



Somewhat off the beaten tourist path, but gaining popularity among foreign sight-seers, a specter haunts Kraków. Atop the richest farmland in the region, the Nowa Huta steelworks and the accompanying massive, city-scaled housing development lies one of the world's only centrally planned communities.

The region can thank Comrade Stalin for the symmetrical, concrete constructions north-east of Poland's cultural capital. His regime felt that the royal Kraków's intellectual and Catholic populace needed proletarian "balance." From Plac Centralny, or "Central Plaza," the oldest part of Nowa Huta, streets and buildings from the middle 1950s radiate like strands of a spider web. Chief architect Tadeusz Ptaszycki's profound vision included a notoriously never-to-be city hall, a monumental theater and intricately detailed ceramic reliefs representing working men, women and harvesters on the facades. What no longer remains, a larger-than-life steel likeness of Lenin towering in the center of the main thoroughfare, was installed at the districts' birth and now only a memory of former residents.

The blocks, or neighborhood units, mimic those found on working class New York blueprints. Each residential set, especially near Plac Centralny, was ideal for community life. Kindergartens, medical clinics and shops meant that convenience was just around the corner and the young ones would never have to cross busy roads. The tight-knit clusters were to offer a sense of equality, harmony and brotherhood. The low archway entrances provided the courtyards with a closed garden mood; in fact the gardens would be quite simple to close. Six tanks or armored combat vehicles could completely seal the plaza, transforming the square into a kill zone for unwary NATO aggressors (or perhaps protesters) as atomic bomb shelters protected civilians beneath the streets. The triangular design of blocks also gave Big Brother an excellent peek at almost every window from almost any window. The architectural characteristics remain, times have changed.

Brian Whitmore, of the Boston Globe, called Nowa Huta, "George Orwell's dark vision of a perfect industrial metropolis... executed with stunning precision." That opinion,

bereft of coal and iron ore, Malopolski's only megaplant is a monument to ideology trumping efficiency. A number of the rail lines leading to the factory are of a wider, Russian gauge, are a testament to the raw materials and ideology imported from the East. Ironically, the burg transformed into a hive of confrontation.

Throughout Poland's Communist dusk, Nowa Huta became a hotbed of resistance. The strikes and riots of the 70s and 80s, dramatic and frequent, served as a catalyst for change.

Today Nowa Huta remains suspended between old and new, socialism and capitalism, the welfare state and the rat race. There even are rumors that Plac Centralny may be renamed "Ronald Regan Square," and that certain zones might become a Socialist theme park. No matter how remarkably and rapidly Poland changes, Nowa Huta will continue to mutate at a different pace.



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Crazy Guide: Michał "Ostry" Ostrowski

"It is the best car in its class"

Back on Tour

BY ANNA BIELECKA



krakout

01.07 - 14.07

WHAT
WHERE
WHEN

IN ENGLISH

So off we went.

We picked up another Pole and an American on the way. Three adults in a surprisingly spacious Trabant.

"It is the best car in its class," Ostry chuckled, as he showed us how the manual windshield washer and wipers worked.

I had my doubts. He couldn't teach me anything new. I knew it all.

As soon as I stepped out of the car, I started to put together a jigsaw puzzle of my memories and study. Not until I was shown how, and why, the city planned, did I realize that Nowa Huta is so politically and ideologically loaded.

We walked around the "ideal city," as our guide told us, amazing yet slightly exaggerated stories about days gone by. It seemed as if Ostry had an anecdote about everything, and found humor in the face of the American having learnt that a can of Coke or a pair of jeans could be unattainable treasures. It reminded me about personal past desire for a Barbie doll,

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the Pewex and how jealous I felt when my cousin brushed her teeth with three-colored tooth paste.

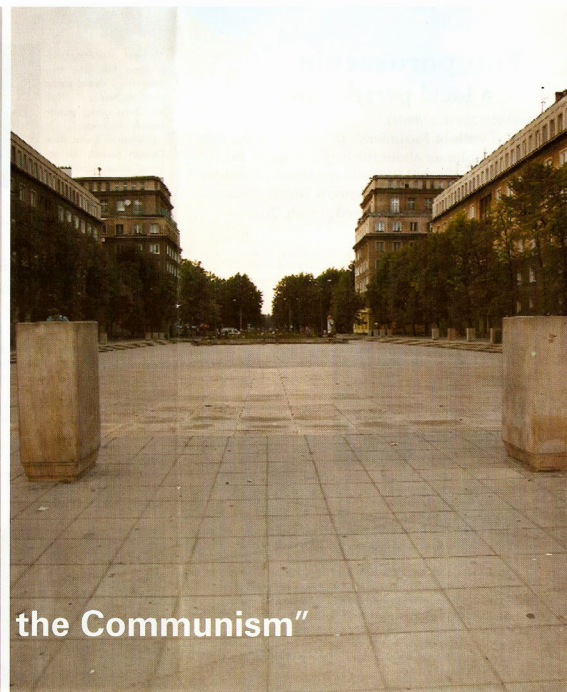
I felt embarrassed by the kitschy restaurant he took us to next. The unwelcoming staff, the décor and the 80s music more fitting of a country wedding than a place to eat, time seemed to have stopped there, and I didn't want my American friend to see that. Ostry, on the contrary, was having a great time and encouraging everybody to "smell the Communism."

Crazy Guides? I couldn't think of a better name.

There is a popular belief that Nowa Huta is dangerous, full of football hooligans and the unemployed. That's just another stereotype. I wouldn't go there alone at night though. It might be a result of the competition between a center of culture and a working-class paradise.

The steelworks outside of Krakow uprooted workers from all over Poland, and the spirit of those who laid the bricks lingers.

No matter how central Kraków looks down on them, I am somewhat impressed with their sense of community. Now I understand the ideological slogan that I saw just few years ago, painted on an overpass near the factory: "Pracujac dla narodu, pracujesz dla siebie." When you work for the nation, you work for yourself. It's not there anymore.



"...smell the Communism"

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