

In the presented project, I am going to research everyday practices of gardeners of the allotments in Nowa Huta. I am going to focus on the gardens which were founded by the Steelworks for its workers. I am going to investigate the time period from 1970 until the present day, focusing on the period of the Polish People's Republic, but spanning also the time passed since the 1989 transformation. I am going to study three sets of processes and practices that the original users of the allotment gardens participated in: the founding of the gardens – planning, settlement and parcelling; their occupancy – obtainment of plots, building of altany (small garden houses), growing crops and breeding animals; and their transformation – change of the socioeconomic system, change of the culture of the allotments and generational change. I am going to research each of these issues from the perspective of the original gardeners, confronting and complementing it with archival documents of the authorities of the allotment gardens, the Steelworks and the district. I am going to conduct fieldwork – consisting in participant observation and in-depth interviews – and archival queries, which are going to feed into and authenticate each other.

The first scientific objective of this project is to understand, describe and conceptualise the meaning of the allotment gardens of Nowa Huta studied from the perspectives of ecology, economy, skills and knowledge acquisition and labour of the original gardeners. In terms of ecology, I am going to examine the relationships and dependencies between the gardeners, the animals, the plants, the materials and the environment. With regards to economy, I am going to investigate informal and second circulation of materials and labour, unofficial exchanges, sales and purchases. Concerning skills and knowledge acquisition, I am going to look into the gardeners' ways of perceiving, thinking and learning about the environment. Referring to labour, I am going to study the materials, such as the building materials of altany, their qualities and transformations in the hands of the gardeners. And lastly, I will try to make sense of what it means to be an allotment gardener.

The second scientific ambition of this project, is an attempt to find a new way of thinking about the period of socialism and the following post-socialism, based on the experience of the allotment gardeners and heavy industry workers. The allotment gardens seem to be a counter-space of socialism – one of activity, coping, independence, creativity, contrivance and abundance. From its perspective, I am going to explore the changing meanings of concepts fundamental to state socialism and the liberal transformation – learning, labour, ownership and shortages, and for centralised heavy industry and its collapse – organisation, welfare, resources, possibilities and social status. I am going to study the attitudes towards time and transience assumed by the allotment gardeners from the oldest generation, who lived as adults both in the Polish People's Republic and the Third Polish Republic. I am interested in their thoughts on the past, changes, aging, health, death, youth and future.

In Poland, there are 5000 allotment gardens with 965 000 plots. It is the highest rate of allotment per capita in Europe. In Nowa Huta, there are 30 allotment gardens; the first one was founded in 1954 and the last one in 1987. Altogether, they make up 196 ha, almost half of the area of the allotment gardens in Kraków. According to a study, in 2010 1/4 of households in the district had access to land. While the allotment gardens in Poland are ubiquitous and the majority of them originate in the period of socialism, the connection between the two has not been studied. The allotment gardens – places of personal expression and freedom; of rootedness and abundance – show a different, understudied side of socialism. Researching the allotment gardens – a counter-space of socialism – in Nowa Huta – the flagship of socialism – is going to shed a new light on the period of the Polish People's Republic. It is going to contribute to the understanding of everyday life, free time and creative expression of the working class under socialism. While the allotment gardeners and heavy industry workers could be framed as victims of the socialist regime and the liberal transformation, I am going to study their individual and collective agency – coping, resourcefulness, perceptiveness, skills and knowledge. As the generation of the original gardeners of Nowa Huta is slowly passing away, it is the last chance to get to know their perspectives.