

How “Poland Entered Europe”

The Motorway as a Space of Neoliberalism

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Abstract

The article surveys a giant infrastructural construction project in Poland: the A2 motorway, connecting Poznań and Warsaw with the Polish-German border. It was the first private motorway in Poland, and the biggest European infrastructural project, and was realized in a public-private partnership system. The last section of A2 was opened on 1 December 2011, which can be seen as a key moment in Polish socioeconomic transformation. I examine it on two levels: (1) a discourse between government and private investors in which the motorway was the medium of economic and social development and infrastructural “the end” modernization of Poland; (2) practices and opinions of local communities, living along the new motorway. On the first level, the construction of A2 was seen as an impetus for the economic and social development of the regions where the motorway was built. But on the second level, I observe almost universal disappointment and a deep crisis experienced by local economies.

Keywords: infrastructure policies, modernization, motorway, multi-sited ethnography, neoliberalism, Poland

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Poland was involved in giant infrastructural construction projects. One was the construction of the A2 motorway, connecting Poznań and Warsaw with the Polish-German border (see Figure 1). It was the first private motorway in Poland, as well as Europe’s largest infrastructural project, realized by the public-private partnership system. The European Investment Bank cofinanced the project along with a consortium of eleven Polish and European banks.¹ The one billion euros that the European Investment Bank invested was the largest loan supporting any infrastructural project ever realized in Poland.² Moreover, the Polish government also supported the project with the biggest financial guarantee in its history since 1989, making it a series of financial and infrastructural record breakers.³ For these reasons, I suggest that 1 December 2011, when the last section of A2 was opened, could be considered one of the most crucial dates marking political, economic, and social modernization in contemporary Poland. In this article, I question the importance of “modernization through the motorway,” for local communities as well as for the entire country, which had previously been deprived of any modern road infrastructure. Another ques-





Figure 1. Route of new motorway, A2, and previous cross-country highway, DK92, map design Irek Popek.

tion concerns the very idea of modernity, as well as the general framework that must be perceived in terms of neoliberalism.

Moving Modernizations

The A2 motorway is where, for over three years (2013–2016), I carried out research concerning a project entitled “Moving Modernizations: The Influence of A2 Motorway on Local Cultural Landscapes.” The project was realized with the help of many collaborators including university and doctorate level students as well as professional researchers. Two problems were of central interest for me: modernization and the motorway.

Undoubtedly, the notion of modernization sounds like an umbrella term. The current anthropological debate on modernization depicts its many facets,

as well as a lack of continuity in the phenomenon. In many works on the subject, terms such as "multiple modernities," "disjunctive order" of modernity, or "limits of metropolitan meta-narration of modernity" can be found.⁴ Some social practices—such as "the ritual of withdrawal," "the shows of unsuccessful transformations," peasants' "grouching" and "bellyaching"—should be treated as essential elements of modernization rather than simply its imperfect reverse reactions.⁵ There is, and never has been, no such thing as one "proper" transformation, for such transformations are a product of both institutional and grassroots changes.⁶ Actions of self-agency and subjectivity in the face of changes in living conditions assumes various forms such as handicrafts, semilegal trade, collecting waste materials, gathering the fruits of nature, spontaneous services, rental of land and buildings, and so on. Localized modernization, as realized in small towns and villages, has bred not only "a new poverty" but also "a new entrepreneurship."⁷ Consequently, we should examine modernity as being heterogeneous, as well as observe its multiple and locally differential phenomenon.

My research area extends over two Polish provinces (Wielkopolska and Lubuskie) and includes twenty-two towns, villages, and settlements that are related to the A2 motorway in various ways and that cut across national road 92 (DK92), which was previously the main communication corridor between Poznań and Poland's western border. My efforts concentrated predominantly on individual interviews with the inhabitants. However, not all that can be verbalized has relevance. Keeping this in mind, our team also observed automobile traffic and customers of roadside pubs and bars, read announcements placed on bus stops and posts, archived thousands of websites, studied police and fire department reports, and analyzed private and official chronicles stored in libraries, public administrations, and district forestry offices. However, above all, we worked with a wide variety of groups of people, including local authorities and activists, local entrepreneurs and contractors (e.g., owners and directors of motels, roadhouses, bars, brothels, and agritourism farms), drivers and tourists, owners and workers at petrol stations and motorway service centers, and other inhabitants of selected towns, villages, and settlements.⁸

As our research area stretched more than one hundred kilometers, we faced many challenges, including having to regularly move from place to place. Although modern mobility dominated the zone, this was, paradoxically, no easy task, and it entailed our entire team being forced to use bicycles and taxis, hitchhike, and even to walk along the dangerous waysides, benefiting from the kindness of people we met along the way. We tried to work following the logic of multi-sited ethnography, the concept introduced by George Marcus.⁹ At its core, the idea of multi-sited ethnography is rather simple: it is a move away from Bronisław Malinowski's single-site-based ethnographic research and toward a more methodological shift that proposes adapting a

set of different sites and varying connections between them as the central complex of ethnography. When conducting multi-sited ethnography, spaces can be geographic, social, or virtual, depending on which ones the researcher chooses to follow. Marcus wrote that researchers can follow people; a “thing”; a metaphor, plot, story, or allegory; a life/biography; or conflict. However, the primary essence of multi-sited ethnography is to follow people, connections, associations, and relationships across space.

Adapting Marcus’s approach, we followed people, objects, and problems. We reached out to representatives of different locales and met with their key figures and activists (this included talks with local government officials, people engaged in the activities of nongovernmental organizations, police officers, firefighters, priests, forest district employees, teachers, library employees, culture center overseers, representatives of farmers’ wives’ associations, current and former village administrators), local businesspeople (owners of hotels, bars, nightclubs, shops, car parks, a pallet purchasing center, car washes; people conducting different types of services, even including those selling garden gnomes), and their employees (from petrol station directors to people running public toilets). Moreover, we reached out to people employed in motorway maintenance centers, tollbooths, motorway construction workers, truck and bus drivers, immigrant workers, tourists, and the “common” inhabitants of various towns.

The area of our research ultimately encompassed the 170-kilometer-long motorway connecting the Polish-German border in Słubice with Poznań. The most intensive terrain research was conducted in and around towns and villages of various sizes, from Świebodzin with twenty-two thousand inhabitants to Jarosławiec with around a dozen people. This included studying the inhabitants’ social structure, institutional and cultural setting, and public infrastructure quality. Despite these differences, the specific roadside aesthetics and economy remained a connecting factor. The landscape of what is mostly small villages is characterized by establishments catering to long-distance transportation and tourist industries (motels, hotels, petrol stations, bars, restaurants, nightclubs) and motorway service stops, the operation of which revolves around automobility (purchasing pallets, tractors, or trailers; stations dealing with the repair of satnav or retreading; service stations; car washes), warehouses, or shipping and logistical centers.

What do we see when observing a motorway? According to Polish law, “a motorway is a public road with limited access that is designated for motor vehicles only and is marked with at least two continuous lanes in each direction that are divided by a barrier. They have no one-level interchanges with any of the intersecting roads or with land and water transport. They are equipped with roadside rest areas, which are intended only for users on the motorway.”¹⁰ Motorways are perceived as important elements of a modern infrastructure—on regional, national, and continental levels. The A2 motor-

way became a part of the European motorway network and a local link in the framework of road E30 from Cork, Ireland, to Omsk, Russia.

What more can we see? According to Tim Edensor, "everyday habitual performances of driving" take place in "mundane motorscapes."¹¹ Looking at a motorway, we see high fences, white stripes on the road, and sometimes petrol stations, tollbooths, road signs, and the like. They could be referred to as "non-places" without permanent inhabitants and without their own local identity. According to Marc Augé's insightful formula, "If place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place"¹².

Augé defined this term in opposition to the classical notion of an "anthropological place," which was built around "belonging," inferring a specific kind of homology between peoples, practices, and places. The notion of "non-places" describes a situation in which peoples, practices, and places are dispersed, and people act without reference to their common history or cultural experience. They are spaces for "circulation, communication, and consumption." The distinctive examples of non-places—such as motorways—can be found in relation to mobility as a main human activity. In Augé's model of supermodernity, a person is reduced to becoming a toll of mobility in transnational space: "He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver."¹³ The concept of "non-places" suggests that the modern infrastructure—especially motorways—are places devoid of history and identity and are not stimulating for cultural researchers.

However, perceiving motorways as simply non-places is a grave mistake.¹⁴ This view reduces their meanings, functions, and dimensions. People who use motorways are more than passengers, drivers, or customers: they are also inhabitants, tourists, migrants, workers, employers, owners of motels or hotels, hitchhikers, and others. I suggest that a motorway is an anthropological place with its own sets of isomorphisms between culture, history, identity, economy, and—not least—landscape. Moreover, I argue that a motorway is a specific space. Like Doreen Massey, I perceive space as a product of relations between people, places, and things. According to Massey, we should understand space in terms of "an emergent product of relations" and as "the dimension of multiple trajectories, a simultaneity of stories-so-far"; space must be acknowledged to be always under construction, always in the process of being made.¹⁵ I embrace this perspective because a motorway is a real space with real people and its own problems.

The focal point of my research was the A2 motorway with its neighboring parking spaces, service centers, tollbooths, intersecting bridges, overpasses, and trestles, as well as its traffic lights, noise, pollution, and traffic regulations. A2 might be perceived as a material object, but it should primarily be viewed as a coinhabitant of the local universe with its people and animals.

It is accompanied by national road 92 (DK92), which, before the motorway was opened for use, was the busiest land route from Wielkopolska and central Poland to Germany. The uniform infrastructural landscape of A2 and the roadside spontaneity of DK92 are two opposite poles in the scene where the local variations of “moving modernizations” have emerged. DK92 is a place where war is waged for the attention of drivers and other traffic participants. In fact, some of the attention-grabbing businesses include neon-lit nightclubs, a hotel—Poland’s largest—in the shape of a pyramid (Figure 2), petrol stations surrounded by fake palm trees (Figure 3), supersize plastic dinosaur figures, a roadside zoological garden with a runway for ostriches, the gigantic Monument of Christ the King (the world’s largest monument of Jesus Christ as of its completion date), dozens of flamboyant billboards, signs, and so on¹⁶ (Figure 4).

After the opening of a new section of the A2 motorway and the other global, political, and economic processes involved, the examined area was clearly affected by numerous discernable yet varying transformations from the very beginning. Until recently, the towns were located along what was the main transit road connecting East and West and could benefit from the automobile traffic resulting from modernization and expansion of the mobility infrastructure and deferred, post-transformative effect. With the opening of A2, the inhabitants were forced to invent new economic strategies and reevaluate the



Figure 2. Piramida Horusa Hotel, Nevada Center, Pożrzadło, Lubuskie Province, photo by Mariusz Forecki

All photographs from author’s collection



Figure 3. Las Vegas Center, Mostki, Lubuskie Province, photo by author.



Figure 4. Roadside plastic animals, Miedzichowo, Wielkopolska Province, photo by author.

approach to their locales in a new transit-centered setting. The multidimensional transformation caused by these changes and the theoretical growth of the potential of mobility provoked by A2's presence made us treat the socio-economic processes, which I have had the opportunity to closely observe, as equivocal. That is, the regimes governing them, the discourses surrounding them, and their resulting manifestations—as well as the manner of ascribing

value, their experiencing, and their utilizing modernization—all turned out to be important aspects for understanding the current socioeconomic conditions in this part of Poland.

Whose Ceremony?

In this section, I would like to focus on one level of this infrastructural project and its consequences: the official discourse created by investors and the Polish government, defining the motorway in categories of economic and social development and as a definitive end toward Polish modernization. On the first level, the construction of the A2 motorway could be seen as Poland's final stage in joining a united Europe. It was also intended to provide a strong impetus for the economic and social development of the regions where the motorway was being built. In this context, I use "modernization through the motorway."¹⁷

Recent Polish modernization has a strong political dimension. On 4 June 2014, A2 was dubbed the Motorway of Freedom (the German side was called *Autobahn der Freiheit*). Polish President Bronisław Komorowski and German President Joachim Gauck attended the ceremony. The presidents unveiled a plaque with the motorway's name and planted a tree. In his speech, Komorowski said that the Motorway of Freedom "connects and will connect not only as a transport route, but also in terms of mutual friendship and respect." Gauck described his visit to Poland as "a kind of pilgrimage," serving as a reminder that "we regained our freedom and it all began here in Warsaw."¹⁸ The tree planted by both presidents—the Oak of Freedom—marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Communism. Tolls for using A2 were symbolically waived on this day.

It should be emphasized that A2's construction was part of the process of modernizing Poland's road infrastructure. The importance of the motorway's construction can only be fully understood in the historical context of the lack of roads and low density of cars prevalent in socialist (and even pre-socialist) Poland. Postwar Poland was a destroyed country, with a devastated infrastructure and practically devoid of motorways. The existing fragments were parts of the previously built latitudinal sections. Most were the result of investments carried out by the Third Reich in areas incorporated into Poland in 1945.¹⁹ A few decades later, in connection with the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow and the accompanying project for the construction of transit roads, work on the Września-Konin motorway commenced, along with a few short, scattered sections of highways. Earlier, in October 1976, the Warsaw-Katowice expressway (almost three hundred kilometers long) was officially opened. The entire length was equipped with two parallel roadways and bypasses to most cities and was considered a symbol of modernization of Poland in the 1970s.

We have an interesting paradox here: socialism perceived itself as a modern ideology, but it was modernity without mobility—without a free flow of people and without an advanced road infrastructure.²⁰ Consequently, the idea of mobility and possessing an automobile exemplified the tension between the dominant ideological imperatives and the aspirations of ordinary people. For most Polish citizens, an automobile represented a ticket to personal freedom and an element belonging to the imagined consumer paradise of the West. The “socialist car” and the socialist roads can be perceived as the result of a compromise between the official ideology of modernity, available resources, and the desires of ordinary citizens.²¹

Just before the opening of the new motorway, Janusz Kaliński, an economist and a historian, described the history of Polish motorways as a “real ordeal.”²² In response, Jan Kulczyk, chair of the supervisory board of Autostrada Wielkopolska (the main company engaged in building and operating A2), formulated a special message:

It is a great success of the Poles, including hundreds of people, companies and institutions, who have consequently and professionally supported the realization of a dream that we had almost 20 years ago. Connecting the Wielkopolska Province and the whole country via a supermodern motorway with the rest of Europe is the final point in the important stage of the transformation process. The A2 motorway will boost the economic development of its transit regions and open the door for foreign tourists and investors. This motorway is also creating a new standard for implementation of very complex international projects, which are implemented long before their deadlines and within their budgets. We performed our task reliably for the benefit of the generations to come.²³

Kulczyk was a highly successful Polish executive whom *Forbes* magazine for many years ranked as the richest Pole. He was very influential in the construction process of the motorway, including raising funds, and was the main private investor in constructing A2.²⁴ During the official ceremony of opening the last section of A2, Kulczyk sentimentally announced that on “1 December 2011, Poland entered Europe.”²⁵

Three years later, *Polityka*, Poland’s most popular and opinion-forming weekly, published an interview with President Komorowski entitled “There’s No Freedom without Modernization.”²⁶ The paper’s title is meaningful. During the past decade, especially after the Union of European Football Associations European Championship in 2012, the discourse on modernization gained momentum in Poland and has been dominated by announcements of the modernization of its infrastructure as an ultimate goal. Mobility, and the possibility of smooth travel, was perceived as an important way of belonging to today’s modern Western society. New motorways were a crucial symbol in this context. This was also intended to be a strong impulse for the economic and social development of the regions where the motorways were being built.

It is worth noting that in November 2010, the Deal of the Year was awarded in London to the financing, construction, and operation of the A2 section reaching the German border. The committee of experts and journalists of Jane's Transport Finance who were responsible for granting the award acknowledged the fast pace of the process and the complexity of the project. Robert Nowak, vice president of finance of the Concession Company that was building A2, stated: "Within less than two months we succeeded in clinching a deal worth 1.6 billion Euro. It was an unprecedented pace of the process, which will permit us to open the road to traffic before the 2012 EURO championships." Zofia Kwiatkowska, spokesperson of the concession company, said, "The new section of the motorway will be of tremendous importance to the country's economy by way of facilitating the trade exchange and mobility between Poland and Germany."²⁷

In the context of this type of opinion, it is not surprising that government policy and the investor's ambitions were intended as a response to public expectations.²⁸ A 2011 survey held by PBS DGA, at the request of On Board Public Relations Ecco Network, shows that 75 percent of Poles considered investments in road infrastructure a priority for the coming decade.²⁹ And when the Wielkopolska branch of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, one of Poland's most influential daily newspapers, announced a poll in 2014 that asked readers to select the most important event of the past quarter-century (1989–2014), first place was claimed by the construction of the A2 motorway. This event was considered more important to the Wielkopolska region than was any cultural festival or even Pope John Paul II's visit to Poznań. The newspaper said: "Poznań citizens waited almost twenty years to be able to smoothly travel from Poznań to both capital cities [Berlin and Warsaw], and finally, Poznań has been integrated with Europe." And a local political scientist said, "The motorway bestows upon us a special sense of being between the East and the West," while one local businessperson claimed, "The motorway is of crucial importance to business."³⁰

Contradictions of Infrastructure

However, that is only the official side of the coin. On another level, I also observed strong disappointment and a sense of exclusion from participation in A2's promised development and benefits. I can affirmatively state that the new motorway caused a multitude of economic, cultural, and social consequences that transformed the local landscape. Major changes affected two specific areas: communes through which A2 was built, and communes located within the area of DK92, which lost its status of being the main thoroughfare. A dramatic qualitative transformation has affected the latter area. Towns that until only recently had been located along what was a transit road

and profited from vehicle traffic in numerous ways have now been deprived of this flow of income by the motorway. "The trauma of a big change" took place, consisting in an unexpected degradation of an external, faultless, and rapid nature.³¹

Before the inauguration of the A2 motorway, nearly all small, local businesses were near DK92. These businesses consisted of bars, restaurants, motels, workshops, nightclubs, gas stations, car parks, car washes, convenience stores, and groundcover, handicraft, and garden decoration stands (including sellers of the famous garden gnomes). A vast traffic of trucks, personal cars, and coaches had previously provided a constant flow of clients and money. Both Polish citizens and foreigners were customers. Illegal activities also became a part of the normalized local landscape, including prostitution, selling of stolen fuel, and smuggling (of goods and people). The constant and heavy traffic on DK92 brought with it both a flow of money and a wave of crime. Authorities also reported a significant number of traffic accidents. Nevertheless, local communities saw all these conditions as "natural" and even favorable.

The opening ceremony of A2 disturbed this well-established "normality." Consequently, the movement of people and cars decreased. The motorway took over most of the transfer, depriving the local population of their profit. Big companies, with gas stations and restaurants chains, dominated the service infrastructure. Small retail businesses and services were excluded beyond the motorway's barrier, so a good part of local businesses fell or came close to bankruptcy. Hotels are now owned mostly by families. Many original business ideas such as dancing events for drivers have failed. In general, only the poorest of users continued to traffic DK92—those who cannot or do not want to pay the toll for driving on the motorway nor desire to spend their money on bars and motels. From the perspective of local inhabitants, the motorway seems to be a black hole that has swallowed their money and customers, as well as the energy, ideas, and inspiration of the local businesses. The old traffic jams, heavy 24/7 traffic, and even roadside prostitutes that were once the source of complaint are now remembered with nostalgia. As one inhabitant of the village located by DK92 noted: "There are no jobs, and the young run away. When this was the main road, traffic was bigger and everything on the road prospered."³² Now, instances of successful new businesses or even people finding a new line of work along DK 92 are rare. Frustration and a lack of perspective have become the dominant experience. A construction worker (temporarily employed in renovation) summed it up in an uncompromising manner: "We've got shit here. The motorway gave us nothing and took everything away from us. It doesn't really matter. There is no more work, no new perspectives. On DK92 everything has died."³³

Moreover, the motorway is perceived as an alien object in a normal and naturalized landscape, as well as an experience in terms of extraterritoriality. One clear sign of extraterritoriality is its high fence, which plays a leading

role in the story about Chociszewo village. The motorway was built no more than half a kilometer from the local farms. There is also a McDonald's with a McCafé and a modern Gym & Fun playroom. The complex was quite an attraction for the local people, but the entire complex is fenced with a net and a secure gate and is inaccessible to the villagers. The young people from Chociszewo must climb over the fence to enter—unless they have a friend working a shift who, if the matter is arranged beforehand, can sneak them in through the gate. Moreover, rumor has it that “someone” from the motorway side has been lubricating the upper part of the net with used motor oil—to fight off the “intruders from the outside.” Obviously, the elder generation will not climb over the fence. One resident remarked how much the local people wished they could simply cycle to the drive-thru on a Sunday afternoon, order a take-away, and cycle back home. But they have no hopes for dialogue, despite how much the children from the village would like to go with their parents to the Gym & Fun, as this type of place is very difficult to find in rural areas.³⁴

This alienation has several different sources: economic, infrastructural, and social. For many drivers, the A2 toll is too high, particularly when an alternative route (DK92) is available free of charge. According to drivers paying to access A2, a large toll cannot be justified, as the motorway is neither accompanied by a local infrastructure nor comfortable to use. This is the primary reason for rejecting its use. Another is the lack of a proper infrastructure: many drivers do not like McDonald's, and no other restaurant chain was granted a license to operate along the motorway. For many, the restaurant's menu and layout are not satisfying. During their stops, travelers are usually tired and want to relax, which is nearly impossible at a McDonald's because of the many customers and ongoing noise. Many of the travelers simply do not like fast food. Finally, the restaurant stigmatizes the drivers' casual dress. Drivers also complain about the impersonal atmosphere. The opinion of a local official can be considered typical: “I spoke with a Ukrainian truck driver who told me why people like him don't use the motorways: they can't have a good meal, wash their vehicle, or find a girl.”³⁵ A Lithuanian truck driver added an important point: “Polish motorways are good but expensive, so I use DK92.”³⁶ Faced with motorway tolls and an infrastructure dominated by international corporations, many drivers still prefer DK92. They openly say they need no “luxuries” but just somewhere to park and a place to take a shower. Finding prostitutes working on the new motorway, which is an important part of some drivers' work-rest cycle, is also difficult.

It is worth noting that the local population feels the same: the motorway is too expensive, and there are no decent places to stop. Social relations proved to be most important. Many drivers take their stops and return to the same places where they already feel comfortable and welcome. A waiter from the Pod Sosenką [Under Little Pine] restaurant noticed this need for socializing: “We have always had different customers: Poles, Russians, but also English-

men. Most of them come back. I know their faces; we chat, and they like to show me pictures of their growing kids."³⁷ During my field research, I observed many examples of such familiarity: drivers and the staff of markets or restaurants and bars address each other by their first names, are friendly with one another, and talk about their health and family affairs. These customers often have regular habits: their favorite dishes, tables, or kind of coffee. When the staff know this, they can satisfy such needs, and both sides benefit. Such behavior ensures psychological comfort and helps form social bonds. Unfortunately, finding such familiarity is not possible within the motorway infrastructure.

As in the case of economic conditions, the cultural consequences of operating the A2 motorway can also change. My studies describe its present state, as the motorway is still a symbolic "alien." However, some current phenomena suggest that the economic importance and cultural status of A2 will change. Some members of local communities—ironically, especially the mothers with small children—admit that they have become accustomed to the noise of the motorway. Some even claim that the noise helps them sleep. Paradoxically, even animals have become accustomed to the motorway. Initially, they did not use the underpasses built for them, as they were afraid of the noise and lights of cars. Recently, however, roadside surveillance has shown an increased activity of fauna, including crossing passes. It can be concluded that the local ecosystem has adapted to the motorway—and in some cases, faster than people.

The new infrastructure has caused many changes, while the old infrastructure has changed as well. Historically, "infrastructure" meant roads and irrigation systems, but with the rise of modern transportation and communication systems, the new technological understanding of this term has changed. Today, it "refer[s] to the basic structures, facilities, and services that are needed for the (smooth) functioning of a country or organization They include transportation and communication systems, water and power systems, and public institutions such as schools and hospitals."³⁸ Rather than considering their technological characteristics, social anthropologists focus on how people view, use, understand, and experience infrastructure and the effects it has on people's lives.³⁹ Infrastructure provides the framework within which people can, or cannot, act, develop their entrepreneurship, and hope for a better life (as well as a mobile and neoliberal life). For the development of infrastructure, it is important that the locally constructed systems are interlinked, standardized, coordinated, and adapted to local socioeconomic conditions. Such things as connections with large systems (international motorways, national roads, internet portals), adaptation to local requirements (arranging "green schools" or trainings in bars, motels, etc.), and standardization (striving for higher standards, which can match Western standards) have become key reasons for tension, conflict, and "the trauma of the big change effect" from A2 in western Poland.

Concluding Remarks

The starting point of our research, its pretext, the area it covered, and its point of reference is the A2 motorway, the last section of which was released for use on 1 December 2011. However, this “modernization holiday,” which was celebrated by investors and central authorities and even spawned an orchestra piece entitled *Fanfares to A2* (composed by Academy Award winner Jan A. P. Kaczmarek), was not accepted by everyone. It quickly turned out that the infrastructure does not solve the most pressing problems of local communities, such as unemployment or lack of perspective,⁴⁰ which have become even more pressing, as they are experienced in proximity to a giant investment. A motorway infrastructure can affect the economy in several ways: it can enable producers to reach markets more cheaply, increase the speed with which producers can reach markets or inputs, enable workers to choose among a wider array of employment opportunities, and give consumers a greater variety of goods, services, and prices. But not all motorway infrastructure produce these outcomes in the same way. Some mainly service international users, producers, and companies, not the local communities. Obviously, infrastructure provides an important framework within which people can, or cannot, act, but a *pure* infrastructure is not enough.

In the context of A2, the phenomenon of “clashing scales”—described by Thomas Hylland Eriksen in terms of a “qualitative shift” in flows of capital, modes of employment, and new forms of consumer market—is only one problem.⁴¹ Another is the recent Polish modernization that I defined earlier as modernization through the motorway. Following the poetic perspective of Allen Ginsberg, it could be said: “What sphinx of cement and aluminum hacked open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination? Moloch whose buildings are judgement!”⁴² Marshall Berman wrote about modernity through the motorway in a more conventional and academic way: “*Sic transit!* To be modern turned out to be far more problematical, and more perilous, than I had been taught.”⁴³

In conclusion, I would like to return to the dimension of financing the A2 motorway. As mentioned, it was a giant project supported by a large consortium of international banks and financial agencies, as well as the Polish government. They presented the construction of A2 as a happy event and a festival of modernization. However, for most local businesspeople, A2 has been nothing less than catastrophic. Their small shops along DK92 selling mushrooms, asparagus, wicker works, and objects of small wooden architecture no longer have customers. What was formerly the main transit corridor from Poznań to the West now has become nothing more than an outlying road. They have no access to the new motorway’s area, where there is only space for big international companies. The spokesperson of the concession company in charge of construction stated, “The new section of the motorway will be of tremen-

dous importance to the country's economy by way of facilitating the trade exchange and mobility between Poland and Germany." In other words, if you have a motorway, you should be happy because a motorway means positive change and money. Before A2 became known as the Motorway of Freedom, it was described as a motorway of modernity, mobility, and progress—at least from the perspective of the official politico-economic discourse that dominated Poland at the time.

In November 2016, I presented selected field materials to a wider audience in the Hotel Nevada, located near A2. We invited representatives of local authorities, business leaders, members of nongovernmental organizations, journalists, and so on. At the end of the presentation, I asked them why they don't like the A2 motorway. They said many things, but the most common opinions focused on money, the local natural environment, and the elusive phantom of progress. For many, motorway tolls are too high, so they don't use it; for others, the motorway—with its cars, continuous noise, and traffic—seems to pose a real danger to the natural local environment. Almost all were convinced that the motorway took customers from the local hotels, shops, motels, and bars. As someone told me: "No traffic, no money."

As I mentioned earlier, Samuel Eisenstadt's notion of "multiple modernities" goes against the classical (Marx, Weber, Durkheim) theories of modernization. Eisenstadt also suggested that one of the most important implications of this notion is that modernity is not "identical" and that there is no one and only "authentic" way of modernity and modernization.⁴⁴ Particularly, the Polish idea of "modernization through the motorway" is an argument that confirms Eisenstadt's thesis. In the case of A2, the new road infrastructure is an agent of multiple transformations far away from idea of progress associated with classical modernization. As I have emphasized, A2—constructed in the framework of a public-private partnership system—was presented as a modern gate to a better future and a more modernized Europe, but today it's a tool of the neoliberal order. According to David Harvey: "The fundamental mission of neoliberal-state is to create a 'good business climate' . . . Public-private partnerships are favored in which public sector bears all of the risk and the corporate sector reaps all of the profit."⁴⁵ Consequently, the A2 motorway should be viewed as a very expensive infrastructural project and a strong metaphor for neoliberal modernization.

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Notes

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 16. The Monument of Christ the King was built, located, and consecrated in Świebodzin, a town in the western part of Poland with twenty-two thousand inhabitants. It is also an important junction for railways and motorways, as national roads no. 2 (from the Świecko border crossing to Germany, to the Terespol border crossing to Belarus) and no. 3 (from Świnoujście, north of Poland, to Jakuszyce, the Czech Republic border crossing) intersect. Świebodzin is also located halfway between Poznań and Berlin. The monument is easily visible from the S3 express road (and is supposedly visible from Zielona Góra, forty kilometers away). The originator of the monument—the *spiritus movens* behind its construction, height, and final shape, its location, and its meaningfulness—was the Catholic priest Sylwester Zawadzki. He decided that the giant statue should stand almost halfway between Berlin and Poznań, on the junction of important national roads, with thousands of people driving by every day. For these people, the monument has become a reminder that there are things beyond their present destination. Waldemar Kuligowski, "33 Meters of Sacrum: The Analysis of Discourses Surrounding the Statue of Christ the King of the Universe in Świebodzin," in *Art in Contemporary Cultural Systems: Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Waldemar Kuli-

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 24. I should note that the situation of crisis and disintegration created numerous forms of verbal aggression toward Kulczyk. Complaints, curses, accusations of corruption, and focusing only on his own interests constituted the main elements of this stigmatizing narrative. This was an important element of “local knowledge.” Jan Kulczyk died in Vienna on 29 July 2015. He was sixty-five. His death was unexpected and the result of a routine medical treatment.
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 28. It is worth noting that the A2 motorway became an artistic inspiration. Works about it include a disco polo (a very popular genre of dance music) song by the Saturn Band titled “Autobana” recorded in 2012; *On the Road between Poznań–Świecko*, an artistic film by Anna Raczyński; *Autobahn der Freiheit*, a photography series by Mateusz Skóra, a regionalist from Frankfurt (Oder) who organizes trips that follow the paths of the first Nazi investments along the stretch of land where the motorway is located today; and the song “Autostrada A2 na nowo,” the translator Filip Łobodziński’s Polish-language rendition of Bob Dylan’s “Highway 61 Revisited.”

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