

Educational Civil Experiment – a Story of a Particular Radical Housing Estate

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Abstract

In the 1920s, in the environment of emerging brutal capitalism, exclusion and ghetto benches, on the initiative of avant-garde architects from the Praesens group and Polish socialists built a housing estate in Żoliborz, the ambition of which was to teach people how to dwell. Soon it turned out that the founders of the housing cooperative were, as we would call them today, activists. This housing estate, initially designed for working class, thanks to the engagement of the intellectuals, who were familiar with the concept of “sociology in action”, benefited from a wide range of experimental forms of education, from the first co-educational secular school in Poland to the emancipated dimension of women’s activities, or Free Workers University. The youth of Żoliborz was raised in a secular spirit of pacifism.

The estate can be seen as a case study of “architecture in action”, and dwelling as a process rather than form. I wish to recall the experiment in Żoliborz in order to show how in a particular radical housing estate there were shaped the attitudes of an “enlightened citizen” (Alfred Schütz).

The performative perspective allowed to see “architecture in action”, and dwelling as a process rather than form. A dweller-citizen is presented as a subject applying revolutionary and liberating initiatives (social, political, economical, educational). A critical perspective, however, as being related to performative, allows to see an unusual power of rebellion and need for change, which results from the connection of mind and action, thanks to the concept of culture as praxis.

Keywords: *radical intelligentsia, socialism, secular education, architecture, performance*

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Introduction

There are numerous strategies for placing an individual in the context of social issues as an active entity, involved in reality. I would like to focus on two of them. The first is based on the creation of utopias in contrast to the concept of treatment of a subject

as an element of a production process. It basically means overcoming this state by organising a free society, free relations and communities, which enable an individual to realise their creative potential so it can express itself in a desired manner. However, I am not particularly certain, that the word “utopia” is appropriate in this context. It might be better to say, that it means designing a desired state of a relative happiness and avoiding injustice and social inequality.

The second strategy means understanding social reality as a theatre for battles, domination, violence and oppression. An individual is supposed to unmask, expose, denounce and radically criticise all institutional actions, which seem neutral and independent. Radical criticism should lead to emancipation, but quite often takes anarchist forms.

There are numerous strategies for putting an individual within the context of social issues as an active and engaged entity. I would like to focus on two of them. The first indicates creating of utopias opposing the treatment of subject as an element or a mode of production process. This mainly aims at prevailing of such state, while organizing a society of freedom, free associations and societies, which enable an individual to fulfil their creative potential in order to express themselves in a desired manner. John Dewey might be considered an advocate of such attitude. However, it is disputable whether the expression: “utopia” is accurate in this context. It might better to say, that it is mainly about projecting a desired state of relative happiness and avoiding social injustice and inequality.

The second strategy is based on comprehension of social reality as a theatre of struggle and domination, violence and oppression. An individual has to unmask, expose, denounce and radically criticize the activities of all supposedly neutral and independent institutions. Such radical criticism may lead to emancipation, but also often takes anarchistic forms. For Rorty, biographical strategy as presented by Michael Foucault is the reflection of such attitude. According to his interpretation, Foucault is “a knight of autonomy” (Rorty, 1991).

The first strategy results in the formation of a citizen actively involved in social structures, who is a Rorthianian liberal in order to have a chance to express their private irony (Rorty, 1993).

The result of the second strategy is the aforementioned “knight of autonomy”¹, “a revolutionary” who, by denouncing and criticising social institutions, aims at avoiding potential oppressions and social violence. In the end, the focus of the power of an institution is switched to the power of individuals towards their autonomy, to the

ethics in the meaning of caring for oneself (precisely in accordance with Foucault's postulate). An individual is then divided into a private one (submerged in its potential for self-transformation) and public (criticising institutions). The first strategy is not, however, a project of oversocialized concept of a human² or an attempt to create an exaggerated "prosocial attitude", but an attempt to realize individualism based on intersubjective exchange, moral integrity and, as a result, a participating democracy, which goes beyond the conventional division for private and public areas. Democracy as an area of individual creativity and moral community, requires methods of upbringing based on experiencing the sense of community, cooperation, coactivity cocreativity. Such upbringing, similar to Dewey's method, is based on simultaneous shaping of both body and mind, and creative self-realization is not limited to the solitary (private) expression of personality, but it allows for diverse life and critical thinking.

Alfred Schultz defined this attitude as "well-informed citizen". He said: "It is the duty and the privilege, therefore, of the well-informed citizen in a democratic society to make his private opinion prevail over the public opinion of the man on the street"³.

In order not to settle for theoretical considerations on radical education, but also to prove that the first strategy does not have to be merely utopian, it is worth paying attention to the case of Żoliborz, an interwar Warsaw Housing Cooperative established by leftwing activists, who were faithful to the ideas of building social estates for a rising Polish working class.

The cooperative is an empirical example of radical education pointing towards a demanded "socialized individualism" (Brukalska 1948, p. 29). I would like to answer the question, to what extent such project relates to Foucault's strategy of unmasking of the system by means of revolutionary activities, or Dewey's rules of democratic education. Dewey tried to solve the problem of a border between public and private, social and individual, in order to avoid being caught in excessive social involvement on expense of shaping one's individuality.

My tale begins in pre-war Żoliborz, which, like Rakowiec, is a district in Warsaw, the capital of Poland, which in early 1920's was still a vacant plot and thus made perfect conditions for acquiring the space for building the most necessary social flats.

Admittedly WHC was not really an innovative project.

In Europe, from the end of the nineteenth century there developed urbanistic projects based on the concept of urban planning as social activities shaping not only space but

also a dweller-citizen, not only an individual, but also the complicated system of social relations, ties between neighbours, dwelling customs, urban strategies of coexistence and co-shaping of reality. A modernist architect at the beginning of the twentieth century is an architect-activist, who initiates a process leading to intervention and social change⁴.

Modern urbanists at the beginning of twentieth century, especially in the interwar period, already had a clear vision of social coexistence and interpersonal relationships, which could be realized thanks to their urbanistic and architectural projects. The leaders in building social housing estates, the estates for working people, were Germans, Belgians, French and English. The most common situation was that the estates were erected as ready-made “products”, the space to be inhabited, modern, innovative, comfortable, but still unfamiliar places, or as patron estates, built by large industrial factories for their workers and inhabited by them as long as they remained employed in these factories. However, the result of widespread, urbanistically planned initiative of public not individual character were the social estates, in principle based on the concept of neighbourhood ties, where the primary unit of urban planning is the bond between neighbours (neighbourhood-unit is the concept by Clarence Perry (Perry 1929) and developed since 1923 until the theoretically shaped form of “neighbourhood unit formula” in 1939).

At the time when Perry was working on the theoretical basis of his “neighbourhood unit formula”, construction of the first social estate by the Warsaw Housing Cooperative created had already started. The first buildings appeared as the result of long-lasting efforts to obtain construction loans, after acquiring land for building the estate, and above all, owing to cooperative action, a thoroughly grassroots initiative of the group of left-wing activists, who saw social urbanism as a chance to correct social injustice, in contradiction to the indifference of the authorities in the political and economical system of the time. Today we can say, that WHC initiatives were the cultural, educational practices of radical urban subversion within the framework of the capitalist system of the time, and sociologists and architects became the catalysts of changes. Urban planning and architecture became a tool for pacifying social problems, a political tool essential for creating conditions for citizen attitudes.

In Poland, the phenomenon of WHC is usually treated as a radical example of ‘taking a citizen into possession’, as an example of almost absolute, oppressive power over him. Even if we agree with Marta Leśniakowska’s point of view, that WHC for its creators, for Stanisław Tołwiński in particular, was the political testing ground of leftist utopia of “new society”, that Tołwiński, Toeplitz and others in their concept of cooperativeness referred to anarcho-syndicalist tradition, then it seems to be

exaggeration to think, that they wanted to create a new human type: “an individual devoid of social egoism, driven by the idea of solidarity and loyal to democracy as the «ideal» system of power”⁵.

The activities of cultural institutions and the involvement of citizens in individual creative development clearly deny this concept.

This approach is obviously the result of Polish history. One should be aware, that some of the founders of WHC, such as Tołwiński or Bierut, after the war became devoted communists, actively participating in Sovietization of Poland.

I am fully aware, that from postmodernist perspective, WHC should be analyzed in accordance to the views of Bauman, Foucault and others, who taught us to distinguish the ambivalence, to expose oppression and domination. Thanks to them we are able to analyze social life, and distrust any project enforcing certain order. Undoubtedly WHC, due to its pioneering character, may be treated as ideological experiment, but, as we know today, not free from disguised modernist ambitions to create oppressive social order. I do not think, however, it should be the grounds for criticism, especially from the perspective of today’s humanities, which tries to deal with narcissistic culture of individualism. I do not think either, that we should treat it as a historic relic.

It is difficult for me not to express a cognitive enthusiasm towards this social and urban educational experiment. I believe that cities get new notions in the context of education. They become particularly needed, because they replace social space of nationalist state. More than citizens of state, we feel as urban individuals. Old models of citizenship do not work in these globalized times. We have to return to city as political idea, as presented by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Hardt, Negri, 2009). City as radical space, as a territory for activities of causative entities, as political idea, as commonwealth, as modern form of co-habitation, urban collectives, urban subversions and autarchy, today becomes a most frequent subject for analysis within modern engaged humanities, humanities in action.

While accepting the methodological starting point in performative and critical perspective, I tend to see WHC as a form of responsible civil project, combining “private irony” with “hope of liberals”, as Richard Rorty might say⁶. For me, he is not a representative of postmodernist philosophy, nor the exponent of fears of social order. He is rather a pragmatic philosopher, and being faithful to Dewey, he pays particular attention to enabling an individual to find fulfilment in democratic and public space of agreement.

It was in this climate of Żoliborz, where the “socialized individualism”, postulated by Brukalska, referred both to the development of private attitudes (in the form of shaping particular moral, personal and aesthetic sensitivity) and solidarity built on minor performances of mutual assistance, cooperation and being together. The experience of Żoliborz may be treated then as the experience of cooperation which outclasses the abilities of a subject acting as an individual. It is then perceived as craft, which demands development of many complex skills, using both intellectual and corporal potential as “social relations are experiences in the gut”⁷.

Under these circumstances the reality of Żoliborz may be interpreted as performance, along with its characteristic features: everyday rituals, which re-establish the sense of community and shared responsibility, but at the same time it does not create the atmosphere of a tight and oppressive community. The rituals of Żoliborz, on one hand, undermined existing class divisions, reduced social and economic discrepancies, which were characteristic for Polish society in the interwar period. On the other hand, they were normative. The citizens of Żoliborz used a particular system of norms, regulations, codes and informal rules to regulate life in the neighbourhood.

A performative perspective allows us to see the strategy of Żoliborz not only as an act of subversion, but mainly as a constructive cultural performance which, on one hand, destabilises and destroys common order (transgressive performance), but also as an act of normativeness. Among participants there can be both the informants of oppression and local authorities. Participation in an ongoing process of creation of common space resulted in efficacy, efficiency, effectiveness (McKenzie 2001).

A radical educational project in Żoliborz was possible thanks to the perception of an architect as an activist – a creator of actions rather than forms. Dwelling is a verb. A house is a process rather than object. Dwelling is an action, which allows political empowerment. A house makes a citizen, a tenant, a member of cooperative, a rightful person. It is also a social activity resulting in creating bonds, the sense of responsibility and citizenship.

“Activity metaphors” allow observation of the community of Żoliborz, which, by their behaviour, embody cultural norms, establishes and settles symbolic structures, and also transforms them and reproduces social relations.

This perspective then allows the conceptualization of means, which update the meaning and values, and are traced in behaviour and events. It turned from culture to participation, from artefact to creative process, from the system of norms to the forms of their realization, incarnation, updating, from text to context, from *langue* to *parole*.

Performance then should be treated as a tool of analysis. Therefore if we abandon the definitions of culture and turn towards participation, lifestyles, examining *modus operandi*, retrieving everyday life, it became possible to search for restored behaviour.

Such perspective makes it possible to see the founders of Żoliborz as urban activists rather than contemporary revolutionaries. If performance is associated with transgression, activities outside the alienating power (also outside dominating culture), and also with overthrowing the totalitarianism of the Establishment. The activists of Żoliborz applied the resisting performance, which undermined the logic of hegemony, but did not contradict norms, “rather infiltrated them through subtle critiques and/or parodies of representational media”⁸. A critical approach and theory in practice become necessary.

A performative and critical approach also makes it possible to go beyond the individual–society opposition. Such a perspective shows Żoliborz as a unique case of realising the idea of local community, in which every citizen may pursue their creative individuality and, at the same time, be socially engaged for the sake of others.

There is no doubt that this project was radical. The radicalism of this cooperative experiment meant, that the “taking into possession” of a citizen, both adult and a child, was total (Goffman 1961). A housing estate, or rather a cooperative, offered a flat not only as an object, but as action. Not only did they teach how to live, but also they organised schools, kindergartens, nurseries, foodcourts, shops, training for adults. A cooperative swimming-pool was an opportunity to teach the basic of hygiene and corporal discipline. It toughened the disciples by practising on them the latest achievements in pedagogy and medicine. At the same time, they did not separate body and soul. It created appropriate conditions for social subject in the public area, in order to give him or her a chance to realise “private irony”.

Avant-garde architecture, sociology and pedagogy

WHC was an interdisciplinary experiment created by authorities and avant-garde architects from the Praesens group: Helena and Szymon Syrkus, Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, all of whom sought inspiration in the outcomes of the La Sarraz conference of modernist architects in 1928. One of the points of the La Sarraz declaration claimed that

“elementary principles of housing could be successfully popularized by means of introduction to the teaching programmes in schools and childcare centres. It is important to explain the notions of purity, the influence of light, air, the Sun, the basics of hygiene, practical skills in the use of household equipment”(Syrkus 1976, p. 63).

The main idea was to teach people how to live.

“Social urbanism” was intended to give the opportunity for rational social coexistence, based on mutual help and solidarity. It was a kind of leftist protest resulting from ideological unity of the initiators of the cooperative, who also assumed that there will also be such unity among the citizens. However, in most cases it remained only a dream. Stanisław Ossowski, a brilliant Polish sociologist and a citizen of this estate, described this urban experiment as an attempt at the conscious creation of a certain social environment:

“the WHC estate in Żoliborz not only shaped territorial community, but also formed its own model of life in community. It was a birthplace of new cultural values. The group of citizens, who shared the same ideological bond, implied their style to the rest of the community. The issue of the estate was not local anymore” (Ossowski 1970c, p. 186).

It is also characteristic that the citizens of Żoliborz themselves, due to such reflections published in the estate newspaper, gained a uniting self-awareness and the sense of identity. The expression of such self-consciousness in the estate, the sense of identification and reflection on one’s own place was presented in the documentary about WHC by Wanda Jakubowska and Józef Cękalski, filmed in 1934. It was entitled: *We are building* (there are no remaining copies today) and Club for the Enthusiasts of Żoliborz established by the citizens of the estate.

Barbara Brukalska, one of the architects of Żoliborz, called this attitude “socialized individualism”. From the very beginning WHC was not meant as a kind of community, commune, or a kind of Fourier’s phalanx. The members of WHC were supposed to become full citizens. It was a civic experiment, which could last as long as it was not administered by the institutions of the authorities of the state⁹. Stanisław Ossowski is fully aware of the bankruptcy of social ideas in post-war communist Poland, when cooperatives were centralized and socialist attitude became a duty rather than the expression of social sensitivity. In 1947 he wrote, that

“the role of WHC today is less important, and therefore less attractive, because the Cooperative has lost its insular significance, in ideological sense: it does not challenge the surrounding reality as it used to be before war” (Ossowski, 1970c, p. 187).

As early as in 1945 Julian Hochfeld wrote, that

“Cooperative is not the organ of the state, but its essential supplement, which to great extent determines the democratic contents — until it replaces the state with self-

governing, universal and wide organization of consumers and makers. (...) Such cooperativeness cannot be bureaucratic. (...) We will not give up the idea of «glass houses»” (J. Hochfeld 1946, p. 260).

Brukalska’s “socialized individualism” was expressed in her unusual respect for an individual, but also as care for good relations between neighbours. It was also reflected in the sense of civic attitude and also in inspiring inner activities within the community, which are seen with sociological-like intuition as

“the influence of the community on its own members, which is expressed in the situation, that the members want to participate in the life of their community. Chaotic and unorganized influence of the community on its members is severe and it blurs the objective judgment and seems to push towards two extremes: life among people and solitary life – which does not need to exclude each other” (Brukalska 1948, p. 29).

While setting the hierarchy of priorities in the art of living with the others, in coexistence within one estate, she postulates:

“Ensuring conditions favouring comprehensive and free development of any individuality is the main purpose of social organization. The secondary purpose, however with decisive importance, is the regulation of individual rights for freedom and development among members of community” (Brukalska 1948, p. 70).

The benefits for an individual from coexistence within neighbourhood cannot substitute the benefits offered by solitude, creative development, independence of thought, a reflexive perspective on oneself and the world around.

Social rules for designing housing estates were published in 1948. While describing the ideas of social estates Brukalska used her sociological sensitivity. However, the basis for its functioning rested in a humanistic principle of the primacy of an individual over community. She named this attitude “socialized individualism”, and the role of the architect became close to that of sociologist, who also participates in social life. The architect, who teaches the dwellers the art of living should also teach himself how to deepen his social sensitivity. It is obvious then, that not only sociology, but also architecture in action was a challenge for the citizens of the estate. Today Barbara Brukalska’s words sound a bit grandiloquently, but if we realize the living conditions of working class at the time, we might easily understand the reason for such rupture. The authorities of People’s Republic of Poland also understood it and they decided to ban publishing and reprinting of *Social rules for designing housing estates*. Even today, the book is rarely quoted by historians of art or architects, and completely forgotten by sociologists. But it might be inspiring for organizers of

cultural activities. Ossowski's articles written in clandestine Architectural-Urbanist Workshop (PAU) today also seem forgotten.

The goals set by the Cooperative were not only connected with “building and lending cheap and healthy flats by means of mutual assistance within community”; or “the collective fulfilling of the cultural needs of the members”¹⁰. They meant more, the culture of new society, the enlightened citizen, empowerment, education, full participation in cultural life through social engagement and individual moral sensitivity.

WHC was the experiment created in a interdisciplinary manner by authorities and avant-garde architects from Praesens group: Helena and Szymon Syrkus, Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, for who sought inspiration in the outcomes of the summit in La Sarraz in 1928. It was a kind of leftist protest resulting from ideological unity of the initiators of the cooperative, who also assumed that there will also be such unity among the citizens, however, in most cases it remained only a dream.

Creators, recipients, members of cooperative

Almost all creators of WHC: Stanisław Tołwiński, Stanisław Szwalbe, Teodor Toeplitz, Adam Próchnik, Maria Orsetti, Antoni Zdanowski, Jan Strzelecki, Jan Hempel, Bolesław Bierut and others originated from leftwing circles linked to the People's University, the Free Polish University and The Union of Workers' Cooperatives. In their arguments they referred to West European projects (in Vienna, Paris, Frankfurt am Main, see: Syrkus 1976, pp. 97-104, 131-161). Their “leftism” was very broad but it had one distinct common feature, which was the concern about the life conditions of the poorest, concern about civic development of the society, and promotion of the idea of cooperativeness, which was supposed to support civic attitudes, called by Julian Hochfeld “everyday democracy”. The creators of the cooperative were not only its founders. The significant role was also assigned to the citizens, among them the couple of sociologists Maria and Stanisław Ossowski, Julian Hochfeld, and Nina Assorodobraj, whose involvement in “cooperative culture”, in the culture of the new type of society, might be referred to as “sociology in action”¹¹, and today we might even say: “performative sociology”.

For Julian Hochfeld, the WHC estate was a special type of sociological laboratory of cooperation and autonomy. Anticipating the approaching centralism of the state, he attempted to protect the idea of cooperativeness during the inaugurating meeting of People's Council of North Warsaw District in January 1946.

“Here, by the initiative and active participation of Polish Socialist Party, there was established and emanated the model centre of diligent workers’ self-government, built on appropriate foundations – this was the estate of Warsaw Housing Cooperative, with flourishing institutions, such as «Glass Houses», Workers’ Association of Friends of Children, «Cooperative Inn», Cooperative Building Company, Warsaw Bookshop Cooperative, First Cooperative Dry-Cleaner’s, Workers’ Sports Club «Marymont». Here, among everyday work on constructive issues, both socialists and communists were learning how to reach agreement. It was here, in the circle of cooperative autonomy, where «Żoliborz socialism» was founded, both of Polish Socialist Party origin and of single front. We managed to cooperate with no friction with both peasant activists and democrats. It was the laboratory of cooperative ideas of Polish Socialist Party” (Hochfeld 1946a, p.262).

Aleksander Ziemny remembers professor Maria Ossowska also as a unique citizen of Żoliborz, who inhabited one of the founder’s colony in 16 Krasynskiego Street. While remembering Ossowska, Ziemny writes about “the programme of the people of Żoliborz”, which had

“a dual dimension: general social and also very personal at the same time. They leaned towards the left wing, in the organizational aspect they united mainly with Polish Socialist Party (their radical faction in trade unions and cooperative). (...) Workers festivals were celebrated in a very natural, easy and, I should say, homelike manner. (...) The Żoliborzanin remains still wanting as a citizen; he does not evade the enterprises which he sees as noble and rational. (...) She wants to cater for herself, indeed, but within the community, not on its expense. And also without being a nuisance” (Ziemny 1970, p. 2 – 3).

The activities of the Ossowski’s in Żoliborz, from the moment they moved in until the occupation period, were so varied and wide that they would require a separate study. But it is worth mentioning, that in the interwar period it was Ossowski, not his wife, who was involved in the organization of the system of education within the Workers’ Association of Friends of Children and also the lectures. However, during the Nazi occupation, Maria Ossowska organized clandestine classes for secondary school pupils and students within the Secret Teachers’ Organization. The main beneficiaries were the members of the *Płomienie* (*Flames*) group. Among the members were Jan Strzelecki (who later became Alain Touraine’s partner in interventionist research upon ‘Solidarity’, a member of Workers’ Defence Committee in the 80’s), Krzysztof Baczyński, and Marcin Czerwiński. Ossowski’s flat in Krasynskiego Street was the place of Thursday meetings with Tadeusz Kotarbiński, it was also the place where matured Jan Strzelecki’s ideas of social humanism. During these seminars they read the works of Abramowski, Sorel, Marx, Mounier and Maritain. The dominating topic was the axiological, critical history of socialism, “which was the result – as Strzelecki

said – of general mistrust towards obscure and optimistic theories, among which all the forms of Marxism fitted well”¹².

How to dwell?

Today it does not impress anybody, and for some it might even be off-putting to dwell in a 30-metre flat with two rooms, so-called kitchen alcove, with no bath, but equipped with toilet and washbasin. We have to remember, that we are talking about 1920's. It is not difficult to imagine housing conditions of workers emigrating from the country to the city. Basement flat or sharing a room in a tenement house with the whole family. During the conference on housing issues in 1930, Teodor Toeplitz called the “housing issue” as “the issue of the way the working classes on low wages dwell”, and it has to be clear, that he referred to the way people dwelled in the cities. It is obvious then, that the smallest flat in Polish political and economic conditions was the question of the most necessary social flat. Whereas the architectural design of the smallest flat in Poland was realized as a political postulate.

Let us picture this experimental, cultural and civic character of WHC estates by juxtaposition with other interesting example: an entrepreneur from the outskirts of Bordeaux, Henri Fruges, offered Le Corbusier designing of a large estate for workers. He guaranteed that it will be erected with the use of contemporary building methods. “The Pessac Estate will be a laboratory. I authorize You to ignore all the conventions, to disrespect traditional building methods”¹³. During inspection the architects were astonished, describing the abundance of polychromes, the balance of the masses, merging of outer and inner spaces. In 1929 the workers moved into the estate, who got long-term, low interest mortgages. However, nobody had taught the dwellers how to organize everyday life in flats which were higher standard than they were used to. Nobody virtually taught them how to live. Helena Syrkus wrote, that

“after few years the whole estate was «exhausted both morally and physically». Some of the ribbon windows, which were supposed to give the feeling of merging of the inside and the outside, were bricked in to fit old, large pieces of furniture, there were extensions, the polychrome faded and was covered with paint – sometimes coloristically indifferent, but sometimes bright and disturbing in comparison to original colour, there were also new villas erected in the neighbourhood, which suited petty bourgeois tastes, and eventually the whole estate was degraded. The contractor and architects imagined Pessac as a major contribution of French progressive thinking to the idea of erecting the most necessary social flats” (Syrkus 1976, p. 50).

At the time, in France, the housing counselling was non-existent, which in Poland was started by WHC, whereas in the Netherlands by Jacobus Pieter Oud, and in Germany by Ernst May.

From the very beginning WHC was a field for experiments and at the same time an international flagship of Praesens group. This cooperative was an incorporation of the ideas of CIAM (*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*). It were the premises of WHC that housed the Frankfurt exhibition “The Smallest Flat”, where they also presented new flats in Żoliborz. These flats were furnished with items adjusted to the small interiors and low financial potential of future inhabitants. There were also presented the design of kitchen by Barbara Brukalska, modelled upon French design by Grete Schutte-Lihotzky, retractable beds by Syrkus and even a design of modern kindergarten run by the Workers’ Association of Friends of Children, one of numerous mutual aid organizations among the citizens of WHC, designed by Brukalska’s friend, Nina Jankowska.

Żoliborz, as a “cooperative republic”, issued its own monthly newspaper, although the first publication has been a one- information bulletin. *Życie WSM* contained news about the activities of institutions and associations in the estate, about the initiatives, it also encouraged people to take part in the cultural life of the social house. It was the place where conflicts were settled, polemics started, disputes handled in printed form, and critical articles were published on its pages (for example by Stanisław Ossowski, Julian Hochfeld, Adam Próchnik, Maria Orsetti). It was a forum for the citizens. It also played a role of a counselling body, not only in housing issues (how to decorate a flat), but also in matters concerning the estate as a whole (how to organize everyday life in the estate in cooperation with others). Since 1932, at the premises of WHC Members Aid Association “Glass Houses”¹⁴ there was a counselling service called “My Flat”, which offered housing counselling, exhibition and renting of various furniture and equipment, there were also architectural, gardening and hygienic units. They organized competitions for the best decorated small flat, the most beautiful garden yard.

This educational experiment, the WHC, aimed at shaping a citizen, who would be eager to develop aesthetic needs, new taste, based on contemporary design, simplicity and functionality, which were associated with progress, breaking with backward, bourgeois, parochial tastes. During the war Stanisław Ossowski wrote about the need to promote an independent style of workers flats. He was aware, that “in their aspirations for social promotion an average worker usually approaches the image of petty bourgeois life, and this image is furnished with plush sofas and display cabinets with figures inside”¹⁵. We cannot discuss the flat interiors in details. However, they seem very interesting from the perspective of class differences displayed in the outlook, style and decoration of the flats and also in the division for intellectual Żoliborz and working class Rakowiec.

Since 1929 in Poland there was issued a monthly magazine *Dom. Osiedle. Mieszkanie*, initially edited by a group of avant-garde architects, and then, since 1930 it became a body of Polish Association for Housing Reform. It was edited by the architects of WHC, interior decorators and socially involved members of WHC authorities. The magazine discussed the functional model of flats for workers and the model for intellectuals (as they grew in numbers in Żoliborz). The issue of design was also raised in the magazine, they also designed everyday objects such as furniture and decorations.

Dwelling is a process

In WHC design it is possible to find more than an ‘architectural avant-garde’. The “more” was a dweller-citizen, who realised important projects of working class and women’s emancipation. He could achieve that thanks to education, both formal and informal, spontaneous, grassroots education, and by becoming a “well-informed citizen” as meant by Schütz¹⁶.

The professional activity of women, relief from house chores (providing a cooperative canteen in the estate, dry-cleaners, nursery and kindergarten, clinic for children with milk kitchen), and involvement in social activities in Circle of Active Female Cooperatists and Women’s Club, numerous societies and clubs, was an important element of a particular movement against the social reality – the exclusion of women from public life, and the exclusion of a citizen from active and direct participation in democracy. Marta Leśniakowska, however, points that the emancipating-equalizing slogans by Tołwiński were merely a façade, because the actual liquidation of domestic service (according to Tołwiński it was a bourgeois remains of inequality and exploitation of women) on one hand deprived women of valuable help, on the other hand it left them unemployed (if they worked as servants). In my opinion, women, even if they sent off their servants (in return they got cooperative canteen, and also the possibility to have their shopping delivered to home thanks to the Cooperative Inn) or they lost their jobs as servants (they could find employment in the canteen, laundry, cooperative shops, clubs, social house and other institutions), they gained much more – a new lifestyle. I do not intend to say, that the emancipation did not have its victims. As Leśniakowska notices, one of them was Brukalska, whose activity in the interwar period is completely marginalized and reduced to the realization of architectural ideas of her husband, Stanisław. It quickly turned out that the liquidation of domestic service was unsuccessful. In the flats which were initially meant for workers, the room for servants was an essential element of flats for intellectuals. In the 1930’s approximately 20% of general number of the citizens of WHC were domestic servants (See: Szymański 1989, p. 142).

The Circle of Active Female Cooperatists acted through “raising the level of awareness and social education among women, removing obstacles, which hold the active participation of women in domestic and international activities of cooperative organizations” (*Sprawozdanie WSM* 1930, p.138-139, Mazur 1993, p.140). The club also managed to enhance legal awareness among women. They discussed current laws, birth control, social care laws and much more. Among the activists of the Circle of Active Female Cooperatists were Maria Orsetti, Janina Dłuska, Janina Świącicka, Zofia Żarnecka. The circle organized the job centre for the female citizens of the estate and also worked towards establishing the Unit of Domestic Service Trade Union (*Życie WSM*, 1932/8, p. 2-3).

The emancipation of a worker, which could only take place with the participation of radical intellectuals (including architects), was not merely a question of building workers’ culture. Both the founders of WHC and the intellectuals living in the estate were fully aware of that. A Stanisław Ossowski, who was convinced that the proletarian character of art is based on the ideology, was also fully aware that proletarian literature is not created by workers and that intellectuals are not its main addressees. Thus it was not about creating workers’ culture, but a certain style and “cultural elements”. “One should not look for them in art or scientific works, but in moral attitudes and relation to the world”¹⁷ – in other words in the worldview and behaviour resulting from it.

The main idea then was to provide the working class with the opportunities of active participation in life, of participation in the formation of the culture of future society, initiating the attitude of the active, responsible citizen, interested in his closest surroundings. It was necessary to create conditions for intervention for the sake of dwellers, and also to build an inner system of institutions, give them legal tools, and provoke change. Education was vital if it was to succeed. Therefore the Workers’ Association of Friends of Children (RTPD) was established in the estate, which opened the only secular co-educational school in Poland at the time with a definite ideological, moral, social and also political programme. Aleksander Landy referred to the experimental character of the school, saying: “our school does everything to raise the children entrusted to us in accordance to the ideals of the working class, in order to morally and physically prepare them to work for socialist restructuring of the system”¹⁸. The WHC kindergarten, school and secondary school consequently applied to the model of secular education (it was the reason why the authorities initially refused the license to run the co-educational school). Religion lessons were substituted with the teachings of moral rules, active participation in the common

interest of others (young people often took part in supportive activities of “The Glass Houses”), the rules of pacifism and a creative attitude. Stanisław Ossowski expressed his opinion about the secular of education (as about every issue important for the cooperative). In 1936 in “Lewy Tor” (The Left Track) he wrote:

“We want a secular school, (...), which does not raise a timid intellectual, who is afraid to scrutinize the reality, but the school which raises brave, honest attitude towards life and social matters, (...). We want school, which will not serve egoistic interests of the possessing class” (Ossowski 1970b, p. 114.).

This was indeed a unique school at the time. Jan Szymański writes that the relations between the teacher and pupils were based on trust and directness, the pupils addressed the teachers and tutors by their first names. They applied modern teaching methodology (Montessori, Dalton, Dewey). The school day at primary school lasted for 2 or 3 hours, the remaining time was devoted to walks, playing, caring for the school mini zoo, work in small workshops or the school garden (children often helped in the works of the estate garden centre).

It is difficult to say whether it is an idealized retrospective and how indeed the pupils felt about this particular “school situation”, but it is worth noting, that in 1982 Maciej Demel, when remembering WHC, pointed to the unique social sensitivity which was taught at school, its ideological climate, and its

“secular, co-educational character and high standard of teaching attracted the youth not only from WHC and from all around Żoliborz, but also from other districts of Warsaw. It should be noted, then, that this secondary school did not have the license from the authorities and its graduates were obliged to take a separate, state exam” (Demel 1982, p. 84).

The secular character of the attitude, which was desired in the cooperative estate, was an important element of ‘socialist humanism’ as a whole.

Despite architectural-urbanist flaws we can observe the enthusiasm of the citizens and the active social life. Ossowski noticed, that

“a social house lacking proper architectural expression attracted people from remote places. Heated discussions, which took place in “Glass Houses” were widely commented. The schools in the estate – despite huge deficiencies, resulting from shortages in finances, despite the problems set by school authorities — became important position in the history of Warsaw school system. And the citizen of the Estate in the time of Ozon, in the times of bench ghettos, upon returning from the city centre was transferred into alternative

reality, he regained the sense of freedom and felt like being among his fellows” (Ossowski 1970c, p.186)¹⁹.

Ossowski gave a detailed account of the problem of social house, comparing its role to Inuit *kashim* as referred to by Marcel Mauss. The social house is the clamp on the social bond, the centre of community and intellectual life.

“Kashim cannot be substituted by the institutions located in houses. It is the social house, as an architectural unit, deliberately incorporated into the structure of the estate, will become the point of focus, transforming a common gathering into a community with stable values, which will spread far beyond the borders of the estate” (Ossowski 1970c, p. 188).

And Krzysztof Pomian recalling the traditions of WHC says:

“WHC is inseparable from PPS (Polish Socialist Party) and left-wing, and the communists were only a small group, because they were also present in the history of WHC from the beginning, but a small contribution to its history. The political power base of WHC was the PPS party, and the so-called laic left-wing, because secular played a major part in its self-awareness. They were not necessarily irreligious people, but always the ones, to whom secularization of Church and state was a dominant value. Therefore when we say WHC, we have to add PPS and RTPD” (Pomian, Walenciak 2009)²⁰.

The secular character of the attitude, which was desired in the cooperative estate, was an important element of ‘socialist humanism’ as a whole.

Mutual aid institutions in Żoliborz stressed the role of education and awareness. They accepted ‘the enlightenment of the citizen’ as a vital feature of a new human, who possessed something more than natural knowledge, and who extends the range of individual concerns to the wider horizons of “social problems”. I deliberately refer to the category of ‘well-informed citizen’ by Alfred Schütz and sociological imagination of Mills, because they are close to certain principles of humanist knowledge, which is able to transform human practice.

The proletariat melted mainly due to the system of grants and material support for pupils – children of workers’ families. Workers’ Association of Friends of Children (RTPD), by means of fee exemption, promoted the idea of secondary education among workers. The main purpose was to avoid automatically sending the children of workers to vocational schools, since this was held to corrupt chances for further education. It is a paradox, that in 1937 only three children paid a full fee. Young people from the beginning of the socialization process were taught community

awareness, active life in the estate, cooperation with the autonomy, Cooperative Inn, editing of *Życie WSM*, *Życie Młodych*, and activities in other institutional forms of support for the citizens. They did not forget about adult education. However, it was not mass adult education. “Glass House” started organizing general courses, and established “Free Workers University” and “School of Community Worker”. Workers University organized a series of lectures in humanities, social and economical science, and also language courses. The School of Community Worker taught sociology and philosophy of socialism, and also the history of social movements of working class. Among the lecturers there were: prof. S. Czarnowski, prof. A. Próchnik, prof. Z. Szymanowski (See: Szymański 1989, p. 107).

In a clandestine brochure from 1944, Ossowski, imagining the education system in a broad perspective, called for the “dissemination of intellectual culture of a higher level” into urban space. As an example of perfect planning he referred to workers’ houses in Vienna, various English settlements and obviously the Żoliborz estate and “Glass Houses” association.

The cooperative in its ideological principles was supposed to put into practice the postulates of emancipation, but the smallest flats were also designed to satisfy the mental needs of the intellectuals, and stimulate them among workers. In this context, dwelling is not an object but a verb. Dwelling is an educational process, in which, thanks to the development of *habitus*, empowerment, one may become a citizen, an individual subject. The tenants in each flat were supposed to be able to satisfy basic needs such as intimacy, privacy (as in the slogan: “a separate bed for each dweller”, and separate rooms for children and parents), and needs of a more intellectual nature, such as: reading, music, chatting with friends, non-professional work. Brukalska wrote: “Despite all this, we find necessary such social arrangement outside the flat, which allows to satisfy intellectual needs on a larger scale or with higher specification, such as libraries, events, clubs, bigger social events, etc.”²¹. In order to allow undisturbed development, focus and concentration, the architect has to provide the possibility of isolation. The struggle for silence is possible on various levels: flats need to have a separate room, which allows isolation from other dwellers, and in social houses there a need for so-called silent rooms, quiet areas in the clubs, designing yards and green areas which would offer quietness. Żoliborz was built in such manner. Meanwhile Rakowiec the authorities commenced works on the programme of a new estate, better suited for the financial potential of working class. WHC authorities were invited to participate, along with architects of the Praesens group and representatives of future dwellers. Rakowiec was planned as workers’ estate, in contradiction to Żoliborz, in which the number of white-collar workers grew yearly. The flats were supposed to meet the financial capability of workers, therefore

its standard and comfort could easily compete with Żoliborz. Helena Syrkus, who designed the estate with her husband, recalls that

“conversations with future dwellers, and especially the restrictions in decorations and furniture that they demanded, were shocking for the team. It was then when we realized the desperate financial situation of workers’ families, who had to survive on less than 200 zloty a month. There was a significant difference when the same figures were listed by sociologists, and when they were given with bitterness by a father of undernourished children...” (Syrkus 1976, p. 102).

For example, the citizens of Rakowiec strongly disapproved of the installation of central heating and demanded stoves instead.

The architects, however, won with both the dwellers and the WHC authorities, who demanded the installation of toilets in one room on each floor. “Toilet in each flat” sounded in the mouth of architects-activists almost as a political postulate, because its purpose was to upgrade ‘housing culture’. It is difficult to judge, whether the idea of the most necessary flats, which not only had purely housing functions, but were also supposed to address the principles of social housing, was successful. The standard of the flat not always allowed to live hygienic life, or so-called “housing minimum”. The experiment, however, did not only imply that while designing the interiors of the flats the architects assumed social, cultural, educational, hygienic and healthy model, but also that they were based on the idea of cooperativeness, with active participation of its members, in this way putting into practice the participating model of a citizen through architectural co-designing. The flats were not only designed for living, but also allowed their dwellers to become citizens, they were, somehow, political and educational activity. They were a form of participation, but in its meaning from the beginning of the twentieth century, similar to “do-it-yourself” concept.

The postulates of these authors should be read rather as critical thinking, disagreement towards current, bourgeois, undemocratic reality, as struggle to overcome disturbing inequalities and free participation in culture. There is no doubt that there was critical thinking present in these cooperative initiatives. It resulted, however, not in an urge to reject the violence of the institution, but in establishing such forms of social cooperation as might reduce this violence to the minimum. On one hand it was supposed to erase the dividing line of exclusion and conflict, on the other, it aimed at abandoning the paternal violence, also self-determination and self-governing inside the housing estate, as well as new norms and rituals.

However, this socialist cooperative republic offered its dwellers a complete, total and radical project. The most significant expression of this totality was the Home Delegation, which controlled hygiene in the flats. The duties of the Home Delegation involved supervising the caretakers, caring for cleanliness and order in the estate, attention to good relations between neighbours, attending to the financial situation of the citizens. This disciplinary regime, however, did not include the houses and streets. In particular cases there were inspections of certain flats, and in 1933 there was a general inspection of all flats in Żoliborz estate. However, the diaries, memories and accounts of life in Żoliborz do not speak in the murky voice of oppression, alienation or symbolic violence. And the character of a ‘romantic intellectual’ is a leitmotif of all these personal accounts. After a while the citizens themselves began to take care of the cleanliness of the stairwells, they applied for renovations in their flats and the rhythm of everyday life in Żoliborz was organized by the activities of the grassroots organizations, autonomous, cooperative and mutual aid institutions (*Sprawozdanie WSM* 1938, p.55 and *Życie WSM*, 1934/9, p.6). The habits of the intellectuals among the citizens of the estate, “cultural coexistence” learned at their homes and social environments, after a while, due to those organized community activities, also involved workers, who were often interested in their fate, they were looking for various ways, even the smallest, to influence their everyday life. Thus the project of Żoliborz exposed its performative power, emphasising causativeness of citizens. The effect of participation was a feeling of dealienation, establishing something current, it was an interior task for an individual, which gave a creative character to its activity. It might be said, that the lifestyle of Żoliborz was based on social space for cooperation, tightening the network between individuals, establishing social bonds, in being together.

This political-staircase control might be interpreted as radical anti-capitalist strategy of urban participation, even “urban guerrillas”, neighbourhood mutual aid, community of cooperative activities resulting from the disapproval of city authorities and state authorities.

Idealism or pragmatism?

Undoubtedly the first WHC estate in Żoliborz was the estate build in accordance to the principles of ‘Glass Houses’. *Przedwiośnie* and Baryka’s invention became the founding myth, which allowed drawing of social and moral horizons for the citizens. I think, however, that the founders of the cooperative and the citizens aware of the ideological base (such as Ossowski’s, Hochfeld, Strzelecki and Orsetti) were far from utopian thinking. The role model of a community worker and specific elements of cultural ethos of the citizen of Żoliborz, were not pre-planned and established, neither was the urban space. It is difficult to find in them a consistent and integrated

model or scheme. The model citizen of Żoliborz was not a “product” of the socializing enterprise pre-planned by the ideologists. Rather the citizen was a product of the daily life of the estate, which often turned out to be as far from the ideal as the reality beyond it. A different story was the educational experiment of secular school, which shaped a sensitive, pacifist, secular socialist. Even here, however, in the principles, the founders of the cooperative and local writers were far from utopian socialism. Ossowski often wrote about the new society, the society of the future without proletariat in the contemporary meaning of the word, but the postulates of these authors should be read rather as critical thinking, disagreement towards current, bourgeois, undemocratic reality, as struggle to overcome disturbing inequalities and free participation in culture (not only as a sphere of artefacts of science or art, but as moral basis and everyday lifestyles offering chances for unrestricted expression). However, the disputes over the character of Ossowski’s engagement in social activity have not ceased, which is clearly visible in the dilemma presented in the question:

“whether this democrat, socialist, who was close to Abramowski, a supporter of planning, a follower of humanist ideals related to socialists, was a clergy or utopist, Marxist or merely a scientist seriously approaching the teachings of Marx?” (Madajczyk 1999, p. 437).

Maria Orsetti disagreed with the notion of socialist utopia according to Robert Owen. She treats it as anti-cooperative, non-participating vision, forcing people to a planned state of happiness (Orsetti 1926). Adam Próchnik repeatedly emphasized the utopian aspect of socialism, and he also underlined its intellectualism and detachment from the practice of everyday life (Próchnik 1934, p. 1.).

Architectural, social and educational projects should be treated as critical awareness, a will to change, as the effect of bothering question about the possibility of existence of self-governing society (or at least a small community). I think it is not worth asking how far WHC is situated from socialist utopia. It seems more promising to investigate the relation of humanist knowledge, critical thinking and daily life, *praxis*, the possibility of accomplishing the set goals and social ideals, which do not necessarily have to be utopian. Therefore it is worth asking to what extent the urbanist-architectural and educational programme influenced the life of the citizens. Does the architect while designing a building have only a little influence on its future use? To what extent can he have a disciplinary effect on citizens? How can architecture dictate lifestyles in a city or estate? Is it necessary at all?

The infrastructure of both estates undoubtedly favoured the emancipation of women. It provided nurseries and kindergartens, and also helped in the first stages of maternity in caretaking and nursing, thanks to clinic and also the milk kitchen. Mechanical

launderettes, canteens offering cheap meals, released women from at least some of chores, and the system of housing counselling, mutual aid clubs, The Circle of Active Female Cooperatists, and magazine, gave the opportunity to educate modern tenants (unlike La Corbusier's Pessac project near Bordeaux), shape their active, socially open attitude, while avoiding the dangers typical for large housing estates: individualism, anonymity and indifference of the citizens. It also guaranteed family intimacy and provided conditions for intellectual work and silence, but also protection against the intervention of political and economic forces. Shortly after war, trying to preserve the idea of cooperativeness, Julian Hochfeld wrote:

“Cooperativeness is autonomous, it is a form of satisfying the needs, created and governed by consumers themselves. Cooperativeness is a school of democracy of daily life, living democracy, cultivated continuously and in practice, (...) a direct interest in one's own matters. Cooperativeness is a natural system defending ordinary people, whose life is measured by specific issues such as flat, provisioning, culture, health, rest and work – the defence against omnipotence of each controlling apparatus of purely political character” (Hochfeld 1946, pp. 259 – 260).

It was the animation project, or “performative sociology”, autonomous idea, grassroots initiative, spontaneous, but also initialized by ‘organic intellectuals’, by Ossowski's, Strzelecki, Lande, Hochfeld, Próchnik, Tołwiński and others.

In this context these activists were idealistic pragmatists. By pragmatists, we do not mean that they are willing to reach compromise, but that their ideological character is not dogmatic. It means, that where necessary, the methods need to be adjusted to circumstances. Elasticity and non-schematic overcoming of obstacles lays at the foundation of their activities. When erecting the smallest flats, architects-activists could have not met minimum housing standards as implied by 20th century modernist visionaries, but they managed to reverse the formula of social housing, that is, instead providing a possible minimum, they provided a maximum – education of highest standards, active participation in culture, a sense of control over surrounding reality. It allowed them to avoid spectacular architectural failure as in the case of La Corbusier, whose political idealism accompanied architectural ideology. In this educational, citizen-oriented housing project, architecture was a political tool rather than aim, it was an action, process, rather than final effect.

Conclusion

WHC approached housing in various ways thanks to the participation of architects, sociologists, teachers, community workers, and – as we may call them today –

organizers of cultural life. It was not only the matter of architectural design, but mainly caring for human rights. Today it may serve as an example of the application of systemic tools (legal, organizational, institutional) and an inspiration to regain a “democracy of everyday life” — both depreciated by the communist system. The phenomenon of Żoliborz also lays in extraordinary art of participation and co-activity, which are very surprisingly up-to-date, however, in the 1930’s in Europe, they were a popular strategy, subversive towards culture of capitalism, introduced by leftist circles of urbanists, architects and community workers. They manifested the transformation from a passive, submitted citizen/user of the city into a participant of urban cultural practices, the estate lifestyle, the creativity of which is activated by the cooperation of “actors” (citizens, activists, institutions, regulations, societies, etc.). And in the attitudes of Barbara Brukalska, Helena Syrkusowa and Stanisław Ossowski and his wife, we can observe the repositioning of accents and relations between social criticism, theoretical reflection, artistic practice and other spheres of culture (ecology, urbanism, architecture, design, education), for which all forms of activity were simply “the art of living”.

The struggle for space, silence, light and fresh air and decent living conditions (Hardt i Negri refer to them as “common wealth” (Hardt, Negri, 2009) within the cooperative framework can be inspiring for contemporary collective urban cooperative movements (such as: food cooperatives, tenants movements, campaigns of co-designing in architecture, or ecological “farms” in estates). All such cooperative initiatives were realised within the life in WHC estate. All such cooperative enterprises occurred as a part of life within WHC, at the same time putting into practice the postulates of “right to the city”. There was, for instance, Cooperative Gardening Centre in Żoliborz, which sold fruit, vegetables and flowers, they also provided advice on gardening, particularly about cultivating plants for people who had small farms within the borders of the estate. They also kept flowers and plant during holiday period. The activities of the Centre received support from the pupils of primary school under auspices of Workers’ Association of Friends of Children.

Warsaw Housing Cooperative resembles a contemporary social movement called *Túpac Amaru*, in north-west Argentina. This movement provides more flats in the region than the official building sector. They build their own schools and hospitals, they have their own factories, which employ the members of the movement. *Túpac Amaru* also possess something, which in WHC might be called social appliances, that is, their own radio station, library. They organize private tutoring for anybody who does not qualify for the formal (state) education system. Families in need form working brigades, which build their own houses. This collective movement goes even further, building its own brickyard and metallurgical factory. However, it is not the

building system that is particularly important here. Milargo Sala, the founder of the movement: “we are revolutionary in the sense, that we believe in the possibility of change in human thinking. Through worthy jobs and change in mentality, health services, education and work, people may become better”²².

Túpac Amaru in Latin America, similarly to WHC, is an example of “sociology in action”, “sensitive pedagogy”, which owes its uniqueness and scale to cooperative character of this “place”, with its idea of self-sufficiency in everyday life, with the system of mutual aid, autonomy, interesting system of social control, education of youth in the manner of socialized individualism in laic co-educational school. And the citizens of the estate were also the animators of this atmosphere of Żoliborz, the intellectuals, who introduced the model of organic intellectual, not knowing about Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*, and they saw culture in a very modern fashion, as the form of conscious resistance towards reality, towards what they found, as a critical attempt to overcome routine and common sense. They firmly believed that humanist sensitivity, knowledge and self-awareness are the rudiments of “becoming a reality”, its realistic shaping. The citizen of Żoliborz crossed the present, he was characterised by constant strive towards changing into imagined better state, but also the urge to understand, giving meaning to that, what is there.

For obvious reasons, it is difficult to judge what role the animating attitudes played in the life of the citizens of Żoliborz, and the facts and events presented here focus on the activities of the founders rather than the attitudes of the recipients. If we, however, study the life of the citizens of Żoliborz regularly described in *Życie WSM* (all the way through 1930s) and in annual reports, the loyalty to the place is striking, as well as the pride of being a member of the cooperative. One can observe care for good relations with neighbours and a ‘high culture of co-existence’.

On one hand, the strategy of Żoliborz can be seen as constant criticism of reality, exposing the mechanisms of power, unmasking institutions. However, it did not lead to anarchy. It was rather, thanks to socialized individualism, close to pedagogy shaping a model of a new democrat, described by Maria Ossowska in a brochure entitled: *A model of citizen in democratic system* (Ossowska 1992). From the performative perspective, it might be said, that it created a liminal norm, putting emphasis on a causative character of subjects, their activity and social engagement, as well as *praxis*.

Recalling the Polish tradition of ‘sociology in action’ seems even more justified, due the the fact, that performative twist – as Ewa Domańska puts it – is

“a typically Marxist project, and in this context it might become a symbol of <<left-wing character>> of new humanities and the effect and the element of the process of political indoctrination. Politics is space, where causativeness and performative character of subjects is executed, whereas performance becomes space for resistance, rebellion; a political act” (Domańska 2007, p. 56).

Translated by Paweł Kołodziej

Notes

¹ Rorty 1991

² Wrong 1961, p. 183 – 193.

³ Schütz 1964, p. 134

⁴ The conference in La Sarraz in 1928 was the birthplace of the term: ‘the most necessary social flat’ – ‘habitation minimum’, while architects and urban planners, for the first time in history, focused on social care, education and culture. The architects declared that they will teach people how to dwell. They also established International Association for Housing Reform based in Frankfurt am Main. Its main purpose was radical improvement of housing conditions in European cities. Europe faced the eruption of social and architectural ideas and also the idea of cooperative. There were favourable conditions for the realization of these projects, much more favourable than today. ‘City’ means ‘people’ rather than space, the notion familiar to both British urbanist, Ebenezer Howard – the inventor of a concept of ‘city-garden’, and Scottish sociologist, Geddes, who perceived city as social institution, but also to La Corbusier, Wolter Gropius, Siegfried Giedion, Pieter Oud, Mies von der Rohe and Ernst May.

⁵ Leśniakowska 2004, p.195

⁶ Rorty 1993.

⁷ Sennett 2012, p. 199.

⁸ McKenzie 2001, p. 43

⁹ The idea of housing cooperative might remind of Turner’s “normative *communitas*”. WHC would than deserve a thorough research and also extensive reading of archive issues of “Życie WSM” in order to find some rites of passage, characteristic codices (they were openly formulated, not only as rules and regulations for the dwellers, but also as an informal “rules of compassion”, founded by the cooperative. See also: (Toeplitz 1935).

¹⁰ *Sprawozdanie WSM* 1930, p. 3.

¹¹ 1964 was the year of publication of Zygmunt Bauman’s *Wizje ludzkiego świata* (*Visions of Human World*). Studies in social genesis and function of sociology, in which one chapter was entitled *Antonio Gramsci czyli socjologia w działaniu* (*Antonio Gramsci, or Sociology in Action*). In the thoughts of the Italian philosopher Bauman discovered what I personally find most striking in the WHC experiment, which is: a unique bond of intellectuals and folks; sociology, which forms the link between the passions of people and the knowledge of intellectuals, that ‘aimed at translating passion into the language of knowledge, and knowledge into the language of passion, thus becoming an important component of consciousness in “historical block”, an element of creative historical activity’ (Bauman 1964, p. 336). Bauman juxtaposes this sociology in action with Mills’s committed sociology.

¹² *Notes for my son*, quote from E. Neyman 2002, p. 44.

¹³ Syrkus 1976, p.49

¹⁴ The name of the association is not accidental. Firstly, the idea of glass houses was successfully developed in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, in 1914 Paul Schreerbart published the book *Glasarchitektur*, and Bruno Taut presented his *GlaShaus* at the Werkbund exhibition. Secondly, for the founders of WHC, Stefan Żeromski's *Przedwiośnie* was a foundation text, and the main character, Seweryn Baryka was a role model, who instead of critical thinking takes up the attitude of an enthusiastic activist and community worker. The invention of doctor Baryka, the building of glass houses, was the expression of breaking off with filth, backwardness and exploitation, it is also the approval of the active attitude promoting healthy lifestyle, progress, active participation. We may definitely say there was an attitude of "żeromszczyzna" among the founders of WHC. The idea of glass houses was thoroughly discussed in Polish literature. See: Mencwel 1990, or by the same author (Mencwel 1998). The programme of „Glass Houses” was based on the principles set by Edward Abramowski, described in *Związki przyjaźni (The Republic of Friends)*. It was designed as mutual aid based on cooperation of small groups of people who know each other in person. The idea was to avoid formalized charitable activities and put emphasis on mutual aid. Ossowski was aware that Abramowski's idea could not be successful, because it is impossible to instantly become friends with people who have never had anything in common. See: Ossowski 1967, p. 361. 'Glass houses' as the association of self-government was involved in co-governing the estate, assistance in fulfilling material needs of the citizens, support in paying the rent, in order to avoid eviction as a result of difficult financial situation. In 1933 one of the most important tasks of 'Szklane Domy', was finding employment for unemployed citizens of the estate in the institutions within WHC, such as Community Building Company, Community Inn, the administration of the estate (female cleaners), Workers' Association of Friends of Children. During crisis material support offered by the association was one of the most important elements of everyday life of less wealthy citizens of WHC. The activities of 'Szklane Domy' were equally focused on culture and education for adults. See: Szymański 1989, p. 91.

¹⁵ Ossowski 1970a, p. 140.

¹⁶ Schütz 1964, pp.120 – 134.

¹⁷ Ossowski 1970a, p. 142

¹⁸ Landy 1934, p. 5-6. Aleksander Landy is the model of Polish prewar intellectual, a pediatrician, social worker and teacher.

¹⁹ Ozon, mentioned by Ossowski, stands for Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego (The Camp of National Unity), the organisation established in 1937 on the recommendation of Edward Rydz-Śmigły. It was accused of fascist and anti-Semitic tendencies.

²⁰ In this interview Pomian explains the ideological detachment of anti-communist opposition from prewar left-wing: 'I remember the conversation with Kisiel, in Paris in late 1970's, after the press conference, during which I talked about the meeting of flying university dispersed by the Secret Police: a private flat was invaded by a hit squad armed with bats and beat the participants. Kisiel then, with his laughter and common sense, replied: Krzysztofie, what is it all about? Why won't they go to church? We gather at churches, we say various things and no militia appears. I don't remember, what I said. But I remember, that after this conversation I thought, that this is indeed what it is all about, about not going to church spelt with either small or capital letter. It is

about autonomy, not only from PZPR (The Polish United Workers' Party) but also from Church! During martial law the need for such autonomy disappeared, followed by secular and leftist tradition' (Pomian, Walenciak 2009).

²¹ Brukalska 1948, p. 23.

²² Milagro Sala quote in: MacGuirk 2014, p. 71).

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