

Debating the Urban, the Rural and the Foreign: Łódź in the Polish Urban Discourse of Late Russian Poland

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SUMMARY

The article scrutinizes the Polish-speaking debate over industrial modernity regarding Łódź, a multi-ethnic textile factory hub on the over-industrialized Western fringe of the Russian Empire. I collate external and internal voices expressed in the press regarding modernity, urbanity and the status of the city within the national public sphere to reveal assumptions about the urban and the rural which underpinned cultural criticism targeting the industrial hotbed and attempts at self-assertion on the part of local elites. A specific developmental trajectory of rapid and barely regulated industrial growth, an ethnically mixed population, and high social polarization secured a highly ambiguous perception of this city. Warsaw-centered elites produced a specific mode of accusation against urbanity, denying its very existence in a place that could not be easily integrated into Polish, nation-alistically colored, modern aspirations. From a broader perspective, the presented analysis maps the binary structure of the rural vs. the urban on the larger field of debate over modernity, the “urban question,” citizenship and national self-assertion.

KEYWORDS: Łódź, urban press, modernity, urbanity, national self-assertion, urban citizenship

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It would not be a serious exaggeration to say that Łódź was the only truly industrial city of the Russian Empire. While being fifth in terms of size (second in Russian Poland), it hosted the largest industrial working class in the entire empire. In comparison to other centers of mainly artisanal production, Łódź epitomized industrial capitalism operating at full throttle, for better or worse.¹ Being an initially German-dominated, and later growingly Jewish textile hub located in mostly rural Russian Poland, it was confronted with the Polish cultural imaginations (peasant and noble alike) and nationalizing ambitions of the Polish-speaking elites. As an urban space dragged through mud and mire, far from the idealized visions of the modern (national) city, and a hotbed of attempts at self-improvement on the part of the local multi-ethnic elite, it offers a possibility to map out Polish cultural space regarding urbanity and modernity and their imagined opposites.

In the following, the urban and the rural are taken as two poles of cultural signification and refer to two allegedly opposite spheres of life; they have inspired thinking and debate about European cities in countless modes.² For instance, large migration waves with rural migrants settling in urban areas caused processes roughly described as ruralization. While they often elicited a sort of moral panic among well-established urban dwellers, these migrations have also been a fruitful field of research, revealing changing demographic landscapes, divergent cultural practices and complex discursive structures, responsible for the rejection of newcomers but also secretly securing the ideal of urban life. The corresponding research focuses on important historical thresholds, such as the years following the Second World War, when considerable human losses, large-scale population resettlement and ideologically-backed forceful industrialization of agrarian areas invited (or forced) large groups of rural inhabitants to settle, or at least work, in the cities.³

¹ While the biggest plant was in St. Petersburg, the capital remained a largely artisanal-based production center. Even more so was Warsaw, see DANIEL BROWER: *Urban Revolution in the Late Russian Empire*, in: MICHAEL F. HAMM (ed.): *The City in Late Imperial Russia*, Bloomington 1986. Russian “company towns” such as Ivanovo (textiles) were smaller in size and still much more connected to the rural areas, often using forms of “indentured” labor and externalizing reproduction to the neighboring areas, see KLAUS GESTWA: *Proto-Industrialisierung in Rußland: Wirtschaft, Herrschaft und Kultur in Ivanovo und Pavlovo, 1741-1932*, Göttingen 1999.

² To signify this generic quality structuring the debates on a very broad level, I nominalize adjectives describing both domains.

³ FELIX ACKERMANN: *Palimpsest Grodno: Nationalisierung, Nivellierung und Sowjetisierung einer mitteleuropäischen Stadt 1919-1991*, Wiesbaden 2010; BŁAŻEJ BRZOSZEK: *Ruralization of Bucharest and Warsaw in the First Postwar Decade*, in: WŁODZIMIERZ BORODZIEJ, STANISLAV HOLUBEC et al. (eds.): *Mastery and Lost Illusions: Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*, München 2014; DAVID CROWLEY: *The Peasant in the City*, in: JOANNA KORDJAK (ed.): *Poland—a Country of Folklore?*, Warsaw 2016, pp. 30-34; EWELINA SZPAK: *Female Tractor Driver, Labour Heroine and Activist: Images of New Socialist Rural Women in the Polish Communist Press (1950-75)*, in: STEVEN G. ELLIS, LUD’A KLUSÁKOVÁ (eds.): *Imagining Frontiers, Contesting Identities*, Pisa 2007, pp. 413-429; EADEM: *Between Farm and Factory*:

The earlier wave of industrialization, creating the proverbial modern city of dubious reputation, also included large population movements. While urban discourse and anti-urban sentiments from Manchester to Moscow have been widely debated by scholars, the focus was more on the perils of a modern city or actual patterns of migration and adaptation.⁴ Also stimulating have been topics such as how municipalities attempted to govern new populations⁵, what new cultural forms were born out of the need to make urban life more bearable among a motley crew of migrants⁶ and, last but not least, how popular classes adapted culturally to the challenges of urban life.⁷ However, this has not lead to the problematization of the very distinction of “the urban” and “the rural,” which have still remained opposite poles structuring the debate. In this sense, scholarship has tended to repeat the symbolic field it is investigating.

This homology may be broken in places where the rural was not an exorcised dimension endangering a well-established urbanity and where the rising industrial city was deprived of the status of an ambiguously perceived but undeniably modern metropolis.⁸ The “contemporaneity of non-contemporaneous”⁹ is no longer a valid label of “combined and uneven” modernity because universal periodization and developmental schemes lost much of their charm in social sciences. They appeared to be not much more than a mistranslation of difference as anachronism.¹⁰ Nevertheless, modern discourses may have different figurations regarding the assumed benchmarks and temporalities. A particular location in physical and imaginary space is productive in self-perceived inappropriateness and accusation against one’s own non-contemporaneity. This creates interesting displacements in urban discourse in places that, due to their imaginary location, are not simply considered backward but in-

Peasants in Urban Space in Communist Poland, in: STEVEN G. ELLIS, LUD’A KLUSÁKOVÁ (eds.): *Frontiers and Identities: Cities in Regions and Nations*, Pisa 2008, pp. 237-250.

⁴ KACPER POBŁOCKI: *Learning from Manchester: Uneven Development, Class and the City*, in: *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2013), 9, pp. 237-267; ALAN J. KIDD, TERRY WYKE: *Manchester: Making the Modern City*, Liverpool 2016; JOSEPH BRADLEY: *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia*, Berkeley 1985. I explore the debate on anti-urban debate later on.

⁵ TIMOTHY J. COLTON: *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis*, Cambridge/MA—London 1998.

⁶ On film and culture of attraction, see BEN SINGER: *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, New York 2001; On the press, see PETER FRITZSCHE: *Reading Berlin 1900*, Cambridge/MA—London 1998.

⁷ ILYA GERASIMOV: *Plebeian Modernity: Social Practices, Illegality, and the Urban Poor in Russia, 1906-1916*, Rochester/NY 2018.

⁸ HAGEN SCHULZ-FORBERG: *London—Berlin: Authenticity, Modernity, and the Metropolis in Urban Travel Writing from 1851 to 1939*, Brussels—New York 2006.

⁹ ERNST BLOCH: *Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics*, in: *New German Critique* (1977), 11, pp. 22-38.

¹⁰ REINHART KOSELLECK: *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Cambridge/MA 1985, pp. 247-248; BLISS CUA LIM: *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, Durham 2009, p. 82.

stead stimulate multi-layered polemics. Not only do they attempt to problematize the status of a particular place, they also affect more generic ideas about what is modern and contemporaneous. As the *locus classicus* of modernity all over Europe is a metropolitan city, such controversies are often mapped out along the urban-rural divide.

In this context it is important that the modern transition, in terms of the mode of transfers between the city and the countryside, had a specific imprint on Eastern Europe. Here, industrialization and urbanization, often latecomers, for the most part did not affect thriving urban centers but created urban settlements from scratch or revived run-down and underdeveloped pseudo-cities.¹¹ Whatever the particular trajectory of the site-specific development, the forging of the urban identity was accompanied by a high awareness of insularity. Industrial centers in the Russian-controlled Kingdom of Poland became huge isles of capitalistic modernity surrounded by rural Polish landscapes.

Moreover, because of the long-upheld regimes of unfree labor typical for the region's agrarian-manorial mode of production, the class differentiation on the verge of the modern transformation partially preserved the older characteristics of status stratification.¹² Large imperial states impeded the emergence of a cross-class nationalism. This characteristic complicated the emerging urban identities. They were heavily over-determined by ethnic divisions, which were soon to transform into competing nationalities.¹³ This fact became more intransigent and tangible during periods of modern nation-building, which almost always began top-down from some kind of educated elite.¹⁴

¹¹ Even if, formally speaking, there were urban settlements here and there, their dilapidated condition and pace of growth turned their transformation into the creation of almost entirely new urban centers. This is the case of Łódź as well. Generally on urbanization in Russian Poland see MARIA NIETYKSZA: *Rozwój miast i aglomeracji miejsko-przemysłowych w Królestwie Polskim* [The Development of Cities and Urban-industrial Agglomerations in the Kingdom of Poland], 1865-1914, Warszawa 1986.

¹² JACEK KOCHANOWICZ: *Backwardness and Modernization: Poland and Eastern Europe in the 16th-20th Centuries*, Aldershot 2006; MACIEJ JANOWSKI: "Multiple Sonderwegs:" The Specificity of Historical Development of East Central Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century (Introductory Remarks), in: *Acta Poloniae Historica* 111 (2015), pp. 5-27.

¹³ WITOLD KULA: *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System: Towards a Model of the Polish Economy, 1500-1800*, London—New York 1987; MARIAN MAŁOWIST: *Western Europe, Eastern Europe and World Development, 13th-18th Centuries: Collection of Essays*, ed. by JEAN BATOU and HENRYK SZLAJFER, Leiden—Boston 2010; ANNA SOSNOWSKA: *Models of East European Backwardness in Post-1945 Polish Historiography*, in: *East Central Europe* 32 (2005), 1-2, pp. 125-145; JAN SOWA: *Fantomowe ciało króla: Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* [The Phantom Body of the King: Peripheral Struggles with the Modern Form], Kraków 2011.

¹⁴ MIROSLAV HROCH: *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, Cambridge—New York 1985; BENEDICT R. ANDERSON: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London—New York 2006; ERNEST GELLNER: *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca/N.Y. 2008.

These realities were inevitably part and parcel of the Eastern European experience of modern transition.¹⁵

The Eastern European urban experience was marked by a high level of cultural diversity and sweeping changes of population caused by rapid urbanization, ethnic cleansings and forced migration. The ethnic compositions of the urban populations varied significantly from place to place. However, they had in common the fact that in urban areas the ethnic mix was much different from that of the usually more homogeneous countryside. Thus, polyvalent cultural tensions and historical laminations added to the urban-rural nexus in the local debates.¹⁶ This feature was typical for the entire region, with a significant presence of urban dwellers of German origin (be they old, pre-modern *Bürgertum* or newer colonists, craftsmen or entrepreneurs) and large Jewish populations (especially in the Pale of Settlement, but also in central Poland). This caused the emerging urban political constituencies and public spheres to be tense forcefields, where it was not only the rights of burghers with respect to the landed gentry or state that was debated.¹⁷

Cities were often populated by groups culturally different from the inhabitants of surrounding areas, which invested them with loaded cultural images, but also entangled the urban areas into the nationalizing projects. They might have been rendered, for instance, as islands in a foreign element or bulwarks of nation at the borderlands, which often created powerful myths further embedding local identities and fanning conflicts.¹⁸ The reverse was also true:

¹⁵ VALERIE BUNCE: The Historical Origins of the East-West Divide: Civil Society, Political Society and Democracy in Europe, in: NANCY GINA BERMEO, PHILIP G. NORD (eds.): Civil Society before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe, Lanham/MD 2000; TIMOTHY SNYDER: The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999, New Haven/CT 2003; BRIAN PORTER-SZÜCS: Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom, Chichester 2014.

¹⁶ ACKERMANN (as in footnote 3); SOFIA DYAK: The Legacies of Others: Dealing with Historic Cityscapes in Soviet Lviv and Communist Wrocław (IWM Working Papers), URL: <https://www.iwm.at/wp-content/uploads/jc-24-03.pdf> (2019-10-29); THEODORE R. WEEKS: Vilnius between Nations, 1795-2000, DeKalb/IL 2015.

¹⁷ On national particularities of Central and Eastern European civil society see STEFAN-LUDWIG HOFFMANN: Civil Society, 1750-1914, Houndmills et al. 2006. Developments of urban public spheres in Eastern Europe are investigated in ANDREAS R. HOFMANN, ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND (eds.): Stadt und Öffentlichkeit in Ostmitteleuropa 1900-1939: Beiträge zur Entstehung moderner Urbanität zwischen Berlin, Charkiv, Tallinn und Triest, Stuttgart 2002.

¹⁸ ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND: Neighbors as Betrayers: Nationalization, Remembrance Policy, and the Urban Public Sphere in Lviv, in: C. M. HANN, PAUL R. MAGOCSI (eds.): Galicia: A Multicultural Land, Toronto 2005, pp. 139-159; EADEM: Urbanisierung und Urbanität als Forschungsproblem in der Geschichte Ost- und Ostmitteleuropas, in: Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte 2 (2012), pp. 53-62; HEIDI HEIN-KIRCHER: Securitizing the Polish Bulwark: The Mission of Lviv in Polish Travel Guides during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, in: LILIYA BEREZHNYA, EADEM (eds.): Rampart Nations: Bulwark Myths of East European Multiconfessional Societies in the Age of Nationalism, New York 2019, pp. 81-102.

other cities were suspected of cosmopolitanism that was endangering the healthy nation of the village or of draining local resources while serving foreign values or commercial interests.¹⁹

At stake was a simultaneous task of making the cities national (Polish in this case) as well as making the nations more urban, i.e. modern. When the last strongholds of agrarian utopias fell, it became perfectly clear that the path to modernity travelled through the gates of the city. Peasants figured prominently in ambitions of nationalizing elites and indeed underwent at least partial nationalization in this period.²⁰ Nonetheless, it was clear that, for a modern nation, the image of the city had to be re-crafted and the vision of the nation urbanized at the same time.²¹ This was also true with respect to Polish intellectual history, atypically embedded in the noble class tradition, and not only busy with the re-imagining of the peasantry, as in many other states in the region, where the new national identities were grounded in the ethicized rural identity. Correspondingly, the urban and the rural remained crucial poles of cultural signification, extensively mobilized in defining modernity, “Polishness” and their mutual relationship.

The nexus of urbanity and modernity—and their opposites—may be pinned down in a way that reveals broader traits of the Polish cultural space. This study tackles the urban discourse of one city.²² The findings presented here are grounded in a complete examination of major local dailies—*Rozwój* (Progress), *Goniec Łódzki* (Łódź Messenger) and *Kurier Łódzki* (Łódź Courier)—in the period 1898–1914 and a less systematic examination of external voices regarding Łódź. Similarly to Andreas R. Hofmann in his study of the image of Łódź as anti-metropolis²³, I am interested in petrified discursive structures coextensive with a particular public sphere. However, having dealt with

¹⁹ ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND: Ostmitteleuropäische Städte als Arenen der Verhandlung nationaler, imperialer und lokaler Projekte, in: STEFFI MARUNG, KATJA NAUMANN (eds.): Vergessene Vielfalt: Territorialität und Internationalisierung in Ostmitteleuropa seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts, Göttingen 2014, pp. 106–131.

²⁰ JAN MOLEND: Chłopi, naród, niepodległość: Kształtowanie się postaw narodowych i obywatelskich chłopów w Galicji i Królestwie Polskim w przededniu odrodzenia Polski [Farmers, Nation, Independence: The Shaping of National and Civic Attitudes of Farmers in Galicia and the Kingdom of Poland on the Eve of the Rebirth of Poland], Warszawa 1999; KEELY STAUTER-HALSTED: The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848–1914, Ithaca 2004.

²¹ Poland in the comparative context of the intellectual histories of the region is presented in BALÁZS TRENCSENYI, MACIEJ JANOWSKI, MONIKA BAÁR, MARIA FALINA, MICHAŁ KOPEČEK: A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe, Oxford—New York 2016.

²² This contribution presents an obviously partial story. I investigate the Polish-speaking symbolic elites of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual city. I am interested in the embeddings of their discourse in a broader framework of Polish intellectual history and the interplay of forces briefly sketched in the introduction. An equally revealing investigation could be performed with respect to German-speaking or Yiddish press circulation.

²³ ANDREAS R. HOFMANN: Imageprobleme einer Antimetropole: Lodz 1900/1930, in: IDEM/WENDLAND (as in footnote 17), pp. 235–257.

external voices elsewhere²⁴, here I focus more on the locally produced inter-discourse, which was actually much richer than Hofmann tends to suggest. Indeed, local journalists and opinion leaders attempted to counteract the externally produced image. They renegotiated significations such as urbanity and modernity, which were denied to their city, and used them as productive measures of self-improvement and self-assertion. They served their city as representatives and disseminators of local public opinion and tried to build a Polish provincial elite that would be active at the national level.

The City from Scratch

Łódź was embedded in a trans-regional commercial borderland network consisting, on the one hand, of external capital-perpetuating accumulation (one vector) and, on the other, of export-driven production (a different vector). While exploiting local resources, the city operated against the backdrop of local social and cultural ties. In one sense, it was a typical industrial center that had much in common with other cities of its type, yet it was a product of its surroundings and Russian Poland's social, cultural and spatial landscape. Therefore, it was profiting from its exceptional position and from being well plugged into broader commercial networks while simultaneously falling victim to various forms of exclusion and "othering." These non-convergent tendencies, unfolding on various "scales" of interconnectedness, might be described as "decoupling integration," which linked the industrial city to its surrounding and simultaneously made it foreign to it. This produced a particular form of discourse about the city, from both outside and within, which to a large extent framed its appearance as both the object and the subject of modernity. Local debates, forming an inter-discourse with respect to the city's external image, were part and parcel of the broader polemics about modernization present among the Polish-speaking symbolic elites of Russian Poland. However, the local debates had specific traits, with many vectors reversed and with arguments fired the other way around than in the broader, Warsaw-centered circulation of ideas.

While discursive responses to capitalist modernization varied, they often contained recurring threads. Jerzy Jedlicki convincingly documents how Western, pastoral, counter-capitalist discourse was re-articulated in the Polish local context. Here, it incorporated, on the one hand, a striving for leveling underdevelopment and, on the other, strong anti-urban sentiments. The latter stemmed from the idea of "Polishness," heavily saturated with the rural heritage of the landed gentry or an idealized peasant pastoralism seen as its vital core.²⁵ Moreover, Jedlicki points at a certain "trial against the city," showing

²⁴ WIKTOR MARZEC, AGATA ZYSIAK: "Journalists Discovered Łódź like Columbus": Orientalizing Capitalism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Polish Modernization Debates, in: *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 50 (2016), pp. 213-243.

²⁵ JERZY JEDLICKI: *A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth-century Polish Approaches to West-*

how the rural ethos of the noble class strengthened an anti-urban stream in the Polish debates, otherwise remaining rather convergent with the Western post-romantic pastoralism.²⁶

Despite this similarity, the Polish anti-urban discourses had one more supplementary, albeit crucial, aspect: What was urban and hostile was, in addition, foreign. Thus, the industrial city was not only horrific and dangerous but also culturally alien. Therefore, not only was there a debate concerning the pros and cons of industrialization, but this was also reframed as a struggle over the protection of local lore and tradition from predicaments of “Western” origin. Thus, anti-urbanity was associated with the protection of Polishness. Łódź as a rapidly growing textile industry center was indeed haunted by all the predicaments and discontent associated with early industrial capitalism. Inhabited first by foreign craftsmen and subsequently by industrialists flowing in from the entire region, who were drawn by the economic opportunities and governmental assistance, Łódź witnessed the growing fortunes of mostly Jewish and German entrepreneurs. This was too much for the advocates of “Polishness” to take. Though Łódź was one of the few real sites of modernization, initially, even if modernization was already an issue, the debate over the modernization of Poland was not focused on Łódź.²⁷ Its discursive presence was limited to a hostile, external body, and its image was converted into that of a foreign colony (first a German, later also a Jewish city), a place for the dissemination of external, dangerous influences of greed, speculation and an industrious spirit.

Indeed, the story of Łódź and its industrial capitalism is rather dramatic. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russian Poland was an almost completely rural, undeveloped area, lacking in industrial centers. The formation of capitalism proceeded in a fairly specific way in the region, divergent from that which developed in regions where it had been built up over centuries. It was a fragmentary, initially state-licensed capitalism, implemented very quickly from the top down by the government. Later it became a particular form of tsarist laissez-faire capitalism, as the prerogatives of the semi-autonomous Polish government were drastically reduced after the January Uprising (1863). The strength and intensity of social changes were much more significant than they were in those countries in which these processes were extended over a much longer period of time. The driving goal of accumulat-

ern Civilization, Budapest 1999; BRONISŁAWA KOPCZYŃSKA-JAWORSKA: *Miasto i miejskość w systemie wartości Polaków* [The City and Urbanity within the Value System of the Poles], in: HALINA BUGAJSKA, HANNA IMBS (eds.): *Miasto i kultura polska doby przemysłowej*. Vol. 3: *Wartości*, Wrocław 1993, pp. 99-119.

²⁶ JERZY JEDLIŃSKI: *Świat zwyrodniały: Lęki i wyroki krytyków nowoczesności* [A World Degenerated: The Fears and Judgements of Modern Critics], Warszawa 2000.

²⁷ As TOMASZ KIZWALTER: “Nowatorstwo i rutyny”: *Spółeczeństwo Królestwa Polskiego wobec procesów modernizacji, 1840-1863* [“Novelty and Routine”: The Society of the Kingdom of Poland and Modernization Processes, 1840-1863], Warszawa 1991, implicitly demonstrates.

ing capital, accompanied by the proletarianization of society and the increase in contract labor, combined with the rapid development of cities and an internal migration from rural areas, created a setting fully exposing the vagaries of peripheral, early capitalism.

Łódź was the *locus classicus* of these processes, having been just a backwater city at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In such a small village, arguing over the ownership of city rights seemed a serious exaggeration. However, everything was to change, and in just a few decades. The semi-autonomous Polish government implemented a special program to stimulate industrial development; this program contained a variety of privileges for future investors and proved to be effective enough to stimulate successive waves of immigration. The population increased very rapidly, at a scale unique in Europe, comparable only to that in the fast-growing, relatively young American cities. The population of Łódź increased from 767 in 1810 to almost 477,000 in 1914.²⁸ The phenomenon of Łódź was nothing less than the creation of a new city from scratch. All these factors led to the emergence of an unusual and unique industrial city, with its structure totally subordinated to the requirements of production and the market.

National divisions strengthened class differences. The population consisted of large groups of Germans (from 77 percent in 1840, the German population fell to 21 percent at the beginning of the twentieth century) and Jews (the population of which rose from 9 percent to 33 percent during the same time span).²⁹ In addition, the city had a Russian administration. The Polish population grew steadily but still amounted to only half the city's inhabitants in the first decade of the twentieth century. The numbers do not tell the whole story, however. The skilled workers were mainly German, while the unskilled, badly-paid and easily disposable ones were Polish. Additionally, the most powerful companies, which employed more than 500 workers, were mainly owned by Germans, with a few in Jewish hands. At the same time, the number of female workers increased greatly. The social structure can also be characterized by an almost complete lack of an intelligentsia, which in the 1890s amounted to only 0.63 percent of the population.³⁰

Stemming from these peculiarities of urban development and the undeniable predicaments associated with early industrial capitalism, and further

²⁸ JAN FIJAŁEK, RYSZARD ROSIN (eds.): *Łódź: Dzieje miasta do 1918 r.* [Łódź: History of the City until 1918], Łódź 1988.

²⁹ JULIAN JANCZAK: *The National Structure of the Population in Łódź in the Years 1820-1938*, in: *Polin* 6 (1991), pp. 20-26.

³⁰ WIESŁAW PUŚ: *Dzieje Łodzi przemysłowej: Zarys historii* [The History of Industrial Łódź: An Outline], Łódź 1987, p. 39. However, recent estimations are less dramatic, pointing to the fact that the weakness of local intellectual elites was not that different from comparable situations in other similar-sized cities. See MARZENA IWAŃSKA: *Garść refleksji i postulatów badawczych w związku ze stanem badań nad inteligencją łódzką w dobie zaborów* [A Handful of Reflections and Research Postulates Regarding the State of the Research on the Intelligentsia of Łódź in the Age of Partitions], in: *Rocznik Łódzki* 53 (2006), pp. 89-113.

taking into consideration the particular reservations in the Polish mindset towards urban development, a specific discursive, imaginary picture of the city emerged. As a discursive object, Łódź began to be rendered in a steady, characteristic manner, creating the foundation for countless depictions of it as an alien, savage, uncivilized city of poverty and greed; these depictions remained the main image of Łódź in the public imagination for a long time.³¹ Its emerging reputation strongly influenced the first travel reportages, which often referred to the already existing stereotypes of the new city. What's more, even circles supportive of "progress" and industrialization (such as the Warsaw positivists) perceived Łódź as their still-born child (or perhaps deformed fetus), positing it as a counter-example of the developmental path they wished Poland to follow.³²

In this context an interesting reversal occurred. Modernity is often defined through exclusion and careful policing of its boundary.³³ In a slightly different context Timothy Mitchell notes that "the identity of the modern city is created by what it keeps out. [...] The city requires this 'outside' in order to present itself, in order to constitute its singular, uncorrupted identity."³⁴ Regarding Łódź, however, many arguments aimed to deny the urban and hence modern status of the city, which was only as modern as it could be against its rural hinterland. The reason was the urge to secure the idea of modernity, still more imagined than practiced, against vagaries of its empirical realization in Łódź. That is why the bulk of anti-Łódź discourse from outside was produced by progressive intelligentsia, who was not outspokenly anti-modern or anti-urban.³⁵ And that is why ethnic undertones were effective means of simultaneously excluding Łódź from the domains of modernity and Polishness, even if both domains could hardly have been more distant from each other.

As local elites slowly emerged, this external condemnation was soon to be questioned from within. Because of these particular circumstances and the

³¹ JOANNA B. MICHLIC: Łódź in the Postcommunist Era: In Search of a New Identity, in: JOHN CZAPLICKA (ed.): *Cities after the Fall of Communism: Reshaping Cultural Landscapes and European Identity*, Washington—Baltimore 2009, pp. 281-304; AGATA ZYSIAK: *Trudne dziedzictwo—w poszukiwaniu tożsamości Łodzi: Wokół nowego centrum Łodzi* [The Troubled Legacy—in a Search for a New Identity of Łódź: Around the New Center of Łódź], Łódź 2010, pp. 103-120.

³² On a positivist genre of nationalism see WOJCIECH MODZELEWSKI: *Naród i postęp: Problematyka narodowa w ideologii i myśli społecznej pozytywistów warszawskich* [Nation and Progress: The Question of Nation in the Ideology and Social Thought of the Warsaw Positivists], Warszawa 1977; BRIAN PORTER: *The Social Nation and Its Futures: English Liberalism and Polish Nationalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Warsaw*, in: *American Historical Review* 101 (1996), 5, pp. 1470-1492.

³³ NATALIE KOCH: *Bordering on the Modern: Power, Practice and Exclusion in Astana*, in: *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39 (2014), 3, pp. 432-443.

³⁴ TIMOTHY MITCHELL: *Colonising Egypt*, Berkeley 1991, p. 165.

³⁵ KAMIL ŚMIECHOWSKI: *Z perspektywy stolicy: Łódź okiem warszawskich tygodników społeczno-kulturalnych (1881-1905)* [From the Perspective of the Capital: Łódź in the Eyes of Warsaw Social and Cultural Weeklies (1881-1905)], Łódź 2012.

existing image of the city, the debate often revolved around the tension between the urban and the rural; what was envisioned in the background was a “proper” (usually Polish) city, which Łódź was urged to become.

The Landscape of the City

The image of a particular place is a result of its actual characteristics and expectations shared in the relevant community of discourse—or, more broadly speaking, cultural codes—among the populations who forge and debate this image. In the case of the Polish debate over modernization of the country and the rising “urban question,” these expectations were shaped by a somewhat vague and idealized picture of a “Polish city” to be created in the future or as a modernized version of the imagined past. In the case of Łódź, its overall cityscape failed to meet any Polish expectations, revealing how distant they were from modernity. Every bit of the urban structure was seen as demonstrating a saturation with something “other” and hostile, from a lack of religion to the imperative of profit. In 1857, one of the first “correspondences” (placed in a part of the newspaper under this revealing title, immediately creating a sense of distance) from Łódź reported that:

“A town with a population of 30,000, but no church tower dominating the landscape, will greet you from a distance. No rumble of living people will take your attention from the low houses, built along axes marked out using a piece of string and a pair of compasses; black and red chimneys ask the sky how fast the revenue will return from the expenditures made for high walls; a murmur and drone present you a prayer, which the city repeats from dawn till dusk. Immediately you notice that it is not a Polish city that stands before you, and if you enter its streets, more than a mile long, you are anxious, because everywhere it is numb, empty and silent, but extremely industrious.”³⁶

Łódź, as a place of rapid, uncontrolled economic growth, confronted its inhabitants and visitors with cultural change, a rearrangement of the social structure, and an unprecedented intensification of urban stimuli. Thus, it was also a place that created a new mode of experience—a modern one. One of the excited correspondents of the Warsaw press remarked in 1890 that: “Industrial movement, movement of money, pre-Christmas movement, railway movement—in a word only movement. It boils, roars, and pulsates in the Łódź colossus.”³⁷ Łódź was probably the only city in Poland where one could really feel modernity with its strength and brutality—a brutality of overloaded senses, urban experience, speed, noise and movement. It was perceived as such by the newcomers from rural areas, who embraced the industrial hub in the hopes of making ends meet. They regarded a forced migration as a path of

³⁶ Korespondencja Kroniki: Z Kalisza [Correspondence of the Kronika: From Kalisz], in: *Kronika Wiadomości Krajowych i Zagranicznych* from 1857-07-14/26. This newspaper was a conservative daily published in Warsaw.

³⁷ *Przegląd społeczny* [Social Review], in: *Głos* (1893), 51, p. 607.

escape from the “benign state of natural, almost primitive culture,” as one of the working-class writers recollected in his memoir, which was turned into a novel. In his own words, he migrated to the “biggest center of machinism in Poland.”³⁸ “With [his] senses of sight and smell [he] felt that great things were being created there,” so he “desired to start work with a machine as soon as possible.” For a real villager, Łódź offered a powerful confrontation with the new world of industrial production, creating an excitement with a new environment, where “waves of air, densified with the overheated oil and cotton, streamed out of the holes of iron windows, stimulating [him] no less than incense during the Easter procession.”³⁹

Despite these obvious markers of Łódź’s urban status, voices could be heard saying that it was not really a city but rather an overgrown village. Interestingly, most of these voices were not directed against the elements of urban life that might be associated with the direct influence of a village. This critical gaze did not focus on the rural populations flocking to Łódź in search of a better life. The inflow of new people did not create so much of a panicked reaction to rural, uncivilized habits, well known from the post-WWII diatribes lamenting the “ruralization” of urban culture. This is epitomized in the myth of pigs allegedly kept in the bathrooms of burghers’ flats in Wrocław (Breslau) or Lwów (L’viv), breeding and multiplying in numbers closely corresponding to the level of resentment and orientalizing condescension felt by the former, “proper” inhabitants. In the case of Łódź, however, elements of “the village,” entering the city on carts packed with the meager possessions of post-peasant migrants, did not bother all that many people.

Łódź was denied urbanity because of its disproportionate growth and village-like structure, including its modern, rectangular street grid, without any “navel” of a central market sanctified by a cathedral. Thus, even if modern *par excellence*, Łódź was perceived as not fitting the urban pattern, being compared to some imaginary, harmonious city, which it most definitely was not. What was modern was not necessarily urban—which was still associated with a more traditional built environment. Indeed, due to its particular history, Łódź did not fit to this pattern—not only had it not grown organically or from an existing urban structure, but it also lacked many infrastructural projects or representative buildings associated with the modern expansion of the state. After all, it was not even a provincial capital (which was in Piotrków) and the Russian state neglected many infrastructural developments in the city.⁴⁰

³⁸ LUCJAN RUDNICKI: *Stare i nowe* [Old and New], Warszawa 1979, p. 94.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

⁴⁰ For comparison with other industrial cities of the region see ANDREAS R. HOFMANN: *Von der Spekulation zur Intervention: Formen des Arbeiterwohnungsbaus in Lodz und Brünn vor und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, in: ALENA JANATKOVÁ, HANNA KOZIŃSKA-WITT (eds.): *Wohnen in der Großstadt, 1900-1939: Wohnsituation und Modernisierung im europäischen Vergleich*, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 225-248; on Russian urban policing, see THEODORE R. WEEKS: *Nationality and Municipality: Reforming City Government in the Kingdom of Poland*, in: *Russian History* 21 (1994), 1, pp. 23-47; BROWER (as in

Moreover, a role was played in this regard by the strong differentiation made between Warsaw, as a capital city and implicit paradigm of urbanity, and the other provincial cities, extensively criticized and denied urban virtues by the Warsaw-based and capital-focused intelligentsia. Łódź fitted neither of these patterns, it was not urban but not benignly pastoral, either. It was something new, but not something that was dreamed of as a modern space.

Re-imagining the City

Even as journalists and writers were describing Łódź as an alien city with no rules, the city itself became more “urban” of its own accord. For instance, due to its rapid development, an increasing number of workplaces for intelligentsia, such as lawyers, physicians or company clerks, was created in Łódź in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As a consequence, the local job market offered better chances for professional development than other locations. Most of these positions were occupied by Poles or assimilated Jews, often mimicking the intellectual life of Warsaw. Consequently, the “lodgment” of the intelligentsia in Łódź grew both in number and in the range of its activities. Some educated professionals, choosing to work in Łódź for financial reasons, believed that the so-called “bad city” was not the worst place after all for stimulating culture and engaging in a social life (for example, writing newspapers or running theatres).⁴¹ Ironically, the very shortage of such facilities created opportunities for their creation and operation.

In many respects, local writers, journalists and active citizens shared the general premises of Polish anti-urbanity. Simultaneously, however, they were genuinely interested in rebuilding their environment so that they found it more acceptable, less harmful to its toiling inhabitants and more legitimized or recognized as a new—finally appropriate for the *Zeitgeist*—urban center in the Polish Kingdom. Thus, they produced a series of texts questioning the existing image of the city and attempting to make virtues out of its vices. They fervently tried to orchestrate public opinion, civil society, the industrial sphere and city administration to create a habitable, “proper” city, worthy of its name, out of the peculiar urban bastard of capitalist modernization. Simultaneously, they tried to re-appropriate those elements that made themselves and their city modern while turning them into a launch pad for future developments. Along the way, they managed to convince themselves that it was not as bad as it might have looked from the outside.⁴²

footnote 1).

⁴¹ The German culture was developed in Łódź beginning in the 1830s but it initially had a closed character, typical of a diaspora. The German press, represented by *Lodzer Zeitung*, had existed in Łódź since 1863 and it changed into a modern source of opinion in the same period when *Dziennik Łódzki* was first launched.

⁴² *Z dnia na dzień* [From Day to Day], in: *Goniec Łódzki* (1900), 78.

It is easy to note the strong binary opposition: A certain undesired, “inharmounious” vision of urban life (industry without culture, etc.) was contrasted with benign attempts to change it and put it on the track towards progress. This general opposition might be accompanied by a more detailed investigation of the respective “desired” and “undesired” states of affairs. Against the backdrop of the existing peculiar image of the city, as reconstructed above, and the painfully felt inadequacy of its local life with respect to the expected conditions of a “proper,” modern city, a specific inter-discourse emerged. Its goals included, simultaneously, a critique of the existing crisis state of affairs and a positive affirmation of the already-acquired elements of the city’s modern identity. This double layering also concerned time. A critical reference to the recent past stressed the present zeal of eliminating predicaments that could not be easily erased. This deployment of time helped ground the legitimacy and viability of future strivings by making it possible to establish a critical distance from the past. Such frog-leaping revealed that the “will to improve” was not an empty shibboleth but actually perpetuated change.⁴³ In the example below, this structure is epitomized by the contrast between Łódź’s weak intelligentsia (an intelligentsia was understood as a necessary element of a “proper city”) and its “alien character,” as well as by the fact that it was being challenged from within:

“However, life has its own demands, and maturing social demands have to be fulfilled. And so it has been in Łódź for the last twenty years. The fact that in the middle of the country there was a city with tens of thousands of Polish workers, and alongside them an entirely dispersed and idle intelligentsia, feeling completely alien in Łódź, and that it was a rarity to meet a man in a frock-coat speaking Polish, could not have been taken as normal. [Not from Warsaw] was a wake-up call played to Łódź intelligentsia to rise from their coma, and not from there were the winds blowing a reviving blast of air.”⁴⁴

As has been described, local journalists often struggled with their own feelings of inadequacy and were somehow reluctant to express pride in the place where they worked. To convince the external public, local readers and (perhaps above all) themselves that Łódź had modern credentials and potential, they tried to build a form of local self-assertion.⁴⁵ Building on the awareness of industrial power and a certain fragmentary modernity of urban infra-

⁴³ I borrowed the concept of “the will to improve” from TANIA LI: *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*, Durham 2007.

⁴⁴ Łódź przed dwudziestu laty [Łódź Twenty Years ago], in: *Rozwój* (1905), 11.

⁴⁵ A form of estrangement or self-alienation was perhaps a common predicament of peripheral local elites, expecting to be spearheads of occidentalism in circumstances not so receptive to their calls, be it because of cultural differentiations on the borderlands of European influences or the class composition of the body politic, reluctant about the paternalistic gazes and self-proclaimed leadership. See PAUL MANNING: *Strangers in a Strange Land: Occidental Publics and Orientalist Geographies in Nineteenth-century Georgian Imaginaries*, Boston/MA 2012; WIKTOR MARZEC, KAMIL ŚMIECHOWSKI: *Pathogenesis of the Polish Public Sphere: Intelligentsia and Popular Unrest in the 1905 Revolution and After*, in: *Polish Sociological Review* 4 (2016), pp. 437-457.

structure, subsequent campaigns were launched to “modernize” the city’s intellectual life, often seen as destitute of “proper” urban cultural practices and lacking in a decent corpus of local intellectuals. This line of critique had a strong undercurrent of polarized imagination, separating the things urban from those associated with a rural backwater, backwardness or roughness. Thus, Łódź was rendered as deficient in the features of a city, being, rather, some overgrown settlement which had to be deliberately elevated to the status of a city. This was both a goal and the practice of the “performative texts,” such as the one quoted below:

“Our Łódź, despite the appearance of a big city, is so far rather an enormous ‘little town’ (*miasteczko*) with respect to the culture of its inhabitants. It is somehow like a concentration of small towns, a plethora of Garwolins or Pacanóws⁴⁶, into one entity. It bears many resemblances to the intellectual and social life of many similar godforsaken places. Weird contrasts—the highest possible development of industrial technology, threading in the first row of civilization gains—and the simultaneous insularity of tumbledown concepts, worldviews and forms of life! There are more and more people coming to Łódź and bringing broader views with them, but they have not been able to exert an extensive influence on the situation. In addition, our members of the intelligentsia accommodate themselves to the local environment so strangely and easily that they often become a pillar of this insularity of concepts and views rather than refreshing the fusty atmosphere.”⁴⁷

The broader framework of similar strivings was a certain “will to improve,” here embodied by attempts to leave behind the city’s “provincialism.” The repetitive calls to move forward in this process were often connected with an implicit benchmark time framework—imposing an imperative to keep up the pace of progress and, consequently, to establish a path that would allow the envisioned developments to be achieved within the “proper” timeframe. This, in turn, was supplemented with a strong feeling of longing, a desire to “finally” achieve what had been expected for so long: “Because it is already high time that Łódź finally ceased to be considered as a small provincial town, in which simple, patriarchal relationships suffice.”⁴⁸ Needless to say, this time-saturated expectation and the rhetoric of belatedness were also meant to express a critique of the social and political reality of Russian Poland, without the interference of censorship.

Once the local journalists became more active in assessing the city’s developments and issuing calls to action in favor of change, several lines of critique developed. They all tended to have a patterned construction, using similar metaphors to describe the modern condition, a customary diagnosis of the situation, and repetitive targets or goals.⁴⁹ Many concerned the problem of the

⁴⁶ This is a form using pluralized, emblematic names epitomizing small, provincial Polish towns.

⁴⁷ *Nadczułość prowincjonalna* [Provincial Hypersensitiveness], in: *Goniec Łódzki* (1899), 15.

⁴⁸ [Untitled material], in: *Rozwój* (1899), 108.

⁴⁹ This analytical matrix is presented in a broader form in AGATA ZYSIAK: *The Desire for*

urban and the rural, siding with the former and using the latter as a contrastive backdrop. In one mode it was an unwanted “failed” modernity of an “enormous little town,” in another, the “backward” rurality of old Poland.⁵⁰ The first mode was used as self-motivation, the second as an argument against external critiques. Acquiring the qualities of a “proper” city was a crucial stepping stone for self-reform.

What Is a “Proper” City?

As described above, for a long time the city constituted a slander for Polish intellectual elites, generally rather unfavorable towards urban modernity. Indeed, the peculiar social and urban structure of Łódź did not make for a very pleasant environment, with the flamboyant palaces of its factory owners surrounded by shantytowns of the working poor and its predatory capitalism flaunting skyrocketing careers against the background of abysmal misery. The affluence of those already established stood side by side with the helplessness of the migratory rural populations, while everywhere urban squalor was spiced with the ubiquitous fumes and noises of the textile mills. Consequently, the most common topic of press coverage on urban issues at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries concerned policing the city, which bustled with undesirable phenomena and was haunted by various disruptive phenomena (from smallpox to debauchery).

The main goals were to orchestrate the spatial chaos and introduce the institutions required by “a proper city.” The development of the city was presented as abnormal and its appearance did not fit into any of the known patterns. As journalists reported with disgust for an extended period of time: “In Łódź, there are businesses worth millions gaining good profit, but there are no schools,”⁵¹ or in a similar vein: “There is the power of millions, but there are no hospitals. There are many palaces—proudly protruding—but there are no hygienic flats for the hard-working masses; there are trimmed gardens, but no public parks.”⁵² While Manchester and many other core-industrial towns were going through intense suburbanization, which influenced not only spatial but also social relations⁵³, Łódź was a highly mixed environment and remains so even today.

Fullness: The Fantasmatic Logic of Modernization Discourses at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Century in Łódź, in: *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2014), 13, pp. 41-69.

⁵⁰ See, respectively: *Nadczułość prowincjonalna* [Provincial Hypersensitiveness], in: *Goniec Łódzki* (1899), 15; *Jeszcze partykularz* [Still Particularity], in: *Rozwój* (1913), 280; *Marzenia Łódzianina* [The Dreams of a Łódź Inhabitant], in: *Goniec Łódzki* (1907), 116; and *Warszawa i Łódź* [Warsaw and Łódź], in: *Goniec Łódzki* (1905), 118a.

⁵¹ *Szkoły fabryczne* [Factory Schools], in: *Rozwój* (1898), 194.

⁵² *W sprawie kąpieli* [Regarding the Baths], in: *Goniec Łódzki* (1898), 90.

⁵³ POBŁOCKI (as in footnote 4.)

The spatial anarchy of mixed neighborhoods with countless tiny workshops, factories, tenement houses and palaces was harshly criticized. Although the city's street grid was consciously planned, it was literally the only factor taming the spatial practices of early capitalist urbanization. In addition, the bad quality of buildings, aesthetic disorder and generally unhealthy living conditions were subjects of scrutiny. The focal points were filthy and dark courtyards and, above all, the never-ending attempts to build a sewer system—Łódź was probably the largest European city where there was no alternative way of draining sewage other than by gutters and open ditches.⁵⁴ In their descriptions of Łódź, journalists joined the pan-European choir of critiques targeting urban squalor and unhealthy conditions, often framed in the sanitary postulates of the hygienist movement.⁵⁵

This longing for a proper, “modern” infrastructure, allegedly already existing in Berlin, Budapest, Dresden and, most often, Warsaw⁵⁶, was profound if not obsessive. For instance, the construction of a municipal hospital was seen as a condition of saving Łódź from its dubious status as an “ungraspable anomaly.”⁵⁷ Moreover, the issue of the lack of infrastructure and the resulting perils was directly connected to moral degeneration. The filthiness of a gutter was metaphorically associated with moral decay, and contagious epidemics were combined with moral illnesses: “starvation and plague will spread, poverty will grow, common despondence will increase, and against the backdrop

⁵⁴ WALDEMAR BIEŻANOWSKI: *Z dziejów kanalizacji i wodociągów łódzkich: Horror z Happy Endem* [The History of Waterworks and Sewer of Łódź: A Horror with a Happy End], Łódź 2005.

⁵⁵ *Budownictwo łódzkie* [Łódź Building Practices], in: *Rozwój* (1899), 50. For some remarks on the hygienist postulates in Poland see ELŻBIETA KACZYŃSKA: *A Century of Social and Economic Change: Its Impact on Health and Welfare (Poland between 1815 and 1914)*, in: *Hygiea Internationalis* 9 (2010), 1, pp. 199-221. For more detailed historical studies, see JAN FIJALEK: *Instytucje pomocy materialno-zdrowotnej w Łodzi i okregu łódzkim; wiek XIX do roku 1870* [The Welfare Institutions in Łódź and the Region: Nineteenth Century to 1870], Wrocław 1962; IDEM: *Tradycje zdrowia publicznego w historii medycyny powszechnej i polskiej: Wybrane zagadnienia organizacyjne i naukowe* [The Traditions of Public Health in the History of Polish and World Medicine: Selected Organizational and Scientific Issues], Łódź 1998. For comparative contexts on hygienist movement on peripheries of Europe see PEDRO L. MORENO MARTÍNEZ: *The Hygienist Movement and the Modernization of Education in Spain*, in: *Paedagogica Historica* 42 (2006), 6, pp. 793-815; CHRISTIAN PROMITZER, SEVASTÉ TROUMPE-
TA et al. (eds.): *Health, Hygiene, and Eugenics in Southeastern Europe to 1945, Budapest—New York 2010*; HAROLD L. PLATT: *From Hygeia to the Garden City: Bodies, Houses, and the Rediscovery of the Slum in Manchester, 1875-1910*, in: *Journal of Urban History* 33 (2007), 5, pp. 756-772.

⁵⁶ See, respectively: *W sprawie kąpieli* (as in footnote 52); *Nasza filantropia* [Our Philanthropy], in: *Kurier Łódzki* (1906), 6b; *Uspołecznienie robotników* [The Socialization of Workers], in: *Kurier Łódzki* (1912), 196; *Budownictwo łódzkie* (as in footnote 55); *Z chwili* [From the Moment], in: *Kurier Łódzki* (1906), 96b.

⁵⁷ *Luźne uwagi* [Loose Remarks], in: *Goniec Łódzki* (1902), 60.

of hunger and despair—immorality and felony blossom with the most exuberant flowers.”⁵⁸

At some point, the seemingly futile calls for change became so repetitive that even those who issued them felt obliged to express an ironic distance. Apparently, they felt that repeating them yet another time in the same mode of normative obligation was becoming pathetic. Consequently, they introduced more complex rhetorical strategies, such as irony and mediation of the journalist’s voice by, for instance, publishing in 1905 a rhyming poem (this feature is not preserved in the translation) on the dreams of a Łódź resident, light-hearted but nevertheless serious, announced to the world in a tavern:

“The citizen of Łódź talks double Dutch when drinking in the tavern, claiming that Łódź is soon to outrun Warsaw concerning urban infrastructure, that soon the city of cotton will be the second metropolis of Europe. Just let the hard times go by, and then even the horse-drawn cab will be electric. A summer theatre, baths and market halls, even street kiosks will soon be ready. And if the big moguls aren’t skimpy with their philanthropy, hospitals will also pop up like mushrooms, so that soon, wherever you go, whether to the center or into any dark corner, you will arrive at a hospital or an asylum. The sewer system, like one speeding up steps, will be ready in the year 2000, so this city, this township, still so young, will be able to drink filtrated water. So we go on, and in two hundred years there will be no smoke or dust in the city, and we will not burn in the sun as Łódź will have nice parks and alleys. And almost Italian-like air will tickle our lungs, and there will no longer be any knee-deep mud.”⁵⁹

The poem plays with time expectations, presenting the idea that merely moderate improvements would end up being delayed for a century. Thus, it tellingly mocks the never-ending process of modernization, constantly postponed improvements and simple calls for simple things in vain. Above all, the satire is a most revealing form of expression, offering insight into the actual imagination about what a “proper” city should look like. Ironically enough, in the year 2000 most of those dreams came true, not because of modern improvements but instead due mainly to the almost total collapse of industry in the city ten years earlier. When issued, however, these calls were intended not only to improve the city’s built environment, but also to forge a legal and

⁵⁸ Zarys sytuacji w Łodzi [Outline of the Situation of Łódź], in: *Kurier Łódzki* (1907), 7.

⁵⁹ Marzenia łódzianina (as in footnote 50). Polish original: “Obywatel miasta Łodzi przy kufelku bredzi, że Łódź w miejskich urządzeniach Warszawę wyprzedzi; że niedługo gród bawełny stanie na tej stopie, że się będzie mienił miastem drugim w Europie. Bo niech tylko, mówi, miną te czasy krytyczne, to dorożki nawet w Łodzi będą elektryczne. Teatr letni i kąpiele i hale targowe, również kioski na ulicach będą wnet gotowe. A jeżeli nie poskapią ofiar grube ryby, będą rosły i szpitale jak po deszczu grzyby, tak że wkrótce, gdzie nie pójdiesz—w centrum czy zaułek, spotkasz, człeku gmach szpitala albo też przytułek. Kanalizacją także, gdy przyspieszą kroku to na pewno będzie ‘fertig’ w dwutysięcznym roku i to miasto, to miasteczko, takie jeszcze młode, będzie miało do użytku filtrowaną wodę. Słowem pójdziemy rażno naprzód, a za latek dwieście, ani dymu ani kurzu nie będzie już w mieście, i nie będziemy się na słońcu smażyć jako skwarki, bo Łódź będzie posiadała aleje i parki. I powietrze á la włoskie będzie płuća łechtać, i nie będziemy się w błocisku po kolana brechtać.”

institutional framework enabling it to function properly and to populate it with decent, cultural, Polish citizens. The feeling of institutional underdevelopment marked most of the debates between the 1863 January Uprising and the 1905 Revolution. The soaring urbanization brought into full view the scale of the shortages in the institutional framework in the Kingdom of Poland under the reign of the Tsar. Not surprisingly, the tsarist administration was generally uninterested in developing an independent Polish public.⁶⁰

In this situation, every social or cultural institution, be it a local theatre or a philanthropic society, even those most provincial, was considered an important center of Polishness, re-balancing the asymmetrical relationship between Polish public life and the Russian administration. But in fact some of the cultural or philanthropic societies were more religious than national. For instance, Łódź's Christian Charity Association was controlled by Germans; German Protestants worked there with some Polish Catholics. The same was true of the local fire brigade. Rising expectations put provincial institutions under the crosshairs of both the tsarist administrative obstacles and the permanent criticisms issued by the Warsaw press. The latter urged them to be more and more socially and culturally active.⁶¹

As a result, imagined new institutions became a Holy Grail promising the solution to swelling social problems. Using references to the benchmark of the Western state order, they were commonly regarded as the most rational path of social development. Positivists, like other European liberals, believed that harmonious social development was possible under a few conditions: a high level of education, social self-organization and the Westernization of public life.⁶² In Łódź, not only was the enlargement of a Polish presence in institutional bodies a hotly disputed issue but, in addition, the peculiarities of the local situation and acuteness of the problems tainted the debate. Responding to these circumstances, the local press made the improvement of local institutions its paramount mission.⁶³ It was a widely held conviction that

“[the] local social life is certainly far from tempting and encouraging, there are hardly any of the facilities (*urządzeń*) which everywhere else constitute an indispensable need for every educated man, and it is difficult to point out any insti-

⁶⁰ WEEKS, Nationality and Municipality (as in footnote 40), p. 27.

⁶¹ ANDRZEJ SZWARC: Inteligencja warszawska i prowincjonalna w świetle własnych opinii z lat powojennych (próba sondażu) [The Warsaw and Provincial Intelligentsia in the Light of Their Own Opinions in the Years after the Uprising], in: RYSZARDA CZEPULIS-RASTENIS (ed.): Inteligencja polska XIX i XX w.: Studia, vol. 3, Warszawa 1983, pp. 195-207. An extensive analysis of the presence of Łódź in Warsaw press provides ŚMIECHOWSKI, Z perspektywy stolicy (as in footnote 35).

⁶² MACIEJ JANOWSKI: Polish Liberal Thought before 1918, Budapest—New York 2004.

⁶³ KAMIL ŚMIECHOWSKI: Łódzka wizja postępu: Oblicze społeczno-ideowe “Gońca Łódzkiego,” “Kuriera Łódzkiego” i “Nowego Kuriera Łódzkiego” w latach 1898-1914 [The Łódź Vision of Progress: The Social and Political Face of “Goniec Łódzki,” “Kurier Łódzki” and “Nowy Kurier Łódzki” 1898-1914], Łódź 2014, p. 169.

tutions that may testify to the existence of a more serious intellectual life and social activity [...].”⁶⁴

The pleas for “institutions” were also made to the imperial administration, while the lack thereof was registered and compared to other Russian cities. In the days of discussions about municipal reforms, this issue gained more momentum, especially considering the growing discrepancy between Łódź’s size and commercial significance and its administrative status:

“Inasmuch as in other regions of the Monarchy cities of similar commercial and industrial significance do have institutions which are lacking in our city, it is our duty to call attention to these lacks, in the belief that the most urgent needs of our ‘township’ will be taken into consideration in the forthcoming future.”⁶⁵

Responsibility for this state of affairs was placed on the inept local government, passive citizens and inefficient organization. Of course, when reading the critiques, one should keep in mind the influence of tsarist censorship, which prevented the proclaimed diagnoses from freely pointing out all the problems and obstacles.⁶⁶ Against this backdrop of criticism of an incapable administration and of the obstacles to political reform, active citizens were envisioned as a supplementary, bottom-up solution. Thus, the local public sphere was scrutinized in search of new resources for urban renewal. Because the attitude of industrial tycoons towards philanthropy was ambiguous, all efforts were directed towards stimulating local patriotism and a sense of public responsibility. The lack of such feelings was explained by the abnormal character of the “Polish Manchester.” One author wondered whether there was any

“true, warm attachment to this big city, where the air wheezes soot and dust that often form a dense fog, here and there poisoned with stinking fumes; where water is drunk with fear of its germs and disgust at its strange taste; where it’s difficult to pass through the dreary streets in a grid-plan because of intensive traffic [...] where money is on people’s tongues and in their hearts ...—‘I hate Łódź!’—We can hear this from the intelligentsia and surely it can be heard from many poor chaps too.”⁶⁷

The press also undertook a broader analysis of the social crisis. The decomposition of social bonds was associated with the particular history of the city and its capitalist industrialization. This materialist line of critique notwithstanding, it was the nation that assumed, to an increasing extent, the mantle of the prevalent form of community. This meant that it was enthroned as a desired goal, one towards which current actions should be oriented. Furthermore, it was assumed that all the actors (including the “enemies”) acted according to the national principle. Hence, not surprisingly, actions were

⁶⁴ Słowa i czyny [Words and Actions], in: *Goniec Łódzki* (1898), 90.

⁶⁵ Powiatowe miasteczko [A County Township], in: *Goniec Łódzki* (1899), 63.

⁶⁶ BARTŁOMIEJ SZYNDLER: *Dzieje cenzury w Polsce do 1918 roku* [History of Censorship in Poland until 1918], Kraków 1993.

⁶⁷ *Partykularyzm łódzki* [Łódź Particularism], in: *Rozwój* (1911), 292.

assessed from the respective national standpoints. This included those accused of undermining basic social bonds and forms of solidarity potentially capable of mitigating the predicaments of industrial life:

“[U]pstarts don’t care about anything except their own pockets. No sentiments, but the opposite—the brutality of capital, let us admit, not a cultural one—has shown its true soul. How much does some Gottlieb care about the Polish working masses or Polish nation, without power and authority? [...] They care little about the culture of the country, about its pains and sorrows.”⁶⁸

However, calls for solidarity could also be heard as a means of overcoming the diagnosed problems. The nationalized mode of critique, later pushed to its limits, appeared to many to be rather misleading. Instead, profound changes were needed and the idea of a broader reconfiguration of social relationships began lurking behind the accusations lodged against lazy magistrates and greedy Germans. The envisioned solution was to reform the existing municipal and/or national institutions to establish, regulate and control education, healthcare (especially preventing repeated epidemics), security, unemployment, cultural life and urban development. Thus, the local press participated in the broader controversy about shaping the modern social realm. In the early twentieth century, this debate was additionally invigorated by the hotly disputed issue of municipal reform, creating hope for a limited introduction of autonomy and local elections. On the one hand, this perpetuated the debate over how to arrange new establishments and finally make use of the opportunity for self-governance, while on the other hand, nationalists fanned the flames of antisemitism, raising fears that, in the end, it would be the Jews who would dominate the local councils.⁶⁹ Thus, for better and for worse, the shape of the local polity and corresponding institutional edifices came to the fore as a topic of debate.

This step closed the previous phase of ambiguity. The debate refocused itself from attempts to ensure that the city’s urban status corresponded to its size to discussion of urban self-governance and harmonious infrastructural and institutional development. While arguments about the “proper city,” underpinned by the image of the “urban” as contrasted with the “rural,” and about incomplete urbanity were still in wide circulation, the very oscillation between the urban status and its opposite was overcome. It was connected to the actual proliferation of the long-awaited proper urban way of living and the burgher style of life. With the numerical growth of local bourgeoisie and the cultural forms accompanying it (such as theaters, cultural associations and philanthropic establishments),⁷⁰ the new activities might be targeted as not

⁶⁸ Ruch polityczny w Łodzi [The Political Movement in Łódź], in: *Rozwój* (1907), 245.

⁶⁹ WEEKS, Nationality and Municipality (as in footnote 40); KAMIL ŚMIECHOWSKI: Searching for the Better City: An Urban Discourse during the Revolution of 1905 in the Kingdom of Poland, in: *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3 (2014), 13, pp. 71-96.

⁷⁰ BIANKA PIETROW-ENNKER: Wirtschaftsbürger und Bürgerlichkeit im Königreich Polen: Das Beispiel von Lodz, dem “Manchester des Ostens,” in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 31 (2005), 2, pp. 169-202. On cooperation and conflict between Polish, German and

sufficiently Polish but no longer left doubt about the at-least-germinating urban identity of the industrial giant.

Exorcized Urban Modernity—Conclusions

In examining the Polish debates over modernity with respect to Łódź both from the outside and from within, one can note four important elements relevant to the urban/rural divide in the Polish discourse.

- (1) As the vast majority of capital was controlled by non-Polish owners, the entire structure of capitalist entrepreneurship was easily perceived as foreign and hostile to Polish national interests. Therefore, in many circles, resistance to modernization and the city which represented it—Łódź—was framed as the protection of national identity and uniqueness, the only guarantee of survival during the hard times of the partitions. And if this was not enough, another layer of reservations against rising industrial capitalism was induced by rural post-nobility sentiments, deeply ingrained traditionalism and faith in the ultimate sacredness of “the fathers’ legacy.” Even among those circles that considered industrialization as a developmental opportunity, such as the Warsaw Positivists, Łódź was an example of what this process should not look like. Thus, the city was usually perceived as a kind of foreign body. Consequently, in this context, the discursive construction contained a paradox. In the approach towards the modern industrial city, what was denied was the status of being urban, which was precisely that which gave rise to it. It was not the elements actually connected to the countryside surrounding the industrial city that were perceived as rural but, rather, Łódź’s deficiencies with respect to the imagined modern, Polish city.
- (2) This image of a non-urban, foreign city was ferociously questioned by the emerging local elites, who tried to renegotiate the division between the urban and the rural and to create an imagination of the city worthy of its name. They sought to re-evaluate the might of industrial power and the resilience of the capital-perpetuated textile city to redraw the imaginary map of Polish urban centers. They were only partially successful, and Łódź was for a long time denied the status of a real urban center. This would have been possible only with a more heterogeneous catalogue of urban forms accepted by Polish public opinion, where Łódź fit better with its legacy.⁷¹ This change, however, was out of reach for the local public, also marginalized country-wide because of their contested place of origin.

Jewish bourgeoisie see JÜRGEN HENSEL (ed.): *Polen, Deutsche und Juden in Lodz 1820-1939: Eine schwierige Nachbarschaft*, Osnabrück 1999.

⁷¹ The attempts to re-brand the city with its industrial power undertaken by the inter-war city council are presented by HOFMANN, *Imageprobleme einer Antimetropole* (as in footnote 23).

- (3) An important aspect of the Łódź urban discourse was its performative capacity. While the lack of local elites, public debate and responsive institutions were its important topics, the very practice of hotly disputing these issues created a nascent public opinion in the city. While journalists bemoaned the weak condition of the local debate, they simultaneously created the very public sphere for which they were longing. Even if their strivings for new institutions or an enlarged level of self-governance seldom came to fruition (because of the realities of the tsarist empire), the debate itself was a significant step forward.⁷²
- (4) The city played a particular role in the broader Polish cultural space. Referring to, and broadening the typology presented by Veronika Wendland to conceptualize diversified “spacial imaginations” mediating between regional, national and imperial scales⁷³, Łódź was a sort of a negatively evaluated island, foreign body, or even an abject space of Polishness. From within, however, the local elite attempted to reconstruct the “field of tension” between the local and the national and make it “transformative” rather than “antagonistic,” i.e. to construct a local identity not only compatible with Polishness but also transforming it in a direction more accommodating towards modern urbanity, commercial activity and cultural diversity. This remained an unfulfilled task.

From a broader perspective, the contested binary distinction between the urban and the rural, and its impact on the urban discourse regarding Łódź, foster an understanding of the symbolic configuration structuring the Polish idea of modernity. For a very long time, the specific feature of the city was the contrast between different aspects of urban life. Without a doubt, this was caused by the different temporality of most of the factors that determined the city’s condition. This was a city of asynchronous modernity in a sense that difference was widely perceived as an anachronism.

When the tensions created by forceful projection of local conditions at the assumed timelines were too dominant, the differences were mapped out on a spatial dimension and re-coded as urban-rural differentiation. If the status of a city in the nationwide imagination can be legitimately described in *longue durée* terms, then Łódź has been a place of ethnic, economic and cultural otherness, often expressed in displaced ways. This sense of inadequacy was established and reproduced by specific discursive practices from outside and was contested but also appropriated within local attempts at self-assertion. This “city from nothing” has generated a feeling of dissonance many times throughout the last two centuries. These dissonances may be referred to as a

⁷² A slightly similar argument about Russia is made in LAURA ENGELSTEIN: *The Dream of Civil Society in Tsarist Russia: Law, State, and Religion*, in: NANCY GINA BERMEO, PHILIP G. NORD (eds.): *Civil Society before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-century Europe*, Lanham/MD 2000, pp. 23-42.

⁷³ WENDLAND, *Ostmitteleuropäische Städte* (as in footnote 19).

particular form of “unconscious” modernity within Polish historical self-awareness.