



# **Urban landscape as biographical experience: Pre-war Lublin in the oral testimonies of its inhabitants**

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## **Abstract**

For several hundred years, Lublin has developed as a multiethnic city. As a result of World War II and the destruction of the local Jewish community, its urban structure and its cultural landscape were significantly altered. The image of pre-war Lublin emerging from archival documents, pictures, newspaper articles, and individual memories is multilayered. Studies of the oral testimonies of local inhabitants reveal the deeply sensory and cultural components of spatial experiences characteristic of the cultural landscape of pre-war Lublin. This aspect will be presented as a reference point to conduct analyses concerning cultural and social aspects of the perception of Lublin's urban landscape.

## **Key words:**

Lublin, Jewish district, cultural landscape, cultural stereotypes, urban space

## **Urban landscape as biographical experience**

For several hundred years, Lublin was a city of many nations and many religions, among which Jews and Judaism played a significant role. The majority of the local Jewish community, in 1939 estimated to include 43 thousand people (i.e., ca. 35% of Lublin's population), perished during World War II. Apart from the drastic change in the population, during the German occupation and in the first decade

after the war, the spatial structure and the cultural landscape of Lublin underwent a radical transformation. Using Polish and Jewish labor, the Germans demolished the Jewish districts of Podzamcze and Wieniawa and destroyed numerous objects of symbolic value to Jews. In 1954, the area of the former Jewish district of Podzamcze was completely rebuilt. The new urban plan that replaced it did not aim to reconstruct demolished buildings or preserve the original lines of communication; instead, it completely obscured the spatial structure of the former “Jewish town.” Nowadays, the memory of the old district is preserved only in a few modest remembrances founded at the end of the 1980s, several memorial tablets installed a little later, and occasional artistic installations and performances (Kubiszyn 2017). The 1980s also witnessed the beginning of systematic studies of the history of the Lublin Jews. They include both archival research conducted by historians, which aims to recover the past of the local Jewish community, and studies of various aspects of its social and cultural life (see Radzik 1995; Hawryluk and Linkowski 1996; Zieliński 1998; Kuwałek and Wysok 2001; Radzik 2007; Chmielewski 2015; Libionka 2017).

Studies of the cultural landscape of the Polish-Jewish Lublin that use pre-war photographs, press materials, archives, literary texts, and contemporary-induced documents (e.g., oral interviews) reveal the overlapping of the sensory and cultural aspects of the experience of inhabiting a space shared by Poles and Jews, as was the case of pre-war Lublin. Recorded interviews clearly demonstrate how the individual memories and experiences of former Lubliners are intertwined with socially constructed and culturally conditioned ways of assessing and describing urban space. In the testimonies of the witnesses of the past, the overlapping of the sensory and the social may be noticed in the ways they describe particular urban spaces (districts, streets, or buildings) and in their saturation with recalled images, sounds, and smells of pre-war Lublin.

Studies of various aspects of urban space recalled in the testimonies of former inhabitants belong, on the one hand, to the broad area of memory studies, and, on the other, to the long-established tradition of urban sociology and anthropology, as well as human geography and new cultural geography (Leociak 2017, 9). The intersection of space and memory studies generates a cognitively productive area which may host reflection on the construction of images of the city based on studies of various types of sources interpreted from the historical and cultural perspective.

The analysis of images of pre-war Lublin focus on fragments of interviews with ethnically Polish inhabitants of pre-war Lublin that refer to the streets, buildings, and courtyards of the old Lublin’s center. These testimonies will then be compared with press articles from the 1920s and 1930s and documents of the Sanitary Committee of the Public Health Department of the city of Lublin. The analyses aim to show how, by referring to the recalled images, sounds, and smells connected with particular

places and objects, the interviewees characterize the space of the pre-war city. Both the analyzed phenomena and the diverse source material suggest the approach typical of cultural anthropology rather than that of traditional history based on written archives. Thus, the approach adopted in this study focuses not only on the facts recorded in the documents but also—or primarily—on the way they are presented, and treats oral history interviews not so much as a source of knowledge of the past but as a material which reveals the structures of thinking, understanding, and perception of urban space and its culturally constructed sense and meaning (cf. Stomma 2002, 9). Therefore, the analyses of the ways the interviewees define certain city spaces as “Polish” (i.e., well-known, familiar, and safe) or “Jewish” (i.e. other or different) will refer to the framework of anthropology and ethnography, in which the “us vs. them” opposition is treated as a vital aspect of the process of constructing the image of both the world and one’s identity (Robotycki 1998; Stomma 2002; Said 1978).

### **“Beyond the Cracow Gate there is another Lublin, only worse.” And “another world...”**

Testimonies referring to pre-war Lublin clearly show the city center as an ambivalent, “divided” space, in which the narrators either directly or indirectly point to symbolic borders separating the part of the city described by them as “Christian” (“Catholic”) / “Polish” from the “Jewish” one. The former comprises the so-called “New Town,” that is, the part of the center located to the west of the Cracow Gate (Krakowskie Przedmieście and Narutowicza Streets, together with adjacent streets) and the area stretching to the south (i.e., Królewska and Zamojska streets). Although inhabited by both ethnic Poles and rich Jewish entrepreneurs, traders, and assimilated intelligentsia, these spaces are described by interviewees as “better” and more elegant parts of the city:

The shops there [i.e., on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street] were mostly Polish, rather elegant, too. If any of them were owned by Jews— they were Polonized Jews, so absolutely, there were no bilingual signboards—there was no question of that on Krakowskie Przedmieście [Street]. (Margulowa, 1998b)

Most of the Polish (Christian) narrators define this space as their “own”—centrally situated, close, well-cared for, clean, sweet smelling, and “more civilized”:

Krakowskie [Przedmieście], Zamojska, Narutowicza streets—well, they were already civilized. There was nobility living there, traders mostly, but Poles. Here after all the shops were Polish. ... There were Jews on Krakowskie [Przedmieście] but they were civilized. (Masłow 1998)

The speakers often emphasize the higher status and material wealth of the inhabitants of this part of the city center and their “elitist” character:

Here on Krakowskie [Przedmieście] one met well-to-do people. Children played with various toys, I remember, small carts, with dolls. This was the place of Lublin elites. (Pakora, 2000)

The “Jewish” part of the city center, located to the east of the Cracow Gate and further to the east, beyond the Grodzka Gate, and to the north, along Nowa and Lubartowska streets, is presented in the interviews as a “foreign land,” characterized as remote and culturally separate, unknown, mysterious, and even horrifying. It was thought of as a space in which one may get lost and run into trouble—dominated by ugliness and chaos (cf. Stomma 2002, 32-36, 163, 198, 217).

Numerous interviews contrast the “Jewish” Old Town and Podzamcze with the “clean” and “ordered” New Town:

Krakowskie Przedmieście, the New Town—well, one could see there was order there, and a higher standard of buildings; the Old Town was poor, shabby, and dirty. There was no sewage system there; the waste ran in open sewers, so it was a sorry sight and a contrast to the New Town. (Skwarek 1998)

The interviews usually present the Old Town as neglected, poor, and fear inspiring, although simultaneously intriguing. Numerous narrators remember it as a land of Jewish craftsmen (bakers, tailors, and shoemakers) and traders of bagels and makagigi, but also as a district of “cheap girls,” a dangerous place where one could get into a fight or do shady business. The Podzamcze area located to the east of the Grodzka Gate and inhabited mostly by the poorer and less assimilated Jewish population is mostly depicted as closed, remote, little known, or even forbidden:

Grodzka Street was sort of transitional. It was inhabited by Poles, some Jews too. But beyond the Grodzka Gate—it was absolutely the Jewish district.... I cannot say much about it as one hardly ever went there; one felt like in a foreign country there. (Margulowa 1998a)

The interviews present the “Jewish” part of the city center as a “foreign land” using several key criteria that refer to the look of streets and buildings, to the sounds characteristic of this space and to its smells (Kubiszyn 2017, 321-331). The descriptions of the Old Town, primarily of the Podzamcze area, are dominated by passages referring to the chaotic urban planning, the noises, the overwhelming buzz of a foreign language (Yiddish), and the sounds of trade (traders’ calls) and transportation. Describing the Old Town and the Podzamcze area, the interviewees also frequently

mention various unpleasant smells dominating this part of Lublin. The latter observations find support in archival materials. The Sanitary Committee's documents confirm the lack of a sewerage system and running water supply, damp and dilapidated buildings, waste disposal problems, and the pollution of the Czechówka River running through Podzamcze. On the other hand, however, archival materials clearly show that the infrastructural challenges of the Old Town and the Podzamcze area were not essentially different from other parts of Lublin inhabited by poorer people. Stephanie Weismann points out that the stench produced by makeshift latrines and garbage heaps, by horse manure covering the streets, and waste-filled open sewers formed a permanent element of the urban landscape of the whole of pre-war Lublin rather than just of its "Jewish" part (Weismann 2017).

The depictions of the Old Town, Podzamcze, and Lubartowska Street recalled by the former inhabitants of Lublin include numerous elements typical of socially constructed images of spaces inhabited by ethnical and cultural "others," as discussed for instance in Ludwik Stomma's anthropological analyses. One may clearly notice mechanisms of the mythologization of urban space operating here. They are manifested, on the one hand, in the idealization of the parts of the city perceived as one's "own" (i.e., Krakowskie Przedmieście, Narutowicza, or Królewska Streets). On the other hand, they can be seen in the "negative idealization" or caricaturing of the Jewish space, which operates by means of deformation, by extending statements referring to a particular case to a whole group of phenomena, and by elevating stereotypical opinions to the level of general and universally operating rules (cf. Stomma 2002, 15, 22-23, 57).

It seems that the "familiar/foreign" dichotomy informing the perception of pre-war Lublin was of fundamental importance to the inhabitants of the city. The legal basis for the separation of the "Christian" and "Jewish" parts of the city was connected with the privileges granted to Christian traders in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. They disappeared in 1862, cancelled by the reforms of Aleksander Wielopolski, which brought about, among other things, the equality of the Jewish population. Yet, as late as in the 1930s, the symbolic borders were still a firm element of the local tradition. Their existence may be confirmed by various 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century archival materials, including press articles, memoirs, and literary texts in which the Podzamcze Jewish district and the Old Town, which since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century on had been gradually inhabited by Jewish people, are presented as a "separate," "remote," or "unknown" world, frequently described with the concepts of otherness, poverty, and dirt (Kubiszyn 2017; Kubiszyn 2015, 6-35; Kuwałek 1996, 49).

The following excerpt from an article published in the journal *Ziemia Lubelska* (land of Lublin) in July 1929 may serve as an illustration of this tendency:

If one by chance happened to get lost along Krawiecka Street and ran into the maze of narrow, winding back streets, one first of all put oneself in danger of breathing a mercilessly

foul stench, of having a pail of slop poured over one's feet, or of facing other pleasantries of the kind. The pavements there are narrow and crooked, swollen, and next to them run wide reeking gutters, serving as open sewers in this district. What one can see there on old, damp, and musty walls, ... what one feels in the air, it takes one's breath away.<sup>1</sup>

The quoted fragment refers to the poorest part of Podzamcze and shows how this district is typically described in journals and literary texts. The description given by the author of the article seems to distort the image of the Podzamcze, while certain statements, although accurate about some parts of the district, are extended to it as a whole. The authors of the text suggest that the biggest problem of the place is the poor hygiene of its inhabitants—which seems to be, partially at least, a highly stereotypical view. Some texts clearly show how this process of extension operates also at the level of language: the narration often uses a “communal” perspective and shows the point of view of an imaginary “we” which is contrasted with an equally imaginary communal “they” (cf. Kosowska 2010, 14-15). Narrators frequently use either impersonal constructions or clauses with a plural subject; statements tend to suggest the existence of some universal, generally accepted ways of assessing the urban space (e.g., “the Old Town was generally avoided,” “one hardly ever went there,” “you did not go there, as Poles felt awkward there,” “better not to go there alone,” etc.).

Archival material suggests that the reasons for the sanitary problems of the Podzamcze district were in reality more complex, only partly connected with the difficult material situation and sanitary customs of its inhabitants, and to some extent provoked by culturally determined ways of using and organizing urban space (Kubiszyn 2015, 29-30; Dylewski 2003, 110 and on) and the fact that this part of the city was systematically neglected by the authorities. The crucial factor, however, was the sheer topographical location of the district: it lay in a depression, thus gathering all the waste that flowed from the higher situated Old Town and the Castle Hill. The following complaint, lodged by one of the owners of a building located on Krawiecka Street, may provide a broader perspective on the sanitary problems of the area:

The building I co-own is located on Krawiecka Street, next to the walls of the Lublin prison. Although this street, like all the others, is under the care of the magistrate, its sanitary condition does not comply with the existing sanitary norms, nor can it ever do so: for reasons unknown to me, either because of the prison's cesspits or because of the negligence of the prison's authorities, the street is systematically disordered so much so that its inhabitants are exposed to the danger of illness as sewage and slop, including

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<sup>1</sup> “Brudy, brudy i brudy. Z wędrówek po Lublinie” [Filth, filth, and filth. Walks around Lublin], *Ziemia Lubelska*, no. 199, July 24th, 1929: 3.

human waste, are poured out straight from the prison's walls, thus ruining all our attempts to comply with sanitary regulations.<sup>2</sup>

Although this complaint may offer a glimpse of the attitude of the very inhabitants of the Podzamcze district with respect to its sanitary conditions, the stereotypical negative opinions connected with this part of the city were very strong and dominated in press articles and literary texts.

Describing the Podzamcze district, many authors point to the shabby look of its buildings, muddy pavements, and unpleasant smells, employing the classificatory function of smell and other categories referring to dirt as a way to stigmatize “others” (Weismann 2017). Passages which use descriptions of dirt, noise, and foul smells as synonyms for the backwardness of the Podzamcze district can be found, for instance, in the book by Seweryn Sierpiński published in 1839, in Stanisław Krzesiński's memoirs published in 1877, in an article published in *Gazeta Lubelska* (The Lublin paper) describing the cholera epidemic which broke out in 1892 and killed a considerable part of the district's inhabitants, or in the text by Alfred Döblin published in 1925 in his reportage volume *Journey to Poland* (cf. Kuwałek 2003, 11-12). Similar views are expressed in the propaganda article describing the demolishing of the historical part of the Podzamcze district during the German occupation published in one of the July 1942 issues of *Nowy Głos Lubelski* (The New voice of Lublin)—a “reptile paper” distributed in the Lublin district. The text, entitled “Porządkowanie byłej dzielnicy żydowskiej w Lublinie” (Cleaning the former Jewish district in Lublin) and expressing opinions entirely in keeping with Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda, describes the situation of the Podzamcze district after the deportation of most of its inhabitants to the Nazi extermination camp in Bełżec and the removal of those that remained to the remnant of the ghetto in Majdan Tatarski. The article describes the fully underway operation of exploding and pulling down the buildings of the former ghetto. Following stereotypes, the author depicts Podzamcze as an “embodiment of dirt and all kinds of pest” and as a “seat of typhoid fever”, thus justifying the need to demolish most of the buildings in the area. He suggests that some of the buildings, because of their better technical condition and historical value, may—after proper disinfestation and renovation—be settled by “Aryan tenants”, in so doing alleviating Lublin's “housing needs.” The text clearly connects the Podzamcze area with dirt and chaos which demands “ordering.” “Obnoxious Jewish shanties,” writes the author, are to be replaced at last with “lawns and flowerbeds” in order to make the “cleaned” area look like a Western-European place.<sup>3</sup>

2 Skarga z 1931 roku [Complaint, 1931], Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie [State Archive in Lublin] (APL), Akta miasta Lublina 1918–1939, Wydział Spraw Społecznych, Oddział Zdrowia, Referat Dozoru Sanitarnego, sig. 2557.

3 “Porządkowanie byłej dzielnicy żydowskiej w Lublinie” [Putting Order to the Former Jewish Neighbourhood in Lublin], *Nowy Głos Lubelski*, no. 156, July 8th, 1942: 3.

The analyzed oral testimonies referring to the interwar period draw a distinctive line separating the Old Town and Podzamcze area on the one hand and Krakowskie Przedmieście Street on the other, which is clearly treated by many of the interviewees as a representative element of “their” part of the city. Not only is this space connected with “order” but also with pleasant smells—many of the interviewees recall the smells of fruit sold in soda shops, along with those of exotic spices and of freshly ground coffee coming from the coffee houses owned by Rutkowski and Semadeni:

Krakowskie Przedmieście seemed a very elegant street to me and indeed, it had a good look; it was sweet and clean. Lublin was a very clean city, in the center. The shops there—they were colonial shops; they ground coffee there and there was the smell of coffee all around. (Hartwig 1999)

[On Krakowskie Przedmieście Street there were] numerous small shops—soda shops well-supplied with fruit. All kinds of fruit you could only dream of; I don’t know if one could get them today. It looked beautiful, as the shop windows were open both in summer and in winter. When one walked down Krakowskie [Przedmieście], one was saturated with the smell of fruit. (Matysiak 1999)

In many interviews, the Old Town and Podzamcze areas are contrasted with the nearby Krakowskie Przedmieście Street and as a result, they are described as looking “poor,” “grey,” “dirty,” “poorly lit,” “ugly,” “shabby,” “dangerous,” and home to those in the margins of society.” These areas are also defined in terms of specific sounds that could be heard there—the wails of beggars, the shouts of playing children, and the hum of conversations in a foreign, and thus perceived as alien, language (Yiddish). Many of the narrators draw attention to the commercial character of these spaces and the great number of various workshops; they recall the sounds of transportation (e.g., the rumble of carts on cobblestones) and the calls of traders and craftsmen trying to attract customers.

Testimonies usually describe the smells of the Old Town and Podzamcze as “unpleasant,” “specific,” and “exceptional”, clearly different from the smells of Krakowskie Przedmieście Street and, so it seems, constituting an important part of the district’s atmosphere. The interviewees recall the odors of stewed and fried dishes, the stench of waste running down the streets, and the reek of various kinds of refuse gathering in open gutters:

I remember the smells of the Old Town; Oh God, the stench was everywhere because they poured out everything, filth, feces, and it all ran down... It was a peculiar smell: onion, herring, their fried and stewed food—they did not eat like us, their food was different... What a smell... Nowadays you won’t meet it, won’t smell it. It’s hard to find words for it; it was so peculiar. (Drobek 1998)



Well, I was really sorry for them back then, because there was just filth and stench there, so to speak, there was no sewer system, so it's a sort of olfactory memory. Grodzka Street... one went down it, and it kept getting worse, dirtier; the further one went the filthier and smellier the street got, as the waste running down it polluted everything... Just filth, some running on the surface, soapsuds—there was a lot of that kind of stuff, home-produced, and it all reeked, I still remember it today. (Sulak 1998)

The smells of pre-war Lublin seem particularly interesting as they shed light on the sensory and cultural aspects of the perception of the city space. Although smell is a biologically conditioned natural phenomenon, its interpretation, that is, the ways in which people react to particular smells, is socially determined and has its cultural connotations. Thus, smell may serve an important classificatory function and be used as an element distinguishing “others”; it may function as a factor contributing to the formation of social hierarchy based on ethnic, religious, or financial criteria (Weismann 2017).

Both oral testimonies and journalistic and literary texts often define the space inhabited by poor Jewish people with the category of smell. Unpleasant smells are unambiguously perceived as a symptom of “backwardness,” running against the project of converting Lublin into a modern European city (cf. Weismann 2017). This stigmatization may be analyzed with the help of Stomma’s concept of “caricaturing” spaces inhabited by “others” (cf. Stomma 2002, 15, 22-23, 57). In the case of pre-war Lublin, the tendency to ascribe filth and stench to the “Jewish” part of the city (the Old Town and Podzamcze) and nice smells and order to the “non-Jewish” part (Krakowskie Przedmieście and Narutowicza Streets) may be regarded as a cultural convention. In the analyzed interviews, the socially constructed image of the city, shaped by the concepts of “familiarity” and “otherness,” seems to overlap with the narrators’ immediate sensory experience recalled from childhood.

Despite the development of trade and industry, many educational institutions, and a flourishing cultural life, interwar Lublin remained a poor peripheral city in the newly independent Poland. Its authorities wished to transform it into a modern city but, faced with financial shortages, were unable to light it properly, create a public transportation system, revitalize its center, or solve its sanitary problems. The rapid growth of its population, the difficulties with its sewer system, and the disposal of municipal waste, along with the pollution of rivers gathering unfiltered waste coming from tanneries, mills, and yeast and sugar plants—all contributed to the grave sanitary condition of the whole of Lublin, resulting in unpleasant smells. Yet few of the narrators pay attention to these problems or refer to the broader historical and social context:

Poland was so dirty and Lublin was so dirty, it's hard to imagine. Back streets were dirt roads, or with some stones only; lower there were gutters. Over the gutter there was

a garbage heap, a sort of wooden box... so when you threw a pail with waste into it, the liquids leaked into the gutter and ran down it... But if you are brought up like that, you don't feel the stench. (Pydo 2012)

This description finds its confirmation in the documents of the Sanitary Committee, press articles, and numerous letters of complaint directed to city authorities by the inhabitants complaining about filth, unpleasant smells in all parts of the city, and non-compliance with sanitary regulations:

There are courtyards where the stench is so bad one cannot help but walk there only with a handkerchief against one's nose. The stench comes from reprehensibly neglected toilets and garbage heaps, in which uncovered garbage rots and putrefies for weeks, right under the windows of desperate tenants.<sup>4</sup>

These kinds of problems, however, were not unique to the Jewish district or Lubarowska Street, also in large part inhabited by a Jewish population. On the contrary, as the reports of the Sanitary Committee show, they were present in various districts and parts of Lublin. Apart from the smells of dirty toilets, half rotten rarely emptied garbage cans, and reeking sewers, the olfactory landscape of the city was also shaped by other unpleasant odors coming from butcher shops, smokehouses, and tanneries, as well as by the stench of horse manure emanating from horse cab stops.

Oral testimonies present unpleasant smells not only as related to problems with hygiene, running water, the sewer system, or city cleaning; more importantly, they connect them to poverty and backwardness, which in turn are mostly attributed to the groups of people perceived as "other." The Old Town and Podzamcze area, neglected and possessing no sewer system but also ethnically and culturally alien, did not fit the image of Lublin as a modern, dynamically developing "Polish" and "Catholic" city proud of its elegant center.

Testimonies recalling the olfactory landscape of Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, the representative street of cafes, sweet shops, and restaurants inhabited by educated and wealthy elites, depict it as the space dominated by the smells of apples, lemons, oranges, candies, and chocolate, as well as exotic spices, flowers, and freshly ground coffee. Yet, as both the inter-war press materials and the documents of the Sanitary Committee demonstrate, in the space of this elegant street one could also encounter other, less pleasant smells. In the interwar period, only a small part of the buildings forming this "city salon" were connected to sewer mains, and as a result their inhabitants experienced exactly the same problems as those populating less wealthy districts. Although the analyzed interviews nostalgically recall

<sup>4</sup> „O czyste i świeże powietrze w mieście. Higiena na podwórkach” [Let's have clean and healthy air in the city: Courtyard Hygiene], *Ziemia Lubelska*, no. 89, March 30th, 1928: 2.

the pleasant smells of this part of the city center, the documents of the Sanitary Committee and press articles from the 1920s and 1930s clearly mention the less pleasant odors of rotting garbage, dirty toilets, and horse manure emanating from the neglected courtyard of seemingly elegant buildings:

Passing Kapucyńska Street we turn into Krakowskie Przedmieście. The view does not change (prostitutes), but the early (too early) visit paid by municipal sanitation provides a diversion. At half past eleven, in front of building number 30, there are sanitation carts. The stench is unbearable. Numerous passers-by, who at this time of the evening come out of cinema theatres, cover their noses and run forward. But the stench spreads over the whole of Krakowskie Przedmieście with the speed of poisonous gases... It would seem that the center should be in all respects the pride of the city, its representative space... Lublin should deserve to be included among the ten greatest cities of Poland.<sup>5</sup>

In an interventionist article published in 1930, *Ziemia lubelska* again informs us about the “scandalous hygienic conditions” of parts of Krakowskie Przedmieście:

Buildings no. 11, 13, and 15 on Krakowskie Przedmieście are the epicenter of all disease. Although they seem relatively clean, because of the lack of sewer system and dirty toilets they reek so much that people literally “go green.” Just passing the gate of number 13, one speeds up without thinking so as not to fall down—the fetor at the gate is so strong it may cause nausea. What can the unfortunate tenants of these reeking buildings do? They keep quiet and smell the odors. Perhaps the Health Department could kindly ask the owners of the buildings to install a sewer system in them? Things cannot continue like this; the tenants cry for help.<sup>6</sup>

Horse manure covering Krakowskie Przedmieście Street was another source of unpleasant smells:

There is a cabstand at the corner of Krakowskie Przedmieście and Wieniawska Streets. Presently, the carriages group there in the dozens. As the stand is never cleaned, one can imagine the odors emanating from this pile of filth and dung over the whole street.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, numerous letters of complaint addressed to city authorities report the difficult sanitary and hygienic situation of the buildings in the city center:

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5 “Wędrówki po Lublinie VII. ‘Prawdziwa’ Wędrówka [Walks around Lublin. A “real” walk]. *Ziemia Lubelska*, no. 92, April 3rd, 1927: 3.

6 „Skandaliczne warunki higieniczne” [Scandalous hygienic conditions], *Ziemia Lubelska*, no. 92, June 11th, 1930: 3.

7 „Przenieść ten postój gdzie indziej” [Move the stand], *Ziemia Lubelska*, no.109, April 24th, 1931: 4.

I report that the owner of the house has not repaired the toilet. For the past six months, the toilet has been half-collapsed and soil-covered, and the tenants—together with the owner himself—have to satisfy their needs (of a physiological nature) as they can. The porter of the house has not managed to clean the courtyard of human waste.<sup>8</sup>

Dolna Panny Marii Street, inhabited mainly by Poles, was located in the close vicinity of Krakowskie Przedmieście Street. Many of the preserved letters of complaint directed to the Sanitary Committee report illegal animal breeding taking place there. A tenant of building no. 24 complains about “unpleasant smells coming from the pigsty” and “importunate flies” which prevent her from opening the windows and using her own garden, located next to the plot of land of a neighbor who breeds pigs and cows.<sup>9</sup> Such documents, on the one hand, clearly confirm the provincial character of pre-war Lublin; on the other hand, they simultaneously suggest that filth and stench were a permanent element of many streets—including those located in the “Polish” part of the former center.

## Individual experience versus cultural aspects of the urban landscape

Oral testimonies are materials anchored in a particular historical context, whose origin is connected with a particular space and time. They transmit overt ideas that include the naming and characterization of space and objects, accounts of events, and descriptions of characters and their actions, as well as references to the narrators’ thoughts and opinions, both past and present. Apart from this, however, they also carry covert ideas, that is, elements unconsciously transmitted by the narrators reflecting their deeper convictions and attitudes. The process of uncovering and interpreting the ideas presented in testimonies (both overt and covert) involves the careful reading of the testimony and then relating it to a broader historical, social, and cultural context available through various archival and iconographic materials, press articles, or literary texts.

Contemporary reflection on oral testimonies draws from methods of reading that aim to reach the covert layer of the accounts of the past and to locate linguistically constructed ideas. It postulates analyzing recollections not so much in relation to historical facts or chronology but focusing on how the narrators present their own experience—or, rather, their own nostalgic ideas of the past. Such analyses may serve as a starting point for studies of mentalities and cultural memory and lead to reflection on the sensory and emotional, rather than purely intellectual,

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8 Donos z 21. sierpnia 1931 r. [Denunciation, August 21st, 1931], Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie (APL), Akta miasta Lublina 1918–1939, Wydział Spraw Społecznych, Oddział Zdrowia, Referat Dozoru Sanitarnego, sig. 2557.

9 Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie (APL), Akta miasta Lublina 1918–1939, Wydział Spraw Społecznych, Oddział Zdrowia, Referat Dozoru Sanitarnego, sig. 2562.

perception of the world. This approach may help analyze social and cultural factors influencing the conceptualization of problems by community members and hence to identify values, convictions, and attitudes typical of that community (Stolarz 2012, 112).

The testimonies of the inhabitants of pre-war Lublin that refer to the “Polish” and “Jewish” parts of the city center include many descriptions of places and objects. The space of the city is recalled either as a separate part of the narrators’ stories (e.g., presented as an answer to the interviewer’s question) or appears in the context of other stories, for example, those concerned with historical events constituting the background of personal experience. The way of describing, interpreting, and assessing personal recollections concerning urban space, including sensory experience, is conditioned by numerous factors. Direct personal experience of the city overlaps with the socially and culturally formed perception of space and historical context, both of which to a large extent shape individual memories (cf. Danziger 2008, 257; Hamilton 2010, 219-323, Smith 2007).

The image of interwar Lublin that emerges out of the oral testimonies is often inconsistent with and partially different from the image that may be (re)constructed from archival documents. The subjective, emotional topography of the pre-war city is informed by images, tastes, and smells remembered from childhood which the narrators connect with the feeling of safety, interest, and fascination or fear, danger, and disgust. The testimonies show urban space in the context of interpersonal relations and everyday experience, in so doing exposing convictions, attitudes, opinions, prejudices, and stereotypes at both the individual and communal level. Oral history materials in which the narrators refer to the “Polish” and “Jewish” parts of Lublin’s center reveal the processes of mythologizing the space inhabited by the “others”/“aliens” and, more generally, the processes of mythologizing the past.

The recollections of the ethnic diversity of pre-war Lublin are clearly reflected in the spatial categories used by the narrators. Their ways of perceiving and describing the worlds on both sides of the imaginary border seem to be shaped by a number of factors, including those connected with the idealization of one’s own world and the caricaturing of “the world beyond the border” (cf. Stomma 2002, 182). Referring to the part of the city perceived as “their owns”, the narrators describe it as a beautiful, clean, aromatic, safe, and familiar world and contrast it with the ugly, dirty, smelly, unpredictable, wild, and unknown world of the “others.” Only in some rare instances is this “alien” space described positively—which may suggest the openness of some of the narrators and their interest in the culturally “other,” different, and unfamiliar.

Despite the requirement—in keeping with the oral history program—that the narrators should refer exclusively to their personal experiences and memory, their testimonies include popular views and opinions, as well as stereotypical notions which seem to provide them with knowledge of the world and convictions held as

true and objective. The image of Lublin's center perceived as an element of the narrators' "own" world and contrasted with its "negative," that is, the world of the "others" (Stomma 2002, 33), may be treated as an element of a wider process of community building connected with identity formation and modelling their perception of reality (cf. Robotycki 1998, 26).

The sensory aspects of the perception of urban space constitute an integral part of almost every oral testimony referring to pre-war Lublin. To the narrators, they seem no less important than visual memories and play an important role in the processes of remembering and narrative construction of the image of the city (cf. Hamilton 2010), revealing the social perception of images, sounds, and smells and the meaning and sense attributed to them (cf. Low 2005, 412). The analyses of the smells that the narrators connect with particular parts of Lublin's center in comparison with other types of archival material confirm the stereotypical—at least to some extent—character of the notions connected with Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, the Old Town, and Podzamcze. They also reveal the cultural context of the processes of forming the concepts of "better" and "worse" parts of the city defined so according to ethnic criteria expressed by smells and sounds. In the analyzed oral testimonies, pleasant and unpleasant smells are attributed by the narrators to "Polish" and "Jewish" parts of the city respectively, and this connection seems, at least partially, conventional, that is, having little to do with the olfactory landscape that may be reconstructed from archival documents. The idyllic recollection of the clean, elegant, and fragrant Krakowskie Przedmieście Street and the simultaneous attribution to the "Jewish" parts the smells described as "unpleasant" and connected with filth and disorder may be regarded as a convention connected with the culturally determined process of the perception of the "others" and the spaces inhabited by them. Filth and unpleasant smells are often recalled not only and not so much as a personal sensory experience but as an expression of antipathy towards the "others" (cf. Classen 1992; Stomma 2002, 9, 32-36, 163, 198, 217). The topography of the pre-war Lublin recalled by the narrators is strongly emotional and seems to reflect culturally constructed notions of the interwar city in the process of modernization. In a thus constructed image, there is no room for dirty toilets in the courtyards of the elegant Krakowskie Przedmieście Street; rarely do they try, too, to rationally—rather than "ethnically"—explain the unpleasant smells and disorder in the "Jewish" parts of the city.

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