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WASTE AND VALUE IN THE POST-SOCIALIST SPACE

ABSTRACT: Since 1989 former socialist countries have gone through significant changes that have shaped human interaction with waste. Using a combination of anthropological and archaeological methods, I explore various ways that things are disposed of in the countryside of West Bohemia (Czech Republic) to shed light on the nature of value. Recycling seems to be an obvious example of re-creation of value. However, an individual's participation in a system of recycling depends on various motivations, barriers, and knowledge, and it also reflects the individual's perception of how things can be re-used. Therefore, instead of being discarded, certain things are considered non-fungible and kept as a memory of the past, circulate among neighbours, undergo renovation, and become part of an official recycling process. Through the interconnection of actions and things I would like to reveal the nature of value in terms of non-monetized models, where aspects of morality, good will and responsibility influences an individual's decision-making related to waste.

KEY WORDS: Classification - Garbology - Recycling - Value - Waste

INTRODUCTION

Since 1989 former socialist countries have gone through significant political, economic and social changes. These changes are reflected in the area of consumption and practices of discarding. Due to the very limited range of commodities available during the socialist era people practised a thrifty way of life including handling things with care and using of a broad net of repair shops. Since the state apparatus controlled all the waste treatment including two national organisations responsible for setting up the collection of raw materials (Sběrné suroviny n. p. and

Kovošrot n. p.), residents were required to hand over old paper (especially newspapers), scrap metal and other recyclable materials to the collecting centres (Bucharová 2013: 58, Cenia 2008: 133). As there was almost zero plastic waste in households – no PET bottles were available – plastic was not recycled in the way we know today. All these facts influenced the amount of waste and how the relationship to things has changed after 1990. While before 1990, people were accustomed to using various packing materials for storing food (e.g. milk bags were also used to wrap snacks for the kids for school), after 1990 access to packaging material has changed. It began to be

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understood as a material, which was made to be wasted (which was particularly evident for plastics).

After 1990, the availability of a new and previously unprecedented range of products required new methods of waste treatment that reflects the classification of things and materials based on prescribed instructions. Proper handling the waste began to be portrayed on containers for recyclable waste as well as in various advertisements supported not only by private waste management companies but also by municipalities. Despite these instructions, I argue that focusing on unwanted things and waste may reveal an individual's perception of value, of how things are re-used and the processes of personal classification, crucial for decisions about which things will be kept or discarded.

The study of waste is a traditional domain of archaeology (cf. Blondé 2002, Hupperetz 2010, Kuna *et al.* 2012, Sommer 1990, Wolfram 2003). Using waste as a mediator between the past and the present, archaeologists aim to uncover systems of production, craft specialisation and reconstruct social activities in a concrete locality (Wolfram 2003: 17). As recent archaeological discoveries in Spain and Israel document (Barkai *et al.* 2010, Lemorini *et al.* 2014, Rosell *et al.* 2015), recycling and re-using of materials such as stones, bones, shells, horns, teeth etc. was common thousands years ago.

In last few decades, social scientists focus also on contemporary societies and their waste in order to discover consumption patterns, migration processes, classification systems, ecological impact of production and consumption etc. (cf. Clemens 2003, De León 2012, O'Brien 2013, Rathje 1974, Rathje, Murphy 2001, Reilly, Wallendorf 1987, Wallendorf, Reilly 1983). In 1973, Rathje and his team introduced the Garbage Project (Zimring, Rathje 2013: 31) and demonstrated the potential of studying contemporary society's waste. Applying archaeological methods to the analysis of material residues, along with interviewing individuals they contributed to better understanding of modern society and its values. Interestingly, despite the number of anthropological works on value (cf. Appadurai 1986, Gregson, Crewe 2003, Kluckhohn, Strodbeck 1961, Kluckhohn 1962, Munn 1986, Norris 2010, Thompson 1979, Weiner 1992) and recent attempts to establish an anthropological theory of value (cf. Lambek 2013), there is no universal definition of this term in the social sciences, although this word is frequently used (Graeber 2001, Miller 2008).

No doubt, the term value plays an important role in debates about waste, its re-using and recycling. The

recycling process confirms the existence of value in things that are discarded (Gabrys 2013). However, value has a variable character. Thompson (1979) describes the process of how value is constructed or destroyed by distinguishing between two basic categories of things: transient and durable. Some things may be perceived as valuable or valueless, but this status may change over time. This flexibility is enabled by the third category called rubbish. For this reason, value is constantly re-created according to context. The role of rubbish in the process of value creation is also reflected by Norris (2010) and Gregson *et al.* (2010). Considering the recycling of clothing in India, Norris (2010) stresses that value lies in the transformation of waste into valuable commodities, that is in the recycling process. Gregson *et al.* (2010) note that value of recycled things depends on consumers' desire for these commodities.

Rather than aspiring to create a universal definition of value, I aim to shed light on how individuals get rid of unwanted things regarding their value in a specific context. Based on garbology and ethnography in a small village in West Bohemia, I elucidate strategies used by Villagers in order to avoid discarding things as well as their participation in a recycling system. At the same time, I aspire to show how the transformation of waste treatment after 1989 might have influenced habits of residents of the village and how previously acquired experience can have an impact on the process of getting rid of unwanted things.

The data indicates that despite the transformation of the socialist economy into neoliberal capitalism during last twenty-six years, the non-monetary sphere of value still plays an important role in contemporary society. Repairing and renovation seem to be significant strategies for avoiding discarding things even though repair shops have dramatically decreased after 1989. Similarly, donation and gift giving reflect not only the value of things. Whereas gift giving is still used to maintain good relationships in a studied community, donation to charity, which was not common during socialist era, may reveal broken bonds within the community and preference of giving, which is free of obligations. In other words, an individual's action may be understood as a means of mediating value (Miller 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on research in a rural environment and is part of the Pilsen Garbage Project

that launched in 2012 and focused on the social dimension of household waste (Brunclíková, Sosna 2012, 2014, Sosna *et al.* 2013). The aim of this project is to elucidate the relationship between humans and waste and interpret the qualitative and quantitative aspects of consumption patterns. During the first year the Pilsen Garbage Project targeted an urban milieu, in the next two years (2013 and 2014) the research was conducted in a rural environment. Since 2015, attention is paid to hostels in small towns. The research is based on two research techniques, garbology, the analysis of waste, and ethnography.

Some researches focusing on the identification of consumption patterns use interviews and/or the receipts approach in order to obtain data (Gudnason 2004, Tremblay *et al.* 2010), however, this method seemed to be less reliable in this research since human memory is very limited and individuals may forget what

they consume during the day or forget to keep all the receipts of purchased goods. For this reason, the connection of garbology and ethnography seems to be optimal methods for this kind of research.

The basic advantage of garbology lies in capturing a significant portion of consumer spectrum regardless of the way items enter a household (shopping, gift giving, self-supply, exchange, etc.). Garbology enables detailed recording of things that people use and discard in everyday life and hence it can provide maximum information about these matters and their users. At the same time garbology encouraged us to ask new questions, such as why there were mostly damaged clothes in garbage (in contrast to urban milieu) and where do all the clothes end up?

We collected and analysed both the municipal mixed and recyclable waste. The category "mixed waste" contains all the household waste placed into



FIGURE 1. Collection and sorting of waste.

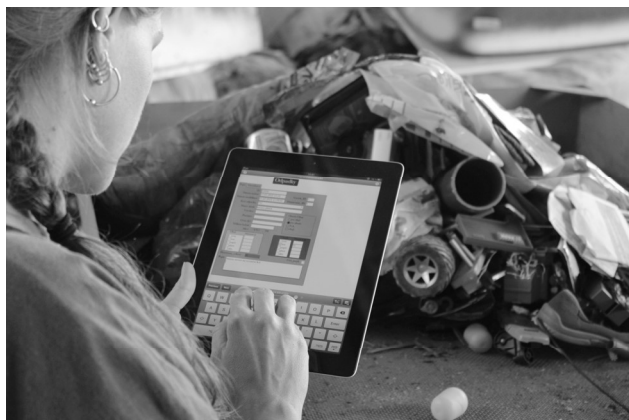


FIGURE 2. Recording the data into a tablet computer.

bins in contrast to recyclable waste which should be thrown into containers for recyclable material. During the waste collection, we cooperated with a waste management company to provide legality for this collection (*Figure 1*). All the waste was transported to a landfill site near Pilsen where the waste was sorted, examined, and recorded on an iPad 2 tablet computer. A relational database on a tablet computer (*Figure 2*) running the programme File Maker Go, inspired by Rathje and Murphy's system of classification (Rathje, Murphy 2001: 22), was developed and used during the data recording (Sosna *et al.* 2013).

In a relational database, two basic recording layouts were created, one for textual and the other for visual data. Every record involves ID, date and time of entry and modification, association with sample (location of collected waste, i.e. village) and subsample (individual household), name of item, its weight, information about producer, seller, price, discount, use of foreign language (reflecting a product bought outside the Czech environment), nature of packing, presence of residues, notes and the category into which the item falls.

In order to adjust the list of categories to Czech environment, a list of products offered in Czech milieu which was available on web sites of various supermarkets was used. This list was consequently extended since it originally contained only basic categories (such as meat, vegetable etc.) and new subcategories emerged (meat: chicken, pork, beef etc.). As a result, a drop-down menu with more than 150 categories of waste accompanied by numeric code emerged. Although most categories reflected items in

waste, during the first year of the research it was necessary to add new categories reflecting current items.

A layout for visual data enabled us to store a photo of an item. FileMaker Go then linked this picture with a record in the database. This method was very useful especially during the data processing and enabled us to use recorded pictures for detailed description from a desk. The overall number of items and their weight are calculated automatically. In total, more than 8,700 items from Village waste with a total weight of nearly 530 kg were described in detail.

The second technique was an ethnographic study including observation and interviews with Villagers and employees of the waste management company. Interviews were carried out in Villagers' homes in order to provide the most natural situations (cf. Fetterman 2010: 41). At the same time, in a domestic environment, I was also able to gather information from personal observation.

Socio-economic characteristics of Village

The research was conducted in a small Czech village located to the west of Pilsen during the time of April 2013 and December 2014. Since less than 40 inhabitants live there, all households and their waste were included in the research. I call this locality "Village". There is no local shop; the nearest store is about 4 km from Village. This store is, however, not well stocked. In a town about 12 km from Village there are two supermarkets. Since public transport does not serve the needs of the Villagers well (the bus goes to Village only once a day), the inhabitants must rely on commuting by car. However, some of them do not have access to a car or have no driving licence. For these reasons, the inhabitants must use various strategies to provide households with basic food and goods.

In total, there are only 10 households in Village, six of them with children from 1 to 10 years. However, the number of children and adults living permanently in Village changed over the two years of field research. One old man died during the first research season and in 2014 a physically and mentally handicapped child had to be taken to a social welfare institution as the family was no longer able to care for him, both for financial (parents had to start working and earning money) and physical reasons (the boy was 10 years old and too heavy to be carried by his mother or grandmother several times a day).

The village is part of the Tachov district which has been, for several years, characterised by the highest

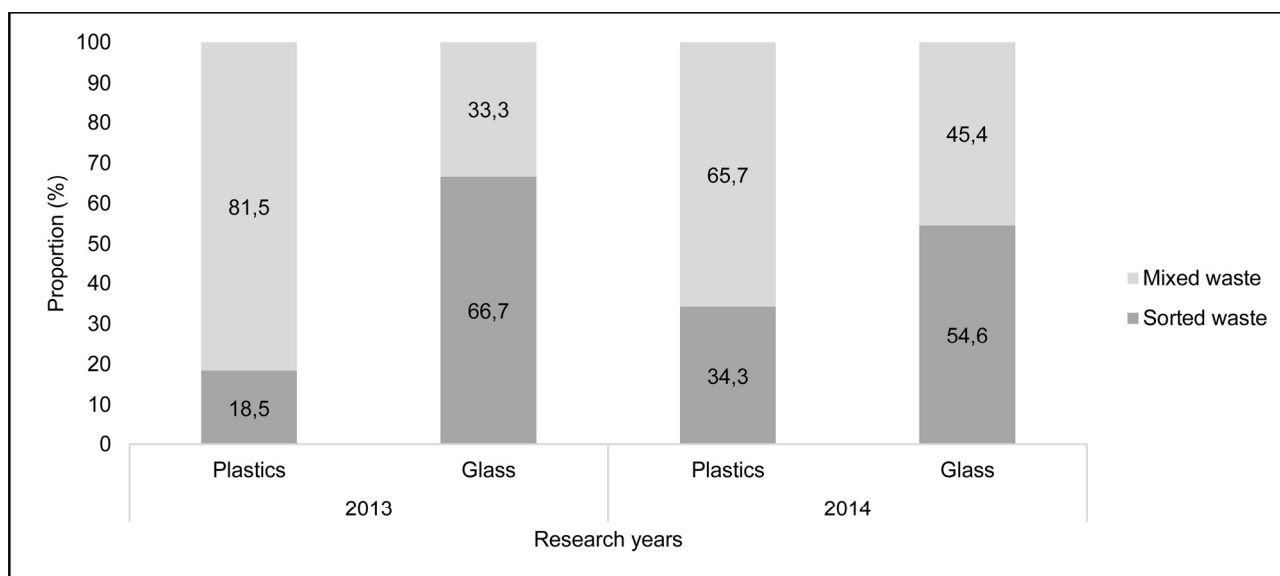


FIGURE 3. The percentage of plastics and glass waste tossed into container for recyclable materials in 2013 and 2014.

unemployment rate in the Czech Republic (ČSÚ 2012). In 4 of 10 households living in Village there are pensioners, one Villager draws a disability pension and two women in Village were on maternity leave at the time of field research. There are only two households where both adult persons are employed and earn money every month. Monthly income of most people in this village is well below the average in the Czech Republic. There is only one exception. One man works abroad (in a German company) and the income of this family is much higher than the others. As will be presented, some individuals use various strategies of informal economy to get financial resources such as collecting and delivering scrap metal. Some also earn money by picking mushrooms, which are then sold to foreign companies. This is, however, an unstable and unsure way of providing money.

Value of the unwanted stuff

In this part of the text I will deal with two categories of things: various packings, and things that could be recognized as waste by an owner but are not discarded. Whereas the former category contains products made to be wasted (Hawkins 2013) (although packing is very important part of marketing and essential and useful part of a product, customers buy a product, not the packing itself), the latter category involves objects originally made and bought due to their quality and/or function that were a matter of desire. While there are

objects that are not useful for their owners anymore on one hand, there are also things that are perceived as having potential to be restored on the other hand.

Although some things do not serve their original purpose, people tend to prolong the life of them in order to avoid being discarded. The decision what should be retained and what can be discarded requires a process of classification that means placing of objects into different categories as well as their physical movement in a different place (Gille 2007: 21). Since there is a distinction between wasting and the process of ridding (Gregson *et al.* 2007), I understand absence of things in waste as a marker of value since this absence may indicate that some things are understood as more valuable than others.

Different conduits through which things flow from households and reflect the value ascribed to these things or human action were identified in this research, including participation in recycling, accumulation of old stuff, gift giving, donation to charity, and renovation. All these strategies represent constant process of (re-) classification and considering various levels of value.

Recyclable material

Sorting of waste into five basic categories – paper, plastics, glass, electro and residual waste – is common in the Czech Republic. Residual waste can be defined as waste which cannot be re-used or recycled. However due to the unwillingness of some individuals to



FIGURE 4. Plastics disposed of as mixed waste (left) and tossed into a container for recyclable materials (right).

participate in recycling system, in this article, I usually use a category of mixed waste which contains all the waste thrown into bins regardless of whether it can be recycled or not. In some localities people are also provided by a container for scrap metal, this is, however, very rare.

During this research, there were only two containers for plastics and glass in Village. Regarding distinct weight of each recyclable material (plastics, glass, paper, scrap metal) I use number of items for the analysis. According to garbological survey in 2013 only 18.5 % of plastics and 66.7 % of glass (*Figure 3*) was tossed into container for recyclable material. In 2014 the number of plastics thrown into recycling container increased to 34.3 % whereas number of glass decreased to 54.6 % (*Figure 3*). The research also reveals qualitative differences. Whereas plastic bottles and bags were tossed into containers for recyclable material, other kinds of plastics (e.g. old and functionless plastic toys, toothbrushes, various plastic components and fragments) are disposed of as mixed waste (*Figure 4*). This pattern is shared by all the inhabitants of Village.

Gille (2007: 27) mentions that materiality plays a key role in thinking about things, however, it does not seem to be the primary factor for the preservation of value. The research shows that perceptions of the usefulness of things play an important role in trashing or recycling. Things that are thrown into containers for recyclable waste are classified as valuable in the sense of their further use as material suitable for recycling. However, the way actors classify these things, can be also influenced by presence or absence of official recommendations for proper waste separation. When

containers for recyclable waste were installed in Village, it was assumed that Villagers know how to sort waste properly since many years ago, the practice of waste sorting was introduced to Czech environment. Therefore, they were not given any instructions from municipality or waste management company, e.g. in the form of pamphlets. The system of waste classification is only portrayed on recycling containers. Through this system people are disciplined to throw packings to containers for recyclable waste. An important role is also played by habituation which allows individuals to eliminate options and make it easy for everyday life. As Berger and Luckmann (1966: 70–71) stress any frequently repeated action transformed into a pattern is then easily practised.

In spite of durability of PET bottles and plastic bags (Hawkins 2013), for Villagers such a packing is no longer considered as re-usable, instead it is seen as something that is suitable for recycling. In other words, Villagers seem to perceive things that were made to be wasted (plastic packings) more valuable than other things made of plastics. They have not learned and therefore do not use knowledge of international recycling codes for plastics for proper sorting in everyday life. During interviews Villagers admitted that they used a simplified model for sorting the waste which was illustrated on containers. For this reason, plastic bags and PET bottles were tossed into containers for recyclable waste whereas other plastic things were thrown into mixed waste because they did not recognize these things as suitable for recycling. In case of plastic toys some Villagers thought about their further use by their neighbour's child, however broken toys were usually tossed into mixed waste. As a young woman, Agata, shows, sometimes Villagers are not sure what category of waste a thing belongs to, and they are not willing to spent time for thinking about it, so they throw it into a dustbin for residual waste: "Plastic toys that are no longer nice and are broken are tossed in the garbage because I don't know where it should be thrown and I don't want to think about it so I simply throw it into garbage. And I don't want to be in stress." (Agáta)

A different situation is in case of glass waste. Especially older participants of the research explained that not all glass waste from households ends up either in a recycling container or in a dustbin for residual waste. The reason is that Villagers use glass bottles for preservation of food for winter (*Figure 5*). As all Villagers own gardens, most of them grow fruits and vegetables and store them for consumption during the winter. "I use glass bottles and jars for home-made

jams, confection and preservation of cucumbers, tomatoes, and for dried herbs so I recycle this glass in my own way." (Cecilie)

This practice was very typical during the socialist era when food was scarce in the shops and even today stockpiling is very common. Although preservation of food is usually practised by older people, in Village it is seen across generations, as a twenty-four-year old lady shows: "I never discard glass jars because every year I make confections and preserve cucumbers, beetroot and mushrooms." (Radka). Sometimes older parents provide their young adults with preserved food supplies. In this case children are recommended to bring empty glass jars back for future use. In this way glass jars and bottles circulate among members of a broad family.

The use value of glass jars and bottles prevent some Villagers from thinking about them as throw-away material. In contrast, the absence of use value is evident in case of bottles of wine and spirits, which are tossed into containers for recyclable waste which means that this kind of glass waste is perceived similarly to plastic bags and PET bottles. In other words, Villagers understand this kind of waste as having potential for recycling but not for re-using at home.

Although most towns and villages were provided with gas pipeline after 1990, gas service is still missing in Village. Hence all households in Village use coal-burning stoves. For this reason, the municipal waste company decided not to put a container for recyclable paper here. Villagers can use old paper (especially newspaper and leaflets) as kindling. In this sense, old paper is classified as valuable even though it is not recycled in the official system. However, due to a huge number of newspapers and newsletters delivered to households on a daily basis, as well as large pieces of cardboard, much of this waste ends up in the garbage because it cannot be used, particularly during the summer. In addition, the wax paper used in the production of newsletters is not very combustible: "We don't burn the nasty gliding broadsheets we just throw them in the trash." (Svetlana). And Cecilia adds: "A year ago I asked the waste management company why there is no container for paper and I was told that nobody needs that because we can burn all the paper. It is not true. These leaflets just clutter the stove. When you buy a refrigerator, TV, furniture, you have it all in these big boxes. Where should people place them?"

Garbological research reveals that paper in mixed waste constituted 23.0 % in 2013 and 28.5 % in 2014. Most often, paper waste occurred as described sheets,

paper envelopes, newspapers and broadsheets, children's coloring books, credit card statements, calls for payment of debt, various messages and fragments of paper. If the garbological research was carried out in the heating season (in winter), this portion of the data would remain hidden (O'Brien 2013: 25).

A similar situation is exemplified by metal cans. Since the official system of recycling in Village does not support the further use of cans, there are no containers for cans and Villagers do not usually sort this material. The amount of scrap metal tossed into mixed waste increased from 16.8 % in 2013 to 18.6 % in 2014. However, not all scrap metal is discarded into mixed waste. While spending some time at Radka's household I noticed a big glass jar full of crown corks (beer caps). She noticed my interest and said: "You never know whether they will come in handy" and explained that some time ago a beer producer announced a competition. Consumers were encouraged to collect crown corks that were provided with codes. For a certain amount of these codes the consumer could obtain certain products. And Radka adds: "We won a flash drive and two 30-liter barrels of beer. In addition, guys in Village had a competition on who is a greater beer drinker and the number of crown corks is a way to track the score."

Getting rid of scrap metal reveals tensions between the formal and informal economy. Garbological research shows that mostly cans, various utensils and small metal components are trashed. In case of larger scrap metal, people may use the collection points, similar to Sběrné suroviny, n. p. operating during socialist era, and people are paid for this scrap metal. In order to stop the stealing of metal objects and scrap metal, a new act no. 24/2015 was implemented in 2015 (Havelka 2015). According to this act, collection points cannot pay for this material in cash. The certain amount of money can only be delivered to one's bank account which means that the sale of scrap metal is not anonymous. This rule seems to be problematic for some Villagers since they draw unemployment benefits and try to pay off debts. If they had an income (e.g. from delivered scrap metal), they could not draw unemployment benefits. Therefore, an older man named Leopold, uses his son-in-law to deliver the scrap metal. In this way, Leopold participates in recycling, however it is an informal strategy.

Not for discarding

In this section, the focus shifts to things that are not discarded for various reasons. Villager's strategies for handling unwanted stuff and waste, and how that

reflects different types of value will be discussed. As mentioned above, attention will be paid to accumulation of old stuff, gift giving, donation to charity and renovation.

Not surprisingly, living in a family house provides enough space for the accumulation of old and currently unused things in attics and sheds. Avoidance of disposal relates to the idea of saving money for parts needed for future repairs. As Strasser (1999: 28) points out "the bricoleur saves scraps not in order to get to heaven but because they it might be useful". The research reveals that the idea of usefulness of things reflects gender. While women are those who would like to get rid of these unused things, men are the ones who would like to preserve them. Sarcastic remarks of wives who do not believe that their husbands can find the time or the mood for these things in order to repair or just use them are encountered: "My husband accumulates this scrap again and again. And one day all the buildings will fall on our heads! Barns, garages, everything is full. But, you know, "what if it ever fits?" (Radka). Also, Soňa does not believe that her husband will use all the devices: "Shed is full of things such as broken lawn-mowers, which he foolishly thinks that he repairs one day, but one day they will end up in garbage." (Soňa)

Men proudly admit that they accumulate these things. They demonstrate not only that they are good householders who think carefully about the things that could be thrown away, but that they are also bricoleurs who can repair anything. Thus they tend to stock various items of metal scrap, non-functioning devices, tools and other utensils with the intention of mending them and using them. "My wife occasionally comes with her cousin and begins to empty the shed but I have a lot of useful things there, e.g. three or four lawn mowers that do not work now but I plan to repair them one day. However, my wife always discards some parts I need to repair them. I always try to retrieve some components from the waste when she is not at home." (Antonín)

The women's sarcastic remarks on their husband's behavior does not mean that women themselves do not accumulate certain kinds of things. Instead of use value they prefer sentimental value (Gregson, Crewe 2003: 119, Hatzimoysis 2003, Hawkins 2006: 55, Strasser 1999: 8) or as Richins (1994: 507) notices "representation of interpersonal ties" corresponding to value of things that remind a close relative and "identity and self-expression" linking value with the self and personal history. Svetlana told me that for more than thirty years she has stored things after her first

daughter, such as clothes for babies, wraps, but also toys that are made of wood and are now no longer made. Svetlana justifies this practice by emotions that these things evoke. Similarly to viewing old family photos touching these things evoke her past and memories. This is also the reason why she always takes great care of these things and tries to keep them in good condition even today. Although she believes that many of these things could still be used, due to the personal bond Svetlana refused to use them or to throw them in waste.

The basic characteristic of sentimental values is that it is personal, i.e. it is linked to a specific individual, unlike the values Thompson (1979) discussed, and which can be related to the value orientation of the community. Memories and personal history are embedded in things which surround individuals in everyday life. The strength of these memories depends on the importance we attribute to an object. The sentimental value thus influences our decision which thing is suitable for discarding and which is kept in the household. If these things personify a concrete – e.g. deceased – person such as photographs, an amulet which was worn by this person etc., the need to keep such objects is much stronger. "Things that are associated with people, either through resemblance or contact, often cannot be discarded because it feels as though one is throwing away the person or the experience itself." (Newell 2014: 200).

Not all things are stored in attics and sheds, however. The Villagers can get rid of unwanted things, especially large objects such as old furniture, twice a year for a couple of days when the local authorities place a large-capacity container in the centre of Village. Getting rid of things encompasses the classification which aims to make enough space for other things for the future. Classification of things reflects not only a time-space aspect but also an effort to restore order, which has an important psychological effect (Hawkins, Muecke 2003). Thus, organization of the place we live in brings order to human life in terms of physical space and psychological need. Most tensions between wives and their husbands emerge just during these few days. As mentioned above, men are used to store a lot of functionless devices and tools which is not supported by their wives. And even though sheds, garages, and attics are primarily used by men, women tend to restore order there.

Planned obsolescence (Packard 1960, Rogers 2005: 113, Strasser 1999: 274–275) makes the discarding of things not only necessary but also much easier since



FIGURE 5. Food stored for consumption during the winter.

every product is simply replaceable. However, Villagers use another strategy of getting rid of unwanted stuff without throwing it into waste, which is gift giving. Many Villagers prefer non-monetized exchange of things or gift giving to selling, even though most of them are economically inactive (e.g. retirement pension, disability pension or maternity leave), because selling does not create strong social bonds that are very important in such a small community. In contrast to selling, gift giving introduces a personal aspect and draws "the receiver into a social field" (Tsing 2013: 22).

Like deciding which things will be kept and which thrown into the garbage, gift giving within the village contains an act of classification. Sorting and discarding things is very organised and thoughtful process, which is also time-consuming. In Village, used clothes for small children are the most common gift and gift giving is practiced routinely. Sorting clothes into usable and

unsuitable for donation reflects one's thinking about the value of things. In other words, when sorting the clothes suitable for giving Villagers should take into account the use value as well as the age of their neighbours' children. At the same time children's clothing obtained from our friends or neighbours express the agreement that it is not recognized as waste (Norris 2010: 107). As a young woman said: "Sometimes I feel that I should buy some clothes for my children. But I found out that if I wait a while, then it suddenly comes, someone gives us clothes and other stuff. Sometimes we get stuff that doesn't look good and I must ask myself, "why does someone give us that?" because I think it's ready to be thrown to waste. But then in the garden we suddenly realize that the clothes are really handy and that neighbours knew why the clothes could still be used." (Agata)

The concept of the gift has a long tradition in anthropology (Bourdieu 1990, de L'Estoile 2014, Godelier 1999, Gregory 1982, Gregson, Crewe 2003, Mauss 1925, Robbins 2009, Testart 2013). The essence of the process of giving is not a gift itself but relations that emerge or are maintained. The maintenance of these relations among Villagers is supported by an obligation to reciprocate. Although gift giving is voluntary, as soon as one enters this process, it is also entangling. In other words, the counter-gift or its equivalent (e.g. lending of something, taking neighbour's children to school) is expected. In this sense, giving of used clothes does not serve only for getting rid of unwanted stuff without putting it to waste. The given clothes are a means of social communication. In such a small community as Village is, it can be understood as an example of valuable action since it helps to maintain good relations.

Circulation of clothes is similar to the situation before 1989, when the inheriting of clothes from older siblings was a very common practice. Currently, the clothes are easily available even at low prices (e.g. from stalls selling), it is more usual that people buy new clothes. However, in Village, exchange or donation of (especially children's) clothes is frequent. Since most adults know the age of their neighbours' children they hold on to some pieces of clothing for them. It is usual that a piece of clothing is passed on from one household to another and thus worn by nearly all the children in Village. "I always give my grandchild's old clothes to our neighbour because she has a little girl. And if I have some trousers or clothes for boys, I give them to other neighbours, they have two boys." (Cecilie)

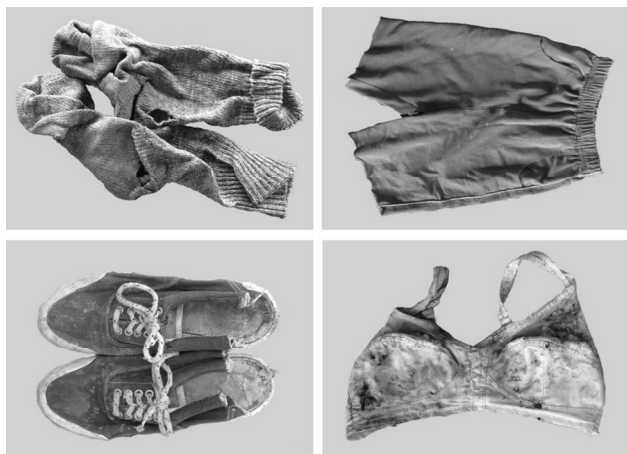


FIGURE 6. Clothing thrown into mixed waste.

To accept these clothes does not reflect only economic reason but also the fact that purchasing of new clothes is time-consuming since there is no shop in Village and the nearest clothes shop is in a 12-km distant town. Furthermore, not all residents of Village have a car and public transport is very limited. They must, therefore, often rely on their neighbours, as mentioned earlier. As *Figure 6* shows, the garbological research revealed that mainly small and damaged pieces of clothing are thrown into mixed waste. This kind of waste constitutes only 0.9 % in 2013 and 0.6 % in 2014.

As mentioned above, the process of gift giving is always relational, it can create, maintain but also weaken relations among actors. In Village, the gift giving reveals negative relations as well. One family is excluded from the gift giving because of a crash accident that happened a few years ago, and resulted in a law suit. Since a member of this family is said to have lied when giving evidence in court, other households broke bonds with this family. Similarly, members of this family do no longer seek social interactions with other neighbours. The result is that this family applies another strategy of discarding things, which is a donation to charity or patients of the mental hospital.

The donation to charity is reminiscent of a free (or pure) gift that is not reciprocal (Derrida 1991, Laidlaw 2000, Parry, Bloch 1989), although good feeling is one of the motivations of this donation. The paradox of the pure gift, according to Derrida (1991), is that it cannot be recognized as a gift neither by the giver nor the receiver. However, without considering some object as a gift (and not as an ordinary object of exchange) there

is no gift giving. In this sense the pure gift is impossible for Derrida. Since donation to charity is anonymous, this free gift contradicts Mauss's (1925) concept of gift with its obligations. Donation perceived as an anti-egoistic act itself reflects the value.

Similarly to blood donation, charity may "create a relation between the giver and the recipient" (Pyyhtinen 2014: 107) however it also maintains such a bond in distance. As a gift that cannot be reciprocated it places the recipient in a subordinate position which is not desirable. In other words, since the woman of the mentioned family does not personally know the recipient, there cannot emerge the same relation as among people in Village. Despite this fact, according to this woman the donation is an act of good will that makes her feel much better. She gets a warm feeling that her family does not experience in Village. In this sense, she benefits from a good feeling as the giver of the gift. The act of donation itself is valuable and donated things are a means to achieve a good feeling. It should be taken into account that the nearest charity headquarters is 45 km away from Village, and the nearest mental hospital is about 25 km further on.

Remembering the potential of unwanted and forgotten things Hawkins (2006: 75) points out that waste seen as things always reflect the possibility of being a resource. This resonates with another strategy to avoid getting rid of things which is repairing and renovation. Although repairing of non-functioning products does not pay off today, some Villagers invest their time, energy and money to avoid throwing certain things away. One of them is Richard who renovates old military jeeps and repairs parachutes. Since he uses old scrap metal and abandoned axles found in barns in order to renovate vintage cars. This transformation corresponds to Thompson's (1979) shifting from the category rubbish to the category durable. This transformation requires crossing two boundaries – from valueless to valuable, and from covert to overt, which means from a category that is not under social control to a category that is subject to society. A similar transformation from waste to desired product or material was introduced by Gregson *et al.* (2010) considering end-of-life ships in Bangladesh, and Norris (2010) writing on the recycling of worn-out saris.

Besides time, energy and money invested in the renovation, know-how plays an important role. Embodied knowledge (Dant 2005) enables Richard to use various materials and tools in order to transform valueless things into a desired vintage car (*Figure 7*).



FIGURE 7. Renovation of old military jeep.

The root of this bricolage lies in the ability to bring to life the potential of broken and unused things. It is an active approach to restoring value in terms of function and/or aesthetics. Therefore, the bricoleur draws on practical knowledge gained in long-lasting interaction with things and re-provide them with value. For a bricoleur all things are provided with indefinite character which enables to see things as "continually open to new uses and frames of understanding" (Hawkins 2006: 88).

Since this hobby is financially demanding, Richard complements his salary with the repair of parachutes. In the attic of his house, he has built a large workroom where he can spread out the fabric for the parachutes. Richard not only repairs and returns them to use but also tests them as he used to work as an instructor of parachuting in the Czech army. Since Richard loved

serving in the army but had to leave this job, repairing parachutes is also a form of nostalgia for him, which can be understood as "a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore" (Holbrook 1993: 245).

Richard's work brings him good feelings and pride that he is capable to transform something valueless into valuable. In contrast to gift giving or donation to charity, pleasure from Richard's creative activity and acquired knowledge are important. The transformed thing is tangible evidence of his know-how and realised dreams. It is not surprising that the best way of spending his holidays is driving his vintage car around Europe.

As mentioned above, repairing of things is not as common and efficient as it used to be. However, some Villagers have things repaired by service providers if

possible. On the one hand, such a service is less time consuming than self-help, on the other hand, it requires deciding which things are worth repairing. Most Villagers take into account use, sentimental and aesthetic value and the costs of repair. Therefore, they do not insist on repairing electronic appliances and most consumer goods. But in the case of luxurious things or objects which have sentimental value they try to find a suitable repairer: "I have had my hundred and fifty-year-old pendulum clocks repaired. Such things are worth investing in. I care very much about them." (Svetlana)

In both cases, renovation and repairing are based on the idea of prolonging the life of things that would otherwise be thrown away. As in the previous case, nostalgia also plays an important role here. Holbrook and Schindler (1991: 330) make a connection between nostalgia and consumption when writing on a preference of objects expressing the connection to times when we were younger: "When the washing machine broke last time, we ordered a repairman, he came, and calculated that repair, after that we decided, that the repair makes no sense at all. Thirty years ago, all things used to work for a long time. My first washing machine worked for twenty years. Today new machines work no longer than few years." (Cecilia)

It is not about sentimental value as was mentioned in the case of accumulating of things, since sentimental value refers to personal memories evoked by objects and reminds us of places, events, or a person who owned these objects. In contrast to sentimental value, frustration or disillusion with contemporary society as well as remembrance of "golden ages" form the basis of nostalgia.

Strategies prolonging the life of things that people like and do not want to throw away also reflect experiences from the socialist era when repairing was an integral part of every household economy. When considering contemporary society and its attitude towards dealing with things most Villagers reported a negative impression. They express their disquiet about the consumer society running on a system of discarding and replacing things.

Since the capitalist economy is based on continually purchasing and wasting things and does not support repair services, the strategies of Villagers can be understood as political and economic critique described by Gregson and Crewe (2003: 124–126). Therefore, by avoiding throwing things away Villagers not only help each other and save money but also express their disapproval of the throw-away society.

CONCLUSION

The fall of communism and the advent of the era of neoliberal capitalism have brought not only political, economic and social changes but also a different interaction with things. These things, unlike during the previous era, had suddenly become easily replaceable, which is facilitated by their unprecedented availability. However, it is evident that people use various conduits for getting rid of things that do not support neoliberal economy. They try to maintain strategies that were common before 1989 and in this way, they reflect their attitude to consumer society.

In this paper, I tried to provide an insight into the interaction between humans and things using the example of a small village. I took advantage of ethnography and garbology to reveal various strategies of getting rid of unwanted things and waste, while considering their value where classification plays an important role.

The advantage of garbology to map the qualitative and quantitative aspects of consumption and detailed recording of waste helped to open a number of questions and issues that would remain covered. Cohesion of garbology and ethnography enables insights into individual's motivations, their everyday practices and strategies for dealing with unused things. Both methods complement each other and help to create a more complete picture of the surveyed community.

Different kinds of value (sentimental, exchange, aesthetic and use value) uncover gender characteristics of accumulation of old stuff as well as motivations for gift giving and donation to charity. The ability to transform objects into a vintage car or repair broken and non-functioning appliances exemplifies value manifestation through potential reuse of waste and unwanted items. It is evident that despite the presence of the throwaway model of consumption, the surveyed individuals tend to use various strategies and the informal economy in order to prolong life of things.

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