
Migration and Settlement Policy in Post-war Europe: A Case Study of the West Pomeranian Region

Submitted 01/09/23, 1st revision 16/10/23, 2nd revision 14/11/23, accepted 30/11/23

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the article is to recognize and comprehend the role of settlement issues as a factor influencing the shaping of the region and regional policy, using the specific example of West Pomerania.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The primary research tools utilized in the article were the method of critical analysis of the literature and the observational method employing arguments in favor of generalized statements. Additionally, methods of induction and deduction, as well as generalizations and synthesis, were applied.

Findings: The conducted considerations allowed for the identification of specific challenges related to resettlement and settlement issues, such as depopulation in certain areas or the necessity to adapt infrastructure to the increasing number of residents in others.

Practical Implications: The considerations conducted can serve as intriguing cognitive material for both decision-makers and policymakers involved in actions aimed at better managing settlement issues, as well as for scientists focusing on demographic and historical matters from a regional perspective.

Originality/Value: The article presents the results of original primary research conducted in the Archives of New Acts (AAN), the State Archives in Szczecin (APS), the State Archives in Koszalin (APK), and the Archives of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister (AKPRM). The presented issue has not been previously addressed in discussions published on the international stage.

Keywords: The latest history of Western Pomerania, migration, settlement policy, regional economy.

JEL codes: J60, R11, N94.

Paper type: Case study.

Acknowledgment: The project is financed within the framework of the program of the Minister of Science and Higher Education under the name "Regional Excellence Initiative" in the years 2019-2022; project number 001/RID/2018/19; the amount of financing PLN 10,684,000.00.

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1. Introduction

After World War II in 1945, Poland underwent fundamental transformations in its political, social, and economic dimensions. The major powers detached 46% (179,000 km²) of its pre-war territory, replacing it with 103,000 km² (33% of the area in a new form) formerly belonging to Nazi Germany. The Polish society and the new state authorities, regardless of their political origins, faced the monumental task of rebuilding the entire country, compensating for losses from the war and occupation, and integrating the Western acquisitions into the crippled state organism.

Following the signing of the Potsdam Agreement in 1945, which established Poland's new borders, the Western Pomerania region underwent significant demographic changes. Key aspects of these changes were resettlements and expulsions. After the war, there were relocations of the German population from areas that became part of Poland, including the present-day Western Pomerania region.

This was in line with the decisions of the Potsdam Conference and the policies of Polish and Allied authorities. Polish repatriates from the Eastern Borderlands and other areas lost by Poland in the east were settled in place of the displaced Germans.

Due to the changes in Poland's borders, the Western Pomerania region became an integral part of the country. These new lands differed fundamentally from other regions in almost all aspects - population, level of civilization, and economic character. They lacked cooperative and trade connections and well-developed transport links with the rest of the country.

Before the war, these territories were richer than the native Polish lands along the Vistula, but the war catastrophe and the plundering activities of the Red Army seriously depleted their potential. They could have been leading districts in Poland, but the condition for restoring their economic health was a massive material effort, which, in the aftermath of the Second World War, Poland simply could not afford.

Therefore, integration processes were conducted by reconstructing the property of the least damaged and most essential settlers for survival. Consequently, these processes often occurred in a chaotic and spontaneous manner, and thus, less rational.

2. Literature Review

The course of post-war migration processes in Poland, especially those related to settlement in new lands and the societal integration issues intertwined with them, has been a subject of interest for historians and scholars from various disciplines since the 1960s. Despite limited access to sources and political constraints that hindered

the exploration of certain issues or presenting them without aligning with the dictates of the totalitarian state's official policy, a few scholarly publications began to emerge. Research limitations were most pronounced in matters associated with the expulsion of the German population, as well as issues related to the so-called repatriation of the Polish population from the territories lost to the USSR.

In the existing studies on settlement, two methodological approaches can be distinguished. The first considers settlement in terms of the place of residence, leading to the distinction between rural and urban settlement. The second approach considers settlement through the prism of the place from which settlers came.

Among the works belonging to the first category, most pertain to rural settlement (Thalassinos *et al.*, 2019). This is the case in Western Pomerania as an area with a predominance of agricultural economy (Łach, 1979; Dziurzyński, 1983; Machalek, 2012). Issues related to urban settlement received relatively less attention from researchers, both in terms of interest and research depth (Kaczkowski, 1963; Drewniak and Lesiński, 1967; Bialecki, 1977).

The issues concerning the territorial origin of the new inhabitants of Western Pomerania have occupied relatively little space in the literature so far. This situation results from the limitations imposed on historical research before 1989. It should be noted that in the vast majority of studies, settlers were grouped into four main categories: resettlers, repatriates, re-emigrants, and autochthons (Dulczewski and Kwilecki, 1962; Czerniakiewicz, 2004; Chlistowski, 1995).

3. Methodology

The authors of this study primarily based their research on the analysis of resource materials from Polish state archives. It should be noted that the repositories of these sources are both geographically dispersed and, to date, undigitized.

This necessitated conducting numerous laborious sessions in direct contact with textual and material sources that serve as evidence for the studied social, political, and cultural phenomena and processes.

The foundational research work was conducted in the repositories of documents from the Presidium of the Provincial National Council, the Provincial Office in Szczecin, the Office of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the State Planning Commission, and the Economic Council of the Council of Ministers. Supplementary references to 21 publications from the years 1959-2023 were also made for the purposes of the discussions presented in this text.

4. Research Results

The Polish administration taking over the post-German territories after the Second World War lacked a coherent colonization concept for the lands along the Oder and the Baltic Sea. The political necessity, driven by the desire to document Polish achievements during the upcoming Potsdam Conference, required the process of settling and developing the former German lands to proceed as quickly as possible, even at the cost of spontaneity and chaos.

Consequently, there was an assumption of rapidly assimilating the borderlands with the rest of the country and creating an inseparable whole. This process was not easy. In 1945, organized economic life in Western Pomerania essentially ceased to exist. Both industry, communal economy, and small-scale craft and agricultural ownership in cities and villages were destroyed or immobilized.

The new Polish authorities did not have detailed data on the pre-war state of the economy or personnel capable of taking over the functions of the displaced Germans in a short time. Additionally, there was an inability to even roughly inventory the losses resulting from wartime destruction or the extent of the dismantling already carried out and planned by the Red Army (APS, 1948; AKPRM, 1956; AAN, 1957).

Due to the need for a rapid solution to provisioning problems and the implementation of planting and harvests, agriculture was prioritized. The shape of the agricultural reform led to a change in the agrarian structure of the former German territories. Farms of average size, around 8 hectares, took the place of large estates, usually exceeding 500 hectares. Farms larger than 100 hectares were administered by the state. The war-related destruction of permanent assets and inventory, both during and after the war, meant that agriculture in Western Pomerania could not return to its pre-war state in terms of productivity for several years (AAN, 1956b).

A significant obstacle to the rapid reactivation of the economy was the loss in technical infrastructure, which was well-developed before the war but, in 1945, was mostly dismantled, devastated, or at least disorganized (APS 1957b; APS 1957c). During the restoration of industrial assets, it was revealed that the destruction was higher than in pre-war Poland, reaching 73% (Magierska, 1978).

Modern branches of industry were the most affected by the ruins. Between 1944 and 1945, Western Pomerania lost 40% of high-voltage power lines, nearly half of the railway tracks, bridges, viaducts, and tunnels, with railway rolling stock damages reaching 80% (Kaliński, 1977). Serious damages occurred to both land and water transport. Damages to road infrastructure and wheeled transport were estimated at 40%. The Oder River was completely closed to navigation, and only a small percentage of the recently numerous river fleet survived.

The fishing industry practically ceased to exist (AKPRM, 1957; Łach, 1988). In this situation, the Polish government decided to postpone the reconstruction of industrial facilities where damages exceeded half of the original value (Heliński, 1959). It can be considered that the taken-over industrial plants and urban infrastructure were initially secured and then restored, starting with what was least damaged and most essential (AAN, 1955; AKPRM, 1955).

Regarding the housing stock of Western Pomerania, it was unevenly destroyed in different regions. In the least devastated cities, losses reached 30%. In severely affected cities like Kołobrzeg, for example, only one out of ten houses was suitable for living (Golczewski, 1964). In this situation, rapid reconstruction of local facilities was impossible. Until the end of 1946, conservation work was carried out only in buildings damaged by no more than 10%. The following year, renovations covered structures damaged by 25%, and in 1948, by 40% (APS, 1950; APK, 1955a; APS, 1964).

Turning to demographic issues, it should be noted that according to various estimates, in the first half of the 1950s, there were still around 29-30 thousand Germans living in Western Pomerania (from the pre-war population of over one and a half million), with 85% residing in its eastern part. Emigration tendencies persisted in this environment throughout the 1950s (APK, 1955b; APS, 1957).

According to official statistics, after the cessation of the migratory wave, no more than 3 thousand people recognized as Germans lived in Western Pomerania (Czech-Sobczak, 1995). For local authorities, a significant consequence of the exodus was the abandonment of homes and workplaces by the Germans.

In 1950, according to the National Census conducted in Poland, the population of Western Pomerania was already close to 1,050,000 people (GUS, 1954). By 1955, this number had risen to 1,290,000 people, and in 1960, it reached 1,450,000 people (GUS, 1965).

However, the intensity of migration movements gradually began to decline from the autumn of 1958. Initial assessments of its effects indicated that the plans to settle Polish repatriates from the Soviet Union in the villages of Western Pomerania had failed. These people, disillusioned by their experiences with collective farming in the Soviet Union, resisted the pressures of the administration, which sought to settle them in state-owned farms (APS, 1959).

They were also reluctant to take over farms, usually dilapidated and lacking inventory. Many sought better living conditions in cities. Official data indicating that 41.7% of repatriates resided in rural areas did not reflect the actual situation. Many who were initially settled in the countryside later moved to cities, especially small ones, or left for central Poland.

A few approached the Soviet Consulate in Szczecin, requesting permission to return. The number of this group in Western Pomerania can be estimated at several hundred people (Ruchniewicz, 2000).

Housing shortages in cities proved to be a significant barrier, preventing the absorption of a larger number of settlers. In Szczecin, as early as 1956, city authorities declared the exhaustion of all settlement reserves. In many places, finding employment became an increasing problem. Although there was a constant shortage of qualified personnel for industry or municipal services, few professionals arrived.

Among repatriates from the USSR, a significant portion consisted of individuals without a profession (40%) or unskilled workers and farm laborers (40%). Less than 1 in 100 adults had a diploma from a higher education institution, and only 1 in 25 had a high school diploma (AAN, 1958-1959). The adaptation of newcomers to the new conditions was also challenging.

As the revelation of these facts unfolded, the focus of settlement propaganda shifted towards preventing the departure of settlers, especially from the villages of Western Pomerania. The issue was recognized from the early 1950s, but during the peak of migration movements between 1955-1958, due to a slight decrease in the number of abandoned farms, it was treated as rather marginal and downplayed. It was only in 1958, with the emerging reflections on the limited effects of the settlement action, that the problem received more serious attention.

In the twelve months of 1958 alone, 4% of the entire population left Western Pomerania. In the optimistic scenario, a similar scale of the phenomenon was projected for the following year. In the pessimistic variant, there were concerns about a tenfold increase. In the western part of the region, in 1958, the number of abandoned properties increased by a quarter. The following year, this dynamic increased to 87% (AAN, 1960).

As mentioned earlier, by the late 1950s, it was clear that ambitious local development concepts for Western Pomerania based on intensive migration actions had not been realized. Although the actual population growth in the region between 1956-1960 was 160,000 residents, it was the result of a persistently high natural population increase. The birth surplus over deaths during this time was almost 186,000 (GUS, 1965). In the following years, this factor gradually diminished, and local indicators became more similar to nationwide ones.

While cities still maintained some settlement attractiveness (with a migration-driven increase of over fifty thousand residents), nearly 80,000 more people left the villages of Western Pomerania than arrived during this period. The absolute rural population increased by just under 2,000 people over 5 years. It can be assumed that in the second half of the 1950s, due to migration movements, Western Pomerania lost about 7,500 residents annually.

In the subsequent years, this fact was accepted as a natural element of the social landscape of the lands of Western Pomerania. The expected immigration was estimated at several dozen families annually. After 1958, migration data was no longer published in statistical yearbooks. In the following two decades, similar characteristics were observed in all voivodeships in the western and northern lands (APS, 1955; AAN, 1958-1959; APS, 1961).

In the course of developing the economic balance of the region and its developmental needs, political decision-makers increasingly noted that the absolute population growth did not solve fundamental demographic and economic issues. In Western Pomerania, there were still no strong cultural and scientific centers. Many young, educated individuals from the region were moving to central Poland, exacerbating disparities in the education of the society between Poland and Western Pomerania.

Despite a large pool of unskilled individuals seeking employment, significant shortages of skilled personnel persisted. A considerable portion of the population, especially in rural areas, lived with a sense of temporariness, hindering progress in intra-regional integration processes (APS, 1958; APS, 1959).

The course of migratory processes in the first two decades after joining Poland revealed persistent neglect of Western Pomerania. For residents of the former territories and newcomers from the eastern border, it continued to appear as a neglected and underfunded district with unresolved property relations and an unconfirmed treaty status (AAN, 1956a).

Actions taken by central and local authorities after 1956 were ad hoc and were unable to change this image. They were limited to settlement incentives, including tax breaks, housing benefits, and credit preferences. However, they could not dispel doubts about the standard of living, professional opportunities, or cultural and educational facilities (APS, 1969).

Concurrently, since the 1960s, the inhabitants of Western Pomerania have inertially and increasingly come to perceive their residence in new settlements as a permanent phenomenon. They identify with these settlements to a much greater extent than before. A turning point in this regard was Nikita Khrushchev's visit to Szczecin in July 1959.

His declaration of unequivocal support for the Polish identity of Szczecin and the entire Western Pomerania undoubtedly contributed to further overcoming the sense of temporariness. Residents increasingly identified with their new homeland. Numerous new small private enterprises, craft workshops, and shops emerged. More and more people decided to build and renovate their homes and apartments. While in 1957, workers in Szczecin questioned the sense of rebuilding the shipyard (APS,

1951a), by the early 1960s, they considered it a permanent element of the city's economic landscape.

In the 1960s, there was also some breakthrough in overcoming temporariness in rural areas. Departure from compulsory collectivization policies, the regulation of property relations, and improved supply of means of production led to farmers with two farms gradually giving up those in central Poland in favor of ownership in the western and northern lands. By early 1959, 15% of farmers in this area had conducted major and ongoing renovations of their buildings (AAN, 1959). While this rate was still significantly lower than in other parts of the country, progress in this regard was undeniable.

Stabilization was also observed in the field of education, culture, and healthcare. Youth became more interested in local schools and universities, rapidly reducing the educational gap between the new lands and the rest of Poland. There was also an explosion of regional artistic creativity and a broad interest in regional topics among scientists from various disciplines.

5. Conclusion

Western Pomerania has a rich and diverse history that has evolved over the centuries. Territorial affiliations have changed over time due to historical events, including wars and peace treaties. Mass migrations, witnessed in post-war Poland, have long been the subject of scientific inquiry across various disciplines.

Decisions by major powers regarding the borders of the Polish state and the provisions of the Potsdam Conference concerning the expulsion of the German population have given rise to numerous challenges that Polish authorities had to grapple with. Among these challenges, the integration of the so-called recovered territories with the rest of the country held pivotal importance.

In the past decades, the identified issues related to Western Pomerania, as outlined in this study, have been largely addressed. However, this success has not been fully realized in demographic matters. Western Pomerania, synonymous with the formally designated West Pomeranian Voivodeship since 1999, has consistently held the 13th position out of 16 Polish voivodeships in terms of population density for over two decades, with a figure of 73 people/km² compared to the national average of 123 people/km².

The estimated population of the region was 1,680,000 at the end of 2021 (GUS, 2022). Concerning regional budget income per capita, Western Pomerania has held the 4th position for several decades (GUS, 2023). This latter indicator distinctly illustrates that the inhabitants of Western Pomerania have transformed their initially challenging region into a significant and economically leading part of Poland. It is worth noting that the contemporary population of Western Pomerania exhibits

specific characteristics, indicating, however, more of a diversity on a national scale than a manifestation of any significant division..

While pointing out potential directions for further research on population migrations in Western Pomerania, it must be emphasized that issues related to the so-called later migrations, i.e., post-1960, still receive limited attention in the literature. Nevertheless, regardless of the proposed research areas, it is crucial to note that a fundamental gap in the existing literature is the lack of a comprehensive monograph dedicated to post-war migrations in Western Pomerania.

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