmentally degraded (SEABROOK 2004). Next to the monumental industrial facilities installed there as early as the second half of the 20th century, detached and semi-detached houses dominate in RA, usually facing the main, yet narrow, artery – A. Street – overcrowded with heavy traffic. Most of the houses have their best years behind them. Their inhabitants, labelled as "aborygeni" by those who moved to RA quite recently, have been living there since they were born, they work nearby in one of the industrial installations or run a small business. Some of their houses are not even made of bricks but of wood. These outliers keep alive memories of the former rural character of this place.

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The neighbourhood is a place of extreme social and architectural contrasts. Next to old housing new buildings are located, with private access roads and gardens, frequently organised according to the latest trends in landscaping. These are the bastions of "nowi" – as the locals call them – the people who have moved to RA recently, mainly from neighbouring districts or from outside of Warsaw. One such community – let us name it "The Flowers" – was one of our main points of interest. All its buildings are hidden behind massive fences and represent a classic gated community, resembling more dispassionate non-places than socially vibrant neighbourhoods. However, such segregated locations provide access to specific lifestyles and self-identifications (ŚPIEWAK 2016). The inhabitants, usually recognised as the middle class (BUCHOWSKI 2006, 2008, 2012), prefer to maintain relations with people occupying similar job positions requiring a certain level of education and creative skills (TITTENBRUNN 2016). Although "The Flowers" was the birthplace of CR – a local social organisation that fights to improve environmental and living conditions in RA, many times we witnessed people leaving their houses to just rush through the neighbourhood in their distinctive cars, hardly ever walking and practicing Michele De Certeau`s "walking in the city" (DE CERTEAU 2008:91), a *sine qua non* for establishing meaningful relations between people, urban agents and local spaces.

So, even for some of its inhabitant's RA is social and spatial *terra incognita*, a place where they live, albeit unwittingly and unwillingly. There are no places where people can meet, socialise or spend their free time. There are no cafes, restaurants, libraries, shops or public squares. Ironically, when walking down A. Street, one still can find large-format posters advertising new houses in the vicinity. The adverts promise that RA is a bulwark of nature at the edge of one of the biggest nature reserves in Poland. How grotesque the advertisements were when juxtaposed with the heavy traffic, smell, and constant noise of machines emanated from RA`s most dominant landscape features – the waste dumps.

The City`s Cleaning Venture (CCV) and BYŚ Cleaning Venture (BCV) – both waste companies located literally in the backyards of RA`s households – shape the local landscape and establish spatial webs channelling emotions like anger, frustration and distrust.

The history of city governed CCV has its roots in the early 50s, when an unregulated waste dump was turned into a professional installation collecting garbage from Warsaw and the vicinity. Many years of intense exploitation resulted in the formation of a waste mound towering over the area. The local inhabitants named it "Górka śmieciowa" – "The waste

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hill"[5]. The hill no longer accepts waste and there are plans for its re-cultivation into a ski slope. Next to the mound there was a processing facility and there the infamous prisms were located. This upset the local community – especially those people new to the area.

In 2012, just before the implementation of the reform reshaping waste policy, CCV applied to the Urząd Marszałkowski (Marshal`s Office) for an "integrated licence for collecting and processing waste", a license in fact legalising potentially hazardous-to-the-environment waste installations. The licence was awarded for four years, and the CCV`s processing capacity quadrupled. The previously small sections with prisms expanded, providing space for more than 150,000 tonnes of odour-generating waste. Just after the new waste policy's implementation, CCV won a tender for collecting waste in Warsaw and created the Regionalna Instalacja Przetwarzania Odpadów Komunalnych (Regional Installation for Processing Communal Waste, RIPOK). Importantly, the installation was located at the edge of an environmentally unique area protected by the Nature 2000 programme – Puszcza Kampinoska (Kapinos Forest). According to the Wojewódzki Plan Gospodarki Odpadami (The Plan for Managing Waste in Mazovia, WPGO), the whole facility was supposed to close in 2007, however, this date has been postponed many times, mainly due to administrative and procedural inaccuracies. In April 2012, the final year of the waste dump was set as 2014, however, the new law in 2013 once again changed the situation. "The waste hill" was finally closed at the end of 2016, and the prisms two years later.

In 2014-2015 a group of experts from Warsaw University of Technology conducted research in RA and investigated the intensity of odour and its maximum range. The results confirmed the source of the odour to be the prisms and estimated its maximum range as being one and a half kilometres. However, the range of "medium-polluted", yet not harmful air, was recorded as being only six hundred metres. Surprisingly, the local school and playground are just outside this line, leaving many residents suspicious and anxious about this coincidence. Although the results have pushed the CCV management to invest about two million Polish Zloties (about 500,000 Euros) in sealing the prisms and improving the process of storing and processing the most malodorous waste, the local community was incredibly disappointed, as the experts had concluded that the situation in RA was acceptable.

The story of CCV is just the first act in the local environmental drama. The second facility, owned by private company BCV, is located nearby, on W. Street. This company employs

[5] Interestingly, the mound sometimes goes as "Uluru" – yet another striking "Australian" reference.

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about one hundred people, and similarly to CCV, many of them live in RA or neighbouring communities. BCV can be recognised by its distinctive blue chimneys producing billows of smoke, easily spotted from many locations. BCV is a heartbeat away from occupied areas, thus making many people anxious. This private company is more enigmatic and less transparent than public CCV`s facility, easily investigated by citizen patrols accompanied by municipal police and CCV`s employees. During our research we visited the whole of the CCV`s installations, including the closed "waste hill", but never were we able to observe BCV`s work. Instead, we have discovered that the company is currently preparing to apply for permission to expand its facilities to a size even bigger than the closed CCV`s processing plant.

Community and Social Movements

RA's community is diverse. The core of the population is made up of smallholders and workers living in multigenerational houses, occupying low-income positions or only just making ends meet thanks to a meagre pension. Nevertheless, we found them to be emotionally entwined with their vicinity, and its natural assets hidden under the cover of industrial facilities. For them, RA has always been a safe home:

"Generally, I am accustomed to it [the odour]. My grandparents are in their eighties now and they also live here. […] It is fine for me, cause I have a small plot, where my kid plays. So, I don`t have to, like I would have to do in the blocks, stroll with a pram" (interview 15, female, age 33).

Surprisingly, they turned out to be a reserved community. We managed to get only five interviews with these people and much of our knowledge about them is based on field observations or second-hand comments. Usually, they were defined as follows:

"There are a lot of people here, most of them from here, as we call them - ´aborygeni´. And I think they are… You know, I don`t want to say anything more…" (interview 11, female, age 50).

We were – somehow – shocked. What exactly she did not want to tell us? Was she trying to be polite, however, simultaneously suggesting that her neighbours were backward and socially degraded people? Well, now we know the answer was – yes.

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Next to the local people, in "The Flowers" and similar communities, newly arrived middle class communities live. They constitute our core research group. "Nowi" – "the new ones" – as aborygeni have often labelled them, are well-educated people with creative and prestigious professions. Mostly, they live in nuclear families, separated from their surroundings by walls marking out arranged spaces sharply contrasting with the rest of local suburban tissue. These people settled here over the last dozen years, bringing to RA new values, aesthetics and social capital. Most of them moved from other parts of northern Warsaw:

"They say that most of us here are the locals, but in these new quarters only new people live, you know, migrants coming from Warsaw, mostly from Bielany" (interview 3, male, age 53).

We value this remark, as it demonstrates that RA has its own unique sense of location – even people from Warsaw are migrants there. They were drawn by the idea of living in the suburbs, next to the forest, but close to vibrant city districts. At the turn of the century, the concept of a slow life in the suburbs was popular, especially among new Polish post-transformation social groups, paying more attention to the size and quality of their living space (PAWLICKA 2008), yet still significantly poorer than the Western middle class (GÓRKA 2007). They have accepted commuting, as living on the city`s outskirts are supposed to be healthier, more prestigious and more comfortable. RA seemed to be the right place – despite its industrial character – as the price of real estate was lower than in other popular locations, and ready properties were for sale. Many of our informants took out bank loans in Swiss Francs – as the loan was over all cheaper than in Polish Zloty – and bought, it would seem, the perfect real estate. However, their loans are much higher now, as the Swiss Franc exchange rate has almost doubled, and the value of properties has significantly dropped, as their location is now unattractive. Many of the informants also claimed that they only flicked through the local plans for new development.

Both the investigated groups – "aborygeni" and "nowi" – used the CCV and BCV installations to sketch mental and spatial maps of RA. However, only the latter group entwined the history of the facilities with their own biographies. "Nowi", as we often heard, divided their life stories into two periods – before and after July 2013. The sudden change in their living conditions was a stimulus to reconstruct their values, social relations, and most fundamentally, their relations with the local space. This change was also a starting point for intense social mobilisation, intensified by the frustratingly long process of closing the noxious installations.

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CR and CB: A Harsh Neighborhood

For a long time, RA was dotted with handmade posters blaming CCV and Warsaw`s authorities for the drama taking place there. They were distributed by CR – an organisation established by "The Flowers'" inhabitants, one of two social movements operating in the area. A second organisation, CB, began focussing its attention on RA a bit later, as it represents the interests of bigger district. These two organisations occupied opposite positions in the discourse and actions focused on RA`s environment. Characteristically, the members of these organisations originated predominantly from the new communities. The participation of local people was minimal, which significantly shaped their negative reputation among "nowi", as our socially engaged respondents saw their engagement as a source of positively distinguishing capital. Let us now briefly characterise the engaged informants by considering their affiliations.

Informants, mostly from "The Flowers" community, to express their disappointment with administrative decisions affecting their life quality, established CR. This social movement shares many features characteristic of "new social movements" (PICARDO – NELSON 1997; BUECHLER 1995). It declares itself to be apolitical and focused predominately on the environment, sustainable development, and civil rights. Its members fight for "environmental justice", which:

"can be distinguished from environmental inequality […], which refers to a situation in which a specific social group is disproportionately affected by environmental hazards" (BRULLE – PELLOW 2006:104).

This is how one of our informants explained CR`s mission to us:

"It was founded because we, as individual people, didn`t have access to any documentation. That`s why we established an association. More people joined us, because of this smell. This is our third year now. […] In 2013, in September, the association was founded. The impulse was of course the increasing odour from the installation, the primary cause of our actions. Just as B. said, at the beginning there were some attempts and small individual crusades, everyone tried something individual, but this was very unsuccessful. So, we came up with the idea to organise, to open doors to the documentation. And secondly, a group is always more effective than a single person, especially in such long-lasting cases" (interview 6, female, age unknown).

CR`s goal was to close all CCV`s installations. The organisation appealed to basic emotions, like the aforementioned one of safety, but also to parental love and care. The organisation`s

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discourse contained a dose of anxiety and struggle with the invisible danger lurking in the polluted vicinity.

CB, the first organisation which we established contact with, like CR, is a "new social movement", declaratively apolitical and focused on local sustainable development and social matters. However, CB is a more comprehensive organisation criticising not only CCV, which CR restricted itself to. Its members attempt to reveal BCV`s actual scale of operations and its future plans for expansion posing a threat to the local community. The following quotation defines this group well:

"BCV has better papers than CCV. […] CCV aspires for 230,000 tonnes of rubbish processing yearly, but as I have calculated, BCV aspires to do 2,300,000 tonnes. So, they can do anything. They can bring a dead cow here because they have permission to store waste right here. Later, they will apply to process, store and so on. […] They bring the rubbish here, nobody knows what they do there, and later they send the waste back" (interview 5, female, age 51).

Despite such conspiracy theories, CB is more muted than CR and aspires to establish a legally grounded voice in the process of administrative decisions concerning waste processing. Therefore, the organisation corresponds with the goals of social movements arising since the 1970s and 80s, i.e. community-based grassroots organisations exerting legislative pressure on the authorities and other involved social actors (BRULLE – PELLOW 2006).

Consequently, both organisations can be counted as "environmentalist" movements, which are composed of people concerned about the environment and advocating for its preservation. However, we consider CR to be environmentally extreme, defined by Danielle Tesch and Willet Kempton as "radical preservationists" who act loudly and emotionally (TESCH – KEMPTON 2004). CB should therefore be considered as moderate "conservationists" – meaning "a less extreme type of environmentalist" (TESCH – KEMPTON 2004:73). Regardless of definitions, we found engagement in these social movements to be a confrontational and political act. Some of our informants, after leaving CR in an atmosphere of scandal, joined CB. They accused CR of supporting BCV and suggested that the organisation was sponsored by the company. A rather reserved answers for our questions regarding the relations between the aforementioned organizations encourages us to indeed consider CR as surprisingly uncritical about BCV. Here is the example from a key figure in CR:

"Well, indeed (pause)*…Yes, there is a certain…* (pause) *Scuffle around BCV. And, what some people consider us to… that we only* (cough) *do one thing. BCV... But the answer is very easy*

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(dramatic change of tempo). *We fight. The work here is so tremendous, that we simply can`t take care about everything and save the world at once. There are two organizations, two installations, each of us takes care about its own. We certainly can support each other and take part in some protests. If one thinks about nuisance, well, you can`t compare. BCV is also disruptive, but not on such a massive scale!"* (interview 14, male, age 51)

Interestingly, the waste installations showed up here to be somehow attached to organizations. Yet, this goes deeper, as we have also been told that the person chairing CR is a close relative to W.B., one of BCV`s owners. However, apart from the following conversation[6], we do not have any reliable proof of this. Here is the part from the meeting with some people attached to CB:

M.C.: "Is it not surprising that there are two organizations almost having no contact? Do you even talk to each other?"

T: "Yes, once on the phone with their chairwoman – she told me she had no time, `cause she is so busy and so one, she will email me later."

A: "She`s W.B` cousin."

M:P: "Is she? I didn`t know that!"

T: "Mrs. B, yes."

A: "She has sold him a land recently."

M.P: "I`ve heard a word from a lady living nearby."

A: "You now, there is a KRS[7] and so, but we are not prosecutors, we are not police officers. We know who steals and cheats here…You know, they might get me out to the forest, it happens…"

M.C.: "But still, what about two organizations?"

A: "It used to be one."

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6 This conversation was held with help of our colleague Magda Cibicka, who was part of the research team. We would like to thank her for sharing with us with this material.

7 Krajowy Rejestr Sądowniczy (National Court Archive) a database containing a vast number of administrative data concerning institutions, entrepreneurial companies, partnerships and associations.

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M.P: "As far as I know, Mrs. G has left CR and later has founded CB."

A: "And constantly they slender us, even in the last post."

M.C.: "I`ve noticed that."

A: "But we sometimes strike back, you know. Yet, they have some connections in the administration, you know, somebody there has had to give them permissions, somebody has suggested the place and later has sold the land. Don`t you think this is a bit thin?"

M.P: "Ok, so who is responsible for the mess here?"

A: "Well, somebody has simply failed to keep an eye on that, offices, the municipality. Somebody has delivered to them all the approvals; this must be somebody with money. Once a city guard has told me that BCV years ago has started as septic-trucks company. There was no plumbing here. So, they cleaned sceptics and throw it all into the woods. Nobody has ever controlled them" (interview 16, male, ale 45, female, age 47).

Space, Class and Activism in RA

Most of the informants – surprisingly including even the "aborygeni" – spoke about class or made subtle allusions about belonging to one. Even when asked to briefly characterise their vicinity, the informants, after sketchily describing the intense odour or other neighbourhood drawbacks, turned their attention to social matters and distinctions between the active and engaged civilians – mostly from "The Flowers" and similar communities – and passive "aborygeni" allegedly uninterested in the quality of public spaces, the environment and sustainable waste policy. But the local people never refrained from making bitter comments about "nowi", for them pretentious Johnnies-come-lately, who have never respected the local inhabitants and, by publicising matters relating to RA, have deliberately invaded their privacy and values. They had not understanding nor sympathy for their distressed neighbours. A short comment delivered by one of the informants – emotional, as related to one`s place, and bitterly ironic, as on people who have aggravated it, encapsulates it well:

"I tell you, this is a very sensitive topic for those, who have moved here to these houses (ironically, points at the wall of "The Flowers"). And I have lived here since always! I live

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here! Soon it will be 44 years. And yes, the dump stinks, as stinks flipped compost. Yes! Today stinks, yep. Like they were flipping some compost" (interview 17, male age 43).

We were overwhelmed by the number of similar class-related practices and declarations – after all, even the abovementioned speech relates to classes, was provoked by the class and aimed to embarrass it. Class distinctions were visibly strengthened by certain slogans repeated by informants, namely "the environment", "sustainable development" and "reasonable urbanisation and waste policy". Class belonging manifested itself in architecture, materiality and spatial arrangement. Next to old chaotic developments, a new and cohesive architecture signalled to us where we should look for the local middle/creative class. One telling detail was even the guarding agents chosen; even they made a difference in RA. The "aborygen`s`" houses were usually decorated with signs with folksy declarations, such as: "Danger. Beware of the dog". "Nowi", instead, hooked up their residences and equipped them with advanced CCTV systems. From time to time, an automatic gate opened, and swish cars left these protected neighbourhoods. Usually, the driver was a relatively young person, with a high chance that s/he belonged to CB, or more probably, to CR.

Our middle/creative class informants rarely spoke to people in the street. They spent time outside RA or entirely within the borders of their closed communities, either in their houses, or when the odour was less noticeable, in their gardens. Admittedly, it was a certain obstacle to us – we were, exactly as the others unwanted – pushed out behind the walls. Yet, this unsettling condition was indeed a great ethnographic lesson to all of us. The following part from Hubert`s fieldnotes encapsulates this well:

"We are randomly hanging around RA and desperately trying to contact anybody from the other side of the wall. Who are these people? Why there are not here? It stinks a lot, but they live here, where are they?" (fieldnotes, September 2015)

We had the impression that they had established enclaves where they lived according to their imagined standards, namely in detached houses near attractive natural preserve, with a piece of own grass and a car – or two – as good, as only could they be. Thus, they have dreamed about – and expected – a certain material confirmation of their own status. However, material structures and objected like cars and houses aimed to emanate their owners from the surrounding urban tissue composed of rather unappealing and densely populated residential constructions. In other words – the informants wanted a space, both material and imagined, a space for their projected individualities and identities. This was, however, only an illusion, as RA, with all its inconveniences, was still there. Factors which ignored all the fences and cameras – the shrill sound of machinery working at the waste dumps and the odour –

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reminded them of that almost every day. Nevertheless, the area occupied by "nowi" was controlled and organised, as they told us, exactly as it should be. The opposite space – the crowded street and the two waste processing plants – were symbolically discarded and pushed outside this space. These private neighbourhoods, with their own greenery and small-scale architecture, were independent from the local authorities' services which, according to the informants, were evidently incapable of organising a safe and friendly place to live.

Bearing this in mind, gated communities, as Jacek Gądecki states, are sociocultural constructs which should be interpreted as a response to the post-transformational state`s failure to provide proper security to its citizens (GĄDECKI 2009). Although he speaks mainly about the crisis of personal safety and private property, we believe the category of safety also covers the most basic and existential aspects of everyday life, including a healthy environment, sustainable development and sustainable policy. This crisis has resulted in the observable privatisation of safety in Poland, as we argue, characteristic of the local middle and creative classes, which, to fully appreciate their self-identification, require certain guarantees of stability and foreseeability (SCHRÖDER 2008). The lack of the latter leads to a collapse of the sense of "class's" ontological security, which, despite writing on a bit different issue, Rosemary Hiscock and colleagues have illustrated well here:

"It has been said that people need the confidence, continuity and trust in the world which comprise ontological security in order to lead happy and fulfilled lives, and furthermore that ontological security can be attained more through owner occupied than rented housing" (HISCOCK et al. 2001:50).

To compare, let us hear from our informants:

"We lived in a kind of obliviousness. There was no odour. We simply lived our lives, and we were happy. Since 2013 we have lived under pressure, actually a kind of stress, I would say. Perhaps now, or if not yet, then maybe in the next hour, we will just go out for a moment to check – a load off my mind – [the odour] *is not here"* (interview 7, female, 46).

And another:

"We can`t use our garden, because it is actually useless […] You never know when the smell will arrive, and you never know if the intensity will allow you to invite any guests. So we don`t invite anybody. I`ve stopped inviting people" (interview 12, female, age unknown).

Therefore, the Polish gated communities fit well into the urban chaos arising since the 90s – a result of the absence of zoning rules in cities, ruthlessly exploited by construction companies, often informally supported by local governments. This architectural and spatial

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chaos was clearly visible in RA. Not surprisingly, the advertisements distributed by the local building companies contained slogans vaunting class and spatial segregation. But to go back to the last informant`s comment, it is obvious that people from RA`s guarded communities were not living their middle-class dream. They were isolated, both physically and socially. They did not integrate with the locals, nor did they invite their friends' round or even freely use their gardens, as the smell – or the fear of it lurking nearby – stopped them from enjoying these tiny personal islands of greenery. Thus, the guarded communities, despite in RA being certain enclaves of imagined safety, prosperity and aesthetics, failed to support broader social networks and in fact intensified social stratification, or, as Buchowski would say, contributed to the orientalisation of "the others" outside (BUCHOWSKI 2006).

It is fair to say that attitude in RA towards the odour and, more broadly, to issues related to the environment and sustainable urban development, were a primary cause of deep social divisions and class stratification. Unsurprisingly, this gulf was a symbolic border between the active "nowi" and passive "aborygeni". Our middle-class informants created sorts of social "norms", like the aforementioned "engagement" and "environment" – slogans ubiquitous in their declarations, yet never well-defined, in relation to which they segregated the local community and established class-defining standards. People who saw themselves as engaged in the struggle for RA`s "environment" – we purposely use the self-perceiving mode, as the core of the engaged individuals was rather small, with the rest of the informants supporting them only from time to time or only on social media – defined themselves and their engaged neighbours as the local elite. Their dedication was an identifying factor only appreciated by those who possessed a certain social and intellectual capital. Here are some examples of this discourse:

"I don`t talk to all the neighbours I know because there are some weird people here. The people I know are rather engaged in this issue, as they participate in demonstrations. I believe this is a consequence of one`s intellectual capabilities" (interview 15, male, age unknown).

And another:

"For example, I use the local photocopying point […]. They are autochthons, and they have lived here for a while. The father and son work there together. But they only observe, you know. They observe what is going on. When I often visit them, I tell them what is happening. They seem to follow me, as they don`t support BCV, and so on. But they have this attitude – I live here, nothing can be done, so I won`t trouble myself, no protests, no engagement in anything" (interview 29, male, age 50).

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We concluded that the poorer and not-engaged people of RA were treated – at least by some of our informants – not as subjects, but rather as non-reflexive objects of distrust, anger, and slightly – compassion. We consider this division to be a reference to the widely discussed, yet criticised, distinction between the "winners" and the "losers" of the transformation (BUCHOWSKI 2006, 2012). The latter are usually seen as people who could not adapt to the new liberal conditions since they were deprived of valuable sociocultural capital supposedly required to initiate a process of post-transformation emancipation and to seek new self-identifications (DUNN 2008a, VONDERAU 2008). They were like *homo sovieticus*, who, according to the dominant stereotype, were culturally and socially retarded, passive, dependent, and demonstrated a lack of any interest in the common good (DUNN 2008a).

Homo sovieticus, exactly like the "aborygeni" – as we were told by informants – unwittingly accepted the authorities` opinions and verdicts. They considered social activism and civic movements to undermine the social order. To some extent this explains why the "aborygeni" participated neither in CR, nor in CB. Additionally, as was suggested to us, the local people – via their passiveness – purposely avoided any responsibility for the area, and thus their own and their neighbours' health and quality of life. Several of our informants complained that their non-engaged neighbours expected others to put themselves at risk by engaging in conflict with the authorities and waste companies. They were also blamed for being blind to such abstract and – for them – "far-fetched" and "new money" ideas such as the environment and sustainable urbanisation. Therefore, people from the gated communities considered them to be "non-modern" and "backward thick-heads" (respondents` epithets), rejecting liberal new middle-class values, namely independence, activity and responsibility for one's own life. They have never come closer to Vonderau`s concept of "capitalist-selves" (VONDERAU 2008:114), and mentally stayed in the long-gone RA-as-a-village on the outskirts of the city of Warsaw. This, however, was not true since the local people, similarly to "nowi", were, after all, also owners and some of them ran small businesses. We found them, like Jeremy Seabrook who researches the poor in cities, to be "an invisible resource" (SEABROOK 2004:475), having much economic and social potential. Nevertheless, only our middle/creative class informants saw themselves as creative and sophisticated "winners". But were they "winners" at all?

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New Middle/Creative Class, Odour and Stigma

The sense of smell, along with sight and hearing, is inseparably intertwined with memories and the cultural images of spaces and their inhabitants. However, when speaking of human dwellings, smell has an exceptional potential to segregate. Therefore, as George Simmel suggests, we can distinguish between fragrant and malodorous districts, the first occupied – stereotypically – by fragrant and noble people, the latter by noxious dissenters (SIMMEL 2006). Smell absorbing places and their social images are more than just a physical phenomenon. It is, following Bourdieu, a symbolic violence, which turns places into repulsive no-man`s-lands occupied by people deprived of capital and socially valued resources (BOURDIEU 2006). In RA Bourdieu`s theoretical works, turned to be grounded in empiricism, as we saw how the odour from CCV has dominated the vicinity and established relations of dependency, which our desperate middle/creative class informants, following their class identification and ethos, tried to cut or upset.

However stigmatising and exclusionary their declarations and actions appear; marks of exclusion and stereotypes have also affected those from the gated communities. Our research revealed levels of experiencing and defining odour that were related to class divisions. The "aborygeni" were astonished that, for the middle/creative class, the odour was not only such a great reason for mobilisation but also for shame and concealment. We hypothesise that living surrounded by an unpleasant odour, predominately associated with poverty, slums and dirt (SIMMEL 2006), has undermined "nowi`s" class self-identification. As Ivan Illich would say, they were people who had been brought up in the anti-odour utopia of modern urban architecture, yet now confronted with "aura" – the smelly mark of human dwellings, yet only recently weeded out of inhabited spaces (ILLICH 2004:375).

As we have already mentioned, the turning point for RA`s issues were July 2013, when CCV increased the volume of processed organic waste. Before, according to our informants, living in RA was good, despite some inconveniences, like a rare and slight smell of "a cowshed". *"We thought that a cowshed here is better than car fumes there, right?"* – one of the informants said (interview 8, female, age unknown). But in 2013 suddenly, the vicinity was "overtaken" by an intense odour and the local streets clogged with heavy traffic. Many of our respondents recalled this time as the beginning of their personal tragedy, a turning point in their biographies. We have noticed that the respondents often complained that overnight they were even forced to abandon their earthbound habits:

"Before I used to walk my dog more often, when she was eager to walk at all. Now the odour is so terrible that you can`t walk. It smells so bad!" (interview 5, female, age 51)

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And a second example:

"Involuntarily, when we leave our houses, [takes a sniff] *we check if it stinks. Shall we call for the city service or not? Then, fast, into the car! Really, it is unpleasant, I can see that clearly. Earlier people were in the streets, many things happened in our gardens. Before 2013, right? It was a normal life"* (interview 16, female age 48).

A sudden change in the way the informants perceived and used their vicinity has left marks in "nowi`s" social self-identification. First, they became aware that they could not live their dream life any longer, as they had been deprived of fundamental middle/creative class values – agency and control. Consequently, many of them regretted their decision to move to RA, that is to say – taking out a bank loan and currently occupying a property whose value has significantly dropped. These thoughts, however, did not only pertain to real estate and financial issues. We found them to be a comprehensive appraisal of the informant`s new life settings and social identification. Along with these reflections, apparently regarding the odour and sustainable urban policy, "nowi" conducted a deep mental and phenomenological reassessment of their status. They have combed through their biographies and class knowledge, searching for reasons for, and possible solutions to, the problem they have been exposed to. Therefore, RA was a land of people changing, of the location for a failed middle/creative class project, and the site of a post-transformational drama, where peoples` expectations and identifications clashed with a malodorous and disappointing reality. This was a place of tensions and self-directed grievances assuaged by criticizing "the others", passive and immune, for – as our informants said – their personal and social tragedy.

When speaking of the "tragedy" in RA, two important elements should be considered, namely shame and stigma. Our informants often directly spoke about the latter making references to their present situation. Obviously, "odour" holds many meanings, mostly negative. Odour, as Erving Goffman says, stigmatises those who are affected by adverse smells commonly symbolising poverty and low status (GOFFMAN 1963).

While talking about odour, the informants often personalised it. They talked about "the odour attacking," or "lurking odour". We saw this anthropomorphisation as a platform for developing a common language to speak about a shared problem – when a threat has characteristics, it is less dangerous. Thus, when the informants gave the odour an agency, they profoundly reconstructed their narratives and left the discourse of victims to become the active party in the conflict. This strategy corresponded with their class values because it restored – to some extent – their faith in controlling their surroundings. Nevertheless, the odour undermined the status of "nowi", as it was virtually impossible to hide it. Odour was

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one's first experience when entering RA and for a long time it stayed in the memories of those who personally experienced it. Certainly, it ruined the elaborately constructed picture of "nowi" as true members of a middle/creative class living in the charming and safe suburbs and bringing home the bacon thanks to their exceptional intelligence. Such a situation provoked negative feelings like shame and reproach, well-illustrated here:

"I can`t stop blaming myself for being such a fool and moving. I lived in Żoliborz*[8] *and I left it for the problems here. I`ve made a terrible mistake, a personal, unimaginable mistake. I invested some money here, but I did not think about officials' mentality. […] I only saw this place as land with potential. […] Obviously, it is embarrassing, as it is related with the air, right? The air, the lifestyle. And it is shameful to admit that you have made such a wrong decision. I`ve just stepped into this odour. I mean, I let myself down, I didn`t check everything, I was naïve. A this hurts me, this makes me so mad! It is killing me. I`ve simply fooled myself" (interview 7, female, 46).

Despite trying our best to understand the informant`s situation, many times we had the feeling that they were ashamed to speak about it. We observed and experienced a tension marking our encounters that was present in the respondent's language, voice, and body language. It was striking that "nowi", when asked about the odour and their current situation, immediately lowered their eyes and voice. To speak about odour, they employed many strategies, like digressing, making generalisations, changing the subject, or even making obviously forced jokes. This was especially characteristic of the narratives told by the members of local social movements. When speaking as a collective, the informants appeared to be engaged and professional, however, the individual interviews revealed a picture of insecure people, visibly preoccupied with their complicated situation, and separated from the values and lifestyle they had dreamed about. They considered themselves to be the objects of potential stigmatisation, as living in a malodorous area was – according to them – a reason for social ostracism:

"Well, it is awkward, especially in front of people, who don`t live here. Let's say they live in Śródmieście or Mokotów*[9] *– they have a different set of problems. Let`s be honest, it is much easier to say – at least I think so – that your place is a bit noisy than it stinks so badly!" (interview 20, male 37).

[8] Department in Warsaw.

[9] Departments in Warsaw, the latter considered as especially liveable.

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Thus, many informants had stopped inviting friends' round and hanging out in the area, as they preferred to spend as much time as possible outside RA. However, their fears and sense of shame exceeded these purely spatial matters, touching upon the foundations of middle/creative class identification, namely educational background, independence, responsibility, and general smartness that allows one to occupy certain social and professional positions. "Nowi" realised that, because of RA`s rather miserable appearance and the mark made by the waste dumps, they were no longer credible in their middle/creative classiness. The local effects of the new waste policy have bitterly undermined their high expectations. Thus, their story is a tale of a wounded middle/creative class with ruined dreams caught up in a sudden and painful clash with a poorly developed suburban reality, unpredictable political decisions and misguided choices regarding their financial and housing plans. Most of our informants unanimously, and with more than a little embarrassment, claimed that their present life was not the one they had imagined, expected, or worked for.

Discussion

In recent decades, due to intense urbanisation, the former village of RA has been absorbed by an expanding Warsaw, bringing in many new people, mainly from nearby districts, but also those new to the city. Thus, RA is a socially and culturally diverse area, where people of different values, worldviews, and economic backgrounds live next to each other – former and still working small-scale farmers, the self-employed, and various workers share the neighbourhood with a creative class working in the city centre or in modern office districts. Hence, RA is a place where anthropologists can observe the ongoing process of a rapid reconstruction of the local social structure, but also steady rearrangements in spatial organisation, architectural landscape and associated values shared by a complex local community exposed to pressures resulting from urbanisation and sociocultural shifts.

These changes have been additionally stimulated by the unexpected results of the Act introduced in July 2013, aiming to tighten up legislation on waste policy and management. Consequently, the local waste companies, generally benign and anchored in RA`s landscape (as they were present there long before the first new inhabitants chose to move there), drastically increased their operational capabilities, producing traffic, noise pollution and emitting an intense odour that has overwhelmed the vicinity until September 2018. Consequently, a populated area located at the edge of one of the biggest and most precious

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nature reserves in Poland has been turned into a malodorous and unattractive hinterland for waste from Warsaw and beyond.

This situation raises many concerns. First, one should question the rationality of a policy supporting huge waste dumps and waste processing facilities in a populated area. It is true that RA has been steady transformed from a rural to an industrial landscape since the early 1950s, however, the proximity of a protected natural area and rapid urbanisation bringing new settlements should have encouraged successive authorities to follow more accurate and reflexive spatial planning and policy. RA as a growing suburb is a fact, nevertheless the local government seems to either turn a blind eye or ignore this situation. RA`s issue has been additionally complicated by imprecise communication from the administrative institutions and courts of various instances, adjudicating conflicting decisions and often clashing verdicts, easily questioned by the local waste companies, which only fulfil their legally established cleaning mission, legitimised by binding contracts signed with the local authority. Consequently, RA`s space has been turned into a chaotic maze, occupied by both "native" populations, well-accustomed to the area`s character, and also disappointed "new" inhabitants, blaming the former as well as the authorities for their personal and class drama. RA has no quality spaces or places capable of bringing people together, regardless of their sociocultural background. The streets, dominated by heavy traffic, noise and car fumes, are socially empty and unfriendly. The vicinity, despite its apparent assets, like the nearby forest and vibrant city districts, according to our informants, turned out to be repelling and incapable of serving the new middle class's needs and expectations. The green protected areas, instead of providing much-needed space for relaxation and social integration, became yet another argument in the struggle with the waste companies and local authorities. The inhabitants of "The Flowers," and similar communities, have closed themselves within their dedicated bastions, which they were unable to enjoy them in accordance with their dreams and expectations, as the odour has forced them from their backyard gardens and blighted social events like barbecues or enjoying a simple cup of coffee with friends. Thus, our informants felt deprived of their class self-identification and lost in an abyss denuded of ontological safety, dignity and hope.

We saw the rise of the local social movements – CR and CB – as an attempt to free the local new middle/creative class from the impoverishment and social discrediting resulting from occupying a commonly stigmatising noxious neighbourhood. We do not question the official and obvious motives for establishing these social organisations, namely a drive to improve the quality and aesthetics of the local space and its environmental conditions thereby translating into inhabitants' improved health and safety. However, the social structure of the

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organisations – explicitly composed of "nowi" – and associated liberal discourses, i.e. stressing a need for self-emancipation, control, activism and self-responsibility as the core attributes of a modern person, suggested to us that the actual reason for establishing these organisations lay deeper, at the level of informants` self-identification, or more precisely, its crisis. Thus, the struggle for a better environment – a standard slogan for both CR and CB – might be nothing more than a class-anchored solution for identity and a representational crisis amongst "nowi", supposedly knowledgeable, far-sighted and, most importantly, responsible for their lives. Yet, as the data under consideration has suggested, they became stuck in RA of their own volition. The informants regret that they never carefully checked the local zoning plans and building applications, or cheerfully believed the official propaganda and building companies' PR advertising RA as a land perfect for those who had higher expectations and a certain social status. Then, the local activism and engagement in the struggle for a clean environment, reasonable waste policy and sustainable urbanisation, should be read if not as the only, then the most credible, message to the local social audience, proving that "The Flowers" and other local guarded communities are inhabited by proper members of the middle class, ready to regain control over their space and rights.

Finally, it is time to reveal a lesson we learnt from our research: perhaps it is now obvious but to us it is still most striking. In Poland, the concepts often heard by us in the field, namely "green policy", "the environment", "sustainable development" and "health", are very much class-related and class-reproduced. These concepts, as we argue, are almost exclusively reserved for the emancipated middle and urban creative classes, which not only shape and disseminate them across various social contexts, actors, and institutions, but also utilise them to craft their own class-related self-identifications and representations. This prompts us to hypothesise that the puzzling incomprehension of, and lack of concern for, the environment in Poland[10], as manifested in our still quite lacklustre social and governmental responses to phenomena like smog, recycling, and renewable energy, might be a result of our relatively undeveloped middle and creative class, poorer and visibly less numerous than in the greenest members of the EU. Additionally, many critics suggest that even the existing, elusive middle class in Poland is economically unstable. This economic fragility was easy to spot in RA,

[10] https://oko.press/cieniu-zamachu-sady-pis-niszczy-energetyke-odnawialna-straszna-krotkowzrocznosc/ (accessed 28.06.20).
https://businessinsider.com.pl/firmy/nowela-o-oze-zabojstwem-dla-branzy-pis-przeglosowal-zmiany/04flk2m (accessed 28.05.20).

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where even relatively small changes in Swiss Franc were a reason for mortgage holders` financial troubles. Under such strong economic pressure, "the environment" might easily be reduced to luxurious and thus secondary needs, appreciated only by those whose social and economic capital allows them to spend time and money on them. Or – like in RA – a sudden shift in one's life situation might push people to recognise and use "the environment" as an argument in a struggle with external institutions and platforms for social emancipation.

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