Regained Cities.
The Renewal of Postgarrison Towns in Poland

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Abstract. This article concerns the settlement of postgarrison towns in western and northern Poland, focusing on three such settlements: Legnica, Kęszycy Leśna, and Podczele. There were many Soviet military bases in Poland that came into being after the Second World War, and which formed part of the Soviet hegemony system in central Europe. These bases were self-reliant, and around some of them small towns were established for Russian personnel and their families. After the collapse of communism, Soviet troops were compelled to withdraw. Deserted cities were settled by Polish inhabitants, who had to establish their own towns from scratch.
1.1. Historical Outline

The Soviet army bases in Poland were a part of the Northern Group of Forces. Soviet garrisons came into being quite early, in June 1945 – just after the end of the Second World War. The presence of these troops was for Poland a clear loss of sovereignty, and the Russian side did not attempt keep up any appearances. In July 1945, the Russians choose Legnica as their main headquarters for the Northern Group of Forces. This was conscious choice, because Legnica (earlier known as the German city of Leignitz) had been planned to be a fortress city. Army buildings and military facilities were strategically built along the all routes into city. Both urban planning and architecture were sub-ordinated to military function.

Legnica was not destroyed during the military offensive in 1945. The city was taken untouched by destruction, and with all the infrastructure in excellent condition – including factories, workshops, the water delivery system, the city facilities, etc. The main damage was caused by the Russians just after war, including the burning of the old city and castle in May 1945. These arsons were called “victory torches” by the Russians, who began the burning on May 1, Workers’ Day, and on May 9, Victory Day in Eastern Europe.

Overall, the Soviet Army had fifty-nine garrisons in Poland, referred to as the Northern Group of Soviet Forces in Poland (Północna Grupa Wojsk Radzieckich w Polsce). During 1945 and later, the Soviets mainly took previously German garrison towns in western and northern Poland, on account of their well preserved military infrastructure, often including barracks, exercise areas, workshops, airfields, and hangars. Another important factor was the fact that this region was near to the Soviet bases in the German Democratic Republic, which also quartered Soviet troops.

Under international law the bases were considered exterritorial areas, and so were exempt from Polish jurisdiction and excluded from Polish oversight.

Poland was additionally obliged to maintain some elements of the infrastructure used by the Soviet troops, such as routes, bridges, train tracks, and so on. These independent garrisons were called by the
Russian acronym ZATOs, for “closed administrative-territorial units.”

Closed cities were known to exist in the Soviet Union, kept secret because of their connection to intelligence services, the military, space technology, or nuclear and military industry.

Most of the Soviet garrison towns in Poland passed into Polish management only in 1992. On the date of the handover, the territory of Poland increased by 70,500 hectares. Some of these postgarrison towns, such as Pstrążę, were not permitted to transform into civil settlements. The town of Pstrążę – previously known by the German name of Neuhammer, and later Pstransee – was a garrison town that had been occupied by the Russians in 1945 and then isolated by the destruction of the only bridge leading to the town. After that, Pstrążę became the largest closed Russian garrison town in Poland, serving ten thousand soldiers and their families. In the 1990s, it was reacquired by the Polish army, but was not transformed into civil town, and remains an urban training ground for Polish troops.

The town of Borne Sulinowo is the best known of such postgarrison towns in Poland. It has been well described and thoroughly researched, so I would like to focus on less known towns, such as Kęszycy Leśna and Podczele. Both of these postgarrison towns are within the scope of the Institute for Western Affairs’ research activity.

Kęszycy Leśna lies in western Poland, near the town of Międzyrzecz. In the 1930s it was a German troop base. After 1945 it was occupied by Soviet troops, who enlarged the base area so that it became a settlement with cinema, shops, sport facilities, and a few new apartment buildings in the characteristic Soviet style. However, the base was well guarded, and surrounded by vast pine forests.

Podczele is situated near the Polish health resort of Kołobrzeg, on the Baltic Sea. Nowadays Podczele is formally a part of Kołobrzeg, although it lies ten kilometres from the city outskirts, and lacks a real

1 Zakrytyje administrativno-territorial’nyje obrazovaniya.
2 The garrison in Nowa Sól was the first to be left by Russian troops, in March 1991 (Północna Grupa Wojsk Radzieckich w Polsce, Kalendarium wyjazdu wojsk radzieckich z Polski).
3 Podczele lies within the formal borders of the city of Kołobrzeg, and is also known under the names Bagicz and Bagicz-Podczele.
connection to it. Before 1992 it was a completely isolated garrison with an airfield, surrounded by woods and moors, and with access to the sea. This garrison town was built and developed as a German airbase between 1935 and 1945. After the Second World War, Podczele became a Russian airbase, quartering fighter and helicopter squadrons. Beside its various other military functions, Podczele had an additional purpose – to control the airspace above the Baltic Sea, and particularly to intercept Eastern Bloc planes heading for the Danish island of Bornholm or the Swedish coast. The Russians left the garrison on May 28, 1992 (Północna Grupa Wojsk Radzieckich w Polsce). In 2002, a local newspaper noted on that date the tenth anniversary of “the annexation of Podczele to Poland” (Dziemba 2002).

1.2. Specification and Settlement Process

Former garrison towns were differentiated from other towns by specific features:

1. For years they were closed areas, secret and isolated. As military bases, they were external territories, excluded from local jurisdiction.

2. Garrison towns were settled by foreigners (with regard to the surrounding region). In those towns lived not only soldiers, but also staff, family members, and others; and that – in conjunction with the isolation factor – established a specific local community.

3. When, in accordance with bilateral treaties, the Soviet personnel of the garrisons were expelled and transferred to the former Soviet Union, the result was a complete exchange of the entire community. There was no mutual social contact; one group of inhabitants simply replaced the previous group. Newcomers found bare buildings, empty flats, left-behind artefacts, symbols, and remains of the previous “civilization.” Contact with the previous population was indirect, through the medium of the town’s infrastructure and symbols.

4. Garrison towns did not come into being as result of long historical processes. These are relatively young towns, built from the begin-

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4 This function became more important after 1953, when a few Polish fighters managed to escape to Bornholm.
ning in order to be military bases. In effect their infrastructure, spatial order, city landscape, etc., were unfamiliar to new settlers because they did not look like traditionally formed towns. Contrary to normal settlements, postgarrison towns lacked what would traditionally be regarded as a centre in the form of a market square with town hall and concentric streets; and there were no churches towers either. They basically lacked the elements of the urban landscape that are familiar in the European tradition.

Former garrison towns were not suitable for immediate settlement. Usually these towns were left in a terrible condition, with their infrastructure demolished and with soil polluted by oil, gasoline, and other pollutants. In addition there was the threat of explosives. In 1995, the Polish government established a Strategic Government Programme to redevelop the properties that the Russian forces left behind. This programme was aimed at assisting all the land recovery processes using budget subsidies. Since 2001, a further programme has been in operation for recovering and additionally detoxifying terrain polluted by Russian forces.

Robert Park, cofounder of the Chicago School of sociology, attached importance to homogeneous societies, which in his opinion acted as a catalyst for harmonic social or neighbourhood interactions (Kotus 2005). Such homogeneity becomes established as a result of the long-lasting inhabitation of the place by its population, the development of later generations, and the transformation of the space. The creation of similar localities was derived by Park from ecological processes; that is, similar ecological factors are held to exert pressure on given places, and result in similar localities with congenial social profiles.

In case of postgarrison towns there is the question of whether there was ever a chance to shape such a similar relationship in the early stages of settlement. It should be remembered that those localities were established relatively quickly and artificially, without the very long-lasting processes typical in the formation of historically established human settlements. In postgarrison towns, settlers arrived over a short period of time from various parts of Poland and became neighbours. This could lead to social tensions and a variety of resulting processes, such as conflict or cooperation.
Also worth examining is the divide between monofunctional and multifunctional settlements; Postmilitary towns are a special case because they are monofunctional in both phases of their development. From the beginning they were planned and built to be first and foremost military bases, though with an extended part for civilian inhabitants, possibly including shops, kindergartens, schools and the like. Despite that civilian part, the military function was primary. Yet when post-military bases had been transformed to civilian settlements, it might be expected that they would in a short time develop into fully operational multifunctional towns; but this did not occur in any of the postgarrison settlements. In this respect, the particular towns differ from one another.

**Kęszyca Leśna** is, from a formal or legal point of view, a rural settlement. Yet there is no evidence of village life present:
- there are neither farmers nor agricultural terrain.
- the town has neither the elements of a rural society, nor a rural style of life.
- the architecture is also atypical for a rural region – for example, postmilitary barracks adapted as apartment buildings.
- the structure of the property is also atypical for the countryside: some flats belongs to municipal housing cooperatives.
- there are two main social stratas: people who work outside of the settlement and pensioners. Such a structure is more typical of a suburban area than of a rural area. In addition there is also a third group – part-time inhabitants, who have flats there but spend only vacation time in the area.

Kęszyca Leśna is essentially a monofunctional settlement, performing a mere handful of roles: It acts as a dormitory town for nearby Międzyrzecz; it also has a recreational role as a resort surrounded by woods and lakes. There is no kindergarten, no school, and no employers.

**Podczele** is in practice a kind of exclave. Formally, Podczele is a part of the city of Kołobrzeg, but lies ten kilometres from the city’s outskirts, and is geographically separated from the main city.

Podczele has its own self-governing body, an estate council (**rada osiedla**), which operates within Kołobrzeg’s municipal government. Podczele has limited functionality, and contains a school, shops, a post
office, and a church, but no significant employers beyond the small local businesses.

The previously mentioned Legnica represents another type of locality. Russian troops for years occupied a part of the city, contained within Polish Legnica. The Russian part – known as “the Square” or “Little Moscow” – was separated from the Polish part by a well guarded concrete wall. After the Russian departure, this whole Russian “inner city” was incorporated into Legnica itself, without any special conditions or distinctions.

Borne Sulinowo is best known postgarrison town in Poland. This town is the seat of the local government and the locality is multifunctional, though with a limited labour market. In Borne Sulinowo there are schools of different levels, a church and a cemetery, but there is a lack of business opportunities which would guarantee employment for the inhabitants.

All the localities mentioned here, in spite of the different official forms they take, have some common features:

- they have only recently come under Polish jurisdiction.
- they have an atmosphere of historical secrecy and special status.
- they are geographically isolated (with the exception of the formerly Russian part of Legnica), far from other localities, surrounded by woods, and far from industrial areas ...
- ... and so they have potential as tourist and recreational areas.

2.1. Growing in Established Space

The main problem which the settlers faced was the problem of transforming the entire urban space. With regard to their former military functions, those localities were strictly monofunctional, that is, subordinated to the army. Because of that, the first inhabitants had to deal with rebuilding the full functionality of the former bases. This ran in three stages (see figure 1):

(a) spatial and architectural solutions, though functional from the military point of view (figure 1, “Function”)...
(b) ... were identified as dysfunctional from the civilian settlers’ point of view (figure 1, “Dysfunction”).

(c) ... so the settlers made an effort to restore full functionality (figure 1, “Restoring function”).

One can consider the story of the main entrance to Podczele as example of such a sequence.

Initial functional stage: There was a well guarded gate with guardhouse and two bridge systems. The bridges maintained a route into the garrison town through the moors. Such a system helped the Russians to better keep the garrison town isolated from the Polish surroundings. The whole garrison town area was surrounded by a concrete wall, supplemented with barbed wire.

Dysfunctional stage: For the Polish civilian inhabitants, this security system was quite burdensome – this was the only route into the town.

Restoring function stage: The entrance was rebuilt, the guardhouses were removed, and the route was enlarged, subsequently becoming the main communication artery leading to the town.
Similarly, the location of the settlement can be considered from the same three points of view.

Initial functional stage: Isolation was a highly desirable feature from the military point of view. It was suitable for keeping garrison towns secret. It is worth mentioning that these localities were removed from maps and tourist guides. For example, Borne Sulinowo – although inhabited by about fifteen thousand Russians – was completely removed from canoe guidebooks, and its location marked as “an inhospitable, marshy lake shore, unsuitable for camping.”

Dysfunctional stage: Isolation meant obstacles to transportation, and some psychological problems also occurred; to the initial civilian settlers, the town seemed like a truly isolated and forgotten place. For
example, during sociological research in Kęszyca Leśna, local authorities described problems with young families who did not want to live in the postgarrison town because they felt isolated and “far from anything.”

Restoring function stage: All these postgarrison towns took advantage of their isolated location, and turned it into a tourist attraction.

One can see a specific side effect that arises from these localities – a kind of dualism: On one hand there are bucolic circumstances, such as the sea, lakes, woods, and a peaceful atmosphere. Postgarrison localities are advertised as ideal places for relaxation. On the other hand, there is a constant threat from explosives and pollution. The landscape is filled with abandoned military installations, like bunkers and hangars.
Figure 4. A historical mélange in Borne Sulinowo: a building stylized as a guardhouse, but commemorating both German and Soviet armies. It is noteworthy that the German soldier, despite the carved date, comes from the First World War era. A Wehrmacht soldier might be considered neo-Nazi propaganda. [Photo credit: Z. Mazur]

### 2.2. Technoscape

I use term “technoscape,” following John Urry, as an abbreviation for “technical landscape.” Some authors add “posthuman technoscape,” but I will not go so far.

Here “technoscape” means the remains of a prior civilization – the technological landscape left behind by those who were here before us.

The first months after the resettlement of the former military bases was a time of euphoric removal and destruction of the entire previous technoscape, which was considered the remains of the Soviet occupation. For this reason, many facilities were demolished with full social licence.

But after the passage of some time, the technoscape became more and more often considered to be a kind of heritage which deserved to be preserved.
2.3. Adaptation of the Symbolic Sphere

The sociologist Florian Zielin’ski took notice of the so-called urban ideological vesture – namely, memorials, monuments, and street names. This comparison is reasonable, because the city can under some circumstances change its “vesture” – that is, the city can change its whole symbolic matrix, if the situation warrants it (Zielin’ski 2005).

In case of the three postgarrison towns described here, we deal with a triple change of “ideological vesture.” First there was saturation with German military features, when the garrison towns were built. Second, there was the exchange of German for Soviet garrisons in 1945, and another vesture change which brought in Soviet symbols. The Russians created their own symbolic reality in these garrisons, they built up own memorials, and they painted their own murals. The third change of vesture ensued during the era of Polonization,
from 1992 onward. Polish settlers built their own chapels and renamed the streets. Especially interesting are the street names in Podczele, because they refer to names of the cities which were lost by Poland after 1945. Thus the street names commemorate Polish cities which were incorporated into the Soviet Union.

2.4. Symbolic Reality

Here we investigate how a single object in Podczele completely changed its symbolic vesture over time.

As commented on previously, postgarrison towns looked strange and hostile to people who were accustomed to traditionally formed cities.

Figure 6. A neopagan Germanic “algiz” rune, with oak leaves. This rune was carved by Germans at the time when the garrison belonged to the German Luftwaffe. Its presence is related to Germanic symbolism, which was reused by the National Socialist regime in the Third Reich. Semantically, the sign would have been unintelligible to those not affiliated with Nazi ideology, although that entire semantic sphere was officially supported by German regime. The oak leaves function in Germanic symbolism as a sign of strength.
Figure 7. A Soviet mural glorifying the Soviet air forces, found in the same building as the carvings in figure 6, but from the time of Russian management. The mural presents a heroic pilot and his war machine, marked with red star – a typical example of the symbolism of the Soviet Army and its hero cult. The Soviet Union was a totalitarian regime, so the symbolism used in social language was aimed at mass mobilization. This mural also carried another message – it illustrated a desirable career path.

New landscape needed to be appropriated. Because of the obligatory state-imposed atheism in the Soviet Union, the Russian-controlled garrison towns entirely lacked chapels, crosses, and churches. Even their graveyards were different from those familiar in Christian culture. For this reason, cult restitution was one of the first social requirements in the new towns.

The role of the religious cult in spatial studies is often underestimated, but quite important, especially in Poland. Three approaches to this aspect can be distinguished (Hervieu-Leger 2002):
Figure 8. The same building, but as a Polish church for the local society. When the town was left by the Russians, Polish settlers adapted this building as a church. Although the crucifix is now in the most prominent position, the Soviet mural was not destroyed, but rather intentionally renovated. This sequence of three photographs presents the complete exchange of the symbolic vestiture of the same building. It is noteworthy that previous symbols were not removed or destroyed, but rather new ones were added, and so all the symbolic layers remain individually stratified.

– The territorial modalities of the communalization of religion: this approach considers how the religious community refers to the space in which it was established.
– The geopolitics of the religion: this approach refers more to the hard aspects, such as religious conquest and the power balance between religious groups.
– The religious symbolizations of the space: One can ask, how religious activity refers to the landscape, or how it comprises the relationship between the religious world and the shape of the space.
Hervieu-Leger also distinguished “church-type communalization,” especially in Catholic countries. This refers to the “parish civilization,” to the way that the Catholic parish embodies part of the administrative form in Catholic localities. In case of the above-mentioned postgarrison towns, things followed the “parish civilization” pattern. Because of the lack of administrative power, and the kind of deprivation present locally, the parish in part took over some of the process of local self-governing. Here churches or chapels are not just places for accessing the spiritual mystery, but also centres for local activity.

Symbolic accustomization can proceed by many means. It is especially visible in examples of monuments. In Kęszyca Leśna, the Russians left a monument which is both monumental and controversial in its aesthetics. It shows a Russian signaller pulling cables through a front line. Until the 1990s, there was also a relief showing a battlefield filled with tanks, planes, and explosions, but with the passage of time all these details were painted over. The monument is regularly renovated by local society, but with every renovation the military significance becomes more blurred. Starting from a depiction of a Soviet Army soldier, the monument was turned into a commemoration of a solider of an unspecified army. A chronicle of the settlement was carved onto a marble table, and so the monument came to embody the local symbolic vesture. It has even been incorporated into Roman Catholic rituals – during Corpus Christi, the monument serves as one of the few Catholic altars.

In 2007, the Polish government passed an act concerning Soviet monuments in Poland. According to that document, such monuments are to be relocated and eventually destroyed. In Kęszyca Leśna this prospect has united the locality, and people were ready to defend “their” monument. Local adolescents intended to put up some guards “just in case” (Brożek 2007).

In Podczele, the Russians had left a monument to Lenin, but it was decapitated by Poles. In a local hotel, volunteers spontaneously created a kind of amateur museum, based on a random collection of objects such as books, clothes, and specifically Soviet ornamentation that represented the long-lasting Soviet stay in the base, and which also contained some German exhibits.
Localities in postgarrison towns face many obstacles, which often create problems in the formation of the community bond. For example, in Kęszyca Leśna an ill-considered decision to build a bitumen factory was made. Because of the difficult production process involved, such a plan usually raises the voices of dissatisfied inhabitants. However, in Kęszyca Leśna that did not happen. One can suppose that presence of social movements comes only after social consciousness. There are a few examples, such as NIMBY ("Not In My Back Yard," with its derivatives NIMD, NIMFOS, and others); LULU ("Locally

5 Such protests have occurred in other Polish towns, including Konstancin, Klęczany, Tenczynek, and Zabagnie. In each of these towns, people established social committees, and demanded research and expert advice.
Figure 10. The same monument, ten years after the Russian departure. It is an irony of history that the monument of an atheistic regime becomes a field altar each Corpus Christi. [Photo credit: Kęszyca Leśna Women’s Society].

Unwanted/Undesired Land Use’’); and QUIMBY (“Quit Urbanizing In My Back Yard”) – typical attitudes in areas where people settle to escape from the cities; they want to live in a beautiful rural area, but at the same time do not want to abandon the city lifestyle.

Such attitudes come to light whenever localities face undesired investment, and they serve as a source for social activities. Yet in Kęszyca Leśna, things did not happen that way. That may show a lack of social engagement, and its sequel, a lack of mature community bond. It is quite possible that because of the high unemployment rate in the region, such anti-investment activity was not socially acceptable.  

6 In the “Farmutil case” which occurred near Piła in Wielkopolska, the most troublesome factory in the region is also the biggest employer. The result is that every act of protest against the factory is repelled by the aggressive inhabitants.
Social support is really crucial in case of neighbourhood and settlement. Such support can be defined as “supportive, interpersonal relations” (Al-Homoud and Tassinary 2004).

There are three main aspects to social support:

– personal (emotional) support;
– instrumental (functional) support;
– informational support.

As one can see, aspects of social support refer more or less to attitude. Personal support helps to break feelings of desolation and to strengthen the feeling of social belonging. According to interviews with the first settlers, personal support was quite strong at the beginning of the settlement, but has weakened over time.

Instrumental support refers to the willingness to engage in cooperative behaviour, like the exchange of tools or services with other neighbours. A change in its incidence has also been seen to occur among postgarrison town populations, decreasing from a high initial rate to weak cooperation.

Informational support is related to the circulation of information, issuing local newspapers, and similar. There was a local newspaper in Podczele, but it has been discontinued.

In the 1990s the huge enthusiasm and hope about making their own place united all the settlers. But as time has gone on, some obstacles have caused stratification. Apart from problems related purely to infrastructure, some social tensions arose: unemployment, low levels of social bonding, and the lack of a clear and comprehensible direction of development. In the case of local labour markets, it very quickly became obvious that isolation – which had seems to promise bucolic circumstances for the settlement – ensures that such localities are far from employers.

There is no investment in Borne Sulinowo or Kęszyca Leśna, and commuting takes a significant part of the domestic budget. In addition, Borne Sulinowo lies in a region of high unemployment, so one must travel really far from the town to find a job; adjacent towns are insufficient to fill the gap in the local labour market.
3.1. The Future

The main challenge is to preserve future prospects for local society. Every one of the discussed locations has similar problems:

1. A lack of local political subjectivity: although these postgarrison towns are quite different from other settlements, as localities they have no distinct status. Except in the case of Borne Sulinowo, none of the postgarrison localities has its own administration, although they are positioned far from any other towns. Flats in Kęszyca Leśna are just a part of the house administration system in the larger town of Międzyrzecz, and all the infrastructural costs are the same as, or higher than, in the bigger town – yet Kęszyca Leśna has no employment prospects.

Podczele, with an approximate population of five thousand, is a district of Kolobrzeg – a town with forty-six thousand inhabitants. Yet Podczele lies ten kilometres away from the larger city, and is much more closely connected to adjacent smaller communes. Consequently, it has no chance of being treated as well as others districts within the city. Podczele, as a mere city district, and in spite of its specific needs as a former garrison town, cannot be the subject of European Community aid programmes. During sociological research performed in the town, inhabitants expressed a feeling of deprivation on account of mistaken local government policies.

2. Disastrous and inconsistent settlement policy: in the beginning, in the 1990s, these isolated settlements were intended to be a place for the underclass. The authorities in Kolobrzeg and Międzyrzecz planned to remove “unwanted” social groups from the cities and settle them in these post-Soviet forest garrisons. But such decisions were reversed halfway, at a stage when some houses had already been settled by such people. The strategy was changed, and the rest of the houses were earmarked for tourist and dormitory purposes. This was a crucial failing. The underclass inhabitants had demolished some buildings, and became a source of problems for the other inhabitants – stealing and engaging in antisocial behaviour. Other inhabitants, on account of such troublesome neighbourhoods, refused to settle in postgarrison towns, just as tourists did not want to spend vacations there. The main shortcoming was the lack of consistency which led to an unacceptable mixing of functions. The same settlement was to be a city dormitory, a tourist resort, and
a kind of underclass ghetto. In effect it became none of these three, although those first two intentions did not interfere with each other.

3. Limited functionality: at beginning of their settlement, it had been acceptable that the postgarrison towns were monofunctional. But as time passed, successive local authorities came up with no plans for further development. Urban processes were halted halfway. The towns may have limited functionality: first of all as dormitories for other towns; and they provide some basic shopping facilities. But at the same time, there are no employers, a limited range of school levels (such as having a primary school, but no kindergarten), and no further subsidies.

There is in Poland one postgarrison town, which was inhabited so unsuccessfully that it was nearly destroyed. During the Russians’ stay, Kłomino had a population estimated at as many as fifteen to twenty-five thousand inhabitants, consisting of Russian soldiers, personnel, staff, and
Fig. 12 Kłomino, northern Poland: a desolated city.

Figure 13. Deserted flat complex in Kłomino.
families. After the Russians left, Kłomino was never inhabited on such a scale again. The whole town fell into ruins, and nowadays only about forty or fifty people live there; the infrastructure decays further with each passing year. It is a rare example of the decay of an entire city.

### 3.2. The Social Challenge

Social interactions in postgarrison towns have passed through two stages:

1. At the beginning of the settlement process, an atmosphere of enthusiasm was typical; there was a very high level of cooperation, and

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7 Information about the Russian population varies, because the base had secret status, and no information was conveyed to Poles.

8 According to interviews conducted in Podczele and Kęszyca Leśna.
the inhabitants willingly helped each other; sometimes there was common rebuilding of houses.

2. When the first stage of settlement had ended and the towns had been established, the readiness to cooperate drastically decreased, and individualism prevailed.

Currently a third stage is arising, as some local opinion makers – priests, hotel owners, local councillors, village leaders – try to unite the inhabitants around common projects such as the anniversary of settlement. They attempt to establish a common “founding myth,” from which community feeling might spring.

Specific stratification might be an explanation. There are three main groups of inhabitants: those who live in postgarrison towns but work and study outside of the locality; pensioners who live in the settlement, but do not participate in local activity; and weekend inhabitants, owners of flats who only visit the towns on weekends or in summer – and they do not want to participate in the overall infrastructure costs, because they use the flats for only a part of the year. These three groups have little or no common ground.

All of the above-mentioned issues have prevented the processes of urbanization and social development from completing. There is also a rare opportunity for sociologists to grasp such local communities in the act of developing. The main question which comes to mind is, whether or not new generations – people who have been born or have grown up in postgarrison towns – will ensure the demographic future. Nowadays there is still only one generation which has chosen these postgarrison town as a living place, but the key question is whether young people will continue to stay in these towns, even if it becomes economically unprofitable.

References


