

## **Post-Socialism and the Changing Geographies of the Everyday in Poland**

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### **Acknowledgements**

This paper is based on research carried out under the auspices of an ESRC-funded research project, award number R000223246. I owe a huge debt of thanks to Lidia Krzynówek, who helped me out immensely with the interviews in Nowa Huta. Thanks also to Ania Boniszewska who assisted with some later interviews; to others in Nowa Huta and Kraków who generously supported this project with their time and enthusiasm; and, of course, to my interviewees for agreeing to talk to me about life in Nowa Huta. Finally, I would like to thank Moya Flynn, Beth Edginton, Stefan Buzhar and three anonymous referees for their thoughtful comments on this paper.

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### **Abstract**

In reporting on recent research on the changing geographies of everyday life in the town of Nowa Huta in southern Poland, this paper seeks to promote the use of post-socialism as a conceptual, rather than simply descriptive and/or transitory, category. By exploring experiences of (im)mobility and (in)security in post-socialism, this paper connects to related work on the west and asks what difference post-socialism makes. It concludes by presenting a post-socialism marked out as different by the particular experiences of socialism, its construction and destruction and as a partial and hybrid social form, produced by a combination of multiple social forms constructed at varied scales of time and space.

**Keywords** post-socialism Poland everyday geographies mobility

### **Introduction**

Mobility, uncertainty, instability and fragmentation have become keywords of the contemporary (post-modern) condition, set in contrast to an earlier image of security, certainty and linearity. For many, the shift between these two conditions is connected to the end of communism and the Cold War in 1989. As 1989 signalled the end of the knowable world order, founded on relatively stable regulatory systems, it heralded the celebration of an unruly globalization (Bauman 1998b). Whilst a considerable body of work has debated and documented the presence and experiences of uncertainty, (im)mobility and risk in the west (Bauman 1998a, b, 2001a, b; Beck 1992, 2000) far less attention has been paid to exploring the ‘post-socialist condition’ through a similar lens. The aim of this paper then is two-fold – not only to ask how these keywords reflect and shape the lived experiences of post-socialism, but also to think through how these ideas can be used to theorise post-socialism more clearly.

### **Theorising Post-Socialism**

For many, post-socialism serves simply as a descriptor, either of the region under study (usually east central Europe [ECE] and the former Soviet Union [FSU]) or of the ‘transition’ in those regions (Stenning forthcoming 2005a). My purpose here is not to reiterate many of the critiques of ‘transition’ as a teleological, reductionist construct – this has already been

done (see, for example, Stark 1992; Burawoy 1992; Pickles and Smith 1998). Instead my intention is to ask, can we talk of a post-socialism that is not reduced only to the tasks and passage of transition? And what might some of the key features of that post-socialism be?

More and more we hear now of the ‘end of transition’, marked either by the ‘completion’ of the technocratic tasks of political and economic reform or by the accession of a number of ‘transition economies’ to the European Union. If post-socialism is reduced to transition, as it so often is, then post-socialism must end with the ‘end of transition’, and in this way it becomes a temporary, transitional category with no power beyond a limited historical and geographical moment. The difference of this part of the world is erased, regardless of the enormity and profundity of this region’s diverse histories, not only during socialism but before (and, of course, after). The use of post-socialism as a transitory category contrasts markedly with the other ‘posts’ of contemporary social theory. The post-modern and the post-colonial, while both coming into our lexicons as descriptions of particular moments, have developed to take on greater explanatory power and to make wider contributions to social theory. It has only been very recently that understandings of the post-socialist have begun to be developed in this role, to engage with other social theories of change, to suggest what might characterise the post-socialist condition and to offer alternative perspectives on other conceptual issues (such as the economy, networks, identity, the state and so on) (Humphrey in Hann *et al.* 2002; Burawoy 2001; Kennedy 2001).

This paper does not assume that we can talk of a post-socialist condition, but asks if we can. The post-socialist world is vast and diverse, incorporating the cosmopolitan cities of central Europe, the steppes of Siberia and central Asia, the oil fields of the Caspian and Pacific coasts and the rural regions of southeastern Europe, amongst a vast range of social and

physical environments. Yet beyond these diversities, there is more than the current ‘transition to capitalism’ which draws these states together. Notwithstanding disparate histories and diverse paths to socialism, Humphrey argues that these states “still had more in common than actually existing capitalisms” (Humphrey, in Hann *et al.* 2002, 12; Verdery 1996). Thus I argue that post-socialism will not disappear after EU accession or the achievement of EBRD 4+ ratings across the board, but that the particular experiences of socialism, its construction on a particular set of nascent capitalist societies and its replacement through a period of rapid and widespread ‘transition’ shape a common condition. Arguing for a post-socialism is not, contrary to possible critique, backward-looking but attentive to history, both in its past and future forms. So too is it alive to geographical difference. Arguing for a post-socialism does not imply uniformity – no one suggests that post-colonial London is the same as post-colonial Cairo – but commonality (Kandiyoti 2002). Support for a post-socialist condition must, also, be tempered by a strong recognition that it does not exist in isolation. Cold War sovietologists were rightly critiqued for “cut[ting] themselves off from developments in other areas of social science” (Burawoy 1992, 778), denying any connections to broader social theory. Instead, any post-socialism must be seen as a partial and hybrid social formation, existing in combination with contemporary others – ‘western’ capitalism, the post-colonial – and founded on older forms – pre-socialism and socialism.

What then of the wider importance of post-socialism? The task is first to explicitly debate what this post-socialist condition might be, and then ask what wider lessons we might learn. In this journal in 2002, Kathrin Hörschelmann argued that the consideration of the post-socialist world by students of the west (and also the south) was often cursory, invoking the events and consequences of 1989 not to understand post-socialism and its relation to other processes of change but to support a more general point, often about neoliberalism. In her

2002 piece, Hörschelmann called for a more complex flow of ideas and knowledge to develop theorizations founded on non-western experiences. I echo this call.

Rather than describe this post-socialist condition, this paper presents work from one research project to identify some possible features. In reporting on this project, the empirical focus of the paper returns to the catchwords of mobility, security, fragmentation to explore the presence and impact of these in the lives of steelworkers, their friends and families in Nowa Huta, southern Poland. In documenting and exploring these themes, this article highlights some features which seem to mark post-socialism, both differentiating it from and echoing other contemporary conditions, and connects with Verdery's aim "to raise questions that might prove fruitful elsewhere" (1996, 11).

### **Mobility and transformation**

Further to the general debates over mobility identified by Bauman et al, the importance of exploring these issues in the post-socialist context is highlighted by two concerns. First, discourses of mobility have played a key role within the wider discourses of 'transition'. Mobility, coupled with consumption, came to be seen as a space for resistance in late socialism (Hammer 2002; Hanasz 1999; Wessely 2002) and as inherently good. In post-socialism, it became discursively connected with choice, with opportunity and with markets. The vast majority of discussions of mobility in post-socialism are constructed around ideas of labour and housing, encouraging people to move not because they want to, but because, in this way, 'healthy' markets for labour and property will be developed. For many, as we will see, far from this discursive utopia, the potential for mobility is experienced through reduced access and constrained choice. Post-1989 mobility and access have been shaped by more and more differentiation, on the basis of at least class, gender, ethnicity and age. As urban

transport and residential mobility are increasingly marketised, even the World Bank draws attention to the consequences of mobility transformations for poverty (World Bank 2002). Contrary to all expectations, the years since 1989 have not been marked by a dramatic increase in residential mobility (Mandic 2001; Ruoppila and Kahrik 2003).

The interest in studying mobility within the geographies of post-socialism rests not only on these shifting experiences but also on the widespread use of metaphors of movement in analysing post-socialist transformations. The clearest example of this is ‘the transition’, deemed to describe the ‘road’ from communism to capitalism, yet at a smaller scale too, Kuehnast (1993, 26, cited in World Bank 2000, 31-2) evocatively parallels the personal consequences of transformation in the former Soviet Union with a doomed journey when “suddenly the road disappears and your car crashes”, whilst Hörschelmann and van Hoven (2003) present a more open account of change in the post-socialist lives of women in east Germany, echoing more recent versions of ‘transition’, with metaphors of complicated, unpredictable itineraries through unfamiliar places to unclear destinations.

### **Researching post-socialism**

This paper aims to amplify these concerns through an account of transformations in Nowa Huta, Poland, a district of Kraków founded in 1949 and centred on the new Lenin Steelworks (now the Sendzimir Steelworks, or HTS). Nowa Huta is best seen as an exceptional example of socialism and post-socialism, imbued as it has been throughout its relatively short history with the symbolism of both communism and its fall. As such, it should be seen as an illustrative, rather than representative, case study. Moreover, whilst it would be difficult and inappropriate to represent Nowa Huta as a singular and coherent community, the focus in this research has been on exploring the experiences of transformation amongst the predominantly

working class, old industrial community around which Nowa Huta was constructed. In contrast to accounts which highlight the emergence of a renewed elite and a new middle class (see, for example, Eyal *et al* 2001; Słomczyński and Shabad 1997), this research focuses primarily on the experiences of loss and dislocation among the old working class, often privileged under the previous system, and increasingly disadvantaged under the new, as the ‘end of socialism’ and the ‘end of work’ reshape livelihoods and identities (Stenning 2002, forthcoming 2005b; Kideckel 2002; Wódz 1997). In the eagerness of many commentators to represent the successes of ‘the transition’ accounts of urban working class communities and their post-socialist experiences have been much rarer than those of new entrepreneurs, the new elite and other social groups. Post-socialist experiences in Nowa Huta have certainly been mixed – some have witnessed considerable benefits and a marked expansion of their lifeworlds, but many seem to find themselves in increasingly precarious economic positions and ever more marginalised politically.

Thus the themes of the paper itself are developed out of a number of concerns, contradictions and issues which arose out of the research I carried out within this community in 2000 and 2001. In discussing the remaking of everyday lives, the increasing feeling of dislocation, insecurity and immobility recurred again and again. These connections between social and spatial mobility and (in)security and opportunity echoed strongly with the very rich Polish academic work on Nowa Huta on post-war Poland from the 1960s and ’70s (Goban-Klas 1971; Nowakowski 1967; Siemieńska 1969; Stojak 1967) I was reading at the time of the interviews. Some interesting and important historical contrasts and contradictions became clear. Nowa Huta has shifted from being (constructed as) a site of security and opportunity in a chaotic and fragmented, turbulent Poland to being a site of insecurity, immobility and lack of opportunity in another turbulent Poland. This paper explores this shift and uses it to

discuss the transformation of mobility and everyday geographies of socialism and post-socialism more generally.

The interviews on which this paper is based were undertaken during the summer of 2001, in the middle of a two year project. In this phase of the research, I carried out thirty two interviews with residents of Nowa Huta, accompanied by one of two research assistants who lived in Nowa Huta. Interviewees were recruited through a number of means: through a network of acquaintances, in their workplace, on the street; they ranged in age from 18 to 87 and worked (or had worked) in a range of workplaces. A significant number were already retired and, intentionally, a particularly high number of interviewees were current or former employees of the steelworks; my interviewees most often defined themselves as working class, frequently inflecting this position with a sense of rurality. Interviews were all carried out in Polish. Meetings lasted between 30 minutes and three hours; most were approximately ninety minutes long. Interviews were transcribed in Polish in full and the names of all interviewees were changed (identified here when first quoted). These interviews were supported by a number of meetings with related organisations such as city and district councils, trade unions, labour offices, social services, regional development organisations and community groups and by work with secondary material, both historical and current.

The ideas developed here form one part of a wider and ongoing research project which is focused on the changing relationship between work and community in Nowa Huta (Stenning 2000, 2003, 2004, forthcoming 2005b). The focus on questions of mobility was not an intentional part of the initial research proposal yet in exploring the work/community relationship, such issues were frequently raised. The connections my interviewees drew between different spheres of their lives created difficulties in classifying responses in any

kind of discrete categories. To work through the transcripts, I marked out a number of key themes and flagged with all sorts of notations, underlining, arrows and question marks. In pulling the transcripts apart in this way, I more often than not ended up with the same excerpt in four or five different thematic files and felt I was disconnecting spheres that my interviewees insisted on connecting. These connectivities between and within different spheres, between production, consumption and reproduction through mundane fields such as transport, housing and retail, exemplify the need to study post-socialism in an integrative and synthesising manner.

In the context of the current paper, whilst not employing mobility as a metaphor for consumption (Crang 2002), many of my interviewees did directly connect their experiences of everyday leisure and consumption with their wider geographies of mobility. A couple of Zofia's statements, quoted in context later, are indicative of this:

“Then you really could travel, to the West and to Yugoslavia, to Germany. And you could study and everything was in the shops.”

“I don't like the world where some go to Majorca and others are dying on a state farm and don't have anything to feed their children.”

The difficulties in pulling apart themes for analysis is reflected in the structure of the following sections. A set of spheres is taken in succession but themes flow between them. I begin by considering the spaces of shopping and socialising, and then connect this to (un)ease of getting around the city. Less quotidian travel is the next focus as I explore travelling for vacations and for work. The fourth theme pulls together ideas which run through these first three, reflecting on the contrary experiences of Nowa Huta as a place both of attachment and flight.

Throughout the paper, the emphasis is on exploring the lived experiences of Poland's ongoing transformations, building on other ethnographies of post-socialism (Hann 2002, Burawoy and Verdery 1999b) and focussing as much on subjective accounts of change as more 'objective' illustrations. My interviewees' own accounts and interpretations of the changing geography of their lives are supported by material and 'facts' derived from other sources – governmental, media and academic – where relevant and available to compare and contrast the experiences of socialism and post-socialism in Nowa Huta with the rhetorics and realities of these times. In contrasting interviewees' interpretations of life under socialism and post-socialism, this paper touches on the growing debates over the complex forms of nostalgia for socialism (Bach 2002; Boym 2001; Modrzejewski and Sznajderman 2002). As Davis (1979) notes, the nature of recollections of, and nostalgia for, the past tells us much more about contemporary lives and anxieties than about the remembered past itself.<sup>1</sup>

### **Post-War Poland and the Settlement of Nowa Huta**

Post-war Poland, like much of the rest of the region, was a turbulent place. Wartime destruction, shifting borders, mass internal and international migration and the construction of socialism came together to create a country with very high levels of social and spatial mobility (North 1958; Pounds 1960; Nowakowski 1967). The commitment to urbanization and industrialization within a Soviet-inspired system was radically transforming the social and economic geography of the country. The largest single project within Poland's first Soviet-style plan was the construction of Nowa Huta (meaning 'new steelworks') – a town and steelworks adjacent to Kraków, designed to focus the attention of the nation on building a new Poland and to answer the social and economic problems of the region and country (Goban-Klas 1971; Stenning 2000). Propaganda called young people to Nowa Huta to find

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Tim Strangleman for repeated discussions of the meanings of nostalgia.

work, a home, a life. Notwithstanding the terrible early years when the promises of stability seemed unlikely (see Lebow 2001; *Emeryt* 1996; *Stara* 1996) by the 1960s stories of stability, opportunity and security were dominant. In Polish sociologies of the time, Stojak (1967), Siemieńska (1969) and Goban-Klas (1971) focused on the importance in the development of Nowa Huta of improving social-occupational and material positions and of securing future stability. Migrants to Nowa Huta explicitly identified it as a site of stability and opportunity, rejecting the day-to-day uncertainty which had characterised their immediate post-war lives in favour of planning for tomorrow, building rooted social networks and forging a deep local patriotism.<sup>2</sup>

The temporal focus of this paper lies in contrasting Nowa Huta's early years with its post-socialist experiences, yet it is important at least to note the transformations which took place in the intervening period. The 1970s were (and are remembered as) a period of growing prosperity, opportunity and security. The worst excesses of Stalinism had faded and post-1953 challenges to the regime had resulted in higher levels of investment in consumer goods production and housing. These, coupled with high growth rates in industry, caused much of the decade to be seen as the 'golden age' of Polish socialism. In survey research, Poles repeatedly look back to this decade with positive assessments (Pańkowski 1997). In contrast,

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<sup>2</sup> Clearly the ideological context of the times call these studies into question. Nowa Huta provided a test case for the construction of 'new socialist man' [sic] and Poland's post-war sociologists were predictably under pressure to verify the regime's claims. Some post-1989 studies (Janus 1999) ridicule the optimism of these studies, yet other triangulations allow for greater acceptance of the earlier work. Praweńska-Skrzypek (1990), whilst critical of the post-war regime in other contexts, echoes Siemieńska's recognition of tight networks and local patriotism in communities populated by migrants, founded, she argues, often on common experiences of settling down and achieving social advance. Moreover, western writers, researching outside the ideological framework of Polish socialism also highlight the advances offered to and made by Nowa Huta's early residents (Fisher 1962). In addition, older Nowa Huta residents, in recent reportage (Sadecki 1994, 1998; *Emeryt* 1996; *Stara* 1996) and in interview confirmed, albeit partially, these experiences of security, stability and advance.

the 1980s were a period of turmoil, uncertainty and insecurity. Political upheavals and the failure of the Polish economy led to shortage, job loss (often for political reasons) and an almost complete absence of the ability to plan (at both the national and individual scales). This turmoil of the 1980s was the beginning of the end of socialism and led directly to its collapse in 1989, altering the parameters of social, economic and political life and heralding yet another period of rapid, wide-ranging and deep transformation.

### **Mobility, access and the everyday geographies of (post-)socialism**

#### *Leisure and Consumption*

Nowa Huta's early years were characterised by a relatively small everyday geography. Soviet town planning and social policy ideals were imported to establish microdistricts which would serve many of the residents' daily needs – schools, medical facilities, playgrounds and food shops – within a small area (Osborn 1970; Strumilin 1961). The connection of social policy to industrial policy and thus to strategic priorities meant that the moves towards comprehensive 'cradle to grave' provisions were uneven; not everyone had equal access to the tenets of security and stability nor to the same opportunities for recreation (Ferge 1996; Domański 1997). Even in Nowa Huta, the promises of social and cultural provision remained unfulfilled for some time (Kapuściński 1955 [1971]; Ważyk 1955; Jarosz 1997), developed only after the political upheavals following Stalin's death. A wave of investment of the late 1950s and early 1960s (Jarosz 1996) resulted in a range of sports stadia, cinemas, cultural centres, clubs and associations, shops and health centres to rival most large cities (including Kraków) (Dziekan and Niwiński 1970). The social and cultural facilities offered by the steelworks, the Party and its youth organisations provided workers and their families with opportunities to socialise and be entertained within the community (Siemeńska 1969).

Józef (a steelworks maintenance worker in his early 50s) explained how he often “used to meet friends, colleagues after work in a pub or a restaurant”. Edward (a retired steelworker in his late 80s), echoing other interviewees reminiscing about their youth, described how

“once around eleven o’clock Huta was teeming with life, people on the streets returning from the cinemas, from restaurants, from clubs of some sort”

As domestic and working lives developed in Nowa Huta, use of community facilities and venues was facilitated by relatively low levels of female employment, as labour at the steelworks paid a family wage, large enough to support a wife and children, reinforcing the paternalism of socialist employment (Domański 1997). Dorota (a retired bookkeeper in her 80s) reflected on family leisure in the 1950s and ’60s, contrasting it with the situation today:

“I went with the children everywhere at first, when the children were small we went to the lake without a break. When Saturdays and Sundays came, then we’d play there the whole day. And later with the grandchildren, I’d go to the pool in Kolorowe [a Nowa Huta neighbourhood]. Everything was free, and now there’s nothing.”

In recent years, the lake, pools, restaurants and cinemas of Nowa Huta have been eclipsed by a plethora of sophisticated new facilities on the district’s north-western edge. In Kraków as a whole, the post-socialist years have been marked an explosion of bars, restaurants, cafes, shops and other commercial activities, reflecting the marketisation of economic activity and contrasting conspicuously with the trials of privatisation and closure in parts of the ‘old economy’ (Hardy and Rainnie 1996). In Nowa Huta, the restructuring of the steelworks, its withdrawal from wider spheres of the local economy and the growing commercialisation and closure of facilities (Radłowska 2002) have been coupled with the proliferation of opportunity in Kraków to reshape the relationship between Nowa Huta and Kraków and to expand the everyday geographies of leisure and consumption. Whilst Nowa Huta in the 1950s and ’60s was seen as a town of youth, offering opportunity for both work and leisure, today Kraków is the attraction. Beata (an 18 year old student) is typical in bemoaning the situation in Nowa Huta:

**“So do you more often go to Kraków rather than to Plac Centralny [the centre of Nowa Huta]?”**

Really, yes, because there there are more opportunities for young people, more of those places, where you can hang out. You know, because here in Huta, what is there? ... here there just aren't any great places which might interest and attract young people”

The last trams from Kraków, especially on Friday and Saturday nights, packed with young people returning “just to sleep” (interview with social worker) symbolise the desertion of Nowa Huta, contrasting so clearly for Edward with the teeming streets of earlier years:

“now, now it's just a complete desert ... Now generally at eleven o'clock its silent on the streets, if you see one person then that's a rare sight.”

At first glance, the boundaries of young people's social lives seem to be much wider than their parents and grandparents; visiting Kraków is an everyday experience. Yet, even for this group, this is not the full picture. Most still felt that their closest friends – the so-called *paczka osiedlowa*, or neighbourhood gang – lived in the closest blocks and neighbourhoods.

Ania (a nurse in her early 20s) described how most of her friends live:

“in Huta, the majority lives in Huta, because like I said to a large extent, they're friends from primary and middle school.

**Right here in this neighbourhood?**

Not only, in this neighbourhood there's maybe five people who I meet up with often, but, from secondary school, then they're spread across the whole of Nowa Huta.”

Though the pubs in Kraków were a draw, much of their social lives was still centred in Nowa Huta. As Paweł (a tour guide in his late 20s) explained,

“If you're talking about Kraków then it's more often a trip to a pub, but if you're talking about just hanging out, then it's more likely to be Nowa Huta.”

This was much more similar to the accounts of older people, many of whom also had a close network of old school friends at the centre of their social lives, often, of course, supplemented by friends from work and neighbours. Whilst some older people visited Kraków more

frequently, to go to museums, meet friends and simply take in the atmosphere, for others, the apparent proliferation of opportunity was little more than an irrelevance. Elżbieta and Danuta (two steelworks maintenance workers in their mid 40s) talked about how they'd love to "pop into Kraków, even sit somewhere in the square underneath the umbrellas" but, put off by the cost of travel (4.4PLN, approximately €1) let alone the price of a beer, stayed instead in the bars around their apartments. For Józef, even the bars and restaurants in Nowa Huta he had enjoyed previously were slipping away; now he "very rarely ever goes out". For many, for myriad reasons of cost, time and the closure of facilities, more and more time is spent at home, with family watching the TV rather than out in the public spaces of consumption, new or old (Ashwin 1999; Domański *et al* 2000).

Not surprisingly social lives and entertainment are shaped by generation; in other spheres, however, the 'smallness' of everyday lives crosses generational boundaries. For a variety of reasons, both young and old tend to stick close to home when it comes to shopping.

Indicative of a number of interviewees, Edward and Beata represent opposite ends of the age spectrum but express similar views:

"Round us you'll see it's very good, downstairs we have a shop, which on account of age and mobility difficulties is a very convenient shop, in the next block we have another little shop, there just where you go out onto the street we have a kiosk with vegetables, everything's within 100 metres..."

"Well, kind of in the closest surroundings, here we've got around us a lot of such big supermarkets like Biedronka and Plus, in which you can buy different products for reasonably accessible prices ... Beyond that there's large stalls like markets or in the square by the [Church of the] Ark, where you can always get hold of fresh vegetables at prices lower than in normal shops. Yeah, and clothes usually also somewhere here in the neighbourhood shops"

Despite the hypermarkets and supermarkets on their doorstep, Nowa Huta's residents seem to continue to shop locally. The network of local shops established under socialism has

withstood the competition of foreign-owned firms and the loss of preferential supply networks through ministerial channels, and developed to be complemented by the emergence of open air markets, offering goods at well below hypermarket prices (Sik and Wallace 1999).

Yet, as Marta, a school secretary in her 40, suggests price is not the only consideration:

“I’m sorry but I don’t like big shops. They’re a nightmare for me ... I don’t like those crowds and hordes ... so I go to shops here in the neighbourhood, in which I know where the butter is, where the milk is...”

For Marta, the familiarity of local shops is important; as Lena (an airline employee in her late 20s) confirms, “kind of, even in shops, people chat to each other, so there’s this small-town climate”.

### *Everyday Mobility and Security*

The theoretical provision and satisfaction, under socialism, of daily needs locally and the tight connection between workplace and community rested on public transport which reflected these local movements. Heavily-subsidised public transport was coupled with underdeveloped road infrastructures which shaped (and restricted) patterns of everyday mobility (Ferge 1997); “mass transportation was both an ideological symbol and the everyday reality of communism” (Hanasz 1999, 3). In Nowa Huta, bus and tram networks were dense and accessible; though to a considerable extent they mirrored the residential geography of steelworkers, connecting neighbourhoods to the plant, they also enabled cheap and easy travel around Nowa Huta and, when necessary, to Kraków. With the incursion of the market through threats of privatisation and rationalisation, cheap and easy travel is becoming less of a reality. Though many in Nowa Huta still enjoyed a comprehensive system, others, such as Edward, were beginning to recognise a deterioration:

“Although I’d have to say honestly that communication between Krakow and Nowa Huta is perfectly good, at this time good, going back 20 years and comparing with those times, in those times it was wonderful ... Now at eleven o’clock the trams run to the garage, after eleven you don’t have a single connection with Huta [from

Kraków], you have to wait for a night bus, that journey is only possible with the help of a taxi...”

Whilst the number of bus and tram routes in Kraków has remained stable through the 1990s, there has been a 30 per cent decline in the length of routes and a 40 per cent fall in the annual number of passengers (Urząd Miasta Krakowa 1997, 2002). Both positive and negative interpretations of this latter figure are possible; some may argue that such a decline indicates a positive shift to car ownership, reflecting growing affluence, others may bemoan the social and environmental costs of this growth in private transport.

In contrast to the ideological link between communism and public transport, car ownership was seen as rebellious and a challenge to the system (Hanasz 1999). In the post-socialist era, cars are promoted as “engines of liberty”, representative of an automobility equated with autonomy (ibid, 15). Car ownership (together with home ownership)<sup>3</sup> is seen to embody dreams of the west and the market, and there has indeed been a sharp increase in recent years. In Nowa Huta, the desire for car ownership coincided with restructuring at the steelworks and the availability of generous redundancy packages. Myths (and realities) of former steelworkers spending all their money on cars abound – as a social worker based in Nowa Huta explained “these people practically became millionaires in a day, and then they bought a new car, so that their neighbours would see”; yet, cars were not just status symbols but also seen as a means to an alternative income. The decline of public transport and continuing low levels of private car ownership have fed a taxi boom (Urząd Miasta Krakowa 2002), and, as elsewhere, redundant industrial workers were at the forefront of this expansion. The flooding of the taxi market highlights the flipside of this myth of car ownership; taxi-driving former

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<sup>3</sup> The contradictory representations of mobility in car and home ownership are fascinating and deserve to be explored further.

steelworkers often find themselves with a car, but little or no work, no money and reliant on social assistance. The dreams of autonomy and automobility remain distant.

For others, movement around the city still depends on public means, increasingly vulnerable to the threat of crime. Nowa Huta is repeatedly characterised in the local media as the neighbourhood with the highest crime levels yet city crime statistics do not support such a characterisation (Guzik 2000). Wider tendencies to characterise and stigmatise working class communities in this way are coupled in this case with historical antagonisms between Kraków and Nowa Huta. In contrast to the known and populated streets of a time when “in Huta it really was safer, you could wander about” and the high levels of mobility of his youth, Edward identified a feeling of entrapment today:

“Because once for me, I could cross the whole world upside down, and nothing threatened me, but now, I’m afraid to go out onto the street...”

For Dorota, also retired, the promises of freedom after the collapse of communism have been far from positive. Echoing Edward, she claims:

“Previously it was safer, I could go out at night, even at 2. And you know, no one would accost you. And now it’s not possible, because everybody’s afraid, everyone’s afraid...”

**And why do you think this is?**

Maybe it’s this freedom. It’s not good to have too much freedom, this freedom. Maybe that freedom’s lost us, but what else I don’t know. As they say, under the communists there was more discipline. There were more militia, those district militia. Who walked about constantly looking after the neighbourhood. And now I don’t even know...”

For Edward and Dorota, the presence of state control, which limited (or threatened to limit) everyday freedoms, was balanced by the security and opportunity it offered. Stifling and restrictive though it may have been, such a state presence did also limit the worst excesses of individual behaviour. For others, though, the everyday restriction of mobility was more keenly felt as access to any number of ‘public’ spaces was controlled by the state and its security forces. In late socialist Poland, the power and presence of the police and militia was

extensive (though in fact few of my interviewees raised it). The contradictory experiences of freedom in Nowa Huta testify to a complex sense of personal and spatial security. Whilst for older generations, the sense of fear and subsequent entrapment felt today contrasts markedly with the ease of travel and mobility of their younger lives, for others, the promises of personal mobility, stoked by the fervour of 1989, have been dashed by the decline of public transport and the faltering dreams of car ownership.

### *Travel and Tourism*

As well as shaping the geographies of local transport, the steelworks and its allied workplaces also structured the contours of less quotidian travel. In addition to establishing and subsidising a range of facilities in Nowa Huta, the steelworks also created opportunities for excursions beyond; as Michał (a former steelworker in his mid 50s) explained “after every shift in the afternoon coaches left in every direction ... it was all easily accessible, everyone who wanted to use these forms of relaxation could”. Piotr (a steelworks electrician in his late 30s) expanded on this, indicating the erosion of such opportunities in recent years:

“There were outings ... which the steelworks organised. There were more 2, 3, 4-day excursions, people were more integrated. People went on, you know, picnics ... Today there are outings, of course, but they’re just for a day, or they’re cash things. Then it was free...”

Beyond short and local excursions, company resorts and subsidised travel meant “everyone could take themselves on holiday. You didn’t have to pay much. Every child could go to camp” (Dorota). For children, the summer camp was a means of getting out of Nowa Huta, whilst also reinforcing friendship networks at home; children went on holiday with the offspring of their parents’ workmates and neighbours. In contrast to earlier years when the steelworks-sponsored camps emptied the town’s streets of children, Piotr depicts a loss of direction:

“and now look, when we have this affluence, look at the neighbourhood, these children are bored, wandering about, because their parents can’t send them on camps...”

For adults too, whilst holidays and foreign travel are no longer structured by the state and its agencies, recent experiences have been mixed. For Zofia (a graphic artist in her late 50s), 1989 marked a clear turning point:

“I haven’t been on a vacation outside Kraków for 12 years. But in the PRL<sup>4</sup> I went on holiday with the children to get some fresh air three times a year ... because then workplaces organised holidays, that’s how the system was, that people were given the means and the opportunity for relaxation and even the payment you could divide up into instalments... and now the last time I went on holiday was 1989 and that’s it ... I sit on my backside in Kraków and I’m grateful that I’m living ... I don’t know if those were better times, but every average person, the inhabitants of these housing blocks, people like us, could go on holiday ... then you really could travel, to the West and to Yugoslavia, to Germany”

Zofia’s recent experiences seem to echo wider Polish patterns which indicate a distinct polarisation of opportunity (Wciórka 2003). Survey research in 2003 found that the overwhelming majority of Poles (68%) had no holiday, and of those who did, 71% holidayed within Poland (ibid.). Approximately half of those who did go on holiday stayed with friends and family rather than in commercial accommodation. For those who did not holiday, lack of money was the overriding reason (71% of respondents). Straightforward financial reasons were not, however, the only explanation. As well as old age and ill-health, many noted that work commitments and pressures to continue to earn reduced opportunities for travel. Growing competition in labour markets was driving a longer hours culture, as people worked longer both to maintain an adequate income and to fight the threat of redundancy. Both result in a foregoing on holiday time as Michał explains:

“everyone’s afraid, that if they go away for 2 or 3 weeks, then maybe already someone more capable will come along, and throw you out into the labour market, right? That might happen, right? Yes, I think that even those people who plan some free time, then it’s near home, so that they can have contact with work all the time, in case something needs to be done.”

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<sup>4</sup> *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, the People’s Republic of Poland.

Holiday patterns, not surprisingly, are structured by social position. Poorer, older and rural Poles are least likely to holiday whilst around three-quarters of young people, especially students, took holidays in 2003 (and were much more likely to travel overseas) (Wciórka 2003). Thus the proliferation of potential opportunities has indeed been important for some. For Bartek (a former steelworker and trainee optical technician in his late 20s) this was a source of excitement and pride, as he explains:

“the situation which has emerged requires maybe wider perspectives, for example horizons have widened, on account of the situation, you know, in Poland, so I’ve been around Europe a bit, with friends, that’s a great thing, can I tell you where I’ve been? I like doing that ... but these are opportunities, which didn’t, you know, exist before”

Yet, having taken these opportunities in the early 1990s, Bartek now wasn’t so sure he’d be able to afford the time or money again. These deliberations highlighted a quandary: whilst people no longer have to holiday in set destinations, the workplace pension in mountains or subsidised apartments on the Black Sea, this also means that there are no longer any guarantees for travel. The polarisation of opportunity sees some travelling internationally while others become socially and spatially trapped. Thus, Zofia complains:

“I don’t like the world where some go to Majorca and others are dying on a state farm and don’t have anything to feed their children.”

For some in Nowa Huta, international travel wasn’t just a feature of leisure. The town’s privileged position within Poland’s economy meant better than average opportunities to work overseas. Contract work in friendly states, within and beyond the eastern bloc, allowed some, mostly skilled, workers to spend considerable periods of time working outside Poland. Before setting up his own business after 1989, Tomasz worked for a fire safety contractor which took him abroad “to Russia three times, to Vienna in Austria. In total I spent about 5 or 6 years abroad in different places”; for Tomasz, “that was normal in this country.” In general,

these periods of employment overseas were used to support lives at home through extra earning and in none of the instances recounted to me had people decided to emigrate permanently.<sup>5</sup> Whilst many interviewees had friends and family living overseas, these had moved in earlier periods – Poland has a significant diaspora populated through waves of emigration at key stages in its history (Zubrzycki 1988).

Whilst travel to the west was relatively rare, travel within the Soviet bloc was not uncommon and produced an interconnected geography between many east central European countries (Wessely 2002). Neighbouring countries (predominantly former ‘fraternal’ states but also Germany) continue to account for the vast majority of overseas travel (Strzeszewski 2001). In Nowa Huta, these fraternal connections were historically reinforced by an inflow of foreign dignitaries, invited to visit the flagship project of Polish socialism (Bieroń 1957). Though few Nowa Huta residents would have participated in such visits, beyond requests for schoolchildren to line the streets for occasional motorcades, the town was nevertheless a more international site than many in Poland and the region.

### *Attachment and Escape*

In many ways, lives in socialist Nowa Huta were more mobile than is often assumed; travel at many scales of time and space was facilitated, managed and subsidised by the state, often through the workplace. However, perhaps the clearest marker of the town’s experiences of mobility is its foundation through in-migration (Kwiecień 1962; Matejko 1956). Migrants came not only from small towns and villages across the region and country, but also from

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<sup>5</sup> Clearly I was not interviewing emigrants. These comments relate to interviewees’ discussions of their friends and family. The issue of migration, remittance and the consequent reshaping of home communities is becoming increasingly important in the post-socialist era and is, rightly, attracting considerable attention (see, for example, León-Ledesma and Piracha 2001; Williams and Baláž 2004)

overseas. As a result, much of the town's population expressed an attachment to more than one community, nurturing both memories of and important social and economic connections to their family home. For those whose families came from villages in the region, these connections continue to shape their everyday lives. Marta, whose "sentiment returns to the countryside", spends as much time as she can at 'home', returning every summer. Both Rafal (an engineer at the steelworks in his 30s) and Józef have small cottages not far from Kraków where they spend every weekend, returning to Nowa Huta just for work. Many more have maintained these rural connections through the generations and live their lives within and between these two places (Jarosz 1997).

Yet notwithstanding these persistent links outward, Nowa Huta's migrant population built networks within the community too. The restrictions placed on mobility by the state were reinforced by the integration of so many spheres of life around the workplace which meant that moving was a complicated process. Long waiting lists for accommodation also slowed the mobility process. The structuring of social lives in this way shaped a tendency to stability and meant that mobility was often unnecessary and difficult (Ferge 1996). The immobility was coupled with the migrants' more recent peasant past to create a 'small-town climate', the intimacy of social relations within families, blocks and neighbourhoods more reminiscent of rural Poland than cosmopolitan Kraków.

Low levels of housing mobility and the association of housing tenure with the workplace have meant that networks of acquaintance and friendship tend to be long-standing and stable. Often neighbours all moved into their flats in the same week, and there has been little turnover since. Numerous interviewees recounted how they had lived in the same flat with

largely the same neighbours for 30, 40, even 50 years. As a result as Bartek suggests, its commonplace that neighbours know each other:

“Yes, yes, just as the block was constructed, we moved in straight away and so by the force of events I know a lot of people round here...”

These relationships are a major part of everyday routines and not just rooted in lengthy acquaintance; younger people are also drawn in. Edward (in his 80s) explains how:

“I’ve been here in this apartment thirty years already ... and yes, I know all the neighbours ... in truth, not with everyone, but with these neighbours here we have good neighbourly connections, often they visit and we often chat with them, someone sorts something out for another, does something, helps with something, advises...”

whilst Ania (in her early 20s) notes that “if someone on the staircase is ill, then the whole staircase knows about it and comes to visit”. Such networks of acquaintance and support can be seen as a relatively undocumented part of the complex social and economic relationships which are increasingly recognised as important for managing lives under socialism and post-socialism (see, in different ways, Grabher and Stark 1997; Smith and Stenning 2004).

The flipside, of course, of such dense networks is a feeling of entrapment. The growing perception of crime in Nowa Huta is coupled for some with a broader characterisation of the town as a place without a future – in stark contrast to its representation in the 1950s and ’60s. In contrast to the period when Nowa Huta experienced the positive side of internal migration, recent years have come to be characterised, if not by realities, then at least by myths of out-migration. Although population figures have in fact remained quite stable, a number of interviewees noted that people, both young and old, were seeking to leave Nowa Huta. In such accounts, Nowa Huta’s youth hope to flee the town for the same reasons their grandparents came – to escape boredom and unemployment, to seek opportunities and excitement (Niward 1997), whilst those grandparents are increasingly returning to their home villages after a lifetime of living and working in Nowa Huta. Some young people were

hoping to make the most of opportunities offered by imminent accession to the European Union, travelling legally or illegally to western Europe for work and study. Others however pointed to new in-flows, often of students seeking cheap accommodation, with the potential to revive the community; in some cases, young people are moving into the older neighbourhoods, taking on the flats of their grandparents as they leave or die, and dramatically altering the blocks' demography.

Another notable in-flow is of poorer families being allocated flats in Nowa Huta by the municipality and by social services (interview with social worker). Because of Nowa Huta's poor external perception, some of its housing stock is difficult to let or sell and, in a strong echo of western public housing policy, cheap, unattractive flats are being allocated to poor families. Alongside this in-flow, we can identify another pattern of enforced mobility as the rate of evictions for non-payment of rent grows and poor families, often from minority communities such as the Roma, are re-housed in smaller, cheaper, worse apartments (interview with social worker; see also Sobotka 2001). At this end of the spectrum, Nowa Huta's historic connection between mobility, stability and security must seem distant and alien.

### **Changing Geographies of the Everyday: The Shape of Post-Socialism**

Many of these patterns and processes echo quite distinctly the accounts of Bauman and others who write of the fragmentation of social life and dislocation (both spatial and experiential) as markers of globalisation. Bauman notes that "most of us are on the move even if physically we stay put" (1998b, 77), experiencing a sense of displacement as the world around us changes so dramatically and so fast. The threat to structuring institutions such as work, the family and community leaves many in search of a new place in the world. Meanwhile, the

freedom to move (and to act) is concentrated with the relatively powerful and wealthy; mobility is polarised between tourists and vagabonds, choosing and forced to move respectively, while others find themselves trapped, “bound to bear passively whatever change may be visited in the locality they are tied to” (Bauman 1998a, 88). At the same, however, the local represents a choice and opportunity, a space where the incursion of the market is not complete, where being known offers security and a ‘safe harbour’ (Bauman 1998a) and where other social and economic forms might continue to exist. On this level it would be possible to see ways in which these theories travel from west to east. There are important commonalities, rooted in common processes of economic restructuring and social change; the ‘pillars’ of post-socialist transformation – the liberalisation and marketisation of economies – are, after all, themes of neoliberal restructurings elsewhere. Yet, I would argue that the similarity of these processes conceals important differences in their construction and experience. In the accounts presented above, the contemporary experiences of post-socialism are shaped as much by earlier structures and practices as they are by the more recent processes of marketisation which they partially share with other parts of the world (and other ‘posts’). In some senses, this is a very simple argument – history and geography matter – but one which is overlooked in accounts which reduce post-socialism to transition and which identify post-socialism as a descriptive category, the differences of which are empirical not conceptual.

One of the specificities of post-socialism lies in the particular shaping of contemporary experiences by the structures and practices of socialism and its construction. Thus, for example, for Zofia being stuck at home with no chance to travel is experienced not simply as a result of the commercialisation of tourism post-1989 but also through comparison with subsidised, accessible and frequent travel during the socialist period. For Dorota and Edward,

the dislocation and insecurity of getting round Nowa Huta today is a product not just of the rationalisation of public transport and rising (perceptions of) crime, but also of the mobility and security that were part of their socialist-era lives in Nowa Huta. For Józef, the pressure and desire to spend more and more time at home is experienced not only through the loss and prohibitive cost of neighbourhood leisure facilities, but also through the stark contrast with the active networks of sociability at work and beyond which were central to his earlier life. Pre-socialist practices are also important in shaping post-socialism - for Marta, the anonymity of today's hypermarkets is experienced not only through their newness and the familiarity of the network of neighbourhood shops, but also through the rural social relations which continue to shape a significant part of her life.

Whilst in the west the modernity of Fordism was associated with an important role for the state and paid work in shaping everyday lives and opportunities, under socialism, especially in communities such as Nowa Huta, the centrality of these institutions and their role in integrating multiple spheres of people's lives was both explicit and extensive. Under socialism, and founded in part on the earlier rural traditions imported into new socialist spaces, production, consumption and reproduction were intertwined at the local scale through structures of employment, housing, the state, community, transport. Thus, travel around and between Kraków and Nowa Huta was shaped by the labour demands of the steelworks; social networks tightly reflected residential patterns which in turn mirrored the employment priorities of the steelworks and its allied institutions and patterns of leisure and consumption reflected the strategic importance of the steelworks to the state, its supply networks, priorities and fiscal situation. Post-socialism can not be understood without attempting to map the connections within and between these varied spheres of life. These connections and the

related networks of transformations which are reshaping the everyday lives of people and communities in the region can thus be seen as another characteristic of post-socialism.

The accounts which I have presented as indicative of a post-socialist condition not only highlight the importance of historical practices and institutions but also the particularities of ‘transformation’. To argue that post-socialism should not be reduced to ‘transition’ is not to deny its importance in understanding post-socialism. Whilst, as I have suggested, the ‘transition’ has much in common discursively with wider economic restructurings in both the west and south (Bradshaw and Stenning 2004), the particular promises and processes of ‘transition’ in the east have shaped the experiences of mobility and security in the region. For Bartek, for example, the prohibitive costs of travelling would not be so disappointing if they were not coupled with the post-1989 celebration of widened horizons and new perspectives. For the taxi-driving former steelworkers, the experience of immobility and indebtedness is deepened by the heady promises of mobility and autonomy before and after 1989. Far from a brave new world of mobility and opportunity offered during and after the revolutions of 1989, post-socialism is marked by a contradictory widening of horizons and the shrinking of lifeworlds. The promises of mobility falter on the realities of dislocation, immobility and insecurity.

Whilst arguing for the difference of post-socialism, it is important also to maintain a balance – post-socialism is not simply rooted in the historical development of socialism but also in contemporary events and processes, many of which it shares with other parts of the world. In many of the examples cited above notions and practices of ‘capitalism’ and Europe, for example, are critical to understandings of post-socialism. Thus, Marta’s post-socialist shopping experiences reflect past practices but also the incursion of western multinational

retail firms into Poland, and Edward's post-socialist bus experiences are shaped not only by the apparent beneficence of socialist-era subsidised travel, but by the pressure on municipal budgets from the accession agenda of the European Union. Post-socialism exists in combination with these other social forms and is, as I have already suggested, partial and hybrid. In some spaces, the socialist seems to be a stronger influence, in others practices of western capitalism seem to be more influential. In all, post-socialism is marked by a combination of multiple social forms, constructed at varied scales of time and space.

One oft-recognised marker of post-socialism is the scale of differentiation between experiences and practices under socialism and under post-socialism. The rapidity of post-1989 reforms has triggered a set of transformations which have been dramatic and profound. As 'shock therapy' implicitly intended, the reshaping of everyday lives has been quick and traumatic. Yet, my arguments for recognising (a) post-socialism rest not simply on a question of scale – after all, there are numerous communities in the west and south which experienced the overnight restructuring of workplaces and livelihoods. Whilst the scale (both temporal and spatial) of post-1989 reforms is a reason to study the region, it is not an adequate basis on which to claim the particularity of post-socialism. Instead, as I have argued above, post-socialism is marked out as different because of the particular experiences of socialism, its construction and destruction. There are clear and important resonances of wider processes of social, economic and political change, yet the particular ways in which these transformations are played out and, importantly, experienced are different. In short, post-socialism can not be reduced to neoliberal economic restructuring, nor just to the legacies of socialism (and pre-socialism), nor indeed to the passage of 'transition'. It is all of these. This paper has explored the combination of these processes in the context of patterns of mobility and security, identifying some of the practices and institutions which shape the everyday geographies of

Nowa Huta. Nowa Huta is a special case and the themes and processes outlined here can not necessarily be seen as representative of wider post-socialisms. Instead, their purpose is illustrative, aimed at developing the challenge of identifying, interrogating and theorising post-socialism as a conceptual rather than a descriptive category after the 'end of transition'. This will only be achieved with more studies which debate the contours and boundaries of post-socialism, exploring differences and commonalities within it whilst also interrogating its connections to other worlds. In these ways, not only can we achieve a deeper understanding of change in the post-socialist world, but we can also continue to think through the ways in which non-western experiences might offer alternatives to western knowledges, connecting to post-colonial studies which call into question received wisdoms and open new understandings.

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