

# The ‘Lublin of the Future’ – Clean, Hygienic, Orderly. Making a Clean Sweep with the Jewish Neighbourhood and its Sensescape

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Regulating and disciplining the urban environment, especially the sensory improprieties of a city, have always been a crucial means to demonstrate new political orders. This article examines how various authorities attempted to regulate and reshape the Old Town neighbourhood of the Polish city of Lublin during the first half of the twentieth century and how a continuous discourse on order and cleanliness reinforced ethnic, class and political prejudices. It shows how the sensory mapping of the city in pre-war times, including noisome odours, crowdedness and unsightly buildings related, more often than not, to the area’s ‘Jewishness’. The profound changing of the Old Town neighbourhood after the Second World War was a major symbolic act of the new communist regime to make a clean sweep of unpleasant legacies to create the ‘Lublin of the future’.

## Getting the City and its Sensescapes under Control

‘You would be astonished to see your old neighbourhood today; we are certain you would not recognize it. [ . . . ] At the place of former Podzamcze, its shacks and ruins, one of the most beautiful parts of Lublin came into being’ a local newspaper answers an émigré reader’s letter in 1957 (KL 23 July 1957: 21). Throughout history, cities and their cityscapes have been exposed to various attempts to reshape, regulate and discipline the urban environment. Both the physical and ideological takeover of cities are usually marked by the new regime’s control and regulation of urban space. Sensory information, that is, visual, olfactory, sonic and haptic features, play a

crucial role in the experience and representation of city life (Corbin 1988). Therefore, managing the unsettling features and disfiguring aspects of the urban environment has always been a crucial means to demonstrate the power of new political and social orders (see Stallybrass and White 1986), among other things, by disciplining sensory improprieties that would be perceived as distasteful, disruptive, subversive or oppositional. The people who inhabit the city leave their sensory imprint on the urban atmosphere, infusing urban space with their bodily presence: their voices, their movements, their work, their cultural practices and, consequently, their odours. Thus, sensory impressions are primarily responsible for creating and sustaining one's sense and experience of a particular place (see Diaconu *et al.* 2011: 393; Tuan 1993: 57; Hauskeller 1995) and have long been mobilized in defining attitudes towards certain urban environments (Corbin 1988).

Complaining about the 'disfiguring features' of Lublin's cityscape has a long tradition. The Old Town district of the Polish city of Lublin was considered a main sensory troublemaker already in the late nineteenth century and suffered from a bad reputation. Lublin's city authorities were then fighting against intruding smells, inappropriate hygiene and Lublin's urban disorder – as part of an overall discourse of sanitation and modernization. The historical Old Town – and even more the neighbouring Podzamcze, the main living areas of the rather traditional, Yiddish speaking and poor majority of Lublin's Jewish population – was reported to be a filthy, malodorous, crowded place beset with insects, epidemics and poverty. This article shows how public expressions of discomfort from noisome odours, bodies crowded together and unsightly buildings related, more often than not, to their 'Jewishness'. It examines how various authorities attempted to regulate and reshape the Old Town neighbourhood of Lublin during the twentieth century and how a continuous discourse on order and cleanliness reinforced ideological agendas of ethnicity and class. Interwar Poland's sanitation efforts mingled with Polish independence and budding nationalism and introduced a more strident public debate about sanitation, strongly interspersed with anti-Semitic rhetoric. The cleansing measures of Nazi occupation resulted in the extermination of Lublin's Jewish population in the Holocaust and the destruction of the Jewish neighbourhood. However, the discourse of cleaning up strangely persisted after the Second World War in the context of the renovation work, undertaken for the tenth anniversary of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) in 1954.

Thus, cityscapes, together with their sensescapes (Cowan and Steward 2006; Diaconu *et al.* 2011), serve as crucial ideological arenas for highlighting the successful story of overcoming a (filthy) past and cleaning up unpleasant legacies of poverty combined with ethnic othering to create a new order. The article looks at the discourse about urban changes executed mostly in formerly Jewish Podzamcze and the Old Town from the interwar period until the new socialist regime. 'Cleaning up' the past to establish the 'Lublin of the future' prompted a discourse about the 'new' Lublin as a bright and modern place, as opposed to the previous (Jewish) topography of backwardness, crowdedness and stench. Drawing mostly on local press reporting, but also oral recollections, memoirs, travelogues and travel guides,

this article studies the continuous discourse about bringing under control the unsettling odours, bodies and buildings of Lublin's Jewish poor. The sources allow insight into various regimes' attempts to clean up and bring order to the cityscape, illustrating the continuity of the discourse about sanitizing urban experience and improving this disturbing part of the city through efforts of deodorization, separation and overbuilding to eliminate urban 'disorder' – ranging from urban sanitation measures, national agitation, and Nazi hygiene interventions to celebrating the socialist Lublin of the future.

The Polish city of Lublin here serves as an exemplary case study, representing general urban challenges and urban regulation efforts in East-Central Europe. With about 35% of city-dwellers identifying as Jewish, pre-war Lublin enjoyed the typical ethnic structure of a city in the region at that time (Radzik 1995: 146). In 1944, Lublin was the first major city in Poland to be liberated by the Red Army. Here, the *Lublin Committee* (the Polish Committee of National Liberation; PKWN), the first executive governing authority, was installed, and Lublin became the temporary capital of socialist Poland. On the occasion of the committee's tenth anniversary in 1954, Lublin was turned into the main stage for the communist liberation festivities. For this occasion, the terrain of formerly Jewish Podzamcze was fundamentally restructured. This profound reconfiguration of Lublin's cityscape after the war – and mostly how it was promoted in the main press organs – was a major symbolic act in creating the Lublin of the future (ŻL 1954, no. 75: 4; SzL 1954, no. 40: 6), overcoming its dark and malodorous past.

### **Urban Sensory Contamination – Odours, Bodies and Buildings of the Jewish Poor**

Motifs of puzzling chaos and obscure exoticism have had a long tradition in memories and journalistic texts about Jewish Lublin since the nineteenth century. The predominantly Jewish neighbourhood of Podzamcze aroused the interest of writers and painters for its somewhat picturesque poverty (Sierpiński 1839; Krzesiński 1877, in Gawarecki 1958; Balaban 1919; Döblin 1925, see also Kubiszyn 2015). In addition, the neighbouring medieval Old Town of Lublin was perceived as 'different' – long-since neglected, therefore dark and humid, and until the Second World War it had been dominated by small Jewish shops and workshops: 'Behind the Cracow-Gate there is something of another Lublin', but 'in a worse edition' (ZL 1930, 18 January: 4). This 'otherness' was mainly characterized by sensory improprieties: unsettling odours, intruding human bodies and disfiguring architecture. Thus, the city authorities considered these (Jewish) neighbourhoods of Lublin to be major culprits of sensory offensiveness and urban disorder: dilapidated houses, labyrinthine and crowded streets, the cacophony of their 'jargon' (Bogdan Pazur 1998) and a general feeling of repulsion among the Polish-Christian majority. From an outside perspective, Jewish Lublin was regarded as a troubling environment of stench and contamination, disfiguring the urban environment and eventually also the social

and national order. These neighbourhoods were therefore considered urban problem zones and became key sites for intervention by different authorities. Sensory experiences and impressions – and the prejudices and emotional meanings going along with them (Low 2005: 412) – form a crucial part of the prevalent discourse about this neighbourhood and eventually served the production and propagation of concepts of ‘oneness’ and ‘otherness’ (Classen 1992). Throughout the process of establishing Polish independence during and after the First World War, sensory unseemliness – irritating smells, voices, human bodies and visual impressions – were increasingly addressed as a violation of ‘our city’. This diminished tolerance for sensory assaults, typical in modernization and nationalization processes, was focused especially on Lublin’s Jewish population.

As an effect of general liberalization and democratization processes during and after the First World War, more Jewish people – now equal citizens of the Second Polish Republic – were leaving their overcrowded neighbourhoods. They started strolling on the prestigious Krakowskie Przedmieście, with its coffee houses and fashionable stores, or in the city park. However, in the context of growing Polish nationalism, Jewish emancipation, both spatial and civic, was perceived as a form of contamination and an inappropriate transgression into spaces of ‘Christian designation’ (GL 1916, 10 August). In 1916, the popular right-wing National Democrats’ newspaper, *Głos Lubelski*, complained that, lately, Jewish people had been dominating ‘our city’. The article remonstrates that ‘Jews are, more and more, flooding the city centre, naturally polluting it with their filth and sloppiness’. Walking in the city park, one would ‘suffocate in the Jewish crowd’. The writer of the article believed that ‘masses’ and ‘waves of Jews’ would ‘inundate us in our daily lives’ and dominate the city with their ‘enormous screaming’ – the notion of ‘sensory contamination’ was central in addressing the Jewish presence in the city. Their odours, bodies and voices were regarded as disfiguring and menacing to Polish city life. As the senses play a major role in the creation, regulation and contestation of particular city spaces and the cultural meanings associated with them (Hetherington 1997: 21), anxieties about civility are often expressed in ways relating to the human body (Elias 1978; Douglas 2013; Pirogovskaya 2018).

In consequence, sanitation as part of urban planning was not only part of the general modernization efforts, but also a key aspect of the developing national(istic) discourse. Thus, the efforts of Lublin’s authorities to sanitize and purify the city intensified with Polish independence and the rise of Polish nationalism. Jewish presence in this Polish city was increasingly perceived as intrusive of and violating ‘Polish space’, thus marring the cityscape and threatening national health. Throughout this process, various newspapers started outlining what a Polish city should look like and what it should lack; these intensified animosities led to stark definitions of what would be ‘ours’ and what was ‘foreign’. Among others, the city park, ‘our beautiful reservoir of fresh air’, was complained about being ‘jammed with the “elected people”’ causing ‘a bad smell of sweat, garlic and onion [to hover] in the air’ (GL 1923, 28 August: 3). Sensory impropriety – the very bodily experience of someone talking too loudly, overcrowding the streets or emitting bad odours – can be perceived as a

social violation and, in the Polish post-war context, as a violation of the (intended) clean body of the Polish nation-state. After 1918, Poland in general, and the city of Lublin in particular, were preoccupied with cleaning up unpleasant exudations and 'polluting' elements that unsettled the atmosphere of the Second Polish Republic – starting with infrastructure. The master plan for the city included the removal of cess-pools, open gutters, all stagnant bodies of water and small private workshops of foul-smelling businesses. The promotion of cleanliness and hygiene and an appreciation for clean air and water were integral to this programme – and to the idea of a pure and homogeneous nation-state. The Yiddish-speaking Jewish poor, transgressing into Christian space, were perceived not only as contaminating the city with foul odours and loud voices but also as spreading infection. For centuries, the discourse about Lublin's Podzamcze has revolved around filth, odours and disease. The Jewish neighbourhood, as an epitome of unsanitary conditions, vermin infestations and epidemics, was identified as a major nuisance in times of publicly performed political and national straightforwardness and the promotion of ethnic purity. Therefore, the Old Town neighbourhood was regularly beset by calls for improved hygiene and cleanliness. The traditions of forced washing and disinfection, and disinsection, were intended to get troublesome and infectious human bodies under control. During the First World War, Austrian-Hungarian occupation forces reported that they 'had to send out armed forces to push them [the Jews of Podzamcze] into the salving bath' (Höllriegel 1916). Memoirs of a Jewish childhood in interwar Lublin recall the visits of the sanitary commission: 'Those whom the commission judged filthy had to undergo a forced bath' (Fizszman-Sznajdman 1989: 60–61). The tradition of sensory anti-Semitism (in which anti-Semites claimed to recognize Jewish people by their smell and to be able to sniff out Jewish plots; Weiser 2011; Hiemer 1938: 10–12) was perfected by Nazi ideology. A description of Polish Jews from 1943 illustrates the continuous discourse on racial impurity and pollution: 'We know about the general innate Jewish aversion to water. [...] It is impossible to describe the sloppiness which dominated, especially in the midst of Polish Jews. It was difficult to find at least some kind of sanitary appliance, at least in its most primitive form.' The Jewish quarter was regarded an epitome of filth and the seat of all kinds of vermin and a breeding ground for dangerous epidemics such as typhus, as was reported by *Nowy Głos Lubelski*, the main local daily newspaper under Nazi occupation (NGL 1943, 8 July: 3). Based on a tradition of urban sanitation and deodorization measures, the forcible disinfection and the elimination of vermin in the Second Polish Republic paved the way for a more violent ethnic othering and strong anti-Semitic discourse. The clean-up efforts of the Nazi occupiers were part of a continuous war against inconvenient (Jewish) bodies and urban disorder – pushed to its extremist limit: 'These neighbourhoods were the first target when it came to the implementation of general order' (NGL 1941, 10 May: 3).

Urban sanitation measures since the nineteenth century, initially directed against unhygienic conditions and poverty, increasingly turned into a fight against moral and racial 'filth' – a discussion stoked up by the National Democrats – and, eventually, resulted in neutralising a whole neighbourhood under Nazi occupation. Ethnic

cleansing can be seen as a final radical act in a long history of clean-ups, of cleansing a city of disorderliness, unpleasant sights, repulsive germs and the ‘odour of the other’ (Beer 2000) that endangered the urban, sanitary, social and national order of this Polish city. The ghetto of Lublin in the Old Town’s district was liquidated in March and April of 1942. Most of the Jewish residents were deported to extermination camps (see Chmielewski 2015; Radzik 2007; Kuwałek and Wysok 2001).

### **Making a Clean Sweep**

After the Nazi extermination of the Jewish residents of Lublin, whose main neighbourhood around Lublin’s Old Town was long-since perceived as a blight on the city, there followed the dissolution of the housing remnants. The unsettling appearance of the densely inhabited Jewish quarter in the city centre had long been a cause of anxiety for the city’s administration. The dilapidated state of the housing of the Jewish poor was perceived as urban disorder, as it marred the historical city centre with its disorder and chaotic buildings. A major aim of various regimes was also the beautification of the city, which included the expulsion of (Jewish) chaos and its disorder of ‘crooked hovels’ and ‘filthy, tattered houses’ (Sommerfeldt 1942: 25). The dictum that ‘Lublin’s Old Town lost its splendour and beauty because of its Jewish inhabitants’ (Sommerfeldt 1942: 25) was a popular incrimination, and the extermination of the Jewish inhabitants was followed by ‘construction and beautification works in Lublin’ (NGL 1940, 4 October: 4). The ‘de-Jewification’ (NGL 1941, 11 February: 3) of the General Government and the city of Lublin was praised to have had the effect of ‘amelioration and beautification’ (NGL 1940s). Where former Jewish properties came under the administration of the urban municipality, it was said ‘to have an effect on the beauty and aesthetic appearance of the city’ (NGL 1941, 10 May: 3).

In 1942, the main Lublin daily newspaper under occupation, *Nowy Głos Lubelski*, reported, ‘Lubartowska Street [previously a predominantly Jewish street] has taken on a European appearance,’ and, ‘Former Jewish houses are now cleaned up and renovated [...], refreshed in bright colours [...]. Nearly all Jewish hovels [...] that occlude our view of the old King’s Castle will be disassembled soon. [...] Lublin takes on a European appearance’ (NGL 1942, 20 August: 3). After liquidating the ghetto, Nazi authorities demolished and dismantled the area of Podzamcze. *Nowy Głos Lubelski* called the dismantling of Podzamcze ‘tidying up the former Jewish quarter in Lublin’. The removal of Jewish people and their houses from Lublin was communicated as an act of cleansing to reveal the city’s hidden beauty.

The city was first significantly restructured in 1954 for the tenth anniversary of the liberation of Lublin, in 1944. The war-ravaged city of Lublin, struck by the bombardment of the Wehrmacht in 1939, by heavy artillery fire from the approaching Red Army in 1944, and by the demolition of the Jewish neighbourhoods Podzamcze and Wieniawa, in 1954 undertook cleaning operations, renovations and construction work for the upcoming festivities. The focus was on establishing

an appropriate backdrop for the festivities. Therefore, the main objectives of the hasty construction work were to renovate the historic Old Town, and, last but not least, the final flattening of the partly destroyed neighbouring Podzamcze area.

What is striking in the context of the preparations of the festivities is – again – the formulation of ‘cleaning up’. There are a number of references in newspapers addressing the big ‘cleaning up’ of the city (SzL 1954, no. 169: 4–5), including slogans such as ‘operation establishing order’ (ŻL 1954, no. 169: 6) and ‘cleaning up the surroundings of the castle’ (SzL 1954, no. 36: 3). These headlines remind us, uncomfortably, of the preceding ‘cleansing activities’ such as *Operation Reinhardt* (the plan to exterminate the Jewish people of Poland). The wording of the press reports frames the process of rebuilding and restructuring the cityscape of Lublin after the Second World War as a continuous act of martial violence: numerous articles reported ‘from the battle front of new Lublin’, where ‘armies of workers’ joined the ‘battle for Lublin’s metropolitan character’ (SzL 1954, no. 50: 4; no. 59: 4; no. 64: 6).

### ‘Today’s Lublin is Clean’

The renovations of 1954 were again presented as a beautification of the city, a beautification that was mostly about cleaning the city from old filth: the ‘beauty of the Old Town’s houses’ must be complete, ‘like the beauty of a woman who needs not only makeup, mascara and cosmetics, but also water and soap’ (ŻL 1955, no. 172: 8). ‘Today’s Lublin is clean.’ ‘New Lublin’, as it was constantly called in the socialist press, contrasts with the old Lublin. The new, socialist Lublin had a metropolitan and European character. ‘The new shops and cafeterias of newly built Lublin do not remind us of its old filth.’ Instead of ‘ugly little shops,’ Lublin was outfitted with ‘beautiful, modern premises, corresponding to the needs of socialist commerce’ (SzL 1954, no. 50: 4). Kowalska Street – before the war, a street inhabited mainly by Jewish people and later part of the ghetto – is recalled as a ‘sloppy crook of grey and filthy houses’. Here, ‘private shops crowded together, the street was always full of horses, covered with horse dung, and the gutters overfilled with reeking liquids that always caused repulsion – do you remember?’ Now this same Kowalska Street was a ‘beautiful, unrecognisable street [...]. We do not remember such a Kowalska Street [...]. Kowalska has never been that beautiful [...]. The street is new, happy and colourful, completely different, although it has the same name [...]. Everything changed here’ (ŻL 1954, no. 172: 4). After the renovation work for the festivities, Lublin ‘comes in a new (festive) outfit’. The disreputable character of old Lublin was replaced by a bright, new, fair city. ‘Lublin proudly stands in its new outfit. New shop windows are gleaming. In the evenings colourful neons are glowing.’ After thoroughly cleaning the city (of its past), Lublin’s inhabitants claimed (at least in the official press), ‘We don’t recognise this city’ (ŻL 1954, no. 172: 4) and, ‘I didn’t know Lublin was so beautiful’ (ŻL 1954, no. 154: 6).

Especially when it comes to the restructuring of the area of Podzamcze, the repetitive references to ‘new Lublin’ are striking, as the new Lublin was literally built on

the sore ground of its Jewish past. Similar to other cities across Europe that were fully or partly destroyed during the Second World War, Lublin, and in particular demolished Podzamcze, remained in ruins for several years after the war. A vast area beside the Old Town remained an empty, uninhabited ruin (ŻL 1955, no. 172: 8). This barren terrain of Podzamcze served as an ideal place to start from the beginning, to celebrate the new Polish People's Republic. Newspaper articles dedicated to the urban structural changes in Lublin in preparation for the festivities in 1954 persistently envisioned 'Lublin – City of the Future' (SzL 1954, no. 40: 6). This 'future' slogan has a haunting presence in the press reporting around 1954, always referring to a 'new' Lublin. The destruction of the Jewish district by Nazi occupiers was literally paving way, as it were, for a socialist 'Lublin of the future'. For the festivities on the tenth anniversary of the founding of communist Poland, the entire area was cleaned with enormous effort and precision. The ruins were dismantled, and the rubble was removed to the last cobble. Not one material trace of the neighbourhood survived this 'cleansing', not even the layout of the original streets. What was left was a clean, entirely empty space ready for a new and different beginning. Nothing but the castle on the hill remained on its place – the only point of orientation in the area (see Zętar 2017; Panas 2004: 13–15). Here, in 1954, the new authorities celebrated the Polish People's Republic, staging a new political and urban order.

In this context, the local press asked its readers, 'Have you realized how Podzamcze now harmonizes with the rest of the Old Town? Indeed, Podzamcze together with the Castle and the square now appear as a beautiful whole' (SzL 1954, no. 290: 6). After the renovation work of 1954, press reporting is all about the new beauty of Podzamcze as part of the historical city centre of Lublin and the new socialist Lublin, a city 'of the future': 'It is hard to believe that not long ago, here were the marshy rubble and dirty puddles of the remains of chaotic building, and now, one after another, new stylish housing blocks are fringing the place' (ŻL 1954, no. 172: 4). In 1957, a former inhabitant of Podzamcze who had emigrated wrote a letter that was published in a local Lublin newspaper. In it, she asked about the fate of her neighbours and her house (KL 22 July 1957). The newspaper proudly reported that 'from Szeroka Street [the busy main street of Jewish Podzamcze], not even the smallest trace remained'; instead, 'the whole terrain now is covered by the even surface of the great *Square of People's Gathering*'. Once perceived as a no-go area 'today it is beautiful. After complete restructuring, it now is one of the most preferred visiting places of our city.' The destruction and razing of Jewish Podzamcze, located between the Old Town and the Castle, made possible 'the picturesque view of the Castle and the Old Town's hill.' Instead of 'former Podzamcze's hovels and huts', we now have 'housing with kitchens, central heating and gas'. The article hints at a new workers' housing complex, to be erected in the centre of this former Jewish quarter.

This cleansing, harmonizing and modernizing approach to the terrain of Podzamcze was based on a long tradition. It dominated Lublin's pre-war discussion of Jewish Podzamcze. It was continued and executed during national socialist occupation, but also reflects the Polish post-war attitude towards its painful past.



## Conclusion

In the context of rebuilding Lublin in 1954, focusing on the terrain of former Jewish Podzamcze, we can observe the following incisive changes: while pre-war newspapers complained about the sheds of the Jewish poor and scandalous housing conditions, the post-war press praised the erection of a formidable new workers' residence in the very centre of Podzamcze. Where once the vibrant Jewish business street pulsed, a representative public square was erected. Where previously a mixed crowd of vendors, artisans and children dominated the streets, a collective body of workers had now erected the Lublin of the future. Previously, looking down from the castle, one would have a view of rural suburbs and the hovels and poverty of Jewish Podzamcze; in 1954, newspapers proudly praised the progressive vista of new industrial centres and brand-new workers' residences and the picturesqueness of the newly renovated Old Town. This changing of the cityscape after the war was a major symbolic act of the new communist regime to create a Lublin of the future. In local city guides of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Lublin's *Square of People's Gathering* (that is, the former Jewish Podzamcze) is discussed using the usual phrasing: 'after bringing order to the area around the castle' and 'operation cleaning-up' (Przewodnik 1959: 72 and Przewodnik 1966: 79 and Przewodnik 1966: 160). These guidebooks echo the official narrative of pre-war 'unsanitary conditions' and Lublin's post-war progress into a bright future. Until the 1970s, guidebooks included the notorious chapter 'Lublin of the Future', written according to the immediate post-war rhetoric and communist narrative. By erasing the few remaining physical and mental traces of pre-war Jewish Lublin – especially by restructuring the area of Podzamcze – the new communist regime ultimately cleaned up the urban remnants symbolizing pre-war social reality and stated there was a clean start to a bright future.

## Competing Interests

The author declares none.

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